



Dominique Kirchner Reill. *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012. 335 pp. \$65.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-8047-7849-7; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-7446-8.

Reviewed by Isa Blumi (Georgia State University)

Published on HABSBURG (March, 2013)

Commissioned by Jonathan Kwan

When They Lived the Impossible: Multi-Nationalist Voices in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Habsburg Adriatic

Dominique Kirchner Reill, assistant professor of history at the University of Miami, has produced a pioneering work that challenges stubborn notions of exclusive nationalism's inevitable rise in nineteenth-century Europe. Reill's impressive first book exemplifies the best of the historian's craft. As she diligently scours still neglected regional archives throughout the northern Adriatic, the book interweaves jewels of insight into a finely crafted narrative about the intellectual journeys of six natives of the northern Adriatic. By tenderly easing her insights gained from inspecting private correspondences, newspaper articles, and an occasional government document into a lucidly presented story, this complex book is as much engaging as revelatory. In this respect, I found myself thoroughly drawn to this study meshed together by a talented historian who uses disparate sources to make compelling arguments about an often-neglected part of the Habsburg Empire. From the start, therefore, I must enthusiastically encourage colleagues to read, cite, and then teach this book.

At the heart of Reill's work is the quite reasonable observation that much of the scholarship on the Habsburg Empire neglects to fully integrate what, well into the 1850s, were still firmly connected social spaces that cut across (or bridged) anachronistically drawn linguistic, "ethno-national" lines. Reill's research exposes the productive interaction between activists in these multilingual imperial spaces, especially in the Habsburg's northern Adriatic regions of Dalmatia, Venice, and Trieste. It is there that productive interactions between advocates for greater collaboration in both the fine arts and political debate complemented a booming regional economy. As a fine cultural and intellectual history, therefore, this is a suggestive study of the early modern pluralism cultivated by talented advocates from regions enjoying a period of economic expansion.

As Reill carefully explains throughout the first half of the book, in the hands of explicitly "pluralistic-minded" writers, the region's "diversity" acted as the launching pad for an expansion of mediated exchanges between those cultivating ambiguously "nationalist" sensibilities. Importantly, Reill warns us that soon after 1848, these same exponents of "multi-nationalism" took an entirely different ideological path. That being said, such trajectories should not distract us from appreciating the earlier period of exchange. Reill's work, in this regard, crucially avoids letting the subsequent decades of ethno-nationalism dictate how we read not only individual works of future "nationalist" heroes (as all six men would become), but also their infinitely more complex, and in my estimation, more appealing, sociopolitical Adriatic contexts.

As such, this excellent book contributes to a body of scholarship arguing that some forms of nationalism—be it Ottoman, Habsburg, Italian, or Slavic—were not necessarily antagonistic to the premodern social, linguistic, and spiritual pluralism found throughout the Mediterranean world. As Holly Case, Pieter Judson, Tara Zahra, and Alison Frank have recently demonstrated, the "nation" in the east-central European context remained flexible and ultimately resistant to calls for exclusivist projects only later realized in their full, destructive form. Reill's work is thus an invaluable complement to, if not crucial expansion of, already well-established challenges to conventions about nationalism in eastern Europe. In this respect, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation* should be added to our respective graduate reading lists.

Reill is able to make this complicated counternarrative work because she uses a refreshingly wide range of sources. Flaunting her linguistic skills in Italian, Serbo-Croatian, and German, Reill drives home in pleasingly lucid detail the hitherto neglected reality that the Habsburg

Empire's coastal extensions were as much an intercultural amalgamation as the so-called heartland that long fused Maygar, German, and Slav cultures. Reill beautifully infuses her tirelessly subtle interpretations of the personal papers of six quite different men—Stipan Ivičević, Ivan August Kaznačić, Niccolò Tommaseo, Pacifico Valussi, Medo Pucić, and Francesco Dall'Ongaro—thereby breaking down the nationalist historiographies that obscure a different set of possible social orientations in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the process, Reill identifies in the plethora of materials produced by these men attempts to constitute a system of mutually sustaining nations within a supranational body, a type of "Adriatic multi-nationalism" that would reflect the possibilities for sustaining Habsburg (and Ottoman further south, I would add) pluralism in face of competing, but still not yet preferred, separatist nationalist projects. Put differently, the advocacy Reill explores must be read within a "multi-national" Habsburg context; the work of these six men aimed to promote harmonizing the imperial future as much as advocating its demise.

In this invaluable contribution to how we study nineteenth-century nationalism, Reill's theoretically sophisticated claims hinge on capturing the full diversity of ideas, thoughts, reactions, and propositions expressed by these six men. Each one could be placed within the mythology of Slavic or Italian nationalism. Indeed, Dall'Ongaro and Tommaseo are often identified today as having left an imprint on separatist Italian and Pan-Slavic agendas respectively. But Reill rightly insists that we need to read the entire body of work of these men and consider the temporary social, professional, and scholarly networks in which they worked. The larger settings shaped by a group of mid-nineteenth-century elites who sought to harmonize the otherwise exclusivist nationalism with cultural pluralism thus suggest that a "movement" had found a perfect time and place prior to 1848 to act.

To these "fearful nationalists," the multilingual cultural spaces in which they thrived—fusing regional Slav and Italian (while largely neglecting German) cultural production—reflected both the trade that made Trieste so successful and a challenge to those political entrepreneurs soon to transform Europe in 1848. At the heart of this Adriatic "idealist" campaign, therefore, was a pragmatism that should have appealed to liberals of the era. There were indeed commercial gains from fully integrating the multiple Slavo-Italian communities in Dalmatia with the Venetian and Trieste maritime networks. As long as coastal incubators of a fused Italian/Slavic multi-nationalism produced wealth, the appeal of chauvinis-

tic ideologues would suffer. More important for men of letters like Tommaseo ("Il Dalmato") who mastered regional dialects and flourished as a hybrid national poet and critic, such "bridge-making" also promised new cultural innovations. Although interesting, Reill may have fallen victim to the overwhelming productivity of these men as advocates for cultural fusion. What is underemphasized is the political economy of the Adriatic's cultural dynamism, both as a reflection of its economic successes and as the subsequent demise in face of Venetian rebellion in 1848.

As amply demonstrated by Reill's research, the rise of a new consciousness, termed by Ivičević as "Slavodalmatian," extended the prevailing Illyrianism in the Adriatic hinterland to incorporate Tommaseo's humanism as a facilitator for commercial growth. This, what some would identify as Pan-Slavism, in effect was used to service a Dalmatian sensibility for building the region's links to the commercial hubs in Venice and Trieste (and Ottoman Bosnia) as much as orientate the region to an exclusive Slavic homeland. This value added to each region's economy by harmonizing "differences" in a self-consciously "creole" setting needs highlighting. As the banking and merchant patrons of these Adriatic intellectuals clearly appreciated, there was much to lose if commercial links were broken by exclusivist nationalism in the region. Through the patronage of Trieste's cultural/literary journal *La Favilla* (The spark)—edited by Dall'Ongaro who later added Valussi to its ranks—by the city's most trade-dependent company, Lloyd Austraco, the most talented advocates for this "multi-national" movement found a welcome platform to promote a new, integrated Adriatic space. Perhaps the most important contributor to this effort through the journal was Tommaseo himself, whose commentaries about multi-nationalism proved crucial to the spread of this vision to Dalmatia.

As a result of his inspiring (and also controversial) treatments, a fruitful mentorship ensued, according to Reill, one that clearly showed the embrace of Tommaseo's initiatives by three Dalmatian natives. How Ivičević and to a lesser extent Kaznačić and Pucić engaged the multi-national project after Tommaseo's publication of his ground-breaking study *Iskrice* (Sparkles) in 1844 obviously speaks of an enthusiasm for further developing Dalmatian and, by extension, Slavic consciousness in a larger Habsburg Adriatic context. It is within these dense contours that Reill is perhaps too subtle. The promise of economic gain as much as cultural development clearly occupied many among the broad audience of these writers and probably accounts to a great extent the continued financial support for their efforts.

Of course, one cannot really fault Reill for so thoroughly studying Tommaseo's appreciation of regional dialects or local folklore at the expense of de-emphasizing the economic concerns of both his financial backers and readers. In fact, cultural historians will do themselves a favor by using this book's sensitivity to the details of Tommaseo's evolution as the main proponent for a new cultural order that offered Europe an alternative trajectory in the nineteenth century. For their part, graduate students beginning their careers should consider themselves fortunate to have such a trailblazer like Reill opening new channels of inquiry in this larger "European-wide project of creating a brotherhood of nations" (p. 153). The fascinating life that this chief advocate of Adriatic multi-nationalism led as he crisscrossed the Mediterranean and its ever-shifting political currents reminds us that the place as well as the time was crucial to shaping political orientations. In this regard, it is the Adriatic that was as much the source from which Tommaseo drew to articulate his changing sensibilities as a barrier to ever realizing his project.

Reill excels in these well-crafted pages, successfully arguing that it was Tommaseo's unending energy that initiated this movement's expansion into even obscure corners of Dalmatia, like Makarska. While Italian and Slavic scholars alike have selectively ignored those sizable portions of Tommaseo's work that do not fit their respective "nationalist" narratives, Reill convincingly attributes the diversity of this man's work to the (temporary, it turns out) conversion of others to the larger agenda. Indeed, one is almost overwhelmed by Reill's invaluable fusion of Tommaseo's writings, almost forgetting that his interactions with others were equally crucial, a point often forgotten by those hagiographies found in the Croatian and Italian nationalist scholarship of the twentieth century.

In her subtle infusion of direct quotations from Tommaseo's disparate works in both Italian and regional Slavic (Serbo-Croatian), Reill leaves no doubt that scholars in the future must incorporate this man's particular contribution to regional and trans-regional history. And yet, despite all the attention his advocacy attracted, Reill exposes just how quickly Tommaseo's "idealism" crumbled under the force of war. *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation* thus charts the subtle ideological transitions that gradually pulled former disciples of Tommaseo's project away from their Adriatic multi-nationalism. In time, they gravitated to a form of separatism during the 1848-49 battles that degenerated into the ugly language of nationalist chauvinism promoted in the period's media.

As with the first part of the book, in the second half, Reill excels in fusing the plethora of sources produced in this period into a readable narrative, demonstrating how Dall'Ongaro, for example, in face of Vienna's power grab, abandoned Adriatic multi-nationalism and enthusiastically supported Venice's fight for independence. While this entire section offers the suggestive link to a "new rhythm of political activity" that ultimately brought starvation to Venetians and an inevitable "rupture" to trans-regional sensibilities, its carefully laid out processes do not necessarily translate into a satisfying final analysis of just how this "rupture" affected the principal actors in this book (pp. 155, 159-62). In what reads as a far more sudden transition than may have actually played out, the story after 1848 rapidly comes to an end with former champions of multi-nationalism going their own ways. We learn rather abruptly that the events leading to war in the region in 1848 reflected the demise of the multi-nationalist agenda, with only Tommaseo and two of his former allies sticking to their passions for an integrated Adriatic world. Although Reill does offer some insight into how Tommaseo and the others reacted, considering the wealth of information provided in tireless detail in the first part of the book, this reader feels the story is incomplete.

We are told in a few pages that Valussi hinged his multi-nationalist agenda to a Swiss model for the region while Ivičević continued to advocate for an interlingua "*Pangrafia*" under different terms. As it became increasingly clear due to the crude anti-Slavic rhetoric that intellectuals from Venice (including Dall'Ongaro) instilled in the larger cultural context after 1848, Ivičević in particular had to reconfigure his universalistic strategies for forging a common language to facilitate integrating the larger Adriatic to one that served the creation of a tolerant, greater Dalmatia. This was a strategic reorientation on Ivičević's part that increasingly gravitated to the much more obvious "inward" shift of his former allies, Kaznačić and Pucić, who now saw once interrelated trade links serving separate national agendas exclusively. As Reill terms it, "outward-looking Adriatic multi-nationalism turned inward, and the Adriatic became not merely a filter for communication but came to represent a border for action and development" (p. 232). The problem is this is all presented in a rather breathless flash at the end of the book, offering us far less of the detail Reill so masterfully provides in the first part. I get the sense that Reill can do more with this. As such, far from a criticism, I hope that Reill will elaborate in another book!

Despite my enthusiastic praise for the book, it is

not quite so satisfying that this story fails to engage more of the entire Adriatic region. The very cosmopolitan dynamism Reill finds in Trieste, for example, is equally observed in other port towns. Reill could have fleshed out better the atmospherics of these heterogeneous port towns throughout Dalmatia and northeastern Adriatic, perhaps as Julia Clancy-Smith did recently in her *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (2011). In other words, Reill clearly appreciates Trieste (and much less so Dalmatian ports) for their vibrancy but misses an opportunity to let the dynamism of these port towns' interregional linkages come to the surface.

The author may also unintentionally reinforce the eternal divide between "East and West" that still poisons the literature. By sticking so close to the geographies determined by state authority in the first half of the nineteenth century, Reill neglects the Adriatic's expanded dynamism. Surely, by drawing from studies on the Ottoman/Habsburg borderlands by Tijana Kristić, Maurus Reinkowski, George Gavrilis, Katherine Fleming, Ebru Boyar, Oliver Jens Schmitt, Molly Greene, Gelina Harlaftis, Kahraman Şakul, and me, Reill would have given the reader greater depth into, for instance, Ivičević's aim to integrate Makarska/Dalmatia's Bosnian hinterland. There is ample evidence of commercial (and thus diplomatic) interactions between the so-called Orient and Habsburg territories that could bring added depth to Reill's perhaps too shapely defined region. In other words, engaging the scholarship of those writing about the exploits of Ali Pasha Tepelena in Arta, the Bushati

family in Ulqin and Shkodër, and Greek independence and corresponding events in Serbia/Montenegro could have given the novice a broader appreciation of the entire Adriatic as space of cultural and commercial exchange.

With this in mind, it is in fact odd that nothing more substantive about these exchanges across boundaries appears in Reill's research. In the Ottoman and Habsburg archives, there is a plethora of documents available that suggest Ottoman port towns, like Dulcino (Ulqin), Antivar (Bar), and Işkodra (Shkodër), enjoyed constant exchanges with Trieste, Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Zadar, and Venetian-based merchants. Indeed many of the top commercial families in Ottoman Adriatic port towns had offices in Trieste, Dubrovnik, and Venice. This angle to the story appears prisoner to those sectarian/linguistic divides still evident in Habsburg versus Ottoman studies. As a result, readers will have to wait for someone else to feed off of Reill's inspired work and further elaborate on an integrated nineteenth-century world that cuts through the disciplinary divides between Ottomanists and those studying the "rest" of Europe.

Of course, this is nitpicking. Reill's work deserves singular praise, not calls for her to add more to a scholarly gem. In this astute, well-crafted challenge for historians to think again about the nineteenth-century nation-state, Reill revisits some of the modern heroes of Italian, Pan-Slavic, and Croatian nationalist thought to remind us the value of avoiding resorting to hindsight. In the process, she reminds us of the joys of a good writer. Reill is an excellent scholar whose work is both invigorating and original. I, for one, cannot wait for her next book.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Isa Blumi. Review of Reill, Dominique Kirchner, *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2013.
URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=36865>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.