



How to Study Early Popular Engagement with Nationalism: Sources, Strategies, Research Traditions

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The article combines methodological considerations with an overview of the literature on early popular nationalism, in which studies on Central and Eastern Europe occupy pride of place. Within these thematic confines, my aim is to give a broad sense of the methodological challenges of writing history from below. After a brief sketch of the problem area, I pass to the question of demarcating and contextualizing modern nationalism and discuss a few conventionally used indicators of national allegiances (tax discipline, draft evasion, turnout at national festivals, abidance by linguistic standards). Subsequently, the major part of the paper is organized according to the source types that historians have utilized to explore the relationship of the lower classes to the national paradigm: archival sources, folklore and ethnographic material, various kinds of egodocuments, press reportage, readers' columns, and non-narrative sources. I address the interpretive issues that each source type raises, citing abundant examples from the literature, including my own research.

Keywords: bottom-up history, Central and Eastern Europe, egodocuments, long nineteenth century, popular nationalism

The social history of nationhood has been a busy and innovative field since the late 1990s, and a significant chunk of it has dealt with early popular responses to modern nationalism. “Early,” in this case, could embrace several generations. The spread of national loyalties and national mindsets was less straightforward, more elusive, and perhaps lengthier than initially thought, and the sources often present contradictory evidence on how far national frames mattered to people in the past. The question of when people began to feel and behave as conscious nationals has remained relevant for the specific nations, but historians are now also interested in how and in what contexts they did so and how far the nationalisms they embraced were the same as the nationalisms of the elites.

The adoption of bottom-up perspectives has been the most consequential thing in the historiography of nationalism, as it has opened up the field for anthropological approaches and reclaiming agency for the people. Whereas intellectual and political histories of elites and counter-elites had dominated research until the 1990s, today's historical accounts of nationalism also feature

middle-class and lower-class men and women as full actors and often give prominence to their everyday culture, practices, and perceptions. And conversely, engaging with the question of what sense ordinary people made of nationalist messages and how these messages resonated with them has been among the most prominent uses of the bottom-up perspective. My article provides an overview of the field from a methodological angle, focusing on scholarship about the lower classes and incorporating relevant work from other research agendas. My goal is to give a broad sense of the methodological challenges of writing history “from below” within the narrow thematic confines of my survey.

I give pride of place to the literature on Central and Eastern Europe, which I know best and which has been one of the powerhouses of innovative research, and I limit myself to the long nineteenth century, ending with the First World War—a convenient time limit for the early phase of most nationalisms in the region. Therefore, peasants—understood in the minimalist way as people doing agricultural labor for a living—will be my main protagonists. Some would argue, and with good reason, that state-backed and minority, oppositional national projects marked out two separate pathways to nationhood; the two had different channels at their disposal, and the latter could better exploit social and other grievances. I will cover both types. The distinction between the two is often lost on historians from other parts of the world, who may even associate nationalism with independent statehood. More importantly, a closer look at nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe also shows that this distinction was not always a sharp one, and national projects are better placed on a continuum according to the state power they could wield.

Ordinary people’s adherence to (or rejection of) state nationalisms and national movements in this early stage is a subject bound up with the question of their involvement in high politics, which creates a close affinity with the research paradigm sometimes referred to as “the politicization of the countryside,” harking back to Maurice Agulhon. Another conceptual framework with overlapping interests, focusing on “political cultures,” is also relevant here, because András Cieger sketched out a survey of source types on the political culture of Dualist Hungary (although largely disregarding the peasantry).¹ On the other hand, the bundle of problems described here stands distinctly apart from the field marked by such diverse names as Hermann Bausinger, Orvar Löfgren, Arjun Appadurai, and Claude Karnoouh, which explores how national cultures were canonized

1 Cieger, “Magyarország politikai kultúrája.”

and everyday cultures were nationalized by drawing on elements from folklore and folk life.

At the foundation of all histories of becoming national stands Eugen Weber's magisterial *Peasants into Frenchmen* from 1976, the story of how peasants in the backwaters of France came to feel and think of themselves as French and, indeed, learned French between 1870 and 1914. The book met with instant criticism for its narrow and late dating of the process, propped on Weber's foregrounding of the most backward regions.² This was a legitimate objection, but the book also came too early and did not have much influence in continental Europe until the 1990s. Only after seminal intellectual and macrohistories of nationalism had prepared the way did historians truly appreciate its focus on the nationalization of the masses, which offered a corrective to the reigning elite-centered view.³ Then, as Weber's book had started to inspire research on nineteenth-century national integration, the same impetus towards bottom-up perspectives ended up challenging it from a new angle.

New social histories of nationhood built on history-writing from below, a trend popular since the 1960s.⁴ The representatives of this trend—British Marxist historians like E. P. Thompson, the Alltagsgeschichte movement, and the Subaltern Studies group—were interested in retrieving popular agency and showing that ordinary people played an active role in shaping their world.⁵ From their perspective, then, Weber's book portrayed peasants as pawns of forces beyond their control. In line with modernization theories, Weber understood nationalization as a top-down process, with peasants soaking up readymade ideology and culture transmitted to them through the agencies of change around which he structured his book: compulsory schooling, military service, economic progress, centralized administration, better communications, and cheap reading material. Studies in the 1990s and 2000s gradually transformed this explanatory model of one-way indoctrination and trickle-down into one in which the non-elites negotiated their national membership. In more recent understandings, people could appropriate nationalist messages on their own terms, turn them to their own ends, and even reinterpret them, upending upper-class meanings. In concert with the new focus on how the nationalist paradigm had been received and reproduced, there has also been a shift towards sources that can illuminate

2 Cabo and Molina, "Long and Winding Road of Nationalization," 267–70.

3 Ibid., 270–74.

4 Beyen and Van Ginderachter, "General Introduction," 4.

5 Eley, *Crooked Line*.

people's experiences. Weber based his tableau of a modernizing countryside on external accounts and statistics. Newer scholarship has sought to complement such sources with egodocuments, long exploited in social histories from below.⁶

Since nationalism was originally constructed by the elites, the top-down view has not lost its legitimacy. In this vein, some research traditions that rose to prominence in the 1990s set out to unpack the nationalist discourses encoded in textbooks, monuments, architecture, pageants, etc. These subjects are still popular today, but rather than tacitly assume that people interpreted them according to the deciphered meanings, historians have realized the need to capture people's reactions.

This task requires a focus on the micro scale. Although the books in this category can span several decades, they often consist of a string of local-based stories interspersed with analyses and narrative passages written from a bird's eye view. At the same time, microhistories confined entirely to specific localities are rare, mainly because the body of high-quality or eloquent evidence needs to be pieced together from various places. Another popular strategy is the complex analysis of text corpora, and there have also been sporadic studies analyzing datasets.

In the last 15 years, two new approaches have emerged. Drawing on theories proposed by Rogers Brubaker and Michael Billig, the paradigm referred to as everyday nationalism emphasizes the contextual, dynamic, and contingent nature of nationhood. Membership in a national category does not matter equally across social domains and roles. Further, nationhood "happens": national frames are recreated in specific situations; this aspect was arguably even more relevant as long as national categories and symbols could not be taken for granted. The other trend is to look for instances of "national indifference." In Tara Zahra's formulation, this concept is built around the idea that in the era of clamoring nationalism, the lack of national allegiances was necessarily a reaction against nationalist agitation. In practice, however, the label refers rather freely to non-national behavior or any behavior that did not comply with upper-class creeds of national orthodoxy. To some extent, it applies the reverse of everyday nationalism's interpretive matrix, but it holds more appeal for historians interested in demystifying nationalist narratives.⁷

6 Cabo and Molina, "Long and Winding Road of Nationalization"; Van Ginderachter, "Nationhood from Below," 127–30.

7 Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities."

Following a section on a few conventional indicators of national allegiances, the central part of this paper will be organized according to the source types that historians of the long nineteenth century have utilized to explore the changing relationship of the lower classes to the national paradigm: archival sources, folklore and ethnographic material, various sorts of egodocuments, press reportage, readers' columns, and non-narrative sources. I will address the interpretive issues that each source type raises, featuring methodological reflections by other historians and giving abundant examples from the literature, including my own research.

Identifying Nationalism

No matter what sources are being studied, their significance for the field lies in what they reveal about people's actions, thoughts, and emotions. Historians have privileged certain kinds of behaviors, thought patterns, and symbols as signs of national allegiances, many of them now contested or fallen out of favor. Before I move on to the sources, let me dwell on some of these customary indicators. Since they tend to go together with specific source types, it often makes better sense to postpone discussion of others for a later section. Voting for nationalist parties, for example, will be discussed together with electoral data among non-narrative sources.

Short of further evidence, popular support for nationalist discourse or politics does not necessarily imply national feelings or thinking. Especially where class, status, or religious boundaries concurred with the ascriptive national categories, it is hard to disentangle the exact role that the various factors played in collective action.⁸ However, some forms of action seem more straightforward. For instance, the fact that most Volga German emigrants headed to the Americas between 1870 and 1917 and few settled in the German Empire speaks to the weakness of sentimental ties to their aspiring kin state.⁹

The study of rumors furthers an interpretation of this kind of collective action by placing it in context and offers a rewarding view of vernacular political imaginaries, as well as people's fears, hopes, and expectations. The local grapevine is of particular importance in the lives of communities with very low literacy or scarce access to reliable news, where strangers are regularly debriefed on what

8 Himka, *Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement*, 205.

9 Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed*, 55.

they heard elsewhere and the scraps of information about designs of “the lords” often change beyond recognition as people try to reassemble them. The rumors British officials in the Raj had heard were a staple part of their reports, and they are also found in administrative reports from nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, particularly in moments of tension.¹⁰ Such references in the archives help Irina Marin depict Romanian peasants’ knowledge of the outside world at the time of the 1907 peasant revolt in amusing and disturbing detail, and Andriy Zayarnyuk also uncovers the reasons why Greek Catholic peasants from the Sambir District stayed away from the 1846 Galician uprising by studying sources containing alleged rumors among the members of this community.¹¹ (Rumors are foregrounded in Veronika Eszik’s contribution to this thematic bloc.)

Devotion to the homeland may stand behind titular majorities’ voluntary compliance with the state’s requirements, but the relationship is too messy to be used as a measure. For Bourdieu, “the progressive development of the recognition of the legitimacy of official taxation is bound up with the rise of a form of nationalism.”¹² Eugen Weber indeed utilized tax dodging as a negative indicator of patriotism, but later authors did not make much of it.¹³ On the other hand, Weber’s recourse to draft evasion figures was picked up in similar studies of the 1990s, even though they are of questionable value: self-mutilation and escape from the draft were old strategies mostly without political motives, and compliance certainly should not be taken as a sign of patriotic devotion.¹⁴

Until recently, turnout at national festivals counted among historians as another favorite indicator of national affinities, and with better justification. Alon Confino dedicated a large portion of his book on Württemberg under the Second Empire to exploring what groups celebrated Sedan Day and the meanings they attached to it.¹⁵ Some studies even focus on peasants. Thus, Patrice Dabrowski gives an insightful account of the religion-imbued Sobieski bicentennial in 1883, which attracted to Cracow over twelve thousand peasants with Polish cockades from all corners of Galicia.¹⁶ The initiative still came from

10 Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 252.

11 Marin, *Peasant Violence and Antisemitism*, 28–72; Zayarnyuk, *Framing the Ukrainian peasantry*, 1–34.

12 Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State,” 7.

13 Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 106.

14 Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*, 136.

15 Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 30–93.

16 Dabrowski, “Folk, Faith and Fatherland,” 397–404.

above. By 1903, Polish peasant activists were organizing reenactments of a 1794 battle to highlight the role of peasant insurgents in the Kościuszko uprising.¹⁷

Xenophobia is by no means unique to the national paradigm. Indeed, strangers to be feared or held in contempt could appear more numerous until the national paradigm imposed at least a modicum of solidarity with millions of personally unknown fellow-nationals and blurred some dividing lines. In his nationalist chef-d'oeuvre, Gandhi described the hatred between Hindus and Muslims as an evil to be cured for the good of the nation, but he nevertheless urged his readers to “go into the interior that has yet not been polluted by the railways, and to live there for six months” in order to learn Indian patriotism.¹⁸ And yet, peasants in the back country were more likely to harbor deep aversions to the opposite religion than to share Gandhi's vision of an Indian nation.

Likewise, confessional endogamy does not have anything inherently national about it. The same goes for language loyalty, but it gained in importance as literacy boosted exposure to nationalist content, and the withdrawal of public recognition from the standard language that people could handle stoked frustrations.¹⁹ Depending on the context, the domain, and one's language repertoire, language choices can signal nationalist dispositions. Martyn Lyons' idea of considering conformity with abstract linguistic authorities a benchmark of national solidarity is also not without some worth, given the alliance between nationalism and standard language ideology. Nevertheless, it is easier to explain the difference between French and Italian soldiers' facility with the linguistic standards, which Lyons noted, by the French Third Republic's relative success at mass schooling over prewar Italy.²⁰ Moreover, some other, typically Lutheran regions had already achieved high literacy rates by the time the age of nationalism set in, which loosened the association between nationalism and the standard language. Finally, it is also not uncommon for standard languages and linguistic authorities to straddle national lines (e.g., English in Ireland, German in Switzerland).

The criteria of nationalism must be contextualized on a case-by-case basis, and ethnonyms highlight this fact more than any other subject. Some ethnonyms on which modern nationalists seized as national epithets had already enjoyed a wide currency for centuries, despite the occasional ambiguities and regional differences. For instance, the “Romanian lads” and “Romanian girls”

17 Struve, “Civil Society, Peasants, and Nationalism,” 28–29.

18 Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 70.

19 Leerssen, “Medieval heteronomy, modern nationalism.”

20 Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*, 91–112, 136–43.

that turn up in Romanian folk songs from Transylvania are nothing unusual or unexpected.²¹ Other new or reinvented ethnonyms, on the other hand, index engagement with the modern nation. Such is the case with calling oneself *ellin* (“Hellene”) in the nineteenth-century Balkans, an identity label that radically rebranded Greekness and inadvertently redefined membership in it. Another example is *polák* (“Pole”), until the nineteenth-century a status-exclusive category largely referring to nobles. Catholic, Polish-speaking former serfs of Galicia called themselves *mazur* (“Masurian”), and in his own words, the future Dzików mayor Jan Słomka did not know he was a Pole until he started to read books.²²

But even national ethnonyms that had been applied to commoners for centuries may have mattered only to make some contrasts and coexisted with sundry regional labels. Regional self-identifications were more common in a world in which the boundaries of a district often marked one’s widest circle of solidarity, and regional labels also hinted at alternative paths. According to Fred Stambrook, for example, the survival of Bukovinan identity in the Canadian diaspora indicates the distance that Orthodox Ukrainians in Bukovina felt from Galician Uniate Ukrainians.²³

Archives

Despite the appreciation for egodocuments in the field and the premium on exploring new source types, historical work on nationalism and the masses still most often draws on archival material and the local press. Whether they derive from government or minority agencies, archives are home to secondhand sources that typically cover ordinary people “from above” in one of three ways: they report on their actions, quote them, and assess their mood, feelings, and ideas. Significantly, archival sources on national minorities can provide key evidence on the forms that state policies took on the ground beyond the information they contain on minoritized people’s reactions to these policies. Finally, in the minutes of local governments, parishes, and associations, ordinary people also come to the fore as empowered agents.

The Subaltern Studies Group’s famous appeal to read government sources about the people “against the grain” boils down to interpreting such sources within the ideology and communicative situations in which they were

21 Mitu and Bărbulescu, “Romanian Peasant Identities in Transylvania,” 274.

22 Słomka, *From Serfdom to Self-Government*, 171.

23 Stambrook, “National and Other Identities in Bukovina,” 199.

grounded.²⁴ Government administrators' views on minorities were influenced by contradictory and situational tropes. On the one hand, the self-legitimizing vision of the state made them prone to depict minorities as peaceful and immune to the siren calls of national movements. On the other hand, law-enforcers often attributed deep-seated, formidable national solidarity to minoritized people in order to raise moral panic, buttress lobbying efforts for resources, or justify harsh measures. The categories they used in that regard can detract from the value of their reporting. A case in point might be the insistence of Dualist Hungarian authorities on labeling Slovak cultural and political initiatives misleadingly as "Pan-Slavic" and thus obscuring important differences.²⁵ Further, it should also matter whether the narrators related firsthand experiences and whether their stakes are identifiable.

Historians may find government officials' views sufficiently convincing to quote or embrace them. Andrei Cușco contends, on the basis of secret memos by Russian officials, that Romanian nationalist or separatist resistance was insignificant in Bessarabia before 1905, although at the same time he cautions that one can only draw tentative conclusions from this corpus.²⁶ In another typical example, Nenad Stefanov quotes the Serbian governor from 1878 on the confusion and opportunism that reigned over questions of nationality in the Pirot region.²⁷

Most of the relevant government files, however, do not pass such judgments but deal with ongoing or looming conflicts. His archival finds on the conflicts between the Bosnian population and the Habsburg authorities convinced a reluctant Siniša Malešević, who a few years earlier had still found "no evidence" that Serbian nationalism "was widespread among Serbs living outside the Serb state,"²⁸ that popular resistance to government policies had "attained proto-nationalist and in some cases fully fledged nationalist contours."²⁹ Contested linguistic attributions in censuses and the ensuing recounts are the topic of Emil Brix's monograph from 1982, which paved the way for a slew of research on how ethnic classification used in censuses inadvertently reinforced self-identification with the categories on offer.³⁰

24 Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 15–17.

25 Vörös, "'Veszedelmes pánszlávok,'" 184–85.

26 Cusco, *Contested Borderland*, 214–15.

27 Stefanov, *Die Erfindung der Grenzen auf dem Balkan*, 141.

28 Malešević, "The Mirage of Balkan Piemont," 142.

29 Idem, "Forging the Nation-Centric World," 685.

30 Brix, *Umgangssprachen in Allösterreich*.

Interrogations and witness testimonies are privileged places of reported speech in the archives and have been a popular hunting ground for historical anthropologists. They require caution and must be read in context, since people, especially peasants, could go to great lengths to dissimulate, feign ignorance, and find out what the interviewer wanted to hear. Zayarnyuk retrieves the rumors circulating among Galician Greek Catholic peasants in 1846 from what they later told investigators.³¹ Confidential administrative and police reports often informed higher authorities about the general mood, the rumors that were circulating, and the popularity of national movements. In early twentieth-century Hungary, the police officers overseeing minority political rallies often wrote down the speeches in shorthand and described the audience's reactions, which elevates the surviving reports to the status of first-rate sources.³²

Historians of oppositional nationalisms, in particular those biased towards them, have tended to underplay the sources coming down from antagonistic governments and rely on the self-documentation of national movements: the nationalist press, accounts by activists, and the paper trails left by ethnic associations, churches, and parties. Of these, activists' correspondence is especially worth revisiting in a critical light for the references these activists make to their claimed constituencies. In a confidential letter to the Greek consul of Philippopolis/Plovdiv from 1862, a Greek nationalist from Stanimaka (today Asenovgrad in Bulgaria) recalled unsentimentally and perceptively how local people had received Hellenism twenty years earlier, after a Greek school had opened in the town:

The first ideas about Greek nationality were, so to say, romantic, they were pleasant to hear, but they were immediately considered mere ideas, theories of teachers not having any weight (...) any idea of a close relation of the local population to Independent Greece, of a real kinship and familiarity, was either absent at all or it was a misty and indiscernible one.³³

In their letters, nationalists often aired frustration over the alleged lack of responses from the people. Such complaints, however, should be read in their psychological and rhetorical context. Moreover, as Laurence Cole warns, even

31 Zayarnyuk, *Framing the Ukrainian peasantry*, 1–34.

32 Several such reports are found in Romanian National Archives, Bucharest, Cancelaria CC al PCR, Arhiva CC al PCR, fond 50, Documente elaborate de organele represive.

33 Lyberatos, "The Nation in the Balkan Village," 172–73.

if the people in question truly felt indifferent to the given aims and efforts, this does not mean that they were simply “non-national.”³⁴

To the extent that local councils were autonomous, democratic bodies, the minutes of their meetings can represent voices from below. Florencia Mallon makes use of such sources to reconstruct alternative, “subaltern” forms of nationalism in two regions of nineteenth-century Peru and Mexico.³⁵ I studied local protests against the Magyarization of locality names in the 1900s partly based on the transcripts of council meetings. Since the dust had long settled over the renaming law, the actual measures caught ethnic Romanian local councils off guard. They did not try to hide their outrage, but their protests were improvised and seldom drew on nationalist (pre-)historical narratives or etymologies.³⁶

Folklore

Apart from government officials, occasional visitors like travel writers and academics also commented on the national consciousness of specific local communities, and sociologically-minded intellectuals increasingly made it an object of scholarly investigation. In particular, historians can tap into a rich source base of ethnographic writing. Early ethnographic descriptions, of which Eugen Weber already made abundant use, raise other problems than the interwar trend of village monographs. While the former frequently arose from or were based on accounts of local priests and schoolteachers—participant observers but not full members of their subject groups—the latter were typically the work of outsiders with a more systematic approach, not shy of interviewing all grownup members of a community in the space of a few weeks. The Gusti school’s 1934 fieldwork in Clopotiva provided the most tangible piece of evidence of status-based Hungarian national loyalty among the Byzantine-rite, Romanian-speaking former nobles of the Hațeg Basin.³⁷ Around the same time in Transdanubia, a collective of young “village researchers” documented how the Calvinists of Kemse felt superior to their Croat neighbors but had neither an appreciation for Hungarian state nationalism nor respect for national holidays, which they believed were a stratagem invented by the “lords” for an unknown purpose.³⁸

34 Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference?” 106–7.

35 Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*.

36 Berecz, *Empty Signs, Historical Imaginaries*, 225–29.

37 Conea, “Nemeși și rumâni în Clopotiva.”

38 Elek et al., *Elsűllyedt falu a Dunántúlon*, 53, 91.

Past identifications and attitudes are not a subject where oral history can yield valid results beyond the informants' lifetime. Even so, Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer's participatory fieldwork in the 1950s and 60s managed to recreate a plausible picture of political culture in Átány around 1900, one decidedly more in line with upper-class trends than that of interwar Kemse. Locals had been avid supporters of the so-called forty-eighter Independentist party, which they considered the patriotic choice. Átány peasants, however, for the most part prosperous smallholders from the most Independentist-leaning county of Dualist Hungary and many of them with noble titles, were not necessarily representative of the Magyar peasantry, all the less so as they lived near a prominent lieu de mémoire, the site of an important battle from 1849.³⁹

E. P. Thompson advocated the use of folklore collections to probe oral worlds of "customary culture." But the extent to which folklore material can and should be used to study social imaginaries is a question dividing historians working on different contexts. Thomson himself quotes second-rate poetry and church hymns more often than anonymous, orally transmitted lower-class creations in his *Making of the English Working Class*.⁴⁰ For Ranajit Guha, ostensible folkloric evidence presents insurmountable interpretive problems in a thoroughly illiterate culture, where whatever survives in written form is by definition privileged and tainted by an elitist point of view.⁴¹ His blanket skepticism, however, already met with an objection in James C. Scott's preface to his book.⁴²

While some folklore genres, such as dance shouts, better reflect actuality, others are more refractory to change, can preserve pre-national patterns, and are slow to herald peasants' engagement with the national paradigm.⁴³ Both Jaroslav Hrytsak's analysis of Ivan Franko's folklore collection from Nahuievychi and Sorin Mitu and Elena Bărbulescu's cursory analysis of Romanian folk lyrics from Transylvania reconstruct pre-national mental maps, symbolic geographies, and ethnic labels.⁴⁴ When it comes to the inroads of nationalism, however, the problem of source criticism risks becoming circular, since it is precisely the occurrence of national motifs that raises a red flag.

39 Fél and Hofer, *Proper Peasants*, 370–78.

40 Thompson, "Folklore, Anthropology, and Social History"; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*.

41 Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, 14–15.

42 Scott, "Foreword," xiii.

43 Mitu and Bărbulescu, "Romanian Peasant Identities in Transylvania," 273.

44 Hrytsak, *Ivan Franko and His Community*, 103–20; Mitu and Bărbulescu, "Romanian Peasant Identities in Transylvania."

The main problem is how closely what collectors recorded reflects what lower-class people consumed and reproduced for their own purposes. From the perspective of the discussion here, the age of the folklore material and the question of peasant or “bookish” origins are irrelevant, but these were not irrelevant details for the collectors, who chased a different kind of authenticity and thought that external accretions could be separated from genuine folklore. Early, Romantic collections, notorious for their authorial interferences and mystifications, are the hardest nut to crack.⁴⁵ They sneaked national or prehistoric content into folklore texts or created the sense that national history deeply mattered for the people, as Vuk Stefanović Karadžić did, for instance, by transferring to Herzegovina the epic songs he collected about Prince Lazar near his burial site much farther north.⁴⁶ If the goal is to spot the early emergence of nationalist themes, comparing different variants to filter out such interventions can be of little help, since it is precisely the eccentric variants that are the most likely to turn up evidence.

These issues do not devalue the testimony of folklore, especially if taken in a loose sense. Some relevant folk creations can be dated with more or less precision. For instance, one song recorded from Volga German transatlantic migrants in the 1870s praises Russia as the “dear, dear Fatherland.”⁴⁷ Then, there are observations made on the margins of folklore. At the end of the nineteenth century, one historian from Mostar noted that the same stories told by the surrounding Orthodox population about Saint Sava had been attributed to Saint Martin, Saint Nicholas, or even Archangel Michael a couple of generations earlier. This statement is significant for what it tells about the penetration of the nationalist cult of Saint Sava.⁴⁸ Finally, there is the testimony of local communal memory and mnemonic cues, such as minor place names. Investigating Frigyes Pesty’s toponymic survey from 1864, I found that the learned Romanian tradition of descent from Trajan’s legions had only entered local memory where people could attach it to nearby ruins.⁴⁹ This chimes in with the opinions of some rural intellectuals, according to whom what they called history (strictly chronological history in national frames) had little place in the world of Romanian peasants.⁵⁰

45 E.g., Bîrlea, *Istoria folcloristicii românești*, 27, 36, 49, 95–100, 135–49, 198–200.

46 Pavlović and Atanasovski, “From Myth to Territory.”

47 Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed*, 54.

48 Grunert, *Glauben im Hinterland*, 124.

49 Berecz, *Empty Signs, Historical Imaginaries*, 78–82.

50 E.g., Mărăscu, *Monografia comunei Sudrigiu*, 63.

However, local tradition could no doubt sustain the memory of battles or military campaigns at a distance of a hundred years or more, as Guy Beiner shows in his analysis of the “folk history” of the 1798 Irish rebellion and French military intervention.⁵¹

Egodocuments

As the rise of history from below and *Alltagsgeschichte* revalued lower-class egodocuments, several collections and archives of popular writing came into being in Western and Southern Europe.⁵² With the exception of Poland, the situation is worse in the states of Eastern Europe, not only because historians have paid less attention but also because, until late, fewer people knew how to write. Entire genres that Western European historians have used prominently to inquire about lower-class loyalties (pauper letters, nationalization applications) are missing or hard to come by, and the surviving material mostly comes from males. The task of finding relevant egodocuments becomes especially hard with a half-illiterate peasantry. The volume of eyewitness accounts written *about* nineteenth-century peasants dwarves that of the surviving material written *by* them. The voices of peasant communities were for a long time mediated by the priests, teachers, village notaries, and clerks who wrote requests on their behalf, recasting their utterances in a middle-class language and logic. But even in the rare cases when they wrote personal letters, they did so because of a disruption in their everyday world. Pervasive illiteracy or half-literacy also raise an important but ultimately unsolvable dilemma: to what extent can the literate few, who had readier access to reading matter, be assumed to represent an illiterate majority?

Collective petitions in support of oppositional nationalist causes, drafted by priests or other rural notables and signed on behalf of the illiterate locals, linger somewhere on the margins of egodocuments.⁵³ They reveal little about their signatories’ worldviews or values, even of those who signed them themselves but under pressure from religious authority. At a minimum, however, they probably imply some knowledge of the cause, and their language is often suggestive of the framing that the priests used to promote it. Parish diaries (*historia domus*), supposedly also representative of their communities, reflect the priests’ viewpoint but often chronicle local events and rumors, with varying

51 Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*.

52 Burnett et al., *Autobiography of the Working Class*; Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*.

53 Josan, *Adeziunea*, 115–304; Hull, *Malta Language Question*, 46.

depth and regularity. Testing the established narrative about the tug of war over Old Slavonic liturgy that unfolded between the Ricmanje parish (near Trieste) and the Trieste bishopric in the 1900s, Péter Tychet turns to the *historia domus*. He shows the limitations of the nationalist interpretation but suggests that, as the fight for Old Slavonic liturgy escalated, it transformed local mindsets.⁵⁴ In a 1991 edited volume on “national differentiation processes,” the study of the parish and school diaries in two Carinthian market towns affords a close view of the sudden breakup among the locals into Catholic Slovenes and anticlerical Germans.⁵⁵

The reevaluation of egodocuments has entailed revisiting lower-class memoirs that had already achieved the status of classics in their national historiographies. Tara Zahra and Jakub Beneš, for example, draw conflicting conclusions about the brick factory worker and poet Heinrich/Jindřich Holek’s and his father Wenzel/Václav’s linguistic identities from their oft-quoted memoirs.⁵⁶ A masterpiece of Polish autobiographical writing, also available in English, is Jan Slomka’s gripping and wonderfully detailed portrayal of peasant life in nineteenth-century Galicia. His organizing principle is the contrast between past and present, including an opposition to the bygone times of national apathy, when peasants harbored dislike for the idea of Polish independence.⁵⁷ Slomka’s memoir fits into a large body of peasant autobiographies from interwar Poland, more than 1,500 of them written in response to a call.⁵⁸ Alongside readers’ correspondence, these autobiographies provide the material for Jan Molenda’s monograph on the nationalization of the Polish peasantry.⁵⁹

Egodocuments are not unmediated sources. Between the historian and the remembered, external or inner experiences stand the autobiographer’s memory, their permanent quest to reproduce an integral self, and the rhetorical devices required for storytelling. Quite independently from self-fashioning, autobiographers cannot escape making sense of, interpreting, and imposing coherence on their lived experience. In addition, the political and communicative context also influences what kinds of selves they want to present to themselves and their audiences. Since most surviving egodocuments originate from the elite,

54 Tychet, *Umkämpfte Kirche*, 126–68.

55 Moritsch, “Der nationale Differenzierungsprozess,” 58; Kuchar et al., “Nationale Differenzierung als Ausdruck ‘ungleicher Entwicklung,’” 192.

56 Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 27–22; Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism*, 51–52, 60–61, 66.

57 Slomka, *From Serfdom to Self-Government*, 171–73.

58 Struve, “Polish Peasants in Eastern Galicia,” 48–49.

59 Molenda, *Chłopi, naród, niepodległość*.

for example, descriptions of childhoods spent in peasant milieus increase the value of social risers' autobiographies. In the new or newly enlarged interwar states, however, this comes at the price that the authors often owed their careers to the change of sovereignty, and thus were particularly likely to emplot their life stories in the master narrative of national suffering and fulfillment. At any rate, interwar memoirists had to reposition themselves with regard to a changed category of the nation, a process that Stefan Berger analyzes in the published autobiographies of nine prominent German and seven British Socialist activists.⁶⁰ Evaluating the details in the context of the whole and looking for content that deviates from the master narrative can help bypass the resulting interpretive dilemma. Besides, social historians seldom study such sources in isolation for what they reveal about past experiences.

The narrative (re)production of the self necessarily relies on the prop of authorized discourses, but peasant and working-class writers sometimes adapted the language of the authorities or their superiors, even when they otherwise remained strangers to it. Although it is not a foolproof measure, historians are then on solid ground to prefer more elaborate formulations or ones that suggest personal involvement against ritualized, formulaic writing that rehashes clichés from above. Clear contextualization thus entails an interpolation with upper-class discourses.

Distance from the recalled past presents problems of its own. In oral interviews conducted between the 1950s and 1970s, some former British working-class volunteers in the First World War apparently projected their experiences of the Second World War.⁶¹ David Silbey probes a total of 1,702 egodocuments in search of reasons why working-class men rushed to colors in 1914, combining this set of egodocuments with statistical evidence. Silbey acknowledges that patriotism could serve as a justification for other reasons or a convenient gap-filler for memory, but he insists that dismissing these accounts as false patriotism is like fitting them to a paternalistic preconceived theory.⁶²

Historians sometimes fall back on recollections compromised by the immediate purpose they were meant to serve. Among the 110 autobiographies investigated by Wiktor Marzec from the perspective of the politicization and nationalization of the Polish industrial working class before and during the 1905 revolution, there are semiofficial autobiographies of party cadres, including some

60 Berger, "In the Fangs of Social Patriotism."

61 Silbey, *British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War*, 6.

62 *Ibid.*, 5–10.

written in Soviet exile. In the latter case, however, Marzec argues that the early, “‘Polish’ part of the memoir was relatively free from the direct constraints put on writing.”⁶³ To investigate the life world of rural Macedonians around 1893–1903, Keith Brown draws on a sample of 350 pension applications that self-claimed participants in the Ilinden Uprising filed between 1948–54. Although these applications were written with an obvious agenda, Brown justifies his choice with reference to the lack of a canonical narrative about the uprising at the time and the diversity of the recollections. Moreover, he uses entire dossiers complete with witness testimonies, rejection letters, appeals, and reviews.⁶⁴

Alongside autobiographies and interviews, letters and diaries are also widely used types of egodocuments. Diaries were a largely middle-class genre, but literate peasants in nineteenth-century Western and Central Europe (including Banat Germans) kept *livres de famille*. These served the chief function of recording loans and borrowings but were interspersed with notes on the harvest, natural catastrophes, and occasionally political news.⁶⁵ Peasants also left miscellaneous manuscripts. A local musician’s manuscript from 1858–1869, for example, testifies to the “Romaic” (pre-national Greek) identity in Arbanasi above Veliko Tirново.⁶⁶ Rarely conceived as diaries in the strict sense, these manuscripts often mix in borrowed texts alongside chronicles and personal utterances, and not everything copied into them necessarily reflects their creators’ beliefs. One Romanian manuscript history of Transylvania from 1836 mentions Romans without linking them to Romanians, laments the depredations wrought by Wallachian armies, and does not feature Transylvanian Romanians until 1763. All this may sound unexpected, as it was written by a Uniate village schoolmaster, were it not clear from the consistently applied Transylvanian Saxon viewpoint that he copied or compiled Saxon sources.⁶⁷

Very little of ordinary people’s epistolary activity has come down to us. Illustrated postcards (on the market since the 1890s) had a better chance of surviving, and Karin Almsy shows that they offered novel ways to index self-identifications.⁶⁸ However, aside from the problem of disentangling

63 Marzec, *Rising Subjects*, 212.

64 Brown, *Loyal unto Death*, 35–40.

65 Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*, 222–44; Siebold, *Deutsches Bauernleben im Banat*.

66 Kitromilitides, “In the Pre-Modern Balkans,” 26–28.

67 Coman, *Hronica Ardiabului*.

68 Almsy, “Linguistic and Visual Portrayal of Identifications.”

contemporary markings from the later additions of collectors or traders, most peacetime postcard senders were also members of the middle class.

Work migration and military service provided occasions to sit down and write private letters, with or without recourse to a collection of letter samples. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki purchased a corpus of Polish peasant letters written during the First World War and addressed to transatlantic migrants, and they wove these sources into their monumental narrative about the breakup of old solidarities and the transformation of social norms. This five-volume classic also includes a chapter on the integration of peasants into national life.⁶⁹

An unusual number of egodocuments from World War I have survived thanks to censorship bureaus and POW camps. Since the front experience, war economy, and special measures on the home front heightened the relevance of national frames, wartime egodocuments are not necessarily indicative of prevailing attitudes in earlier decades. The correspondence between soldiers and their families went through open censorship, which imposed conformism, meaning alignment with official patriotism and the avoidance of oppositional nationalist statements. On the other hand, intercepted letters show an obvious bias towards politically subversive content, although many letters were withheld for other reasons, most notably for data on the positions of troops.

Investigating a vast body of intercepted letters and censorship records from the later years of the war, Péter Hanák found that by a long shot, Serbs, Italians, Romanians, and Czechs were the most likely among the Austria-Hungarian nationalities to air secessionist views and approve of desertion. Nationally subversive Italian letters stand out from the rest for the high percentage of middle-class senders. Hanák compares intercepted letters in Czech, more than three quarters of which expressed sympathy for Czech independence, with the hundreds of letters that Czech POWs sent to destinations outside of the Monarchy but that were misdirected and landed in the hands of the K.u.K. military censorship. Among these latter, 40 percent contained Czech nationalist views and 13.5 percent voiced support for Czech independence.⁷⁰ At the same time, the Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia who wrote home were more likely to manifest what Alon Rachamimov calls “civic spirit” and criticize “specific practices and specific policies of the Habsburg state.”⁷¹

69 Thomas and Znaniecki, *Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 1, 432–63.

70 Hanák, “Die Volksmeinung.”

71 Rachamimov, “Imperial Loyalties and Private Concerns,” 91.

Andriy Zayarnyuk explores a rare and serendipitous find from Austria-Hungary, namely a deposit of letters by soldiers on the frontlines and POWs that were actually delivered to the village of Zibolky, to the north of Lemberg. The authors had clearly paid deference to the censors, but also to the priest, who read the letters out to their illiterate families. According to Zayarnyuk, they expressed little anti-Russian sentiment and tended to define themselves as Galicians and members of the local community.⁷²

The Italian front was best studied from this point of view. Scholarship on letters written by Italian soldiers in the First World War started in real-time, as the Graz philologist Leo Spitzer, employed as a military censor, utilized them to reconstruct the Italian “national psyche.”⁷³ More critical of national categories, historians since the 1970s have drawn on this example many times to show how little ordinary Italians had assimilated the ideals of the Risorgimento.⁷⁴ Compared to the letters that the French intercepted from their troops in Alsace, who seem to have imbibed the lesson of revanchism, Martyn Lyons finds that soldiers of the Kingdom of Italy were quite confused about their country’s war aims, their allegiances lay firmly with their home towns, valleys, and regions, and their patriotic slogans often appear insincere.⁷⁵ The situation was none too different among the Italian-speaking Tyrolese. The Archivio della Scrittura Popolare in Trento stores a large collection of war memoirs-cum-diaries written in the Kirsanov POW camp in Russia. Although Italians from the Tyrol spontaneously separated in the camp from other nationalities of the Dual Monarchy and later developed a new national attachment thanks to the cultural activities organized in an Irredentist spirit, this attachment remained utilitarian. It expressed POWs’ need for strong solidarity under extreme living conditions and was conditional on the better treatment and provision one could receive as an Italian and the prospect of returning home, while POWs also feared for the safety of their families from the retaliation of Habsburg authorities.⁷⁶

72 Zayarnyuk, “‘The War Is As Usual,’” 200.

73 Spitzer, *Italienische Kriegsgefangenenbriefe*.

74 Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*, 118–19.

75 *Ibid.*, 91–112, 136–43.

76 *Ibid.*, 143–52; Mazzini, “Patriottismo condizionato”; Bellezza, “From national indifference to national commitment.”

Press Coverage and Readers' Correspondence

In his discussion of how German and Czech journals in late Habsburg Bohemia blew up mundane conflicts and twisted them into national frames, Pieter Judson discreetly cautions against historians' all-too-convenient reliance on newspaper reporting. Rather than first-order sources, he suggests, press reports should be seen as propaganda tools aimed at nationalizing a-national populations: "complicated, messy events were reduced to their most recognizable elements and compressed into intelligible stories about battling nations."⁷⁷ A piece of news run in 1908 in two German nationalist papers (*Deutsche Volkszeitung* from Reichenberg and *Bohemia* from Prague) alleged that German gymnast-activists had faced aggression crossing Czech-speaking Stachy:

Attack on German gymnasts. As the Bergreichenstein [Kašperské Hory] gymnasts returned from their Easter excursion to Eleonorenhain through the Czech Stachau, the Czechs attacked them. Only the gymnasts' levelheadedness prevented a bloody brawl from breaking out.⁷⁸

After the Ministry of the Interior launched an investigation into the affair, the local authorities cut this story down to size. They found that the gymnasts had been drunk and had picked a quarrel with passers-by shouting anti-Czech slogans. Furthermore, only a few children and one adult had run after their wagon throwing pebbles at them, without actually hitting anyone.

I need not dwell on Judson's choice of an example where the two renditions do not contradict each other in substance. The German informant may have fancied that the Stachy people should have swallowed their pride and let them get off scot-free with their affronts, but he certainly did not cross "the line between strategic exaggeration and outright lying."⁷⁹ It would not be difficult to quote similar, more egregious bending of the truth by the contemporary press. We know this because, although Judson is right that the German and Czech press could reinforce each other's nationalist framing, journals of opposing ideological stripes sometimes carried conflicting descriptions of the same event. There is often little way of knowing which account was closer to the truth, but the gap between them could be quite big. The catch is that when a story emerged from various sources in a single version, this could also cast a shadow of doubt

⁷⁷ Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, 178.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 183–84.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

on its authenticity, especially when there was a high chance that no eyewitness from the supposed scene of the incident would read the coverage.

More problematic is Judson's assumption that the contrasting accounts can be verified against an objective benchmark to be found in the archives; as if the local authorities conducting the investigations had been impervious to national and other biases or, should the question be whether an incident took place at all as if they could have no interest in hushing it up. To the extent that the imperial authorities were involved, this belief may have some basis regarding Dualist Cisleithania. But it becomes untenable where, as in most contexts, the authorities had an ideological axe to grind in nationalist incidents or were typically involved in them. In 1910, for instance, one Romanian newspaper from Hungary published an official press release on an incidence of bloodshed in a Transylvanian village only to rebut it with a different, purportedly the local, narrative.⁸⁰ Despite the differences between the two accounts, both boiled down to gendarmes killing two peasant boys who wore belts with the Romanian colors, hence there is no reason why Judson would not extend his skepticism of nationalism from below to the official account, which reproduced the gendarmes' side. In fact, reports on gendarmes seizing "foreign symbols" in the villages were a regular feature in both Hungarian and minority papers, often with mention of the fines levied on the offenders and references to the administrative officials in command.

Press coverage should be compared with archival evidence whenever it is accessible, not losing sight of the ideological positions and power interests behind both types of sources and the censorship that occasionally restricted press coverage. In practice, and not just since the advent of searchable online collections, news items lead researchers to archival files more often than the other way around. Measured in the sheer number of references, the local and regional press is the bread and butter of the field. This also holds true for Jeremy King's seminal book on late Habsburg Budweis/Budějovice, which relies mostly on local German and Czech papers to craft a narrative akin to Judson's about an ethnically ambiguous middle class that separated into Germans and Czechs over the span of two generations.⁸¹

Readers' correspondence, sometimes published in a separate column, is hardly safer terrain for the unwary historian. Ideally, it contains genuine first-person utterances by ordinary people, but ostensible readers' letters were at

80 Anonymous, "Martirii tricolorului."

81 King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*.

times cut out of whole cloth. Between these two extremes, editors probably interfered with the content and the style in most cases. It is hard to make guesses about their procedures in the absence of the original documents. At best, the context of the given journal might offer clues.

According to Ostap Sereda, the editors of Galician Polish and Ukrainian papers routinely fabricated letters under peasant-sounding names in the 1860s and 70s to lure literate peasants to their fold until real peasant correspondents turned up on the horizon.⁸² In later decades, the Polish peasant movement of Galicia produced its own crop of populist journals under the editorship of peasant-born activists. With these, the question becomes the representativeness of the peasant correspondents' views. Aside from manuscript memoirs, Keely Stauter-Halsted's splendid *The Nation in the Village* uses the testimony of such journals, especially readers' correspondence, to explore how Polish-speaking Roman Catholic peasants emancipated themselves by subverting nationalist discourses about peasant values and constructed a peasant identity in parallel with a national one.⁸³ Against the background of similar developments in the Galician Ruthenian political field, Andriy Zayarnyuk foregrounds one regular peasant correspondent, also making use of his letters surviving in manuscript collections.⁸⁴

For his monograph on Flemish workers' political loyalties between 1880 and the First World War, Maarten Van Ginderachter unearthed a rare format that transmits readers' voices in an unaltered form and thus comes closest to an egodocument. In exchange for donations beyond membership dues, Belgian Labor Party members from Ghent could place so-called "propaganda pence" in a dedicated column of the local party newspaper: short messages of unrestricted content which came out anonymously. Ginderachter calls them "proletarian tweets." It is well-known that the Socialist movement provided alternative forms of sociability beyond and perhaps even above ideology. It can be nonetheless surprising to learn that the abstract political values touted on the first pages did not find much echo in these tweets. Even fewer workers thought to share their views related to Flemish or Belgian identity, the center of Ginderachter's interest, with their comrades. Only 305 in Ginderachter's sample of 27,500 "tweets" made references to a national, linguistic, or ethnic category. The overwhelming majority engaged in promoting identity as organized Socialist workers (what

82 Sereda, "Whom Shall We Be?," 210.

83 Stauter-Halsted, *Nation in the Village*.

84 Zayarnyuk, *Framing the Ukrainian peasantry*, 215–316.

Ginderachter calls *Organisationspatriotismus*), confirming their authors' solidarity with the movement and slamming class enemies and Catholics.⁸⁵

Propaganda pence offer a unique angle on the views of their authors, and one can only wish for similar sources in other research contexts. Like so many other kinds of sources, however, they do not provide an unmediated view. Genre constraints appear loose at first glance, but a consensus had clearly formed that this column was to be used as a site for "grooming talk," communication with a primarily bonding function. The fact that patriotism and ethnicity were not themes that Dutch-speaking organized Ghent workers would often bring up at leisurely party meetings may be significant, but that does not necessarily imply they had no feelings and (admittedly less articulate) ideas on the matter. To identify these feelings and ideas, Ginderachter complements the testimony of propaganda pence with more conventional sources.

Non-narrative Sources

Quantitative evidence can be broad in its sweep but tends to be reticent and vague. The print runs of newspapers and magazines, for instance, have long been used as indicators to assess the spread of nationalist ideas. As much as the evidence they provide is extensive, however, it is also circumstantial and shallow, primarily because people may not have read a certain paper for its nationalist content, and even when they did, the size of a readership reveals nothing about its reactions to specific messages. To the extent that reliable circulation figures are available, they gain a real significance when compared across multiple press organs in the same market.⁸⁶ But circulation figures are often elusive and inconsistent, based as they were on the editors' own reporting. State regulation and technological aspects also need to be taken into account. The fact that minority papers were not sold at newsstands in Dualist Hungary, for example, limited their outreach. On the other hand, Linotype machines drove down production costs around the turn of the century, which led to skyrocketing print runs and the mushrooming of "penny papers." Most significantly, newspapers reached a much broader audience than the number of copies sold, as people passed them on and, in the countryside, read them aloud to others in evening gatherings.⁸⁷

85 Van Ginderachter, *The Everyday Nationalism of Workers*, 125–43.

86 As seen in Himka, *Galician Villagers*; Lorman, *Making of the Slovak People's Party*.

87 Stauter-Halsted, *Nation in the Village*, 193; Fél and Hofer, *Proper Peasants*, 182.

Membership counts of associations, which scholars have often used as a means of gauging the followings of national movements, are perhaps even more ambiguous. High enrollment figures in the Polish cooperatives of Prussia on the eve of the First World War suggest that a large segment of the peasantry had recognized the economic benefits these cooperatives offered and that the Polish minority elite had established one massive channel to communicate with the masses. Taken by themselves, however, it is doubtful how far they can demonstrate the popularity of national ideas.⁸⁸

The extension of male suffrage in nineteenth-century Europe coincided with the rise of nationalist politics, making electoral data an easily accessible gauge of the support that nationalist ideas received from large populations. On this basis, Abigail Green concludes that no more than one-quarter of the German male population shared the enthusiasm for unification under Prussian auspices in the immediate aftermath of the victory over France, since of the 50 percent who bothered to vote at the first Reichstag election, only half voted for parties aligned with this solution.⁸⁹

The fact that electoral data are available in successive and often comparable data series invites longitudinal treatment of such data. Reconstructing the failed Polish attempt at national mobilization in Upper Silesia, James E. Bjork regularly revisits electoral outcomes.⁹⁰ In most contexts, however, some parties with pronounced nationalist profiles came to enjoy massive popular support, which is very hard to disregard. In southern Bukovina, for instance, 95 percent of Romanians voted for a Romanian nationalist (although typically not irredentist) ticket on the eve of the First World War. In his doctoral dissertation, political scholar Ionaș Rus follows the spread of national consciousness among them with the help of electoral results, but he complements these with “qualitative” data.⁹¹ Recently, a cross-sectional analysis of the 1907 Reichsrat election results in the Czech lands has challenged revisionist accounts of Czech and German nationalization campaigns. Looking at the strategies used by nationalist parties to attract voters, a team of political scientists established a correlation between the share of peasants and the nationalist vote, with rural districts being the most

88 Lorenz, “Civil Society in Polish Cooperatives,” 40.

89 Green, *Fatherlands*, 298–99.

90 Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole*.

91 Rus, “Variables affecting Nation-building,” 45.

likely to vote for nationalist parties. This suggests that by 1907, nationalist ideas had resonated widely with the peasantry.⁹²

This said, engagement with nationalist politics must be differentiated from nationhood understood as a *habitus*, i.e., the tacit and routine acceptance of national categories. The latter crystallized more linearly through the succession of life cycles, an incremental change that built up the possibility for national frames to congeal into action.⁹³ Engagement with nationalist politics, on the other hand, could undergo sudden surges, breaks, and relapses. Moreover, the perceived stakes of an election, the availability of potent non-nationalist alternatives, and the messaging of the given party must also be taken into consideration. The nationalist outlook of a party or a candidate was not their only potential appeal; nationalist parties often adopted leftist or pro-smallholder economic platforms, defended traditional religious values, etc. Local developments could also favor their popularity, and it would be instructive to juxtapose voting behavior with communal action, social trends, and civil society in small sets of well-documented localities.

Most national movements introduced a string of historical or invented given names to index their vision of national history. The spread of such names among the people can thus serve as a rough proxy for the gradual embrace of this vision, at least in the first couple of generations, until their novelty value wore off and they became normalized or discarded. Choosing such a “national” name for one’s child, with cultural allusions graspable only for the initiated, entailed a radical break with local custom and could expose the family to ridicule. Such names typically lacked patron saints, a big hindrance in contexts where peasants baptized their children according to the day they were born. Worse still, Ruthenians of Galicia attached a stigma to rare first names, which were traditionally reserved for illegitimate children.⁹⁴

Jürgen Gerhards compared trends in baby naming in selected Protestant and Catholic German towns from the nineteenth century down to the Nazi times by occupational categories.⁹⁵ Stefano Pivato studied the frequency of republican versus dynastic first names in northern Italian towns of the liberal era to gain a general picture of the population’s political sympathies.⁹⁶ Jaroslav

92 Howe et al., “Nationalism, Class, and Status,” 846–47.

93 Brubaker, *Reframing Nationhood*, 19.

94 Hrytsak, “History of Names,” 171.

95 Gerhards, *The Name Game*.

96 Pivato, *Il nome e la storia*.

Hrytsak dealt more specifically with new names of nationalist inspiration, charting the popularity of given names taken from the Rurik dynasty and the Cossack hetmanate in the families of nineteenth-century Ruthenian (Ukrainian) national awakeners and in a few parish registers. Judging by his sample, such names did not catch on in the Galician countryside before the First World War, apart from in one village, where they received a boost from the local landlord and the priest.⁹⁷

I analyzed the diffusion of Latinate Romanian, medieval (including “pagan”) Hungarian, and reinvented Germanic male given names in Transylvania and eastern Hungary between the 1840s and the 1900s based on a near-complete database of grammar school graduates and a massive collection of birth registers. I confirmed that peasants started to adopt the new names decades after the elites in all three contexts. Among Romanians, the first non-elite adopters were people who lived side by side with Magyars: craftspeople in small market centers, miners, and the personnel on aristocratic manors. In contrast, several Romanian-inhabited valleys located far in the outback registered no Latinate names until after the First World War. This finding highlights the role of boundary maintenance in the appropriation of nationalist content.⁹⁸

Two exhibitions at the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum (from 1989 and 2016) displayed datable objects of known provenience featuring patriotic or national symbols and inscriptions, most of them fashioned or decorated by their lower-class owners.⁹⁹ The Hungarian colors and other patriotic imagery seem to have picked up in popularity after the defeat of the 1848–49 revolution, and a wooden cupboard from 1861 even had a Slovak inscription asking for God’s blessing on the homeland around a carved and painted Hungarian coat of arms.¹⁰⁰ Such visual clues, as well as the many early-twentieth-century references to peasant women who wore ribbons with the Romanian colors, suggest that the spaces on garments, accessories, and household objects that had been traditionally decorated, and likely with changing motifs, were also an obvious site to introduce national marking.

97 Hrytsak, “History of Names.”

98 Berecz, *Empty Signs, Historical Imaginaries*, 25–44.

99 Selmeczi Kovács, *Nemzeti jelképek a magyar népművészetben*.

100 *Ibid.*, 34.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This panorama may have left readers with a giddy feeling of uncertainty. The sources are ambiguous, each source type comes with a proviso about its limitations, and, to restate, they often contradict one another. The same people seem to have been drawn to the call of the nation on the basis of one kind of source but were oblivious to it according to another. What does all this add up to? The name of the game is, as always, contextualizing, juxtaposing various kinds of sources and different perspectives, and comparing the same source types across contexts. This article has taken conceptual clarity and terminological precision somewhat lightly (let me offer as an excuse the explanation that I tried to avoid imposing my theoretical preferences on other people's works). But beyond familiarity with the historical setting under study, we, researchers, must also untangle, in light of our favorite theories, what the given evidence is supposed to reveal, and we must be specific about our assumptions. The dilemmas of interpreting early responses to nationalism force us not only to refine our methodological toolkit, but also to ground our analyses in a theory of social behavior, beliefs, and emotions and rethink what we are talking about when we talk about nationhood and nationalism.

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