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Zwei Texte zu

Victor Neumann:

Kin, People or Nation? On European Political Identities,

Translated by Gabi Reigh, Edited by Neil Titman, Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, London, 2021.

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Foreword

Against the backdrop of the worrying return and spread of nationalism in the form of strong cultural and political identity, Victor Neumann approaches from a new perspective the unity-diversity relationship within and between cultural and political communities. His study combines historical and systematic moments of analysis of national thinking and arguing in order to problematize the concept of nation.

His historiographical chapters construe the semantic field “nation” - its constitutive moments, effects and supporters - explaining the nation-state in France, the cultural nation in the historic German-speaking regions of the nineteenth century, and in Eastern Europe with a particular focus on twentieth-century Romania. His approach subtly considers the use of the semantic field by distinct speakers in distinct circumstances for distinct purposes.

The systematically oriented chapters build on the critical reconsideration of some remarkable theorists of those categories which had shaped the discussion about the “nation” for a long time such as identity, unity, diversity, ethnicity culture etc. They, however, turned out to be

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inadequate for both a plausible analysis of the historical processes under consideration and a conceptualization of the contemporary world, since they presuppose uniform, homogeneous, and closed cultural and political communities. Neumann regards the need to redefine these patterns of analysis as inevitable. His close look at these categories demonstrate that identity is always hybrid, that culture is always heterogeneous and that historical differences are not just exclusive. Cultures unfold, he convincingly argues, in the tension between diversity and what they have in common. According to Neumann, the political and cultural world is characterised by being individual and diverse at the same time.

Neumann's book is a substantial plea for the recognition of the other, of the other's culture, of the other's political community. Reciprocity, however, constitute an essential prerequisite for recognition as a fundamental model for socio-political life.

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Starting from the history of concepts, Victor Neumann shows how the variety of connotations associated with the ideas of 'nation' and 'people' have been circumscribed in south-eastern Europe, holding back the region over many decades. More important, with erudition and seriousness of purpose, he mounts a defense of a notion of identity that is neither fixed nor monocultural, and proposes a legal definition of 'nation' that can resist exclusivist or racist versions. In an age when counter-rational fantasies about identity seem to be prevailing, when many seem unaware of or have forgotten where such thinking leads, Neumann's is a much-needed voice of reason.