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Ernst Bruckmüller. *Nation Österreich: Kulturelles Bewußtsein und gesellschaftlich-politische Prozesse*. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1996. 465 pp. DM 98.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-205-98000-1.

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Being and Becoming Austrian

Ernst Bruckmüller's *Nation Oesterreich* was initially published in 1984, and a second, revised and expanded edition appeared last year, among many other publications related to Austria's "millennium."^[1] Bruckmüller, professor of history at the University of Vienna, was the research director for "Ostarrichi-Oesterreich: Menschen-Mythen-Meilensteine, 996-1996," a split-site exhibition in St. Poelten and Waidhofen an der Ybbs in Lower Austria, that was organized by the Austrian federal provinces to commemorate the millennial anniversary of "Austria." He co-edited, in this capacity, a 736 page catalogue with Peter Urbanitsch to go along with it.^[2]

In the introduction to *Nation Oesterreich*, Bruckmüller discusses the role of myth and memory for group identities and the evolution of the concept of "nation." In this ambitious and well-informed book, he attempts to relate the historically malleable concept of "nation" from the Middle Ages to the present to the equally malleable territories, institutions, political regimes and ideologies that have been associated with the term "Austria" from 996 to the Second Republic. Bruckmüller addresses the feudal foundations of Austria (from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries); the imperial ideology and institutions of the Habsburg empire from the beginning of the sixteenth century up to the French revolution; the rise of German-Austrian nationalism (and other nationalisms) in the Austrian empire in the nineteenth century; the problems of German-Austrian identity from 1918 through 1945; and the development of a distinct

Austrian national identity since 1945.

This book is not an attempt to construe continuity where there was little or none. For example, Bruckmüller is ironic about the Austrian "discovery" of its 950 years of history in 1946, one year after the demise of Nazi Germany's "1000-year Reich," and makes the following observation about the first national celebration of the Ostarrichi codex: "[Austrian Federal President] Karl Renner took this occasion to demonstrate to the Austrians that they were so autonomous and unique that they had the right to constitute themselves as their own nation" (p. 15).

Bruckmüller works like a historical navigator who wants to reconstruct the various tacks in Austrian historical discourse about Austria. His objective is to relate how the images, vocabulary, context, and primary points of reference in Austrian narratives about Austria have shifted in the course of time and ultimately been incorporated (or not) into what it means to Austrians to be Austrian today.

The second chapter of his book (pp. 35-87) addresses popular and academic controversies about the concept of the "Austrian nation" in the Second Republic, and provides an overview of the results of empirical social research on the evolution of Austrian national consciousness in the past thirty years. His survey of the debate that followed the publication of Karl Dietrich Erdmann's *Die Spur Oesterreichs in der deutschen Geschichte: Drei Staaten-zwei Nationen-ein Volk?* in 1989^[3] is a good

introduction to the problematic relationship of German to Austrian history and national identity as well as to the prevailing sentiments in the Austrian historical community.

As far as the results of empirical social surveys go, the numbers look good for Austria: 80 percent of Austrians consider themselves a “nation” and a somewhat more cautious 12 percent feel that Austria is in the process of becoming one. Sections in the third chapter of this book that also rely on empirical surveys (pp. 114-54) seem to indicate that the Austrians have a relatively stable repertoire of positive as well as negative self-images and that the neighboring countries’ perceptions of Austria and the Austrians are relatively stable and predictable, too. As far as the statistics go, Austrian identity is not an empirical problem.

Unlike Josef Langer in his recent HABSBUrg review of *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, Bruckmueller seems to have a bit more faith in these “hard figures.” He is not especially concerned about the process of European integration as potentially detrimental to the development of the Austrian national identity because it does not seem to have made any substantial inroads into the national identities of the “older” members of the European Union.

Langer mentions that almost one-third of Austrian seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds surveyed lack a feeling of belonging to a nation. He attributes this to the spread of consumerism, and questions the strength of regional identity and cultures in Austria: the *Bundeslaender* as the territorial, historical, and constitutional building blocks for an Austrian national identity. I find Langer’s lack of faith in local or regional Austrian identities striking because Bruckmueller goes to great efforts in his book to illustrate that the “provinces and provincial consciousness”—*Laender* and *Laenderbewusstsein*—represent continuities in Austrian history, and he posits them as constituent elements out of which Austrian identity or Austrian identities are made: landscapes, buildings, places of association and remembrance (pp. 87-102), local traditions, and the *staendische* institutions of the provinces that not only antedate the Habsburg “conquest” of Austria in the Middle Ages but also provide the historical and institutional substrata for today’s federal provinces (pp. 155-200).[4]

Local, regional, or provincial identity never appear to have been part of the Austrian identity problem, insofar as the inhabitants of Styria or Tyrol, for example, do have a sound sense of place and tradition: a combination

of common sense and established local narratives. However, problems have arisen in the past when the inhabitants of the *Laender* were confronted with being something more than provincial, such as “Austrian.” From this perspective, the problem of Austrian identity emerges when one moves from fundamentally intact local or regional forms of identity onto higher levels of generalization, abstraction, or institutionalization: how the parts of Austria are related to a larger Austrian whole which, in turn, has frequently assumed an intermediate position between the constituent parts of Austria and broader institutions or concepts, such as the “House of Austria,” “the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation,” “Germany,” or “German culture.”

Austrian identity, Bruckmueller argues, was not such a problem as long as the most abstract “community” to which the Austrians belonged was articulated or dictated by Austrian institutions, such as the relationship of the historical *Laender* to the dynasty, the Habsburg court and its ancillary aristocracy, the Roman Catholic Church, the military, and Josephinian bureaucracy (pp. 200-25). This “Austria” worked just fine from the top down, so to speak. It was a pre-modern success story, whose subsequent lack of prospects was dictated by a series of “failed revolutions.”

Bruckmueller identifies the origins of the failure of “old” Austria in the course of the nineteenth century with its inability to develop institutions providing the inhabitants of the monarchy with an opportunity to develop modes of participation and identification that worked from the bottom up. A.J.P. Taylor once observed that 1848 was a year in which “German history reached a turning-point and failed to turn,” and this is true of Austria history, too. The belated liberalism and dualism of the Compromise of 1867 failed to resolve the “nationalities question,” and liberal and national demands for more popular and “national” sovereignty in Austria-Hungary fed upon each other.

Bruckmueller devotes two sections of his book to the rise of nationalism in Austria. Under “identity problem one,” he discusses nation-building among the non-Germanic nations in the monarchy from 1848 through 1918 (pp. 237-76). “Identity problem two” is in some regards more provocative: “German Austrians from the ‘Holy’ to the ‘Greater German’ Empire” addresses the career and the problems of “linguistic nationalism” in Austria (pp. 276-317). This section provides an informative analysis of the relationship of German culture to Austrian culture, the concept of German-Austria, the am-

biguous relationship of “cultural and linguistic” Germans in Austria to (Protestant-Hohenzollern) Germany as well as (Catholic-Habsburg) Austria, and the development of Pan-Germanism in Austria.

The problem of Austrian identity for German-speakers shifted in the course of the nineteenth century due to the rise of German nationalism and Pan-Germanism. Concepts such as *deutsche Wissenschaft und Kultur* or a *deutsche Sprach- und Kulturnation* provided a larger and more “universal” community to which German-speaking Austrians, in particular elites, could belong, just as Germany, as an imperial political reality after 1871, reinterpreted what the concepts of “empire” and “German” and “German empire” meant.

Although Bruckmueller does not use this term, he describes well what I would call the “Austrian identity-exclusion double-bind”: “The Austrian Germans were ‘the Germans’ for Magyars, Czechs, and Slovenes (and immediate opponents in national confrontations), but the Germans in ‘the empire’ referred to themselves as ‘the Germans’” (p. 292). In the course of the nineteenth century, German-Austrians participated in the rise of German nationalism and defined themselves increasingly in terms belonging to a German “linguistic and cultural nation” that depreciated the cultures of non-Germanic “others.” However, after 1871, imperial Germany politically excluded German-Austrians from being truly “imperial Germans” (*Reichsdeutsche*). In this respect, German-Austrians had to find new modes of relating to a “German nation” that excluded them, and Bruckmueller describes how two “German nations” constituted themselves in the course of the nineteenth century.

One of the characteristics of the “second” German, or German-Austrian, nation was its ambiguity. The idea of one German nation did not correspond to the reality of two political empires, and Austria, as part of the “second” German yet multinational empire, had trouble politically legitimizing itself in linguistic and cultural terms. In other words, for German-Austrians, the linguistic and cultural criteria of national inclusion ran counter to the historical arguments German-Austrians could muster for the sake of “national” differentiation. Furthermore, the drawing power of the Habsburgs’ old program of multinational patriotism based on a allegiance to divinely ordained dynasty and a multinational community of interests (*Gott, Kaiser, Vaterland*) increasingly lost its drawing power in the course of the nineteenth century.

The German-Austrian confrontation with “the German” as the “self” and the “other” in the nineteenth cen-

tury played a much more important role in the development of the Austrian national identity in the twentieth century than the German-Austrian confrontation with the non-German nationalities of the monarchy. After 1918, Austrian national identity was, to a large extent, based on the desire for inclusion: wanting to be “German.” After 1945, Austrian identity and nation-building was followed by a process of dissociation: not wanting to be “German.”

The lack of continuity in what perhaps could be called an Austrian “national narrative” in the twentieth century is striking. Inside of thirty years in the first half of this century, Austrians were exposed to five different stories about Austria. There was the multinational Habsburg, yet German-Austrian story before 1918. This was followed by the (first) republican story about German-Austria that lacked credibility, not only because of the widespread doubts in the economic, political, and national viability of the state that culminated in various Anschluss schemes, but also because the Austrian left and right were committed more to their own ideologies than to the institutions of “bourgeois democracy.” After a “civil war” in 1934, the Austrians had a German-Austrian “Christian Corporative State”–“Austro-fascist” in some people’s diction–for four years that was explicitly anti-Pan-German and anti-National Socialist in ideological terms. Then the Austrians spend seven years as “Germans” in the Third Reich.

In 1945, Austrians had a second chance to have a “republican” history based on the lessons learned from the failure of the First Republic in 1934 and their experience as “Germans” in the German Reich from 1938 to 1945. The historiographical framework for the Second Republic was also determined to a great extent by Allied policy toward Austria: the Moscow Declaration of 1943 that formulated the reestablishment of a free and independent Austria as an Allied war objective, in addition to granting Austria the status of being the “first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression,” and the negotiation of the Austrian state treaty from 1947 through 1955, the conclusion of which was the prerequisite for the Austria’s unilateral declaration of permanent neutrality on October 26, 1955 after the evacuation of Allied occupational forces.

If one of the peculiarities of Austrian history has been the great extent to which Austria was *aussengesteuert* or “externally determined,” as Friedrich Heer maintained in his classic on the Austrian identity,[5] then the big dates in Austrian history in the past 150 years have been al-

most coextensive with the big dates in German history: 1848, 1866, 1871, 1918, 1933 (1934 for Austria), 1938 (1939 for Europe), 1945, 1949 (for Germany), 1955 (when the Federal Republic joined NATO six days before the Austrian State Treaty was signed on May 15), 1989. Austrian historiography has had a fundamentally *reactive* relationship to German historiography, because each time “the Germans” have redefined what German history means, “the Austrians” as German-Austrians have had to redefine themselves by reinterpreting their relationship to Germany and the German past.

In particular, Austrian historiography had to react to the imperial *kleindeutsch* “Prussification” of Germany after 1871, the “Nazification” of Germany after 1933, and the “Federal Republicanization” of Nazism and Germany after 1949. Bruckmueller is fully aware of how prevalent Pan-Germanism was among Austrian historians in the interwar period, and he is interested in pointing out those exceptional cases of anti-Pan-Germanic theoreticians of the Austrian nation between 1918 and 1938, who, since 1945, have assumed an important position in Austrian historiography because they built their theories of an autonomous Austrian nation on the “otherness” of Germany in its second and third imperial manifestations, not on the unity of the “German nation” as a historical, linguistic, cultural, or political entity.

Until 1945, attempts to define Austrian national identity relied on describing Austrians’ relationships to the various Germanys (as different historical, linguistic-cultural, and/or political communities) or, to put it simply, how Austria fit into some kind of larger narrative about the German-speaking world. After 1945, Austrian national discourse about being Austrian has been dictated to a much greater extent by the desire to get out of German history than to be included in it.

As Bruckmueller documents, the Third Reich did a very good job of eliminating most Pan-Germanism in Austria, and it helped, in this respect, to create the preconditions for the development of a much more autonomous and “smaller” Austrian national identity that sought distinctly Austrian points of reference. For example, after 1945 Austrian historians “discovered” that the *Laender* of the Habsburgs at the end of the fifteenth century formed a unit that corresponded roughly to the *Bundeslaender* of the Republic of Austria.

The three imperial points of reference in Austrian history—Habsburg, Hohenzollern, and Hitler—suddenly recede at this point, and the *Bundeslaender* provide a new federal point of reference that is neither imperial

nor Pan-German. As the historical building blocks of the Republic of Austria, the *Bundeslaender* define the limits of national frontiers, and after 1945 discourse on the Austrian national identity increasingly began to rely on those specifically Austrian cultural achievements, traditions, and institutions that provided criteria for national differentiation.

If the standard formula for a nation is a people that shares a common territory, language, culture, and history, the importance of the *Bundeslaender* as a territorial and a historical unit is obvious. The problems of a linguistic justification for the Austrian nation also are evident, although the idea of German as a “pluricentric” language has encouraged some Austrian philologists to argue that Austrian-German (*das oesterreichische Deutsch* or *Oesterreichisch*) should be viewed as an autonomous variant of German.[6] The absence of a widely accepted linguistic justification for the Austrian nation makes it exceptionally important to come up with criteria of cultural differentiation: one language, two cultures. In the realm of literature, the distinction between “literature in German” and “German literature” has political implications. The medium for Austrian literature is German; the authors and the literature, however, are Austrian. Austrian traditions, one could argue, were always substantially different from German ones. What the Austrians had to learn to do—and obviously have done—is to “nationalize” the differences in a manner that affirms Austrian autonomy.

However, it is equally important to recognize that the Allies, by granting Austria the status of the first victim of Nazi aggression in the Moscow Declaration of 1943, released Austria and the Austrians from being part of eight years of Nazi-German history after 1945, and I would have appreciated it if Bruckmueller had devoted a bit more attention to the problems of memory, myth, and amnesia with reference to the Anschluss era and to what extent they, too, have been constituent elements of the Austrian national identity building process. While discussing the roles of emigration, resistance, and de-Nazification (pp. 348-57) and the development of a “republican national consciousness” (pp. 384-96), he could have devoted more attention to the implications of the “victim theory” of National Socialism in Austria and the role it has played in the development of Austrian national identity as well as the manner in which Austrians have coped, or failed to cope, with the Nazi era.[7]

Bruckmueller focuses more attention on another important institutional element in the development of an autonomous Austrian national identity: the Austrian

State Treaty of 1955 and the subsequent role of Austrian neutrality as a new mode of national identification that not only provided the Second Republic with a new “national” and “international” mission but also gave Austria a role to play in Cold War Europe. The Austrian public at large may not really have understood the complexities of neutrality in terms of international law, just as the Republic of Austria has never really taken its obligations to defend itself as a neutral state as seriously as other European neutrals—if one is willing to take Swiss, Swedish, or Finnish defense spending per capita as a standard of resoluteness. But Austrians, justifiably or not, identify neutrality as one of the sources of their personal security and prosperity.

Indeed, neutrality, which was the price Austria judiciously and pragmatically paid to get the Allies out of Austria in 1955, became a national, moral virtue in the course of the Cold War. Bruno Kreisky, Austrian Federal Chancellor from 1970 to 1983, did an exceptional job of implying that the idea of the “old Austria” had something to do with the role that modern Austria had assumed as neutral state with the function of being a “bridge” or “mediator” between “East” and the “West.” Kreisky was an exception for a Social Democrat, insofar as he understood the implication and the benefits of Austria’s imperial history and he knew how to use them diplomatically.[8]

If the “victim thesis” and “neutrality” have provided substantial parts of the framework for articulating the modern Austrian national identity, things certainly have changed in the past decade or so. The “Waldheim affair” had the therapeutic consequence of confronting Austrians with the “victim theory” as a historically untenable national interpretation of National Socialism. The end of the Cold War in 1989 completely depreciated the importance of Austrian neutrality and facilitated the access of Austria (and other “neutrals,” such as Sweden and Finland) to the European Union in 1995, although Austrians themselves are having a tough time giving up the idea of neutrality. Is anyone left to be “neutral against” or is there something called “permanent neutrality for the time being”?

Ernst Bruckmueller’s book illustrates how complex the evolution of the Austrian identity, and identities, has been on various levels up to the present. Looking back, we can see how auspicious and stable conditions were for the development of a modern Austrian national identity between 1955 and 1989. In his conclusion, Bruckmueller points out the “power of the factual”: that the great majority of Austrians born since 1945 not only have a funda-

mentally unproblematic relationship to Austria, but also are exceptionally proud to be Austrian. At the same time, he appreciates the challenge European integration represents for regional and national identities, and hopes it will be possible to maintain an Austrian national identity in a positive and integrative “non-nationalistic” manner, as opposed to a negative, exclusive, and “nationalist” one.

Bruckmueller convincingly demonstrates that pan-Germanism was part of an identity problem that Austrians have long [since] overcome. Nevertheless, the xenophobic potential inherent in Austrian and in other, well established forms of Western European nationalism appears to be one of his concerns.

Notes:

[1]. The most ambitious publishing project is being edited by Herwig Wolfram, a ten volume, 5,500 page *Oesterreichische Geschichte* published by Verlag Carl Ueberreuter that covers 1,500 years of history. Six volumes have appeared to date. The Austrian Academy of Sciences published a collection of articles, Richard G. Plaschka, Gerald Stourzh, and Jan Paul Niederkon, ed., *Was heisst Oesterreich* (Vienna: Verlag der Oesterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996). More levity and irony is to be found in the essays in Gernot Heiss and Konrad Paul Liessmann, ed., *Das Millennium*, (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1996).

[2]. Ernst Bruckmueller and Peter Urbanitsch, ed., *Ostarrichi-Oesterreich: Menschen-Mythen-Meilensteine, 996-1996* (Horn: Verlag Berger, 1996).

[3]. Zuerich: Manesse-Verlag, 1989.

[4]. It is worth noting, in this context, that the historical “newcomers” among the Austrian federal provinces, Vienna and Burgenland, were both established after World War I. According to the surveys Bruckmueller cites, Austrian national identity is more pronounced in Eastern Austria–Vienna, Burgenland, and Lower Austria—than in central and western Austria, which might indicate that the less “regional identity” Austrians have, the more “national identity” they need.

[5]. Friedrich Heer, *Kampf um die oesterreichische Identitaet* (Wien, Koeln, Graz: Boehlau Verlag, 1981; reprint 1996), p. 17.

[6]. For arguments pro and contra, see Peter Wiesinger, “Ist das oesterreichische Deutsche eine eigene Sprachnorm?” and Rudolf Muhr, “Das Oesterreichische Deutsch in Linguistik und Sprachunterricht seit 1945–

Ein Bericht" in Georg Gimpl, ed., *Mitteleuropa—mitten in Europa*, vol. 14 of *Der Ginkgo Baum: Germanistisches Jahrbuch fuer Nordeuropa* (Helsinki, 1996), pp. 205-39.

[7]. Heidemarie Uhl's excellent study, with the telling title *Zwischen Versoehnung und Verstoerung* (Wien, Koeln, Graz: Boehlau Verlag, 1992), was published four years after the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss and in light of the "Waldheim affair." Uhl discusses at length the development, function, and erosion of the "victim thesis" between 1945 and 1988. Bruckmueller, however, does not address this work.

[8]. It is worth noting that Christian democratic

politicians, such as Erhard Busek, who are more comfortable with the Catholicism (and catholicity) of the "old Austrian" concept of Mitteleuropa tend to deal with the Habsburg-multinational dimensions of Austria with greater comfort and ease. As a rule, Social Democrats have a problem with pre-1918 Austria because it does not fit into the social democratic categories of "republicanism" or "modernization."

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