

Introduction

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THE AUTHORS OF THE FOLLOWING SIX ARTICLES developed their work from papers they presented at a May 2008 symposium entitled “Sites of Indifference to Nation in Habsburg Central Europe.” Hosted by the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at the University of Alberta in Edmonton in cooperation with the Herder Institute (Marburg Germany) and the Center for Austrian Studies (University of Minnesota in Minneapolis), the symposium gathered eighteen scholars from Europe, Canada, and the United States. The organizers sought historians of Habsburg Central Europe and the successor states whose work explicitly examined different sites of what they labeled “indifference to nation,” that is, forms of popular indifference to nationalist presumptions about personal and group identity. The participants’ work exposed the limits of nationalist paradigms for understanding popular practices of identity in daily life in the period 1848–1948 from highly diverse perspectives. It shared an interest in investigating the complex ways people, families, and communities may have used the language of nation flexibly and indeed opportunistically on occasion to pursue personal or community agendas. But it also suggested the ways in which individuals, families, and communities could reject national labels in cases where shared intimate, emotional, or commercial relations crossed local linguistic or alleged national boundaries. These historians’ work drew on highly diverse geographic and chronological examples, from nineteenth-century Hungary, Transylvania, Carniola, Styria, Trieste, and Bohemia, to interwar Czechoslovakia and Fascist Italy, to post-World War II Yugoslavia and Italy.

The very diversity of chronological and behavioral examples introduced by the authors may suggest that “Indifference to Nation” is far too broad a category to achieve significant analytic use. Nevertheless, as an answer to the far more diverse ideas and behaviors gathered under the catchall terms “nationalism” or “nationhood,” indifference may well offer a way to rethink the powerful influence that national(ist) narratives and categories continue to exert in the field today, even as it defines itself in relationship to that very set of narratives.¹ Scholarly interest in indifference to nation has grown in part out of considerable dissatisfaction with ways in which narratives oriented to national/ist outcomes continue to influence historical narratives

¹For a fuller treatment of these issues, see Tara Zahra, “Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69 (Spring 2010): 93–119.

of Habsburg Central Europe. This interest resulted equally from scholars' attempts to link investigations of local cultures more effectively to the larger historical narratives that structure the history of Habsburg Central Europe. At the level of the neighborhood or the village, for example, historians' claims about a linear nationalization of the masses are often not borne out and sometimes make little sense. Evidence of local behaviors often completely contradicts what historians otherwise imagine to have been true from evidence they draw from party politics or the mass media. Despite the fact that the nationalist, Fascist, and Communist movements dramatically swept across Habsburg Central Europe in the twentieth century, seemingly leaving little space for indifference (aside from indifference to the suffering of others), local evidence continues to confront us with significant examples of indifference to nationalism, right through the mid twentieth century.²

Traditional developmental models of nationalization—even those of a constructionist character—tended to explain the disjuncture between trends of nationalization and local examples of its rejection in terms of the allegedly traditional character of local social relations. Examples of rejection of nationhood, so the argument goes, can be attributed to surviving pockets of economic and social backwardness, or “premodern” religious or regional loyalties, and should not be seen as significant.³ Another related explanation for the phenomenon of indifference sees it largely as an attribute of an imagined private sphere of domesticity in which attitudes are shaped by narrowly parochial concerns and real politics do not intrude. The scholars who met at Edmonton rejected these understandings of indifference—views often propagated by nationalists themselves, who portrayed nationally indifferent populations as backward or insular. Instead, they located indifference to nationhood or nationalism precisely in highly modern social, economic, and public developments such as mass education, literacy, industrialization, and migration. Tara Zahra

²Several local or regional studies demonstrate this point. See Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, 1981); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, 2003); Petr Lozoviuk, “Ethnische Indifferenz im heutigen Ostmitteleuropa. Ein Beitrag zum Studium aktueller Macht sozialer und kultureller Grenzziehungen,” in *Grenzen und Differenzen. Zur Macht sozialer und kultureller Grenzziehungen*, ed. Thomas Hengartner and Johannes Most, 727–37 (Leipzig, 2006); Robert Luft, “Nationale Utraquisten in Böhmen: zur Problematik ‘nationaler Zwischenstellungen’ am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Allemands, Juifs et Tchèques à Prague*, ed. Maurice Godé, Jacques Le Rider, François Mayer, 37–51 (Montpellier, 1996); Caitlin Murdock, *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands, 1870–1946* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2010); Joachim Höslér, *Von Krain zu Slowenien. Die Anfänge der nationalen Differenzierungsprozesse in Krain und der Untersteiermark von der Aufklärung bis zur Revolution 1768 bis 1848* (Munich, 2006); Peter Vodopivec, “Die sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Ansichten des deutschen Bürgertums in Krain vom Ende des sechziger bis zum Beginn der achtziger Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Sloweniens 1848–1941*, ed. Helmut Rumppler and Arnold Suppan, 85–119 (Vienna, 1988); Konrad Clewing, *Staatlichkeit und nationale Identitätsbildung. Dalmatien in Vormärz und Revolution* (Munich, 2001); Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, 2003); Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford, 2012); Laurence Cole, ed., *Different Paths to the Nation: Regional and National Identities in Central Europe and Italy, 1830–1870* (New York, 2007); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008); Brendan Karch, “Nationalism on the Margins: Silesians Between Germany and Poland, 1848–1945” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010); Theodora Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands: Nationality and Emigration among the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900–1949* (Ithaca, 2011).

³Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 66–70.

summarized her approach to the diverse phenomena that constitute indifference precisely by highlighting their political significance:

[My goal] is to historicize national indifference and to explore its potential as a category of analysis, without reinscribing imagined boundaries between the public (political) sphere and the private (apolitical) world of “everyday life,” and without evacuating non-elites from politics. Instead I argue that tensions between nationalist aspirations and popular responses to their demands often propelled political change and radicalization in modern East Central Europe.⁴

In other words, as we argue more fully below, the very processes associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of modernity produced much of the phenomenon we see as indifference.

Rejections of nationalism or nationhood sometimes arose when a compelling economic, social, or emotional logic for an individual or a family contradicted the nationalist logic propounded by local nationalist activists or even by state law. Nationalists raised worries about affiliation when it came to their perception that some people were too willing to contract so-called “mixed marriages” or their perception that some people “fraternized” socially with local members of an “enemy nation.” In particular, nationalists worried about the influence of local religious practice, which they believed encouraged such fraternization at the expense of national clarity.⁵ Later on, especially after 1918, rejections of nationalist demands—or even of the basic demands of nationhood—grew out of assertions of local interests against an increasingly powerful bureaucratic state.

The types of behavior documented by scholars that might count as forms of indifference to nationhood or nationalism are highly diverse, as are the actors who engaged in them. They range from multilingual Jewish traders to refugees in postwar Italy, from cosmopolitan Bohemian aristocrats to settlers in the Italian empire, to parents who wanted a bilingual education for their children. Clearly, it is the context in which they are practiced that lends the actions of these subjects significance as rejections of the demands of nationhood. Scholarly work on indifference to nationhood or nationalism is thus largely rooted in investigations of highly localized and often individual situations. The organizers focused on “Sites of Indifference” (as opposed to indifference itself) as a way to bring to the foreground the critical importance of place, context, and event for interpreting certain behaviors as indifferent to or even as a rejection of nationalism. At the same time, these investigations also carefully incorporated an understanding of larger national or imperial institutions, laws, administrative structures, and histories even as they dissected local social relations in order to make sense of particular forms of behavior. In fact, it is prior studies of imperial structures and institutions, from the judicial courts to the census to the schools that helped to produce this relatively new interest in indifference to nation as a category of historical analysis.

Nationalist narratives about the Habsburg monarchy often ignore the importance of imperial structures despite several historical works in the past decades that have argued cogently for the centrality of imperial institutions and laws to the development of particular forms of nationalist politics. If the prior existence of the nation is the basis for the historical narrative, however, then the institutions and laws governing the empire appear to have only a limited or temporary meaning in the inevitable development of a national community. By placing more of an

⁴Zahra, “Imagined Non-Communities,” 97–98.

⁵Some examples of concerns about “mixed marriages,” “fraternization,” and the dangerous influence of local priests are found in Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 33, 112–23.

emphasis on imperial and administrative structures, however, some historians had already effectively questioned the degree to which alleged nations as such had actually functioned as primary agents in the history of the region. In particular, historical scholarship on the complex relationship among language use, primary education, and the rights of citizenship in the Habsburg monarchy traced how nationalism could have emerged in the Habsburg monarchy as a powerful political force without relying on traditional tropes of awakening nations, ethnic mosaics, or the nation-state as history's logical outcome.⁶

As it developed within the Habsburg monarchy, nationalism increasingly made universalizing claims on individuals and significant demands on their personal behavior, demands that often contradicted people's understanding of their own interests and attachments. Especially after 1848, nationalist activists fought to instill in people a sense of the urgency of their demands, often invoking a language of fundamental political rights to justify their programs. At the local level, however, the experience of fighting for individual rights of citizenship, such as the right to use a local language in the schools, in the administration, and in the courts, gradually became subordinated to the idea of promoting the embattled group. Nationalists sought to make the rights of citizenship a function of national group identity, and they demanded collective rights for imagined national communities. And as groups of activists succeeded in gaining their linguistic and legal demands, they increasingly presented membership in their national communities as mutually exclusive.

Several historians have analyzed this process by which nationalists sought to infuse local social life with exclusionary views of national belonging.⁷ Some local nationalists in the nineteenth century rejected this notion of exclusivity, asserting their ability to belong to more than one nation in different contexts. Their protests, however, were not effective. In the Bohemian Lands, for example, nationalist attempts to organize social life in the 1880s resulted in the destruction of local clubs originally open to those who used either Czech or German and subsequently ended many friendships. Historian Gerald Stourzh, for example, offers one such account of his Moravian ancestor Franz Anderle, whose family had spoken Czech and who had to learn German in school as a way to obtain a higher education and eventually a career as a civil servant. Anderle lamented that the vicious politics of nationalism had destroyed the local reading association to which he belonged and to whose governing body he had been elected. Under suspicion of Slavic sympathies by German nationalist members, Anderle was removed from the governing body and forced to avoid the organization whose society he had enjoyed. "Wherever high politics is practiced," noted Anderle with some bitterness, "we all know that that is where genial sociability ends."⁸

⁶King, throughout his *Budweisers*, argues strongly for a consideration of state institutions for understanding the particular issues raised and strategies developed by nationalist movements both in Bohemia and in Budweis/Budějovice. Several influential studies demonstrate the crucial role played by state institutions in shaping nationalist movements. See esp.: Emil Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation. Die Sprachenstatistik in den zisleithanischen Volkszählungen 1880 bis 1910* (Vienna, 1982); Gerald Stourzh, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs 1848–1918* (Vienna, 1985); Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachengerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen 1867–1918* (Vienna, 1994); Gary B. Cohen, "Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867–1914," *Central European History* 40 (2007): 241–78.

⁷King, *Budweisers*; Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole*; Judson, *Guardians*.

⁸Gerald Stourzh, "'Aus der Mappe meines Urgrossvaters.' Eine mährische Juristenlaufbahn im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Der Umfang der österreichischen Geschichte. Ausgewählte Studien 1990–2010*, ed. Gerald Stourzh, 125–38 (Vienna, 2011), esp. 134. See also examples in Jeremy King, "The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond," in *Staging the Past. The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, ed. Nancy Wingfield and Maria Bucur, 112–52 (West Lafayette, IN, 2001).

If nationalists hoped to convince locals to see the world in terms of mutually exclusive national communities, they quickly came up against economic, social, and cultural realities that promoted a different approach, however. In a period of increasing geographic and social mobility, many people recognized bilingualism, for example, as an effective tool for obtaining social advancement. Parents had long argued that education in two regional languages, for example, would give their children more tools to obtain better employment. “Our children learn Carniolan at home” complained Slovene-speaking parents to the authorities already in the 1820s; “They should be learning German in the school.”⁹ As state-funded primary education was offered in the recognized regional vernacular languages (in principle as early as the education reforms of Maria Theresa in the 1770s but more practically with the education reforms of 1868), knowledge of a second language, be it Magyar in Hungary, Polish in Galicia, Italian in Trieste, or German in Cisleithania, opened greater possibilities for higher education or a career in government service to the individual. Increasingly in the late nineteenth century, however, nationalist activists fought bilingualism and bilingual education, seeing the phenomenon as a potential danger to the national community. Especially in a society where nationhood was defined almost completely on the basis of language use, bilingualism, it was claimed, could potentially weaken individual commitment to the nation (and especially in a young child). Many local people, however, including those who otherwise identified themselves with a national community, continued to demand a bilingual education for their children. Their unwillingness to commit their children to single language education became increasingly stigmatized as alleged indifference to their nation.¹⁰

The challenge of bilingualism was hardly necessary, however, to produce indifference to nationhood. Bilingualism simply constituted one factor that tended to exacerbate public discussion of the issue among nationalists and thus facilitated historians’ investigations. It was, as Tara Zahra and others have convincingly demonstrated, a general popular unwillingness to commit oneself fully to a nationalist program that drove nationalists to adopt more extreme positions, and this unwillingness could just as easily manifest itself in linguistically homogenous regions. Thus, the picture of radical nationalist conflict in late Habsburg Austria especially (but also in Hungary) with which we are familiar may not be the product of emerging nations battling each other or the state, so much as a conflict that pitted nationalists of all kinds against those whom they perceived as dangerously indifferent to nationhood. This perception is reinforced by another element that several scholars—including those at Edmonton—have repeatedly noted about nationalist activists, namely, the close similarities of their appeals and their organizational structures to each other. Rival nationalist organizations did not develop separately from one another; instead, they shared strategies, ideological appeals, and organizational structures. They were ultimately far more similar to each other than to the nationally indifferent whom they failed to mobilize adequately. And many of the conflicts between nationalist elites were actually conflicts over which nation a contested individual “really” belonged to, something nationalists increasingly asserted could be determined based on “objective” characteristics.¹¹

⁹Hösler, *Von Krain zu Slowenien*, 142.

¹⁰Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900–1948* (Ithaca, 2008), 13–48; on the decline of bilingual schooling in Slovene-German language regions, see Maria Kurz, “Der Volksschulstreit in der Südsteiermark und in Kärnten in der Zeit der Dezemberverfassung” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1986); Judson, *Guardians*, 47–48.

¹¹On the fundamental similarity among the various nationalist movements in Cisleithania, Judson, *Guardians*, 16–7. For the rise of nationalist arguments that national identity could be determined according to objective criteria, see Gerald Stourzh, “Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria: Good Intentions, Evil Consequences,” in *The Habsburg Legacy*:

Once nation-states replaced Austria-Hungary after 1918 and nationalists gained considerable influence within state governments, they increased their intrusive demands on people's behavior by exponential proportions. Using the power of the law to shape popular behavior and to mold more nationalist citizens, they provoked many people to develop new strategies either to avoid national commitment or to attempt to use it opportunistically in situations of social conflict. During World War II, of course, national indifference was seen as an act of collaboration or treason, particularly when East Europeans invoked their ties to Germandom in order to join the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹²

These battles continued well into postwar Eastern Europe. After 1945, for example, conflicts raged in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia over how to determine which nationally ambiguous citizens should be expelled to Germany and which could be profitably "salvaged" for the nation. Official citizenship laws did not necessarily determine how these conflicts worked out on the ground. So-called intermarried couples and their children were particularly troublesome to nationalists.¹³ Even after 1948, diplomatic conflicts erupted when the Polish government refused to acknowledge the French nationality of Poles who were naturalized French citizens or of French women married to Poles and forcibly detained them behind the Iron Curtain. In the twentieth century, national indifference increasingly brought the risk of deportation, detention, or death.¹⁴

The participants at the Edmonton symposium did not simply believe that some other forms of identity might more usefully be substituted for national identity, such as regional, religious, patriotic, or local. Most developed an approach that allowed them to see beyond a static element of identity, or indeed multiple or even fluid identities. Their focus on context propelled them toward a more situational understanding of people's self-identification. Following the recent work of Rogers Brubaker, many of these scholars analyzed situations in which national feeling or national commitment had come into play, as opposed to situations that had engaged other feelings or loyalties in individuals.¹⁵ Most interestingly, several of them demonstrate the ways in which concepts like dynastic patriotism and nationalist commitment, often understood as opposing forces, were in fact mutually constitutive of each for many people. Thus, indifference to nation or nationalism does not necessarily involve

National Identity in Historical Perspective, ed. Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms, 67–83 (*Austrian Studies*, vol. 5) (Edinburgh, 1994); on the rise of objective attribution and the attempts of individuals to fight this trend, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 39–48 and 106–41.

¹²On interwar Europe and World War II, see Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*; Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2009); Timothy Snyder, *Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, CT, 2004); Brown, *Biography of No Place*; Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, 2007); Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York, 2009); Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT, 2003); Doris Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (October 1994): 569–82.

¹³Benjamin Frommer, "Expulsion or Integration: Unmixing Interethnic Marriage in Postwar Czechoslovakia," *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 185–212; Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, 2011), chap. 6; Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław During the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton, 2011). On conflicts over national classification in Germany's postwar Displaced Persons' Camps, see G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford, 2011), chap. 2; Zahra, *The Lost Children*, chap. 4 and 7; Pamela Ballinger's essay in this issue of the *Austrian History Yearbook*.

¹⁴See files in folders 204–205, Pologne, 1944–1970, Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, Paris.

¹⁵Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, 2004), 7–27; see also Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2000): 1–47.

outright rejection of the nation as a form of identification. Rather, indifference refers to the attempt to maintain a degree of choice in one's life, in historical situations where such choices are becoming drastically limited, either by official fiat or local activist pressure. "Indifference" ultimately constituted a form of agency for citizens in a world of competing nationalist movements and nationalizing states. If its meaning changed across time and space, its specter haunted and frustrated nationalists continuously, reminding them of the limits of their own power to mold the world in their image.

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