

Book Review of "Negotiating National Identities: Between Globalization, the Past and 'the Other'"

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The rise of neo-nationalism in Europe over the last two decades has made many fear a turn to exclusionary societies that draw rigid boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Frequently read as a response to the effects of globalization, nationalism, according to Karner is but one among many diverse ideological reactions to the perceived crises of the contemporary era. Moreover, he posits that although many commentators are quick to associate *national identity* with an exclusionary *nationalism*, the two must not be conflated: national identities are flexible and complex, and represent ongoing processes of contention and negotiation. As such, they can also be *inclusive* and subject to counter-hegemonic critique. Based on some of the author's previously published works, this book explores the varied public discourses on key subjects of contention in contemporary Austria, including in particular, attitudes toward immigrants and asylum seekers, the European Union, and areas of national pride and cultural heritage such as language and the natural environment. While Karner recognizes the emergence of far right ideology, his primary focus is on the variety of counter-discourses that have emerged in the public sphere. Through a discourse analysis of Austrian media and other 'cultural texts' such as political manifestos, literature, and civil society initiatives, he highlights the contested and negotiated terrain of Austrian national identity over the course of the last decade. He demonstrates that civil society plays a crucial role in negotiating identities at the local, national, and European levels, and has contributed to the emergence of inclusive ideas about identity and belonging. Throughout the book, the author extrapolates from his Austrian case to the wider European context through brief comparisons to other countries.

Drawing primarily on Anthony Smith (2008), Michael Billig (1995), and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), the first two chapters outline the author's main theoretical points. National identities and boundaries, he argues, should be viewed as social processes that are continually reproduced, reinterpreted, and evolving: "[e]ven within a given national context, national identities are not ideologically monolithic but are defined by heterogeneity, disagreement and discursive struggle" (p. 26). National identities are reproduced as 'cold nationalism' (Billig 1995) in small, seemingly insignificant ways in everyday life through the pervasiveness of symbols such as national flags. These identities represent a sort of habitus (Bourdieu 1977), or "the 'structuring structures' provided by shared categories, dispositions, practices, assumptions and tastes that enable and constrain . . . social action and furnish a taken-for-granted, rarely reflected on and hence predominantly unconscious cultural common sense" (p. 56). In times of crisis, however, taken-for-granted, undisputed cultural 'truths'—doxa, in Bourdieu's terms—are questioned, resulting in ideological contestation among dominant and subordinated groups.

In Austria, a number of political and corruption scandals since the mid-1980s, an influx of refugees from the former Yugoslavia, and various effects of globalization, have led to a widespread perception of crisis. As a result, Karner argues, previously taken-for-granted 'banal' objects of national pride, particularly language, sports, history, and the natural environment, have become arenas of discursive struggle. One prominent example is the 'jam jar crisis,' during which controversy erupted over the EU's proposal to designate all non-citrus jams as 'Konfitüre.' In Austrian-German, all jam—citrus or not—is designated 'Marmelade,' whereas German-German distinguishes between citrus jam as 'Marmelade' and non-citrus jam as 'Konfitüre.' Jam labels thus became important boundary markers between German and Austrian identities. Karner demonstrates that while national boundaries are sometimes reasserted through such struggles, even in mainstream media counter-discourses have emerged that challenge nationalist ideology. He cites for example, readers' letters to the editor that defend the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers and denounce xenophobic attitudes toward Muslims. Similarly, in debates on environmental issues, protectionism is one of several views expressed in public discourse.

The final three chapters of the book explore counter-hegemonic discourses among civil society organizations and initiatives, critical media, and literature. Although it was slow to emerge, according to Karner the last twenty years have seen the development of a vibrant Austrian civil society. Nancy Fraser's (1992) notion of 'subaltern counterpublics' informs the discussion. Based on Habermas' (1989) work on the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser's 'counterpublics' refers to the multiple, alternative arenas of discourse constituted by subordinated social groups, who develop oppositional definitions of their interests, identities and needs, which challenge mainstream discourse (p. 149). Karner's counterpublics challenge nationalism and rigid self-other categorizations with inclusive discourses of belonging, multi-dimensional notions of identity, and flexible boundaries fostered through intercultural projects. Newspapers such as *Falter* and *Megaphon*, for example, critique mainstream portrayals of Islam and ethnic minorities, and community initiatives such as the Innsbruck intercultural garden encourage intercultural exchange. A growing number of minority actors and organizations challenge mainstream cultural stereotypes through their own self-representations, reversing the traditional 'othering' gaze of the majority.

The book provides an excellent account of the diversity of identity discourses in the Austrian public sphere. Although popular depictions of Austrian identity frequently focus on the rise of neo-nationalism, Karner highlights the many competing discourses about different ways of belonging to the nation that are prevalent in contemporary Austrian society. In so doing he effectively demonstrates the fluidity of national identity; national identity, in short, cannot be reduced to a stable, monolithic entity, but is better conceptualized as an ongoing process of negotiation that involves diverse civil society actors. The book demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between nationalism and national identity, and of studying the latter as a subject in its own right. This is a subtle, yet important point, for critical commentators often conflate the two, and while they rightly point out the exclusionary potential of national identities, it is important to keep in mind that these may also be inclusive and subject to counter-hegemonic critique.

Although it is well researched and richly detailed, the book's main theoretical thread is not always clear, particularly in the middle chapter: "Markets and Nations." The chapter discusses the diverse reactions to modern global capitalism (of which protectionism is but

one) and highlights the centrality of the market to debates about 'the nation' in contemporary Europe. However, it also introduces new theoretical concerns and takes a slight detour from the book's main focus. Moreover, given the centrality of public discourse to the analysis, the book would be strengthened by introducing Habermas and Fraser in an earlier chapter. As it is, this discussion appears only in the latter half of the book, which results in a sense of disconnectedness between the two halves. Synthesizing the main theoretical concepts would help to strengthen and clarify the author's main arguments. Despite some of these organizational weaknesses, the book provides interesting insight into the negotiation of boundaries and national identity in contemporary Europe.

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