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# Introduction: Sovereignty, Nationalism, and the Quest for Homogeneity in Interwar Europe

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The aftermath of the Great War significantly changed the history of nationalism, putting into motion processes that still influence European politics today. Although nationalism arose in the late eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> it became one of the pillars, both domestically and internationally, of sovereignty and political legitimation by the end of the Great War. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the victorious powers agreed upon a new international system “focused on populations and an ideal of state sovereignty rooted in national homogeneity.”<sup>2</sup> The principle of self-determination became a rallying cry for political leaders claiming to represent “oppressed peoples” across the globe.<sup>3</sup> Self-determination promised a future of freedom from foreign domination. It also foreshadowed vicious conflicts about membership of and loyalty to legitimate sovereign communities. In European states that were already independent before 1919, nationalism served to enhance processes of inclusion and exclusion. It solidified allegiances and crystallized geographies, borders and, broadly speaking, societies. In newly independent states, nationalism became the political framework around which the nation and the nation-state were built. In most cases, nationalism postulated national and cultural homogeneity, but this rarely resembled lived realities in those countries. Consequently, between the two World Wars, minority questions sparked struggles and violent conflict throughout Europe, from East and West to North and South.<sup>4</sup>

Minority questions did not disappear after 1945. They are still a daily topic of discussion in contemporary politics. The massive population transfers that coincided with the end of the Second World War constituted a radical attempt to reduce the potential for ethnic strife in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> This objective was achieved only in part, as multinational states persisted in the continent, notably in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Ideological rather than national forms of identification became dominant after 1945. However, the declining legitimacy of communism in the 1980s created a fertile ground for the mobilization of national, ethnic, and linguistic cleavages, which in the meantime had been reinforced, rather than repressed by state authorities in these two countries. The early 1990s brought a spike in nationalist conflicts, most visibly in former Yugoslavia, and with this brought a renewed academic and political

interest in minority rights.<sup>6</sup> These conflicts did not remain confined to the western Balkans and the former Soviet Union. In the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first, self-determination movements have grown stronger in several Western European regions and have even threatened the stability and territorial integrity of well-established states. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the row between the Spanish and Catalan governments over the organization of a similar consultation on self-determination are only the most visible recent instances of a broader European phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, throughout the continent, parties of the populist radical right have resurfaced after several decades of exclusion from politics. With these parties gaining strength, demands for bolder forms of national assertion and greater intolerance of cultural difference have gained currency too.<sup>8</sup>

As in the interwar period, nationalist contestation is to be found throughout Europe. Although the institutional architecture of the European continent has changed dramatically since the end of the Second World War, most notably with the establishment of the European Union, nationalism remains a key principle of political legitimacy.<sup>9</sup> Examining how nationalism promoted a generalized quest for homogeneity in a Europe at the peak of its transition from dynastic to popular sovereignty promises to offer relevant insights for contemporary affairs.

In 1919, European intellectual and political elites began to neatly compartmentalize state populations into minorities and majorities. While the term “minority” existed before the Paris Peace Conference, it is only in the immediate postwar period that it began to be widely used in the contemporary meaning of a non-dominant group deemed to be different from a putative “majority” on the basis of cultural, linguistic, religious, and/or ethnic criteria.<sup>10</sup> Seeking the establishment of “perpetual” peace, the victorious powers set up a system of international protection of minority rights and, in an unprecedented step, entrusted its enforcement to an inter-governmental organization, the League of Nations. The minority treaties, modeled after the agreement between the Allied and Associated Powers and Poland, bestowed upon “persons belonging to racial, religious or linguistic minorities” negative rights of non-discrimination, equality before the law, and religious freedom. The treaties also granted minorities positive rights to set up social, charitable, educational, and religious institutions and an equitable share of public funds to support them.<sup>11</sup> The strange formulation whereby individuals, not minorities, were the holders of rights was a cunning solution expedient to protect minority groups while avoiding to grant them the status of international law subjects. Most European statesmen were afraid of creating a “state within the state.”<sup>12</sup> The treaties “required a group subject and obliterated it at the same time.”<sup>13</sup>

The procedure established in the years immediately after the end of the Peace Conference allowed private individuals, as well as organizations claiming to represent minorities, to send petitions to the League’s Minorities Section. These petitions did not have legal standing, and international bureaucrats in Geneva often dismissed them as non-receivable on the basis of restrictive criteria designed to reduce the flow of petitions examined by the League’s Council to a minimum. That notwithstanding, the system allowed specific groups in selected countries to appeal to an international institution to denounce rights violations committed by the state where they lived. The

former League's bureaucrat Lucy Mair did not hesitate to call the treaties "the greatest abdication of sovereignty that has been made by an independent state."<sup>14</sup>

Yet such abdication was not universal. The Great Powers limited the application of this system to the newly independent states that arose from the fall of the Eastern European empires, as well as to some older states in the area such as Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania.<sup>15</sup> Resorting to older civilizational arguments and considering the question of national minorities as one of the causes of the war, the Great Powers deemed it necessary to place the new states under international supervision.<sup>16</sup> This decision constituted a humiliation that was profoundly resented by the so-called "minority states." Along with the League of Nations's Mandates in extra-European territories, the minority treaties de facto established a three-tiered hierarchical system with fully sovereign (Western) states at the top, people "not yet able to stand by themselves"<sup>17</sup> at the bottom, and "semi-civilized" Eastern European countries under the League's supervision in the middle.<sup>18</sup> The decision to limit minority protection to some countries also offered ground for Great Power intervention into the domestic affairs of the states forced to sign minority treaties, a practice that some scholars have directly linked to the privileges offered to Western citizens and Christian minorities by the capitulations system in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

The unequal application of the treaties reflected both new and old understandings of sovereignty shared among European political elites. Nineteenth-century conceptions of sovereignty had emphasized the absolute power of the state. The First World War had clearly exposed the perils of unfettered state authority. The League of Nations was a novel attempt, if not to bind sovereignty, at least to coordinate it. Yet ideas of international legal constraints were mapped onto civilizational stereotypes. As the South African statesman Jan Smuts emphasized at the Paris Peace Conference, "the peoples left behind by the decomposition of Russia, Austria, and Turkey are mostly untrained politically; many of them are either incapable of or deficient in power of self-government; they are mostly destitute and will require much nursing toward economic and political independence."<sup>20</sup> The asymmetry of the minority treaties, and the creation of the League's Mandates, signaled a transition from an absolute to a "graded" conception of sovereignty, with the "gradation" being based on the degree of approximation to the ideal typical of the (Western) European homogenous nation-state. It was both an attempt to universalize this model of political organization and to mark the unbridgeable difference between non-Western populations and Western modernity.<sup>21</sup>

However, civilizational stereotypes do not completely explain the asymmetry of the minority treaties. Widespread assumptions about the irrelevance of minority questions in Western Europe contributed to that too. Several Western European actors denied the existence of minorities in Western Europe, even if in fact national and cultural homogeneity in their states was more a myth than a reality.<sup>22</sup> Already in 1915, the British historian Arnold Toynbee, who would later be one of the masterminds behind British plans for peace in Paris, self-confidently asserted that when looking for something similar to the Western European homogeneous nation-state in Eastern Europe, one could simply not find it.<sup>23</sup> In the appendix to his *Nationality and War*, addressing cases that might have contradicted his assertion, he described the populations of the

Basque Country and Catalonia simply as Basque- and Catalan-speaking Spaniards. He also predicted the inevitable merger of Flemings and Walloons into the Belgian nation. Seven years later, in a work that became a standard reference on the subject of minorities, the French ambassador Jacques Fouques Duparc located the origins of the “minority problem” in differences of language, race, and religion that—he stressed—were immense in Eastern Europe. Western Europe, on the other hand, “more stable in its political organization, had lost even the memory” of such “barriers” between groups.<sup>24</sup> Such self-confident statements found an echo in political circles as well. In 1925, reacting to a Lithuanian proposal for a general convention on the protection of minorities, the French delegate at the League of Nations, Henry de Jouvenel, replied that “if France has not signed such [minority] treaties, it is because she has no minorities. To find minorities in France, one would have to invent them.” During that same meeting, his British counterpart, Lord Robert Cecil, dismissed the Lithuanian plans affirming that he did not fear “the cantankerous Welsh because none existed.”<sup>25</sup>

This myth of Western European homogeneity has influenced the international historiography on European interwar minorities. In spite of repeated calls for “depathologizing” Eastern Europe<sup>26</sup> and awareness of the existence of minority questions in European countries not subjected to the minority treaties, most studies have focused, geographically speaking, on the so-called “minority belt” extending from the Baltic states to Turkey.<sup>27</sup> This is especially the case with works looking at extreme forms of exclusion and homogenization that have accompanied the rise of the nation-state in the first half of the twentieth century. Although these contributions have suggested a universal connection between modernity, nation-states, and forms of cultural homogenization, their emphasis on extremely violent policies, including genocide, ethnic cleansing, and population transfer, has made them privilege few selected cases in the East. Overlooking “softer” nation-building programs, these investigations have tended to leave Western Europe out of the picture.<sup>28</sup>

Recently, some authors have begun challenging this East-West divide showing how the history of majority-minority relations in interwar Europe defies simple categorizations pitting a heterogeneous, repressive East against a homogeneous, tolerant West. Tara Zahra has questioned the commonplace idea of France as a homogeneous nation-state, as well as blind interpretations of French nationalism as a civic script. At the end of the Second World War, both France and the newborn Czechoslovakia were confronted with the challenge of integrating sizable German-speaking minorities of unsure national identification into the fabric of the state. Zahra shows that, contrary to stereotypical understandings of East and West, between the autumn of 1918 and the spring of 1919 French officials dealt with their own minority challenge in Alsace-Lorraine through ethnic “identity cards, purges, expropriation and expulsion.”<sup>29</sup>

Zahra correctly emphasizes that the point of her comparison is not to suggest that majority-minority issues were the same in the two halves of the continent. Her aim rather lies in examining the diversity within each aggregate and the specific historical factors that explain convergence or divergence. A similar concern is evident in the comparative work of Timothy Wilson and Volker Prott. Wilson dissects inter-ethnic violence from below in Ulster and Upper Silesia in 1918–22. Prott inquires into how international, national, and local factors contributed to promoting or restraining ethnic

violence in the contested regions of Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor between 1917 and 1923. Both confirm that nationalist and ethnic violence was not a uniquely Eastern European story, but rather informed postwar events in Western European locales as well. At the same time, their accounts do not hide away from the conclusion that violence was indeed greater in Upper Silesia and Asia Minor than in Ulster and Alsace-Lorraine, respectively. Both historians reach this conclusion after rigorous historical examination, and both of them explain this outcome with reference to specific historical and, sometimes, contingent factors.<sup>30</sup> Their *modus procedendi* is key to understanding how all contributors to this book approach the study of majority-minority relations.

We intend to take the challenge to the East-West divide one step further. Anchoring specific case studies to the wider European context, we question the twin myths of Western European homogeneity and Eastern European heterogeneity, of Western European civic tolerance and Eastern European ethnic rejection of cultural and national difference. Our purpose is not to suggest that majority-minority relations evolved in the same way across Europe, but to offer a granular comparison between different European experiences.<sup>31</sup> By including Western European states in this discussion, we offer new historical insights into the relation between sovereignty, nationalism, and the quest for cultural and national homogeneity that allow us to identify factors favoring or restraining processes of assimilation and exclusion in different European places.

The contributions to this volume aim at bridging not only East and West, but also top-down, bottom-up, comparative case study, and transnational approaches. We consider minority questions as issues that need to be looked at from different angles and bring together different methodological perspectives to provide the most comprehensive view possible of majority-minority relations between the two World Wars. The following three premises inform our analysis.

Firstly, building on Rogers Brubaker's work on nationalism in Eastern Europe, we emphasize the multi-layered nature of nationalist conflicts. Brubaker's framework focuses on how nationalist conflicts result from the interplay of multiple actors operating at different scales (national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands).<sup>32</sup> Similarly, our contributors examine majority-minority relations as resulting from the dynamic interaction of state authorities, their policies toward minorities, and the reaction of minority representatives/organizations; the attitude of ordinary people toward the frequently rival claims of state authorities and minority representatives; diplomats, minority representatives, and international and nongovernmental organizations negotiating majority-minority relations internationally.

Secondly, we question the assumption that interwar Western Europe was a paradigmatic model of accomplished national integration.<sup>33</sup> We consider Western European states as "nationalizing states" that pursued policies of cultural homogenization because their dominant elites perceived them as "incomplete" or "unrealized" nation-states.<sup>34</sup>

Thirdly, the contributors to this book do not assume that nationalism was a decisive factor at all levels of people's existence. While recognizing the pervasive nature of nationalism in modern societies, our authors see "nationhood" as "a variable property of groups" that becomes salient at certain moments, but not at others, as something that "happens" in specific situations.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the 2000s, scholars working on the history of the Habsburg Empire have embraced this methodological

approach and, focusing on everyday experiences, have introduced the concept of national indifference. With it, these authors identified different behaviors adopted by ordinary people to counter the nationalizing attempts of state authorities or minority nationalist activists that primarily converged around the three following types: giving priority to non-national forms of identification (religious, class, local, professional, etc.); switching opportunistically from one national self-understanding to another; and sticking to previously existing dual identities accompanied by bilingualism and intermarriage across different national communities.<sup>36</sup>

National indifference has been criticized on many grounds. As ordinary people left few records of their thoughts, feelings, and actions, national indifference is mostly deduced from nationalist activists who complained about the lack of commitment to the national cause of their “co-nationals.” The expression “national indifference” itself comes from the discourses of such militants. The indirect nature of this evidence clearly limits the conclusions that can be drawn from it.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the term “indifference” risks being too broad to serve as a meaningful analytical tool and would probably gain accuracy if broken down into more precise components pointing to specific behaviors, such as national “agnosticism,” instrumentalism, or the prevalence of local geographical forms of identification over national ones. Finally, most of the literature on national indifference focuses on the period prior to the Paris Peace Conference, when nationalism was institutionalized as a major principle of legitimacy in domestic and international politics. The relevance of national indifference in the interwar years is still largely untested.<sup>38</sup> As Tara Zahra has suggested with regard to the Central and Eastern European context, “the collapse of the Habsburg empire into self-declared nation-states in 1918 rendered the outright refusal of nationality nearly impossible”—a conclusion that is echoed in some of the contributions to this volume.<sup>39</sup> These limitations notwithstanding, the national indifference framework poses valid questions for any analysis of majority-minority relations: does nationalism work? If yes, under which circumstances? What does nationhood mean to ordinary people and how does it influence their everyday life?

Building on Brubaker’s model and the considerations on national indifference made above, we engage with three dimensions of interwar majority-minority relations asking specific questions and providing new insights. First, several contributors examine majority-minority relations from a *comparative top-down perspective*. International historians have emphasized how in Eastern Europe the “Paris system”—according to the felicitous term coined by Eric Weitz<sup>40</sup>—and the League of Nations, as its guarantor, promoted a world order “that treated clearly separable homogenous nation-states as the accepted norm” and cast diversity as “a potential problem.”<sup>41</sup> The authors who focus on this comparative dimension go one step further by examining the impact of this new world order not only in Eastern European cases, but also in supposedly homogeneous Western European countries. They examine state policies seeking patterns of majority-minority relations as well as investigate whether there is a nexus between policies and political regimes. Additionally, some contributions inquire into how minority actors, notably political elites in minority regions, reacted to state policies and whether homogenization occurred, or was attempted, within minority groups rather than at the state level. These contributions find that the Paris system unleashed repressive policies of exclusion or assimilation in France (Volker Prott) and Italy (Emmanuel

Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling) as well as in Poland (Marina Germane) and in the USSR (Sabine Dullin), while democratic institutions put in place mechanisms for the acceptance and protection of national and cultural difference in Estonia (until 1934) as much as in Belgium (Dalle Mulle and Bieling). Our comparative cases suggest that factors such as the nature of the political regime (liberal-democratic, authoritarian, or hybrid), the power of the state to enforce its own decision, and the commitment of international actors to specific territorial decisions influenced outcomes on the ground in unpredictable ways that do not follow a superficial East-West dichotomy.<sup>42</sup>

The chapters addressing the previous dimension largely consider majorities and minorities as uncontested entities. This is an approximation that we accept in order to pursue specific research objectives. We also recognize the need to complement this top-down comparative view with a *bottom-up approach*, which is the second dimension that this volume covers. The chapters that focus on this dimension challenge the assumption that minorities are coherent communities and interrogate the triangular relationship between state institutions, minority nationalist elites, and ordinary people deemed as belonging to minorities. They dissect how the populations of minority regions negotiated their identities between the often rival claims of state institutions and minority organizations. They further investigate whether national indifference is an adequate label to describe such interactions. These contributions simultaneously build on and move away from the concept of national indifference. On the one hand, the authors who adopt this bottom-up perspective recognize the validity of the national indifference paradigm in challenging old interpretive schemes about mass nationalization at the beginning of the interwar period. On the other hand, they all point to the fact that in the new international order ushered in by the Paris Peace Conference the space for indifference, although still existing, shrank considerably and especially so in border regions inhabited by minority groups. In the coda, Omer Bartov offers an insightful explanation of the reasons why nationalization progressively extended its reach further into the general population in Europe and beyond. Several contributors also make an effort to narrow down the capacious concept of national indifference to more precise and distinguishable behaviors. They identify “navigations of national belonging” in Alsace-Lorraine (Alison Carrol), describe strategies of “hedging” and “fence-sitting” in Ireland (Brian Hughes), and examine “vernacular cosmologies” that provided meaning to interwar individuals in Eastern Poland (Olga Linkiewicz).

Despite striving to avoid methodological nationalism through comparative analysis and a focus on the interaction of actors operating at different scales, notably local realities and central state institutions, the chapters addressing the previous two dimensions mostly consider majority-minority relations within state borders. However, some authors do look at majority-minority relations from a *transnational perspective*, which is the third dimension that this book covers. They expand Brubaker’s model by considering not only the influence of “external national homelands,” but also that of international organizations such as the League of Nations and transnational actors advocating minority rights. Their chapters inquire into how international and nongovernmental organizations approached minority protection throughout the interwar years, which strategies minority actors pursued within the international arena, and whether minority representatives cooperated or competed



for international recognition of their claims. Two sets of actors are the key characters in the chapters that adopt this perspective: activists advocating for minority rights in the international sphere, notably around the Congress for European Nationalities and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and the civil servants of the League of Nations' Minorities Section. On the one hand, these contributions point out how minority activists came from all over Europe—not only from states subjected to the minority treaties—and propose a re-assessment of the Congress, as an organization that until the early 1930s pursued a moderate, liberal policy of minority rights promotion and was careful to avoid political radicalization on the ground (Xosé Manoel Núñez-Seixas and David Smith). On the other hand, they show how transnational networks were complex webs of interaction in which certain organizations, such as WILPF, could act as mediators between local minority activists and bureaucrats at the League of Nations in Geneva, thus further problematizing Brubaker's model. These chapters also remind us that, although nationhood is a critical prism through which to understand these transnational interactions during the interwar period, other dynamics tied to gender, class, race, and civilizational hierarchies contributed to shaping them too (Jane Cowan).

Engaging with these questions, the volume brings together East and West, as well as top-down and bottom-up approaches. Examining both nation-states' ingrained tendencies to promote national homogenization and factors that restrained such tendencies, we aim at advancing and nuancing the current understanding of minority questions in interwar Europe. We are aware that national identities, promoted either by the state or by minority actors, were not hegemonic in the interwar period. Europeans held a number of different simultaneous forms of identification. Among territorial ones, local, urban, regional, and pan-ethnic self-understandings all became more prominent and generated allegiances that stood along national belonging in a complex set of relations of competition, collaboration, contradiction, indifference, or symbiosis.<sup>43</sup> However, nationhood was a key category in interwar Europe. In a number of contexts and everyday situations, being deemed to hold the “wrong” national tag could have far-reaching consequences for a great many individuals. We invite the readers of this volume not to forget that multiple, concomitant, and, at times, concurrent forms of identification coexisted in interwar Europe. We deliberately chose to focus on nationalizing states, national minorities, and external national homelands, since their interplay bore heavily on European politics and daily life.

## Outline

Part One addresses the theme of “Minorities and the Transition from Empires to Nation-states.” This part sets the context for the rest of the book by looking at the different ways in which empires and nation-states have dealt with issues of cultural heterogeneity before, during, and shortly after the First World War. Proposing an unusual juxtaposition that might intrigue historians investigating empires, this part examines three empires (Austria-Hungary, the United Kingdom, and the Ottoman Empire) that, although on different scales, experienced crisis and partition at the end of the Great War.

Within the context of the First World War and the early interwar years, Pieter Judson revisits some of his earlier theses on national indifference, the compatibility of the Habsburg Empire with self-determination claims, and the record of imperial institutions in dealing with cultural difference. Judson inquires into what national belonging meant for ordinary people living in the Empire and shows how, in many ways, imperial forms of governance in the Austrian part of the Dual Monarchy gave more space to people to speak the language they preferred and to embrace a wider array of self-understandings than the nation-states which followed the fall of the Habsburg Empire. Then, Alvin Jackson's chapter brings the United Kingdom and its different "unions" into a wider European comparative framework. His starting point is the surprising acknowledgment that, despite the widespread awareness among specialists of the composite nature of the United Kingdom, in comparative studies, this has often been examined as a nation-state rather than a union state. Jackson, by contrast, considers the United Kingdom as a composite monarchy sharing many of the characteristics of similar continental kingdoms that were later replaced by nation-states. He dissects the centrifugal and centripetal forces that led to the partial break-up of the Union, with the secession of Ireland in 1921, but also Britain's continued survival (and the survival of the British Empire) in the immediate postwar period. Erol Ülker closes this first part by approaching the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey from the perspective of the relationship between the Turkish population and ethnoreligious minorities. Covering the years from the Young Turks Revolution (1908) to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), Ülker dissects the rise of Turkish nationalism and the implementation of ever-more extreme homogenizing policies, from the purge of non-Muslims from the labor force to forced migration and resettlement. The chapter concludes that although there was a clear transition toward increasing homogenization, Turkish nationalists pursued a range of measures toward non-Turkish minorities that are considerably more complex and varied than recognized by traditional accounts. This first part thus introduces some of the main themes of the wider volume: the bridging of East and West, national indifference as a conceptual tool, and evidence that the Paris system did favor the unleashing of homogenizing tendencies throughout Europe.

Part Two, entitled "The Minority Question across Europe: Comparing Policies, Regimes and Resistance," looks at majority-minority relations in interwar Europe mostly from a top-down comparative vantage point. More specifically, it comparatively scrutinizes the measures adopted by different states toward populations considered to be minorities and the strategies followed by the groups in question in several Eastern and Western European countries. The main goal is to bridge the East-West divide in the relevant historiography, showing that minority questions existed throughout the continent and that countries not submitted to the League's minority system did not necessarily deal with cultural difference in more tolerant ways than the states of the minority belt.

Volker Prott opens this part by testing the Paris system, the new international order established at Versailles that tied state sovereignty to a vaguely defined national legitimacy of the state. Comparing self-determination and ethnic violence in Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor, Prott highlights how a temptation to use force to implement the Paris system was inherent in the postwar international regime. At the same time, through an exhaustive analytical framework, he singles out the factors

that contributed to restraining the excesses of homogenization, as well as those that favored the degeneration of majority-minority contact into processes of large-scale violence. In the following chapter, Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling consider Belgium, Italy, and Spain as cases of Western European countries that, in different ways, experienced both attempts at state-led national homogenization and relevant sub-state nationalist mobilization. They argue that some of these Western European states behaved as nationalizing states, pursuing highly coercive forms of assimilation toward some minority groups, as exemplified by certain interwar regimes in Italy and Spain. Moreover, they show how homogenization can occur at the regional rather than the state level and be called for by the leaders of specific minorities, as illustrated by interwar Belgium. Dalle Mulle and Bieling provide further evidence of the built-in tendencies toward homogenization promoted by the Paris system.

Marina Germane shifts the focus of this part of the volume to Central and Eastern Europe by comparing minority policy and the strategies adopted by minority representatives in Latvia, Poland, and Romania. Germane follows German and Jewish minority representatives while simultaneously examining policies of accommodation and assimilation adopted by state authorities in these three countries. Zooming in on debates around electoral reform in Poland, educational policy in Romania, and cultural autonomy in Latvia, Germane assesses the preconditions for successful minority cooperation between the members of these two minorities. She investigates the limits of successful domestic mobilization showing how, by the mid-1920s, disillusion with the postwar promises of minority protection pushed activists to expand their lobbying efforts to the transnational sphere. Sabine Dullin closes this part with an innovative contribution on the Soviet Union's ambiguous nationality policy. Dullin emphasizes how the USSR was the only post-imperial state that combined federal construction of the state and ethnic personal identification. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks' understanding of national sovereignty and state power was not linked to cultural and linguistic homogeneity, but rather promoted the development of national cultures. At the same time, Soviet leaders were obsessed with border control, capitalist infiltrations, and war scare. When collectivization turned the countryside upside down and pushed peasants to rebel, the diasporic nations and ethnic minorities living in the borderlands came to be perceived as dangerous potential fifth columns, becoming the targets of collective punishment, forced displacement, and terror.

Part Three, entitled "Majorities and Minorities as Social Constructs: Negotiating Identity Ascription," nuances and deconstructs some of the assumptions adopted in Part Two. The contributions gathered here inquire into processes of identity ascription and examine how ordinary people negotiated their identities between the often opposing injunctions of state authorities and minority representatives. They explore instrumental conceptions of rival forms of identification and instances of national indifference among non-elites. They capture a more focused image of "majority-minority" relations in interwar Europe—one that complements the conclusions reached in the previous part. More generally, this part dissects the situational and negotiated nature of identity in different European contexts, while, at the same time, pointing to the limits of national indifference in an increasingly nationalizing interwar Europe.

Using the Second Polish Republic as a case study, Olga Linkiewicz examines the nature of local conflicts in rural areas of interwar Eastern Europe. Linkiewicz focuses on popular reactions to the language plebiscite carried out by Polish authorities in 1924 and shows that, in their everyday interactions, rural peasants behaved in accordance with the principles of a vernacular cosmology that defies simple classification within the opposing extremes of national indifference and full Polish nationalization. The chapter provides a nuanced interpretation of ordinary responses to state-led nation-building and contributes to clarifying the national indifference paradigm. Similarly, Brian Hughes explores strategies of “everyday” resistance pursued by Irish loyalists during and after the Irish Revolution (1916–23). By looking at the experiences of ordinary people, he further dissects the meaning of loyalism, suggesting how this ranged from attachment to the monarchy and the Empire, with obvious links to similar lingering allegiances in continental Europe, to a political identity descending from a Protestant faith shared across the Irish Sea, although Hughes’ chapter also includes Catholic loyalists (a minority within the minority). Extending his analysis well into the 1920s and early 1930s, Hughes follows dynamics of integration and assimilation within an Irish Republic that openly promoted a Catholic and Gaelic identity. Dynamics of integration and assimilation are also central to the last contribution within this part. Alison Carrol revisits Germany’s return of Alsace to France exploring how different groups within Alsatian society navigated, and resisted, state plans for the region’s integration. French politicians initially thought that the incorporation of the area would be straightforward, but they had to confront a reality in which locals had much more complex and varied opinions about their feelings of belonging. Carrol shows that concern for unrest pushed the state to adopt more flexible policies of integration than those initially pursued, creating spaces in which alternative (regional) understandings of identity could flourish. At the same time, many of these flexible solutions were the result of temporary compromises that slowly turned into permanent arrangements more out of contingency and necessity than by design.

The final set of chapters, gathered under the title “Minority Mobilization beyond the Nation-State,” follows minority representatives across borders and gauges their efforts to lobby foreign governments and international organizations in favor of the defense of minority rights. Part Four also examines the reception of petitions at the League of Nations and focuses on some women’s organizations concerned with questions of minorities.

Activists are the protagonists of Xosé M. Núñez Seixas and David Smith’s contribution. Beginning with a broad assessment of transnational networks of minority representatives and their strategies of advocacy across the continent, both East and West, the authors zero in on the Congress of European Nationalities (CEN), the most important nongovernmental organization concerned with the defense of minority rights in interwar Europe. Núñez Seixas and Smith examine the emergence of a transnational nationality theory that aimed to overcome the limitations of the Paris system. Despite its failure, these efforts bore witness to the existence of a broad spectrum of actors looking for alternatives to the dominant model of the homogeneous nation-state in the interwar years. Subsequently, Jane Cowan explores in depth the triangular, asymmetric, and not fully reciprocal relations between the Women’s

International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Bulgarian and Macedonian female activists concerned with the fate of the Macedonian minority in Greece and Serbia, and the male-dominated Minorities Section of the League of Nations. Cowan uses the minority question in Macedonia as a prism to study the League's minority petition procedure as a site of mobilization and contestation, as well as to examine the engagement of and collaboration between women belonging to different geographical and political contexts. The chapter further investigates how, in their interactions, these actors navigated hierarchies of gender, class, race, and civilization. Including women as another marginalized group, Cowan's chapter poses important questions of how better to incorporate gender dimensions into all of our work.

Omer Bartov closes this volume with a broad-ranging coda on what he defines as "the conundrum of national indifference." Bartov argues that national indifference correctly reminds us to avoid taking nationalist arguments at face value and to be skeptical when faced with easy claims of mass nationalization. Yet even a cursory look at the history of the twentieth century prompts the equally valid conclusion that historians downplay the power of nationalism at their own peril—as the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has reminded us. Building on a wide variety of cases, from Eastern Poland to France, Germany, and Israel, Bartov suggests that the emancipation of the peasantry in several European countries unleashed widespread and profound top-down processes of cultural and linguistic homogenization. Zealous "nationalizers" patrolled up and down state territories and border regions to spread national consciousness among fellow citizens. While often frustrated in their efforts, the polarizing effect of the First World War and the postwar institutionalization of nationalism described earlier in this introduction gave them a decisive boost. As Bartov's and many other contributions suggest, although nationhood did not become the only, nor consistently the most important, form of identification for a sizable share of the European population, as a result of this quest for homogeneity, the space for national indifference shrank considerably between the two World Wars, in Poland and Romania, but also in Italy, France, and Ireland.

## Notes

- 1 By nationalism we mean an ideology holding that "the political and the national unit should be congruent." See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1. Although there is no consensus on the precise origins of nationalism in the historiography, most authors consider the late eighteenth century and the French Revolution as a decisive moment for its development and spread. For different approaches see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

- 2 Eric Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1314.
- 3 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 4 Jennifer Jackson Preece, *National Minorities and the European Nation-states System* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 11.
- 5 On population transfers during and after the Second World War, see Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History: Population Transfer in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 6 On the role of nationalism in the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, see Aleksandar Pavković, "Anticipating the Disintegration: Nationalisms in Former Yugoslavia, 1980–1990," *Nationalities Papers* 25, no. 3 (1997): 427–40. On renewed interest in minority rights in the 1990s see Patrick Thornberry, *International Law and the Rights of Minorities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Andre Liebich and André Reszler, eds., *L'Europe centrale et ses minorités: vers une solution européenne?* (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 1993); Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jennifer Jackson Preece, "National Minority Rights vs. State Sovereignty in Europe: Changing Norms in International Relations?," *Nations and Nationalism* 3, no. 3 (1997): 345–64.
- 7 On the growth of self-determination movements in Western Europe, see Michael Keating, *Nations against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations without States: Political Communities in a Global Age* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); Emmanuel Dalle Mule, *The Nationalism of the Rich: Discourses and Strategies of Separatist Parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy and Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 8 On the populist radical right, see Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 9 Especially in the case of banal nationalism. See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).
- 10 On the history of the terms minority and majority, see Till van Rahden, *Minority and Majority as Asymmetrical Concepts: The Perils of Democratic Equality and Fantasies of National Purity* (Workshop Sovereignty, Nationalism and Homogeneity in Europe between the two World Wars, Graduate Institute, Geneva, 2020). Although one could say that the terms minority and majority were invented in 1919, they also inherited features of the concept of nationality, which was widely used in imperial contexts and continued to circulate after the end of the First World War. On the differences and continuities between the concepts of minority and nationality, see Natasha Wheatley, "Making Nations into Legal Persons between Imperial and International Law: Scenes from a Central European History of Group Rights," *Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law* 28, no. 3 (2018): 481–94; Anna Adorjáni and László Bence Bari, "National Minority: The Emergence of the Concept in the Habsburg and International Legal Thought," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 7–37; Börries Kuzmany,

- “Non-Territorial National Autonomy in Interwar European Minority Protection and Its Habsburg Legacies,” in *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands*, ed. Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 316.
- 11 *Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Poland*, June 28, 1919, <http://ungarisches-institut.de/dokumente/pdf/19190628-3.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2022).
  - 12 Fouques Duparc, Jacques, *La protection des minorités, de race, de langue et de religion, étude de droit des gens* (Paris: Dalloz, 1922), 42.
  - 13 Natasha Wheatley, “Spectral Legal Personality in Interwar International Law: On New Ways of Not Being a State,” *Law and History Review* 35, no. 3 (2017): 777. For a discussion on whether the rights enshrined in the minority treaties were individual or collective rights, see Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling, “The Ambivalent Legacy of Minority Protection for Human Rights,” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift Für Geschichte—Revue Suisse d’histoire* 71, no. 2 (2021): 272.
  - 14 Quoted in Jane K. Cowan, “Who’s Afraid of Violent Language? Honour, Sovereignty and Claims-making in the League of Nations,” *Anthropological Theory* 3, no. 3 (2003): 273.
  - 15 The treaties applied to Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Turkey, Yugoslavia, and the territory of Memel, and Upper Silesia. See Pablo de Azcárate, *League of Nations and National Minorities an Experiment* (Washington and New York: Carnegie endowment for international peace, 1945), 94–5.
  - 16 Mark Mazower, “Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe,” *Daedalus* 126, no. 2 (1997): 53.
  - 17 *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, article 22, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp) (accessed June 27, 2022).
  - 18 Lerna Ekmekcioglu, “Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey’s Step-Citizens,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 666–7.
  - 19 Laura Robson, “Capitulations Redux: The Imperial Genealogy of the Post-World War I ‘Minority’ Regimes,” *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 3 (2021): 978–1000. Andre Liebich interprets minority rights as an attempt to “compensate” defeated parties in post-conflict negotiations. See Andre Liebich, “Minority as Inferiority: Minority Rights in Historical Perspective,” *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 2 (2008): 243–63.
  - 20 Jan Smuts, “The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion,” in *The Drafting of the Covenant*, ed. David Hunter Miller, vol. 2 (New York: Putnam, 1928), 26.
  - 21 Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On sovereignty see also Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
  - 22 Mazower, “Minorities and the League,” 53.
  - 23 Arnold Toynbee, *Nationality & the War* (London: Dent & Sons, 1915), 476–504.
  - 24 Fouques Duparc, *La protection des minorités*, 17. See also Carlile Aylmer Macartney, “Minorities: A Problem of Eastern Europe,” *Foreign Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1931): 677.
  - 25 League of Nations, *Sixième Assemblée, 1925. Procès-verbal de la quatrième séance de la sixième commission*, September 16, 9–11, Centre d’Archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve, 242QO-87.

- 26 Tara Zahra, "The 'Minority Problem' and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands," *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (2008): 143; Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 39; Maarten Van Ginderachter and Jon E. Fox, *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018), 248; Timothy Snyder, "Introduction," in *The Balkans as Europe, 1821–1914*, ed. Timothy Snyder and Katherine Younger (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2018), 1–10. See also recent works that have emphasized the contribution of Central and Eastern Europe to the creation of the post-First World War global order through the creation of international, rather than national, institutions. Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley, eds., *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Natasha Wheatley, "Central Europe as Ground Zero of the New International Order," *Slavic Review* 78, no. 4 (2019): 900–11.
- 27 Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe: 1848–1945* (New York: St. Martin's Pr., 1983); Stephan Horak, *Eastern European National Minorities, 1919–1980: A Handbook* (Littleton: Libraries unlimited, 1985); Paul Smith, *Ethnic Groups in International Relations* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1991); Christian Raitz von Frenzt, *A Lesson Forgotten: Minority Protection under the League of Nations: The Case of the German Minority in Poland, 1920–1934* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 1999); Martin Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung?: Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den zwanziger Jahren* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2000); Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Umut Özsü, *Formalizing Displacement: International Law and Population Transfers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sarah Shields, "Forced Migration as Nation-Building: The League of Nations, Minority Protection, and the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange," *Journal of the History of International Law* 18, no. 1 (2016): 120–45; Carolin Liebisch-Gümüß, "Embedded Turkification: Nation Building and Violence within the Framework of the League of Nations 1919–1937," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2020): 229–44.
- 28 Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Donald Bloxham, "The Great Unweaving: Forced Population Movement in Europe, 1875–1949," in *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World*, ed. Richard Bessel and Claudia Haake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167–208; Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013); Mark Levene, *Devastation: Volume I: The European Rimlands 1912–1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-states: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016); Frank, *Making Minorities History*.
- 29 Tara Zahra, "The 'Minority Problem,'" 148.
- 30 Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia 1918–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For other, more limited, attempts to expand comparative analyses to Western European countries, see Frank, *Making Minorities History*, 99–118; Marcus Payk and Roberta Pergher, eds., *Beyond*



- Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and the Formation of New Polities after the Great War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 143–64.
- 31 Although including the League's Mandates in our comparative analysis would certainly provide an additional insightful perspective on the topic of this edited volume, it would also risk stretching our efforts too widely. On minorities in the Mandates see Benjamin White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Laura Robson, *States of Separation Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).
- 32 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55–78.
- 33 This is what most of the literature on nation-building has generally done. For a summary and an early critique, see Anthony Birch, *Nationalism and National Integration* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). The point has been repeated by Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 81–2. For a recent innovative work on the subject that in part questions earlier views of nation-building in Western Europe, see Andreas Wimmer, *Nation Building* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- 34 For a definition of “nationalizing states” see Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 9.
- 35 Ibid., 19. See also Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition,” *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (2004): 31–64.
- 36 See Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities”; Maarten Van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, “Introduction,” in Van Ginderachter and Fox, *National Indifference*, 1–14.
- 37 See John Breuilly, “What Does It Mean to Say That Nationalism Is ‘Popular,’” in *Nationhood from Below. Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Maarten Van Ginderachter and Marnix Beyen (London: Palgrave, 2012), 23–46; Laurence Cole, “Differentiation or Indifference? Changing Perspectives on National Identification in the Austrian Half of the Habsburg Monarchy,” in Van Ginderachter and Beyen, *Nationhood from Below*, 96–119.
- 38 For exceptions, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Ginderachter and Fox, *National Indifference*.
- 39 Zahra, “Imagined Non-Communities,” 101.
- 40 Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System,” 1314.
- 41 Liebisch-Gümüş, “Embedded Turkification,” 11. See also Shields, “Forced Migration”; Özsü, *Formalizing Displacement*, 1–20.
- 42 On the factors that explain variations, see especially Volker Protz's and Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling's chapters in this volume.
- 43 On these various territorial identities and their relationship with nationhood and the nation-state, see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Joost Augusteyn and Eric Storm, *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe Nation-Building, Regional Identities and Separatism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Alexander Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in “Fin-de-Siècle” Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*

(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Xosé-Manoel Núñez and Maiken Umbach, “Hijacked Heimats: National Appropriations of Local and Regional Identities in Germany and Spain, 1930–1945,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 15, no. 3 (2008): 295–316; Xosé Manoel Nuñez Seixas and Eric Storm, *Regionalism and Modern Europe: Identity Construction and Movements from 1890 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Maiken Umbach, “A Tale of Second Cities: Autonomy, Culture, and the Law in Hamburg and Barcelona in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 3 (2005): 659–92.

