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Pledge of honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'f' followed by a 'h'.

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„Wien war, man weiß es, eine genießerische Stadt, aber was bedeutet Kultur anderes, als der groben Materie des Lebens ihr Feinstes, ihr Zartestes, ihr Subtilstes durch Kunst und Liebe zu entschmeicheln?“

- Stefan Zweig

Abstract

Culture has been claimed in many ways for Austria identity, most notably in the image of the *Kulturnation*. Such uses of culture as well as the image of the *Kulturnation* have, however, also been subject to much contestation. The aim of this thesis is to show in what ways culture and the image of the *Kulturnation* have intersected with Austrian identity politics as well as to shed light on some of the contradictions that have accompanied this process. This thesis will examine the term's evolution from its origins in pan-German nationalism, to its identity establishing use in the Second Republic as well as the use of culture to criticize Austria's neglected dealing with its involvement in the Nazi regime. It will find that culture has been used in a great variety of contradicting ways and that the image of the *Kulturnation* faces many strong challenges. The thesis will conclude that the image of the *Kulturnation* remains a political narrative with little relevance in the present. Nevertheless, it will be shown that culture did have a significant impact on Austrian politics.

Keywords

Kulturnation, national identity, culture, identity contestation, Second Republic, identity politics

Kultur wurde in vielfältiger Weise für die österreichische Identität beansprucht; vor allem im Bild der Kulturnation. Das Verwenden von Kultur, sowie das Bild der Kulturnation, waren jedoch auch stets heftig umstritten. Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit ist es, zu zeigen in welcher Weise sich Kultur und das Bild der Kulturnation mit der österreichischen Identitätspolitik überschneiden, sowie einige der Widersprüche zu beleuchten, die diesen Prozess begleitet haben. Die Arbeit untersucht die Entwicklung des Begriffs von seinen Ursprüngen im Deutschnationalismus, bis hin zu seiner identitätsstiftenden Verwendung in der Zweiten Republik, sowie der Verwendung von Kultur zur Kritik des vernachlässigten Umgangs Österreichs mit seiner Verwicklung in das NS-Regime. Sie wird feststellen, dass Kultur in vielfältiger und widersprüchlicher Weise verwendet wurde, und dass das Bild der Kulturnation sich mit vielen Herausforderungen befassen muss. Die Arbeit kommt zu dem Schluss, dass das Bild der Kulturnation ein politisches Narrative mit geringer Aktualität für die Gegenwart bleibt. Nichtsdestotrotz wird diese Arbeit zeigen, dass Kultur einen signifikanten Einfluss auf die österreichische Politik hatte.

Schlagwörter

Kulturnation, nationale Identität, Kultur, Kulturpolitik, Zweite Republik, Identitätspolitik

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1. Introduction: Austria and the narrative of the *Kulturnation*

The coalition agreement of a recent Austrian government opened its chapter on art and culture with the short sentence “Austria is a *Kulturnation*.” (Neue Volkspartei and Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs 2017). This is hardly a surprise, as when one is asked to think of a defining element of Austrian national life, culture is likely to be a frequent response. Austria is widely held to be a country of culture; the site of a long history of creative genius, home to some of the most renowned cultural institutions in the world, a place where cultural practices form an integral part of the daily life of its inhabitants – a cultural nation. Indeed, from across the world, tourists travel to Austria to witness some of these attractions while Austrians themselves also consider culture to play a defining role for their national identity. Both the view from abroad, as well as from within is that Austria is a *Kulturnation* – a nation of culture.

However, what does this image mean? What and whom does it include and what does it exclude? When did it develop and how has it changed? The aim of this thesis is to trace the origins of the image of the *Kulturnation* and examine what role culture plays for Austrian national identity. With the image of the *Kulturnation*, we are confronted with an issue of national identity. Therefore, this thesis will make use of some of the insights from the literature on national identity. Nations, similar to people, adopt identities which attribute them with uniqueness. Yet, how do nations come to understand “who they are?” How can national identities change and why do they do so? Who promotes ideas of national identity and what is their relationship with the wider public? What issues of contestation lie beneath images of national unity? In addressing the image of the *Kulturnation*, this thesis will also shed light on some of the processes of national identity formation and contestation. The contribution of this thesis is, thus, twofold. For one, it adds to the existing knowledge on national identity formation. For another, it contributes to a better understanding of Austrian national identity.

This thesis is structured in ten chapters. After having addressed the subject matter in this chapter, chapter two will explain the method that will be used to measure and analyse issues of national identity. Chapter three will provide an overview of the literature on national identity formation and highlight its shortcomings with regard to the role of daily experience. The fourth chapter will try to “approach” the idea of a *Kulturnation* by examining the historic

and ideational context in which the term arose and surveying some of its components such as culture, language and race as well as how these components have changed during the term's use. In chapter five, we will examine the conflict between the Germanic cultural community and Austria's political reality as part of a multi-ethnic empire. This conflict will be presented as the first of a series of contradictions within the image of the *Kulturnation*. Chapter six will show how the *Kulturnation* narrative took a deliberately Austrian turn after the Second World War and was actively promoted by Austrian officials as a new source of national identity. In chapter seven we will see how the image of the *Kulturnation* helped sustain the myth of Austria as Nazi Germany's first victim. We will also see how culture was used to challenge this myth and to shed light on Austria's neglected responsibility for its past. The contrast between culture being used to sustain a post-war identity while also being used to challenge this identity will be considered as the second contradiction of the *Kulturnation*. Having looked at the two most significant contradictions, chapter eight will look at further sources of contestation and contradiction. Here the nexus between narrative and practise will be illustrated with more contemporary examples. Chapter nine will summarize the findings of interviews with practitioners in the cultural sector. These interviews will confirm many of the contradictions and points of contestation raised in the previous chapters and reveal a general distaste for the term by the practitioners. Chapter ten will conclude this thesis by asking the question whether Austria can be considered a *Kulturnation*. In light of the many challenges to the term, this thesis remains doubtful whether Austria can be considered a *Kulturnation*. Nevertheless, the conclusion will emphasize the political impact culture has had on Austrian history.

2. Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to examine a specific image of Austrian national identity. As simple as this goal may seem, it is fraught with much complexity and many challenges. Identity is difficult to describe as it may change over time or be contested. Some forms of identity are openly pronounced while others remain silent. Identities are often full of contradictions. An actor may state a certain identity but fail to live up to this identity. National identity takes such issues to another level. It is virtually impossible for tens of thousands or even millions of people from different regions, different levels of education and different socio-economic backgrounds to share the exact same identity. Yet, remarkably, political actors have repeatedly tried to claim a single identity for such a diverse group of people. The image of the *Kulturnation* is one such example. The question now is, how can we measure versions of national identity, their impact and reception, as well as the changes they have undergone over time? What methods can be used to assess the abstract feeling of belonging?

The methodology of this thesis starts from the premise that versions of national identity must be uttered. This is particularly the case when there is a political component involved. Politicians and parties evoke certain identities for political purposes such as gaining the vote of a particular identity group or gaining legitimacy for their rule. In this case, we are interested in the image of the *Kulturnation* after 1945. In order to examine how this narrative of Austrian identity has been uttered, I searched various political documents published after World War Two for the keywords “*Kulturnation*.” These documents included all records of parliamentary sessions from 1945 to 2020, all party manifestos from 1945 to 2020, the annual reports of the ministry responsible for art and culture from 1970 to 2020, as well as selected historic newspaper issues. With regard to the party manifestos, there is one caveat that I would like to add. The manifestos were taken from the database “Manifesto Project”¹. Access to this database requires a membership which is free for research purposes. More recent manifestos are pdf-files while older ones are photocopies of the original document or of book pages containing such documents. Unfortunately, some of the photocopies only present the content of the documents and do not state what source they are from. Others were

¹ <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>

photocopied in bad quality making the title of the document or page numbers illegible. In the documents used in this thesis, this is the case for the 1979 party manifesto of the Social Democratic Party as well as the 1986 manifesto of the Green Party. In these cases, the references in the bibliography are only partially complete. Nevertheless, the original documents can be accessed via the link that is provided in the bibliography entry (an account is required to access the database).

The term *Kulturation* is, however, an umbrella term. Although certainly the most commonly used term used to describe this version of Austrian identity, there are also some other expressions used to do so. In order to fill any potential gaps, I also engaged in extensive literature research. This literature included the academic work on Austrian national identity as well as literary and artistic treatise of the topic. Finally, I also conducted a series of interviews. The aim of these interviews was to assess how the term *Kulturation* is received today. For this I talked with a manager of a Viennese theatre, the manager of a Viennese opera house, a cultural correspondent of a leading Austrian daily newspaper, a theatre director and musician, as well as a representative of *IG Kultur*, an interest group representing artists and cultural initiatives.

3. National identity formation

The self-other dichotomy

How do identities come into existence? And how are they maintained? One of the key consistencies across the literature on identity is that identity formation has something to do with the relation between the self and the other. Identity is a sense of uniqueness of the subject (the self) which stands in opposition to the difference of the other. As such, identity is a “relational term” (Wodak et al. 2009, 11). It is the result of social interaction and therefore intersubjective. We find this self-other dichotomy in theories of individual identity and collective or national identity.

Scholars with a linguistically orientated approach place an emphasis on language and discourse. Language, in this view, is not just confined to itself through grammar or syntax but also has a context. Within this context it can “do” things. The language speakers or writers use can “shape the interpretations and actions of listeners and readers” (Gee 2014, 20). One of the things discourse can “do” is to create and perpetuate identity: “Through discourses, social actors constitute (...) social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups” (Wodak et al. 2009, 8). The grammar, vocabulary and tone we use situates the self in relation to the other thus giving rise to a specific identity for instance as a student or as an expert (Gee 2014). The language that is used, however, is not just a representation of a certain pre-discursive identity but the very process of interaction gives rise to identity (and equally important to changes in identity). As Benwell and Stokoe (2006, 4) put it:

“(...) rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is actively, ongoingly, dynamically constituted in discourse. (...) Who we are to each other, then, is accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse.”

Discourse analysts are concerned with individual as well as collective identities. However, when it comes to collective identities, they are far more concerned with social groups such as professional communities than they are with national identity.

Applied to the formation of state identity and how it affects international security, the relational nature of identity is also stressed in constructivist International Relations theory (Wendt 1992). Here it is collective meaning which gives rise to identity: “(...) identity is an inherently social definition of the actor grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another and which constitute the structure of the social world” (*Ibid.*, 398). Collective meaning is established through interaction which gives rise to norms and rules (*Ibid.*, 417). Norms inform the self how to act in a given situation in order to correspond with a particular identity. Identity is therefore linked to a “logic of appropriateness” which informs the self of its interests (Checkel 1998, 326).

There is some similarity between discourse theorists and constructivists as they both place a strong emphasis on some type of interaction – be it in the form of language or in the form of lived experience – for the process of identity formation. However, constructivists place a much greater emphasis on the potential stability of identities. Wendt (1992, 399) refers to stable identities as institutions. Discourse analysts and other proponents of postmodern and post-structuralist theories, on the other hand, emphasize the ongoing and incomplete nature of identity formation, or as Han (2019, 106) puts it: “(...) postmodern identities reject categories in favour of fluidity.” It should also be noted that IR constructivists are much more interested in the security aspect of national identity. Their interest in culture is focused on those aspects of culture and identity which may have an impact on inter-state relations as can be observed in studies on Japanese and German military culture (Berger 1996; Katzenstein 1998). Nevertheless, the distinction between self and other and the value it has for identity formation is present.

The literature on nationalism and national identity also views the self-other dichotomy as important albeit with some differences as to what characterises the self-other relationship. Anna Triandafyllidou (1998; 2003) considers the self-other dichotomy as quintessential for national identity and defines it as a “double-edged relationship.” On the one hand, national identity is concerned with the sameness of the in-group (the self) while, on the other hand, it is concerned with the difference of the “significant other”. The “significant other” can be both internal (e.g. a minority group) or external (another nation). Triandafyllidou argues that the relationship between the self and the “significant other” is always one of conflict. The significant other poses “a threat to the existence of the nation”

(Triandafyllidou 1998, 600). This conflict creates national identity as it helps “to clarify the boundaries of the ingroup and to reinforce its members’ sense of belonging” (*Ibid.*, 603).

Other authors place an emphasis on compatible ways of functioning and shared experiences within a nation rather than on conflict and emotion. Karl Deutsch (1962, 72) notes the importance of effective communication:

“Membership in a people essentially consists in wide complementary of social communication. It consists in the ability to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects, with members of one large group than with outsiders.”

The relation between the self and the other is therefore characterised by practicalities, which leads to nations being “marked off from each other by communicative barriers, or by “marked gaps” in the efficiency of communication” (*Ibid.*, 74).

Interestingly, given the prominence of the self-other dichotomy for national identity formation in both Triandafyllidou and Deutsch’s work, how exactly the self comes to understand itself or how it is able to keep its cohesion is left rather vague. Trying to describe what contributes to the sameness of the in-group, (Triandafyllidou 1998, 599) refers to “a belief in common descent and/or to a common culture, namely a system of traditions, ideas, symbols and patterns of behaviour and communication that are shared by the members of the community.” How the in-group comes to a such a conclusion of a common belief in its origin or why certain symbols have a meaning for it is left unexplored. Deutsch’s focus on communication also has an equally vague cultural component. For him communication is more than just a “standardized system of symbols which is a language, and any number of auxiliary codes, such as alphabets (...)” (Deutsch 1962, 70). Communication and its, for national identity so vital, efficiency is facilitated by culture which Deutsch describes as “living memories, associations, habits and preferences (...)” (*Ibid.*, 70). Again, how exactly members of the in-group come to have the same memories, associations and habits is left undefined. Both Triandafyllidou and Deutsch leave us guessing that there must be some meta-narrative in the background which kits the in-group together.

Tim Edensor (2002) takes a different approach. He concedes the importance of the self-other dichotomy for national identity (*Ibid.*, 24), yet his understanding of the self does not require a background narrative to make up for some of the theoretical shortcomings. In

fact, he critiques the very idea of grand narratives holding together an in-group. Drawing from Michael Billig's (1995) work *Banal Nationalism*, he argues that it is much more popular culture and everyday life, or "unreflexive patterns of social life" (Edensor 2002, 10) that bind the in-group together. Elements included in such "unreflexive patterns of social life" could be the consumer products or cars available in one country and the connotations they carry with them. Likewise, we can think of films and daily news shows which subtly construct national identity. Edensor (2002, 142) reminds us that "[n]ationally based mediascapes still largely predominate in everyday media experience – people still largely consume national newspapers, listen to national radio stations and watch national television." National identity, in this view, operates as a barely conscious "second nature" which only reveals itself in circumstances in which a member of the in-group is removed from the community and its habits as is the case when one travels abroad. While Edensor accepts that official identity or "high culture", disseminated through the education system or in official ceremonies has contributed to national identity formation, today such acts must compete with a range of popular culture elements which represent the nation. Bridget Byrne (2007) comes to a similar conclusion. In a study on English national identity she shows that "the nation is constructed and imagined through forms of living, through personal histories and everyday routines and consumption." (*Ibid.*, 526). The defining features of the self and the other are thus encountered in the realm of the ordinary and domestic.

Narrative and national identity

The previous section has shown how the dichotomy of self and other plays a vital role in issues of identity formation. When it comes to national identity, however, how the self comes to define itself is frequently left vague. The identities nations have are simply taken for granted and little effort is made to explore their origin. Edensor attempts to bridge this gap by attributing importance to the subtle forms of national identity formation found in everyday life. Yet, also he attributes importance (although a declining one) to grand stories of national identity. The literature on narratives is useful to overcome this gap. It studies how narratives can be and have been used to "fill" the identity of the self and how they are disseminated. While the self-other dichotomy raises the issue of uniqueness and difference

for identity, national narratives tell the story of “*how* nations are distinctive” (Feldman 2001, 141).

Narratives can be understood in a multitude of ways. Literary studies of narrative, for instance, focus on a story’s internal structure, or categorise stories according to types (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 137). In this context, we are rather interested in the role narratives play for national identity. What differentiates a narrative from different sorts of storytelling is that a narrative wants to accomplish something; it is “inter-action orientated” (*Ibid.*, 135-136). First and foremost, narratives want to give meaning to a world which is composed of “disparate facts” (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 315). They are “‘edited’ descriptions and evaluations” of the self and of the other (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 137). We need to deliberately edit our personal and collective identities because in reality they are faced with a plethora of contradictions and discontinuities. One central contradiction is that of continuity over time. On a personal level, for example, consider the great difference between the self as a child and the self as a married adult. On a collective level, think of the contradiction between a nation claiming a centuries-old heritage from forefathers which would have never identified with that nation. Narrative identity aims to solve such problems. The task of the narrative is to integrate “various, different, partly contradictory circumstances and experiences (...) into a coherent temporal structure (...)” (Wodak et al. 2009, 14). Narratives allow for “diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability” in what is otherwise concerned with sameness. (Ricoeur, 1992, quoted in Wodak et al., 2009, 14). They introduce “a sense of identity coherence by incorporating notions of connectedness and temporal unity.” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 138). Narratives establish social relations by embedding them in a wider ideational context. The individual is connected to the greater picture, this greater picture being either one’s personal history or the history of a collective.

By giving meaning to our surrounding; by telling us what is important and what is not and why, narratives influence our perception of (political) reality and consequentially affect our actions (*Ibid.*, 315). They can be deliberately used to achieve specific outcomes such as discrediting a political opponent or increasing legitimacy for a governing regime. Narratives are the product of agency (*Ibid.*, 316). Given the significant political and societal consequences narratives can have, it is interesting to study their origins and by whom they are distributed. There are many voices that argue that narratives of national identity and culture are strongly linked to and disseminated by elites. Ernest Gellner (1993, 57) points to

the role of the education system and the academy for “the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, (...)” Narratives of national identity are thus diffused in a top-down process by cultural and educational elites. Hobsbawm (2012, 10) argues that elite “invented traditions” can be used to foster a sense of superiority and/or cohesion among the elite. He concludes that the entire nation, with all its associated symbols and narratives, rests on “exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative (...)” (*Ibid.*, 13). Kornprobst (2005), also points to the emphasis most accounts of national identity formation put on elites.

While the arguments highlighting elite contributions to the dissemination of national identity through narratives hold valuable insights, the role of elites should not be over emphasized. First and foremost, Boswel (2013, 620) recalls that “attention to narrative is not just the preserve of political analysts and elites. Grass-roots activists also talk about the importance of constructing an effective narrative to chime with people’s experiences and beliefs.” Edensor (2002) also criticizes this focus on elites by pointing to the false assumption that all elites share the same national narrative. He also states that such an understanding of national identity from above views citizens as passive and powerless absorbers of the elite’s vision of the nation. This is, however, not the case. For one, elites are limited in the narratives they can present. For another, citizens or groups within a nation can (and have) expressed disagreement over prevailing narratives. In a study of Israeli electoral behaviour Sheaffer, Shenhav, and Goldstein (2011) have shown that “narrative proximity”, the similarity of a party’s narrative and that held by voters, strongly correlates with party preference. In a democratic system, citizens are not just passive recipients of narratives but get to actively choose between them. Insights from studies on the effect of collective memory also point to the necessity of acceptance on the behalf of the target audience. In the context of mnemonic actors Kubik and Bernhard (2014, 3) point out that “there are limits of malleability in the presentation of the cultural/historical material that are imposed (...)” They state:

“Mnemonic (or—more broadly—political) entrepreneurs are free to construct their narratives out of the available “national” repertoire but are limited in their choices by its boundaries. If they choose elements outside this repertoire, they appear to be alien and not credible to their potential constituents.” (*Ibid.*, 17).

Thus, in order for narratives to be successful (meaning barely contested) they must find expression in the lived reality of those they address. Patterson and Monroe (1998, 323) cite the example of the “American dream,” arguing that if a group feels like it will never achieve this dream, the narrative loses its unifying effect which can lead to political instability. Once again, we are confronted with the role of everyday experience which has been largely ignored in the study of national identity.

From the literature on identity we can take away the following conclusions. First, identity is a sense of uniqueness created out of opposition to something else. It determines the relationship between the self and its environment. Second, the self comes to understand itself not just through interaction with the other but also through the cultivation of deliberate narratives which aim to cover-up the complexities and contradictions within the self-self relationship. Narratives reinforce the self. Third, for narratives to be successful, they have to make use of existing cultural knowledge and correspond with the lived reality of the target audience. In this sense, we can speak of a narrative-reality nexus. Narratives shape the way we perceive reality while reality may provide the basis for critiquing a narrative. If a narrative fails to adequately express itself in the lived reality of those it seeks to target, we can expect a window of opportunity to open for those who want to contest the narrative.

4. Approaching the *Kulturnation* – what does the term mean?

The term *Kulturnation* is composed of the German words for “culture” and “nation”. In the English literature the term is commonly translated as “cultural nation” (see its use in Coakley 2018; Kiebuszinska 1995; Meinecke 1970). In general, it establishes a link between culture and the nation by suggesting an explicit importance of the role of culture for national life and national identity. The following chapter will try to approach the term by first reflecting upon the term “culture.” The term is not without its own complexities which, as we will see, spill-over and give rise to some of the issues also present in the term *Kulturnation*. After that, we will closer examine the defining elements of a *Kulturnation* and how they have evolved. It will be shown that while the term originally gave a prominent position to language, it increasingly referred to race towards the end of the 19th century. This evolution will be the starting from which the term’s relation to the state and ethnic nationalism will be reflected upon.

Competing understandings of culture: broad and narrow; culture and civilisation

There are many definitions of “culture.” So many that we can speak of an “essentially contested concept.” Although we may never come to one conclusive definition of what culture is, we can distinguish between a “narrow” and a “wide” approach to the term (Straßl 2010, 95). Tracing it back to its origins can help to explain the narrow understanding of the term. The word culture comes from the Latin word *colere*, which means to farm, cultivate (land) or to worship (Knapp 2005, 21; Wimmer 2011, 42). All these meanings place an emphasis on the specialized activities of humans thus positioning culture as the opposite of nature (Knapp 2005, 21). The notion of cultivating – giving special attention to something over time – was then transferred from agriculture to man’s intellectual faculties (*Ibid.*, 22). Building on this understanding of culture as the result of time, growth and dedication, we arrive at what is often grouped as “high culture.” Here, culture finds its expression in the greatest works of human capabilities. It lives in artefacts of creative and intellectual

excellence. This understanding of culture is narrow in the sense that it is exclusive. Culture, from this understanding, is neither intelligible by everyone nor can it be produced by everyone.

On the opposite we find the wide approach. A frequently quoted definition falling into this category is that by the British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1871, quoted in Tomlinson 1991, 4). He defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” In contrast to the narrow definition, all members of society can participate in culture and it is not only limited to great works but also includes day-to-day customs and what is commonly referred to as “low culture.” The Final Report of the 1982 UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies emphasizes the contrast between high culture and the need to include diverse forms of cultural expression. Delegates understood culture “not in the restricted sense of belles-lettres, the fine arts, literature and philosophy, but as the distinctive and specific features and the ways of thinking and organizing [the] lives of every individual and every community” (UNESCO 1982, 8). Culture, in its broad sense, permeates all spheres of the human experience. This omnipresence of culture was referred to by one delegate at the conference who said that for this reason culture “might indeed be confused with life itself” (*Ibid.*, 8). The different approaches to culture are a precursor to some of the debates we will see with regards to the image of the *Kulturnation*. Here as well, there is a narrow approach, focusing on traditional high culture, and a wide approach advocating for the inclusion of contemporary low culture in the image of the *Kulturnation*.

In addition to the distinction between a narrow and a wide approach to the term, we should also pay attention to the dichotomy of culture and civilisation which primarily found its expression in German-speaking countries and is therefore relevant to the Austrian case. This distinction was a reaction to the industrial revolution and the rise of modern, capitalist societies at the turn of the 19th century (Wimmer 2011). Those states who developed earlier, notably Great Britain and France, were considered to be civilisations characterised by rationalism, economic thinking and technological development. In contrast stood the culture of the German speaking-states which was considered to be a creative force and an organic ancestral bound. Moreover, the perceived superficiality of civilisation was considered to be a threat to the spiritual depth of culture as can be observed in Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* where civilisation is described as the threatening final stage of culture (*Ibid.*, 47).

The *Kulturnation* and historic nationalism: between language and race

From the above-mentioned distinction between culture and civilisation arose two distinct understandings of the nation and the state. With regard to the nation, we find this distinction in the juxtaposition of (German) ethnic nationalism and (Western) civic nationalism which is often referred to as the Kohn dichotomy (Coakley 2018). The nation, in the German understanding, is not merely a “collection of free individuals consenting to be governed as a unit.” (Coakley 2018, 254). It is “an organic entity with a spirit of its own, set apart from other nations by community and distinctiveness of culture and especially of language (...)” (*Ibid.*, 254). With regard to the state, the distinction between culture and civilisation manifests itself in either a *Kulturnation* or a *Staatsnation*,² a distinction which was popularized by the German historian Friedrich Meinecke (1970)³. The concept of the *Kulturnation* links culture and the nation by suggesting that national culture plays a crucial role in the formation of nation states. In the case of the *Kulturnation*, the cultural community preceded the political community and eventually resulted in it. In the words of Meinecke (*Ibid.*, 18): “It is the cultural nation (...) that produces the national state in this sense (...)” Particularly relevant for our case is how Meinecke defines a *Kulturnation*. On this Meinecke writes: “A standard language, a common literature and a common religion are the most important and powerful cultural assets that create a cultural nation and hold it together” (*Ibid.*, 10).

The importance given to language (and to a lesser extent also to religion) is something that can be frequently encountered when studying texts on cultural nations. The Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1933)⁴ makes this point in his essay *Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation*.⁵ He begins by conceding the importance of an intellectual attachment as the foundation of a community: “It is not through living together on our home soil, not through our physical contact in trade and exchange, but through an intellectual attachment above all that we are connected to the community.” (von Hoffmannsthal 1933, 9). This “intellectual attachment” primarily expresses itself in language. On this Hofmannsthal writes:

² Engl.: Political nation; the emphasis here is on the civic and political component of the nation.

³ The German original version came out in 1908.

⁴ The published essay is based on a speech given at the University of Munich in 1927.

⁵ Literature as the Spiritual Space of the Nation

“We come together in a language which is something completely different to a mere means of communication; for in it the past speaks to us, forces act upon us and immediately become powerful (...), a peculiar connection becomes effective between the lineages, we sense behind it something that we dare to call the spirit of the nation.” (*Ibid.*, 9).

The idea of the nation based on a shared culture is something we also find in Italian nationalist thought. Giuseppe Mazzini and Terenzio Mamiani similarly considered the unified Italian political nation to rest on a cultural community (Neumann 1888). Just as Meinecke and Hofmannsthal, they attribute importance to a common language and like Meinecke also mention a common religion in the list of those cultural signifiers that give rise to a cultural community. (*Ibid.*, 54). Yet, the Italian thinkers go beyond language and religion and also attest significance to common geography, a common race, common customs, a shared history and shared laws (*Ibid.*, 54). This broader definition of culture, which notably includes race (*razza* or *comunanza di sangue*), illustrates why notions of *Kulturnation* fall into the side of ethnic nationalism on the Kohn dichotomy. Many proponents of *Kulturnation* go beyond Meinecke’s and Hofmannsthal emphasis on language and literature and place a strong emphasis on race and blood. *Kulturnation* therefore can also have a racial (and racist) component.

Although the concept of the *Kulturnation* must not rest on an ethnic component – Meinecke’s definition of the *Kulturnation* does completely without it – some of its reoccurring themes place it on the side of ethnic nationalism. In discussing the term of the *Kulturnation*, we should not overlook the fact that particularly in German thought culture, and cultural attributes such as language, became increasingly linked with race. The writing of German philosopher Bruno Bauch is exemplary in this regard. For him language is inherently linked with race – it is an expression thereof:

“The physical and spiritual community of origin of the ‘fellow-born’, however, finds its expression in the community of language. It is the decisive expression of the cohesion of the nation. The ethnic stranger may live among us for generations and

may not be able to speak any other language than ours. Yet his language is not ours.”
(Bauch 1917, 144).

The link between culture and race is that culture, in this view, is merely an outwards expression of race which in turn forms the core of the nation. As Bauch (*Ibid.*, 140-141) puts it:

“The community of blood is the unifying bond in the natural existence of the nation and the nation itself is first of all a natural organic community, a natural entity. In the colour of the skin, the features of the face, the build of the body of each individual it expresses itself as a visible type.”

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, culture moved away from being the apolitical space of retreat for the middle class, which it was during the early and mid 19th century, to “an excessive battle cry with nationalist overtones” (Knapp 2005, 23). As such, the link between culture and race became stronger. Wimmer (2011, 47–48) describes the racial turn in Germany as follows: “In a disastrous way the ‘people of poets and thinkers’ should mutate into a ‘people of agitators and full of judgment’ (...) The result was a feeling of superiority over other peoples through culture, born primarily of political weakness and uncertainty.”

5. Whose *Kulturation*? – Austrian culture versus German culture

Having established some of the core ideas behind the concept – national unity on the basis of culture as expressed through either language, literature, race and heritage, or a combination thereof – this chapter will now pay closer attention to the historic origins of the term which lie in the context of 19th century pan-German nationalism. The term's historic origin is important because it will reveal one central ambiguity of Austrian identity and the image of the *Kulturation*: the conflict between German versus Austrian provenance. On the one hand, Austria shares a common language with Germany and historically most Austrians considered themselves to be ethnically German. This cultural community, however, was contrasted with the political community of the Habsburg empire which was multiethnic and oriented towards the East. This chapter will illustrate this conflict by showing, on the one hand, the extent of pan-German thought in the Habsburg monarchy as well as its continuation into the First Republic. On the other hand, it will also describe the attempts of state authorities to counter the widespread German cultural identification with a distinctly Austro-Habsburg identity. The chapter will conclude by reflecting the reactionary connotation of the term in its early use.

Pan-Germanism in the Habsburg monarchy

Unlike the older nation states of France and Great Britain, the German-speaking states of central Europe were divided into a plethora of smaller and larger political entities. In the absence of a shared civic experience, the common culture of these states formed the main pillar of German nationalism. In the course of the 19th century, particularly literature and music became the basis of German national consciousness (Hochman 2016, 174). All across the German-speaking communities, cultural figures such as the musician Franz Schubert, the medieval lyricist Walther von der Vogelweide and the poets Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were cherished. Although their origins were scattered across present-day Germany and Austria, their works were perceived to be expressions of a German spirit. Culture was seen as the unifying bound between Germans separated by multiple political

borders. The term *Kulturnation* thus originated in a pan-German nationalist context. Yet, how did pan-Germanism fit with the multiethnic and eastward-oriented Habsburg monarchy?

The pan-German movement in the Habsburg monarchy (and to a lesser extent also in the First Austrian Republic) was characterised by one central ambiguity: the conflicting relation between the centuries old, multiethnic Habsburg monarchy and the unfolding process of German unification. Austria's defeat in the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, established the *kleindeutsche* solution which excluded the German-speaking parts of the Austrian monarchy from the rapidly unifying German state. This status-quo was mostly accepted by pan-German nationalist in Austria. Their political aims and agitations were limited to securing the privileged position of the German-speaking population *within* the centralized Habsburg state (Thorpe 2011, 19). This can be observed in a series of communal disputes in ethnically homogenous provinces such as Bohemia which culminated in the Badeni-crisis of 1897. In this crisis, the most significant of its kind, the Austrian prime minister, Count Kasimir Badeni, introduced a decree which mandated all civil servants (including German-speakers) in Bohemia to speak both German and Czech within a few years (Vocelka 2014, 92). The result of this was a series of riots in Vienna and Graz led by outraged German-nationalists, fist-fights in the imperial parliament, counter-protests in Prague by Czech nationalists and the eventual resignation of Badeni (Thorpe 2011, 21–22). Despite such episodes, the split of the German language and cultural community between Habsburg-Austria and the German Empire was mostly accepted. Only the fringe of the pan-German movement demanded Austro-German political union. We can conclude that among the German-speaking population of Austria there was widespread identification with the German culture, but not with the German political *Kulturnation*. German ethnic nationalism coexisted with Austro-Hungarian civic nationalism.

Culture as an argument for *Anschluss*: Social Democracy and cultural pan-Germanism in the First Republic

The loss of the empire after Austria's defeat in the First World War resulted in a reversal of this. Although some elements within the conservative Christian-Social camp tried to remain a distinction between Germans in Germany and Germans in Austria, by referring to the general *Deutschtum* and the particular Austrian *Volkstum* (a sort of regional patriotism) (Thorpe 2011, 31), the overall trend was in favour of political unification with Germany. Despite some pleas for a more nuanced cultural identity and some calls for an eastward looking Austria in the form of a "Danube Federation", the early first republic was dominated by a strong view towards Germany. Especially the Social Democratic party was eager to argue for an "*Anschluss*" with Germany. For the first time since Austria's defeat in 1866 the *großdeutsche* solution was earnestly on the table again. Interesting for our study is how arguments of cultural unification were used to promote political union with Germany. While cultural pan-Germanism had existed already in the monarchy, it was used to promote cultural hegemony within the diverse Habsburg monarchy, not to promote political union with Germany. By the time of the First Republic, this had changed. In its early months, for instance, the Social Democratic deputy to the constituent national assembly Karl Leuthner celebrated the fall of the monarchy as a sort of liberation from the ethnic burden of a multicultural empire:

"We are at last nothing but Germans, members of this great *Kulturnation* that has stood for centuries. We are saved and redeemed from mixing with younger, lesser cultures, pulled out of the dark, wildly fermenting wilderness of the Balkans (...)" (Leuther, quoted in Heer 2001, 341).

Leuthner, along with other leading Social Democratic figures such as Otto Bauer or Karl Renner, were strongly associated with the pan-German movement. They were active in pan-German associations such as the *Österreichisch-Deutscher Volksbund*, a non-partisan group founded in 1925, lobbying for Austria's unification with Germany (*Ibid.*, 349). Also the

*Arbeiter-Zeitung*⁶, the Social Democrat's daily newspaper took a pro-German stance. Reporting on a pro-*Anschluss* gathering held at Vienna's city hall in August 1925, Karl Leuthner can be once again heard making a cultural argument for joining the German republic:

"Sacred is the homeland but more sacred are the cultural assets of mankind which each people forms in its own way and shape. Therefore, every progress in civilization makes national unity more vital, more necessary for culture. One speaks of Austrians, of Austria according to the decree of Saint-Germain. But in truth, there are only Germans in Austria" (*Arbeiter-Zeitung* 1925, 1).

The German president of the *Reichstag*, Paul Löbe, (likewise a Social Democrat), also spoke at the gathering. He similarly used culture to reject the criticism that an Austrian *Anschluss* is a form of German imperialism: "When parts of a people who speak the same language as the great nation, who have the same culture, want to go home to the motherland, then this is our first human right." (*Ibid.*, 1). Culture serves as a clear source of legitimacy for state policy.

Notable in these statements is the lack of references to German race or ethnicity. Surely, there are openly chauvinist tones in Leuthner's statement on the "lesser" cultures of the Balkans, yet, generally speaking, the pan-Germanism of interwar Socialists was a moderate one based on culture, not ethnicity. The statement of Paul Löbe even casts the issue of cultural union in terms of human rights – a very modern parlance. Many of the leading Social Democrats advocating for the *Anschluss* with Germany, notably Otto Bauer, the party's deputy leader or Friedrich Austerlitz, the editor-in-chief of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, were in fact of Jewish origin. Because of this, pan-German organisations which included Jewish members, such as the *Österreichisch-Deutscher Volksbund*, were attacked by the far-right (Hochman 2016, 226).

What the Social Democratic pan-Germanists of the early First Republic did not know was that their inclusive, culturally based German nationalism only opened the door for a far more aggressive and highly racially charged German nationalism. Where the Habsburg monarchy once served as an alternative to political union with Germany, and to an extent

⁶ The Social Democrat's daily newspaper was published from 1889-1938 and from 1945-1991.

also to pan-German ethnic nationalism (in the form of dynastic, Catholic universalism), the First Republic could muster no such alternative. Even more, it was Austrian parties, and particularly the Social Democratic party⁷, which actively contributed to the destruction of the Austrian identity.

Attempts at establishing a Habsburg-Austrian cultural identity

As we have seen above, the notion of a *Kulturnation* has strong historic ties to pan-German nationalism. Culture was considered to be a unifying element between politically separate states and after the fall of the Habsburg monarchy, it would be used to argue for political unification. Nevertheless, during the second half of the 19th century we can also observe an alternative source of Austrian national identity which articulated different cultural points of reference from those referred to by proponents of pan-Germanism. Instead of focusing on the common German language and literature or ideas of ethnic homogeneity, there was a growing Habsburg patriotism which placed a greater emphasis on Catholicism, imperial cosmopolitanism and baroque architecture as the Austrian national style.

This variation of a particularly Austrian identity (Austria standing for those regions under Habsburg rule) can be seen as a direct reaction to the growing nationalism of the second half of the 19th century, increasingly threatening the multi-ethnic monarchy's existence (Nierhaus 2016, 5). This identity found its cultural expression in the (neo-)baroque style of architecture which was considered to be a synthesis of the core elements of the Habsburg state. These elements were: the House of Habsburg, the Catholic faith and the diversity of its population. A key figure in the dissemination of this political narrative was the Viennese art historian Albert Ilg who first sketched this vision of Austria as a "baroque nation" in his 1888 pamphlet *Die Zukunft des Barockstils*. In his following work he described the baroque as quintessentially Austrian because it was the style of the period in which the Habsburgs were able to consolidate their power over Eastern Central Europe. It was also the architecture of the Catholic counterreformation and just like the empire, the Austrian baroque was a fusion of different elements (Nierhaus 2016; Stachel 2006). What also

⁷ The Christian Social party also had a pan-German wing yet this was only one of many which had to compete with business owners with financial interests in the former imperial territories, monarchists and Habsburg loyalists and the Catholic wing fearful of a renewed *Kulturkampf* in a greater Germany.

characterises this variation of Austrian identity was its anti-German undertone which placed a strong emphasis on the sectarian divide between Catholic Austria and Protestant Prussia. The art historian Ilg, for instance, considered Catholicism as a creative force therefore making Austria the greater *Kulturnation* than Germany which in his view was characterised by a “sober” protestant neo-renaissance (Stachel 2006). While Ilg placed an emphasis on the creative potential of Catholicism, it also contributed in another way to an Austro-Habsburg patriotism. The monarchy was characterised by a particularly baroque Catholic piety, at times referred to as *pietas Austriaca* (Vocelka 2014, 59).

The notion of Austria being a “baroque nation” found expression in the buildings commissioned by the government. The neo-baroque became the monarchy’s preferred architectural style as can be observed in the extension of the Hofburg palace (the Neue Burg), the imperial theatre (Burgtheater), the interior of the art history and natural history museums, the war ministry along the Ringstraße or the Austrian pavilion at the 1893 world exhibition in Chicago and 1900 world exhibition in Paris (Nierhaus 2016, 5; Pollerros 2004, 454). The active promotion of neo-baroque architecture by the highest authorities of the state reveals the central weakness of this variation of Austrian identity. The emphasis on Austria as a baroque nation – Catholic, cosmopolitan and under the rule of the Habsburg dynasty – was almost exclusively held by the old elites. Albert Ilg, for instance, worked in Vienna’s highest social circles, giving art history classes to members of the imperial family and other prominent families (Pollerros 2004, 454) while the emperor’s son, Franz Ferdinand, was commissioned with the planning of the extension of the Hofburg (Stachel 2006, 289). Apart from the Catholic element of the narrative, the *pietas Austriaca*, practiced by much of the rural population, this Habsburg patriotism as an alternative to pan-German nationalism was limited to individuals and institutions with strong ties to the state. The rising middle class was much more pro-German orientated. It was only the army, bureaucracy and the aristocracy which truly identified with the Habsburg state resulting in what Bruckmüller described as *Hofratsnation*⁸ (Bruckmüller, quoted in Knapp 2005, 44–45).

⁸ “Hofrat” is a title given to senior civil servants. It can still be awarded today by the Austrian president.

Kulturnation – a reactionary term?

Chapter four tried to approach the term *Kulturnation* by paying closer attention to its defining features and the context of its origin. We have seen that the term rose to prominence in the context of 19th century (pan-)German nationalism. It has been (but does not necessarily have to be) linked to racial views of national community. In this chapter we saw that those figures who sought to challenge the often racially charged pan-German version of the term did so themselves from a conservative position. Albert Ilg and his circle were known as ardent critics of modern art, such as the *Jugendstil* (Stachel 2006, 272). Their criticism of ethnic pan-Germanism was due to the fact that it was a challenge to the multiethnic empire they supported and not out of a liberal conviction for tolerance. Besides, also this side of the argument could barely conceal that within the multiethnic Habsburg state it should be the German speakers who should be in a hegemonic position. Does this make the *Kulturnation* an inherently reactionary charged term?

Before coming to such a conclusion, we should appreciate the fact that the pan-Germanism of the Social Democrats contained some sincerely progressive elements. As Heer (2001, 338) points out, for Austrian social democrats Germany was “*the country of humanity, of education, of human progress.*” In this view, Austria stood for the reactionary monarchy, Catholicism and social inequality while Germanys stood for the opposite; it was a projection of the Socialist vision, including the revolution. Yet also here, we find a culturally chauvinist undertone. Although the Social Democratic belief in Germany was not based on race, the insistence on German cultural and intellectual excellence does go uncomfortably well with such views. We can conclude that the use of the term in the 19th and early 20th century stood in a nationalist context with openly chauvinist tones. Though never used exclusively by and for reactionary purposes, the concept of the *Kulturnation* stood in close proximity to reactionary causes. In the next chapter we will see how conservative actors continued to champion the term after the Second World War.

6. The making of the Austrian *Kulturnation*

The collapse of the Nazi regime and the end of the Second World War brought a significant change in the use and understanding of the term *Kulturnation*. Just like Austrian identity in general, it experienced a strong move away from its originally pan-German context. Moreover, we can observe a reversal of the term's historical meaning. While the German aspect of Austrian national identity declined, the above mentioned "Habsburg patriotism", and the image of Austria as a baroque, Catholic nation, made a strong comeback. This chapter will take a closer look at some of the defining elements of the post-war *Kulturnation* image as well as highlighting the political will behind this image.

The remnants of pan-German nationalism in Austrian politics

The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, as well as the war, which had been started by it, strongly discredited ideas of pan-Germanism and ethnic nationalism. Despite this, such ideas did continue to survive on a smaller scale. Politically, pan-German attitudes remained alive in the form of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and its predecessor party the Federation of Independents⁹ (VdU). In the VdU's 1954 election manifesto the party states: "Austria is a German state. (...) [The VdU] stands for the preservation and consolidation of the German people in the Austrian region (...)." (Verband der Unabhängigen 1954, no page). Note that Austria is only referred to as a "region" The negation of Austrian statehood and the affirmation of German culture also found expression in the manifestos of the newly founded FPÖ which came about in 1955 after disputes within the VdU. In an election manifesto from 1957, the FPÖ proclaims:

"We must keep awake in the German Austrians the awareness to be a part of the German people with all rights and duties resulting from this affiliation. (...) The 'Austrian nation', on the other hand, was only invented in 1945. The family is (...) above all the bearer and multiplier of our national and cultural heritage (...). With the

⁹ Verband der Unabhängigen

mother tongue, the child absorbs the first foundations of the culture inherited from its parents and ancestors. Culture and the consciousness of the *Volk* have their first foundations in the family” (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs 1957, no page).

In this passage we find the link between culture and blood which was discussed in the previous chapter. The FPÖ would continue to make references to German culture in its party manifestos until 1983.

The construction of the post-war *Kulturnation* and its main elements

Despite these statements, after the Second World War, the German element of Austrian national identity gave way to a deliberately Austrian understanding of the term *Kulturnation*. We can thus observe a reversal in the term’s use. Discredited by national socialism and the war, the previously far more widespread pan-German connotation became subordinate to a more Habsburg-orientated understanding of the term *Kulturnation*. Politically, this image was championed by the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP). Austria’s “new” national identity made use of a series of “old” themes, most notably in the form of an emphasis on religion, a revival in the interest of baroque architecture and lifestyle, the appropriation of artists who were citizens of the old empire as well as a generally strengthened appreciation of the Habsburg empire and great power thinking.

The rejection of contemporary art

The aesthetics of the early *Kulturnation* were traditional and rejected contemporary art in general and abstract art in particular. Summarizing this attitude aptly, the Austrian author Alexander Lernet-Holenia (quoted in Feldgrill 2014, 50) wrote in an August 1945 issue of the conservative art magazine *Der Turm*:

“In fact, we need only continue where the dreams of a madman have interrupted us. In fact, we don't need to look ahead, we only need to look back. To be perfectly clear: We do not need to flirt with the future and make nebulous projects, we are, in the best

and most valuable mind, our past, we only have to remember that we are our past – and it will be our future.”

Moreover, themes and words of Nazi art criticism continued into the Second Republic. In a 1950 parliamentary debate, one ÖVP politician spoke of modern art as “*entartete Kunst*” thus using a Nazi propaganda term (Strachwitz 1950, 1547). He went on to state: “We must ensure that these art forms are not promoted because they do not deserve it and, in our opinion, they are perishable for the youth and for all that we want” (*Ibid.*, 1547). Besides the use of Nazi terminology, there was also considerable continuity in the personnel of the cultural sector. Musicians of the Vienna Philharmonics who were Nazi party members could continue to play for the orchestra in the most cases (Rathkolb 2015, 317). Similarly, the German actor and director Lothar Müthel – an active member of the Nazi party and director of the Burgtheater from 1939 to 1945 – continued to work for the theatre after the war and directed one of its first new productions (*Ibid.*, 317). The Künstlerhaus, home to Vienna’s oldest artists’ association, remained a stronghold of old Nazis after the war (Mießgang 2020, 49; Borchhardt-Birbaumer 2020, 61). Rudolf Eisenmenger, one of Hitler’s favourite painters and a member of the Nazi party, went on to design the safety curtain of the Viennese opera house. Another figure with a Nazi past, the Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr, rose to prominence with his book *Verlust der Mitte* which attacked contemporary art. The rejection of contemporary or avant-garde aesthetics corresponded in large parts with the National Socialist understanding of art. This explains such continuities in personnel.

Religion and the baroque

The importance of religion as a cultural and societal corner stone of Austria was frequently referred to in ÖVP election manifestos from the 1950s and 1960s. In a 1962 manifesto, for instance, the ÖVP states: “It is the task of cultural policy, on the basis of a religious foundation of life and education, to provide for responsible and discerning citizens as well as capable and well-educated working people” (Österreichische Volkspartei 1962, no page). The baroque *pietas austriaca* found a renewed expression in what the ÖVP refers to as “Austria’s Christian culture” (Österreichische Volkspartei 1952, no page). Alongside the return of references to religion in political life, the image of the Austrian *Kulturnation* was also constructed through

a revival of interest in baroque architecture. Similar to the image sketched by Ilg and his followers from the 1880s onwards until the fall of the monarchy, Austria was once again considered a “baroque nation.” This can be observed in the cultural policy of the French occupation administration which considered an emphasis on the baroque and Catholic values of the Habsburg empire to serve as a useful antidote to anti-Semitism, anti-Slavic sentiments and pan-Germanism (Rathkolb 2015, 326). In Austrian thought as well, this return to Austria as a “baroque nation” was present. In a series of popular science and identity-establishing publications, such as Ernst Marboe’s (1948) *Österreich Buch*, Ann Tizia Leitich’s (1948) *Vienna Gloriosa: Weltstadt des Barock*, Theresia Schüssel’s (1960) *Kultur des Barock in Österreich* or Hans Aurenhammer and Willy Lorenz’s (1961) *Allen Ernstes ist Österreich unersetzlich*, the baroque was portrayed as Austria’s national style with it being a representation of Austria’s open, diverse and cosmopolitan national character and special function as a bridge between the South and the North as well as the West and the East of Europe (Pollerroß 2004).

Imperial themes

It is not just the return of Catholicism and a renewed interest for the baroque style which give the post-war Austrian identity an imperial touch; the image of the Austrian *Kulturnation* is fundamentally embedded in a great power mentality. Austria, in this view, performs culture on a world stage as is spelled out in a party newspaper of the ÖVP from 1945. It states that the aim of Austrian cultural policy is to demonstrate to foreign countries Austria’s great cultural achievements for it to “take a place of honour among the world’s *Kulturnationen*” (Pertner, quoted in Knapp 2005, 92). The empire’s borders also live on in the mind of the Austrian *Kulturnation* as a source of “Austrian” artists and as their sphere of activity. Thus, as Rathkolb (2015, 47) points out, the great cultural achievements of the monarchy, themselves the result of centuries of migration, exchange and assimilation processes, were “austrianized.” Some of the greatest Austrian minds and writers, such as Sigmund Freud (born in today’s Czech Republic), Franz Kafka (born in Budapest) or Joseph Roth (born in today’s Ukraine), would today no longer be considered Austrian yet they feed into Austria’s image as a *Kulturnation*.

A benevolent disposition towards the Habsburg empire is also observable in the programme of the reopening of the Burgtheater (the former imperial theatre) in 1955. For its reopening two pieces were considered: *König Ottokars Glück und Ende* by the Viennese playwright Franz Grillparzer and *Egmont* by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Konrad 2011, 85). Grillparzer's play championed a traditional, Catholic and Habsburg-oriented image of Austria while Goethe's play was critical of the church and monarchy (*Ibid.*, 85). Ultimately, the decision was made by the government to perform Grillparzer's play (Knapp 2005, 99).

Political decisions establishing the *Kulturnation*

The above-mentioned decision to play Grillparzer's *König Ottokars Glück und Ende* does not just show the strong preference for Habsburg-related themes but also the central role that politics played in the promotion of this image. This reiterates the argument presented in the literature overview on national identity formation that elites play a crucial role in the process. Knapp (2005) points to a few such links between culture and politics. In addition to the decision made on the piece for the reopening of the Burgtheater, the government also decided what was to be performed for the reopening of the Staatsoper (Fidelio). In what style the Burgtheater was to be reconstructed was also decided by the government. Despite the successful design in the official competition envisaging a modern facelift of the theatre, the government opted for a traditional design, keeping the hierarchical boxes (*Ibid.*, 99).

Legislation was also a tool used by the state to shape and finance the Austrian *Kulturnation*. Two notable laws in this regard are the *Kunstförderungsbeitragsgesetz*¹⁰ of 1946 and the *Kulturgröschengesetz* of 1949 which funded national and federal cultural activities (Konrad 2011, 83). In 1950, parliament passed the *Salzburger-Festspielfonds* law which commits federal as well as regional public funds for the Salzburg Festival. This law is still in place and its importance for establishing Austrian identity has been frequently referred to in the culture ministry's art report (*Kunstbericht*) such as in this quote from 2003:

¹⁰ Eng.: Art Promotion Contribution Act

“The adoption of the Salzburg Festival Fund Law in 1950 by the National Council, which placed the financing of the festival on a legal basis and is still in force today, expresses the cultural-political attitude of the time, namely that the Second Republic wanted to create an identity for itself as an independent *Kulturnation* in the international field with the help of highly respected artistic institutions. (...)” (Bundeskanzleramt 2003, 52)

7. Culture and the myth of Austria as Nazi-Germany's first victim

The previous chapter sketched some of the themes of Austria's post-war identity as a *Kulturnation*. Culture – particularly high culture – was employed to bolster Austria's identity as an independent nation. The image of the *Kulturnation*, however, was also used to deflect from Austria's National Socialist past. This chapter will show how culture was used to sustain the narrative of Austria as Nazi Germany's first victim. In addition to examining how the *Kulturnation* did so, this chapter will also explore the use of culture to challenge this myth. We will see that the cultural engagement with Austria's responsibility for its involvement in the Nazi system long preceded any form of political engagement with this topic.

The *Kulturnation* as part of the *Opfermythos*

In the early Second Republic, political actors did very little to acknowledge Austria's responsibility in the involvement of the Nazi regime. On the contrary, official Austria sought to distance itself from any affiliation with Nazi Germany, emphasizing the destruction, suffering and victimhood German aggression had brought upon Austria. The political backbone of what would later be known as *Opfermythos* was the 1943 Moscow Declaration which judged Austria as the first victim of German imperialism (Liessmann 2004, 207). As Veronika Zangl (2013) points out, the myth of Austria as a victim of Nazi aggression fit well into a set of further myths depicting Austria as the victim of foreign powers. For one, Austria's chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated by Nazis in a 1934 coup attempt, strengthening the image of Austria as a victim of Nazi-Germany. For another, the occupation and administration of Austria through the Allied powers was also portrayed as further evidence of Austria's status of victimhood. However, the *Opfermythos* portrayed Austrian society as a whole to be the victim of National Socialism and mostly ignored those persecuted directly by the regime. On this Peter Utgaard (quoted in Zangl 2013, 277–78) writes: “The failure to distinguish between general suffering and being a victim of the Nazi regime resulted in the creation of a homogenized community of victims that encompassed nearly everyone

(...).” Jewish claims to victimhood were met with irritation and Austria refused to enter into negotiations with the Claims Council, an organisation advocating and negotiating for compensation and restoration for Jewish victims of the Nazi regime (Zangl 2013).

How did the image of the *Kulturnation* help to maintain the myth of Austria as a victim of the Nazi regime? The main contribution of the narrative was to deflect from Austria’s role as a part of Nazi Germany: “The idea to be able to take up pre-war cultural traditions without a break after 1945 characterised the post-war years involving the externalisation of National Socialism” (Zangl 2013, 289). The image of the *Kulturnation*, with its focus on high culture, cultural Catholicism and Habsburg splendour, addressed neither the Nazi regime, nor the war, nor the Holocaust. For the *Kulturnation*, the years between 1938 and 1945 simply did not exist. This also explains the continuity of personnel with a record of involvement in the Nazi movement in the cultural sector described above. The image of the *Kulturnation*, and with it the need for a well-functioning high culture sector, trumped any serious attempt to clear the sector of Nazi protagonists.

Explaining the conservative shift

This conservative cultural climate remained dominant in Austria until the 1960s (Rathkolb 2015; Knapp 2005). In the first decades of the Second Republic, we find little contestation over Austria’s image as a *Kulturnation*. With regards to institutionalized politics, we can speak of a conspicuous absence of thereof. This lack of contestation is all the more noticeable given the strong differences in national identity experienced in the first republic. How can this be explained?

The literature on national identity, with a focus on the role of memory, holds some valuable insights for this question. Bernhard and Kubik argue (2014, 12) that in some special cases there may be consensus on a specific memory of the past (and with this also on the narratives that accompany it) “because of the potential danger of politicizing the past.” A shared version of the past is thus more agreeable than an open conflict over it. This corresponds to what we find in post-war Austria. In favour of political stability, the Social Democrats largely abandoned their cultural visions of the First Republic. Social Democratic thought also became much more pragmatic as the economic potential of high culture events was recognised (and appreciated) rather than its exclusive nature. More generally, with the

rise of post-war prosperity, consumer culture largely replaced working class culture (Rathkolb 2015, 346). It was, thus, the extraordinary circumstances that the post-war Austrian state found itself in that help to explain this cultural consensus. On this Rathkolb (2015, 322) remarks that in times of such socio-economic instability, a conservative understanding of culture was more suitable to stabilize the newly risen Austrian state. Contestation in times of national crisis is less likely than in times of prosperity. These circumstances provided the basis for the narrative of the *Kulturnation* to become hegemonic.

In addition to this, there was also little appetite by the main political parties SPÖ and ÖVP to delve deeper into the past and thus disrupt the politically advantageous and economically increasingly lucrative image of the *Kulturnation* falling victim to Nazi aggression. As Tony Judt points out, “[b]oth parties had an interest in putting the past behind them (...).” He writes:

“The Christian Socials, reborn as the Austrian People's Party, boasted proudly of their opposition in 1938 to the German takeover; but they were conspicuously silent on their singular contribution to the destruction of Austrian democracy just four years earlier. The Socialist, as the Social Democrats were now known, could reasonably claim to have been the victims twice over: first of the civil war in 1934 and then at the hands of the Nazis. What this obscured, however, was their erstwhile enthusiasm for the Anschluss.” (Judt, quoted in Zangl 2013, 275).

Culture as a criticism of the *Opfermythos*

Although we have seen how the image of the *Kulturnation* was used to promote a “clean” image of Austria, thus contributing to what has been referred to as *Opfermythos*, cultural expression has also been used to precisely criticise the latent anti-Semitism and wide-spread National Socialist attitudes in Austrian society. Besides the positive narrative of the *Kulturnation* there exists also a negative representation of Austria, or what Zangl (2013, 272) refers to as “black myth.” Liessmann (2004) comes to a similar conclusion when he contrasts the *Opfermythos* with the *Lebenslüge*. The former is the already discussed narrative of Austria as a victim while the latter focuses on Austria as a perpetrator. In this narrative, there is an intrinsic authoritarian and xenophobic bias in the Austrian population which made Austrians

enthusiastic perpetrators. This supposed bias continued to exist in Austrians after the war and hides behind a thin veneer of bourgeois mentalities. Yet, before coming to this opposing narrative, which found its expression in songs, sketches and plays, artists first dealt with issues of trauma.

In contrast to the history books, politics and high culture; avant-garde artists did deal with National Socialism, the war and the Holocaust as subjects in the early years of the Second Republic (Borchhardt-Birbaumer 2020, 61). Such motives can be seen in the works of the Austrian painters Anton Lehmden (*Panzerschlacht (Kriegsbild III)*, 1954-1956; *Kämpfende in einer Landschaft (Kriegsbild IV)*, 1954), Ernst Fuchs (*Schädelstätte*, 1950), Friedensreich Hunderwasser (*Gasflammen zusammen mit den Flammen des Heiligen Geistes*, 1957) or Rudolf Hausner (*Die Arche des Odysseus*, 1948-1951, 1953-1956). However, these early attempts at thematising the recent past gained little attention outside of art circles and dealt with personal traumata rather than a socio-political critique of Austria's involvement in the Nazi-regime.

Beginning with the 1960s, there emerged a cultural critique of what Zangl (2013, 273) refers to as “para-nazistic” milieu. The term refers to a subtle “everyday fascism” which manifested itself in informal discourses on “allegedly positive experiences during National Socialism, like community spirit in NS youth organisations or effective employment creation during National Socialism (*Ibid.*, 273). Such criticism was frequently accompanied by a media scandal and strong expressions of apathy towards the artists, revealing just how explosive the *Opfermythos* had become. A notable early example of this was Helmut Qualtinger's monologue *Herr Karl*. Its broadcast on Austrian state television in 1961 caused the first TV scandal of the second republic (*Ibid.*, 278). In the monologue, Qualtinger portrays a Viennese shopkeeper who tells the story of his life and his engagement in historic events. These events range from the First World War, to the Great Depression, to interwar Austrian politics, the rise of Nazism and the Second World War, and end with Austria's occupation after the war by the Allies. It becomes evident that Herr Karl is an opportunist who switched allegiance according to who was in power. His opportunism is riddled with many contradictions. For instance, he expresses sympathy with the Nazi regime while at the same time denouncing it or he engages in anti-Semitic harassment of Jews while at the same time stressing that he did not profit from the aryianization of Jewish businesses. Qualtinger's importance was to have

convincingly portrayed everyday fascism which had been completely eradicated from the public space but continued to be present in more informal spheres.

A musical treatise of the subject of everyday fascism is found in Ludwig Hirsch's 1978 song *Die Omama*. In it, Hirsch describes an archetypical strict Austrian grandmother who continues to sympathise with National Socialism. Despite having lost her husband in the war, she is still proud of her *Mutterkreuz*, a Nazi state decoration awarded to "honourable" mothers with many children. Upon the grandmother's death, the singer urges her not to bring the cross with her into heaven.

With regard to the subject of Nazi crimes, the work of the Austrian painter Gottfried Helnwein is exemplary. In a series of pictures, the painter addressed the ignored history of child euthanasia at the Viennese psychiatric clinic *Steinhof* during the NS regime.¹¹ Having begun the series in the early seventies, the pictures became known to the wider public in 1979 after Helnwein had read an interview with Dr. Heinrich Gross in the Austrian newspaper *Kurier*. In this interview Dr. Gross, who was the head of the children's psychiatric clinic at *Steinhof*, admitted the killing of disabled children at the clinic but insisted that this was done peacefully by secretly adding poison to the food of the victims. Outraged by the lack of public criticism, Helnwein asked the weekly newsmagazine *profil* to print his series of paintings depicting scenes from the children's ward at *Steinhof*. The magazine printed the paintings which caused the public debate Helnwein hoped for. One of the paintings, *Lebensunwertes Leben*, depicts a dead child with its head in a bowl of food, clearly referring to the practice Dr. Gross described. As a consequence, Gross was expelled from the SPÖ – somewhat reminiscent of the ambivalent allegiances of Qualtinger's *Herr Karl*, Dr. Gross had joined the party in 1953 – and had to resign from his medical post at *Steinhof* (Thomas, Beres, and Shevell 2006, 344). Nevertheless, he remained one of the co-chairs of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research into Deformities of the Nervous System and continued to be a forensic expert to Austrian courts until the late 1990s (*Ibid.*, 344).

The greatest cultural attack on the *Opfermythos* was Thomas Bernhard's piece *Heldenplatz*, which had its premiere at the Burgtheater in 1988. By the mid-eighties, the *Opfermythos* had already become increasingly under attack. As we have seen, this attack was

¹¹ Information on Gottfried Helnwein and his works on child euthanasia taken from the wall text for *Lebensunwertes Leben* by Gottfried Helnwein. *In the Beginning: Kunst in Österreich 1945-1980*, 13 March – 8 November 2020, Albertina Modern, Vienna

led by cultural challenges to it. With the scandal surrounding Kurt Waldheim's election as Austria's president in 1986, it had finally also reached the political echelon. The central character of Bernhard's play is the Jewish professor Josef Schuster who had recently committed suicide by jumping from his window looking onto Vienna's Heldenplatz. Although, Josef Schuster is not seen in the play, we learn from the recollections of his family and house maid that he, together with his brother Robert, had fled Austria in 1938 to work as professors at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. The brothers re-migrated to Vienna in the late 1950s only to find that the political climate had not changed. For years, Josef Schuster's wife Hedwig had been hearing the cheers of the masses at Heldenplatz, the square where Hitler gave his infamous speech after Austria's "*Anschluss*" in 1938. Prior to Professor Schuster's suicide, the family had planned to return to England. The play ends with *Sieg Heil* chants becoming louder before Mrs. Schuster head drops onto the table she is sitting at. The impression the viewer gets is that the Schusters have the ability "to hear what to the rest of the country obviously is not visible or audible." (*Ibid.*, 288).

Unlike the previous works which dealt with Austria's role during the Nazi regime, Bernhardt's *Heldenplatz* entered the political sphere from the moment it was first performed with the main protagonists of the debate being senior politicians and editors-in-chief (Zangl 2013, 286). Erhard Busek, the ÖVP's spokesman for culture, called for a boycott of the piece (Knapp 2005, 181). The former chancellor Bruno Kreisky said that such an insult to Austria "should not be allowed to take place" and that "rudeness must be met with rudeness." (Kreisky, quoted in Kiebuszinska 1995, 380). President Kurt Waldheim – his Nazi past having caused the first political scandal in this regard during his election two years earlier – called the play "an outrage against the Austrian people" (Waldheim, quoted in Kiebuszinska 1995, 280). On TV footage from the premiere, a young Heinz-Christian Strache, the former leader of the FPÖ, can be seen in the audience protesting against the play.

In the scandal surrounding Bernhard's play, the image of the *Kulturnation* came face to face with its critique. As Kiebuszinska (1995, 378) points out: "The Burgtheater represents a tradition rooted in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the repertoire of the Burgtheater historically reflected that tradition." As we have seen in chapter five, the Burgtheater has been at the heart of the image of the *Kulturnation*, having been built in the "Austrian" neo-baroque style and having been purposely reopened with an "Austrian" play after the war. *Heldenplatz* clearly broke with the Burgtheater's tradition of upholding a central theme of Austrian

national identity. In addition to this, the year 1988 marked the 100th birthday of the theatre along the Ringstraße. The theatre received letters demanding a traditional and Austrian play, such as *König Ottokar's Glück und Ende*, the same play which reopened the theatre in 1955, to be staged (Kiebuszinska 1995, 379). Instead, the Austrian audience was confronted with its past in a way which both eroded the narrative of the *Opfermythos* as well as the narrative of the *Kulturnation*. The *Opfermythos* finally found its political end in an address held by chancellor Franz Vranitzky (SPÖ) before Austria's parliament in 1991. In it he stated:

“Nevertheless, many Austrians welcomed the Anschluss, supported the National Socialist regime and supported it at many levels of the hierarchy. Many Austrians were involved in the suppression and persecution through the Third Reich, some of them in prominent positions. Even today we cannot ignore the moral responsibility for the actions of our citizens. (...) We acknowledge all the dates of our history and the deeds of all parts of our people, the good as well as the bad; and as we claim the good ones for ourselves, we have to apologize for the bad ones – to the survivors and to the descendants of the dead (Vranitzky 1991, 3282–83).

8. *Kulturation* and contestation

The previous chapters have shown how the narrative of Austria as a *Kulturation* was deliberately used after the end of the Second World War to foster a distinctive Austrian identity. Austrian national uniqueness was asserted through the narrative of a long history of cultural achievements, rooted in the country's past. Yet, the image of the *Kulturation* also helped to sustain the larger post-war narrative of Austria as a victim of German aggression. Over time, however, challenges to this narrative emerged. Artists and creatives began to break with the image of the *Kulturation* by turning their work against the narratives upholding Austrian national identity. Yet, the relationship between art, society and Austria's past was not the only factor which contributed to an erosion of the *Kulturation* image. As we will see in this chapter, the image of the *Kulturation* faced many further points of contestation. For one, the narrative has changed somewhat. In this chapter we will see how the *Jugendstil* became a part of the *Kulturation* narrative although it was virtually forgotten at the time of the narrative's conception after the Second World War. Secondly, the *Kulturation* can also be contested on grounds that the *Kulturation* image does not necessarily correspond with the lived experience of many Austrians. In other words, culture does not play an above average role in the daily life of Austrians. Thirdly, there are many competing interpretations of the term and what it should contain. There have been attempts to include previously marginalised understandings of culture, notably contemporary and popular forms of art. Finally, there are voices that doubt the existence of a *Kulturation* altogether or openly address the gaps between narrative and political practise. All this points to the fact that narratives do not exist in a vacuum but require a degree of lived experience or daily plausibility to be sustained.

The *Jugendstil*: a latecomer to the *Kulturation*

When recalling the image of Austria as a *Kulturation*, the splendour of *fin de siècle* Vienna quickly comes to mind. Austrian artists and cultural achievements are firmly incorporated into the narrative of the *Kulturation* in a way which seems to suggest that the *Jugendstil* is only the most recent expression of a centuries-old history of artistic excellence. Moreover,

the *Jugendstil* and turn of the century Vienna are not just considered to have significance for Austria as a *Kulturnation* but for the entire course of Western civilization. The historian and diplomat Emil Brix (1990, 137) describes Vienna around 1900 as the “test site for all the essential trends of the 20th century.” In an article titled “How Vienna produced ideas that shaped the West”, *The Economist* (2016) labelled Vienna as “the city of the century.” The strong presence of the *Jugendstil* in Austrian identity (and here particularly in Viennese identity) has gone so far that one art historian writes: “(...) Austria is desperately trying to force the spirit of 1900 into our everyday life by the means of reconstruction and imitation” (Wagner 1990, 113). A prominent example of this imitation is the entrance to the Viennese amusement park *Wurstelprater* which was redesigned in 2008 in a pseudo-*Jugendstil* style.

The importance of the *fin de siècle* is, however, only a recent addition to the image of the *Kulturnation*. The discussion of the attempt to establish an Austro-Habsburg cultural identity (chapter five) has shown that the baroque was considered to be the “authentic” Austrian style, while the *Jugendstil* was viewed as too modern. Also during the First Republic, the *Jugendstil* contributed little to Austrian identity. On this Knapp (2005, 47) writes: “Although the first decades of the 20th century were among the most artistically and culturally creative periods in Austria, this did not have an identity-forming effect in the situation at the time.” The *Jugendstil* in general entered into a period of neglect, being discredited as “decadent”, “romantic” and as exemplary of *Kitsch* (Hermand 1965). Even in the literature on art history, publications on this style became scarce until it was slowly rediscovered in the 1950s (Simon 1976). With the *Jugendstil* only being rediscovered during the early period of the Second Republic, the post-war *Kulturnation* narrative relied heavily on the baroque and Catholic image already fostered during the monarchy.

In the rediscovery of the *Jugendstil* and its incorporation into the image of the *Kulturnation* we find two central themes of contestation. Firstly, it shows that narratives of national identity can change. While *fin de siècle* art and culture played virtually no role in the post-war construction of the image of the *Kulturnation*, today the period is considered to be one of the greatest examples of Austrian creative prowess. Secondly, the *Jugendstil* movement offers a counterweight to an image of a *Kulturnation* which is increasingly considered to be conservative-oriented. The emphasis on avant-garde art and the origins of modern aesthetics is in itself a criticism of a narrative which tends towards high culture and traditional aesthetics. The turn of the century became what Brix (1990, 142) calls a “flawless myth” – a

period which was challenging but free of conflict. Unlike the highly divisive interwar period which led to a brief civil war, Austria's role in the Nazi regime or Austria's founding myth as Nazi Germany's first victim, the period around 1900 is enticing yet undramatic, hardly stirring any political feelings in the present (*Ibid.*, 142). Once the narrative of the *Kulturnation* lost some of its appeal, the *Jugendstil* period became a fruitful source of identity, without completely breaking with the *Kulturnation* image but rather adding a modern layer to it.

The *Kulturnation* in lived experience

Chapter three showed that successful national identity narratives must have some relevance in the lived experience of citizens. Does this apply for the image of the *Kulturnation*? The narrative suggests elevated levels of cultural participation and interest for culture in Austria. Is this the case or is the term merely part of a political project?

Data on Austrian attitudes towards culture suggests that the image of the *Kulturnation* is somewhat exaggerated. In an overview of studies pertaining to Austrian national identity between 1980 and 1999, Knapp (2005) comes to the conclusion that Austrians do not primarily define themselves through great cultural achievements. The image of the *Kulturnation* rather shares its role in Austrian national identity with sports, the landscape and the system of social partnership (*Sozialpartnerschaft*) (*Ibid.*). A similar picture can be seen in the European data on cultural attitudes. A Eurostat study from 2015 shows that 73,6% of Austrians attended a cultural event in the twelve months before the survey (Eurostat 2019, 126). This percentage does not make Austria a unique *Kulturnation* but places it rather within the European average for cultural participation. Nordic countries, such as Finland, Sweden and Norway, all achieved scores over 80% with Iceland topping the chart with 90,0% (*Ibid.*, 126). Divergences in the level of cultural participation along age, income and gender were also average in European comparison. Again, it was the Nordic states that had the smallest gaps. With regards to spending on cultural activities, data from the Austrian statistics office *Statistik Austria* shows that in 2015 Austrian households spent on average 1,1% of their available monthly income on cultural events such as a visit to the theatre or a concert (Statistik Austria 2017, 63). A further 0,3% of income was spent on books and 0,5% on newspapers (*Ibid.*, 64). There was, thus, an average spending for culture related expenses of

1,9% of available household income. In contrast to what could be assumed of a *Kulturnation*, expenses for culture are lower than for other leisure expenses. For instance, in the same year, Austrian's spent 4,5% of available monthly income on holidays and 6,9% on restaurants (*Ibid.*, 64).

The data shows that culture does play a role in the lived experience of Austrians but in no way as a defining feature of Austrian life. Moreover, in European comparison, other nations engage more in cultural activities than Austrians do. This data suggests that "the nation" is not an essential part of the *Kulturnation* and confirms a bias towards high culture and an elite audience. The question of who is included in the *Kulturnation* is therefore another area of contestation.

Alternative uses of the term *Kulturnation*

Chapter five showed the historic contestations over the image of the *Kulturnation* between pan-Germanism and a baroque, Catholic Habsburg patriotism. The pan-German understanding of Austria as part of the wider Germanic *Kulturnation* remained dominant until the Second World War. Chapter six showed how some of the core themes of the *Kulturnation* narrative, as it was propagated at the beginning of the Second Republic, drew from what was historically the weaker form of identity and became dominant. However, throughout the Second Republic, especially after the immediate post-war decades, this understanding of *Kulturnation*, with its imperial themes, coexisted with other interpretations of the term which placed greater emphasis on different aspects. Contestation over the term's meaning, as well as a diversity in its usage and connotation, expressed itself in political discourse.

Notable in this regard are parliamentary records where the term was used in multiple ways with some of the reoccurring themes being presented here. The importance of books and reading, for example, was mentioned on multiple occasions, most directly expressed by Social Democratic member of parliament Leopoldine Pohl: "Only a book nation is a *Kulturnation*." (Pohl 1972, 8918). For other members of parliament, the preservation of historic buildings and monuments defines a *Kulturnation*: "The protection and preservation of historical monuments is self-evident for a *Kulturnation*." (Haselbach 1990, 24315). Or as Paul Kaufmann (1973, 8682) from the ÖVP puts it:

“A state that wastes its heritage, that sells off, squanders and lets the works it has taken over decay (...) not only curtails its citizens of what we now call quality of life but it is also in the process of losing its claim to be a *Kulturnation* and a *Kulturstaat*.”

Others have referred to science and education as core components of any *Kulturnation*. In this regard one member of parliament said: “If we want to keep Austria as a *Kulturnation*, then we must also do something for education because education and culture are causally linked.” (Franz 2014, 101). Hertha Firnberg (1969, 13788) from the SPÖ expressed a direct link between the budget for research and Austria’s status as a *Kulturnation*: “If scientific research at universities continues to be so poorly funded, by the year 2000 Austria will no longer be one of the *Kulturnationen*.” Firnberg used the term in the plural, relativizing Austria’s position from the *Kulturnation*, to a *Kulturnation*. This pluralistic interpretation of Austria being only one of many *Kulturnationen* was also frequently mentioned. Many speakers did not consider Austria to be an exceptional *Kulturnation* in its own right but to form part of an exclusive collective of cultural nations. This use of the term considers *Kulturnation* as a rank or a title, reserved for the most significant and culturally advanced European countries. Campaigning for Austria’s entry into the EU, one Social Democratic member of parliament explained: “Ladies and gentlemen! In this future Europe of ours, we will be dealing with other *Kulturnationen*, not with banana republics.” (Bösch 1994, 28570).

Somewhat remarkable, when it comes to the plurality of the use of the term *Kulturnation*, is its use in the context of animal protection. The treatment of animals, in this view, acts as an indicator of how cultured a nation is. Indeed, this line of argumentation was used on multiple occasions. In a debate in 1970, one Social Democratic member of parliament even directly contrasted the high culture interpretation of *Kulturnation* with animal protection: “For a *Kulturnation* like Austria cannot be measured by (...) how many operas and operetta performances are staged, but also by how it treats its animals.” (Kriz 1970, 2029).

The tension between “low culture” and “high culture”

As we can see, the term carried meaning and connotation beyond what was expressed in the classic *Kulturnation* narrative. The statements above can be seen as an attempt by political actors to incorporate such different understandings of the term into the national narrative. The most significant debate on what should form part of a *Kulturnation*, and a central point of contestation of the overall narrative, was the relationship between high culture and low culture, an elite audience and mass participation. Beginning with the tenure of Bruno Kreisky (SPÖ) as chancellor, there emerged a vocal critique of a national identity based on high culture and biased towards conservative cultural norms. While the Social Democrats remained largely silent during the formative years of the *Kulturnation*, in its party manifesto for the 1979 election, the party critiques the emphasis on the past: “Only a Social Democratic government can guarantee against reactionary attitudes and paternalism that wants to drag our country down into museum-like paralysis.” (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs 1979, no page). But not just the backward-looking orientation of the *Kulturnation* narrative became a point of contestation, also the issue of inclusiveness. In the party’s 1983 manifesto, the SPÖ calls for more equal access to art and culture: “As an indispensable part of cultural life, art must be open to all, whether active or consuming. (...) We will increasingly open the classical cultural institutions - such as federal theatres and museums - to all segments of the population” (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs 1983, 31).

From this moment on, we can observe a steady erosion of the classical *Kulturnation* narrative and a decline in its unifying appeal. The exclusive nature of the *Kulturnation* image was increasingly problematised. On this the 1986 party manifesto of the Green Party states: “Many forms of creative life are not recognized and promoted as culture” (Die Grünen 1986, no page). The manifesto also calls for a “shift away from ‘high culture’” when it comes to subsidizing art (*Ibid.*). The conflict between high culture and low culture, historic art and contemporary art, an elite audience and popular participation became the greatest challenge for the narrative of the *Kulturnation*. Closing this gap was a core tenant of left-wing, particularly Green Party, cultural policy, as the following statement from the 2006 manifesto aptly illustrates:

“(...) the flagships of representational culture (federal theatres, federal museums) receive three quarters of the cultural budget. All other institutions, associations and artists have to be satisfied with the rest. The Greens want to correct this imbalance. It prevents the realisation of numerous initiatives and consolidates Austria’s reputation as a conservative *Kulturnation*.” (Die Grünen 2006)

The unachieved *Kulturnation*

The section above has considered some of the alternative interpretations of the term *Kulturnation*. These amounted to competing versions of the same narrative. Actors primarily wanted to include certain themes to the existing narrative which they thought were important or had been ignored. Proponents of the arguments presented in this section believe that the image of the *Kulturnation* is altogether inherently flawed or completely unjustified. The *Kulturnation*, in this view, remains unachieved. The term is criticized for only being a narrative and not being adequately practiced in reality.

A frequently raised point in this regard has been the financing of culture, more precisely the lack, or inadequacy thereof. Already in 1953, a communist member of parliament lamented the state of Austrian schools which does not provide the adequate atmosphere for “the youth of a *Kulturnation* to be brought up” (Fischer 1953, 925). Describing the – in his view underfunded – state of the Austrian public broadcasting company ORF, a ÖVP member of parliament decried: “It would be better not to talk at all about culture, about *Kulturvolk*, *Kulturnation*, the promotion of culture, in other words, culture per se, in Austria” (Bürkle 1962, 4662). In some cases, political actors have criticized financial constraints in the field of culture by explicitly problematising the “narrativeness” of the term *Kulturnation*. We can say that the *Kulturnation* narrative had been placed on its head by pointing to a lack of national identity rather than providing the basis for national identity. In 1987, for instance, a member of parliament for the Green Party stated:

“The following is really unbearable: this eternal assertion of its importance, how we go from door to door, telling the world we are a *Kulturnation*. But when it comes to facts, when it comes to doing something, then nothing, then silence, then it is ignored.” (Fux 1987, 128)

A similar sentiment is echoed in a statement from 2007 by the leader of the Green Party and current federal president, Alexander van der Bellen:

“In the field of arts and culture, expenditure is falling in real terms. Explain this to the people engaged in culture in Austria! Explain this to the wider public where you are never tire of emphasising, in Sunday speeches, what a great *Kulturnation* Austria is” (Van der Bellen 2007, 18).

Not just the budgetary situation for culture is critiqued but also its more general position within the political institutional framework. In 1988, a member of parliament for the Green Party criticized the lack of an independent culture ministry: “I think it is also embarrassing that an old *Kulturnation* like Austria, with such a great cultural history, still does not have the courage to appoint a culture minister. This portfolio is effectively shared with sport.” (Fux 1988, 9620).

A further, frequently mentioned, strand of argumentation relating to the incomplete nature of the Austrian *Kulturnation* is that which raises the issue of the financial situation and working conditions of artists. The often precarious conditions under which artists must work and live are contrasted with the perceived splendour of the Austrian *Kulturnation*. In a parliamentary session in 2009, a member of parliament for the Green Party stated: “Being an artist today means having a five times higher risk of becoming poor than the average person in the population and that is frightening. What kind of *Kulturnation* can afford something like this?” (Zinggl 2009, 73).

9. The *Kulturation* today: a practitioner's view

The previous chapters of this thesis have sketched the narrative of the *Kulturation* from its origins in pan-German nationalism, to its use after the Second World War, to its main points of contestation. We have seen how it has changed and has been questioned. Where does this leave us today? Does the narrative still have any relevance for Austrian national identity and how do people involved in the cultural sector feel about the image? Interviews with professionals in the industry have revealed a general distaste for the term. It was mostly viewed as outdated and lacking in meaning. They reiterated many points of criticism already mentioned in this thesis such as a bias towards high culture and conservative aesthetics, a lack of contemporary work as well as the term's association with the *Opfermythos*.

A strong critic of the *Kulturation* image was a manager of a Viennese theatre who completely rejected the term. He found the description of Austria as a *Kulturation* to be problematic as every country has its own culture. Culture, in his understanding, is a trio composed of science, art and religion which is not unique to Austria. The term *Kulturation*, thus, conflates the separate concepts of culture and art. Further, given the precarious conditions under which artists work, as well as the stagnating subsidies the cultural sector receives, he considered the term *Kulturation* to be mere lip service by politicians. Asked whether the term has any meaning for his work, he replied that it is completely irrelevant, saying: "I have never heard of an artist that moved to Austria because it is such a great *Kulturation*" (Interview 1 2020).

A representative of *IG Kultur*, an interest group representing cultural workers and grass-roots cultural initiatives in Austria, similarly saw little meaning in the term. She stated that the term *Kulturation* has become an empty phrase which is used differently depending on the occasion. Beyond the projected image of a rich imperial heritage, there is little consensus today on what the term means. Vis-à-vis the outside world, it is used as an element of nation branding while towards a domestic audience it is often used by artists to stress their demands towards political stakeholders. The term is frequently used, however, there is a feeling that it is hardly applicable to contemporary forms of art. The representative of *IG Kultur* also stated that the organisation does not use the term in its work. She explained this by referring to its vague meaning as well as its historic context as a means of giving a positive connotation to only selective parts of Austrian history. In addition, she also found the

national element to be problematic. Asked whether it would make sense to speak of a *Kulturnation* under any circumstances, she answered that ideally the term could refer to the importance of art and culture in a society. However, pinning a fixed meaning to a culture related term is always problematic as art and culture are inherently subjective. It is therefore more useful to deal with open concepts (Interview 5 2020).

A theatre director and musician highlighted the, in her eyes, highly limited scope of the *Kulturnation* image which undermines its claim to the entire nation. One of these limitations is class. Tickets to high culture events tend to be expensive and owning season tickets for high culture institutions still is a defining feature of bourgeoisie culture. In her view, the image of the *Kulturnation* draws from and caters to a narrow sector of society posing the question whether it is really possible to speak of an entire nation of culture. She observed a similar gap between city dwellers and the countryside. Apart from annual events in Salzburg and Bregenz, the great institutions of Austrian high culture are located exclusively in Vienna. Once again, the question is, how can we speak of a *Kulturnation* if it is limited to very few geographical locations. Besides the issues of class and geography, she also considers there to be inequality in what the image of the *Kulturnation* stands for. In her view, the *Kulturnation* has a monopoly on the niche of high culture, rather than being a place where artists can easily create. Finally, she criticized the image of the *Kulturnation* for containing a nationalistic element. She sees in it an outdated attempt to insist on the excellency of one's own culture which runs against the European spirit and potentially limits the interest in the international art scene (Interview 4 2020).

In relation to high culture, the image of the *Kulturnation* does still hold some value. A manager of a Viennese opera house, for instance, highlighted Austria's leading role in the world of classical music and opera. He stated that the quality and the prestige of Austrian institutions such as the Staatsoper, the Musikverein or the Wiener Philharmoniker orchestra is world-renowned. In addition to musical excellence, the Austrian audience, particularly in Vienna, Salzburg and Bregenz, is large, interested and has high standards. He recalled the opening of a third opera house in Vienna and said that in the country's capital it is not unlikely to discuss a theatre piece with a taxi driver. In his view, the combination of high artistic quality with the high-level engagement of the audience make Austria unique as a *Kulturnation* as this combination is hardly found in other countries. However, the manager did concede that Austria's leading role as a *Kulturnation* is confined to classical music and

here also primarily concerned with the work of deceased artists. While there certainly is a promising contemporary art scene in Austria, he considers the global hubs of its respective genres to be elsewhere. He concluded by saying that Austria's lack of a world-renowned contemporary art scene does question the validity of the image of the *Kulturnation* (Interview 2 2020).

A bias towards high culture was also observed by a cultural correspondent of a leading Austrian daily newspaper. Asked what value the culture section of newspapers has, she answered that it has a particularly important value for high culture events which are often older readers. Giving an example of this she said: "Readers have called the newspaper to complain that a particular classical music concert had not been reviewed – this has never happened with a pop concert" (Interview 3 2020). Newspaper critics reviewing works of pop culture, on the other hand, must compete with online reviews, as well as crowd opinion, which is not so much the case with high culture. She also observed that the term *Kulturnation* is increasingly used in a polemical manner in two competing ways. On the one hand, it is used to reaffirm Austria's rich cultural heritage while, on the other hand, it is used to address short comings in the cultural sector. With regard to the latter, she observes that the image of the *Kulturnation* functions as an unachieved utopia.

10. Conclusion: is Austria a *Kulturnation*?

The aim of this thesis was to reflect upon the narrative of the *Kulturnation* and to examine how changes to national identity take place. With regard to the narrative of the *Kulturnation* we can conclude that it has seen remarkable change and contestation. It has been associated with contradictory causes and supported by rivalling political fractions. The first contradiction this thesis considered was between the *Kulturnation* as a pan-German cultural space and as an Austrian imperial cultural space. The identification with the German *Kulturnation* remained dominant until after World War II when it switched towards an identification with Austria's imperial legacy. Another significant contradiction was between the image of the *Kulturnation* as a distraction from Austria's involvement in the Nazi regime and the use of culture to highlight Austria's participation in the regime. Beyond these historical discrepancies, the thesis has also shown further points of contestation such as alternative interpretations of the term, the conflict between "high culture" and "low culture" or the adding of elements to the narrative long after its initial conception. We have also seen how the term is received today by practitioners in the cultural sector. To them, the term has become meaningless and problematic in differing ways. Even the one interview partner how did see some value in the term conceded its restriction to a specific cultural niche.

What does this mean for Austria's image as a *Kulturnation*? Can the country be considered to be a *Kulturnation*? In concluding this thesis, we stand before evidence which makes it hardly possible to speak of Austria as a *Kulturnation*. Surely, it has been tried to establish Austria as a *Kulturnation* but this thesis has shown that from the very beginning of its use it has been riddled with change, contestation and contradiction. These challenges to the image of the *Kulturnation* have only increased since its initial use and also appear to be much more serious and widespread than the evidence that would support it. In this sense Austria is not a *Kulturnation*. Nevertheless, a second conclusion must also be made. Culture has had an enormous impact on Austrian identity and politics. The messianic fever with which interwar pan-Germanists looked to the German *Kulturnation* as well as the scandals and outrage post-war artists caused by making Austria's role in the Nazi regime subject of their work is truly remarkable. It appears as if culture in Austria always had a strong political component.

With regard to national identity formation, we can conclude that there is a nexus between narratives of national identity and lived experience or political practice which is crucial not just for identity formation but also for identity contestation. The narrative-experience nexus consists in providing a benchmark against which lived experience can be measured. If the gap between a narrative's ambitions and daily experience becomes too big, a window of contestation opens for identity entrepreneurs. We have seen that the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and the Second World War made German cultural identification unattractive. This allowed for the historically weaker Austrian version of identity to become dominant. Yet, also this narrative, and with it the image of the *Kulturnation*, began to be questioned when it could no longer deliver its expectations. Some of these expectations were the ability to freely create contemporary art and question societal grievances (notably whether Austrians had really broken with German identity) as well as adequate funding and working conditions for artists.

This thesis has explored the image of the *Kulturnation* in Austria; however, further research could be conducted into similar narratives in other countries. Especially interesting in this regard would be research into the image of the *Kulturnation* in Germany as the concept itself is of German origin. How was the term used in Germany after World War Two? Did culture also play a critical role for Germany's dealing with its Nazi regime? Likewise, it would be interesting to study the role of culture for national identity in countries such as Italy and France. Both countries are well-known for their historic architecture, fine art and high fashion. Can similar conflicts between "low art" and "high art" be observed there? A further avenue of research could be a study of countries which are rather known for their contribution towards "low culture." Notable in this regard are the United States and the United Kingdom. Can such countries be considered as cultural nation? All in all, the significance of culture is a fascinating topic which intersects with politics on many levels. Its study is likely to lead to fruitful and timely contributions.

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