Forum: The Adriatic, the Alps, and the Danube: Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications

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Introduction

Rok Stergar

In one of the first paragraphs of his 1929 book *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Oscar (or Oszkár) Jászi claimed that the survival of Austria-Hungary had been dependent on its ability "to unite those ten nations through a supranational consciousness into an entirely free and spontaneous cooperation."[1] Jászi tried to achieve that during his political career, before Austria-Hungary fell apart and he moved to the United States. There, he established himself as a historian, probably becoming best known for his influential distinction between the "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces, a distinction that—as Laurence Cole has pointed out—had a large impact on the historiography of the Habsburg Empire.[2] However, his original contribution is not what is interesting here. On the contrary, what is of interest is his claim that Austria-Hungary comprised "ten nations." This claim was hardly original; far from it, it was just another instance of the reification of nations that was dominant in the historiography of the Habsburg Empire for so long. Not only English-language historians but also those from the successor states treated nations as fixed and almost transhistorical entities. As much as historians differed in their interpretation of the Habsburg state, the Czechs and the Slovaks, the Italians and the Romanians, the Germans and the Poles, and all the rest were simply there. Their existence was an assumption that was hardly questioned. For instance, even Leo Valiani, the Italian historian who unlike most others did not think the empire was bound to collapse, never questioned the existence of those nations and their all-encompassing character.[3]

In this regard, historians were reproducing the views that prevailed in the Habsburg Empire before 1918. For instance, when Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Mensdorff-Pouilly tried to explain the Austrian Empire to the British Ambassador in Vienna in 1866, he began with

[1]Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929), 3.

[2]Laurence Cole, "Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy," in *Nationhood from Below: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen (London, 2012), 110. On Jászi and his generation of historians of the Habsburg Empire, see also John Deak, "The Great War and the Forgotten Realm: The Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War," *The Journal of Modern History* 86, no. 2 (June 2014): 336–80.

[3]Laurence Cole, "Leo Valiani's 'La Dissoluzione Dell'Austria-Ungheria' in Historiographical Context," *Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske* [West Croatian History Journal] 10 (2016): 145–54.

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"Was sei die österreichische Monarchie? Es sei ein Reich von Nationalitäten."[4] Almost without exception, journalists, intellectuals, politicians, and many others—even those who did not think that the Habsburg Empire was destined to fail and disintegrate into nation-states—were convinced that the empire was multinational and that its entire population belonged to the "ten nations" about which Jászi was writing.[5]

Curiously, this outlook remained dominant in Habsburg historiography even after modernism became the leading paradigm in the study of nations and nationalism. As most scholars of nationalism came to realize that nations were a modern phenomenon and rejected "national awakening" as a relevant explanatory framework, historians of the Habsburg Empire—as Jeremy King has shown—only modified their terminology. When writing about periods before the nineteenth century, they started using the terms "ethnic groups" or "ethnicities" instead of "nations"; the gist, however, remained the same: Czechs had always been Czechs, Hungarians always Hungarians, and so on. In short, the entire population—or at least a large majority—was again assigned to ten groups.[6]

Seemingly, historians—who, as a group, have invested a great deal of intellectual and symbolic capital in the construction of long histories of "their nations"—were largely unable to let go of this crumbling edifice.[7] Because of that, identifications found in the sources that did not match modern national categories were ignored or explained away.[8] If modern nations were not centuries old, historians and some other scholars continued to claim, ethnic groups were. Ethnic identities, they further insisted, were all-pervasive and decisively shaped the emergence of nations. Knowingly or unknowingly, and with only a few exceptions, historians of the Habsburg Empire became ethno-symbolists, using a theoretically flawed paradigm, which simply did not fit the historical data, as their explanatory framework.[9]

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[4]Francis Roy Bridge, "Österreich(-Ungarn) Unter Den Grossmächten," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1948–1918*, vol. 6/1*: Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der Internationalen Beziehungen*, eds. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna, 2013), 231.

[5]Pieter M. Judson, "'Where Our Commonality Is Necessary …': Rethinking the End of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Austrian History Yearbook* 48 (2017): 10–11.

[6]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*, eds. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette, 2001), 112–52. On the modernization of terminology, see also Marko Pijović, "Demistificiranje 'etniciteta'" [Demystifying "Ethnicity"], *Historijska traganja* [Historical Searches] 10 (2012): 21.

[7]The literature on historians as nation-builders is extensive and the following titles are just a necessarily arbitrary selection: Monika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2010); János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay, eds., *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, 2015); Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (New York, 2010); Claire Norton, ed., *Nationalism, Historiography, and the (Re)Construction of the Past* (Washington, DC, 2007); Dirk van Hulle and Joep Leerssen, eds., *Editing the Nation's Memory: Textual Scholarship and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam, 2008).

[8]Claire Norton, "Nationalism and the Re-Invention of Early-Modern Identities in the Ottoman-Habsburg Borderlands," *Ethnologia Balkanica* 11 (2007): 80. See also Michael Portmann, "'Nationen' in den Quellen: Methodisch-Theoretische Kritik am Beispiel der 'Deutschen' in Südosteuropa," in *Zugänge: Volkskundliche Archiv-Forschung zu den Deutschen im und aus dem Östlichen Europa*, ed. Hans-Werner Retterath (Münster, 2015), 35–50.

[9]Ernest Gellner, "Ernest Gellner's Reply: 'Do Nations Have Navels?,'" *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 3 (1996): 366–70; Siniša Malešević, "'Divine *Ethnies*' and 'Sacred Nations': Anthony D. Smith and the Neo-Durkhemian Theory of Nationalism," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10, no. 4 (2004): 561–93; Umut Özkırımli, "The Nation as an Artichoke? A Critique of Ethnosymbolist Interpretations of Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 3 (2003): 339–55; Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (Dec. 2001): 862–96.

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Yet eventually (and only gradually), things began to change as new approaches, informed by recent theorizing, gained ground. In the last few decades, the historiography of the Habsburg Empire has made great strides and our understanding of identifications in this large Central European polity has become much more nuanced.[10] The image of the Habsburg Empire as a mosaic of mutually exclusive ethnic groups increasingly came into question as it became apparent that ethnicity was not a relevant category of identification in all situations. Additionally, it became clear that modern nations did not evolve out of preexisting ethnic groups, and that there were many more collective identifications in the prenational period than there are modern nations. Before the onset of nationalism, nonethnic categories of identification, such as religion, social status, and vocation, were often dominant and ethnic identifications were usually much more local. Most of the rural population identified with their village, parish, or valley, and perceived the lands outside their home province as "foreign."[11] Identification with ethnic communities territorially congruent with modern nations was rare, if it existed at all. The Slovene nation, for instance, was an invention that only started to take shape at the beginning of the nineteenth century; previously, most inhabitants of the region identified with their province or an even smaller region.[12] Similarly, the modern Slovak nation was not the offspring of a Slovak ethnic community—such a thing never existed—but a result of nationalist activities; for most Slavophones of present-day Slovakia, Slovakness only really became a relevant identification after 1918, in Czechoslovakia.[13] Recent research has also refuted the still dominant view that the Serb nation is a continuation of an earlier Serb ethnic community. Like other modern nations, it was at first an intellectual concept from the turn of the nineteenth century; it only gained relevance as it was successfully disseminated among the population in schools and through other institutions.[14]

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[10]For a fairly recent overview of developments, see Cole, "Differentiation or Indifference?"; Pieter M. Judson, "Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe: Introduction," in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, eds. Pieter M. Judson and Marsha Rozenblit (New York, 2005), 1–18. See also Michael Portmann, "Die Nation als eine Form kollektiver Identität? Kritik und Konsequenzen für eine zietgemäße Historiographie," in *Nation, Nationalitäten und Nationalismus im östlichen Europa: Festschrift für Arnold Suppan zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Marija Wakounig, Wolfgang Mueller, and Michael Portmann (Münster, 2010), 44–45.

[11]Teodor Domej, "O skupinski identiteti na Koroškem v prednacionalnem obdobju" [On Group Identity in Carinthia in Prenational Era], in *Matija Majar—Ziljski*, eds. Andreas Moritsch and Vincenc Rajšp (Klagenfurt, 1995), 43–65; Andreas Moritsch, ed., *Vom Ethnos zur Nationalität: Der nationale Differenzierungsprozeß am Beispiel ausgewählter Orte in Kärnten und im Burgenland* (Vienna, 1991), 49, 82; Pieter Plas, "Voicing Folk for the Academy: Interdiscursivity and Collective Identity in a North Dalmatian Ethnography, 1899–1900," *Journal of Pragmatics* 39, no. 12 (Dec. 2007): 2244–72; Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914* (Ithaca, 2001), 1–5; Kai Struve, "Bauern und ukrainische Nation in der Habsburgermonarchie und im Zarenreich," in *Die Ukraine: Prozesse der Nationsbildung*, ed. Andreas Kappeler (Cologne, 2011), 159–60.

[12]Joachim Hösler, *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); Jernej Kosi, *Kako je nastal slovenski narod: Začetki slovenskega nacionalnega gibanja v prvi polovici 19. stoletja* [Imagining the Slovene Nation: A History of the Slovene National Movement in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century] (Ljubljana, 2013); Rok Stergar and Jernej Kosi, "Kdaj so nastali 'lubi Slovenci'? O identitetah v prednacionalni dobi in njihovi domnevni vlogi pri nastanku slovenskega naroda" [When Did 'Dear Slovenes' Come About? Identities in the Pre-National Period and Their Supposed Role in the Formation of the Slovene Nation], *Zgodovinski časopis* [Historical Review] 70 (2016): 458–88.

[13]Alexander Maxwell, *Choosing Slovakia: Slavic Hungary, the Czechoslovak Language, and Accidental Nationalism* (London, 2009).

[14]Bratislav Pantelić, "Memories of a Time Forgotten: The Myth of the Perennial Nation," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2011): 443–64; Siniša Malešević, "The Mirage of Balkan Piedmont: State Formation and Serbian Nationalisms in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Nations and Nationalism* 23, no. 1 (2017): 129–50. See also Bogdan Trifunović, *Memory of Old Serbia and the Shaping of Serbian Identity* (Warsaw, 2015).

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Furthermore, recent research has persuasively shown that even as modern nationalism started to gain ground and nationhood became relevant, the nation was a pertinent category of identification only in some situations and for some people. Unquestionably, nationalists were able to mobilize thousands at certain moments, and for many people identification with a nation was a very important part of their lives. Yet despite all the nationalists' efforts, many still refused to identify with any nation or did so only in certain situations.[15] Research on national indifference has shown that the "good soldier Reberšek," the Slovene-speaking private who in his World War I–era correspondence showed a great affection for his home province, Styria, but self-identified as a Slovene only once, was no exception.[16] Even as late as World War I, nationalism could hardly mobilize everyone. Like many of his comrades, the Italian-speaking Giacinto Giacomolli from Trentino refused to fight for the "Italia irredenta" and chose to stay in a Russian POW camp instead.[17] Historians have also established that Reberšek's understated dynastic patriotism—he commented on the death of Francis Joseph with "the old Joe left this world now"—was also not exceptional. Moreover, Jászi's rather rigid division of "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces has been refuted; quite often, dynastic patriotism went hand in hand with nationalism.[18]

Last, but not least, historians have also recently shown that the present-day nations and their territorial arrangement were not the only possible outcome of historical processes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "nationalization of the masses" was not only complicated but also fairly open-ended. While Croat, Serb, and Slovene nationalists argued that the Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes were distinct nations, Yugoslav nationalists—sometimes the same people—claimed they were in fact all Yugoslavs. Precisely because Slovene and Croat nationalists were quite often Yugoslav nationalists at the same time, they were extremely reluctant or entirely unwilling to draw a border that would unequivocally separate,

[15]James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor, 2008); James Bjork et al., eds., *Creating Nationality in Central Europe, 1880–1950: Modernity, Violence and Belonging in Upper Silesia* (London, 2016); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Kai Struve, "Polish Peasants in Eastern Galicia—Indifferent to the Nation or Pillars of Polishness? National Attitudes in the Light of Józef Chałasiński's Collection of Peasant Youth Memoirs," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 109 (2014): 37–59; Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93–119; Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, 2008). See also the articles in the forum "Sites of Indifference to Nationhood," *Austrian History Yearbook* 43 (2012): 21–137.

[16]Janez Cvirn, "Franc Reberšek: Pisma slovenskega vojaka iz I. svetovne vojne" [Franc Reberšek: A Slovene Soldier's First World War Correspondence], *Borec* 40 (1988): 767–814. Reberšek's attitude did not change at all after the Reichsrat reopened at the end of May 1917 and Slovene nationalist propaganda greatly intensified reaching the rank and file on the front. See Walter Lukan, *Die Habsburgermonarchie und die Slowenen im 1. Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 2017), 127.

[17]Cole, "Differentiation or Indifference?," 97–98. On the varied and dynamic identifications of Italian-speaking soldiers from Trentino during World War I, see Quinto Antonelli, *I dimenticati della grande guerra: la memoria dei combattenti trentini, 1914–1920*, 2nd ed. (Trento, 2014); Simone Attilio Bellezza, *Tornare in Italia: Come i prigionieri trentini in Russia divennero Italiani (1914–1920)* (Bologna, 2016). I am grateful to Francesco Frizzera for drawing my attention to these two highly informative books. On Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia, see also Iris (formerly Alon) Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford, 2002).

[18]Laurence Cole, *Military Culture and Popular Patriotism in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford, 2014); Daniel L. Unowsky and Laurence Cole, eds., *The Limits of Loyalty: Imperial Symbolism, Popular Allegiances, and State Patriotism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy* (New York, 2007); Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916* (West Lafayette, 2005).

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say, Slovenes and Croats.[19] Similarly, nominal Czechs and Slovaks were often simultaneously perceived as Czechoslovaks. Joep Leerssen's remark that "the history of nationalisms is far more complex than merely a pre-history of the contemporary states," applies to nationalisms in Habsburg Central Europe too.[20]

To summarize, historians of the Habsburg Empire have largely abandoned the nationalized and deterministic outlook on its history even if some still cling, as Pieter M. Judson illustrated in the 2017 Robert A. Kann lecture, to an anachronistic picture of the crumbling state being irrevocably pulled apart by national tensions.[21] A comparison of the latest survey, Judson's *The Habsburg Empire*, not only with Jászi's book but also with more recent ones, makes this transformation abundantly clear. The story of "ten nations" has been replaced by a much more complex narrative that emphasizes the contingent and situational character of identifications and finds agency with people, not reified groups.

Case studies included in this forum further validate such an approach. They were developed from the papers presented at the conference "Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic." The conference was hosted by the Department of History at the University of Ljubljana, the Institute of Contemporary History, the National Museum of Contemporary History, and the Viennese Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Historical Social Science, and it gathered more than twenty scholars from Europe and the United States. Its aim was to present and analyze identifications in diverse settings and in different periods, thus further questioning teleological national narratives.[22] The articles selected for the forum focus on the Habsburg Empire in the long nineteenth century and show that even at the turn of the twentieth century, nations, while undoubtedly important, were not always the most relevant category of identification; sometimes they were not relevant at all. Identification with nations was offered—sometimes imposed—from above as nationalists tried to nationalize the population, and it was driven by events—elections, wars, trials, and so on. Yet even as nationalisms were increasingly salient, supranational patriotism remained relevant and not necessarily in conflict with ethnolinguistic nationalism. Furthermore, groups could still coalesce across alleged national borders around a business interest, a common profession, or a social class, while an ethnic boundary could form contrary to linguistic classifications and nationalist beliefs. Because of that, ethnicist and groupist language is of limited use for describing and analyzing the past or, for that matter, the present.

To conclude, the aim of this forum is not to whitewash the history of Austria-Hungary, to claim there were no nationalists and nationalism, to suggest the empire was a paragon of peaceful coexistence without conflicts. Certainly not! Nationalism was a salient ideology,

[19]Marko Zajc, *Kje se slovensko neha in hrvaško začne: slovensko-hrvaška meja v 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja* [Where the Slovene Land Ends and the Croatian Begins: The Slovene-Croatian Border in the 19th and at the Beginning of the 20th Century] (Ljubljana, 2006).

[20]Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006), 18. For alternative nationalisms and the open-endedness of nationalism, see Konrad Clewing, *Staatlichkeit und nationale Identitätsbildung: Dalmatien in Vormärz und Revolution* (Munich, 2001); Maxwell, *Choosing Slovakia: Slavic Hungary, the Czechoslovak Language, and Accidental Nationalism*; Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford, 2012).

[21]Judson, "Where Our Commonality Is Necessary," 3; Cf. Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York, 2014), 15.

[22]A video recording of the entire conference is available at "Identities, Categories of Identification, and Identifications between the Danube, the Alps, and the Adriatic," *Sistory Zgodovina Slovenije*, accessed 28 Nov. 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/11686/37958.

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capable of mobilizing thousands, and there were many nationalist conflicts, some quite violent. Yet workers in, for instance, Marburg/Maribor, a town on the so-called language frontier, continued to celebrate May Day together, and self-identifying Czech workers often felt greater affinity toward German-speaking workers then toward the Czech middle class and nobility.[23]

Austria-Hungary was not nonnational: Identification with a nation was one of the modes of group building and certainly not the least important one; however, the Habsburg Empire was also not just a patchwork of nations or ethnic groups. In some situations, and for many people, the nation was hardly relevant as a category of identification; at times, it was entirely irrelevant. Additionally, the boundaries of national "imagined communities" were flexible, and "others"—as Edin Hajdarpašić has shown—could sometimes be "brothers."[24] The articles in this forum only further confirm that as historians we really ought to move away from reified identities and start seeing identifications as highly situational and contingent. After all, did not even nationalist politicians and other so-called ethnic entrepreneurs demonstrate just that when they enrolled their children in German-language schools to make them bilingual and consequently better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future? In this situation, and contrary to all their ideological goals and policies, they acted pragmatically, as "caring parents" and not as nationalists.

Rok Stergar is an Associate Professor in modern history at the University of Ljubljana. His research is focused on the history of South East and East Central Europe in the long nineteenth century, especially the history of nationalism and World War I. He has published two books and several papers in scholarly journals and edited volumes. His latest publication is the paper (co-authored with Tamara Scheer) "Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification," *Nationalities Papers* 46 (2018, forthcoming).

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I would also like to thank Nancy M. Wingfield for suggesting I try to put this *Austrian History Yearbook* forum together, and the editor, Daniel Unowsky, for all his help.

[23]Franc Rozman, "Politično življenje Nemcev v Mariboru" [Political Life of Marburg/Maribor Germans], in *Od Maribora do Trsta: zbornik referatov* [From Maribor to Trieste: A Collection of Papers], eds. Darko Friš and Franc Rozman (Maribor, 1998), 54–55; Jakub S. Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism: Czech and German Social Democracy in Habsburg Austria, 1890–1918* (Oxford, 2017). I am grateful to Jernej Kosi for reminding me about the Rozman article.

[24]Edin Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca, 2015).

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