

Haslinger, Peter: *Nation und Territorium im tschechischen politischen Diskurs 1880-1938*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag 2010. ISBN: 978-3-486-59148-4; X, 531 S.

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In the nineteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy the question of what territories nationalists claimed for their nations became a critical site for the intersection of politics, history, literature, journalism, the arts, demography, even climatography.¹ Claims on territory also became a critical site for the internal propagation of nationhood to a public that, early on, functioned more comfortably with familiar concepts of community organized around religion or social status.

Unlike the situation of nationalists in „nationalizing“ states like France, Germany, or Italy (D’Azeglio’s famous „Gentlemen we have made Italy. Now we must make Italians“), where state borders offered a recognized framework for imagining the extent of national territory, the Habsburg Monarchy did not legally recognize national territorial units as such. It did, of course, recognize traditional political or administrative units such as Bohemia, Hungary, or Tyrol, as well as more recently invented entities such as Bukovina or the Kingdom of Galicia-Lodomeria. Politicians in some of these units claimed that their territories were historic nations, as did Magyar nationalists in Hungary or Polish nationalists in Galicia. Other nationalists, of course, disputed those territorial claims. But where was the Czech nation to be found on a map?

Answering this question was far more complicated than might at first be imagined. Those who turned to history often argued that the Czech nation was the same thing as Bohemia; it didn’t hurt that the Czech word for Bohemia and for Czech was one and the same, or that the Czech language had a distinguished history in government, literature, and administration. But a demographic view of the issue rooted in language or dialect use would have yielded a very different answer to the question. In fact, as Peter Haslinger’s erudite analysis argues, there was no self-evident

answer to this question. Early on, Czech nationalists created a consensus framework that both contained and disciplined all debates on this question for a century. In part, the limits on available ways to imagine a territorial Czech nation resulted partly from the fact that Czech was not the only language spoken in the Bohemian Lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia). During this same century, German nationalists too developed their own concepts of a national territory, often in an unacknowledged dialogue with their Czech nationalist contemporaries. Despite the often bitter antagonism that separated Czech and German nationalists, both depended on each other for coherence, as producers of discourses that fetishized a narcissism of minor differences.

The book’s introductory essay elaborates the theoretical underpinnings of Haslinger’s spatial approach to the imagined nation. As in his previous works, the author demonstrates a remarkable facility with both European and Anglo-American literatures, from which he deftly derives his own distinctive program of analysis. In theoretical terms, Haslinger demonstrates persuasively just how and why certain political discourses about imagined national territory gained credibility, while other potential competitors fell by the wayside. In particular he shows that while regional forms of identification gained some local popularity, especially in Moravia and Silesia, they nevertheless tended to reinforce the claims of hegemonic Czech nationalists in Bohemia. As with the ethnographic exhibits at an 1895 Exhibition in Prague, separate regional impulses often made greater sense when they could be fitted into a consensus discourse on national territory. This consensus had grown out of the situational politics of the mid nineteenth century, and although it was further elaborated later in the century, it did not change much. In part, as Haslinger demonstrates, this consensus could not change precisely because Czech nationalist politics in Cisleithania enjoyed immense success. That success rested on the historic idea of what was called „Bohemian

¹ On climatography, see Deborah R. Coen, *Climate and Circulation in Imperial Austria*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010), p. 839-875.

States' rights," which insisted on the territorial integrity of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia as the territory of the Czech nation. Of course the argument might contain other elements. Sometimes, for example, activists stressed Bohemia's natural mountainous borders that had allegedly protected the West Slavs against German penetration.

As Haslinger points out, some nationalists used Bohemia's historic borders to argue for a program that sought to „win“ German-speaking border regions for the Czech nation. These regions inspired claims that most German speakers there were in fact Germanized Czechs, or claims that unfair census procedures there had obscured significant numbers of Czech speakers. This tension between the claims on historic Bohemia as the territory of the Czech nation, and the implicit future work required to „win“ the border regions inhabited by German speakers, often produced contradictory undercurrents in Czech nationalist territorial ideology until 1938.

It is impossible to do full justice to the complexity and exhaustive nature of Haslinger's analysis in this review. He doesn't simply investigate ideologies; instead he shows how each cluster of ideas derived from complex processes of social mobilization, often at the local or regional levels. Haslinger picks up the story in the 1880s, the year that Czech nationalist politicians ended their boycott of the Cisleithanian Parliament and joined Count Eduard Taaffe's coalition government. His investigation of discursive strategies remains highly attentive to the ways the Imperial Austrian political system influenced their shape. Haslinger also analyzes the dynamic of radicalization produced by increasing confrontation, not with the state, but with the competing visions articulated by German nationalists. There was certainly nothing inevitable about the failure to forge a compromise between Czech and German nationalists in Bohemia before 1914. But Haslinger's analysis demonstrates that the specific qualities of their national-territorial arguments made each side shy away from compromise. Given the broad claims made by each side, the nationalist public would have perceived any compromise as a defeat. Additionally, it seems that the non-territorial nature of the

Moravian Compromise in 1905 would not have worked as easily in Bohemia, where it would immediately have been understood in territorial ways.

Crucially, Haslinger traces these internal and external debates through the First World War, both within the Monarchy itself and in international settings from London and Paris to Pittsburgh. Along with more recent scholarship that downplays 1918 as a radical break, Haslinger traces substantial ideological continuities that linked the Imperial period to the First Republic. The relentless focus by the nationalists on Bohemian states' rights before the war paid off, by normalizing Czechoslovakia's western borders during the critical negotiations of 1918 and 1919. The new frontier followed the historic borders of the Bohemian lands, rather than any kind of linguistic consideration. For much of the Czech nationalist public and certainly for local nationalist politicians, the historic borders remained fundamental to the territory of the imagined Czech nation.

Haslinger then shows how two very different traditions of Czech nationalist territorial thinking—the borderlands discourse mentioned before and an integral Bohemian discourse—survived the war to play critical roles in the political life of the new Republic. Each gained prominence depending on the changing political situation. Borderlands discourse highlighted the alleged plight of Czech nationals living among German speakers in the borderland regions. It demanded a harsher policy toward the regions' Germans and more supportive measures—from welfare payments to new schools to outright colonization if necessary—for the region's Czechs. The Bohemian discourse, on the other hand, sought to integrate German speakers more fully into the life of the nation, to show tolerance and respect toward the national minorities, while never compromising the territorial integrity of the Bohemian Lands. Practically, this meant that the Czechoslovak state could never offer the German nationalists the territorial-based administrative autonomy they desired. In the 1920s, however, governments managed to ignore the more radical demands of Borderland activists without compromising their own political support. Not

surprisingly, however, borderland organizations and their ideology became far more influential during the crisis years of the Republic, starting in the mid 1930s.

One of Haslinger's most insightful discussions links the continued predominance of the states' rights approach to national territory with the new state's dealings with Slovakia. The state's right tradition made it difficult to develop a discursive or even imagined place for Slovakia in the territory of the nation, and consequently difficult to treat the idea of a „Czechoslovak nation“ seriously. Few politicians or publicists had focused attention on Slovak speakers before 1914, given their location in neighboring Hungary, and fewer still had imagined a place for them in the nation. Since the arguments of German nationalists remained the main focus of their concern, most Czech nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s unconsciously left Slovakia out of the national territorial equation altogether. Moreover, the absolute opposition of the States' right model to administrative partition of the Bohemian Lands—so effective against German nationalism—made it difficult for Czech nationalists to imagine a federalist relationship with Slovakia. It was not that they cared one way or another about Slovak autonomy; the problem was that any structural accommodation would have offered a dangerous precedent to the Sudeten Germans. Haslinger's analysis links this critical weakness to the breakdown and break-up of the First Czechoslovak Republic and to the short duration of its successor. Although great power politics ultimately destroyed the state that had emerged from the Habsburg Monarchy, Haslinger demonstrates the fundamental internal problems that this distinctive Czech nationalist concept of territorial nationhood had produced in Czechoslovakia, and the ways that other nationalists found to exploit that concept to gain their own radical territorial ends.

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