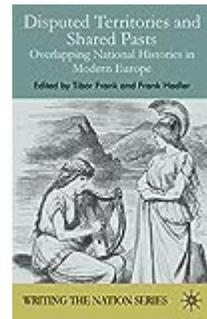




Tibor Frank, Frank Hadler. *Disputed Territories and Shared Pasts: Overlapping National Histories in Modern Europe.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 430 S. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-50008-2.



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T. Frank u.a. (Hrsg.): *Disputed Territories and Shared Pasts*

A publication concerning the overlapping national histories in modern Europe is one of the outcomes of a five year research project, focused on the structures of national histories and the diversity of national narratives in Europe. The exceptional density of various state and regional borders makes Europe a perfect environment for borderlands and transitional zones, as "important areas of a nation struggle for a national identity" (p. 4). It is not surprising that (with a few important exceptions) the most numerous and most disputed of these overlapping territories are in Central and Eastern Europe. A well written and comprehensible introduction by the editors defines the most important concepts. It declares that from the seven defined types of overlapping perceptions, the volume focuses only on the territorial borders. These overlaps are grouped into three types. However, despite the mentioned clarity of the first study, it is too brief, especially in the methodology part – it doesn't really prepare the reader for the diversity of approaches used in the following texts.

Due to the limited length of this review, the main focus is given to the already mentioned three main chap-

ters. The first two texts of the first chapter "Overlaps Alongside State Borders" are dealing with the problems of "peculiar overlap" (phrase present in both articles) (p. 17, p. 35) namely the Union of Sweden and Norway (Ragnar Björk) and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Tibor Frank). A common feature of both articles is the absence of "the overlapping discussion", although for different reasons. In the first case, it is because of the objective asymmetry in the Norwegian and Swedish interest in the Union. The problem with Tibor Frank's article seems to be its chronological form, analyzing the opinions of the most important Hungarian historians of their generation on the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. However, such an approach omits both discussions within one generation of historians as well as the views of other national historiographies (Austrian, Czech). Both of these aspects are very well incorporated in the case study of Werner Suppanz about the Habsburg Monarchy in Austrian historiography, demonstrating the developing opinions concerning the treatment of multi-ethnic/national and multilingual zones (p. 91). Regarding their scope and focus, the articles on German-Polish (Jürgen Hackmann) and Polish-Russian (Rafał Stobiecki) overlaps, create the

highlights of the chapter. These texts are followed by the study on the 'Great Netherlands Controversy' (Niek van Sas), dealing with the persisting problem of conceptualization of the 'Belgian nation' and the challenging Flemish movement connecting itself to the Dutch narrative.

Part II, 'Overlaps in Historical Regions Between States', consists of five case studies. Uffe Åstergård's survey on Schleswig and Holstein in Danish and German historiography is a thorough analysis of discussions over disputed provinces. Part of the text, which would deserve more space, is the observation that the fear from being labeled as a nationalist (p. 219), effectively eradicated all the 'disputed territories' discussions after 1945. From the political point of view, the ignorance of problems could be beneficiary, but the similar 'well-meaning tendencies' (p. 219) in history could cause doubts about its status as a science. The outstanding article by Ilkka Liikanen, demonstrates the practical absurdity of many 'overlapping discussions'. Study is about the origins of the Finnish Eastern border as one of the key parts of the Finnish master narrative construction. Liikanen's great ironic conclusions to the whole grand controversy of 19th and 20th centuries are the newest assertions that the document it was based on probably never existed (p. 199).

The last two articles are dealing with the cases of well known disputed regions, Alsace-Lorraine (Christopher Fischer) and Transylvania (Andrew Ludanyi). The reasonable decision to put these two texts together enables the reader to better realize the different developmental stages of 'Western' and post communist historiographies regarding the overlapping regions. The France-German 'historical wars' over Alsace-Lorraine are more or less over and the whole case is presented as 'a ray of hope for the future of a unified Europe, in which such border regions bind nations together rather than drive them apart' (p. 246). In the case of Transylvania, Ludanyi can only hope for a rational discussion between Rumanian and Hungarian historians (and politicians), who can see the need to 'understand history from the other side' (p. 270). This hope is connected with the membership in the EU and its 'denationalizing influence'. This stance is typical for part of the elites in the new member states; although there are many examples that success with such a process is by far not granted.

The third part of the book is devoted to the ethnic, national and religious overlaps within the states. These are those of the most complicated cases of overlaps, especially when connected with recent or still existing strong

political cleavages, accompanied with armed struggles or terrorism. This is the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Robin Okey) and Israel (Jacob Barnai). The Bosnian example demonstrates the grave dangers of emotional primordial perspectives offering no possibility to incorporate any 'anomaly' in the national narrative. However, the potential role of the 'Slav grand narrative' for providing overarching loyalties could be a very elusive project regarding the past conflicts. In this case, the civic multiculturalism, also mentioned in the text, with the systematic influence from the EU, could be a better direction. Similar to the Israel-Palestinian case, it is quite clear that the '19th century style' national narratives have to be abandoned if historians should contribute to the solution of disputed territories in question. At least partial success of such a process is described in the articles dealing with 'Sudetenland' (Milan Åepa) and the formation of the Irish historical profession (Ciaran Brady). An important part of this chapter is a case study about real and imagined overlaps in the Iberian Peninsula (Xosr-Manoel Nãez). The only questionable point is why there is so much space devoted to the rather marginal question of Olivença/Olivenza, when it could be used for more important overlaps, also mentioned in the text.

The general remark involves maps of Central Europe, namely the problem in the transcription of town names. There is no good reason why towns in the Bohemian Kingdom should have only German names (p. 38, p. 248). To make the whole situation more absurd, the most important cities are written using English transcription (Prague, Vienna, Cracow). Secondly, in different maps depicting the borders from the same era, the same cities have different names (Lviv vs. Lemberg) (p. 38, p. 94), which also contributes to the general confusion.

In general, the book consists of high quality texts; there is really not much to criticize. Although many of them have a form of general surveys, this is not a negative feature. The book as a whole points out interesting facts: the European historical tradition was (is?) overwhelmed with borders between 'East and West', between 'civilization and barbarity' and the role of 'Kulturträger' present in nearly all national narratives, is closely linked with the claim on certain territories. A common conclusion could be in a form of assertion that if the individual historiographies have ambitions to solve the questions of disputed territories and overlaps, they have to abandon nationalist, primordial stances. The successful Western example is, without doubt, greatly influencing the positive development in the rest of the continent.

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