Confession, Loyalty, and National Indifference: Perspectives from Imperial and Postimperial Borderlands

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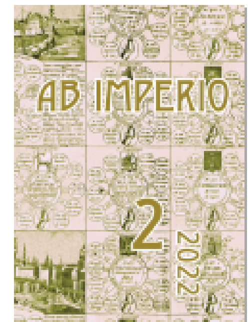

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CONFESSION, LOYALTY, AND NATIONAL INDIFFERENCE:

PERSPECTIVES FROM IMPERIAL AND POSTIMPERIAL BORDERLANDS*

Work on this forum began during the year before Russia's full-blown aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The world is now a very different place. In the spring of 2022, our work as editors was interrupted by reading and discussing the news, helping refugees from Ukraine, coordinating scholars-at-risk programs, and participating in public discussions about the war. Although the topic of the forum is historical, as scholars of the Russian Empire and of East European nationalism, we strongly feel that we have a professional and moral responsibility to address the problems looming large in our field today. We follow the lead of the *Ab Imperio* editorial team, who in the first issue of 2022 called into question the intellectual contribution of the so-called imperial turn that has taken place since the 1990s in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. They write somewhat bitterly that "the much-trumpeted 'imperial turn' of the late 1990s or avant-garde

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disciplines such as memory studies and comparative history have ended up conceptually indistinguishable from traditionalist national histories, inasmuch as historians have essentialized the groupness of imperial hegemons and subjects as preserving some stable characteristics through time."[1] Our aim here is not to dwell on the reasons for what the *AI* editors term the "archaization of the discipline," which readers can reflect on for themselves in the previous issue of the journal. Rather, we see this forum on religion and nonnational forms of loyalty and belonging as a partial response to some of the criticisms they raise about the tendencies toward "essentializing groupness" and "methodological nationalism" in our field.

The imperial turn has become a well-established trend in academia internationally; however, within the field of "new imperial history," religion has played a somewhat secondary role.[2] At the same time, there is a vibrant field of social and cultural history of religion, which has partly developed independently of imperial studies. An influential article by Gregory Freeze published in 1985 called for a noninstrumentalist view of the Russian Orthodox Church and paved the way for studies of the Orthodox Church as a social, cultural, and political actor in imperial Russia.[3] But most prominent social histories of Russian Orthodoxy, for instance, have very little to say about borderlands and interactions with non-Russian and heterodox populations.[4]

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[1] From the Editors. War and the State of the Field // Ab Imperio. 2022. No. 1. P. 10.

[2] Jane Burbank and David Ransell (Eds.). Imperial Russia: New History for the Empire. Bloomington, 1998; Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatoly Remnev. Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930. Bloomington, 2007; Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (Eds.). Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire. Leiden, 2009. There are, of course, several notable exceptions, such as: Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Eds.). Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918. Vol. 4: Die Konfessionen. Vienna, 1985; Börries Kuzmany. Brody: A Galician Border City in the Long Nineteenth Century. Leiden, 2017; Emily Greble. Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe. Oxford, 2022; Yoko Aoshima (Ed.). Entangled Interactions between Religion and National Consciousness in Central and Eastern Europe. Boston, 2020.

[3] Gregory Freeze. Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered // Journal of Ecclesiastical History. 1985. Vol. 30. No. 1. Pp. 82–102.

[4] Gregory Freeze. The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform. Princeton, 1983; Vera Shevzov. Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution. Oxford, 2004; Chris Chulos. Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861–1917. DeKalb, 2003; Laurie Manchester. Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia. DeKalb, 2008; Scott Kenworthy. The Heart of Russia: Trinity-Sergius, Monasticism and Society in Russia after 1825. Oxford, 2010; T. G. Leont'eva. Vera i progress: pravoslavnoe sel'skoe dukhovenstvo Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX–nachale XX veka. Moscow, 2002.

Furthermore, in pioneering works that focus on the role of Islam, the Uniates, and the clergy in the southern and western borderlands, historians have studied primarily administrative projects, policies, religious leadership, and confessional engineering and legislation, while the social and cultural aspects of confessional diversity have remained secondary, approached as responses (usually resistance) to imperial efforts.[5] There are several notable exceptions, such as the work of Paul Werth and of Agnès Kefeli, who provide a complex and nuanced engagement with the variety of responses, adaptation, and resistance of lower classes to imperial policies and religious leaders' efforts.[6]

Our forum uses the category of religious confession to broaden and complicate the working model of the imperial situation, characterized by the tension, incompatibility, and immeasurability of the languages of self-description of various historical actors.[7] We believe that there is a need to place more emphasis on confession in studies of the late imperial and postimperial periods. Religion was not only an important category of difference, serving as shorthand descriptions to identify groups,[8] but it can also counterbalance the often obsessive concern with nationality questions and provides us with examples of multiple alternative and coexisting loyalties, hybridities, ambiguities, and forms of "national indifference."

The aim of our forum is to bring different strands of research on imperial studies and social histories of religion into dialogue with one another. We need this because, first, different historiographies (pertaining, for instance, to the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian Empires, Romania, Moldova, and

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[5] Barbara Skinner. The Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. DeKalb, 2009; Mikhail Dolbilov. Russkii krai. Chuzhaia vera. Etnokonfessional'naia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II. Moscow, 2010; Mustafa Özgür Tuna. Imperial Russia's Muslims: Islam, Empire and European Modernity, 1788–1914. Cambridge, 2017; Heather Coleman. Vera, sem'ia i natsiia v dnevnikakh sviashchennika Kievskoi eparkhii o. Mikhaila Shcherbakovskogo. // Vera i lichnost' v meniaiushchemsia obshchestve. Moscow, 2019. Pp. 266–294; Eadem. Shche take Kievske pravoslavia? Parafial'nyi klir i mistseva religiina praktika Kiivskoi eparkhii // Trudy Kiivskoi dukhovnoi akademii. 2014. No. 21. Pp. 179–187.

[6] Paul Werth. At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, Conversion and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region. Ithaca, 2001; Agnès Kefely. Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy and Literacy. Ithaca, 2017.

[7] On imperial situation as a working model, see Ilya Gerasimov et al. Novaia imperskaia istoriia i vyzovy imperii // Ab Imperio. 2010. No. 1. P. 43.

[8] Juliette Cadiot. Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917) // The Russian Review. 2005. Vol. 64. No. 3. Pp. 440–455.

the Baltic states) often study the same populations in different periods and with different lenses; second, religions are transnational and we need to be aware of the diverse historiographical problems since geographic and national historiographies rarely coincide; and third, through intellectual cross-pollination, we are able to refine concepts that have been established in one historiographical strand but not yet accepted in another, and use them to provide alternative categories of analysis and description. We argue that a focus on religion is especially important for studying non-elite populations and their responses to nationalizing processes and imperial interventions on the microhistory level, especially among borderland confessional communities.

Models for Studying Confession in the Framework of the Russian Empire

Our forum focuses on the Russian imperial situation. There have been several influential models for describing the Russian imperial management of religious difference, notably the concepts of a "multiconfessional establishment" (Paul Werth) and the "confessional state" (Robert Crews). Both made important contributions to studies of religious diversity in the Russian Empire by showing that despite the dominant position of Orthodoxy, non-Orthodox faiths enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and a legitimate place in the realm of imperial social structure and in governance.

The multiconfessional landscape was characteristic of three continental empires, the Ottoman, Habsburg, and the Russian. Arguably, the Ottoman system of millets, the system of indirect rule based on religious difference, influenced the Habsburg and the Russian Empires' models of organizing and ruling diverse religious communities within their territories.[9] For the Russian Empire, Werth termed this the "multiconfessional establishment," a system that "granted a series of significant collective rights to recognized religious groups and rendered the foreign confessions state religions entitled to certain forms of government patronage and protection."[10] The system came under challenge from modern ideas of religious freedom and rising nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, but it did not disap-

[9] Karen Barkey and George Gavrils. The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and Its Contemporary Legacy // Ethnopolitics. 2015. Vol. 15. No. 1. Pp. 24–42.

[10] Paul W. Werth. The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia. Oxford, 2014. P. 4.

pear forever. Traces of the system continued to exist either in the form of nostalgic references to it as a counterweight to the nation-state or in vestige forms across former imperial territories.[11]

Historians have generally evaluated the Russian imperial management of religious difference positively. Even though Orthodoxy was declared a foundation of the imperial order, Werth insists that the tradition of toleration prevailed, even in the most conservative periods of Russia's political history, constituting "a core attribute of the Russian Empire's identity."[12] Robert Crews, who applied the term "confessional state," has shown how the Russian Empire's Muslim population was modeled in accordance with the synodal system of the Russian Church.[13] Crews argues that the confessional order of the Russian Empire meant that all recognized faith groups were legal within the empire, and religious affairs were "managed" by their bona fide religious leaders who were in contact with the state. Building on the earlier argument of Andreas Kappeler – about how the imperial state co-opted the non-Russian elites, including religious leaders, into positions of privilege and power – Crews notes the efforts of the religious leaders to gain positions of authority within their communities through securing backing from the imperial state.[14] *For Prophet and Tsar* argues that the imperial state was both Orthodox and Muslim; that from the time of Catherine the Great (1762–1796), Russia's rulers turned Islam into a pillar of government, transforming Muslims into active participants in the daily operation of the autocracy and the local maintenance of the imperial order. Prophet and tsar, in other words, were not antagonistic poles of loyalty, but worked in tandem with one another.[15]

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[11] Barkey and Gavrils. The Ottoman Millet System. Pp. 28–39. On the challenges to the millet system, see Aylin Koçunyan. The Millet System and the Challenge of Other Confessional Models, 1856–1865 // Ab Imperio. 2017. Vol. 18. No. 1. Pp. 59–85. Emily Greble charts the ambiguous legal position of Muslims in post-1918 Yugoslavia and clearly shows remnants of the millet system in Habsburg Bosnia and Yugoslavia (Greble. Muslims and the Making of Modern Europe).

[12] Barkey and Gavrils. The Ottoman Millet System. P. 105.

[13] Robert Crews. Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia // American Historical Review. 2003. Vol. 108. No. 1. Pp. 50–83.

[14] Andreas Kappeler. The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History. Harlow, 2002. Pp. 247–281; Crews. Empire and the Confessional State. P. 60.

[15] Robert D. Crews. For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asiaю Cambridge, MA, 2006).

Nationalizing Russian Empire and Challenges to the Confessional Order

In the Russian Empire the Russian Orthodox Church was the established confession, benefiting from legal privileges and a special connection with the monarchy that other religious groups did not have. Conversion of non-Orthodox and non-Russian subjects to the "tsar's faith" was a recurrent feature of the nineteenth century, with hundreds of thousands of Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Greek Catholic peasants in the Baltic provinces and Northwestern Territory joining the Orthodox Church in the period between the 1830s and 1905 (see the contribution by James M. White in this forum). Some of these conversions were voluntary, others were forced. Since the mass conversions were not always sufficiently supported by the Orthodox Church's efforts to assimilate the new converts within the Orthodox faith, these led to the numerous cases of recalcitrancy, viewed as apostasy, since it was illegal to convert from Orthodoxy to other confessions.[16] The problem of apostasy highlighted the ascribed character of confession in the Russian Empire and gradually led to the development of the discourse on freedom of conscience.[17] Both conversions to Orthodoxy and the problem of apostasy shook the imperial multiconfessional order.

Confessions were not perceived in purely religious terms. Faith was understood not only as an individual concern but also as a communal matter. Thus, under some conditions confessions could become political categories. According to Mikhail Dolbilov, the conversions of Roman Catholics to Orthodoxy in 1867 were not conceived as religious conversions, but as a struggle against Catholicism, which was perceived as a social, cultural, and political threat to the imperial order in the western borderlands. From the

[16] Werth. The Tsar's Foreign Faiths; Vilma Žaltauskaitė. Interconfessional Rivalry in Lithuania after the Decree of Tolerance // Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima (Eds.). The Tsar, the Empire and the Nation: The Dilemmas of Nationalisation in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905–1915. Budapest, 2021. Pp. 113–140; Chiho Fukushima. The Struggle between Confessional and Nationalist Groups for the Chełm-Podlasian Region: The 1905 Decree of Tolerance and Former Uniates // Staliūnas and Aoshima. (Eds.). The Tsar, the Empire. Pp. 141–170; Mikhail Dolbilov. "Tsarskaia vera": Massovye obrashcheniia katolikov v pravoslaviie v severo-zapadnom krae rossiiskoi imperii (1860-e gg.) // Ab Imperio. 2006. No. 4. Pp. 225–270.

[17] On apostasy, see Werth. The Tsar's Foreign Faiths. Pp. 136–137, 243–249; Catherine Gibson and Irina Paert. Apostasy in the Baltic: Religious and National Indifference in Imperial Russia // Past & Present. 2022. Vol. 255. No. 1. Pp. 233–278. On freedom of conscience, see Randall A. Poole and Paul W. Werth (Eds.). Religious Freedom in Modern Russia. Pittsburgh, 2018.

point of view of the conversion activists, religious indifferentism and even atheism were preferable to Catholicism. The "tsar's faith" was thus not a religious notion but a secular one.[18]

From the standpoint of the imperial government, all confessions had a degree of rights to self-government and various territorial and economic privileges. This did not apply, however, to those who challenged religious orthodoxy: dissenters, Old Believers, sectarians, religious reformers, and mystics. The state provided the established confessions with instruments of control and banned heterodox minorities from access to legal privileges (establishing places of worship, registering civil acts, and publicizing their beliefs in print).[19] By the early twentieth century, faced with mounting pressure from modernizing elites and transnational organizations, the Russian imperial administration was forced to adopt policies that adhered to Western European standards of religious toleration, which led to a contradictory and potentially explosive situation: religious minorities received some rights in 1905 following the tsar's Manifesto on Religious Toleration, but the state still claimed the privileged status of Orthodoxy within the empire.

The multiconfessional order also came into tension with the process of "nationalizing Empire."[20] Confessions became reimagined in their relationship to the soul and body of the nation. The official ideology equated Orthodoxy with the monarchy and nationality, while in the eyes of the Slavophiles Orthodoxy and commune were essential components of the Russian nation (*narod*). As with Catholicism, Orthodoxy had a transnational character, but many bureaucrats and religious actors often associated it with the ethnic majority that followed that faith: thus the pairs "Pole and Roman Catholic,"[21] or "Russian and Orthodox," could be used as synonyms.

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[18] Dolbilov. "Tsarskaia vera." Pp. 225–270.

[19] Peter Waldron. Religious Toleration in Late Imperial Russia // Olga Crisp and Linda Edmonton (Eds.). Civil Rights in Imperial Russia. Oxford, 1989. Pp. 103–119; Thomas Marsden. The Crisis of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia: Bibikov System for Old Believers, 1841–1855. Oxford, 2015.

[20] Alexei Miller and Stefan Berger. Nationalizing Empires. Budapest, 2015; Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen. (Eds.). After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires. Boulder, 1997; Raphael Utz. Rußlands unbrauchbare Vergangenheit: Nationalismus und Außenpolitik im Zarenreich. Wiesbaden, 2008.

[21] On the genealogy of the former pair, see, e.g., Brian Porter-Szűcs. The Birth of the "Polak-Katolik" // Sprawy Narodowościowe. 2017. No. 49. https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/sn/article/view/sn.1280. On the latter, see Catherine Gibson. Geographies of Nationhood: Cartography, Science, and Society in the Russian Imperial Baltic. Oxford, 2022. P. 69.

Some scholars suggest describing the mid- to late nineteenth-century developments in terms of "nationalization of religion" (as a process that inscribed nationality into a religious framework).[22] The slippage between Russianness and Orthodoxy could also serve as a basis for non-Russians (*inorodtsy*) to claim rights and privileges as faithful subjects of the tsar (see White's article in this forum). On the other hand, heterodox confessional minorities such as Old Believers sometimes chose to emphasize their Russianness as a strategy to claim rights – with mixed results (as examined in Thomas Marsden's contribution). The relationship between religion and nationalism, however, was often complicated. During the Polish–Lithuanian uprisings of 1863–1864 the clergy played a discernible role.[23] The Greek Catholic clergy was active in Ukrainian national activism, while the Orthodox clergy was also involved in the contest between the Russian and Ukrainian national identities in late imperial Russia.[24] Even though historians previously regarded the role of Lutheranism in the Finnish, Latvian, and Estonian national movements as marginal, some recent works suggest that it was an underestimation.[25] In

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[22] This term is often paired with the "sacralization of nation," meaning the transfer of functions and means of representation from religious systems to the concept of the nation. See Martin Schulze-Wessel. Einleitung: Die Nationalisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa // Martin Schulze-Wessel (Ed.) Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa. Stuttgart, 2006. P. 7; Hartmut Lehmann. Die Säkularisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im 20. Jahrhundert. Varianten einer komplementären Relation // Hans-Christian Maner und Martin Schulze-Wessel (Eds.). Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen 1918–1939. Stuttgart, 2002. P. 23; Hartmut Lehmann and Peter van der Veer (Eds.). Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia. Princeton, 1999. P. 8. See also Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche. Einleitung // Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (Eds.). Nation und Religion in Europa: Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschafen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Frankfurt a. M., 2004. Pp. 11–23. For the sacralization of nation, see, most recently, Stefan Rohdewald. Sacralizing the Nation through Remembrance of Medieval Religious Figures in Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia. Leiden, 2022; Maria Falina. Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia. Serbian Nationalism and East Orthodox Christianity. London, 2022.

[23] A. Bendin. Problemy veroterpimosti v Severo-Zapadnom krae Rossiiskoi imperii (1863–1914). St. Petersburg, 2013.

[24] John-Paul Himka. Religion and Nationality in Western Ukraine: The Greek Catholic Church and the Ruthenian National Movement in Galicia, 1867–1900. Montreal, 1999; Ricarda Vulpius. Nationalisierung der Religion. Russifizierungspolitik und ukrainische Nationsbildung, 1860–1920. Wiesbaden, 2005; Anna Veronika Wendland. Die Russophilen in Galizien. Ukrainische Conservative zwischen Österreich und Rußland, 1848–1915. Vienna, 2001.

[25] Priit Rohtmets. Eestlaste usuelu. Looming, 2021. Pp. 1703–1721.

sum, the effects of the empire's nationalizing policy were often contrary to the stated objectives, since non-Russians did not enter into the political body of the empire.[26] As Darius Staliūnas and Yoko Aoshima maintain, neither an imperial nor a nationalist vision prevailed in the last decades of the old regime, and if "tsarist Russia in its last decade represented a nationalizing empire, it was only inconsistently and reluctantly so."[27]

National and Confessional Ambiguities in Borderlands

Stressing the diversity and multiethnicity of borderland as assets, several Eastern European historians, sociologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, and religious scholars see borderlands first and foremost as communication regions. The studies of East European borderlands often praise what they describe as a borderland phenomenon, a cultural hybridity, pluralism, or syncretism.[28] Most contributions in our forum deal with stories from borderland territories (see the articles by James White, Darius Staliūnas, Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, and James Kapaló) as regions that produced a variety of responses to the challenges of national ideologies and a multiplicity of loyalties and identities. Such territories, sometimes termed as communication regions, are characterized by dense inner interactions and multiple cultural practices and experiences.[29] Borderlands are also places of cooperation and confrontation. Several articles in our forum deal with various efforts to communicate different confessional, national, and imperial ideas

[26] Ilya Gerasimov et al. Novaia imperskaia istoriia Severnoi Evrazii. Vol. 2. Moscow, 2017. Pp. 286–287.

[27] Staliūnas and Aoshima. Introduction // Staliūnas and Aoshima (Eds.). The Tsar, the Empire. P. 13.

[28] For an overview, see, for instance, Liliya Berezhnaya. A View from the Edge: Borderland Studies and Ukraine, 1991–2013 // Harvard Ukrainian Studies. 2016. Vol. 34. Pp. 43–68; Tomasz Zarycki. Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe. London, 2014.

[29] Wolfgang E. J. Weber. Die Bildung von Regionen durch Kommunikation: Aspekte einer neuen historischen Perspektive // Carl A. Hoffmann and Rolf Kießling (Eds.). Kommunikation und Region. Konstanz, 2001. Pp. 58–59; Stefan Rohdewald, Stefan Wiederkehr, and David Frick. Transkulturelle Kommunikation im Großfürstentum Litauen und in den östlichen Gebieten der Polnischen Krone: Zur Einführung // Stefan Rohdewald, Stefan Wiederkehr, and David Frick (Eds.) Litauen und Ruthenien: Studien zu einer transkulturellen Kommunikationsregion (15.–18. Jahrhundert). Wiesbaden, 2007. Pp. 7–33; Daniel Ursprung. Südosteuropa als Kommunikationsregion: Reichweite und Randzonen eines historischen Raumes am Beispiel Albaniens und Rumäniens // Martina Baleva and Boris Previšić (Eds.). "Den Balkan gibt es nicht": Erbschaften im südöstlichen Europa. Cologne, 2016. Pp. 59–78.

and projects, the interactions between these forms of communication, and the longevity of such entanglements (see particularly the contributions of White and Kapaló).

Scholars of the region who try to scrutinize these forms of interaction tend to interpret the whole of East European history through the prism of borderlands. They argue along with Peter Sahlins that "the history of the world can be best observed from the frontier."[30] But, in this way, they also opt for putting "an end to the traditional divide and polemics separating the so-called Eurocentric and postcolonial historiographies."[31] These studies confirm the general observation of Omar Bartov and Eric D. Weitz as expressed in their book on the "shatterzones of empires":

> They are spaces-in-between, where identities are often malleable and control of the territory and the population is subject to dispute. Most often, borderlands are geographically or culturally distant from the seat of power, and states expend great energy trying to subsume and integrate them. Borderlands are therefore also constructs of the political imaginary and products of ideological fantasies.[32]

The idea of cultural interactions in border zones is also appealing for anthropologists and ethnographers dealing with the so-called East European borderland "grey zones," as territories "of ambiguity that severely challenges pervasive polarities such as we/they, friend/enemy and good/evil."[33] Religious anthropologists, in particular, focus on interconfessional situations, on "religion of the fringes" in modern Eastern Europe as seen from a historical perspective.[34] Catherine Wanner and Vlad Naumescu, for

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[30] Peter Sahlins. State Formation and National Identity in the Catalan Borderlands during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries // Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Eds.). Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers. Cambridge, 1998. P. 31.

[31] Andrea Graziosi. Viewing the Twentieth Century through the Prism of Ukraine: Reflections on the Heuristic Potential of Ukrainian History // Serhii Plokhy (Ed.). The Future of the Past: New Perspectives on Ukrainian History. Cambridge, MA, 2016. P. 115.

[32] Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz. Introduction // Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz. (Eds.). Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands. Bloomington, 2013. P. 1.

[33] Martin Demant Frederiksen and Ida Harboe Knudsen. Introduction: What Is a Grey Zone and Why Is Eastern Europe One? // Martin Demant Frederiksen and Ida Harboe Knudsen (Eds.). Ethnographies of Grey Zones in Eastern Europe: Relations, Borders and Invisibilities. London, 2015. P. 1.

[34] Natalka Boyko. Religion(s) et identité(s) en Ukraine: existe-t-il une "identité des confins"? // Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest. 2004. Vol. 35. No. 4. Pp. 37–74.

instance, scrutinize mutual influences in the history of the "churches in-between" (Greek Catholics and Pentecostalists).[35]

Other authors describe Ukrainian Christianity in general "as the middle-of-the road construction between the Orthodox and the Latin world,"[36] whereas the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) is sometimes seen as an institution searching for cross-border interconfessional exchange. One of the articles in a recent collection edited by Thomas Bremer and Andrii Krawchuk puts it as follows:

> Greek Catholic liminality has much in common with the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere of postmodernity that abhors essentialism, blurs dividing lines, delves into borderline zones, and focuses on marginalized existence. The UGCC is an example of how a pre-modern historical legacy acquires strikingly postmodern features.[37]

The issue of confessional ambiguity is often addressed in the context of studying borderland regions.[38] In this forum, White applies this term to the Baltic provinces, a zone where Lutheranism and Orthodoxy met at the end of the nineteenth century, to demonstrate the plurality of ways of engagement with denomination, which has a long history, not limited only to the age of nationalism. The tradition of a peaceful coexistence, of "local denominationalism,"[39] is often interpreted in such studies as a precondition for the current religious revival in some post-Soviet countries.

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[35] Catherine Wanner. Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism, Culture and Society after Socialism Series. Ithaca, 2007; Vlad Naumescu and Stéphanie Mahieu (Eds.). Churches In-Between: Greek Catholic Churches in Postsocialist Europe. Berlin, 2008; Vlad Naumescu. Modes of Religiosity in Eastern Christianity: Religious Processes and Social Change in Ukraine. Berlin, 2008.

[36] Vlad Naumescu. Religious Pluralism and the Imagined Orthodoxy of Western Ukraine // Chris Hann and the "Civil Religion" Group (Eds.). The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe. Berlin, 2006. Pp. 241–268.

[37] Yury P. Avvakumov. Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Past and Present // Andrii Krawchuk and Thomas Bremer (Eds.). Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis. Basingstoke, 2016. P. 30.

[38] Andreas Pietsch and Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (Ed.). Konfessionelle Ambiguität. Uneindeutigkeit und Verstellung als religiöse Praxis in der Frühen Neuzeit. Gütersloh, 2013.

[39] Catherine Wanner. An Affective Atmosphere of Religiosity: Animated Places, Public Spaces, and the Politics of Attachment in Ukraine and Beyond // Comparative Studies in Society and History. 2020. Vol. 62. No. 1. P. 71.

People In-Between and the Nationalization of Borderlands

The stories of churches as well as "people in-between" depict a somewhat polished image of a "borderland man."[40] As described by the Polish publicist Krzysztof Czyżewski, a man from the borderland is characterized by "tolerance, openness to dialogue, ability to rise above divisions, civic and neighborhood patriotism, universalism, freedom and responsibility, self-criticism, openness to the world and the art of remembrance."[41] Analogous images are to be found in different regional historical studies.[42] The main idea is to describe the mode of life of borderland people, with their complex hierarchies of identities and loyalties. The tradition of borderland coexistence and confessional ambiguities stretches back to earlier periods. Already in early modern times it was "a story of toleration, of finding a set of practices … that allowed individuals and communities to co-exist, sometimes cheek by jowl with people who were hated, or, at the very least, held for incorrigibly pig-headed."[43] In the shadows of the idealization of border experiences lies the opposite side of it – a history of violence and separation, of borderlands into bloodlands.

The crucial questions in this respect are what turns a once peaceful borderland into a zone of violence and competition,[44] and what is the difference in this aspect between the premodern and modern history of imperial borderlands? There is no single answer to these questions. Recent studies on premodern and modern continental empires focus on imperial situations and hybridity, which determined the maintaining of social tranquility and problematizing of hierarchical order.[45] There were, of course, exceptions,

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[40] Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah, and Marius Turda. Identities In-Between in East-Central Europe. London, 2020.

[41] Krzysztof Czyżewski. Ścieżka pogranicza. Sejny, 2001; Idem. Linia powrotu: Zapiski z pogranicza. Sejny, 2008.

[42] An example is the revival of the historical term "Homo Bucovinensis." See Anatoliy Kruglashov. Bukovyna: A Border Region with a Fluctuating Identity // Journal of Ukrainian Studies. 2010–2011. Vol. 35–36. Pp. 121–140.

[43] David Frick. Five Confessions in One City: Multiconfessionalism in Early Modern Wilno // A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World. Leiden, 2011. P. 439.

[44] Alexander V. Prusin. The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992. Oxford, 2010.

[45] See the forum "Carnal Politics and Knowledge in the Imperial Situation," in Ab Imperio. 2016. Vol. 17. No. 2. Pp. 28–181; and the thematic issue "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly": Hybridity, the Nationalizing Empire, and Imperialist Nationalism," in Ab Imperio. 2020. Vol. 21. No. 3.

such as the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire or the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire. Furthermore, premodern times witnessed waves of violence, described, for example, by Barbara Skinner in her research on the religious roots of the eighteenth-century Kolyivshchyna uprising as a borderland phenomenon.[46]

The nationalization of borderlands and the popularization of national ideologies in general brought with it the end of the world of imperial borderlands and the beginning of new waves of violence and migration. The question of how and why this happened is partly answered by Bartov and Weitz, who stress that modernization processes on borderlands caused profound transformations and led

> to the great intensification of population separation via migrations, forced deportations, and genocides, as it has, of course, transformed the nature of war. The claim that people were essentially constituted as nations and that their destiny would be fulfilled when they acquired their own state proved vibrant, powerful, and alluring; in its racial form, as under the Nazis, it could become limitless in its violence and in its conception of the territory appropriate to the dominant race.[47]

After World War I, the countries that either came into existence as a result of the breakup of empires or acquired some former imperial territories confronted the challenges of managing ethnically and religiously diverse populations. As Bartov and Weitz write, "Nationalism created minorities and majorities."[48] In some cases, as in Estonia and Latvia in the 1920s, ethnic and confessional minorities gained new institutional support and credence from interwar governments. In other cases, however, local populations could not always afford to remain indifferent to nationalist politics, especially in cases where different rights were given to the majority and minorities.[49] In interwar Romania, as examined in the articles by Cindrea-Nagy and Kapaló in this forum, the Romanian state and Romanian Orthodox Church pursued policies in the borderlands to persecute and assimilate confessional minorities, who were perceived as a threat to the idea of the Romanian nation and nationalizing church. The state attempted to force "borderland people" to

[46] Barbara Skinner. Borderlands of Faith: Reconsidering the Origins of a Ukrainian Tragedy // Slavic Review. 2005. Vol. 64. No. 1. Pp. 88–116.
[47] Bartov and Weitz. Shatterzones of Empires. P. 5.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Kate Brown. A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland. Cambridge, MA, 2004; Catherine Gibson. Geographies of Nationhood: Cartography, Science, and Society in the Russian Imperial Baltic. Oxford, 2022. Pp. 200–209.

decide between "us" and "them," attempting to destroy multiple identities and loyalties in the process.[50]

Confession and National Indifference in Dialogue: Studying Reactions from Below

The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the scope and range of historical approaches that push us to think beyond and between nations as traditional categories of historical inquiry. One explanation for the modern phenomenon of nationalization of borderlands has been the theory of cultural ambiguity. The characteristic feature of all contact zones, their cultural pluralism, has long been a research subject for medievalists, early modern historians, and scholars of Islam, as well as anthropologists of borderlands. Many of these scholars underline the higher level of ambiguity in relation to powers and institutions in borderlands in comparison with central regions. The German historian Thomas Bauer, a leading expert on Islamic cultures, mentions the different phases of ambiguity tolerance. Bauer also uses the term "ambiguity training" in this context and points to different periods in history when there were attempts to accommodate, at the political level, these ambiguous relationships.[51] For the modern period, there have been increasing efforts by historians to examine these strategies for dealing with borderland cultural ambiguities from a bottom-up perspective. Notably, Philipp Ther, in his work on Upper Silesia, defines three different strategies that borderland populations have used to cope with "compulsory unambiguity" (*Zwang zur Eindeutigkeit*) in the age of nationalism: (1) to join one of the competing movements, (2) to resist and establish regional movements, and (3) to retreat into the private sphere and maintain distance from political activities in general, including competing nationalisms.[52]

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[50] See, for example, Irina Liveseanu. Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930. Ithaca, 1995.

[51] See the recent English translation of his groundbreaking study: Thomas Bauer. A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam. New York, 2021. For early modern history, see Pietsch and Stollberg-Rilinger. (Eds.). Konfessionelle Ambiguität. For anthropological studies of borderland ambiguities, see Mathijs Pelkmans. Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia. Ithaca, 2006; Mathijs Pelkmans (Ed.). Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies. London, 2013; Daphne Berdahl. Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland. Berkeley, 1999.

[52] Philipp Ther. Caught in Between: Border Regions in Modern Europe // Bartov and Weitz (Eds.). Shatterzones of Empire. P. 486. Also see Brenden Karch.

On this latter point, the work of Jeremy King, Pieter Judson, Tara Zahra, and James Bjork on "national indifference" has been particularly influential for drawing attention to the limitations and failures of nationalist projects to nurture national loyalties among local populations.[53] They were influenced by the early work of Gary Cohen on Germans of Prague and the legal studies of Gerald Stourzh.[54] These studies of "national indifference" focused on the inhabitants of imperial and postimperial borderlands, where national activists struggled to mobilize the populace. Nationalist projects often held little appeal for locals who identified more strongly with local, religious, or class-based communities, for people who engaged in "side-switching" between imposed national identifications, or for individuals who proved hard to classify into national categories, for example, as a result of multilingualism or of so-called mixed marriages.[55] These studies – and the subsequent wave of scholarship they inspired – sought to reevaluate teleological narratives of "national awakening" and highlight the gap that often existed between elite nationalist rhetoric, on the one hand, and experiences and practices of everyday life, on the other (the article by Staliūnas in this forum mounts a similar challenge to Lithuanian nationalist historiography).[56]

Historians of the Russian Empire have recently started to reflect on the impact of this "national indifference" historiography, emerging from Habsburg studies, in light of developments in their own field leading to a rethinking of the relationship between empire and nationalism. The approach of new imperial history, anchored in the journal *Ab Imperio*, calls for the study of the imperial situation characterized by sociocultural and political

Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960. Cambridge, MA, 2018; James E. Bjork. Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland. Ann Arbor, 2008.

[53] Jeremy King. Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics. Princeton, 2002; Pieter M. Judson. Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria. Cambridge, MA, 2006; Bjork. Neither German nor Pole; Tara Zahra. Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948. Cambridge, MA, 2008.

[54] Gerald Stourzh. The Multinational Empire Revisited: Reflections on Late Imperial Austria // Austrian History Yearbook. 1992. Vol. 23. Pp. 1–22; Gary B. Cohen. The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914. Princeton, 1981.

[55] Tara Zahra. Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis // Slavic Review. 2010. Vol. 69. P. 106.

[56] For more recent historiography building on the concept of "national indifference," see Karch. Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland; Maarten Van Ginderachter and John Fox (Eds.). National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe. London, 2020.

heterogeneity.[57] Within this imperial turn, the concept of "national indifference" by scholars of the Russian Empire has been met with mixed reactions. For some, the discussions of various forms of "national indifference" are closely aligned with new imperial history and can provide us with a useful perspective for understanding forms of nationalism, national ambiguity, and hybridity characteristic of Russia's imperial situation. A special issue in the *Journal of Baltic Studies* used "national indifference" as a lens through which to examine how German speakers (Baltic Germans) in the Baltic provinces and interwar Estonia and Latvia navigated between concepts of nationhood, loyalty to the empire and tsar, socioeconomic and class-based identifications, and a sense of belonging to their locality (*Heimat*).[58]

Others, however, argue that "national indifference" is helpful only in a more limited sense as a metaphor rather than an analytical category or concept.[59] As Alexei Miller argues, due to the different trajectory of nationalism in the Russian Empire, where the tsarist government restricted the activities of mass cultural organizations for much longer than in the Habsburg Empire, "national indifference" in imperial Russia manifested itself primarily as a "political strategy" among elite borderland groups in the Baltic provinces and Bessarabia, and among the Krajowcy (Polish-speaking nobility in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania) and "Little Russian" nobility.[60] The attitudes and behavior of these elite groups are characterized as a form of strategic "national indifference," whereby they sought to safeguard their socioeconomic and political status and maintain loyalty to the empire against what they perceived as the destabilizing currents of nationalist ideologies and political activism.

[57] Marina Mogilner. New Imperial History: Post-Soviet Historiography in Search of a New Paradigm for the History of Empire and Nationalism // Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest. 2014. Vol. 45. No. 2. Pp. 25–67. On the dialogue between these historiographies, see Alexander Semyonov. Finding Empire behind Multinationality in the Habsburg Case: Interview with Pieter Judson // Ab Imperio. 2019. Vol. 20. No. 1. Pp. 25–43.
[58] Katja Wezel. Introduction: German Community – German Nationality? Baltic German Perceptions of Belonging in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century // Journal of Baltic Studies. 2017. Vol. 48. No. 1. Pp. 1–11.
[59] Alexei Miller. "National Indifference" as a Political Strategy? // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2019. Vol. 20. No. 1. P. 64.
[60] Miller. National Indifference. Pp. 67–71; Karsten Brüggemann and Katja Wezel. Nationally Indifferent or Ardent Nationalists? On the Options for Being German in Russia's Baltic Provinces, 1905–17 // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2019. Vol. 20. No. 1. P. 42; Andrei Cusco. Russians, Romanians, or Neither? Mobilization of Ethnicity and "National Indifference" in Early 20th-Century Bessarabia // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2019. Vol. 20. No. 1. Pp. 7–38.

Aside from these reservations about the application of "national indifference" to the specific Russian imperial context, many scholars have acknowledged larger, underlying problems with the concept itself. As Tara Zahra herself notes, the term historically "carries a pejorative connotation" and was deployed as a "negative and nationalist category" by activists to refer to populations, often construed as "backward" and "anti-modern," who did not embrace the nationalist agenda.[61] Thus, framing historical analyses of this phenomenon using the same rhetoric as the nationalists who scorned it risks conflating "categories of practice" with "categories of analysis."[62] Others also note how "indifference" carries "connotations of inactivity and therefore risks underestimating people and ethnic groups as historical agents."[63] The authors of the concept, however, used it for the opposite reason, to understand otherwise invisible forms of agency. Moreover, by presenting national indifference as a counterpoint to nationality identity, we must also be wary of how "it turns non-identity into another form of identity, insofar as it focuses attention on the outcome and assigns someone a label, or a personality." Finally, despite numerous attempts over the years to bring more focus and clarify to the concept, the term still remains vague.[64] Also, the intellectual situation has changed since the time that the concept entered circulation, and today there are many more alternative and nuanced concepts to counter the nationalist interpretations of history compared to two decades ago.

While we acknowledge these limitations, we believe that "national indifference" still has the potential to enrich our understanding of the Russian Empire and postimperial regions. We regard "national indifference" as one of the possible reactions to policies of "nationalizing empires" that have occurred in borderlands since mid-nineteenth century. This concept is one of the ways to describe lack of mobilization rather than mobilization, as well as the ambivalence or disregard of social actors toward nationalizing projects. Rather than taking "indifference" as a fixed category or integral concept, we use it as a lens through which to examine practices, processes,

[61] Zahra. Imagined Non-Communities. Pp. 98, 104–105.

[62] Rogers Brubaker. Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice: A Note on the Study of Muslims in European Countries of Immigration // Ethnic and Racial Studies. 2013. Vol. 36. No. 1. Pp. 1–8.

[63] Per Bolin and Christina Douglas. "National Indifference" in the Baltic Territories? A Critical Assessment // Journal of Baltic Studies. Vol. 48. No. 1. P. 14.

[64] Maarten Van Ginderachter and John Fox. Introduction: National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe // Ginderachter and Fox (Eds.). National Indifference. https://bit.ly/3doLJMy.

attitudes, and actions that otherwise might remain "illegible" to historians.[65] We do not categorize populations into a fixed category of the "indifferent," but instead use it as a way to ask questions about the contexts, situations, and places in which confessional and national loyalties manifested, such as in the case of Old Believers' petitioning for legal rights on the basis of their Russianness (Marsden) or Lithuanian-speaking peasants protesting against local authorities in defense of the closure of their church (Staliūnas).[66] On the reverse side, it also encourages us to pay attention to the circumstances in which people remained more ambivalent to emerging ideas about nationhood (Marsden), practiced their faith in confessionally ambiguous ways (White), or prioritized other loyalties, such as maintaining their calendar and other eschatological concepts of time (Cindrea-Nagy and Kapaló) or loyalty to the tsar (Staliūnas and Kapaló).

We argue that approaching "national indifference" in these ways is especially important for understanding the entanglements between confession and nationalizing processes. As noted above, the salience of religious forms of identification as part of the systems of the "confessional state" and the "multiconfessional establishment" in the Russian Empire meant that religious sentiment and commitment were important factors that developed alongside, and interacted with, the nationalizing discourses and policies that became increasingly dominant in the first decades of the twentieth century (see articles by Cindrea-Nagy and Kapaló on interwar Romania). Scholars have examined how indifference to nationalist concerns was produced by, and interacted with, other competing forms of loyalty to class, family, gender, or locality.[67] Religion, however, has thus far been underrepresented in studies of "national indifference," which have tended to privilege questions of national, ethnolinguistic, or socioeconomic belonging over confessional ones. Notable works dealing directly with religion and "national indifference" include James Bjork's study of the role of Roman Catholicism as a form of solidarity and community that inhibited Polish and German nationalist projects in Upper Silesia, Lucian Leustean's use of "national indifference" as

[65] Pamela Ballinger. History's "Illegibles": National Indeterminacy in Istria // Austrian History Yearbook. 2010. Vol. 43. Pp. 116–137.

[66] On situational approaches to "national indifference," see Pieter Judson and Tara Zahra. Introduction: Sites of National Indifference // Austrian History Yearbook. 2012. Vol. 43. Pp. 21–27.

[67] David Feest. Spaces of "National Indifference" in Biographical Research on Citizens of the Baltic Republics, 1918–1940 // Journal of Baltic Studies. 2017. Vol. 48. No. 1. Pp. 55–66.

a starting point for analyzing Orthodox hierarchs in late nineteenth-century Bukovina, and Andrei Cusco's research on political strategies of "national indifference" among clerical elites in early twentieth-century Bessarabia.[68] Moreover, as Catherine Gibson and Irina Paert have shown elsewhere, large numbers of peasants in the Russian Empire's Baltic provinces moved back and forth between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century as they navigated a marketplace of different confessional and imperial loyalties, socioeconomic opportunities, and pressure from relatives and neighbors. Their attitudes and behavior toward confessional matters display many parallels with kinds of fluid, hybrid, or oscillating national identifications studied by scholars of "national indifference."[69]

Contributions to the Forum

Building on these observations, we invited contributors to this forum to reflect through the lens of social histories of religion on what concepts such as "national indifference" might bring to our understanding of the complex interactions between confession, nationhood, and other forms of loyalty in imperial and postimperial borderlands. Since much literature on multiconfessionalism looks at matters very much from the top down, in this forum we would like to redress this. We encouraged the authors to examine how different confessional groups reacted and responded to various interventions from churches, the imperial/state authorities, and nationalist promoters, what kinds of new questions and insights a perspective of "indifference" might yield from their source materials, what the limitations of such an approach are, and what scholars of religion can contribute to the broader discussions about cases where nationhood did not emerge as the primary basis for forging a sense of loyalty, community, and belonging. Through interrogating these questions, the articles in the forum respond to calls for further regional case studies exploring how the dynamics of confessional belonging, nationalist activism, and forms of indifference manifested themselves in various ways across different regions of the Russian Empire and independent successor states.

The first three contributors (Marsden, White, and Staliūnas) examine varying popular responses of religious and ethnic minorities in the imperial

[68] Bjork. Neither German nor Pole; Lucian N. Leustean. Eastern Orthodoxy and National Indifference in Habsburg Bukovina, 1774–1873 // Nations and Nationalism. 2018. Vol. 24. No. 4. Pp. 1117–1141; Cusco. Russians, Romanians, or Neither?

[69] Gibson and Paert. Apostasy in the Baltic Provinces.

era to interventions by churches, the imperial administration, and nationalizing processes. In contrast to the majority of previous studies on the Russian Empire, which have examined "indifference" to nationhood as primarily an elite phenomenon, the authors demonstrate how looking at religion enables us to focus on the actions of so-called ordinary people.[70] As Pieter Judson and Tara Zahra note:

> Indifference refers to the attempt to maintain a degree of choice in one's life, in historical situations where such choices are becoming drastically limited, either by official fiat or local activist pressure. "Indifference" ultimately constituted a form of agency for citizens in a world of competing nationalist movements and nationalizing states.[71]

By examining various forms of self-representation, emotional alignments, collective petitioning, and acts of resistance, the articles present arguments in favor of taking the grassroots agency of peasants and the lower classes seriously.

Marsden examines popular responses to nationalizing processes among the Russian Empire's Old Believers to highlight the limitations of projects to forge a shared sense of Russianness. Marsden traces the changes that took place over the course of the nineteenth century in the imperial legal system, from granting rights to subjects on the basis of confession to increasing weight of ethnic claims by the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, Marsden shows how the language of nationalism was co-opted by Old Believers to petition for civil rights. Through a detailed analysis of the discourse of nationalism used in petitions and appeals from different denominations of Old Believers across the empire, Marsden argues that nationalist ideas spread earlier and more widely among the lower estates, thanks in part to the higher literacy rates among Old Believers. On the other hand, he cautions against overestimating the power of nationalist claims to replace legal or religious ones. Old Believer expressions of loyalty to the monarchy were situational in character. The petitions and appeals were the work of nationalist mediators and highly coordinated petition campaigns. A large proportion of the population remained apathetic and national solidarity across social divides remained weak. In this regard, Marsden shows how groups of religious dissenters, such as Old Believers, exposed the fundamen-

[70] On elite approaches to "national indifference" in the Russian Empire, see Miller. National Indifference. Pp. 66–67. On national indifference and history writing from below, see Zahra. Imagined Noncommunities. P. 98.
[71] Judson and Zahra. Introduction: Sites of National Indifference. P. 27.

tal challenges posed by confessional difference to the process of creating a cohesive Russian national identity and how the Old Believers themselves attempted to use this ambiguity for their own ends.

White's article examines the competing confessional, national, and imperial claims of religious actors on the small Swedish-speaking community of Aibofolk ("island people") – reminiscent of *tutejszy/tutejsi* ("people from here")[72] – living on the remote island of Vormsi located off the western coast of the Russian Empire's Estland province. In the period from the 1870s to 1905, the islanders' traditional adherence to Lutheranism and the Baltic German-dominated manorial economy system was dramatically disrupted both by the arrival of the Swedish Evangelical Protestant Mission claiming the islanders as part of the Swedish nation and by the activities of a mixed Russian-Estonian group of Orthodox clergy seeking to expand Orthodoxy in the Baltic provinces to more closely connect the region's inhabitants to the Russian Empire. White uses the concept of "national indifference" to interpret events on Vormsi against the grain of the dominant Swedish national historiography: rather than seeing the conversions to Orthodoxy simply as a Russian imperial intervention to weaken Swedish sentiment, he constructs a vivid microhistory of the mixed reactions of the islanders who navigated between vying confessional, national, and political loyalties to try to carve out better lives for themselves. White shows how some islanders responded with apathy or indifference, or remained attached to older forms of identification, such as social estate and local belonging. Others approached conversion to Orthodoxy instrumentally, hoping that converting to the "tsar's faith" and demonstrating loyalty to the imperial government would help them obtain support for their ongoing struggles with their Baltic German landlord and against local rival factions within the volost administration. Among the close-knit island community, confessional ambiguities developed as the Aibofolk eschewed fixed confessional labels and blurred denominational boundaries between Lutheranism, evangelical Protestantism, and Orthodoxy in their worship practices. The logistical challenges of providing pastoral support to Orthodox parishioners in this remote imperial outpost and the mounting dissatisfaction among the islanders with how belonging to the Orthodox Church failed to improve their livelihoods ultimately led many to return to Lutheranism after 1905 and

[72] Morgane Labbé. National Indifference, Statistics and the Constructivist Paradigm: The Case of the Tutejsi ("the People from Here") in Interwar Polish Censuses // Van Ginderachter and Fox (Eds.). National Indifference. Pp. 161–179.

to the subsequent collapse of the Vormsi Orthodox parish. White reflects on this dramatic episode in Vormsi's history to highlight the importance of studying the entanglements between the various competing projects to build confessional, national, and imperial loyalties at the microhistory scale and how minority communities responded to these interventions by adapting their confessional behavior in strategic ways.

Staliūnas's article shifts the geographical focus to another borderland region of the Russian Empire, the Northwestern Territory, to examine the tensions that erupted between parishioners, clergy, and the local authorities during the so-called Kražiai massacre of 1893. Peasants in Kovna province self-organized to protest the closure of Roman Catholic churches and were violently driven away by Cossack forces. The event has been enshrined in Lithuanian and Polish memory as a heroic act of religious and national struggle by Lithuanian peasants against the tsarist regime. Staliūnas, however, provides persuasive evidence to counter this narrative, arguing that the protesters were mobilized by the collective concerns of the religious community, and the defense of the church was detached in their minds from nationalist concerns. The church defenders felt a strong sense of belonging and solidarity with their Roman Catholic religious community and regarded the Kražiai church and prayer house as their collective property, having invested funds into the construction of the house of prayer and its maintenance.[73] The protestors perceived the threat of the closure of their church as a violation of an unwritten social contract that existed between them, the tsar, and the imperial and religious authorities. Staliūnas raises important questions about the limits of indifference and under what circumstances peasants were mobilized to step up and defend what they felt was important and meaningful to them.[74]

Religion is also crucial for understanding the consequences of nationalism in the twentieth century. The articles by Cindrea-Nagy and Kapaló demonstrate how confessional identities remained salient during the interwar period and how, especially in borderland regions, religious minorities often had an uneasy coexistence with (if not outright resistance to) the homogenizing efforts of interwar states. Cindrea-Nagy examines the important continuities between religious practices and worldviews spanning

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[73] See also, Darius Staliūnas. Why Catholics Rebel: Tsarist Confessional Policy as a Catalyst of Grassroots Opposition in the Western Borderlands // Canadian Slavonic Papers. 2022. Vol. 64. No. 1. Pp. 64−88.

[74] Daniel Brett. Indifferent but Mobilized: Rural Politics during the Interwar Period in Eastern and Western Europe // Central Europe. 2018. Vol. 16. No. 2. Pp. 65–80.

the revolutionary divide that framed the articulation of peasant discontent to nationalization in interwar Romania. Bessarabian twentieth-century ethnic communities have recently been studied by Cusco in the context of the "national indifference" paradigm. He comes to the conclusion that "national indifference in this period was not limited to alternative projects challenging mainstream imperial or national visions." Importantly, most of the Bessarabian peasants demonstrated various forms of resistance to and/or noninvolvement in strategies of national mobilization both within the Russian Empire and in interwar Romania.[75] Cusco, as mentioned above, is among the few historians who use "national indifference" to urge other historians to pay attention to religious actors. For him, indifference to the national mobilization efforts of the Bessarabian church establishment was caused by loyalty to the Russian imperial state and "opposed to the national faction among the local clergy."[76]

Cindrea-Nagy goes further than Cusco, not only chronologically, but also beyond the level of clergy in assessing the perception of national projects by interwar Romanian peasant borderland society. She scrutinizes the ambiguous attitudes toward the church calendar reform introduced by the Romanian government as part of Romanian nation-building, particularly in Bessarabia and in Romanian Moldavia. The calendar reform by the Romanian authorities was an attempt to tackle the problem of religious minorities, who were perceived as a threat to both the state and the nationalized Romanian Orthodox Church. Cindrea-Nagy argues that the church calendar reform was seen by some communities as a challenge to the traditional world order, or even as heresy. As a result, a movement known as the Old Calendarism came into being. It promoted a distancing not only from the modernizing and nationalizing efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Church but also from the Romanian state's attempts to promote homogeneity in borderland areas. Cindrea-Nagy considers the concept of time and apocalyptic feeling as factors that create a sense of group identity. Furthermore, she affirms that faithfulness to the Julian calendar by the peasant communities in the postimperial borderlands was a sign of maintaining tradition as opposed to accepting the nationalized religion of interwar Romania. Preservation of the old calendar meant keeping locals' in-betweenness intact, in spite of all the pressures from the church and state to nationalize.[77]

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[75] Cusco. Russian, Romanians, or Neither?

[76] Ibid. P. 27.

[77] Fellerer, Pyrah, and Turda. Identities In-Between.

Another religious minority, the so-called Inochentists (*innokent'evtsy*), is the subject of the article by Kapaló. The Inochentists were a peasant-based millenarist movement, with significant elements of lived and existential eschatology. Kapaló gives voice to these largely illiterate Moldavian peasants who were persecuted as a religious minority and whom the interwar Romanian state tried to assimilate in the 1920s–1940s. He challenges the representation of Inochentists as ignorant and superstitious, and presents a more nuanced and complex interpretation of the movement. Kapaló's article highlights a paradox: while Inochentists were persecuted as heretics in the Russian Empire by Orthodox missionaries, they retained eschatological forms of popular monarchism and traditional notions of "sacred time," which were later perceived as a sign of disloyalty by the Romanian state. The peculiar survival of the imperial myth among the largely illiterate sectarians and its misinterpretation by the Romanian authorities highlight how the transition from the imperial to the postimperial order was full of tensions and contradictions. Kapaló argues that Romania strived for national integration through the religious homogenization of the population, and in this it differed from imperial Russia's "confessional state" system, which was based on a process of co-opting different faith groups. In the case of Inochentists, their eschatological beliefs, popular monarchism, loyalty to their communities and leaders, and preference for Church Slavonic as the sacred language held more weight than loyalty to the new Romanian nation and state.

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Our forum addresses the problem of indifference in relation to confession, and processes of nationalizing empire and nationalist mobilization in imperial and postimperial polities. Looking at the challenges posed by nationalism to the Russian imperial "confessional state" through the lens of social histories of religion enables us to examine the interactions between multiple loyalties at the grassroots level. Religion opens up new ways for studying the appeal of nationalism, and lack thereof, by expanding our focus on forms of "national indifference" beyond elites in the Russian Empire. In this way, the forum contributes to the general trend in imperial studies that also encompasses religious studies. Bringing together the confessional and imperial turns,[78] our authors indeed move "from 'formal configurations' of the Church to local levels of practice and the institutionalization of religi-

[78] See, Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2012. Vol. 13. No. 3. Special issue: Freedom of Conscience in Russia.

osity, and, beyond studies of Orthodox Christianity, to imperial aspects of religious studies."[79]

Through their rich analyses of sources such as petitions, diaries, and police reports, the authors of the forum highlight the diverse reactions of the lower classes and peasant populations to the efforts of churches, imperial/state authorities, and promoters of nationalizing agendas to intervene in their lives, whether from the perspective of the empire's non-Russian populations (such as speakers of Lithuanian, Swedish, and Romanian/Moldovan) or from the viewpoint of confessional minorities and dissenting groups (for instance, Old Believers, Old Calendarists, and Inochentists). Examining the interactions of confessional, imperial, and national loyalties among non-elite populations in borderland contexts reveals how borderlands multiply these complexities, producing new forms of hybridity and confessional ambiguity. Many of the contributors base their research on multilingual archival materials located outside of the imperial center, in today's Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, and Moldova, demonstrating the importance of regional case studies for bringing new perspectives on how church and imperial/state policies were actually implemented on the ground and how they were received by borderland inhabitants. The forum also raises new questions and directions for research, such as the need for further studies of the interactions between confession and nationalizing processes in other Russian imperial and postimperial border regions, such as the Caucasus, Ukraine, and Central Asia, which are not represented in the present forum.

SUMMARY

This is the introduction to the thematic forum "Confession, Loyalty, and National Indifference," which includes five articles that address the problem of emerging collective identity through the entanglement of complementing and conflicting forms of groupness: religious, political, and ethnic. The introductory essay conceptually frames these studies in terms of national indifference and confessional ambiguity, underscoring the role of religious collective identities in forging other forms of groupness – ethnocultural and political.

[79] Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Jan Kusber, Marina Mogilner, and Alexander Semyonov. New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire // Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (Eds.). Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire. Leiden, 2009. P. 16.

Резюме

Эссе представляет собой введение в форум “Вероисповедание, лояльность и национальная индифферентность”. Форум объединяет пять статей, посвященных проблеме формирующейся коллективной идентичности через переплетение взаимодополняющих и конфликтующих форм группности: религиозной, политической и этнической. Вводное эссе концептуализирует включенные в форум исследования в терминах национальной индифферентности и конфессиональной неопределенности, подчеркивая роль религиозной коллективной идентичности в формировании других форм группности – этнокультурной и политической.