

Laboratory Central Europe

**Groupism, Statism, and
Identity Politics:
Central Europe Before and
After the Nation-State**



Trachten aus Mähren und Schlesien. Deckfarben auf Karton von Hugo Charlemont. Vorzeichnung zum "Kronprinzenwerk" (Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild, Wien 1886-1902), Bd. Mähren und Schlesien, 1897, o. S.

**VIENNA WORKSHOP
11-15 OCTOBER 2025**



**Stadt
Wien**

Kultur

About the Workshop

Concept and organisation: Tim Corbett, Béla Rásky, Julia Secklehner
Funded by the Cultural Department of the City of Vienna (MA 7)

At the latest since the epochal turn of 1989/90, the nation-state has (re-)asserted itself as the dominant form of political organisation in the world – so much so that, increasingly, the term ‘nation’ is today (at least in English-language contexts) used self-evidently and synonymously to refer to states around the world (so for example in the intrastate organisation “United Nations” as well as in its interwar predecessor “League of Nations”). This state form is most commonly, certainly in Central Europe, based on the concept of the ‘nation’ as a more or less natural, hereditary entity marked by a common language and/or culture (see e.g. Gellner 1998). This ostensibly ‘natural’ entity constitutes the ‘demos’ from which modern democracies derive their legitimacy. However, especially given the widespread and historically entrenched ethnicisation of Central European regions, this predominant conception of the ‘demos’ fails to capture the manifest diversity of the populations that make up modern states, both in Central Europe and beyond. Moreover, strategies and discourses of ideological homogenisation concerning the ‘demos’ are frequently and deliberately deployed (both in the past and the present) to exclude those deemed not to belong (such as immigrants, asylum seekers, and minorities of whatever definition) from the body politic and its attendant rights.

Central Europe, precisely because of its complex history of dynastic and imperial entanglements, has constituted a prime laboratory for the nation-state since the nineteenth century, yet ongoing territorial conflicts framed in ‘nation-statist’ terms (for example in the Balkans and Ukraine) belie the apparent success of this state form. Revisionist histories (e.g. Zahra 2010; Judson 2016; Corbett/Siegel/Thulin 2024) have recently rediscovered the old empires, particularly the Habsburg and Ottoman, as spaces that, despite their own predication on problematic groupist hegemonies, proffered more diverse conceptions of the ‘demos’ than was granted by the nation-state in their place. Indeed, the forced reorganisation of Central Europe into ‘nation-states’ after 1918 – which in practice merely meant a redistribution of power relations within new diverse state formations (especially Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia) and a shift from dynastic/territorial to demographic politics – was unable to prevent, or perhaps even actively fostered, the rise of radical exclusionary movements that ultimately enforced ‘national’ homogeneity through mass violence (displacement, expulsion, mass murder, and genocide, practised to differing extents and through differing means across Central Europe since the twentieth century; see e.g. Judt 2005).

This workshop is dedicated to dissecting the various ‘groupisms’ that have characterised political thought, social interactions, and cultural practices in Central Europe in modernity; the identity politics these conceptions of groups have engendered and through which they have been mobilised; and the statisms such groupisms and identity politics have given rise to and sought to legitimise. This groupist dynamic has perhaps been captured most accurately by Ernest Gellner’s (1984) seminal definition of nationalism as the attempt to “make culture and polity congruent”: in a context where each self-defining ‘unit’ lays claim to its own clearly demarcated space, exclusions and border conflicts necessarily follow. A critical deconstruction of such groupist logic may proceed from the alternative premise that the ‘demos’ of a given region is fundamentally nothing more than the sum of the populations inhabiting that region – a nebulous mass of people who can only be statistically grasped, socio-economically mobilised, and politically regulated through the application of particular group definitions (most typically based on religion, language, class, heredity, colour, gender, creed, and so on, depending on the specific local context; see e.g. Schuberth 2015). Groupisms are both appropriating (by claiming to speak for an ‘imagined community’; Anderson 1983) and exclusionary (by defining the imagined group against other groups or by exclusion of competing groupist claims). One might conclude that any groupist politics necessarily entails exclusion, due not least of all to the appropriation and attempted monopolisation of rights and resources (Weber 1972), which raises the question of whether any state form based on groupism can be truly inclusive.

The past and present of Central Europe provide manifold empirical examples of both (homogenising) groupist politics and of more complex and contested lifeworlds, which will be the focus of this workshop. The theme of groupism, statism, and identity politics is kept deliberately broad to allow for critical papers from a combination of theoretical and empirical, historical and contemporary, as well as interdisciplinary perspectives. In focusing on a deeply modern phenomenon – mass movements and mass politics – that is often mobilised through affective, romanticising, and (pseudo-)historicising arguments and ideologies, it moreover allows for a direct continuation of the discussions from the previous workshop on “Conflicted Modernities” held in Poznań in 2023. Participants are invited to consider (but are certainly not limited to) the following questions:

- What different groupisms and state forms have been conceptualised, theorised, developed, implemented, tested, or enforced in Central Europe through modernity?

- How are the paradoxical claims to inclusion and exclusion negotiated within particular groupist ideologies and/or identity politics, and how are competing forms of groupism negotiated?
- How have groupist politics across Central Europe handled the well-documented contradictions (e.g. King 2002; Judson 2006; Zahra 2010) between the ideological orderliness of their own claims and the ambivalences and constant boundary-crossings in their wider contexts?
- How do Central Europe's neo-nationalist or otherwise exclusivist identity politics today respond to similar, lived ambivalences? What forms of response or resistance to homogenising groupist politics are evident in the past and present, and how have these potentially produced their own (new) forms of exclusion or claims to exclusivity?

Participants are also especially encouraged to consider the issue of groupism, statism, and identity politics in Central Europe from a self-reflexive angle with regard to our own work as academics and within academic discourse:

- How does academic discourse implicitly or explicitly mobilise and perpetuate groupist thought (see e.g. Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) without the prerequisite critical distance (for example through perennially popular or reburgeoning concepts such as nation, people, race, culture, community, and so forth)?
- In what ways does the academic logic of disciplinarity and the history of particular disciplines (history, sociology, ethnology, anthropology, political science, as well as area studies such as – specifically in the Central European context – Slavic studies, German studies, Jewish studies, Romani studies etc.) serve to maintain rather than critically deconstruct artificial and at heart ideological groupist assumptions?
- And finally: to what extent is academic discourse currently serving to address and alleviate societal divisions based on groupism and identity politics, and to what extent is it actively perpetuating the problem of divisive discourse in late modern societies?

Each participant has a one-hour slot to present an in-depth research synopsis with the possibility of extensive discussion with the other participants. The keynote address, serving to chart a theoretical and thematic outline for the subsequent presentations and discussions, will be held by Christian Karner. There will also be two plenary roundtables, the first dedicated to the question of groupist thought in academic discourse, the second to the future of our research network and future cooperation plans.

Saturday, 11 October

Arrival in Vienna. Conference Hotel: **Austria Trend Hotel Ananas**, Sonnenhofgasse 8/10, 1050 Vienna (near U4 station Pilgramgasse)

19:00 Informal dinner at **Dancing Noodles Chinese Restaurant**, Schönbrunner Straße 40, 1050 Vienna (near conference hotel and U4 station Pilgramgasse; participants pay for themselves)

Sunday, 12 October

10:00-12:00 Walking tour of **Alt-Erdberg**, meet at U3 station Schlachthausegasse

12:00-14:00 Lunch break

14:00-15:30 **Tour of Prater Museum** with curators Susanne Winkler and Werner Michael Schwarz (Prater 92, 1020 Vienna, near U1/U2/S train station Praterstern)

19:00 Dinner at **Red Sea Eritrean Restaurant**, Robert-Hamerling-Gasse 23, 1150 Vienna (near U3/U6/S trains station Westbahnhof)

Monday, 13 October

Workshop day 1 at **Verein für Geschichte der ArbeiterInnenbewegung**, Rechte Wienzeile 97, 1050 Vienna (near hotel and U4 station Pilgramgasse)

9:00-9:15 Welcome

9:15-10:15 Christian Karner: "Groupism from the Right *and* the Left: Or the Sinister Battle between Cultural Essentialism and Structural Determinism"

10:15-10:30 Coffee break

10:30-12:00 Roundtable 1: Groupist Discourse in Contemporary Academia

12:00-13:30 Informal lunch at **Café Rüdigerhof**, Hamburgerstraße 20, 1050 Vienna (near hotel and U4 station Pilgramgasse; participants pay for themselves, cash payment only)

13:30-14:30 John Holmwood: "The Colonial Origins of the Failure of 'Un-Nationalism': A Revisionist Account"

14:30-15:30 Jan Balon: "Czech Reflections on Colonial Legacies and the Nation-State: Small-State Ambivalences in Central Europe"

15:30-15:45 Coffee break

15:45-16:45 Julia Secklehner: "Folk Dress in the Borderlands: Sudeten German Tracht and Group Formation in Interwar Czechoslovakia"

- 16:45-17:45** Tim Corbett: "A Haunting History: Historical Groupisms and Traumatic Pasts in German-Speaking Central Europe through the Medium of Gothic Fiction"
- 19:00** Dinner at **Elvira's Ukrainian Restaurant**, Seidlgasse 39, 1030 Vienna (near U3/U4/S train station Wien Mitte-Landstraße)

Tuesday, 14 October

Workshop day 2 at Verein für Geschichte der ArbeiterInnenbewegung,
Rechte Wienzeile 97, 1050 Vienna (near hotel and U4 station Pilgramgasse)

- 9:00-9:15** Welcome
- 9:15-10:15** Maciej Junkert: "The Big Bang of Ideas: Polish Intellectuals after 1795"
- 10:15-11:15** Jakob Norberg: "Heroic Peoples: Bettina von Arnim's Critical Nationalism"
- 11:15-11:30** Coffee break
- 11:30-12:30** Marek Kaźmierczak: "Folk and Shoal: The Cultures and Media of the Emergent Patriotism in Poland after 1989"
- 12:30-14:00** Informal lunch at **Café Rüdigerhof**, Hamburgerstraße 20, 1050 Vienna (near hotel and U4 station Pilgramgasse; participants pay for themselves, cash payment only)
- 14:00-15:00** Laura Morowitz: "Cooperation or Competition: Group Identity in the Central European Artistic Secessions"
- 15:00-16:00** Béla Rásky: "When the 'Österreichische Mensch' became a Central European: The Failure of Two Phantasms"
- 16:00-16:15** Coffee break
- 16:15-17:45** Roundtable 2: The Future of the "Contradictory Modernities" Research Network
- 19:00** Dinner at **Plachuttas Grünspan Viennese Restaurant** by invitation of the Mayor's Office, Ottakringer Straße 266, 1160 Vienna (U3/S train station Ottakring)

Wednesday, 15 October

Departure

Abstracts

CZECH REFLECTIONS ON COLONIAL LEGACIES AND THE NATION-STATE: SMALL-STATE AMBIVALENCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE

JAN BALON

The Czech experience provides a productive lens for interrogating the paradoxical legacies of empire, coloniality, and nation-statehood in Central Europe, thereby complementing revisionist accounts that locate the “failure of un-nationalism” in the *longue durée* of European modernity (Holmwood). As scholars of coloniality argue (e. g. Mignolo; Bhabha), European modernity was always already structured by the interplay of overseas empires of extraction and continental empires of incorporation. The Czech lands, though lacking colonies, were profoundly shaped by these dynamics: positioned as both subjects of Habsburg incorporation and participants in a wider European “civilising mission”. Such ambivalence reflects Zahra’s account of “national indifference” as well as Brubaker’s distinction between immigration-engendered polyethnicity and territorial ethnicity-as-nationality – distinctions which collapse once viewed through the lens of Europe’s entangled colonial and imperial formations.

The founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918 demonstrates Gellner’s observation that nationalism seeks to align culture and polity, while at the same time reproducing exclusionary logics that mirror the reconfigurations of empire elsewhere. The new state’s privileging of Czech and Slovak identities over Germans, Hungarians, and Roma parallels the contradictions of Western Europe’s “un-national” states which, as Holmwood notes, relied upon colonial extractions overseas to stabilise their liberal order. After 1989/90, the Czech Republic’s integration into European and transatlantic institutions did not escape these inherited dilemmas: methodological nationalism continues to frame debates around migration, minority rights, and sovereignty, with homogenising identity politics echoing the colonial binaries of civilisation and otherness.

Engaging the Czech case alongside Holmwood’s broader historiographical critique highlights Central Europe’s role as a laboratory for alternative state forms and contested identities. The paper argues for recognising the inseparability of colonial legacies and nation-state imaginaries: whether in Western Europe’s overseas empires or Central Europe’s land empires, the logics of extraction, incorporation, and exclusion were constitutive of modern statehood. The Czech trajectory thus foregrounds the ambivalences of small-state sovereignty in a world where groupism, statism, and coloniality remain mutually entangled, raising the broader question of whether any national form can achieve inclusivity without reproducing imperial logics in new guises.

A HAUNTING HISTORY: HISTORICAL GROUPISMS AND TRAUMATIC PASTS IN GERMAN-SPEAKING CENTRAL EUROPE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF GOTHIC FICTION

TIM CORBETT

All histories produce dead bodies, not just traumatic histories – but no dead bodies are as haunting as those produced through violence, persecution, deprivation, and neglect. Popular tales of haunting invariably relate back to traumatic events, whether true or fictional: Ghosts and ghouls may represent the spirits of victims of malicious acts of murder, or of the murderers themselves, haunting the scenes of past violence seeking justice, retribution – or new victims. Mass violence also frequently produces ghosts: Across Europe, sites of historic battles and mass atrocities are said to witness the nocturnal return of the legions of the dead, reliving in spectral form not their past lives, but rather the moment of their violent deaths.

As manifestations of traumatic pasts, ghosts are inherently temporal beings – but haunting is also an inherently spatial manifestation, a marker not just of the occurrence of crimes, but of the scene of the crimes, too. In Gothic fiction, the unquiet dead inhabit castles, cemeteries, and ruinous mansions, and seek constantly to infiltrate the spaces of the living – both in their physical and temporal dimensions. Often, it is only through these intrusions upon the present that the living even become aware of, and seek to uncover, the nature of past events that caused such hauntings in the first place. Sometimes, however, hauntings are not reminders of past atrocities, but rather reflections of the suppression of violent pasts – a pervasive example is the trope of the “Indian burial ground” in post-genocidal horror fiction in North America.

It is telling that the metaphor of ghosts and haunting has also found its way into historiography dealing with violent crimes of the past and historical memory in the present. Examples from the post-Nazi German context, which address not only historical events but are set in specific locales – uniting past and present, time and space, in a manner reminiscent of the Gothic novel – include Brian Ladd’s *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago 1997) and David Clay Large’s *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich’s Road to the Third Reich* (New York 1997). Indeed, Central Europe in many ways constitutes a haunted, ruinous landscape, populated by the spectres of innumerable groups who suffered violence and/or inflicted violent suffering upon others: After all, violent crimes necessarily involve one or more perpetrators, one or more victims, and potentially a whole host of other individuals or groups implicated in the crime in other, sometimes very complicated ways.

This presentation will offer a synopsis of an ongoing creative writing project that seeks to capture multiple and intersecting violent histories in German-speaking Central Europe – from colonialism and warfare through displacement and forced labour to mass murder and genocide – and the varying levels of visibility and historical consciousness afforded to each. Provisionally entitled *Gaestanhaus: The House of Yesterday*, this novel project in the Gothic style imagines modern German history as a rambling haunted mansion, in which the present occupants are constantly confronted by the ghosts of the past – both their own pasts and the past of others, of which they may not even be consciously aware, but that haunt them in their nightmares nonetheless.

THE COLONIAL ORIGINS OF THE FAILURE OF “UN-NATIONALISM”: A REVISIONIST ACCOUNT

JOHN HOLMWOOD

The paper is concerned with social scientific historiography. Hobsbawm's short twentieth century – defined by the rise and demise of the Soviet Union – is reinterpreted as a long twentieth century from the last quarter of the nineteenth century (the Treaty of Berlin to the present). It sketches out an alternative way of thinking of Europe, its historical legacies and contemporary dilemmas, in the light of European overseas colonialism as an integral part of what is generally represented as a Euro-centred capitalist modernity. The latter is focused on Western Europe and contrasts the stability of the liberal/republican “un-national state” with the disorderly nature of small national(ist) states in East and Central Europe. Brubaker's distinction between “immigration-engendered polyethnicity” and “territorial ethnicity-as-nationality” breaks down once we understand that the exemplar Western European nation states were also overseas empires, whose (later) dismantling outside Europe created the same problems as the (earlier) dismantling of land empire within Europe (Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian). Following Bhambra, the paper argues that the two kinds of empire are sociologically distinct – empires of extraction in contrast to empires of incorporation. Whereas the former are integral to modernity, the latter represent an earlier form associated with the end of feudalism and early modernity. Contra Snyder, movements for independence from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires were not the first “anti-colonial” struggles. While Nazi Germany can be regarded as an empire of extraction operating within Europe, the Soviet Union was different, not least because of its internationalism in relation to Third World anti-colonial struggles. In that context, it was closer to being an empire of incorporation (as it was regarded by theorists of minority rights in the inter-war years). As such, its demise has had consequences similar to those of the end of land empires within Europe in the early twentieth century.

THE BIG BANG OF IDEAS: POLISH INTELLECTUALS AFTER 1795

MACIEJ JUNKIERT

The Third Partition in 1795 marked the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, necessitating a radical reevaluation and rethinking of the previously held concepts of state and nation. This task was undertaken by several groups of intellectuals from Warsaw, Vilnius, Krakow, Poznań, Krzemieniec, and Puławy, who from that moment on were subjects of the King of Prussia, the Tsar of Russia, and the Empress of Austria. Unlike the intellectual movements occurring in Great Britain, France, Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire at the turn of the nineteenth century, the activities of Polish intellectuals were not primarily political. This political role was largely assumed by the new state administrations of the partitioning powers. As a result, Polish intellectuals focused on researching, documenting, and analyzing their history while also formulating a vision for a new nation that could, in the future, resist the denationalizing policies implemented by the states that had taken control of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The most intriguing aspect of their activities is their repeated and varied mimetic efforts to engage with and influence the dominant intellectual discourses of Europe in order to establish a national language of self-determination. The former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a state characterized by diverse languages, religions, and cultures. Consequently, Polish intellectuals had to address the crucial question of how to define the Pole of the future. Should this be based on class affiliation – nobility, bourgeoisie, or peasantry? Or should this focus on linguistic and cultural identity, Catholic faith, or perhaps a shared belief in the existence of common enemies? Each of these perspectives inevitably excluded significant portions of the population from future national projects.

I would like to discuss the activities of the Warsaw Society of Friends of Science (1800–1832) in the context of a constellation, as interpreted by German historians of philosophy who reconstruct the origins of German idealism. The Warsaw constellation encompasses various individual paths that contributed to the preservation of Poland's historical heritage. At the same time, it involved reformulating this heritage in a way that would allow as many citizens of the partitioning powers as possible to identify with the new national project.

FOLK AND SHOAL: THE CULTURES AND MEDIA OF THE EMERGENT PATRIOTISM IN POLAND AFTER 1989

MAREK KAZMIERCZAK

The current political and cultural situation in Poland is disturbing and dangerous. Liberal and left-wing circles in Poland are strongly polarized, and far-right circles are increasingly radicalizing public discourse. In this paper, I will show the specific nature of the consolidation of far-right circles. Right-wing politicians build their power by gathering around themselves those who are criticized in left-wing and liberal circles: hunters, priests, stadium hooligans, neo-nationalists, various religious groups, paramilitary organizations, trade unions, farmers, public institutions, private entrepreneurs, civic clubs, antisemitic, homophobic, and xenophobic organizations, and some local government institutions. These examples could be multiplied. The interests of these groups are highly heterogeneous, but they are able to organize themselves into entities that, despite their differences, give these groups a new meta-power. Each of these groups articulates its views in the mass media, social media, at rallies, marches, during protests, and symbolically (through clothes, books, rituals).

I propose the concept of an "emergent patriotism," because each of these groups has a different specificity as an element of an ad hoc, dynamic structure. Emergence occurs when an entity, co-founded by these groups, has properties that its parts do not have on their own.

Under the surface of slogans connoting patriotic values, new, vernacular rules of the state's functioning are established. Right-wing politicians approve of these actions as long as they serve their interests. The consequence of such actions is the legitimization of violence, exclusion and hatred, and a relativization of moral norms and historical interpretations.

Emergent patriotism is a dynamic, fluid, highly functionalized, reactive moral and communication background, alert to political and cultural contexts, constantly ready to change in order to achieve an immediate goal, with great power to adapt to the conditions posed by groups contesting the ideas of liberal society. Emergent patriotism can be useful in explaining the phenomenon of populism being the source of the corrosion of democracy in Poland.

GROUPISM FROM THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT: OR THE SINISTER BATTLE BETWEEN CULTURAL ESSENTIALISM AND STRUCTURAL DETERMINISM

CHRISTIAN KARNER

This deliberately provocative paper postulates that what are problematically labelled as today's "culture wars" reveal, on closer scrutiny, a disconcerting clash between two competing types of groupism: a cultural essentialism of the (new) far-right and a structural determinism articulated from different points at or near the left end of the classical political spectrum, respectively. I make this argument through a series of ethnographic, social historical, and autobiographical reflections centered on Austria and through a close engagement with pertinent historiographical and social theoretical literature.

My starting points are Philip Manow's recent political economy of populism and Ernest Gellner's last book *Language and Solitude*. From Manow I borrow the argument that many social scientific responses to today's populisms show a "lack of theorizing" and a concurrent "excessive moralizing." While Manow responds to this through a political economy approach to populist groupism, I here opt for a neo-Weberian framework focused on shifting patterns of social closure, usurpation and discrimination. Ernest Gellner, meanwhile, provides a historical template for interpreting the fin-de-siècle and the end of the Habsburg Empire that allows for interesting comparisons with the here and now. The period between 1890 and 1914 saw, according to Gellner, a philosophical-cum-political clash between cosmopolitan rationalism and romantic organicism. Building on this, I argue that today we are witnessing a battle between three forces: neo-romantic (cultural) essentialisms, mostly of the right; structural determinism, often of the left; and an increasingly "squeezed out" cosmopolitan meritocracy that, I argue, provides the only plausible antidote to groupism of any kind. From here the discussion proceeds to examine cultural essentialism as well as structural determinism. The empirical/historical inaccuracies and distortions of the former are well-known but clearly need restating today. Less established, though perhaps only marginally less harmful, is a form of structural determinism that I here illustrate, and criticize, through currently much-used mis-conceptualizations of intersectionality theories through models of various "wheels of privilege."

Following these critical illustrations of how today's polarizations manifest on - and are arguably driven by - both the right and the left of the spectrum, the most difficult question that remains is *how else* to respond to historically deeply sedimented structures of inequality and oppression. My answer will be two-fold: first, precisely not how current understandings of equality, diversity and inclusion tend to respond. Instead, and drawing on work by Georg Simmel and Stuart Hall, I will argue that what is urgently needed - instead of structural determinism - is a processual understanding of social actors' open-ended negotiations of structural parameters. Second, I will argue that culturally and politically, across Central Europe and far beyond, what we need is a (concurrent return to an) ethos that Omri Boehm defines as *radical universalism*.

COOPERATION OR COMPETITION: GROUP IDENTITY IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN ARTISTIC SECESSIONS

LAURA MOROWITZ

If all group formation entails exclusionism, then the various artistic Secession movements throughout Eastern and Central Europe – in Vienna, Krakow, Prague – are paradigmatic forms of group identity. Such groups were formed by seceding, or breaking away from, a larger group, only to have some of the members then further secede and form new organizations. (“A Secession has arisen in the Secession,” wrote the astute critic Berta Zuckerandl in 1905). One of the many ways in which the varied Secession movements attempted to distinguish themselves from other artistic groups was by pledging themselves to internationalism, swearing allegiance both to transnational artistic collaboration and to the absolute freedom of art from any political persuasion (“Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit”). Yet, just as the notion of a unified empire, made up of individual, harmonious nations – *viribus unitis* – had frayed by the 1890s, so too did the pledged internationalism of the Secessions coincide with, and in some cases submit to, an irresistible nationalist agenda and artistic template.

In this paper, I explore the Secessions as a form of artistic identity in (supposed) opposition to, and in tension with, nationalism. The groups under study in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Austria attempted this in two ways. The first was by forging connections between the various Secessions. The second was through their profound commitment to exhibiting the works of foreign artists, one of their very *raison d'être*. I will also examine the ways in which the Secession substituted artistic group identity for a national or political allegiance.

Yet a deeper look reveals the impossibility in many ways of breaking out of a “nationalist” model for art history and for the art market, a model that benefitted both the art groups themselves and the Imperial government that supported the various Secessions. Tension arose between their images and acts of transnational solidarity and cooperation, and their self-promotion and reception as national movements. Looking at their original programs and the discourse that surrounded their exhibits shows that despite their commitment, such movements were never free of a nationalist vision. Moreover, I argue that in some cases their “brand” of nationalism closely echoes certain Central European writers and thinkers who formed a more nuanced and less reactionary variant of nationalism, one in which internationalism in fact strengthened national identity. (Something we might not see, accustomed as we are to looking only for a kind of ethno-nationalism.) Finally, I wish to look at how contemporary art history has reinscribed the Secession movements neatly into its nationalizing borders: There are seldom exhibits on “Secession(s),” but rather each Secession folded back into the national narrative or artistic development in that nation.

HEROIC PEOPLES: BETTINA VON ARNIM'S CRITICAL NATIONALISM

JAKOB NORBERG

Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859) was one of the most important women political thinkers in the German lands in the early nineteenth century. Between the years 1835 and 1852, she published a series of highly poetical but also politically controversial works, which addressed issues such as the legitimate form of governance in an era of revolutions and the proper way to deal with widespread immiseration among the urban proletariat. Von Arnim also engaged extensively with the question of nationhood. In fact, she was a member of the most influential circle of German Romantic nationalists – she was married to the patriotic Romantic poet Achim von Arnim, she was the brother of the poet Clemens Brentano, and a close friend of the famous Brothers Grimm. Von Arnim even participated in the two most significant cultural projects of the German Romantic nationalists – she gathered tunes for Achim von Arnim's and Clemens Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm dedicated their famous folk tale collection to her.

Yet von Arnim was not a German nationalist. Her brand of nationalism instead developed through her active interest in a series of revolts in Central Europe, most prominently the Tyrolean Rebellion against Franco-Bavarian forces in 1809, the Greek War of Independence (especially around 1826), the Polish struggle against the Prussian and Russian governments (around 1846) and the Hungarian Revolution against the Habsburg Empire in 1848. Von Arnim was mostly indifferent to nationalist pursuits, except when they assumed the form of a liberatory struggle against imperial governments. She declared her relative lack of interest in a specifically German nationalism, while enthusiastically promoting popular uprisings of national peoples against hegemons. This pattern of engagement with nationalism anticipates, I suggest, modern progressive support for nationalist causes. Many thinkers and actors on the left reject nationalist parties and movements within established nation states (e.g. German, Austrian, or Danish nationalism) but nonetheless support anti-colonial and anti-imperial groups that struggle for national independence and sovereignty. Interestingly, von Arnim's writings develop a similarly selective pattern of support for nationalism very early, alongside pioneer representatives of Romantic nationalism. Von Arnim's example thus demonstrates that there were always multiple kinds of nationalisms, and that nationalism could from the very beginning be coupled with an analysis of power and oppression.

WHEN THE “ÖSTERREICHISCHE MENSCH” BECAME A CENTRAL EUROPEAN: THE FAILURE OF TWO PHANTASMS

BÉLA RÁSKY

The invocation of a distinct “Österreichische Mensch” that developed over centuries in the Danube and Alpine regions is by no means new. As William Johnston describes, it was not only Austrofascist ideologists who resorted to this construct; alone the Corporate State was virtually obsessed with this fantasy. The esoteric, pseudo-scientific talk of an a-ethnic, supranational, yet German “Austrian Individual” fills libraries, influenced the Austrian exiles of the years 1933/34–1945, was reinterpreted after 1945 in the spirit of the Second Republic, and continues to have an impact today.

According to this concept, ethnic diversity, Catholicism, landscape, history, and climate shaped a unique “Österreichische Mensch”. It is obvious that this construction of historical, social, topographical, or even biologically derived group characteristics, supported by a literarily, politically, and journalistically active elite, often had, and still has, real roots in vested interests and political expediency.

We enter new territory though, when we consider the efforts to extend the features of the “Österreichische Mensch” into the Central European, or post-Habsburg space – partly as early as the 1930s, but especially immediately after 1945. Yet even these approaches remained – at least before the Second World War – within biological, racist, pan-German, or Austro-nationalist thought patterns, since this newly conceptualised, though never directly named “Mitteleuropäische Mensch” was also defined by blood types, features defined on racist grounds, flora, fauna, topographical features, and climate, while “Germanness” was still assigned a civilising role.

One example for this idea(s) is a booklet by the Moravian entrepreneur, geographer, and anti-Nazi Victor Bauer (1876–1939): Insisting on the East–West divide, he understood Central Europe as a transitional region in which this dichotomy was to be dissolved. This meant that the Central European (never defined socially) could appear as the “ideal European” in whom Eastern “vitality” and Western “experience” combined to form a “higher being”: Central Europe here became the “breeding ground” of the “new European”.

On the other hand, the geographer and advocate of the Nazi “Lebensraum” policy, Hugo Hassinger (1877–1952), attempted to legitimise the “Central European Man” academically. In his *Handbuch zur Tschechoslowakei*, published in 1935, he developed the paradigm of the Central European k.k. (not k.u.k.!) civil servant, again an elitist definition of a specific group, whose “social capital” made the region’s supposedly undisturbed development possible.

Finally, the reinterpretation of the “Österreichische Mensch” after 1945 will be discussed, particularly based on the texts of the Austrian historian Friedrich Heer (1916–1983). Furthermore, an attempt will be made to contrast this primarily culturally defined concept with sociological and historical approaches.

FOLK DRESS IN THE BORDERLANDS: SUDETEN GERMAN TRACHT AND GROUP FORMATION IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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My paper examines the relationship between folk dress and national minorities in former Czechoslovakia. It assesses how sartorial styles were used to shape group identities while also serving economic purposes with a focus on the modernisation of Sudeten German *Tracht*, especially women's attire, through the so-called *Trachtenerneuerung* ("renewal of folk dress") of 1935. Developed collaboratively by ethnologist Josef Hanika and young seamstresses from towns and villages in the Sudetenland, the aim of the *Trachtenerneuerung* was, firstly, to modernise Sudeten folk dress to make it suitable for everyday use, with the intention of establishing a highly visible local German identity in Czechoslovakia. Secondly, in line with nationalist ideals, adopting shared sartorial styles was also meant to assert Sudeten German identity as part of a greater German culture. Lastly, reviving *Tracht* in Czechoslovakia's border regions was seen as a way to boost local economies through traditional craft practices, such as weaving and knitting, especially during times of financial hardship. Tying together these various aspects of group assertion through dress, the paper analyses both the production process and the ideologies behind the wearing of Sudeten *Tracht* in Czechoslovakia as a "situated bodily practice" (Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, dress and Modern Social Theory*, Polity Press 2015, 10). Emphasising different social and political aspects tied to this development before the standardisation of *Tracht* under National Socialism, I argue that the assertion of local minority identities in Central Europe's borderlands offers a particularly rich case for studying how dress intertwines with identity politics in the region.