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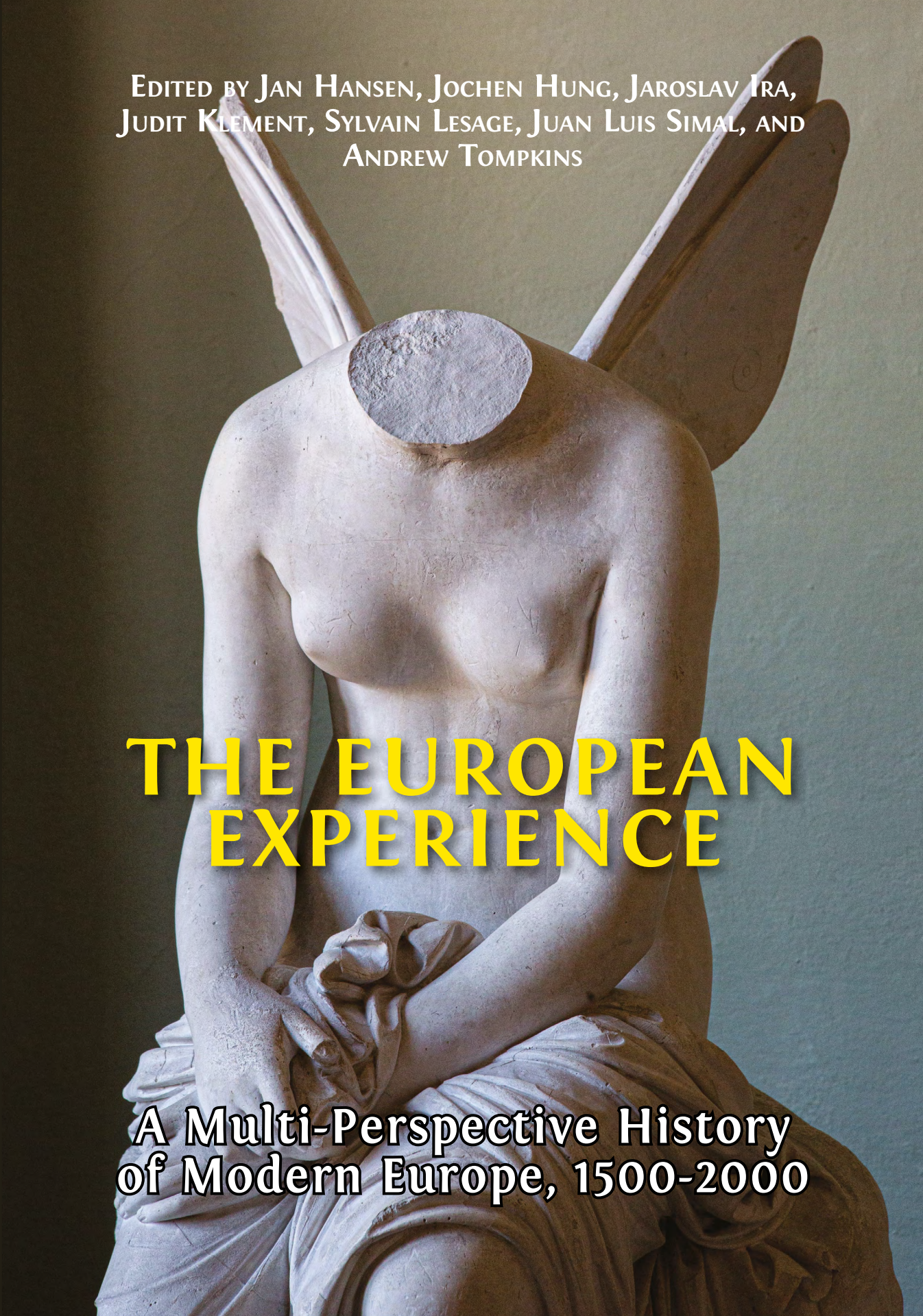

The European Experience

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

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2.2.2 Interethnic Relations in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)

Jaroslav Ira, Erika Szívós, and Irina Marin

Introduction

Ethnicity or ethnic group, as with similar collective nouns, is a commonly used but fuzzy concept. Most dictionary definitions stress that ethnicity presupposes a group of people that share a number of communal identity features, the most frequently invoked being language, culture, traditions, rituals, sometimes religion, and a sense of common descent. While to this day theorists of ethnicity debate its nature and its composition, in nineteenth-century Europe the concept itself did not exist, and only came into usage in the twentieth century. The concepts that circulated at the time varied greatly across time and geographical space. Depending on author and historical context, the demographic map of Europe was inhabited by peoples, nations, nationalities, or races. These concepts were sometimes used interchangeably; in other contexts, they designated very specific historical realities. In some cases, they were mere ethnographic terms; in others, they acquired political meaning.

Ethnic groups had, of course, existed before the nineteenth century and were mentioned by travellers, chroniclers, historians and governmental officials. What the nineteenth century introduced was a sharpening (and sometimes artificial creation) of lines of demarcation between various ethnic groups across Europe, and their reconceptualisation as 'nations', which came to be regarded as the legitimate basis for states. The emergent disciplines of folklore collection, ethnography, philology, and statistics processed group differences and came up with distinct categories of peoples. Thus, they also served as instruments of codification, regularisation and unification.

A look at a demographic map of nineteenth-century Europe shows that in terms of ethnicities or ethnic groups Western Europe was seemingly more compact while the greatest amount of ethnic fragmentation was to be found in

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Central and Eastern Europe. Such an impression is not completely erroneous, as indeed Central and Eastern Europe marked a region of the continent where several empires met and chafed at the edges. Imperial borderlands are usually much more ethnically complex. However, what a demographic map hides is the complex reality of ethnicity throughout west and east. Well into the nineteenth century, groups that might otherwise be represented as compact (the Germans, the French, the Italians) did not in practice represent one single ethnicity but rather myriads of regional dialects, local cultures, and worldviews, sometimes mutually unintelligible and foreign to one another.

This subchapter is going to investigate European patterns of interethnic experiences and state policies. The first section will concentrate on the ways ethnic groups were viewed in the emerging modern nation-states of nineteenth-century Europe, focusing on the links between state-building and homogenisation efforts as well as on the relationship between majority and minority groups. The second section will explore multi-ethnicity and multi-national empires in Central and Eastern Europe, concentrating on the Habsburg Monarchy as a paradigmatic example. The Jewish case will be presented in a separate section as a special category of minority experiences.

The Emergence of Modern Nation-states and the Changing Position of Ethnic Minorities in the Nation-state Paradigm

By the end of the early modern period, the common use of one dominant language had become the norm in several European monarchies. Although not all nineteenth-century states strove to achieve language homogenisation, most of them worked toward the marginalisation of minority languages in one way or another and strove to curtail the autonomy of historic minorities. In France, a country which served as a model for many emerging nation-states of nineteenth-century Europe, the centralisation of state power had progressed hand-in-hand with policies of language homogenisation since the early modern period. The 1539 Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts declared that French should be used exclusively in state administration and legal documents, as the only official language of the country. The French Revolution continued this tendency: linguistic diversity was interpreted as a risk to national unity, so the official use of regional languages (such as Occitan in the south, Celtic-influenced Breton in the north, and Basque near the French-Spanish border) was suppressed together with the local autonomies and ancient legal privileges of historic regions, which were all integrated into the uniform system of *départements.* With the emergence of nationalism and the ideal of the nation-state in nineteenth-century Europe, efforts in favour of cultural homogenisation became pronounced in several other European states as well. Education was

seen as a particularly effective tool for transforming domestic populations into modern nations. The task of schools was, among other things, to raise good citizens and instil patriotic feelings in children. Therefore, educational systems were centralised in the course of the nineteenth century and 'state languages' assumed an increasingly dominant role in schools at the expense of minority languages. In 1880, for example, a nationally uniform school system was introduced in France, which left little or no room for regional languages.

However, even in countries with one dominant official language, a diversity of dialects prevailed, local languages survived, and significant ethnic minorities or nationalities continued to exist. The United Kingdom, officially the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1801, is a case in point; despite the common language, it has never become a nation-state per se. In nineteenth-century Britain, the Irish, Welsh, Scots and smaller ethnic groups lived alongside the English and maintained their separate identities. These 'nations' were all peoples of Celtic origin, descendants of the population that had lived on the British Isles since before the Anglo-Saxon conquest.

Several members of those communities continued to use their own languages, although their struggles to ensure the survival of their native tongues were fought with varying degrees of success. In Ireland, Wales and Scotland, for example, the native Gaelic languages had long lost their primacy by the nineteenth century, and either bilingualism or the exclusive use of the English language had become the dominant pattern.

In nineteenth-century Spain, centralising tendencies followed the French model in many respects. The historic rights of significant minorities like the Basques were gradually suspended throughout the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth, and Spanish was declared to be the main language of the state. Nonetheless, regional cultural identities such as that of the Basques, Catalans and Gallegos proved to be strong enough to withstand the Spanish monarchy's centralising ambitions, and their languages survived, transforming into modern languages during the nineteenth century.

In countries that achieved unification in the second half of the nineteenth century, like Italy in 1861 or Germany in 1871, common language and common cultural heritage were regarded as the chief unifying factors. However, strong dialectal differences and regional identities survived in these countries, thanks to centuries of territorial and political separation. It was to some extent a matter of decision which dialect should become the basis of standard German and standard Italian (and thus the language of state administration, the judiciary, middle and higher education, literature, and the press), and dialects continued to be spoken locally at work, in public, in informal social situations, and in families. On the other hand, both modern Italy and Germany were conceived as nation-states, and, at least in Germany, there was perceptible pressure on minorities—such as the Poles in the eastern provinces—to assimilate.

In binational states or dynastically connected countries with two large nations, ethnic relations and issues of national identity were complicated in a different way. In the nineteenth century, countries and regions continued to change hands in Europe as the result of wars and subsequent treaties by which rising powers satisfied their expansionist ambitions. For example, Denmark and Norway formed a dual monarchy together from 1537 to 1814, which also contained Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands with their native populations and languages. But then Norway was ceded to Sweden in the Treaty of Kiel in 1814. As Norwegians refused to accept this solution and declared their independence, a personal union (i.e., two countries joined by the person of the monarch) with Sweden was created as a compromise, lasting until 1905. In a country like Denmark-Norway, linguistic differences among the major ethnic communities were not exceedingly sharp, as the languages remained fairly close to each other until the end of the early modern period and even beyond. At the same time, Danish clearly dominated in official usage until 1814. So the nineteenth-century Norwegian cultural renaissance—very similar in nature to kindred revivalist movements in early nineteenth-century East Central Europe and other peripheral areas of the continent—did not merely strive to make the Norwegian language more distinct from the other Scandinavian languages by purification (for example, the replacement of 'foreign' loan words by indigenous ones) and spelling reforms, but was also faced with the task of having to create a modern literary language.

In other cases, new, ethnically compound countries were created from territories which had previously been ruled by other monarchies. Following a revolution in 1830, Belgium, formerly part of the Protestant-dominated United Kingdom of the Netherlands, was created in 1830 as an independent, bilingual country, comprised of Dutch-speaking Flemish and French-speaking Walloon inhabitants.

Multi-ethnic Empires

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large parts of Central and Eastern Europe formed portions of multinational and multi-ethnic empires, namely the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire. A third imperial power, the Ottoman Empire, ruled the peoples of the Balkans, and although it was increasingly forced to give up control over territories during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it controlled a substantial part of south-eastern Europe for much of the period discussed in this chapter. As mentioned above, the German Empire also included significant non-German populations as the result of Prussia's territorial acquisitions in earlier centuries.

Unlike states in Western Europe, empires in the eastern part of the continent remained ethnically diverse until the end of the nineteenth century and even beyond. Many historical reasons stood behind that. Firstly, the empires of nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe had been formed over the centuries of ethnically and culturally diverse lands, which often adhered to their own political traditions and institutions and were linked together by ruling dynasties. Secondly, the policies of assimilation by the state elites appeared relatively late, in the late eighteenth century in Austria and even later in Russia. Thirdly, in some places such as the Ottoman Empire or the Baltic region in Russia, language diversity also served as a social barrier imposed by the ruling classes on the masses. Less advanced economies and relatively underdeveloped systems of communication and transport also hindered stronger assimilation. The ethnic map was therefore particularly diverse. More importantly, the power relations between states and ethnic groups (as well as among ethnic groups) varied widely and tended to change over time.

An Example of a Multi-ethnic Empire: Ethnic Relations in the Habsburg Monarchy

Until the emergence of national movements in the first half of the nineteenth century, the multi-ethnic character of the Habsburg Empire did not cause serious difficulties for Habsburg governments, nor did it lead to conflicts among diverse ethnic groups. Emperor Joseph II (r. 1780–1790) promoted the German language as a lingua franca in the Habsburg Empire, regarding it as a tool of efficient centralisation, provoking a resistance that can be interpreted as a sign of rising national consciousness in various parts of the empire. Apart from that, however, the Habsburg governance of diverse areas rested on a degree of respect for local languages, religions, cultural and political traditions.

Early nineteenth-century movements of 'national awakening', as they were called in Central and Eastern Europe, were primarily cultural movements, but they gradually acquired stronger political overtones. The ideology of modern nationalism was intertwined with liberal ideas; the peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy were no longer content with the political system of the centralised empire and its absolutist government and demanded greater individual rights and freedoms, as well as collective rights and autonomies. Linguistic and cultural communities increasingly defined themselves as nations. Emerging national movements within the Habsburg Empire often had conflicting goals and interests and could be consciously pitted against each other by Austrian governments—as the revolutionary events of 1848–1849 amply demonstrated.

In 1867, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise created the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (the official name of the Habsburg Empire between 1867 and 1918)

and established parliamentarism in both halves. In the Austrian half of the Monarchy (Cisleithania), the constitution of 1867 secured rather generous 'national' rights for the corresponding ethnic groups. In addition, voting rights in Austria were gradually extended by electoral reforms in the late nineteenth century, while universal manhood suffrage (the right of all adult male citizens to vote) was introduced in 1907. As a result, the demands of nationalities were increasingly articulated in the Imperial Parliament, causing severe tensions. In the constitutionally autonomous Hungarian Kingdom (Transleithania), voting rights remained limited to a narrow circle of around six percent of the adult population, and ethnic minorities were severely underrepresented in Parliament. Although the rights of nationalities were stated in an important law of 1868, state policies in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hungary were a de facto curtailment of minorities' cultural and linguistic rights, and especially from the mid-1890s these policies strove to forcefully assimilate non-Hungarians. All this together led to an increasingly strained relationship between the Hungarian state and members of national and ethnic minorities. The 'nationality problem' thus plagued domestic politics in both halves of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and contributed substantially to its dissolution in 1918.

Still, the constellations were diverse. In Bohemia, the rise of the Czech nation, markedly visible already during the revolution of 1848, led to intense struggle with an outnumbered yet economically strong German minority, which benefited from Germanophone networks and the German character of the Austrian state. In the province of Galicia, both Ruthenians and Poles were given broad space for their respective national activities. But it was the Poles, better-positioned in society, who assumed political control of the province.

The sense of belonging to a distinct ethnic community was arguably stronger in cases like those of the Czechs and the Poles, who could rely upon a long literary tradition in their own printed language and a legacy of statehood. The latter was still very much alive in the Polish case, while the ethnic identity of other peoples, such as Ukrainians or Slovaks, was weaker at the threshold of the 'age of nations'. But even among these groups, ethnic identity was not simply out there, waiting to be taken to the fore by nationalists. Rather, national movements helped define and reinforce ethnic identities in the first place, building upon existing cultural markers such as language or religion. Ethnic identity was often unclear for many people, not to mention irrelevant to their everyday lives. Many people spoke two or more languages and switched depending on the situation, while identifying themselves primarily by profession, social status, place of living, or confession rather than ethnicity or nationality. Polish peasants, for instance, for a long time had little interest in the efforts of the Polish nobility and gentry to restore the Polish state, as

class antagonisms rather than shared ethnicity defined their relations with one another well into the late nineteenth century.

As the century progressed, people were increasingly forced to belong to neatly divided ethnic groups. In the Habsburg Monarchy, modern censuses were introduced in 1869 and became powerful tools in this regard. The 'language of daily use' (*Umgangsprache*, used as a technical term in Austrian statistics) became an indicator of one's ethnic belonging. Census data, in fact, often concealed bilingualism or the use of multiple languages, and were unable to reflect hybrid identities, shifting allegiances, and the complex situation of people with mixed ancestry. From the perspective of nationalist agitators, however, individuals characterised by national indifference or 'ambiguous' identities were seen with growing disdain. On a different level, ethnic features were appropriated in newly invented national traditions and symbols (such as national costumes) or studied, classified and displayed in the newly founded ethnographic museums and exhibitions.

Fig. 1: Karl Freiherr von Czoernig, Ethnographic map of the Habsburg Monarchy (1855), Public Domain, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethnographic_map_of_austrian_monarchy_czoernig_1855.jpg.

Apart from political and intellectual struggles in state-wide arenas, interethnic relations played out in local spatial frameworks. In multi-ethnic regions, but sometimes in more homogeneous ones too, larger towns and cities were often multi-ethnic and multi-confessional. Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg, the capital of

Galicia, for example, was comprised of Ruthenians, Poles, Jews, and Austrian Germans, while Timişoara/Temesvár/Temeswar/Temišvar had Romanian, Hungarian, ethnic German, Serbian, Slovak, Jewish, and Ruthenian inhabitants in the late nineteenth century. Ethnically mixed cities were the rule rather than the exception in several parts of the region. Ethnic maps of the period can therefore only provide an approximate image of regional and subregional colourfulness and do not sufficiently reflect the actual complexity of local conditions. In addition to the local ethnicities, cities in the Austrian half of the empire would also include German-speaking officials of the imperial administration.

Mass migration often thoroughly altered the ethnic composition of nineteenth-century cities while transforming their social structure. Some of the major regional capitals, such as Prague or Lemberg (in Polish Lwów, present-day Lviv, Ukraine), became centres of competing national movements laying claims to public space. Efforts by Czech elites to seize and symbolically recast Prague as a Czech city, and of Polish elites to sustain Lemberg's image as a Polish city, were contradicted by "the politics of ethnic survival" (as described by historian Gary Cohen), practised by the vital minority of Germans in Prague, and by the growing presence of Ukrainian claims in the capital of Austrian Galicia. At the street level, territories and places were symbolically appropriated, such as the 'Czech' or 'German' promenades that stretched westwards and eastwards from Prague's Wenceslas Square.

It would be misleading, however, to imagine *fin-de-siècle* cities as divided or even segregated. Interactions among members of different ethnic groups often took place on a daily basis, in spaces of leisure, work, and consumption—despite nationalist agitation encouraging people to follow precisely the opposite strategy. Members of ethnic communities were urged to shop with 'their' retailers and to avoid mixed marriages. However, many individuals, such as some of the leftist or Jewish intellectuals, deliberately crossed these ethnic boundaries.

Jews in Nation-states and Empires: Ethnicity or Denominational Minority?

When it comes to interethnic relations, the position of the Jewish population deserves special attention. Even though, statistically speaking, they were regarded as a religious group and not an ethnicity in most European countries by the late nineteenth century (with the exception of the Russian Empire), they were perceived as an ethnoreligious group by many contemporaries as well as by several members of Jewish communities themselves—especially the Orthodox. Assimilated Jews, on the other hand, tended to identify themselves

in the second half of the nineteenth century primarily as members of one of the European nations or of linguistic-cultural communities such as English, French, Germans, Hungarians, and so on, depending on location and first language. The legal emancipation of Jews, which occurred at different times in different countries (1789 in France, 1812 in Prussia, 1867 in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1917 in Russia), theoretically created the possibility of full social integration for Jews. However, the success of the integration process depended significantly on the social, cultural and political environments of individual countries. Whereas the social integration of Jews reached generally high levels in Western and North-western Europe, antagonisms were much more likely to prevail in east-central and Eastern Europe, where the proportion of Jews was significantly higher than in the western half of the continent. Not all segments of non-Jewish society accepted Jews in their ranks, and antisemites often called into question their Jewish compatriots' national loyalties as well as their sincere identification with their homelands. Modern antisemitism, often and increasingly combined with racial theories by the turn of the twentieth century, had complex ideological, social and cultural roots, which cannot be analysed here in detail. But the persistence of antisemitism in modern European societies had grave consequences later on in the interwar period, when authoritarian or totalitarian regimes emerged across much of Europe.

In Russia, Jewish emancipation did not occur until 1917. Until the early twentieth century, Jewish citizens were confined by law to the Pale of Settlement, a large territory in the western part of the Russian Empire where they were mandated to reside, and which they could leave only on certain conditions. In other European areas, east-central Europe included, residential restrictions affecting Jews had been abolished by the 1850s at the latest. They had to endure various forms of popular as well as state-sponsored antisemitism, including periodic pogroms, which were among the main reasons for large-scale Jewish emigration from Russia after 1881.

Conclusion

The ethnic map of Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century was diverse and characterised by time-honoured patterns of coexistence. With the emergence of modern forms of nationalism, however, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural states as well as their resident ethnic groups were faced with new challenges. Efforts to transform countries into modern states often led to assimilationist policies and the attempted marginalisation of ethnic minorities. In absolutist regimes, 'national' demands for greater representation erupted in revolutions; by mid-century, national and ethnic tensions assumed different forms in constitutional

monarchies. In bi- or multi-national states, competing nationalisms caused severe political tensions in the late nineteenth century and undermined political stability (even where minority rights were guaranteed by law).

One would assume that competing nationalisms provoked increasingly bitter conflict within local and urban communities in the second half of the nineteenth century too, but that would be a misunderstanding of the complexity of local conditions. Nationalist agendas were articulated in the public space, in the press, in associations, and in parliament, but at the same time, long-standing practices of interethnic communication and coexistence continued to characterise everyday life on the local level.

In the age of mass migration, the proximity of old and new ethnic groups, the appearance of culturally different 'newcomers', and particularly the rapid change which altered the former ethnic and linguistic composition of towns and cities, all together created the potential for conflicts within urban societies. However, larger cities also functioned as crucibles where the linguistic and cultural assimilation of minority groups proved much faster than in ethnically homogeneous, isolated regions.

Discussion questions

1. What were the most important changes in interethnic relations in nineteenth-century Europe and what were the reasons for these changes?
2. Which role did language play in interethnic relations in nineteenth-century Europe?
3. In which ways do these changes still shape Europe today?

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