

Imagining a Greater Germany: Republican Nationalism and the Idea of Anschluss

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Roaring flames, thousands of uniformed men, political speeches demanding a union of Germany and Austria, and an enthusiastic and cheering crowd of Germans and Austrians assembled together listening to the words ‘For us Germans in Austria, a powerful impulse prevails to return once again to the Reich’ is how Erin Hochman evocatively introduces readers to her book (p. 1). One immediately thinks of the theatrical National Socialist political rallies that aimed to bolster support for the eventual annexation of Austria by neighboring Nazi Germany in March 1938. The fact that the event described at the opening of the book took place in the centre of Germany in 1925 without any Nazis present is surprising, and it is within this context – both forgotten and unexamined – that Hochman offers a nuanced argument that complicates traditional narratives of politics and nationalism in inter-war Austria and Germany.

Hochman asserts that the *Anschluss* was not uniquely of Nazi provenance; rather, the union of Germany and Austria was a shared geopolitical ambition of rival movements that adhered to an altogether different type of nationalism. Hochman employs the term *alldeutsch* (pan-German) to represent a militaristic, conservative, and imperialistic interpretation of nationalism, which she ascribes to National Socialism, whereas *großdeutsch* (greater German) drew on the spirit of a cooperative, internationalist, and peaceful form of nationalism that would support the League of Nations and operate lawfully (p. 3). Hochman classifies this latter form as ‘republican nationalism’. Generally, the book attempts to debunk the idea that Nazi Germany absorbing Austria was inescapable, and instead argues that republican nationalism both within Austria and

outside, in Germany, offered a popular and alternative pathway towards union, distinct in content and character from that taken by the Third Reich in 1938.

By exploring this alternative vision of *Anschluss*, Hochman aims to bridge gaps in the traditional scholarly narrative of an inter-war period polarized between the socialist left and conservative right. Contingents from both sides melded to form a composite political momentum towards republicanism in the First and Weimar Republics, which 'sought to popularize democracy in the wake of a disastrous and bitter defeat'.⁽³⁾ Hochman's central thesis is that the desire for unification between the two states lay at the core of republicans' political ambitions and philosophy, which was framed by the *großdeutsch* worldview. Unlike the Nazis, who prioritized the reclamation of territories lost after the First World War, Hochman contends that the issue of *Anschluss* was the primary motivation behind the republicans' platform (pp. 8–9). Furthermore, the book places republicanism on a spectrum of German nationalisms, which was persistently disparaged by the 'anti-democratic, anti-Semitic, anti-Marxist right' and which stood in contradistinction to the 'exclusionary and violent nationalisms of the political right' (p. 3).

Imagining a Greater Germany attempts to offer much to the history of nationalism, the history of the inter-war period, and the history of Austrian and German experiments with democracy in the time before the rise of the Nazis. Tackling the notion of a single German nationalism split between two states, Hochman's transnational approach seeks to establish a confluence between two historiographies that have been previously largely separate – the history of Austria and that of Germany – by arguing that the state border was a bridge between the two that facilitated the exchange of both ideas and people (pp. 9–10). Because many in the 'rump state' identified as Germans and looked to Germany with longing, the influence of the idea of Germany on Austrians was undeniable and necessarily constitutes an intertwined history, which Hochman attempts to flesh out (p. 11). Moreover, Hochman's revisionist interpretation of the period argues for a complication of the normative claim that the roots of National Socialism can be seen in German nationalism, which was 'exclusionary, racist, and anti-Semitic...from the start' (pp. 12–13). Instead, Hochman asserts that there 'is no single form of nationalism' and that republican trans-border nationalism was not a harbinger of the ensuing Nazi empire; it thus 'defies easy categorization' (p. 13). This new narrative challenges the established binary classification of civic and ethnic nationalisms, and demonstrates how republicans in Austria and Germany cooperated to ward off attacks from rival political factions, exchanged ideas, coordinated cross-border events, and worked together in both states in an attempt to legitimize and promote the notion of an Austro-German unification in the spirit of peaceful, embracive republican nationalism (pp. 13; 15). As such, the work draws on the recent trend for not only transnational history, but also the history of entangled states. Hochman's work revisits the tensions of the inter-war period, illustrating that the struggle for leadership that would determine the trajectory of the Austro-German relationship was not a forgone conclusion.

The monograph is divided into six sections, the contents of which are organized thematically, with each section exploring a topic that chronicles the often heated debates in which republicans became embroiled and the great lengths over which they hurdled in their attempt to legitimize their political mandate in the eyes of the public. The first chapter, entitled 'The nationalization of democracy in the Weimar and First Austrian Republics', considers the 'rhetorical strategies deployed by republicans to defend and popularize the democratic republics' (p. 22). By drawing a line through historic events, such as the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, the revolutions of 1848, the Frankfurt Parliament, the arts festivals of the 1830s, as well as the retroactive appropriation of 'nationalist' personalities, such as Friedrich Schiller and Jacob Grimm, republicans tried to establish a tradition that 'democratic ideas were at the heart of historic efforts to achieve German national unity' (p. 28). Republicans appealed to a broader demographic because, unlike the exclusionary and violent nature of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, the imagined republic extended German-ness to Jews and socialists. Furthermore, republican foreign policy was couched within the sphere of a republican ethos, thus, it did not call for the absorption of German minority communities in Eastern Europe. Republicans were curiously silent, however, on the issue of rights for minorities already living within the territory of the imagined *Großdeutschland*. The continuity of republican values in the rhetoric of foreign policy was a strategic move to garner the support of the international community by 'demonstrating that republican

German nationalism would not threaten European peace or other nations' independence' (p. 47).

The second part, entitled 'The search for symbols: debates about the German flag and the Austrian anthem', details the hotly contested debates in both republics about the representations of nationalist identity behind which a legitimate state could be organized. In Weimar, the selection of the black-red-gold flag by the National Assembly prompted the so-called *Flaggenstreit*, in which proponents of the black-white-red imperial standard boisterously contested the state's claim to represent all Germans. Republicans created a historical narrative that harkened back to the *großdeutsch* spirit of the 1830–40s, claiming that the black-red-gold flag was privileged by virtue of its more well-established use representing German nationalism, whereas the black-white-red flag symbolized *Kleindeutschland* (which did not include Austria) and shared an association with Prussia alone, and not Germany as a whole. Moreover, in the wake of the collapse of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire and the removal of the Habsburgs as the crux of Austrian-ness, Austrians in the search for a new identity found resonance in the black-red-gold flag; for them, it represented a nineteenth-century call for unity, whereas the imperial standard left little impression on many (pp. 51; 60–1).

Likewise in Austria, the quest for a new anthem was rife with controversy. After the fall of the empire, Austrians turned to their rich musical heritage as a source of identity. With the old imperial anthem falling into insignificance over night, debates arose over both the melody and the text. Several on the political right proposed keeping Haydn's familiar tune but with new texts that encapsulated the fears and hopes of the interwar period. A colorful example was penned by staunchly conservative and anti-Semitic Catholic Richard von Kralik, who suggested the following opening:

God, preserve, God, protect
our country from the Jews!
Powerful through the support of faith,
Christians, maintain a strong position!
Let us protect our fathers' legacy
from the most terrible enemy!
So that our *Volk* does not become corrupted,
remain faithfully united! (p. 68).

The Austrian dilemma was complicated, however, because of uncertainty over whether Austria should have a national anthem or a state anthem. The struggle over a state hymn was more contentious because those situated at farther ends of the political spectrum did not even acknowledge the right of the First Republic to exist. The internal debates over the two hymns highlight the primary difference between Germany and Austria: in Austria, the state and the nation did not overlap – Austrians were citizens of an Austrian state, but considered themselves to be part of a German nation (p. 86).

Chapters three and four, entitled 'Representing democracy: commemorating the Republics' and 'Staging a Greater German Republic: cross-border Republican rallies' respectively, investigate the republicans' orchestrated efforts to mobilize the masses by inculcating them with a politicized state religion. These attempts sought to create participants out of the masses, whereas in Wilhelmine times they had been simply passive onlookers. In Weimar, the creation of state holidays was agreed upon by democratic consensus because of the preexistence of a German state. Although radicals refused to legitimize the republic and the constitution, opposing parties in the middle worked 'across class, political, and confessional divisions' in

order to 'be inclusive of all Germans in their attempts to win over skeptics and opponents of the republic' (pp. 128–9). In Austria, the debates were less productive. Political leaders embedded themselves within their respective *Lager* and not only refused to work across political boundaries, but 'purposefully sought to antagonize' their political opponents (p. 129). Rather than serving as points of convergence, as in Germany, holidays in Austria became sites of contestation and competition amongst factions fighting over the future shape and trajectory of the state. Far from agreeing upon the proposed holiday to commemorate the signing of the republic's constitution, Nazis used the 12th of November as a day to call for the dissolution of the state and for immediate *Anschluß*. For Republicans, Constitution Day in Germany was also a *Volksfest*, a celebration of the entire German people, and Austrians flocked across the border by the thousands to participate in the commemorations. Austrian politicians were featured in German newspapers, and vice-versa. Republicans not content with domestic celebrations often traversed the porous 'border they hoped one day could be erased' (pp. 135–7).

There were considerable differences, however, between the two major republican organizations in Germany and Austria, the multiparty *Reichsbanner* and the socialist *Schutzbund*, respectively. When *Reichsbanner* representatives joined republican celebrations in Austria, they encountered a heavily socialist program that isolated Catholics, for example, who themselves were ostracized by Austrian Christian Socialists, a conservative Catholic party, for collaborating with their largest foe at home. In Austria, these cross-border cooperative encounters became the target of the radical right, which in an attempt to sidestep into power, planted false information in the ears of the Christian Socialist-led government that the *Reichsbanner* and *Schutzbund* were conspiring to overthrow the state and seize control (p. 168). The very notion that the right was moved to take action against republicanism, Hochman argues, suggests its significance as a competing form of nationalism.

Chapter five, entitled 'Composing the *Volk*: cultural commemorations with political implications' revisits some of the themes discussed in the first two sections, and focuses on the appropriation of cultural figures, such as the composers Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven. Their lives supposedly typified the republican experience and they were portrayed as forerunners of the idea of the *Kulturnation*, a common culture that united the German *Volk*, and which provided an impetus behind contemporary justifications for *Anschluß*. Although born in Bonn, republicans argued that Beethoven's extensive career in Vienna showcased the permeability and insignificance of state borders dividing an undeniably single nation. Cultural celebration transcended the Entente-enforced borders, and the personalities commemorated therein became objects of great desire as rival factions battled for ownership of them for the legitimization of their own partisan views (p. 170).

The final chapter, entitled '*Anschluß* before Hitler: the politics of the *Österreichisch-Deutscher Volksbund*', details how the organization that held unanimous views about the need for annexation were divided, and clashed because of their fundamentally different ideas about where the boundaries of a Greater Germany should lie, what political system the state should have, and who shall be invited to become members of a *großdeutsch* nation. Great efforts were made by *Volksbund* committees to prepare for *Anschluß* by consolidating Austrian and German laws and policies in the areas of administration, education, the press, culture, and commerce, but these plans were ultimately abandoned because of disagreements within the organization. Hochman concludes that, 'the triumph of Nazi ideas about politics and nationhood was, as the republican *großdeutsch* project shows, far from inevitable' (p. 242).

Hochman succeeds in raising new questions and reexamining the inter-war period through the lens of transnational history. In a field that has predominantly been segmented into single-state studies, Hochman's fresh approach sheds new light on a period and subject that had been long neglected. The primary utility of Hochman's alternative exploration of the interwar era is that it challenges assumptions about the political struggles in the Weimar and First Republics, and forges in the direction of cultural history by attempting to examine the extent to which politics permeated everyday life. For the history of inter-war Austria in particular, this is indeed a new and welcome direction.

Despite its strengths, of which there are many, there are nevertheless some methodological weaknesses that

detract from the project's overall potential. It must be stated that, although the following criticisms are founded, the points raised in no way diminish from this monograph's significant contribution to the field.

Most notably absent is a discussion of the author's sources and methodology, which one would have expected to find in the introduction or at least in an appendix. Given that the narrative itself is novel—and that the sources marshaled in the thesis' defense are expansive and diverse—one is led to assume that these are hitherto unexamined materials and that the author is the first to utilize them for scholarly purposes. A discussion of the materials used might also have clarified that the author is not the first to tackle the topic of interwar republicanism in a cross-border context, as the reader is led to believe. In her introduction, Hochman writes:

The few subjects that have received cross-border treatment from scholars in both fields [German and Austrian history] are diplomatic relations, the Nazi movement, and the Anschluss of 1938 ... In exploring the exchange of people and ideas across the Austro-German boundary, this study revises our understanding of German nationalism and democracy during the interwar period (pp. 11–12).

It is only hidden away in a footnote on page 12 that the reader learns that a 1974 monograph also examines the cross-border interactions of republican nationalism in interwar period. The author's justification for jumping through the same rabbit hole is that the earlier work focuses on political elites.

That comment segues into the next criticism, in that the author also claims to 'investigate the ways in which [ordinary] citizens engaged with the new form of government and participated in the debates over nationhood' and that 'availing themselves of a language of rights and responsibilities, citizens asked their government to listen to their opinions and believed that their ideas would be taken seriously by officials' (15–16). While, at the outset, this reader was excited at the prospect of reading an attempt at a history 'from below' which brought to life how regular citizens encountered the politics of this turbulent period and internalized the struggles that we know occurred at the 'top' of Austria and Germany, the author ultimately fails to provide substantial archival evidence to back up this claim. With the few and far between examples of ordinary republicans, such as the aforementioned Richard von Kralik, who proposed a new text for the Austrian national anthem, or Louise Modersohn-Breling, an artist from Worpswede, who was moved to write to the National Assembly with her feelings about the *Flaggenstreit*, Hochman overwhelmingly relies on sources featuring political elites, such as leaders of the *Reichsbanner* and *Schutzbund*, or prominent literary, military, and clerical personalities. After setting up such a promise in the introduction, it was even more disappointing to see the voice and character of the 'citizen' reduced to 'the masses' or 'Austrian republicans'. This is not to say that the sources utilized do not color the scene effectively, or fail to bring to life the vividness and emotion underlying the debates and contestations between the different factions. The narrative of crisis in the interwar period remains top-heavy, however, leaving future historians to give voice to the 'ordinary citizen'. Nevertheless, it must be stated that, although the aforementioned criticisms are founded, the points raised in no way diminish from this monograph's significant contribution to the field.

While the argument itself advances the field, the rich bibliography and appendices listing key political personalities and affiliations, dates of activity, and localities are of immense value to scholars wishing to dive further into the field. This information provides directions for future research, and is supplemented by grouped, pertinent archival records that streamline the process for anyone willing to follow them up. Overall, Hochman's assertion that Nazi *Anschluss* was not inevitable, and that the preceding period was rife with contention between the radical right and those who sought an alternative pathway to annexation is convincing, providing a new template for examining Austria and Germany during the inter-war period, and raising new questions about German nationalism and the experience of republicanism for everyday people.

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