

Regional Conceptions of Austrian Identity in the Interwar Press of Salzburg and Vienna

Julie Thorpe, *University of Adelaide*

This paper will explore ideas of Austrian nationhood as conveyed in the articles and editorials of the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* in Vienna and the *Salzburger Volksblatt* in Salzburg between 1933 and *Anschluss* in March 1938. My research is primarily concerned with the way that the press constructs the national community and this emphasis on construction comes out of the recent theories on national identity, which have emerged from the literature on nationalism as an analytical approach to popular expressions of the national identity.¹ My research departs from the debate among Austrian historians in the past three decades on Austria's historical relevance to the German nation and seeks, rather, to fit the study of Austrian identity within the history of migration and exclusion in twentieth-century Europe. My dissertation will also compare a third provincial newspaper in Styria, placing my study of the provincial press within a new area of inquiry into regional perceptions of Austrian identity in the important interwar years of transition from monarchy to republic. The newspapers I have looked at belonged to the German-national press and so their political vision was of a Greater Germany that included Austria and all German-speaking Central Europeans but alongside that utopia, there lay more immediate political questions of minority groups, immigration, political violence, terrorism and the contentious issue of Austro-German relations in the absence of *Anschluss*. My paper shows that the identity narratives in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* and the *Salzburger Volksblatt* responded to these political concerns according to different regional priorities and thus, the construction of an Austrian interwar identity was grounded in provincial ideas of state and national community.

Viennese Voices

On 27 October 1935, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* commemorated its tenth anniversary edition with an article describing the German national idea that had

¹ For example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991). A recent Austrian study on the role of public discourse in the construction of a national identity is Ruth Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, translated by Angelika Hirsch and Richard Mitten (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

been the newspaper's leitmotiv for a decade.² The article pointed out that Austria belonged not to the German Reich, which had been a political entity since 1871, but to the German nation, being *'Deutschland'*, which embodied the cultural union of all German-speakers in Europe. Specifically, the newspaper saw its mission as investigating and representing the views of and issues directly concerning German-speaking minority communities outside of Austria and Germany, especially those in border regions or neighbouring European countries.³ Throughout the five-year period from 1933 until *Anschluss*, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* continued to uphold this Greater German mission in its support for Hitler and National Socialism, for German-speaking minorities in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary, and for the German nationalist parties and leagues in Austria, chiefly the Grossdeutsche Volkspartei, the National Socialist party as well as a host of provincial non-party associations, such as the Lower Austrian Farmers' League and others.

The question of minority rights figured prominently in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*. Several articles discussed the historical role and contributions of minority groups in Austria, such as the Czech, Slovene and Croat speakers, and drew comparisons with the parallel experiences of German-speaking minorities in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. There were also countless reports of Jewish political agitation in the émigré Jewish press in France, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Romania.⁴ These articles repeatedly questioned the political rights of immigrants, specifically those of Jews. But the argument against the public voice of Jewish émigrés was more than a racial or ideological campaign against the Jews; rather, it was indicative of a deeper xenophobia in Austria that excluded Jews as well as gypsies and other minority populations from the Austrian national identity. An article in November 1934 suggested that it was the state's responsibility to ensure national homogeneity to fortify the nation-state in the post-imperial European order. In the republic of the 'new Austria', this meant ensuring its future existence and identity through the protection of its German

² In fact, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* had first appeared weekly in 1894 as an 'independent organ for the political, economic and social interests of the Christian population in Austria,' standing closer editorially to Karl Lueger's Christian Social Party than to Georg von Schönerer's German National Party, although the newspaper was also anti-Semitic. In 1917, the newspaper was renamed the *Montagsfrühblatt der Wiener Neuesten Nachrichten*, in 1919 it became the *Neues Montagsblatt* and, in 1928, the *Wiener Montagsblatt*. Thus, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* from 1925 had a separate identity from its weekly counterpart. Kurt Paupié, *Handbuch der Österreichischen Pressegeschichte*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1960). 111-2.

³ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 27 October 1935, p. 2.

⁴ See, for example, *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 29 November 1933, p. 2.

ethnic and cultural borders.⁵ This fear of the foreigner was at the core of the national identity that was projected through the articles and editorials in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*.

Fear of the foreigner was present in articles about the gypsies in the province of the Burgenland.⁶ These reports declared the gypsies to be a burden on the 'native' Austrian population, specifically referring to the allegedly exorbitant health costs of the highly reproductive gypsy population.⁷ By comparing these arguments with later articles supporting the Austrian Fatherland Front's mothers' aid programmes, one has a striking picture of who the desirable offspring in Austria were.⁸ The large gypsy families in the Burgenland were seen to be draining the state health system while the official, patriotic campaign to encourage women to have more children was directed only at German-speaking Austrians. It is further significant that these articles saw the gypsies as the dominant issue in the Burgenland's short history since its creation in 1921; in other words, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* viewed the Burgenland's adoption of an Austrian identity as a parallel struggle against unwanted foreigners in their midst.

Like the gypsies in the Burgenland, the émigré Jews in Vienna were also a people who did not belong in Austria and so the national identity was constructed by emphasizing the foreignness of these outsiders. For example, in a three-page article in May 1934, a photographic essay portrayed everyday Jewish life in Vienna's second district in the 'ghetto,' which was the bold headline splashed across the first page. The photographs showed men in caftans with long beards, women and children sitting on park benches, streets lined with Jewish shops and a group of young women listening to a gramophone.⁹ The images in the photographs depicted the foreignness of the eastern European Jews in their dress, in their social habits and in their separation from popular culture. The particular stereotype of the *Ostjude* was conveyed elsewhere in articles that discussed the differences between assimilated Jews and the Jewish refugees from Eastern

⁵ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 11 November 1934, p. 2.

⁶ Articles on the Burgenland were prominent in the *Wiener Neuesten Nachrichten*; in November 1936 the newspaper published a series of historical essays and photographs commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Burgenland's creation as an Austrian province.

⁷ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 19 January 1933, p. 5, 29 December 1935, p. 9.

⁸ See, for example, *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 10 January 1936, pp. 1-2. The Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss (1932-35) founded the Fatherland Front in May 1933 as a quasi-party organisation that aimed to filter patriotic values through state-structured political and social organisations, such as the *Mutterschutzwerk*.

⁹ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 6 May 1934, pp. 2-4.

Europe.¹⁰ Both in the depiction of the *Ostjuden* in Vienna and in the reports on the Burgenland's gypsies, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten's* construction of an Austrian identity was based on regional stereotypes that were immediately recognizable to the Viennese through common encounters with gypsies and ghetto-Jews. While these stereotypes were themselves a product of historical imagination, their centrality to the identity narrative in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* shows how regional perceptions influenced the construction of the national identity.

The interwar years in Europe saw a wave of emigration mainly from Russia and Poland into Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria and Germany as well as Switzerland, France and the Netherlands and this movement of stateless people was a deep concern for the editors of the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, who believed that Austria was under threat of invasion by foreigners, especially eastern European Jews or *Ostjuden*. But in stark contrast to the articles on Jewish refugees were the reports in August 1936 of the Austrian refugees fleeing Spain's Civil War which graphically described acts of persecution, violence and terror directed towards political and national opponents (or perceived opponents) of the state.¹¹ The homecoming Austrian refugees appear in the articles as no less foreign than any other Austrian citizen, even if they had married and settled in Spain. Thus, the identity narrative in these reports was of the Austrian national identity based on the legal concept of *jus sanguinis*, the nation formed by blood, as opposed to *jus solis*, where citizenship was based on birth and residence in a country.¹² But in the articles just over a year later, from September 1937 to February 1938, on the migration of eastern European Jews into Western Europe, the newspaper's concern had returned again to the protection of Austria's population against the perceived threat of foreign (Jewish) immigration.

By December 1937 the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* was nervously observing the political events in Romania where the right-wing nationalist and anti-Semite, Octavian Goga, had come to power after the elections of December 20, sending a new wave of Jewish refugees into Austria and other parts of Europe. The news that Czechoslovakia and Hungary had already restricted immigration gave urgency to the editors' calls for new laws in Austria to stop the migration across

¹⁰ For example, *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 21 March 1935, p. 2.

¹¹ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 11 August 1936, p. 1. See also *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 28 July and 7 August 1936. Other articles in August and September reported on the hundreds of Germans who also fled to France and Germany.

¹² Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: The New Press, 1999). 61-63. For a fuller discussion of these terms in France, Germany, Britain and Italy, see David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook, eds., *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996).

the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian borders.¹³ The *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* had also repeatedly called for an end to illegal smuggling operations, which the newspaper claimed were run by Jews.¹⁴ An editorial on December 17 ended with a call-to-arms: 'Protect the borders and our country from a new flood of *Ostjüdische* [immigrants].'¹⁵ Two days later, the newspaper published a letter to the editor that expressed a similar sentiment:

It is...the uncontested right of the state to ban or control immigration [...]. Austria needs neither the labour nor the financial ownership of the Eastern European Jews.¹⁶

Border security was a concern shared by the editors and the readership of the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* as well as other sections of the political press, notably the Christian-social *Reichspost*.¹⁷ But in the shifting discourse on national identity in the pages of the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, the question of Austria's sovereign right to restrict immigration escalated into a question of who belonged on Austrian soil. A satirical cartoon of Austria's border block against Romanian Jews in January 1938 illustrated this narrative of exclusion and belonging.¹⁸ Other articles described the resistance of farmers and workers to Jewish asylum in Austria in an expression of solidarity against unwanted foreigners in Austria.¹⁹ The argument for border protection stemmed from earlier xenophobic tendencies in the articles on Jews and gypsies and merged with the dominant idea of Austrian identity in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* of a homogeneous cultural and ethnic German community. While at first this indicates support for German national identity, the arguments that called for the protection of Austria's population and borders suggest more persuasively that Austrian identity was a strongly felt idea of exclusion, which called for Austrians to monitor who entered and stayed within Austrian borders. The shift away from the idea of Greater Germany and emphasis, instead, on the defence of the Austrian republic in a context of interwar migration and asylum throughout

¹³ These restrictions included reducing residence permits to two months and also reducing the foreign quotas in the cities, forcing immigrants and refugees to move to the countryside where there was no work. *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 17 December 1937, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 28 September 1937, p. 6. Also, 30 September 1937, p. 5.

¹⁵ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 17 December 1937, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 19 December 1937, p. 4.

¹⁷ See morning and evening editions of *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 31 December 1937.

¹⁸ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 7 January 1938, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 1 February 1938, p. 1. Also 8 February 1938, p.

1.

Europe shows that by the late 1930s, Austrians had developed an articulate awareness of who was Austrian and who was an outsider. This raises more questions about the construction of national identity in Austria throughout the twentieth century and invites a welcome change of focus in the historiography on Austrian identity from the much debated question of Austria's German identity to address the exclusion and inclusion of minority groups, especially immigrants, living in Austria since the demise of the monarchy.

The Search for National Identity in Salzburg

Unlike the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* was less focused on questions of belonging to the national community as on questions of state ideology. Through this inquiry into ideas of the individual and the state, totalitarianism, fascism and social politics, a picture of Austrian identity emerged that was surprisingly resistant to the fascistic ideas in German National Socialism. Furthermore, the rejection of Germany's political identity laid the foundations for a separate Austrian identity based on authoritarian (not totalitarian) social and political values.

The earliest expressions of a national identity were a response to acts of political extremism by Austrian National Socialists, whom the *Salzburger Volksblatt* had initially supported after the Party's success in Germany.²⁰ But a spate of bomb explosions in cars and public buildings in June 1933, carried out by Austrian National Socialists after the Party's ban in that month, drew condemnation from the newspaper, as did the attacks in July 1934 that culminated in the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss on 25 July, who was replaced by Kurt von Schuschnigg.²¹ Violence and terror were unacceptable political tools, even to an editorship that had previously been sympathetic to the national cause of the Nazis, and these terrorist acts distanced the newspaper from any further political loyalties to the National Socialist Party until 1938.

From 1934 the provincial authorities' strict censorship measures ensured that the articles and editorials refrained from political comment but the idea of the Austrian state continued to figure prominently in the editorials. Earlier editorials in the *Salzburger Volksblatt* had been concerned primarily with Austria's

²⁰ Editorials in early 1933 were full of admiration for Hitler's achievement in uniting Germany and were jubilant at the NSDAP's electoral success of March 1933. See, for example, *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 31 January, 6-7 March and 15 April 1933.

²¹ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 8 September 1933, p.1, 3 October 1933, p. 1, 9 August 1934, pp. 3-4, and 14 September 1933, p. 3. By the beginning of 1934 the number of daily explosions had reached 40. Ernst Hanisch, *Der Lange Schatten des Staates: Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1994). 149.

economic and demographic vulnerability as a small, alpine republic that relied heavily on the German tourist trade for its economic stability, a concern that heightened in May 1933 when Germany imposed a 1000 Mark border tariff on all German tourists to Austria, virtually ceasing all German travel to Austria, as well as political relations between the two countries, until the embargo was lifted in July 1936.²² Another dominant editorial concern was the question of social organization from the family unit to the state level of youth and mothers' leagues. From 1935 to 1937, a number of articles and editorials fixed their attention on the role of women and youth in a socially structured and gendered society that would bring stability and community values to the state.²³ In shifting the identity discourse away from external factors to internal social engineering, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* began a process of identity construction that responded to the contemporary social values and needs of the community in which only Austrians lived. This process was informed by immediate regional priorities, such as the tourist trade in Salzburg and the coordination of local programmes for mothers in the Fatherland Front's provincial section of the state mothercare agency (*Mutterschutzwerk*). These articles and editorials form a second phase of identity construction that began and merged with the early disassociation from the political extremism of the National Socialists and continued into the next phase of resistance to totalitarianism.

The relationship between the state and the individual was a prominent theme in the editorials after 1935. These articles presented an ideal national community in which the individual was considered as the highest value. In June 1936, an editorial argued that state-structured political and social organizations were necessary only so far as they achieved national unity, as for example in the mobilization of all sections of the military, economy and society for the war effort during 1914-1918. But this political tool had been used as an end in itself, as in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, the editorial argued, and unjustly sacrificed individual freedom for the greater good of the state.²⁴ More significantly, the editorial argued that state authority must not impose its structures on the individual's private life:

We will not sacrifice our soul, our character. We will not sacrifice our religious beliefs [...], family life and marriage, all that is personal and will remain so.²⁵

²² *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 3 June 1933, p. 3 and 2 August 1933, p. 9.

²³ See, notably, *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 3 January 1935, p. 8, 14 April 1936, p. 8, July 1937, p. 1.

²⁴ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 9 June 1936, p. 7.

²⁵ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 9 June 1936, p. 7.

This ideal of the national community as the guardian of individual freedom was a powerful statement of resistance to the idea of a centrally imposed identity of obedience and sacrifice for the nation that had been present in earlier editorials, which supported the nationalist revolution of all German national groups in Austria, including National Socialists.

While rejecting totalitarian forms of state, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* supported the idea of corporate authoritarianism in its fundamental principle of authority in the interests of the individuals of the state. The Austrian Corporate State (1934-1938), which is often referred to by historians as the period of Austrofascism or clerico-fascism, was based on the medieval concept, first adopted by Mussolini, of grouping similar vocations and professions into corporate bodies that each regulated and represented the interests of these groups. The *Salzburger Volksblatt* argued that a democratic state, which represented the individuals and not just the majority, had to be founded on the principle of corporate authoritarianism. The newspaper had consistently criticized the Allies for compromising the ideals of democracy by imposing democratic constitutions on Austria and Germany without the democratic will of the people.²⁶ An article in May 1936 declared that democracy in practice was the 'tyranny of the majority.'²⁷ Therefore, in rejecting both democracy and fascism, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* rejected the contemporary political structures in Europe and expressed instead a tangential idea of statehood, which in the absence of Austro-German political relations had become the most viable expression of a national identity.

Even after the Austro-German détente in July 1936, the *Salzburger Volksblatt* editorials continued to reject political unity with Germany because of the fear that totalitarian values would eradicate the individual's freedom. An editorial in December 1937, just three months before *Anschluss*, argued that Austrians would not be able to come to terms with totalitarian rule as easily as the Germans had, claiming that 'our present state wants to be authoritarian but not outrightly fascist.'²⁸ The editorial presented authority as a positive concept, which fostered a democratic will but did not manifest itself as arbitrary rule of the state. Authority should 'never be the negation [nor the] replacement of the popular will,' the editorial argued, but, rather, 'should ensure the continuity of state leadership [which] steers the expression of the popular will along an orderly path.'²⁹ The implication to be made from this is that the Austrian state had to employ authoritarian measures that were in some cases characteristic of fascism, such as paramilitary and social organizations, to uphold law and order and

²⁶ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 31 December 1935, p. 2.

²⁷ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 18 May 1936, pp. 1-2.

²⁸ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 9 December 1937, p. 1.

²⁹ *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 9 December 1937, p. 1.

conservative social values. But the intention was not to build collective thinking, as in fascism, but to eliminate political views that ‘responded to popular moods rather than the nation’s will,’ which were injurious to the possibility for Austrian democracy.³⁰

Both the *Salzburger Volksblatt* and the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* present a view of Austrian interwar identity that diverges from the accepted view that Austrians identified exclusively with Germany during the years of the First Republic (1918-1938). The unstable editorships and censorship during the authoritarian years of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg state meant that the views represented in the newspapers were not the unanimous opinion of the whole editorship nor were they consistently upheld throughout the five years. But my paper shows that the daily newspaper stands on its own as a rich source of ideas about the national identity and as a model of identity construction in the interwar period in Austria. Furthermore, the particular provincial perceptions and concerns represented in this short survey of Austrian identity show that national identity cannot easily be synthesized as a total expression of the population but, rather, the varied regional histories must be blended with the overall picture of the development of the Austrian state in the post-imperial nation-building process in Central Europe. The study of the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* shows that the Austrian identity found expression in a context of increasing geopolitical sensitivity to the burdens and responsibilities of being a small, land-locked republic in the centre of Europe. The *Salzburger Volksblatt* reveals an identity dilemma in which the previous notions of national identification (that is, being German) were challenged by the alarming extremism of both politics of the state and in the everyday sphere of public demonstration. These concerns and reactions in the daily press of two provincial capitals form a narrative of national identity in interwar Austria in which the themes of this narrative continue to shape the discourse on state and identity in Austria throughout the twentieth century to the present.

³⁰ *Ibid.*