

Habsburg Statehood Through the Historiographical Lens of Bohemian  
National Identity

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Historical arguments about nationalism directly reflect shifting interpretations of the nature of nations. The subsequent pages navigate this dual shifting in the discourse on national identity in Austria-Hungary generally and the Bohemian Lands specifically.<sup>1</sup> Along the way, pitfalls and landmarks emerge and submerge. From nations as assumed homogenous bodies, through universal contingency, and ultimately to the nationalization of indifferent individuals, this ever more complex trajectory both clarifies and alienates. On the one hand, the larger historiographical shift from policies to practices allows the historian an understanding likely closer to ‘reality.’ On the other hand, as the discourse becomes more specific, it becomes isolated from larger studies. The cells come into view as the organism becomes blurry. Still, as will be discussed, the innovative methodologies and ideas of recent historians provide hope for constructing a ‘big-picture’ argument so rare in contemporary history. Navigating the historiography of nationhood in the Bohemian Lands elucidates a method through which one can conceptualize the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Many early histories of Austria-Hungary and the Bohemian Lands assumed the existence of nations as objective building-blocks on which to

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Bohemian Lands” refers to the area now known as the Czech Republic and is contemporarily favored because it does not imply nationalistic favoritism as do “Czech Lands,” or “German Bohemia.”

construct an argument. By and large, the trajectory, analysis, and conclusion of these works reflect the assumption of national homogeneity. A great deal of early Habsburg histories used this assumption of nations as ethnic-national incompatibilities to debate the inevitability of dissolution.<sup>2</sup> Histories dealing specifically with the Bohemian Lands likewise pointed toward ethno-national homogeneity. R.W. Seton-Watson argued that an inherent and homogenous national community undercut Austro-Hungarian stability.<sup>3</sup> Other historians such as John Bradley and A.H. Hermann linked Czech national identity to the coming of popular sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> In this view, an uncontrollable awakening of communal identity undermined Habsburg solidarity. The only major distinction here regards origins – on the one hand nations are ethnically primordial, on the other, nations are awakenings of historical ethnicities. Nevertheless, in both cases the actualization of nations remains inevitable.

This discrepancy over the nature of nations expanded greatly in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s Robert Kann and Hugh Seton-Watson saw nations rooted in politics rather than primordial causality. For both, national identity was an output of the political process, not an awakening of an

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 248-258, and Josef Redlich, *Das österreichische Staate- und Reichsproblem*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1920-1926). Arthur May, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951); C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (New York: MacMillan, 1969)

<sup>3</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (New York: Hutchinson, 1943), 211, 248-249.

<sup>4</sup> J.F.N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia: A Short History* (Edinburgh, UK: The University Press Edinburgh, 1971), 119-139; A.H. Hermann, *A History of the Czechs* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1975), 103-117.

inherent or traditional characteristic.<sup>5</sup> Though they never used the words, Kann and Seton-Watson saw ethnicity as historical rather than primordial – that is, historically developed rather than inherently inevitable. In the 1980s, Benedict Anderson aptly labeled nations “modern” and coined the term “imagined communities.”<sup>6</sup> For Anderson, nations are “imagined communities” because they require the mental construction of boundaries and abstract communal identity. One can not touch a nation. One can only imagine a community beyond ones own immediate surroundings. In Anderson’s understanding, nations – thinking nationally – represent a prerogative of the modernized. In short, imaginative musings of nationhood emerged only from those with the liberty of musing.<sup>7</sup> In this understanding, nationalism serves not as a realization or awakening of eternal identity, but as a contingent offshoot of modern civilization. Accordingly, the political force called ‘nationalism’ transforms imagined nations into actual nation-states.

Still, this relatively abstract understanding of nations as modern suggests that nations are essentially definitive. Although Anderson’s notion of imagined modern constructs rightly captures the essence of nations, it does little to explain how a multi-national empire gave way to a multitude of

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) and Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977) 143-157.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1983); for a similar argument on the modernity of nations, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 37-47; Gellner, 88-101.

nations. In each interpretation nations represent essentially monolithic entities; the works omit national composition. Even before Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, however, social history methodology shifted the discourse of the Bohemian Lands and Austria-Hungary toward an understanding of national composition. Social historians Gary Cohen and Miroslav Hroch attempted to aggregate the sums of individuals to produce a larger meaning or representation.

Gary Cohen's 1981 *The Politics of Ethnic Survival* employed Prague as a laboratory in which to observe transitions over time in a relatively fixed population. The monograph argues that ethnicity and nations represent social constructs in perpetual flux rather than eternal, primordial, or even historical bodies. Ethnicity and identity, said Cohen, result from attaching subjective meanings to social traits: language, education, high culture, class, and most importantly, political affiliation.<sup>8</sup> Here ethnicity represents a socio-political construct and nationalism represents the political form which defines it; *not the inverse*. By looking at nationalism and nationality as political rather than ethnic, Cohen realized that many people considered themselves ethnically Czech or German only as they became nationally – that is politically – Czech or German.<sup>9</sup> Cohen's understanding of identity and his documentation of side-switchers challenged the assumption that nations can be understood as

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<sup>8</sup> Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1961-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, 15-17.

homogeneous entities. Due to a variety of social conditions, the German national movement lost control of Prague by failing to combat assimilation and penetrate political loyalty into private life.<sup>10</sup>

Cohen contributed a new way of looking at nations and ethnicity, and raised revolutionary questions about social homogeneity. In effect the discourse began to focus on the political forces behind nations rather than the abstract nature of nations. Still, some historians resisted the change. John Bradley extended an argument concerning the unified politicization of a nationally conscious Czech mass.<sup>11</sup> Although Bradley maintained Anderson's notion of nations as modern, his analysis was entirely too sweeping and became a target for subsequent historians. Specifically, the social historian Miroslav Hroch played an integral role in undercutting such a clear cut interpretations.

A pioneer in the social history of nationalism and national identity – much like Cohen – Miroslav Hroch created an empirical framework through which nationalist movements in different countries could be compared.<sup>12</sup> Although modern, Hroch argued that Czech nationalism was stunted by the

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen, 278-281.

<sup>11</sup> John F.N. Bradley, *Czech Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (East European Monographs, Boulder: distributed by Columbia University Press, 1984), 10, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Hroch's process is exhaustive. It contained three stages: national awareness of the intelligentsia, a period of public patriotism, and the national movement. In addition there are two stages in which nationalist movements develop: the struggle against absolutism, and the period after the rise of capitalism. Further, there are four developmental types of movements contingent upon the presence, timing, and/or lack of: bourgeois revolution, industrial revolution, and organization of the working-class.

uneven modernization of the Bohemian urban and rural areas. The movement could not shift from “public patriotism” to “mass movement” because there was no concrete common denominator between the people of the Bohemian Lands.<sup>13</sup> Together with Cohen, Miroslav Hroch attacked general musing and theorizing about a mystical force called nationalism and showed that each movement was unique and contingent upon a multitude of events.

Still, despite Miroslav Hroch’s demonstration of the social ambiguity of national movements, some historians continued to exhaustively discuss the politicization of unified masses. For example, H.L. Rees dismissed the vastness of historical contingency admitting only in passing the general social disunity of the Bohemian Lands.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously Rees insisted on discussing “the Czechs,” “the Czech Movement,” and “Czechness,” as if those terms applied to every person within a geographical region. Rees accepted the idea of nations as constructs of modernity however his approach was blatantly dismissive of social disunity, the enormity of the human experience, and the notion of historical contingency. The historian Hugh Agnew made a similarly dismissive argument, admittedly with a little more nuance. Although Czech nationalism may not have been unified before the Great War, Agnew argued for a dormant unified “national consciousness.” By nature then, Czech nationalism can be understood as the politicization of this

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<sup>13</sup> Hroch, 61.

<sup>14</sup> H.L. Rees, *The Czechs During the First World War: The Path to Independence*, (East European Monographs, Boulder, CO: distributed by Columbia University Press, 1992), especially chapter one.

sleeping national consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Agnew's argument relied heavily on the social philosopher Anthony Smith who argued that national community was different than modern nationalism; the former an entity of traditional homogeneity, the latter, its political awakening.<sup>16</sup>

This argument partially resurrected notions of social homogeneity and inevitability in that it assumed everyone to be a member of a prefixed national community with a prefixed national consciousness. But Agnew represents something of a crossroads: although his argument rested on a 'thing' – historical national consciousness – his study acknowledged politicization as a 'process.' Agnew partially accepted historical contingency as well as the process of politicization however he rejected nations as modern ideas and thus rejected the idea of nationalism as a modern political force. Although Agnew made no explicit counter argument to Cohen and Hroch – and thus his idea of a national consciousness becomes questionable – his discussion of politicization as a process remains significant.

In the edited volume, *Becoming National*, Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny further developed nationalism as a process. Generally, the volume argues that nationalism was a condition of history; historically contingent rather than

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<sup>15</sup> Hugh Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (Pittsburgh & London: Pittsburgh University Press: 1993), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 7-33.



primordial or even ‘modern.’<sup>17</sup> In the Bohemian Lands, Miroslav Hroch and Tom Narin pointed to nationalism as a reaction to social conditions. In his contribution, Hroch argued that the rise of nationalism drew impetus from social composition. In the highly segmented Bohemian Lands there was only room for “articulating social contradictions or hostilities in national categories... as dangers to a common culture, particular language, or ethnic interest.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Narin argued that nationalism was a political reaction to the combination of capitalism and mass politics.<sup>19</sup> Together, Hroch and Narin claimed popular sovereignty amplified self interest and group isolation. With a heavy focus on historical contingency, *Becoming National* discussed nationalism as a political and social condition rather than a fixed inevitability. Though integral to the study of nationalism, the volume remains perhaps too dismissive of issues of modernity and politicization in that it aggregates individuals without taking into consideration the ways in which individuals navigate through social structures.

In essence, *Becoming National* represents the culmination of the paradigm shift initiated by Cohen and Hroch of viewing history as a study of the diversity of the human experience. The teleology of historical circumstance thus resulted in viewing history as a conglomeration of

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<sup>17</sup> Geoff Eley, Ronald Suny, ed., *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32. ‘Modern’ here should be taken in the technological/industrial sense demonstrated by Anderson and Gellner.

<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,” in Eley and Suny, 60-77, especially 68.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Narin, “Scotland and Europe,” in Eley and Suny, 79-104, especially 83-84.

contingencies. This telos however has significant historiographical implications: what happens when contingency rules the day? If everything is contingent, nothing appears comparable, no trends of analysis can be made, and no arguments of similarity can be valid. Universal contingency reigns supreme, and the historian's power to generalize becomes obsolete. Universal contingency erects a barrier between the subjects of history and the commentators of it. The subjects become increasingly inhuman; their individuality subjected to the historian's understanding of their inanimate movement amidst a sea of circumstance. This line of reasoning troubles the historian. Interestingly, it was not only the historian, but history which provided a solution. Interestingly, the metaphorical wall shared a fate with another very real wall.

The past three works, though published after the end of the Cold War, do not reflect any major changes initiated by the event. On the one hand this interpretation gauges earlier works with later ones, but on the other it remains true that the contextual events did little but encourage research in newly opened archives. In terms of argument, the past three texts have essentially debated issues previously made apparent by earlier scholars; modernity, homogeneity, and contingency. Even more generally, beyond these three texts every work thus far explains nations and nationalism as ideas or 'things.' The inherent assumption being that those 'things' actually existed

with some solidity, thus giving historians the ability to accurately discuss them.

In the wake of the break-up and ‘national un-mixing’ of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker made some game-changing observations. Brubaker argued that previous conceptions of nations were far too simplistic and presupposed the very existence of political nations. By discussing nations and nationalism as we perceive them now, we presuppose their nature and more importantly, their very creation and survival.<sup>20</sup> In short, previous commentators of nations and nationalism saw a multitude of nations from their vantage point in the present and wrote their existence into the past, thus reading history backwards.

In both historical cases – the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of Austria-Hungary – a presumably more-than-national ethnically mixed state gave way to a multitude of ethnically homogeneous nation-states. When the break-up of ‘multi-national’ states in Eastern Europe went less than smoothly, the complexities of national identity and the role of historical heritage became readily apparent. Seizing impetus from Brubaker and the end of Cold War, subsequent historians generally rejected the existence of nations as solid ‘things’ and focused on the process of nationalization; the *creation of*

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<sup>20</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-17.

‘things.’ The interpretation of nations as actualizations via nationalism gave way to a drawn out process of practices by which nations are constructed.

One of the first historians to utilize Brubaker’s interpretation of nations was Jeremy King, whose article “The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond” stands central to the historiography. King argued that perhaps every previous historian of the Bohemian Lands, whether actual primordialists or not, was a ‘closet-primordialist’ or ‘ethnicist,’ in that they read nations into national indifference. Ethnicists ignored the existence of non-national politics by presuming that any non-national peoples were simply not-yet-national. As Kings puts it, ethnicists saw “not so much non-national politics as ethnic nonpolitics.”<sup>21</sup> Still, beyond an opening anecdote, this article offered little in the way of nation specific analysis, preferring heavy historiographical and sociological discussions of nationalism and nationhood.<sup>22</sup> The term “non-national politics” remained mostly ambivalent.

In his subsequent monograph, *Budweisers into Czech and Germans*, King further discussed this ambiguous term and opened an entirely new discourse on nationhood in the Bohemian Lands. King’s local history

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<sup>21</sup> Jeremy King, “The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond” in Maria Bucur, and Nancy Wingfield Ed. *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 112-152, here 124-126, 129.

<sup>22</sup> “Nationhood” means social composition and political loyalty to a “nation.”

revealed not two, but three identities: Czech, German, and Budweiser.<sup>23</sup> The latter group was non-national, meaning they had no socio-political loyalty to the Czech or German “imagined community.” For King, the coming of popular sovereignty was not national by nature. Indeed non-national Budweisers were modern supporters of popular sovereignty but remained Habsburg loyal rather than nationally loyal. As the Czech and German national groups targeted this population, popular sovereignty became nationalized, and non-national Budweisers and their middle path policies were nipped in the bud.<sup>24</sup> Society itself was nationalized, Habsburg loyalties disappeared, nationhood became institutionalized, and Bohemian politics underwent a redefinition in the very nature of politics.<sup>25</sup>

In the contemporary world where almost all politics is national politics, the non-national form helps explain how ‘imagined communities’ developed into states and how a once non-national region developed into the nation-state known as the Czech Republic. While King certainly does not espouse inevitability, his work nevertheless explains the present through the past. In a different context this has been succinctly described as “the future of the past” rather than “the past as past.”<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, King showed that nations and nationalism are not simple political entities but rather dynamic

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<sup>23</sup> Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> King, *Budweisers*, 45, 69-79.

<sup>25</sup> King, *Budweisers*, 96-113, 128, 209-210.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Burbank and David L. Ransell eds. *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), xv.

products of socio-political change. No doubt some ‘ethnicist’ historians remained, however the majority of King’s contemporaries agreed with the notion of nationalization as a practice of Bohemian politics.<sup>27</sup>

The political nationalization of non-national Bohemians was further discussed by Eagle Glassheim who argued that the Bohemian nobility attempted to remain non-national because it meant the end of their relative socio-political importance. Bohemian nobles “changed so as to conserve,” thus effectively avoiding nationalization until World War Two.<sup>28</sup> Taken together, Glassheim and King examined the nature of non-national politics but neither fully explained how national groups attempted to spread their influence, nor did they explain how non-national peoples experienced and reacted to the process of nationalization. In short, because they focused on politics rather than socio-cultural experiences, they demonstrated the process without addressing the practical effectiveness of it.

The 2005 edited volume *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* dealt explicitly with the effectiveness of the dynamic process of nationalization. As a whole the volume argued that nations – defined as ideas of modernity – are only fully recognized in actuality through state power. In

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh Agnew broadened the scope of his first book, as previously discussed, and argued that homogenous ethnic Czechs were politicized into national Czechs. Agnew made no mention of King’s non-national Budweisers or to his claim on ethnicism as closet primordialism. Agnew did however further debunk the myth of nationalism as the direct cause of Habsburg dissolution. The idea of ‘nations’ as inevitabilities and direct causes of Habsburg dissolution it seems, had been quite phased out. Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2004), esp. 146.

<sup>28</sup> Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 48, 149-158.

other words, much like Jeremy King had, the volume argues that nations are power constructs.<sup>29</sup> This distinction of power proves important. For now suffice it to say that understanding the existence of nations as nation-state power constructs very sharply contrasts earlier studies which viewed nations through the lens of generic popular support. In the volume, essays by Pieter Judson, Cynthia Paces and Nancy Winfield addressed the ways in which public spaces were nationalized by opposing groups aiming to sway the non-national public. For the former, nationalist attempts to nationalize were largely ineffective. For the latter two, nationalization successfully created at least moderate cultural homogeneity, often only because of state encouragement.<sup>30</sup>

Pieter Judson furthered this debate over effectiveness in his monograph, *Guardians of the Nation* which focused explicitly on issues of nationalization in the whole Austrian half of the empire. The process of nationalization, Judson claimed, was a battle between opposing nationalist activists making socio-political and cultural claims of significance on public life: traditional festivals, historical figures, and historical events.<sup>31</sup> The nationalization of the tourism industry claimed historic sites as culturally and

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<sup>29</sup> Pieter Judson and Marsha Rozenblit, Ed. *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Pieter Judson, "The Bohemian Oberammergau: Nationalist Tourism in the Austrian Empire" in Judson and Rozenblit eds., *Constructing Nationalities*, 89-106; and Cynthia Paces and Nancy Wingfield, "The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1920" in Judson and Rozenblit eds., *Constructing Nationalities*, 107-125.

<sup>31</sup> Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

historically significant for specific nationalities despite the often non-national reality. In hopes of swaying local politics, nationalist groups physically relocated national sympathizers into small towns. Indifference became so subversive that non-national individuals often faked national political sympathies in order to take advantage of nationalist subsidized housing.<sup>32</sup> For Judson, these claims on society were largely unsuccessful; nationalist activism, it seemed, often fell on indifferent ears.<sup>33</sup> National identity, to the nationally indifferent, became simply a *social convenience*; thus the development of nations and national identity, were highly contingent and fragile developments, often with little to no correlation to actual politics or national pride.

Two years later, Nancy Wingfield furthered her position on the effects of nationalization in *Flag Wars and Stone Saints*. Like Judson, Wingfield addressed nationalization as a conflict of cultural significance. Nationalist claims represented a nationalization of public memory. By claiming a statue as a national monument, the groups were creating national history and heritage. For Wingfield these cultural claims drew a good deal of public sympathy.<sup>34</sup> Wingfield, much like King and Glassheim, attempted to explain how the Czech Republic formed out of the non-national Habsburg Empire. But, as noted above, this type of reverse teleology can be dangerous.

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<sup>32</sup> Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 98-103, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4-13.



Nevertheless, all three historians made arguments which not only furthered the discourse, they also likely represent a closer look at ‘reality’ than many of their predecessors. However, from these three works alone, and in part Judson’s can be included here, little discussion ensues as to what these arguments signify other than the complexities of nationalization.

In 2008, Tara Zahra’s monograph *Kidnapped Souls* bridged some of these issues. The text, attempted to explain the existence of the Czech Republic, re-grounded the discourse of the Bohemian Lands by pointing out the significance of national indifference. Nationalization, claims Zahra, represents not only the clash between nationalists, but the very conflict over who *belonged* to each nationality. In other words, nationalization represents the conflict of creating the basis of national support required for actualizing the idea of a nation. Zahra focuses on Bohemian children as nationally indifferent social hybrids which accordingly became targets of nationalist activism.<sup>35</sup> As national groups adapted their policies to the practices of indifference, indifference itself shaped the political aims and methods of national groups.<sup>36</sup> For Zahra, national indifference becomes a narrative of historical change like race, war, class conflict, and technological change, in that it shaped how history itself progressed.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 9-10, 13-23.

<sup>36</sup> Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 50-52, 70-71, 272-273.

<sup>37</sup> Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 9.

In this survey of national identity in the Bohemian Lands, we have seen that not only did non-national politics exist (King and Glassheim), and not only did national groups attempt to harness and nationalize them (Judson and Wingfield), but indeed their very existence shaped the form of the process (Zahra). As these last few texts have shown, the threat of universal contingency can be avoided through innovative interpretation and method. Individuals do not float on a sea of contingency; rather they make their own history by playing a part, active or passive, in larger processes. Perhaps this analysis fits too many pieces together in a forced or artificial structure but the goal here has been to find some kind of larger meaning. Recent historical literature reflects a shift away from ‘truth’ and toward credibility.<sup>38</sup> As such, defining the ‘historian’s task’ becomes increasingly problematic. No doubt history has become complex, but fractured pieces encourage the historian to make mosaics.

This discourse traced arguments from the inevitable crumbling of the Habsburg Empire at the whim of primordial nations, all the way to the efforts and implications of nationalization. Many texts, especially later ones, navigated multiple contingencies in explaining the presently existing Czech Republic. Thus these works can be said to deal not with the ‘reality’ or ‘state of being’ of the Bohemian Lands or Austria-Hungary, but with explaining the actualization of a very real nation-state. While it remains too bold, and flat

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<sup>38</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians,” *American Historical Review*, October 2009, 114/4, 930-946, especially 930-932.

out incorrect, to label these works deterministic, one can say that something has been lost in the ‘big picture.’

Interpretations of the Habsburg Empire, which started this essay, have given way to explaining the existence of contemporary nations.<sup>39</sup> The ‘big picture’ historian within – the mosaic maker – begs to know, what can one say about the Austro-Hungarian Empire?<sup>40</sup> In this discourse, the idea of nation-states as power constructs has been broached, but not developed. Monographs by King, Judson, and Zahra, as well as the edited volume *Constructing Nationalities*, refer to Max Weber’s definition of a state as, “a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>41</sup> Most of these works dealt with the ways in which non-national individuals were pigeonholed into a national identity. On the level of daily life, national groups attached political meaning to consumption thus categorizing who shopped where and who bought what. In sum, the process of nationalizing the nationally indifferent becomes a process of coercion. If this remains true on the provincial town

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<sup>39</sup> For a brief sample of other Habsburg succession histories see Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Anti-Semitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Peter Toma and Dušan Kováč, *Slovakia: From Samo to Dzurinda* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> For example the question of Habsburg dissolution has become less important than Habsburg succession. The former results in a diplomatic pre-war narrative, the latter essentially ignores this very notion. The point here is not to bemoan this shift or claim one question is ‘better’ than the other, but only to make an observation on the practices of history.

<sup>41</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

level, then perhaps it also remains true on the largest levels as well. So then, what exactly was the Habsburg Empire?

If it was a Weberian ‘state,’ then presumably it could be subjected to questions of practical authority. Pieter Judson has shown political indifference spanning beyond the Bohemian Lands and into the entirety of Cisleithania. Likewise, the Hungarian historian F. Tibor Zsuppán argued that the Hungarian half of the Empire was generally not subject to the authority of Vienna.<sup>42</sup> If the Habsburg state lacked practical power over its territories then perhaps it controlled nothing beyond the physical reach of Vienna. Indeed, the Habsburg Empire was built on strategic diplomatic maneuvering, not physical conquest.<sup>43</sup> To follow Weber’s logic, a failed state would be one which lacks the monopoly of power, and a strong case could be made that the Habsburg Monarchy suffered from just this ailment. Thus Habsburg succession could be seen, as Jeremy King has suggested, as an all-out scramble to create legitimate Weberian states; nation-states only consequently.

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<sup>42</sup> F. Tibor Zsuppán, “The Hungarian Political Scene,” in Mark Cornwall, *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth Century Europe* Revised and Expanded Ed. (Exeter, UK: Exeter University Press: 2002), 97-118.

<sup>43</sup> This Habsburg saying is suggestive of political consolidation of theoretical power: “Let others wage war. You, happy Austria, marry to prosper” see Carl Schorske *Fin-de-siècle-Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1981), 146.

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