



Routledge Histories of Central and Eastern Europe

IDENTITIES IN-BETWEEN IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

Edited by
Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah and Marius Turda



Identities In-Between in East-Central Europe

This volume addresses the question of ‘identity’ in East-Central Europe. It engages with a specific definition of ‘sub-cultures’ over the period from c.1900 to the present and proposes novel ways in which the term can be used with the purpose of understanding identities that do not conform to the fixed, standard categories imposed from the top down, such as ‘ethnic group’, ‘majority’ or ‘minority’. Instead, a ‘sub-culture’ is an identity that sits between these categories. It may blend languages, e.g. dialect forms, cultural practices, ethnic and social identifications, or religious affiliations as well as concepts of race and biology that, similarly, sit outside national projects.

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and Marius Turda**

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Introduction

Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah and Marius Turda

This edited volume is one of the results of a four-year research project sponsored by the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council from 2012 to the beginning of 2017, with further support from the UK Centre for East European Language-Based Area Studies (CEELBAS). Based at the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, it sought to explore ‘Sub-cultures as Integrative Forces in East-Central Europe, 1900–present’. The main idea was a new approach to the notion of ‘sub-culture’ as a heuristic means of understanding and studying non-dominant ethnic groups which have often been neglected or misunderstood in twentieth-century East-Central European history. These are the manifold communities in the region whose particular characteristic is that they do not conform to a singular identification as a national or ethnic ‘majority’ or ‘minority’. Instead, they display multiple or simultaneous practices of belonging to more than one language, ethnic group or nation and set of cultural practices; and they may also exhibit more than one religious affiliation. Thus, the working hypothesis of the project has been that East-Central European sub-cultures, as we call these groups in terms further defined below, existed in parallel to, and in-between, established state, national and regional structures.

In this sense, the term ‘sub-culture’ acquired an experimental meaning in our project. Rather than denoting consciously counter-cultural groups, the project proposed the notion of understanding constituencies with historically formed identities that, in the modern age, came to be viewed as hybrid. They were an intrinsic part of East-Central European societies, even though they became situated in-between the monolithic categories that have dominated the region and beyond since the nineteenth century, such as nation, culture and language.

East-Central Europe, broadly understood, is a prime example of a region that had been traditionally defined by extraordinary ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The cataclysmic social and political upheavals in the region’s twentieth-century history fundamentally challenged this diversity. Socio-political demarcation lines emerged that ran through existing communities and gave rise to groups positioning themselves deliberately or, more often, inadvertently in-between the new categories, notably those of nationality and ethno-linguistic ‘majority’ and ‘minority’. The reasons for this shift and its outcomes were many, and subject to place and time. The proposed notion of sub-cultures does not seek

to do away at an abstract level with these differences in historical conditions. Its function is rather to provide a conceptual tool that focuses the attention on a hitherto frequently neglected topic: ethnic groups who fall in-between, or altogether outside, typologies commonly applied in modern times, and who manifest changeable or fluid forms of collective identity.

Initially, the project set out with a range of pertinent case studies from various East-European cities at different junctures in time from around 1900 to the present, focusing on linguistic identities in Habsburg-ruled Lemberg (Lviv) and Russian-ruled Łódź around 1900; on myth and memory among Jews and Germans in interwar Romania, especially Cluj and Timișoara; on historical discourses in newly Polish and communist Wrocław and Lower Silesia; and on discursive social constructions in present-day Ukrainian Lviv and Polish Wrocław. Thus, the case studies span across various East-Central European regions in the imperial, interwar, communist and post-communist eras. They were conducted by the conveners of the project and authors of this introduction. An important aspect of the project was to branch out and involve historians from the region and beyond who share an interest in multi-layered, complex East-Central European identity formations in modern times, without necessarily subscribing to our more specific and experimental understanding of the term 'sub-cultures'. Workshops convened by the project in Oxford, Kraków and Cluj enabled us to test the concept by engaging with those following a similar scholarly agenda. This agenda certainly has important precursors, such as the well-established interest in nationally 'indifferent' groups in the age of the rise of nationalism.¹ However, during these workshops it clearly emerged that 'indifference' and 'hybridity' in modern East-Central Europe is not confined to a lack of ethno-linguistically defined national belonging.² It encompasses other categories and may manifest itself in various forms, e.g. rather than as an a-national identity, as a bi- or even tri-national one based on collective denominators, such as class, type of economic activity, religion, historical memory, gender or age. Alternatively, it may take the form of an abrupt re-positioning of a majority as a minority, or vice versa, engendering a conflicted understanding of one's ethnic and linguistic peers.

Further seeking to refine our experimental notion of 'sub-culture', the project also included an applied element, in the form of a symposium co-organised by the Lviv-based Center for Urban History of East Central Europe. It brought together cultural policymakers, practitioners and activists who are engaged in dealing with the hybrid, mixed and, thus, often complex legacies of East-Central European cities today. The discussions between representatives from L'viv (Ukraine), Wrocław (Poland), Cluj and Timișoara (Romania) revealed that important contemporary responses to these legacies are at first indifference or antagonism. However, if embedded in a context that is relevant to these cities' residents, and approached in a way that acknowledges their concerns and interests, they equally bear great potential to inform and to enrich contemporary policymaking and community engagement in areas such as urban planning and revitalisation, the strengthening of local heritage assets, and community

cohesion. The encounter with cultural politics today provided an important corrective lens to the scholarly agenda of the project. At the same time, it offered practitioners from the region the opportunity to engage with current academic discourse, and to reflect on it with peers from places with shared historical experiences.

The present volume grew out of the final stages of the project, when the case studies described above had advanced sufficiently to assess the merits, as well as the shortcomings, of proposing a novel understanding of the term ‘sub-culture’ to capture social groups that have otherwise remained poorly understood or altogether invisible in twentieth-century East-Central European history. But is this term sufficiently distinct from other concepts, such as ‘national indifference’, ‘pre-modern’ identity and so on; and is it a useful terminological generalisation to capture a variety of forms of hybrid identity in East-Central Europe? These questions were put to a group of historians towards the end of the project and their reflections are included here. An important feature of the initiative was, again, the participation of scholars not only interested in East-Central European history, but also from the region itself, given their particular familiarity with the respective national as well as international discourse on the region. The former in particular, which often includes politically influential historiographical disputes, frequently escapes historians from elsewhere due to language barriers.

The chapters of this book are the outcome of this invitation to engage with the proposed notion of ‘sub-culture’. As the contributions show, responses vary. However, they all test the suitability of the notion against a variety of topics, ranging from the Baltics to the Balkans, and from the early twentieth century to the present day. Three contributions deal with groups not normally associated with the regional focus of the present volume. There are the ‘Frisians’ in northern Germany and Denmark who, to some extent, also display an identity ‘in-between’. There are also the ‘Memmela(e)nder’ in peripheral Lithuania, who had a part-German identity harking back to longer-established German settlement in East Prussia. These cases are, for obvious reasons, not ‘Central’ European, and certainly the experience of hybridity and ‘in-betweenness’ is a human phenomenon resulting from any kind of mixing in contexts where a normative ethnic category does not always acknowledge difference. What differentiates East-Central Europe from other regions under academic scrutiny is perhaps the intensity and particular historical resonance of these experiences owing to the forcible changes and the length and ‘normality’ of mixing until the changes of the twentieth century.³

Overall, this book records an interim milestone in the development of a conceptual tool, putting to the test the idea of ‘sub-cultures’, while also presenting papers that advance original research in their own right. Thus, one of the key questions informing this volume on identities in-between in East-Central Europe – again, broadly defined – is this: What is the role of sub-cultures in the formation of a multi-layered identity (linguistic, ethnic, religious, cultural, biological and so on)? Like many terms that circulate widely in the scholarship on nations and nationalism, ‘sub-culture’ has received uneven academic scrutiny. It has a

wide application in sociology and anthropology, but its use by historians is limited. Yet there is much heuristic value in using the term when discussing issues of identity (individual and collective) in East-Central Europe, as is pointed out in the following chapters.

We define 'sub-cultures' not in traditional terms as, for instance, subaltern or youth groups, but as groups with wider, composite forms of cultural self-expression (linguistic, religious, other practices) and multiple or simultaneous belonging. As such, they cross over and integrate 'majority' and 'minority' cultures and 'ethnic groups'. Such 'sub-cultures' existed in parallel to state or regional structures and form part of a more complex web of multiple and shifting ethnic identities, which are typical of twentieth-century East-Central Europe. They are not 'hybrid' communities, in the simple sense of being ethnically mixed, but they use 'hybrid' languages or exist in 'hybrid' situations; moreover, they are not 'subaltern' as the term is used in post-colonial studies, or 'non-normative', as the term is used in sociology to describe how sexual identities interact with gender identity and social status. In the specific context of East-Central Europe, 'sub-cultures' express a multi-layered, simultaneous form of identity, which developed 'underneath' the locally dominant project of identity construction, but was not in a 'subaltern' position, neither necessarily opposing the majority, nor excluding it. The interplay between sub-culture and identity hence requires careful contextualisation. Sub-cultures need boundaries (ethnic, national, cultural, linguistic, sexual and so on) which are defined by the mainstream (society, state, dominant ethnic group), and which are implicitly or explicitly accepted by the sub-cultures. The recognition of such borders, real and imagined, and the 'in-betweenness' that they are responsible for, allows us to investigate the life of various ethnic groups in novel ways, and this is what is proposed in this volume. In sum: the use of the term in this volume aims at a better understanding of these complex, shifting and often contradictory forms of ethnic identity.

As such, we do not propose a complete methodological framework; rather, some starting considerations for application to any practical case studies. These were outlined at the outset of the sub-cultures research project in an agenda-setting essay published in the journal *Nations and Nationalism*, to which several of the authors in this volume refer.⁴ Our use of the term 'sub-cultures' is intended to better understand more fluid and practical forms of identification, as opposed to of 'identity', as more conventionally seen, in reified and static terms – which better reflects the historically determined experiences of certain groups in East-Central Europe. Accordingly, the definition posited a more integrated approach, fusing perspectives 'from above' – that is, following constructionist notions of identity formation via institutions, linguistic coding and the actions of 'ethno-political entrepreneurs' – with those 'from below'.⁵ Within the latter category, the aim was to integrate established historical methods such as oral history with insights from sociological studies into the 'groupness' of the cases under scrutiny – embracing an understanding of how rituals, behaviour, 'performance' and use of symbols interact – together with a close attention to place and context, and an

understanding of how language, as mentioned further on in this introduction, functions as a vector of practical or applied ‘in-betweenness’. This is a potentially extensive range of factors, but is intended neither to be exhaustive nor prescriptive to researchers. Rather, it is proposed as a stimulus for those within their disciplines to consider the facet of hybridity within and between existing heuristic categories, where it may be observed empirically, through a range of features. The term ‘sub-cultures’, while carrying intellectual baggage, thus fundamentally expresses the processual nature of identifications under scrutiny, which existing research into ‘minorities’ or ‘ethnic groups’ in the region has tended to elide.

Furthermore, the notion of ‘sub-culture’ as it relates to hybrid groups allows for a repurposing of the term.⁶ Its considerable value lies in observing how urban identities are shaped, contested and re-interpreted⁷ through bricolage and ritual and/or performance – a notion deriving particularly from the use of the term by the Birmingham (UK) sociologists of the 1960s, including Dick Hebdige in his influential work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). But these largely take place in delimited national contexts, and ethnicity as a factor is not considered. Meanwhile, later works on so-called ‘post-sub-culture’, while considering ethnic identifications, tend to dissolve the defined boundaries necessary for analysing empirical cases, such as ours, which still refer to such entities as the nation state as points of departure, integration, or reference.⁸ Context, as Hilary Pilkington identified in her work on Russian youth, is key to understanding the specific ‘strategies’ (her term) deployed – which go beyond traditional definitions of ‘sub-culture’ as pure bricolage or lifestyle.⁹ Indeed: in East-Central Europe, whether due to the experience of communist rule from without or other factors, the nation state remains an all-important touchstone and frame of reference. This is a broad but not unreasonable generalisation in 2019, amid the well-documented return of right-wing populism in countries such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and beyond. It underscores the need for integrative ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ understandings of how people process and articulate identifications, which past uses of the term ‘sub-culture’ highlight, but do not quite embrace by stopping outside, or else dissolving the categories of ethnicity and nation. ‘Hybridity’ and ‘hyphenation’, meanwhile, while useful components of analysis, tend to lack the focus of ‘sub-culture’, which aims to look beyond outcome to reveal how groups under scrutiny function between categories – simultaneously, diachronically, and not necessarily from a single fixed angle or point in time.

As with any conceptual approach, efforts were made to mitigate the danger of finding something simply because one is looking for it: such as in not asking leading questions in interviews and ensuring an empirical basis to our investigation. For example, in Lviv, the self-defining ‘Polish’ minority respondents consciously and assertively reproduced ethnic categories ‘from above’, in contrast to the minority Germans of Wrocław, who, unprompted, flagged areas of practical or applied hybridity. Equally, the fact that some cases appear to work against the notion of hybrid identities, despite a demonstrable knowledge of

ethnic and other forms of mixing, may also confirm our knowledge of how governments and state actors in the region have, in different ways over the 'long' twentieth century into the present, worked hard to subsume identifications that do not necessarily fit a reified, static, and narrowly construed ethno-linguistic definition of a set nation – and that this has left clear traces in people's conscious practice.

Overall, this volume offers a *longue-durée* perspective that transcends periodic limitations, and which reveals, in fact, that identity-building projects in East-Central Europe in the twentieth century drew on an eclectic range of elements from different historical experiences: imperial; republican; wartime; communist; post-communist. This offers a key to understanding not only the specifics of identity building in countries such as Poland, Romania and Ukraine, but also provides a more sophisticated approach with contemporary relevance that challenges the mapping of Western experiences elsewhere. Indeed, our project's definition of sub-cultures as 'integrative' forces comes from the fact that groups thus defined often work to overcome potentially explosive divides, seen from this region's historical perspective(s). The Wrocław Germans of the early twenty-first century are an entirely peaceable self-defining minority who reflect the historical circumstances of their evolution as a group, absorbing 'Polish' cultural rituals, linguistic forms, and in some cases blending them quite specifically with German ones, without controversy or self-consciousness. Moreover, across this volume's various case studies, what emerges is less the notion of a conflict of cultures (majority vs. minority), but rather simultaneous *constructions of cultures* cutting across national borders and historical periods.

The focus on specific urban micro-contexts, at given moments, yields details that the generic approach to 'minorities' can often miss; close attention to context and intersecting vectors of time and place reveal many examples to be between both minority and majority discourses. In addition to the Polish and German examples cited, think, for example, of the Hungarian or German speaking Greek-Catholic Romanians in Timișoara; or consider the Yiddish speaking Ashkenazi peasants in Maramureș or the assimilated Jews of Bucharest. Again, these Jews were very different (linguistically and culturally) from the Hungarian speaking Jews of Cluj, for instance. Precisely this state of 'in-betweenness', belonging fully to neither category, is what becomes a 'sub-cultural' form of identity in our application of the term.

That said, while broadly informed by our conceptual challenge, this volume does not offer a unitary approach to the question of identity in East-Central Europe. The authors included here are interested both in unpacking how a variety of minority groups interact with historical definitions put upon them or used by themselves, and how these definitions are then played out in practice – such as through use of 'blended' forms of language or in situations in which there is a need to accomplish a certain nation-building project. As such, the approach as well as the detail of each case study and national context inevitably differs. Yet there are also similarities that reach towards our definition of 'sub-cultures' as *identities in-between*.

The essays underscore how these similarities arose specifically in East-Central Europe thanks to historical processes that are particular to that region's twentieth century experience: namely, the fact that it lived with 'mixing' and diversity for many centuries. Ethnic groups had lived side by side, intermarrying to different degrees. National awakening during the nineteenth century, the obverse of traditional dynastic ties, or simple national indifference at the micro level, was one impulse that 'unmade' this history of mixing. The collapse of Empires after the First World War, and more radically still, the forcible and still contested reshaping of national borders after the Second World War went further still to 'unmix' this diverse region. Most notably, mass population resettlements that followed the Second World War across the region formalised titular ethnic separation and created 'orphan' populations with mixed but suppressed identities. Being 'in-between' would fit neither the communist nor post-communist national projects except in limited cases (for example, where the folkloric illustration of sub-ethnies could be used to underscore regional particularism, as with 'Szekler' and 'Maramureşean' highlanders in Romania). In some cases, such as interwar Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania, former majorities became minorities, and other groups with a proto-ethno-national identity that simply failed to achieve national status continue either to strive for independent recognition as such (some Upper Silesians in Poland), or else define themselves as in-between the established national projects by dint of this 'otherness'.

The way we think of our past, as individuals and as groups, is very important for our understanding of ourselves. Things become complicated and challenging if our memory does not correspond to some authoritative version of the past, communicated by society, or one's parents, or by politicians, or by the 'mainstream'. Many people in East-Central Europe today discover that their past is not quite as 'Polish', 'German', 'Romanian' or 'Hungarian' as they were encouraged or used to think. Perhaps there was a Jewish grandfather, or some enigmatic relative who turned out to be Orthodox rather than Roman-Catholic. A village may discover that their place actually used to be almost exclusively inhabited by Jews, or there may be material objects that look strange and unfamiliar. This is when memory becomes more challenging and may need to be re-imagined and re-shaped to accommodate a more complex, hybrid past. It is perhaps no coincidence that post-war East-Central and South-Eastern European literature often deals with personal and collective memory. Polish, Ukrainian, Czech and Romanian authors who come to mind are, for example, Yurii Andrukhovych, Paweł Huelle, Stefan Chwin, Ota Pavel and Herta Müller.

Language is a further key factor, since it is at the very heart of who we feel we are, and how we express ourselves. In Europe today there is a widespread conception that everyone 'belongs' to one language, and has one mother tongue. Of course, we learn foreign languages, possibly to a level of high proficiency, but we will still have one native language that defines us; so the argument goes. However, monolingualism in that sense is not the norm, but the exception, both historically as well as today in many parts of the world. Many people are, in one form or another, bi- or multilingual, and feel they 'belong' to more than one

linguistic community. This was, and to some extent still is, particularly true of East-Central Europe, even if politics, the media or public opinion suggest otherwise. If people identify with two or more languages, as many do and did, they may have learnt one from one parent and the other one from the other; or they may have spoken one language at home and used another one in school or at work; or they may have acquired the second language later, when they married someone from a different linguistic community and formed a bilingual family. They may keep the two or more languages neatly separate as to when and what they use them for; or they may switch constantly or mix them together into something completely new. There is huge variation in how we acquire languages, how we use them and how we relate to them. From a linguistic point of view, we will want to identify typical set-ups and describe and analyse them in linguistic terms. What, however, will always remain the same is the fact that language is central to who we feel and perceive we are in our place and time. As shown here, the task is to try and find out how a particular linguistic set-up may shape these feelings and perceptions. Bi- and multilingualism may at times work relatively harmoniously. At others, it may be a symbolic battlefield where strong social antagonisms, or even hatred, are being played out.¹⁰ This identity conflict was delineated by the boundaries that separated those who belonged to the national community from foreigners and outsiders who were often seen as potential enemies. In addition to this defensive, external strategy of ethnic protectionism, another one developed: a system of ‘internal cleansing’, according to which those members of the community deemed different were subjected to various interventionist measures, both in their personal and public lives.

As this volume demonstrates, ‘sub-cultures’ are forces of simultaneous integration and disintegration: they often refuse to, or cannot wholly be, subsumed into one or another national project, although this often occurs; therefore understanding how they function promotes integration as a natural consequence of human mixing: through intermarriage, cultural contact, linguistic and other practices, going back centuries, and in certain groups resistant to full incorporation into a specific project. Clearly, one does not wish to suggest that national projects themselves lack validity: despite the voluminous and now decades-long engagement of historians with deconstructing nationhood, national narratives have proved not only robust but enduring. The point of ‘sub-cultures’ as construed in this volume is that, rather than trying to undermine specificity and difference, they actually reinforce it, but in a way that suggests how cultures blend and link at the margins. In other words, this is not a post-modern attempt to relativise, but in fact to describe, understand, and point out the human benefit of understanding ties that bind as well as divide – an emphasis solely on the latter coming at great cost, and one that risks being forgotten in the climate of the late 2010s. To recognise and examine this revival of ethnicity and nationalism in Europe and elsewhere, we must attend to each country’s specific historical traditions, but at the same time we need a new methodological and comparative framework suitable for dealing with questions of collective, minority and individual identity in an increasingly polarised and divided Europe.

Notes

- 1 Larry Wolff provides a pertinent review in ‘Revising Eastern Europe: Memory and the Nation in Recent Historiography’, *The Journal of Modern History* 78, 1 (2006): 93–118.
- 2 On ‘indifference’ see Maarten van Ginderachter, Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); and Tara Zahra, ‘Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis’, *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010): 93–119.
- 3 See the studies included in Irina Livezeanu, Árpád von Klimó, eds., *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
- 4 See Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah, ‘Redefining “Sub-Culture”: A New Lens for Understanding Hybrid Cultural Identities in East-Central Europe, with a case study from early 20th century L’viv-Lwów-Lemberg’, *Nations and Nationalism* 21, 4 (2015): 700–720.
- 5 Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 6 ‘Sub-cultures’ as a term derives from a subset of ‘Cultural Studies’, and traces its origins to urban ethnography in the early twentieth century, in the work of Robert Park *The City* (1925) and the Chicago School. See, for example, Robert E. Park, *Human Communities* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952).
- 7 Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) and Ross Haenfler, *Subcultures: The Basics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).
- 8 David Muggleton, Rupert Weinzierl, eds., *The Post-Subculture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).
- 9 Hilary Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth and its Culture: A Nation’s Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 10 There is by now an extraordinarily rich research tradition in various sub-disciplines in applied linguistics which shows how languages and linguistic practices acquire multiple and complex forms of social meaning. For just a few pertinent studies and surveys with reference to East-Central and South-Eastern Europe in the modern period to the present day, see e.g. Susan Gal, ‘Imperial Linguistics and Polyglot Nationalism in Austria-Hungary: Hunfalvy, Gumpłowicz, Schuchardt’, *Balkanistica* 28 (2015): 151–173; Victor A. Friedman, ‘Language in Macedonia as an Identity Construction Site’, in: Brian D. Joseph, Johanna DeStefano, Neil G. Jacobs, Ilse Lehiste, eds., *When Languages Collide: Perspectives on Language Conflict, Language Competition, and Language Coexistence* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2003), 257–295; Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and its Disintegration* (Oxford, New York: University Press, 2004); Tomasz Kamusella, Motoki Nomachi, Catherine Gibson, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Slavic Languages, Identities and Borders* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Rosita Schjerve-Rindler, ed., *Diglossia and Power: Language Policies and Practice in the 19th Century Habsburg Empire* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2003).

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1 The fallacy of national studies¹

Tomasz Kamusella

Introduction

National studies is a broad field of academic pursuits potentially comprised of all the social sciences and humanities, though its typical core is limited to philology, history and ethnography (also known as folklore studies or ethnology). In Central Europe (also in Japan and southeast Asia), where the ethnolinguistic kind of nationalism predominates for building, legitimising and maintaining nations and their nation states, national studies are the main intellectual cornerstone of these processes. As such the ideal of dispassionate and disinterested research open to all is abandoned, and scholarship is harnessed into the service of the state-led national idea. The resultant subservience of research to ideology requires the adoption of circular logic among proponents and practitioners of national studies that better serve the national interest. Language, history and culture are nationalised and essentialised. The basic assumption of this development is that a given nation's language, history and culture are fully accessible and knowable exclusively to the nation's members. Scholars sticking to this dogma are assured of employment at state-owned and state-approved universities, while those whose research contradicts cherished assumption of the national idea are summarily ostracised in order to bring them into line or make them leave academia.

Nationalism, philologists and peasantry

In the early modern period in Western Europe, a popular idea coalesced that people 'naturally' come in neatly delineated (ethnic) groups. These groups can be discerned through the careful research of their customs and appearance, thus allowing for the supposedly unambiguous and 'scientific' apportioning of all humanity into such 'discoverable' discrete population categories.² Without much comment on this fact, the assumption also entailed the normative belief, which persists to this day, that an individual can 'naturally' belong only to a *single* human group of such a type. Perhaps this normative belief stems from the conviction of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, which claims that a person can profess only a *single* religion (at least, at the same time).³ The religious strife in

Western and Central Europe that concluded with the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) reinforced this norm of (serial) mono-religiosity, as succinctly summarised in the 1555 principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio* ('Whose realm, his religion').⁴ It meant that the ruler decided on the *single* religion (confession) for his realm and all the population needed to follow this dictum, or leave.⁵ Another consequence of this novel principle was the rise of the sovereign 'territorial state', which was supposed to be internally homogenous and normatively free of any outside influences. This aforementioned homogeneity meant that the state was reserved for the population of 'the *same* type', which at that time meant of the *same* religion (confession).⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment quest for discovering and gathering knowledge about the *entire* (social) world decisively added the category of 'a language' (*Einzelsprache*) to religion and customs as a necessary and unique trait of each discernible people.⁷

The afore-described ways of 'sorting out' human diversity are sometimes referred to by present-day *students* of nationalism as 'national thought', in order to avoid the self-serving phrases 'early nationalism' and 'proto-nationalism' that are actually preferred by *nationalists*.⁸ But in essence both terms are anachronistic labels applied to preselected earlier (that is, *pre-national*) intellectual trends, which nationally-minded scholars and national activists found [to be] of use for their own national projects, which were mostly developed in the nineteenth century.⁹ However, scholars and thinkers of the eighteenth century who were involved in developing and practising what nowadays is known as 'national thought' did not use the term 'national thought' or 'early nationalism' themselves. In no way did they see their period as 'national'. There were some 'peoples' to be discovered and taken note of, but no nations on the horizon yet.¹⁰ Furthermore, such ideas on discrete peoples as developed by a narrow (almost invariably noble) stratum of male literati had no chance of reaching other strata of society, let alone the masses.¹¹ In the estates society, birthright, serfdom and illiteracy rigidly separated peasantry (or the vast majority of the population) from the demographically minute nobility. Studies of the national specificity of one people or another, usually focusing on this or that national language, originated in nineteenth-century Central Europe.¹² This field of research grew from two different pursuits. First, at the turn of modernity philologists discovered vernaculars (illiterate peasantry's speech) as the 'proper' field of research. Second, these peasant vernaculars came to be understood as *discrete* national (people's) languages (that is, *Einzelsprachen*) connected to this or that 'written language' used by an elite for writing, education and administration. In practice philology treated such vernacular languages as metonyms for speech communities, quickly (and with almost no comment) equated with nations to be led by 'their' elites.¹³ It was these elites who invented, imagined nations and their languages into being.¹⁴

In Central Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century the nation became a new sought-after form of human groupness that was gradually accorded the highest political recognition. This recognition came complete with the right of nations to their own state, especially after the Great War.¹⁵

Subsequently, the nation was elevated to [being] the hallmark of the future and modernity, as opposed to the region's 'backward' and 'reactionary' empires that were *not* national in their social or political character and aspirations.¹⁶ This perceived 'deficiency' of the empires became more 'visible' during the nineteenth century, the greater the insistence that the nation must be defined through its own specific vernacular, unshared with any other nation. For instance, as a result the Austrian Empire's population was largely homogenous in their Catholicism at the beginning of this century. However, three generations later, *Einzel Sprachen* were replacing religion as the main locus of group identity in Austria-Hungary. Descendants of the previously undifferentiated Catholics began to see themselves as now belonging to a variety of ethnolinguistically defined nations tentatively united under Franz Joseph's benign rule.¹⁷ Obviously, this process was messy, protracted and uneven. As late as the end of World War I, not all inhabitants of Austria-Hungary had seen themselves in national terms. Turning peasants into nationally-conscious individuals required a lot of 'hard work' on the part of nationalist activists (usually stemming from the nobility and burghers, as transformed into a middle class),¹⁸ who apart from creating nations and national languages, sought to combat what they termed as 'national indifference'.¹⁹ The target population (usually peasantry) as a rule of thumb distrusted the novel ideology of nationalism and was reluctant to do their former lords' bidding by joining this or that nation.²⁰ Ethnographers and ethnologists (often known as folklorists in Central Europe), together with sociologists and anthropologists, were at the forefront of this 'hard national graft', as the scholarly and political avant-garde of a middle class identifying with a given nation. These academically discovered peasantry were perceived through the national lens as the 'forgotten soul' and the 'true body' of the nation. A craze ensued for collecting peasant songs and customs, which retroactively were fitted to one national language (*Einzel Sprache*) or another, as already identified and endowed with an authoritative dictionary and grammar by peasants' social betters.²¹ Not that peasants who enquired about the process understood, supported or identified with the proposed languages or nations.²² Their identity remained wedded to their localities, pragmatically anchored in their everyday experience.²³ It was hard work to convince them otherwise. National activists had to establish newspapers, educational societies, publishing houses, cooperatives, literary organisations or schools in order to spread the national message among a target peasant group. More often than not, in order to take hold, this message had to be coupled with economic incentives that would meet the concerns and needs of peasants in a given village or region. Success at spreading a nationalism among a target peasantry was rare, came late if ever, and invariably was judged by national activists (almost invariably from the middle class) as imperfect or only partial.²⁴ Furthermore, the activists had to be watchful, so that peasant groups tentatively secured for 'our nation' would not be seized by a competing national movement with a more attractive educational or economic offer.²⁵

This novel metonymy of language (*Einzel Sprache*) for the nation was set in stone by the equally novel genre of ethnographic (ethnolinguistic) map. It

appears that this type of map is indebted to the eighteenth-century 'depiction' of languages (*Einzel Sprachen*) through the 'telegraphic' representation of their writing systems (usually the beginning of the Christian prayer 'Our Father') on the maps of the world's continents.²⁶ Ethnographic maps that locate peoples (nations) in cartographic space by depicting the territorial extent of the peoples' languages appeared in the 1820s and became ubiquitous by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁷ Finally, statistics lent an overpowering aura of 'scientific character' to such maps in the last third of this century.²⁸ In 1866, it was proposed that language (*Einzel Sprache*) should be used as the 'objective' marker of nationality.²⁹ Shortly thereafter, in 1872, the delegates attending the Sixth International Statistical Congress at St Petersburg decided that language and nationality (that is, the state of being a member of a nation) were to be included among the *essential* categories about which population at large *must* be asked in state-wide censuses.³⁰ Thus, modernising bureaucrats dethroned religion as the main locus of identity in Europe, and replaced it with the novel principle of *Cuius regio, eius lingua* (Whose realm, his language), although many in the Dual Monarchy had strong opposing views until the very end of its existence.³¹ This new yardstick of identity was not any less arbitrary than the declaration of this or that faith, though national activists claimed that language was *the* 'objective' marker of national identity.³² For instance, in what today is Belarus, Slavophone Catholics were classified as 'Poles', while their Slavic-speaking Orthodox counterparts in the very same village as 'Belarusians'.³³ Or Polish intellectuals, during and immediately after World War I, classified the Baltic-speakers in Latvia's region of Latgalia as a separate ethnolinguistic group of Latgalians because they regarded this population's Catholic faith as a stronger marker of distinction than the linguistic closeness between the Latvian and Latgalian languages.³⁴

In Austria-Hungary in 1880 and in the Russian Empire in 1897, empire-wide censuses were conducted in which the inhabitants were asked about their languages, popularly understood as the 'scientific and objective' indication of their nationalities.³⁵ The data generated was used to apportion people to this or that ethnolinguistically defined nation.³⁶ As a (largely unintended) result, prospective national movements were given 'hard numerical arguments' about the 'size' and spatial location of postulated nations. This allowed activists to demand political concessions and funds, especially for schooling 'their' nations' youths in and through respective national languages. Ethnolinguistically construed nationalism ceased to be a minority pursuit limited to a small group of noble and bourgeois enthusiasts and was transformed into a dominant sociopolitical force in the age of mass politics, first heralded by the introduction and spread of full male suffrage: in 1871 in Germany, in 1905 in Russia, and in 1907 in the 'Austrian half' of Austria-Hungary.³⁷

Initially amateur and private philologists put themselves to the task of endowing their (usually native) languages with 'scientific' dictionaries and grammars, first using their own leisure time and money.³⁸ But later scholarly foundations and university departments were established for researching and standardising a growing number of officially recognised languages (*Einzel Sprachen*).³⁹ These

institutions could gradually tap into funds made available by multiethnic empires, which wished to either placate emerging ethnolinguistic national movements or periodically suppress them by banning the use of some national languages or scripts.⁴⁰ Meanwhile folklorists were busy collecting a given peasantry's songs and customs, which they saw as equal in quality to, or even transcending, the ancient Homeric tradition.⁴¹ Both groups of scholars soon propounded that the language of an elite (nobility) was 'impure', due to 'foreign' influences, usually from Latin, French or German. Slavic languages were to be 'true' to their Slavic character, while Germanic ones to their Germanic 'soul'. Hence, 'ugly foreign Gallicisms, Germanisms, or Slavicisms' were replaced with neologisms coined entirely from 'native' word roots or borrowed from a 'kindred' language.⁴² In this way, for example, standard Czech had been 'purged' of German(ic) words by the turn of the twentieth century, while standard Romanian was infused with numerous Italian and French linguistic loans from the 1830s through the interwar period.⁴³

An ethnically correlated peasantry's speech extolled as an epitome of the 'pure' national language actually posed the pesky problem of easily observed spatial variability. The *single* 'peasant language', in breach of the national dogma of uniform homogeneity, somehow differed from village to village, from region to region, and was not at all free of 'foreign impurities', either.⁴⁴ For instance, the speech of the 'Romanian' peasant was replete with numerous (lexical, syntactic and grammatical) Slavicisms (irrespective of region), especially due to the centuries-long use of Church Slavonic as official and liturgical language.⁴⁵ This problem was 'explained away' by nobles' oppression of peasants through the system of serfdom, which lasted for many centuries. As a result, the supposedly pristine culture and language of peasantry were corrupted, and the putative early medieval, or even ancient nation, was thus fragmented, because serfs were not permitted to leave their villages or parishes.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, nobility 'unjustifiably' separated themselves from their ethnically kin 'peasant brethren' (betrayed the people) by adopting a 'foreign language' (Latin, French or German), by allowing a succession of (nationally) 'foreign' monarchs to assume the throne of the (national) kingdom, and by marrying foreign nobles.

This corruption – in the novel nationalist interpretation of the past and the present moment – almost destroyed the nation and its language, which nearly 'died'. But not a ray of hope remained, as 'in reality' both nation and language just 'fell into a deep sleep'. National activists perceived their task as [being] to 'awaken'⁴⁷ the nation from its heavy slumber, aided in this difficult task by philologists and folklorists, alongside nationally-minded historians and cartographers.⁴⁸ By that time the ideas of ethnolinguistic nationalism had become so deeply and unreflectively internalised in the thinking of the aforementioned activists that most genuinely believed in what they were saying.⁴⁹ When the ancient (or medieval) state of the nation was successfully re-established, peasants freed from the proverbial 'chains of serfdom', and nobles gave up their elevated status (alongside foreign languages) and rejected foreign rulers in the name of national love with their peasant brethren, at long last it was time for the

're-purified' (proper, correct) national language to be taught to all (peasant and noble sons and daughters) in compulsory elementary schools. Because the national language was made the sole medium of instruction and the main subject of study in such schools, in the span of two to three generations it became the preferred basis of national unity.⁵⁰ The nation's members began communicating with one another and imagining 'their' nation into being from generation to generation exclusively through the medium of the nation's 'own' national language. On the other hand, the deepening monolingualism in the standard version of the nation's language increasingly isolated it from other nations and their members, now depicted as 'foreign'.

Not that it was a smooth process. National activists clamouring for different national projects often disagreed where the language of one nation stopped and another nation's language began. This was an exercise in the proverbial forcing of a square peg into a round hole. They sought to identify clear-cut borders of their national language in line with the Western concept of a *discrete* and *countable* language (*Einzelssprache*). However, the linguistic reality on the ground more often than not was *continuous* in its character, that is, changing from village to village, from region to region, with no boundary that would indisputably mark the end of one language and the beginning of another.⁵¹ In such a case activists enamoured with the concept of *Einzelssprache* had no choice but to arbitrarily decide where such a border was to be put, if they wanted to continue constructing their nation on a linguistic basis.⁵²

For instance, in the Habsburg Monarchy Croatian nationalists frequently denied the existence of any Slovenian nation, referring to them as 'Alpine Croats', whose language was 'corrupted', due to 'centuries-long Germanization',⁵³ while a few Slovenian activists, already in the first half of the nineteenth century, proposed that all speakers of the Kajkavian dialect (today's northwestern Croatia with the country's capital of Zagreb) were Slovenes.⁵⁴ Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century Serbian nationalists developed a theory that all speakers of the Štokavian dialect (now shared, at the level of official language, by the Bosnians, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs) are Serbs, despite any religious differences or the confessionally-coordinated use of different scripts for writing.⁵⁵ Croatian nationalists replied in kind, claiming that all South Slavs (with the tentative exception of the Bulgarians) were Croats and spoke Croatian.⁵⁶ Likewise, until the end of the existence of the Russian Empire, Belarusians and Ukrainians – officially known in Russian as 'White Russians' and 'Little Russians' – were seen to be 'junior branches' of the '(Great) Russian' nation, because they 'stemmed directly' from the medieval polity of Rus'. In this case it was 'centuries-long Polonization' that corrupted Belarusians' and Ukrainians' once 'pristine Russian language'.⁵⁷ Of course, no one cared to enquire of the target populations what their views were about their identity and ideals of political groupness. Nationalists always know better what the 'correct identity' of the 'nationally unconscious' population is, or should be.⁵⁸

Educating the nation

The moulding of nobles (and burghers) together with peasantry on the basis of their postulated 'common national language' that somehow needs to be taught to all in school, is Central Europe's typical paradigm of creating 'national history' through philology, that is, through language creation and engineering.⁵⁹ This exercise was repeated with minor alterations in the case of the Norwegians, Latvians, Poles, Slovaks, Croats, Macedonians or Greeks, namely, in the case of the region's ethnolinguistic nations, which achieved the goal of their own unshared nation states. The national master narrative is developed, maintained and transmitted by national philology and history.⁶⁰ The latter is represented by the histories of Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Bulgaria, while names of the nationally-inflected philologies are coined from the Latin or current names of nations, for instance, *Germanistik* for the German nation, *Polonistyka* for the Polish nation, *Slovenistika* for the Slovenian nation, or *Българистика* (*Balgaristika*) for the Bulgarian nation.⁶¹ Both *national* history and philology are the leading departments of the social sciences and humanities at *national* universities in any Central European *national* polity, alongside departments of ethnology (folklore studies)⁶² (nowadays frequently transformed into less ideologised departments of anthropology).⁶³

Graduates of these departments become teachers in schools, transmitting the 'correct' national message and its very medium to the successive generations of citizens in this or that nation state. The goal is 'to develop and strengthen the feeling of national belonging'.⁶⁴ The national message is posed as the 'historic truth'. If that is questioned by 'schoolchildren who are too much inquisitive for their own good', or by pesky foreigners, this national truth must be defended as much as one's own country, because 'the nation's honour is at stake'. If an argument posed by an 'anti-nationalist' or 'national agnostic' cannot be logically refuted, the last line of national defence is to say that foreigners with inherently imperfect knowledge of 'our' language and history 'by nature' are unable to see in full 'our national truth'. A 'solution' in the case of 'in-house doubters' is easier: unless they make sure to see the national light, they will fail their exams and will be barred from attending secondary school, let alone university. A more difficult problem is posed by university graduates who belatedly lost faith in 'their' nation. At their disposal they have a wide array of intellectual instruments and methods to debunk cherished national myths. However, peer pressure and rituals of public naming and shaming work wonders.⁶⁵ Should the 'culprit' persist in his wayward ways, the measures may be combined with a formal or informal (but strictly observed) ban from the profession for which the person concerned earned qualifications, followed by forced relocation to the countryside for the most obstinate detractors.⁶⁶

This pattern of construing and instilling the national message and its medium in successive generations of students is also followed in Japan, where ethnolinguistic nationalism was borrowed wholesale from Germany in the late 1870s⁶⁷ and subsequently grafted on the local tradition of isolationism with the popular

feeling of civilisational superiority towards foreigners.⁶⁸ But ethnolinguistic nationalism took hold among the Japanese as late as the 1920s,⁶⁹ leading a decade later to the creation of a monolithic standard Japanese language at the expense of suppressing previously significant linguistic and regional differences.⁷⁰ The success of this programme of ethnolinguistic nationalisation (combined with the loss of the empire in 1945) produced, in the 1960s, a national dogma that Japan has been an ethnolinguistically homogenous polity for millennia.⁷¹ This widely popular belief is often accepted at face value also outside Japan, and mirrors the equally fallacious conviction that France has been an ethnolinguistically homogenous polity for centuries.⁷²

In Japan the division between national insiders and ‘ignorant foreigners’ (外人 *gaijin*, literally ‘outside person’, but often employed to mean ‘overseas devil’) is even more pronounced.⁷³ When the Japanese learn Japanese at school it is known as 国語 *Kokugo* (national language), while the subject of study for foreigners who want to learn this language is referred to as 日本語 *Nihongo* (limited, simplified Japanese). The assumption is that non-Japanese are inherently unable to fully master the Japanese language (*Kokugo*), so they are compelled to settle for the language’s insipid reflection, namely, *Nihongo*.⁷⁴ A racist ‘scientific’ explanation of this ‘fact’, as developed during the first half of the twentieth century, proclaims that the Japanese brain is biologically different (better) than the (inferior) brains of foreigners. Only the Japanese brain can ‘get’ all the intricacies of the Japanese language and culture. Hence, the popular Japanese belief is that foreigners are ‘biologically’ unable to achieve a native-level command of this language.⁷⁵

Likewise, the nationalist distinction between *Kokugo* and *Nihongo* is duly reflected at universities. Future school teachers of the Japanese language for the country’s national schools study at the departments of 国語学 *Kokugo-gaku*. On the other hand, those who want to teach this language to foreigners study in the departments of 日本語学 *Nihongo-gaku*. It is akin to the English Language Training (ELT) specialisation that produces teachers of English as a second language. The salient difference is that graduates of departments of English and ELT study the very *same* English language, *not* its two different varieties, one civilisationally and culturally ‘higher’ and the other ‘lower’. On the contrary, *Kokugo-gaku* is an exact counterpart of Central Europe’s *Germanistik* or *Polonistyka*, that is, nationally-inflected philology. Graduates of departments of *Kokugo-gaku* maintain the national language and make sure that its ‘proper’ knowledge continues to be spread from one generation to another.

The circular logic of nationalism

The logic of such national studies focused on language as the mystic essence of nationhood is inherently circular: A is B, because B is A. Foreigners (A) do not understand our national culture (B). Why is it so? Because our language and culture (B) are so sublime and inherently specific only to us. Hence, foreigners (A) with their biologically limited brains are inherently unable to master our