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Review of Between Reconciliation and Distraction: A Controversy Over Austria Historical Identity 50 Years After the Anschluss (German), by H. Uhl

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German scholars and historical witnesses paint much more differentiated pictures of French administrators, some of whom attended the conference, and above all of High Commissioner and later Ambassador Grandval, who clearly formed a personal attachment to the Saar. Perhaps most notable is the revision of the image of the much-hated Hoffmann, who ruled the French-dominated Saar with scant regard for democratic liberties between 1947 and 1955. He emerges as more than a French puppet. Most contributors agreed that his commitment to the region and to European and Christian ideals was genuine. One wonders whether East Germany's bosses, Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, too, will ultimately be seen in a more generous light or whether the Stasi and the shootings at the Wall will prevent such partial rehabilitation forever.

Last but not least, this *mélange* of scholarly reassessments, personal reminiscences, and conversation across lines of old national and political antagonisms makes for fascinating reading because it is something of a historical document itself. It records the process of maturation of historical judgement, of *Aufarbeitung* or coping with a traumatic period. As such it might well become a model for a reevaluation of the history of the Soviet occupation and evolution of the East German state. Could it, too, mature into a link between Russians, Germans, and Poles?

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Zwischen Versöhnung und Verstörung: Eine Kontroverse um Österreichs historische Identität fünfzig Jahre nach dem "Anschluß."

By *Heidemarie Uhl*. Böhlau Zeitgeschichtliche Bibliothek, volume 17.

Edited by *Helmut Konrad*.

Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1992. Pp. 470. S 470.

For decades after the Second World War, historians of German-speaking Central Europe were struck by the fact that the field of Austrian *Zeitgeschichte* had remained untouched by politically sensitive historiographic debates such as the Fischer Controversy, the *Sonderweg* thesis, or the *Historikerstreit*. It was not until Kurt Waldheim's 1986 presidential campaign and the reflective opportunity provided by the fiftieth anniversary of the *Anschluß* in 1988 that Austrian historians, journalists, and those who had experienced the period 1938–45 began to engage in serious public introspection concerning Austrians' experiences of the Nazi past. Heidemarie Uhl's inquiry into the relationship between historical memory and its politicization is a most welcome investigation of the varieties of Austrian historical consciousness.

Uhl asserts that in the wake of the embarrassing Waldheim affair, the 1938/88 observances provided the social democratic (SPÖ)–Christian democratic (ÖVP) coalition government with a public relations opportunity, a chance to demonstrate to international and domestic observers that the Second Republic was capable of confronting the Nazi interlude in Austria's past with candor and sensitivity. Because the Second Republic's founding myth portrayed Austria as the first victim of National Socialist aggression (justified with reference to the Moscow Declaration of 1943), government encouragement of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* catalyzed an unprecedented investigation into the responsibility of the Austrians themselves for the *Anschluß*. This was no small matter. Uhl notes that the majority of Austrians had long since embraced the "official" historiography of victimization, satisfied that "there would be a

fundamental consensus of distance from the goals and contents of National Socialism" (p. 17). Academic historians began to disrupt this consensus; wearing their party affiliations on their sleeves, each glorified their own camp's tradition of resistance to nazism, leveled accusations of culpability, and offered recriminations in turn. Because "scientific" approaches to 1938/88 indulged the interests of professionals, it was the print media, Uhl explains, that provided the opportunity for average people to express their experiences of the *Anschluss* and to describe what they found significant in its consequences. Her thesis is that the print media allowed a unique expression of personal memory that was impossible in official, consensus-based, platitudinous histories, on the one hand, and in academic-political works that served only to perpetuate civil war "with the help of historiography" (p. 74), on the other hand. Media reports addressed the experiences of active resisters, silent opponents, and opportunistic sympathizers, but given Uhl's preoccupation with the political culture of consensus and silence the reader will likely find the reflections of the Nazi regime's former adherents of particular interest. These responses fell into three categories: (1) positive recollections of the *Anschluss* itself, which brought work for many and a modest prosperity; (2) ambivalent recollections of the war, which no one could have foreseen, and which led to the victimization of all Austrians—even those who "did their duty for the Fatherland"; and (3) negative impressions of Nazi mass killings, which were attributed to a different, separate order of reality than the one respondents experienced and were generally reported as the only thing the Nazi regime did wrong. Uhl is careful to remind her readers that media representations did not concern themselves with delineating the boundaries between memory and "reality" and that reporters failed to understand that memory is subject to embellishment, filtering accommodation, forgetting, and repression (pp. 176–77).

There is no shortage of material to corroborate Uhl's assertions. Some two hundred pages of the book are devoted to an impressive and exhaustive content analysis of over a dozen major federal and local daily newspapers published between January and March 1988. With extensive quotations from most reports, as well as the reproduction of several key articles in their entirety, she has assembled a volume that is as much a documentary collection as a well-argued monograph. There is no reason to contest that the commemoration of this very problematic period in recent Austrian history captured the interest of broad sections of the population in a way that other historical observances during the Second Republic (e.g., the recognition of Austria's first millennium or the annual celebrations of the founding of the First Republic) did not. Yet while there can be little doubt that 1938 marked a pivotal point for the individual memories of the war generation—and, of course, for the communal historical memory of subsequent generations through civics education, publications, and documentaries—Uhl's emphasis on the challenge that 1938/88 represented for an Austrian political culture founded on the resistance to memory offers only a partial step toward understanding the forced distance that Austrians had come to place between their present and a repressed fascination with their recent past.

Uhl acknowledges that in academic and media representations the *Anschluss* was depicted as either the culmination of domestic and international developments originating in the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain or as the point of departure for new trajectories of individual or community development. She does not, however, explore the ramifications of this point for the broader investigation of Austrian political culture toward which her study inclines. Historians and politicians of very different shades of opinion have suggested that the peace treaties that concluded the First World War, establishing the circumstances within which the First Austrian and Weimar

republics came into being, represented a *Diktat*. If this conclusion is not entirely inaccurate, it is also true that the manner in which the social democratic and Christian democratic parties, as social partners in the institutions of consensus building, formulated strategies that placed a taboo on dredging up the past in the interest of social peace represented a *Diktat* in its own right. Uhl recognizes this development. The creation of *Zeitgeschichte* represented more than an intramural quarrel between the political parties over responsibility for National Socialism's success in Austria, though, and here she explores only one dimension of the complex dynamic involving "official" political culture, on the one hand, and the antithetical relationship between the repression of memory and the processes of identity formation, on the other hand.

Uhl's focus on 1938/88 is characteristic of a general tendency in contemporary Austrian historiography that suggests that the disruptive resurrection of the past actually began in the 1980s. Any investigation with implications for a fundamental rethinking of the elements of Austrian identity must come to terms with the chaotic circumstances of the interwar years, which impressed a remarkably tenacious *Lager* mentality upon Austrian political culture after 1945. Austria's society and economy remain divided relatively equally between the two dominant political parties that had warred incessantly with one another from the 1920s until the civil war of February 1934. The official political culture forged through the commitment of the SPÖ and the ÖVP to social peace minimizes this history of conflict. During the first decades after 1945, both parties agreed that consensus would best prevent the Second Republic's destabilization through fascist or communist intrigue, and they suspended class conflict in the interest of economic reconstruction. This understanding by no means presupposed unanimity with regard to what "Austrianness" represented after 1945, however. In the development of curricula for children's historical and civics education, both camps returned substantially to traditional ideological references as they advanced the values and social expectations each deemed essential for the new Austrian. Heated disagreement over the role that the Roman Catholic church would play in the Second Republic, the images and rhetoric elicited in electoral campaigns, and vicious debate over whether the Catholic conservative or social democratic camp had been the true advocate of democratic values between the wars all suggest that unresolved issues predating and contributing to the Nazi appeal within Austria lay at the heart of a conspiracy of silence that was challenged—but never really violated—only when it was politically expedient to do so. Even if a resolution of fundamental differences over the sources of Austrianness was not possible, a working consensus was restored to avoid a return to social chaos. Such brinkmanship, as Uhl correctly points out, could not have been successful if the population had not been willing to respect this complex of taboos.

Criticism of Uhl's work should not imply that what she has accomplished is not valuable. As a reasonably sophisticated source book for the undeniably important case study of the Austrian reaction to 1938/88, this volume is impressive and commendable. A welcome addition to the historical literature on contemporary Austria would be a work that would critically examine such observances, as well as national holidays, educational institutions broadly conceived, and civics and historical curricula, as part of a thoroughgoing investigation of political culture, historical memory, and identity formation. To the extent that Uhl's book contributes to current work in this direction and stimulates new interest in such a project it is a valuable publication, indeed.

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