



Pieter M. Judson. *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the language frontiers of imperial Austria.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. 332 S. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-02325-3.



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Language and Nationalism in the Hapsburg Empire

In his book, *Guardians of the Nation*, Pieter M. Judson presents a compelling investigation of nationalist movements in regions of the Hapsburg Empire that were home to more than one language group. These places, where people with various linguistic backgrounds lived and worked together, have become known as language frontiers, a concept that Judson argues was developed and promoted by nationalists seeking to convert others to their cause. The frontier, in Judson's view, is not an accurate description of these regions but rather a construct. Drawing on such diverse primary sources as newspapers, statistics, cultural artifacts (plays and novels), materials from nationalist organizations, guidebooks, and administrative documents, Judson shows how and why the concept of the language frontier developed during the last decades of the empire. To demonstrate the variety of tactics that different nationalist groups chose, the author discusses three regions: Bohemia, South Styria, and South Tyrol. Judson finds evidence in his sources that national identity was mutable, not fixed, and the majority did not equate language use with loyalty to one nation over another. Those who devoted themselves to the nationalist cause were in the minority, yet these ef-

forts yielded significant results—so much so that the concept of the language frontier became commonplace during the twentieth century and played an important role in arguments about political boundaries in central Europe. Judson's study reveals the many activities in which nationalists engaged as well as the varied success that they encountered. His comprehensive evaluation of sources combined with his expertise on the Hapsburg Empire provide a fascinating glimpse of life in these so-called language frontiers prior to the imperial collapse.

Judson advocates the reexamination of nationalism in central Europe through a close study of local societies and cultures. His ideas are influenced by Rogers Brubaker's essays in *Ethnicity without Groups* (2004) along with such historical regional studies as Jeremy King's *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (2002) and Tara Zahra's dissertation "Your Child Belongs to the Nation: Nationalization, Germanization, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands" (2005). Because the official position of the Hapsburg Empire was supranational, local societies and cultures developed independent versions of nation-

alism that varied from community to community. The press in such larger centers as Prague and Vienna often cited incidents that occurred at these frontier regions as fodder for political argument. As a result, accounts originating from urban centers—used in the past as key sources by scholars—are often biased and distorted. To understand what was happening at the language frontier, it is essential to reevaluate local sources rather than rely solely on urban press coverage.

In the first chapter, “Languages, Territories, Politicians, and People,” Judson introduces his main argument and provides an overview of important historical developments that fostered the concept of the language frontier. The chapter begins with a contemporary document that is presented to contextualize the argument made in the chapter, a structure followed throughout the book. The source here is a 1902 language use study conducted by demographer J. Zemrich that features the term “language frontier.” In his summary of scholarly research on nationalism in the Hapsburg Empire, Judson argues against the idea of imperial Austria as an outdated political entity that was destined to failure. Scholars have often equated a burgeoning nationalist consciousness with the modern nation-state, a perception that Judson believes is not accurate. He advocates regional studies as a means to correct these misassumptions. This chapter also provides historical context for the time period under discussion, focusing particularly on key developments in the Hapsburg territories, such as the 1861 and 1867 constitutional reforms and the imperial census. The chapter concludes with a description of the nationalist organizations that played an important role in these areas, including the German, Czech, Slovene, and Italian school associations and regional groups.

Chapter 2, “Schoolhouse Fortresses,” considers how and why the school became a potent symbol for nationalist groups. A district could have German schools and institutions that taught in the main language depending on the demands of the local citizens. For nationalists, the choice parents made for their children was interpreted as a declaration of loyalty for one group over another. However, Judson points out that the decision was often contingent on factors other than nationalist beliefs. In some regions, parents sought a bilingual education for their children, demonstrating that segments of the population did not formulate their identities based on language. Judson also discusses a genre he calls the “schoolhouse drama,” a newspaper story that reported vandalism against the school building as a manifestation of tension between national groups. Such stories, while based on

factual information, exaggerated the importance of nationalism in these events in an attempt to sway neutral citizens into choosing sides.

“Encounters on the Rural Frontier,” chapter 3, expands on the difficulties nationalist groups faced in their interactions with local populations. Judson demonstrates that many people interested in nationalism were recent arrivals in these areas, such as schoolteachers in conjunction with the 1869 education reforms. Often, the newcomers defined themselves as “authentic rural insiders with a natural right to set the local agenda” in face of antipathy toward nationalism exhibited by the established population (p. 99). Judson shows that the concept of the language frontier was restricted to this smaller group of new arrivals and less relevant for the population as a whole.

The following chapter, “Reluctant Colonists: The Sudmark Settlers,” is a case study examining the initiative of one German nationalist group, the Sudmark, to bring new residents into South Styria. This plan was viewed as a way of creating a bulwark against the perceived threat of Slovene culture. Judson brings together a variety of sources, including Sudmark documents, analysis of the 1912 Styrian novel *Das deutsche Leid*, and Slovene-language publications, to show the ideological importance placed on this plan as well as the near impossibility of implementing it. He then analyzes data collected from the imperial censuses establishing that the initiative was ultimately unsuccessful. This chapter effectively demonstrates Judson’s approach because it synthesizes numerous types of documents to make a convincing and compelling argument.

Chapter 5, “Tourism to the Rescue: Consumption and National Identity,” examines ways that German nationalist groups sought to make commitment to the nation the primary motivation when selecting holiday destinations, thereby making nationalism a consumer choice. German tourists had the potential to bolster German culture and provide needed support to German-owned businesses in these seemingly volatile areas. Guidebooks presented tourists with a construct of a shared German culture that stretched across the empire despite geographical separation. Without such unity, there was no justification for the concept of a nation. Judson discusses two main examples: the activities of the Bohmerwaldbund to support an annual passion play staged in Horitz/Horice na Sumave and the attempts to renovate German landmarks in South Tyrol.

Judson looks at how nationalist groups “exploited

violent incidents and endowed them with propagandistic value by linking them repeatedly to larger narrative frameworks” in chapter 6, “Violence in the Village” (p. 178). The conflict under examination took place during September 1908 in the village of Bergreichenstein/Kasperske Hory and pitted a visiting group of German students against some of the town’s Czech residents. This event sounded reverberations all the way to Vienna and Prague; within the village, it even caused the loss of one life. Judson suggests that press coverage of this event and similar incidents led contemporary observers and later historians to conclude that conflict between nationalities was common in rural areas. Construing the other side as a threat was one way of motivating otherwise ambivalent citizens to be loyal to a nationalist cause. By comparing newspapers from both groups along with government documents, however, Judson argues that the conflict was likely far less dramatic than the narratives presented in the contemporary press.

Chapter 7, “The First World War and Beyond: The Transformation of the Language Frontier,” provides an overview of the transformations that took place in these territories during and after World War I. Judson looks at new strategies devised by nationalist groups in the war years, such as the distribution of welfare benefits. The post-Hapsburg division of central Europe transformed the meaning of the term “language frontier” because political borders were determined by cultural and linguistic similarities. Now inhabitants of these regions either belonged to the national majority or were considered outsiders to the culture. Judson provides a brief discussion of changes in these territories after their absorption into Czechoslovakia (Bohemia), Yugoslavia (South Styria), and Italy (South Tyrol) until 1945.

Scholars interested in Bohemia and South Styria will undoubtedly find this study extremely helpful, but those wishing to learn more about nationalism in South Tyrol may be disappointed. Only chapter 5, which looks

at tourism, discusses this area with extensive detail; the rest of the book provides surprisingly little information about it. Furthermore, apart from chapter 5, the references on South Tyrol are often broad characterizations rather than the richly detailed discussions of happenings in the other two regions.

Indeed, this need for specific detail brings up a greater question: how widely applicable are Judson’s findings? Certainly in an entity as extensive and complex as the Hapsburg Empire, the need for regional studies is pressing, yet at the same time it is difficult to assess how universal these observations can be. For instance, are the villages under discussion special cases or are the same patterns found all over these regions? In some instances, it seems that the specific locale was significant, such as the passion play in Horitz/Horice na Sumave, while other topics, such as the “schoolhouse drama,” could apply more generally. Also, several national movements are absent from Judson’s study, perhaps most noticeably the Hungarian. While this omission is justified considering the regions chosen and Judson’s acknowledgement from the onset that his focus is primarily on the German nationalists, questions remain nonetheless about how these observations transfer from one region to another. This is not to say that similar undertakings should be avoided because the extent of their impact is difficult to determine; on the contrary, more such detailed and persuasive regional studies might allow scholars to hypothesize about nationalism in the Hapsburg Empire on a larger scale.

Judson’s book is a comprehensive examination of how and why these regions became known as language frontiers. While each chapter is sufficiently contextualized so that it can stand on its own, the book as a whole will be a valuable addition for scholars interested in central European nationalism or the late years of the Hapsburg Empire.

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