

“THE BETHLEHEM OF THE GERMAN REICH”

**REMEMBERING, INVENTING, SELLING AND FORGETTING ADOLF HITLER’S
BIRTH PLACE IN UPPER AUSTRIA, 1933-1955**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the history of the house where Adolf Hitler was born in the Upper Austrian village Braunau am Inn. It examines the developments in the period between 1933 and 1955. During this time high-ranking Nazis, local residents, tourists and pilgrims appropriated the house for their purposes by creating various narratives about this space. As unimportant as the house might have been to Hitler himself from the point of view of sentimentality and childhood nostalgia, it had great propaganda value for promoting the image of the private Führer. Braunau itself was turned into a tourist destination and pilgrimage site during the Nazi period—and beyond. This thesis traces how people engaged and interacted with the house where Adolf Hitler was born, how they attributed narratives to it, how they commercialized and sacralized it. It furthermore transcends the temporal boundaries and historic watersheds of the Anschluss in 1938 and the end of the war in order to point out continuities in the strategies of remembering and forgetting history in Austria.

This thesis takes cues from memory studies, Austrian historiography, the history of everyday life under National Socialism as well as other ambivalent sites associated with National Socialism in order to unsilence the history of this contested space.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the objects in the municipal museum of Braunau am Inn in Upper Austria is a handcrafted and intricate model of the town made out of *Gmundner Keramik* (Gmunden Pottery). The model was a birthday gift presented by the town's father to its most infamous son, Adolf Hitler, on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday on 20 April 1939. Hitler did not have any use for this model and donated it to the collection of the *Deutsches Museum* (German Museum) in Berlin. In 1946 the museum cleaned its collection of controversial and unwanted objects from the Nazi period and returned the model to Braunau. There it was put into a vitrine in the entrance area of the museum where it can still be found today—without any hints about its origin and history.

While the model has found a place in Braunau, there is another object in the town which has not yet found its place in Austrian collective memory and the history of National Socialism in general: The house at the address 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, 5280 Braunau am Inn in Upper Austria. The empty and decaying *Biedermeier* building is the place where on 20 April 1889 Adolf Hitler was born. In the last decades, the house and Braunau occasionally made international headlines regarding the secrets lurking in the shadow of the house and in the collective memory of the town. Most recently, international media reported on Braunau when the Austrian National Assembly passed a special legislation that would allow the state to confiscate the building from its owner in December 2016.¹ Before this legislation, the state had rented the building from the owner and sublet it to various charity organizations, in order to prevent it from becoming an attraction for Neo-Nazis. In the past few years negotiations

¹ “211/ME (XXV. GP) - Enteignung Der Liegenschaft Salzburger Vorstadt Nr. 15, Braunau Am Inn [Confiscation of the Property Salzburger Vorstadt No. 15],” accessed June 7, 2017, https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00211/index.shtml.

between the state and the owner about buying the building were accompanied by an expert commission investigating possible solutions as to how to use the space.

The commission was composed of historians, legal experts, the mayor of Braunau and deputies from the ministry of interior, the state of Upper Austria and the Jewish Community Vienna. In October 2016, the commission, published a final report for a “historically correct handling of the birth house of Adolf Hitler.”² The commission, dealing with the history of the house during National Socialism only briefly, suggested a dissociation of the house with Adolf Hitler after the acquisition by offering it to charity organizations or using it as administrative offices. While the Austrian Minister of Interior, Wolfgang Sobotka, “confused the public” by suggesting to “solve the issue once and for all” by simply demolishing the building, members of the commission contradicted him strongly and stated that this would “equate a denial of history,”³ without mentioning what the history relating to this space was in particular.

This thesis started out as an investigation about the discourses of remembering and forgetting that surrounded the birth place of Adolf Hitler in Austria after the Second World War. However, I soon realized that I did not know what the “issue” or the “problem” the discourses oscillated around was—and those participating in the debates in many cases did not know either. I started wondering what might have actually happened at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and in Braunau between 1938 and 1945 when Austria was part of the Third Reich. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is now to unsilence the history of this house and consequently the ghosts that still haunt Braunau today by inquiring about the developments at Hitler’s birthplace as an attraction associated with the Führer’s life. Rather than arguing for how much Hitler there was

² Republik Österreich, Bundesministerium für Inneres, “Abschlussbericht: Kommission Zum Historisch Korrekten Umgang Mit Dem Geburtshaus Adolf Hitlers [Final Report: Commission on the Historically Correct Handling of the Birth House of Adolf Hitler],” October 2016, <http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/cs03documentsbmi/1908.pdf>.

³ “Hitler-Geburtshaus: Innenminister Stifft Verwirrung [Hitler’s Birth House: The Minister of Interior Causes Confusion],” *DerStandard.At*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://derstandard.at/2000046030926/InnenministerHitler-Geburtshaus-wird-abgerissen>.

in Braunau or how much Braunau there was in Hitler, this thesis looks for other actors and agents, how they rendered his birthplace significant by appropriating and engaging with it.

Throughout my research it has become evident that first the actors and agents engaging with the house neither came exclusively from the outside nor were they only local residents, but that they interacted with each other beyond the walls of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and the ancient city gates of Braunau. The second realization was that these exchanges and developments were not confined to the period between the Anschluss, the German annexation of Austria in 1938, and the liberation of Braunau by the US army in May 1945. Braunau had become a tourist attraction and a site of pilgrimage already before the Anschluss and continued to be one after the liberation—albeit for different kinds of tourists and pilgrims. Therefore, this thesis looks beyond the often monolithic categories of insiders and outsiders and the period of Austria as part of the Third Reich in order to trace the history of Hitler’s birth house.

After having established a historiographical and methodological framework which will navigate me through this space in its various contexts, this thesis sets out to open three windows, or research chapters into the house. The first chapter presents a mapping of the more general developments in and around Hitler’s birthplace between 1933 and 1955. It examines the house in the context of the image of the “private Führer” created by Nazi propaganda portraying Hitler as a regular citizen in his domestic settings. This chapter will dispel the myth that 15 Salzburger Vorstadt had ever been a place Adolf Hitler himself liked to call “home.” Paradoxically, the birth place as Hitler’s “home” is all that was remembered about the house after 1945 while the actual developments of the past—such as tourism, pilgrimage and how the local residents engaged with both phenomena—were gladly forgotten.

The second research chapter discusses how Hitler’s birthplace was subjected to and influenced by the inclusion of the *Ostmark* into organized Nazi tourism after the Anschluss and

how the birth house became popularized as a tourist attraction. This chapter examines travel brochures and guides, postcards and souvenirs, and puts Braunau in the broader context of Nazi merchandise and tourism policies of the Third Reich. It will also show how the locals shifted their strategy during the war from showing Hitler's "home" to tourists to providing a "home" for local arts and culture, and how after the war the same exhibition objects were used to depict "true Germaneness" vis a vis the "horrors of National Socialism."

Finally, the focus of the third chapter will be "the Bethlehem of the German Reich" and will examine the attempts to turn Braunau into a site of pilgrimage in the context of the religious dimensions of National Socialism and the Hitler cult. This chapter analyzes the depictions of Braunau in popular Nazi literature and attempts to establish an annual tradition of a passion play similar to the Passion of Jesus Christ. It also examines what US soldiers found in the house when they liberated Braunau in May 1945, how they reacted to it, and how the religious dimensions of Braunau as the cradle of National Socialism could not be swept away easily.

The house at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt was most certainly not important for Adolf Hitler from the viewpoint of his own childhood memories. While he described his birth in Braunau as fateful for his later efforts to unite Austria and Germany, he was clueless what to do with the pottery model he received as a gift from his native town. But, as this thesis will show, the space unfolded its own dynamics of commercialization and tourism, sacralization and pilgrimage, remembering and forgetting in the years from Hitler's *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power) in 1933 until the signing of the Austrian State Treaty and the withdrawal of the allies from Austria in 1955. The driving force behind the creation of a link between Hitler and his birthplace and behind the invention of the "Bethlehem of the German Reich" was not the man who had been born there. It was a joint effort of local actors and high ranking Nazis, tourists seeking attractions and pilgrims seeking salvation.

Finally, a note on the title of the thesis: In many ways it is paradigmatic for the archival adventure this thesis turned out to be. At the beginning of my research, in December 2016, I met with the Austrian historian Heidemarie Uhl. I told her about the first sources I had discovered and how they hinted at a dimension of Nazi tourism and Hitler pilgrimage in Braunau. Excited about my project and findings, she exclaimed “it’s like the Bethlehem of the Third Reich!” On the one hand, I immediately thought that this was a catchy title. On the other hand, I was also reluctant to use it, wondering to what extent it would perpetuate the myth of Hitler’s birthplace by interpreting too much into it from a few sources. It was only months later that I stumbled over an poem from 1938 actually praising Braunau as “Bethlehem of the German Reich.” Similar incidents happened throughout researching and writing: I found little traces and imagined them to be linked to something bigger, only to find an actual connection between Braunau and the larger developments in the Third Reich later.

2. FRAMEWORK: FORGOTTEN SPACES OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

This thesis presents the history of a contested space of Austrian history and the history of National Socialism. It traces how people have appropriated and engaged with it and attributed narratives to it in the years from 1933 to 1955, and how the forgetting of this history has turned the house into a “Pandora’s Box,” as one local politician has recently called it, of history and memories.⁴ The birth place of Hitler is embedded within several contexts. First, the contesting of the memory and forgetting it in relationship to space are connected to the emergence and subsequent developments in memory studies and the spatial turn in Holocaust research. Second, the house is obviously embedded within the specific context of Austrian historiography and collective memory which has been dominated by the “victim myth” for decades and is still dominated by the periodization of the Nazi era in Austria between 1938 and 1945. Third, the birthplace of Adolf Hitler is connected to and entangled with other spaces of National Socialism, which are not clearly spaces of suffering or genocide, but rather sites that were built for the self-representation of the regime.

Memory, Silencing and Forgetting

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, memory has become a subject of scholarly inquiry and developed into its own field of research on the intersection between various disciplines to unsilence forgotten narratives in histories of oppression and suffering. There are several factors that contributed to this paradigm shift. First, the Holocaust lies at the heart of the emergence of collective memory in post-war Europe, however, the looming waning of the war generation—victims, perpetrators and bystanders alike—meant that living memory would soon become only

⁴ “For Austria, A Tough Choice On What To Do With Hitler’s Birthplace,” *NPR.Org*, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/12/10/504955078/for-austria-a-tough-choice-on-what-to-do-with-hitlers-birthplace>.

accessible via representations and mediations.⁵ Second, new, digital technologies for recording memory questioned how we think about the past. Only recently, these technologies themselves have become a subject of inquiry in memory studies.⁶ Third, the end of the Cold War unfroze memories in both Eastern and Western Europe and questioned the national identities built on this division.⁷

At the beginning, memory studies focused on what actually was remembered, in national and collective contexts, in oral testimonies and stone monuments, rather than inquiring what is not being remembered when constructing the nation.⁸ Only recently, the acts of forgetting, silencing, non-remembering or omitting have become understood as deliberate acts in the construction and mediation of memories rather than accidental amnesia.⁹ For example, André Brink has argued that memory and its narratives are constructed “around its own blind spots and silences.”¹⁰ The emergence of memory studies is also intrinsically linked to the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences that put an emphasis in research on how space was constructed through the interaction of individuals. However, recently it has been argued that in the research of the Holocaust not its memory, the actual spatial turn is taking place only now. Two recent volumes, *Geographies of the Holocaust* and *Hitler’s Geographies* investigate how spaces were constructed in the Third Reich through exchanges and mobilities—for example

⁵ See: Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

⁶ See: Anna Reading, *Gender and Memory in the Global Age* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁷ Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Müller, Jan-Werner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157–83.

⁸ Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, No. 26, Spring 1989, 7–24. James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁹ See: Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting,” *Social Forces* 88, no. 3 (2010): 1103–22, doi:10.1353/sof.0.0290, David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012). Andrea Pető, “‘Hungary 70’: Non-Remembering the Holocaust in Hungary,” *Culture and History Digital Journal*, December 2014.

¹⁰ Brink, André, “Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-Apartheid Narrative,” in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, ed. Nuttal, Sarah and Coetzee, Carli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.

concentration camps, social engineering, Nazi cartography, ghettos and deportation.¹¹ While the first wave after the spatial turn focused on how interactions constructed memories and the space, the second wave now examines how interaction between spaces construct sites.

Austrian Memory and Historiography

In many studies of Holocaust memories, Austria was forgotten or simply subsumed under Germany, for example in James E. Young's *The Texture of Memory*.¹² In addition, Austria was infamously known as suffering from “collective amnesia”—paradoxically only after this *omertà* had been broken by the Waldheim affair.¹³ After the Second World War, Austria claimed for itself the status of Hitler's first victim it had been promised by the Allies in the Moscow Declaration of 1943. The “victim thesis” was embraced by all political parties and sanctified by the Allies in 1955 with their signatures under the Austrian State Treaty. The view that the victim thesis remained monolithic in the postwar period has been refuted by several Austrian historians such as Oliver Rathkolb, Bertrand Perz and Heidemarie Uhl, who have argued that it was assigned new meanings several times over the years.¹⁴

Austria used different memories internally and to present itself to the rest of the world. While on the grassroots level of almost each and every town Wehrmacht soldiers and veterans were commemorated as heroes, the victim thesis was maintained on an official level by

¹¹ See: Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano, eds., *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) and Giaccaria, Paolo and Minca, Claudio, eds., *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

¹² Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

¹³ Hella Pick, *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

¹⁴ Oliver Rathkolb, *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria, 1945-2005* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), Perz, Bertrand, “Österreich [Austria],” in *Verbrechen Erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung Mit Dem Holocaust Und Völkermord [Remembering Atrocities: Coming to Terms with the Holocaust and Genocide]*, ed. Knigge, Volkhard and Frei, Norbert (München: C.H.Beck, 2002), Uhl, Heidemarie, “From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis: Nazi Rule, World War II, and the Holocaust in Austrian Memory,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Lebow, Richard N. and Kantsteiner, Wulf (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 40–72.

remembering resistance fighters and the Austrian struggle for freedom as to avoid uncomfortable questions about the past. Only after the TV series *Holocaust* had been broadcast, Jewish victims became visible and gained a voice in Austrian collective memory.¹⁵ What was still lacking, however, was an official recognition of the co-responsibility of Austrians in the planning and execution of the Holocaust and atrocities during the war.

Austria's "innocence" as Hitler's first victim could no longer be maintained during the presidential election of 1986. On the surface, Kurt Waldheim, an experienced career diplomat seemed to be the perfect candidate for the highest office of the republic. Two months before the election, the Austrian weekly *Profil* and the *New York Times* revealed that Waldheim had omitted his membership in the Nazi student association and the SA, the paramilitary unit of the Nazi party. Just like the establishment of the victim thesis, its collapse has to be put into an international context. Oliver Rathkolb has maintained that Austria's "postwar role as the darling of the Cold War was coming to an end," and the former allies no longer saw "any geopolitical necessity to bypass the political confrontation on the extent of the implication in the Holocaust and the Second World War."¹⁶ Waldheim was elected president, but isolated internationally, while his involvement in or knowledge of war crimes and genocide in the Balkans was never definitely proven. He involuntarily served as a catalyst for the internalization of National Socialism into Austrian history and collective memory, and official Austria finally admitted the country's co-responsibility for National Socialism and the Holocaust.¹⁷

After the Waldheim affair historians started to write up the dark chapters of the past in the light of co-responsibility. To a large extent, historiography since the Waldheim affair can

¹⁵ Heidemarie Uhl, "Von 'Endlösung' Zu 'Holocaust': Die TV-Ausstrahlung von „Holocaust“ Und Die Transformationen Des Österreichischen Gedächtnisses [From 'Final Solution' to 'Holocaust' and the Transformations of Austrian Memory]," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 30, no. 4 (114) (2005): 29–52.

¹⁶ Rathkolb, *The Paradoxical Republic*, 255.

¹⁷ Uhl, Heidemarie, "From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis: Nazi Rule, World War II, and the Holocaust in Austrian Memory," 63.

be subsumed under the genre of political history and furthermore memory studies mainly focusing on coming to terms with the victim myth as such. In recent years, for example, an emphasis has been put on the chapters of the *Volksgerichte* (People's Courts) and Nazi trials in Austria,¹⁸ or biographies of “the perpetrators in the second row.”¹⁹ In addition, much effort has been put into writing Austrian-Jewish history, often about the forgotten rural Jewish communities that barely left a trace after the Holocaust. Notably, institutions such as the world-renowned Vienna Philharmonics Orchestra and the federal railway company ÖBB have made efforts to come to terms with their past which have resulted in online documentations and databases.²⁰

What becomes evident from examining recent publications and research projects is that the historiography of National Socialism and the Holocaust in Austria still confines itself to the years from 1938 to 1945 and examines victims and perpetrators in the grand scheme of events. 1938 and 1945 were watersheds, for sure, but at the same time they were not. This period of history is still overshadowed by the absolute distinction between the Austro-fascist regime between 1933 and 1938, the Nazi period from 1938 to 1945, and the allied occupation and the struggle for the Austrian State Treaty in the years between 1945 and 1955. One of the aims of this thesis in the bigger picture of Austrian historiography therefore is to overcome the boundaries of this periodization by examining agents and their interactions on the microlevel of Hitler's birthplace,

¹⁸ Hellmut Butterweck, *Nationalsozialisten vor dem Volksgericht Wien: Österreichs Ringen um Gerechtigkeit 1945-1955 in der zeitgenössischen öffentlichen Wahrnehmung [National Socialists in the People's Courts in Vienna: Austria's Struggle for Justice 1945-1955 And its public Image]* (Wien: StudienVerlag, 2016).

¹⁹ Gregor Holzinger, *Die zweite Reihe: Täterbiografien aus dem Konzentrationslager Mauthausen [The Second Row: Perpetrator Biographies from the Mauthausen Concentration Camp]* (Wien: New Academic Press, 2016).

²⁰ “Die Wiener Philharmoniker in Der NS-Zeit (1938 Bis 1945) [The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra during National Socialism (1938-1945)],” accessed June 4, 2017, <http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/orchester/geschichte/nationalsozialismus>, and “Verdrängte Jahre: Bahn Und Nationalsozialismus in Österreich 1938 - 1945 [Forgotten Years: The Railways and National Socialism in Austria 1938-1945],” accessed June 4, 2017, <http://konzern.oebb.at/de/vielfaeltige-oebb/verdraengte-jahre>.

Dark Spots on the Map of National Socialist Spaces

The agents attributing narratives and consequently significance to Hitler's birthplace interacted on a local level with each other and were entangled in wider developments. I have already hinted at the focus on victims and perpetrators in Austrian historiography of National Socialism as well as how the post-spatial turn in Holocaust research that emphasizes the interaction between spaces through actors. Little has been written about how Austrians engaged with the regime and the occupation on a day to day basis. If mentioned it is often in the form of a short anecdote within a grand narrative. For example the large study *National Socialism in Upper Austria* contains several stories of individuals engaging or struggling with the Nazi regime.²¹ What is interesting about ordinary people during the Nazi period is that they were continuous agents interacting with each other throughout the three regimes in the period between 1933 and 1945. Similar, a space such as the birth house of Hitler can serve as a marker of the continuity beyond the watersheds, because people engaged with it and appropriated it before the Anschluss and after the liberation. When uncovering the forgotten history of Hitler's birthplace, this allows us to overcome the boundaries of periodization.

Forgetting the past after 1945 and declaring it *another country* by blaming all guilt on Germany and neglecting one's own involvement in the Holocaust was a common strategy not only in Austria but all over Europe. "The memory of that experience was distorted, sublimated and appropriated, bequeathed to the post-war era" and molded into "an identity that was fundamentally false, dependent upon the erection of an unnatural and unsustainable frontier

²¹ Christian Angerer and Maria Ecker, *Nationalsozialismus in Oberösterreich: Opfer - Täter - Gegner [National Socialism in Upper Austria: Victims - Perpetrators - Opponents]* (Wien: StudienVerlag, 2014).

between past and present in European national memories.”²² Spaces associated with Nazi self-representation, however, remained in the *same country*, but were largely forgotten. The past can be distorted, sublimated and appropriated in many ways, for example through actual erasure or destruction of any physical trace. However, this “one day will exact a price,” when the past comes back to haunt us.²³

After the war, for example, first the US Army and later the Bavarian government made great efforts to demolish and then clear away the debris of Hitler’s mountain residence *Berghof* at Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden. However, the space continued to attract curious visitors seeking the *genius loci*, the spirit of the Führer. Some of them were just tourists dropping by during their vacation in the Bavarian Alps, others were the last of Hitler’s faithful. Only the establishment of a Documentation Center in 1999 succeeded in exorcising the demons haunting this site and made the Obersalzberg effectively unattractive for Hitler pilgrims.²⁴ The Obersalzberg and other spaces of the ruinous Nazi self-representation and the aura of ambivalence surrounding them today have only recently become a subject in historical research.

The book *Böse Orte: Stätten Nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung – Heute (Evil Places: Sites of National Socialist Self-Representation – Today)* from 2005 presented an overview of such sites and the problems pertaining to them today.²⁵ The book examines places “the Nazi regime built out of self-fascination, where the barbarity of the terror regime is not central and that pose a difficult task for remembrance. Because this task is so difficult, these

²² Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Müller, Jan-Werner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157.

²³ Müller, Jan-Werner, “Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Müller, Jan-Werner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.

²⁴ See: Schmundt, Hilmar, “Am Berghof [At the Berghof],” in *Böse Orte: Stätten Nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung - Heute [Evil Places: Sites of National Socialist Self-Representaion - Today]*, ed. Porombka, Stephan and Schmundt, Hilmar (Berlin: Claassen, 2005), 31–61.

²⁵ Stephan Porombka, *Böse Orte: Stätten nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung - heute [Evil Places: Sites of National Socialist Self-Representaion - Today]* (Berlin: Claassen, 2005).

places have been charged with an evil aura in the past decades. They seem ambiguous, ominous and dangerous.”²⁶ The book confines itself to Germany and includes among others essays about the Nazi beach resort on the Island of Rügen, the *Reichsparteitagsgelände* (Nazi party rally grounds) in Nuremberg, the Olympia Stadium in Berlin, the forgotten remnants of the *Reichsautobahn* (Reich highway) in Bavaria and Hessen, and Hitler’s residence at Obersalzberg. Many of the places examined in the book are surrounded by an aura of the uncanny, they are familiar and strange at the same time.²⁷

How could such sites contaminated with National Socialism yet not perpetrator places be approached? In this thesis I will argue that they should be examined through their exchanges and interactions in order to understand the fluid dimensions of the processes that were at work in Braunau and Berchtesgaden, in Linz and Landsberg, and elsewhere. These processes continue into the present and enforce a past that in many ways still lurks in the dark. This thesis takes cues from memory studies, Austrian historiography as well as the wide field of ambivalent sites associated with National Socialism in order to unsilence the history of Hitler’s birthplace, by putting an emphasis on how actors and agents engaged and interacted with each other.

Note on Sources

When I visited Braunau in April 2017, I noticed that the birth house of Adolf Hitler in the town is understood as a unique space to which no comparable object exists elsewhere. The house is only seen as embedded within its very local context, but not understood in the wider meaning it had during the Nazi period and beyond. This understanding of Hitler’s birthplace becomes

²⁶ Porombka, Stephan and Schmundt, Hilmar, “Unterwegs in Germania: Vorwort [On the Road in Germania: Introduction],” in *Böse Orte: Stätten Nationalsozialistischer Selbstdarstellung - Heute [Evil Places: Sites of National Socialist Self-Representation - Today]*, ed. Porombka, Stephan and Schmundt, Hilmar (Berlin: Claassen, 2005), 10.

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

problematic when looking for sources. Trying to answer the most basic question of what changes were made at what time in the structure of the building is impossible: The *Bauakten*, the construction files, of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt remain classified and can only be accessed by people with legal interest in the object. The minutes from the city council meeting are either non-existent or have been altered after the war. Other documents are missing from the local archive with the note that they have been transferred to Linz or Berlin but cannot be found there. Thus, the most valuable source for this research has been the *Verein für Zeitgeschichte*, the contemporary history association of Braunau, which also runs the online platform braunau-history.at, containing valuable documents. Other documents found their way to me via email. The ANNO newspaper database of the Austrian National Library contains all issues of the local newspaper *Neue Warte am Inn* and has been a valuable addition to the documents from *Verein für Zeitgeschichte* and the *Historisches Archiv zum Tourismus* (Historical Archive on Tourism) in Berlin.

3. PRIVATE AND DOMESTIC: MAPPING HITLER'S "HOME"

“Hier liegt auch der eigentliche Anreiz des vorliegenden Buches, dessen Aufgabe nicht in einer literarischen Darstellung des Lebens des Führers besteht, sondern in der unmittelbaren Wiedergabe eines tatsächlich Gesehenen.“

“The actual appeal of this book does not lie in the literary depiction of the Führer's life, but it is an immediate reproduction of what actually happened.”

Baldur von Schirach

This chapter focuses on the creation of Hitler as a private citizen and ordinary man of the people and the importance of the spaces he inhabited for the construction of this image. Braunau and the house at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt present a special case in the long list of addresses Adolf Hitler held throughout his life, because even though he was born there, he only lived in the house for a few months. Unlike other childhood homes, his birth house became part of an image campaign and was promoted alongside other sites associated the life of the Führer. First, I will examine why Hitler was born Braunau in order to show how attached he was to his birthplace. Second, it addresses the issue of the image of Hitler as a private citizen created in the 1930s and, third, the impact this had on 15 Salzburger Vorstadt as it was turned into the small house of a great man in the years leading up to the Anschluss in 1938. Fourth, this chapter examines the developments in Braunau as birth place of the Führer during the Nazi period, and the last part deals with the developments regarding the house during the Allied occupation from 1945 to 1955 in the light of the original owner's fight to reclaim the property. In conclusion, this chapter argues to the contrary of what the opening quote by *Reichsjugendführer* Baldur von Schirach claims: The powerful images of Hitler as a private citizen are not an actual reproduction of what actually happened, but much rather a literary depiction of the Führer's life, which in many ways still continues to fascinate us today.

Braunau, 20 April 1889

Adolf Hitler was born on 20 April 1889 in Braunau am Inn at the address of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt in an apartment at the local inn *Zum braunen Hirschen*. This is a fact well known, because, after all, Hitler himself never tried to hide his origin from a small town. In *Mein Kampf* he reflects on the location of his birth as “providential” and “fateful” for his aims and actions as a politician.²⁸ Hitler in fact tried to hide was his family’s origin from the Austrian-Czech border region in the Waldviertel. His omission of his obscure family roots in Northern Austria served as a rich source for debates about family incest and possible Jewish ancestors among contemporaries and historians and is the base for numerous speculative publications ever since the 1930s. Contrary to hiding his ancestry in the multiethnic Waldviertel, Hitler never denied the fact that he was born in Braunau, a town with an almost exclusively German-speaking population. He actually instrumentalized the small border town in his writing, even though his family moved to the other side of the border in 1892, to Passau, where his father had been promoted to Highest Collector of Customs.²⁹ After moving around the Austrian-German border region for years, the family settled permanently in Leonding near Linz in 1897, which Hitler regarded as his hometown “down to his last days in the bunker.”³⁰

Today, most of the houses Hitler inhabited in Germany and Austria, in Passau, Linz, Vienna, Munich and Berlin serve as normal apartment or office buildings. The area where the *Berghof* near Berchtesgaden once stood functions as a documentation center and actively deals with the troublesome past of the Berghof where political decisions were made in the seemingly innocent setting of the Bavarian alps. Surprisingly, Hitler’s apartment in Munich remains an

²⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Pimlico, 1994), 3.

²⁹ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

unmarked space and functions as a police station where the cupboards designed by the Führer's interior designer serve as a cabinet to showcase soccer trophies, and curious visitors are usually chased off with the words "this is a working police station, not a museum."³¹

The Invention of Hitler as Private Citizen

After the First World War, Adolf Hitler became politically active in the then small NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party). In November 1923 the Nazi party with Hitler as one of their leaders attempted a coup in Munich, the so-called Beer Hall Putsch, or in German *Hitler-Ludendorff-Putsch*. The coup failed and the party's leadership was arrested. In the ensuing trial Hitler was found guilty and sentenced to five years in prison. During his time in the Landsberg prison fortress he would write *Mein Kampf*. Because Hitler was still an Austrian citizen, the Bavarian authorities attempted to negotiate the insurgent's deportation to his home country, while he was serving time in the Landsberg prison fortress. Hitler became aware of the pending deportation after his early release in December 1924 and sent a letter to the Upper Austrian administration, demanding his release from the Austrian citizenship. In the letter of 7 April 1925 Hitler explains that he has been living in Germany since 1912, fought in the Bavarian army during the war and plans to become naturalized as a German citizen in the near future. "I am not even sure," he adds at the end of the letter, "if my Austrian citizenship hasn't expired anyways."³² The Upper Austrian government willingly gave in to this request and from the end of April 1925 on, Hitler lived as a stateless person in Germany.

While the future Führer built the small outsider NSDAP into a large organization, acquiring German citizenship as a convicted criminal proved to be difficult. After several of his

³¹ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 312.

³² Werner Maser, ed., *Hitlers Briefe und Notizen: sein Weltbild in handschriftlichen Dokumenten [Hitler's Letters and Notes: His World View in Handwritten Documents]* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1973), 142.

applications for German citizenship had been refused, Hitler finally acquired it in February 1932, less than one month before the presidential election he was a candidate for. Paul Hindenburg won the election, but in the ensuing *Reichstagswahlen* (parliament elections) the NSDAP became the strongest party, and on 30 January 1933 Hitler was sworn in as *Reichskanzler* (Reich chancellor). Throughout these tumultuous times of election campaigning, headed by future propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi party struggled to get rid of Hitler's image as a stateless loudmouth populist, agitating the masses in beerhalls. The future leader of the German people had no family ties in Germany, it even seemed that he had no roots at all. Even worse, one event would further threaten his potential success.

In September 1931, Hitler's niece Geli Raubal, who was living with her uncle in Munich, committed suicide in the apartment they shared. The uncle-niece-cohabitation ending in a mysterious suicide gave rise to further rumors of incest and perversity. According to Despina Stratigakos, this obscure image threatening Hitler's credibility as a politician and potential leader of Germany was the trigger for a media campaign directed by Joseph Goebbels and executed by Hitler's personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. Less than a year after Raubal's suicide, Hoffmann published *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (*The Hitler Nobody Knows*), a „visual complement to *Mein Kampf*.“³³ *The Hitler Nobody Knows* presented the people with baby and childhood photos of the Führer, including an image of the house he was born in to create the impression of a happy and undisturbed childhood in Braunau. The main emphasis however was put on Hitler in his domestic settings in Munich and Berchtesgaden, surrounded by children and dogs, or travelling Germany from North to South and East to West. In the introduction, Baldur von Schirach, youth leader of the Nazi Party, invites the reader to get to know the unknown side of Hitler. “The actual appeal of this book does not lie in the literary

³³ Despina Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 1st edition (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2015), 151.

depiction of the Führer's life, but it is an immediate reproduction of what actually happened.”³⁴ While some of the images might have been snapshots, the overall selection and arrangement of the images in the album served the clear political purpose to make Hitler seem more humane and approachable. This concept is an immense success, by 1942 over 400,000 copies had been sold.³⁵

The publication of baby photos, pictures of his parents, a facsimile of the birth announcement alongside a photo of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt with subtitles full of anecdotes from Hitler's childhood and youth in *The Hitler Nobody Knows* were an attempt to give roots to the restless Nazi leader in Braunau—which had been already selected by Hitler as a fateful location. Hitler's birthplace does not go unnoted in the German public. On the occasion of the new chancellor's 44th birthday on 20 April 1933, the North German regional newspaper *Lübeckische Anzeigen* publishes a full front page article that includes pictures of Hitler in uniform, his residence on the Obersalzberg—and a photo of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt (Image 1). A cross above one of the front windows on the second floor marks the room where Hitler's cradle allegedly once stood—even though it is more likely that the Hitler family occupied an apartment in one of the back buildings.

³⁴ Heinrich Hoffmann, *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt: 100 Bilddokumente aus dem Leben des Führers*. [*The Hitler Nobody Knows: 100 Image Documents from the Life of the Führer*] (Berlin: Zeitgeschichte-Verlag, 1932), 7.

³⁵ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 156.

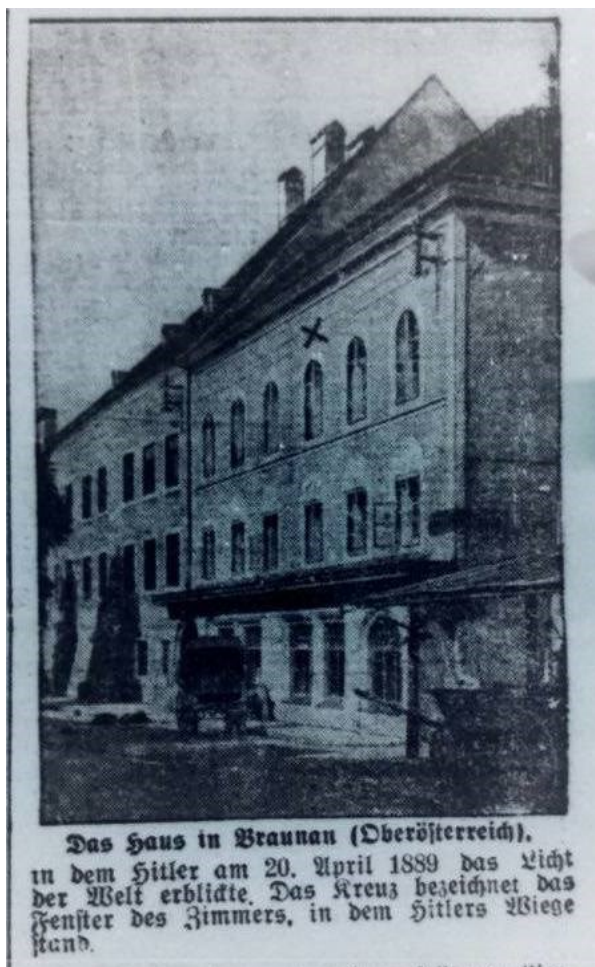


Image 1: "The House in Braunau (Upper Austria)," *Lübecksche Anzeigen*, 19 April 1933.

The Discovery of Hitler's Birthplace in Braunau

Since the Hitler family moved away in 1892, there is no evidence whether they ever visited Braunau again or had ties of any kind in the town. Hitler's parents died in 1903 and 1907 and were both buried in Leonding near Linz. The only evidence of a potential visit of Hitler himself before the Anschluss is an article in the local newspaper *Neue Warte am Inn* from 1940—at this time of course fully controlled by the Nazi propaganda apparatus—which describes a campaign visit that had allegedly taken place on 3 October 1920. Hitler visited his birth place to give a speech in front of about sixty people by invitation of local Nazi leader Georf Hofmann, who after the *Anschluss* would become Braunau's mayor. The article claims that Hitler's ideas already then fell on fertile grounds in the town but that the rally ended in a brawl between Hitler,

Hofmann and one of the participants, citing court records which cannot be found today, neither in the archive in Braunau nor in the Upper Austrian State Archive in Linz.³⁶

Meanwhile, the property at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt had changed ownership in 1912. Widowed Helene Dafner, who had run the inn while the Hitler family resided there with her now deceased husband, sold it to Braunau locals Josef and Maria Pommer. With the property they also acquired the *Schank- und Gastungsrecht*, that is the right to sell alcohol and offer accommodation.³⁷ In the local newspaper, the Pommers soon announce their takeover and promise that they would continue operations at the *Gasthaus zum braunen Hirschen* in the tradition of their previous innkeepers.³⁸ At some point before 1938, however, they change the name to *Gasthaus zum Pommer*, most likely to avoid confusion with the other local inn *Gasthaus zum goldenen Hirschen*.

In Braunau, Hitler's political activities in Germany are noticed for the first time in 1923 around the time of the Beer Hall Putsch. In the analysis of "The Personality of Adolf Hitler" in the local newspaper, it does not sound as if anyone in Braunau was very fond of the Nazi party's aspiring leader. Hitler is described as a bachelor who never held an ordinary job but devotes all his time to political agitation. Mentioning Hitler's restless life, the article further notes that even though he might have been born in Braunau, he was not a son of the town but the son of a rootless Bohemian migrant.³⁹ The next time Hitler's name comes up in Braunau is in 1933 after the he had been sworn in as chancellor in Germany. While the town council sends polite congratulations to the chancellery in Berlin, they also vote against a request of bestowing

³⁶ Neue Warte am Inn, 3 October 1940.

³⁷ Bezirksgericht Braunau: Grundbucheintragungen, "Geburtshaus – Braunau History," accessed May 25, 2017, <http://braunau-history.at/w/index.php?title=Geburtshaus>.

³⁸ Neue Warte am Inn, 28 December 1912.

³⁹ Neue Warte am Inn, 15 November 1923.

honorary citizenship upon Hitler.⁴⁰ Around the same time *Gasthaus zum Pommer* at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt became a meeting place for Nazi sympathizers.

Braunau, due to its proximity to the German border and the increasing awareness of being the Führer's birth place had a strong Nazi followership and well organized illegal party structures before the Anschluss.⁴¹ Josef and Maria Pommer's son, Josef junior, was arrested in October 1933 for holding a public broadcast of a Hitler radio speech at the inn—which was illegal at the time in Austria. It is unclear when the Pommer family found out that their inn was actually the house the *Führer* was born in. As already mentioned, pictures and descriptions circulated in the German press at the time and might have found their way to Austria from across the Inn River. Furthermore, the records of Hitler's birth and the family's residence can be found in the town's registry.

By 1936, once economic sanctions by Germany against Austria were lifted and cross-border travel started to flourish again, one room on the upper floor of the building was turned into the “*Führer*'s nursery” as a postcard from the time with the caption “The birth room of the German chancellor in Braunau am Inn” (“Des Deutschen Kanzlers Geburtszimmer in Braunau a.[m] Inn”) proves (Image 2). The postcard was produced by the local photo studio Doppler and clearly intended for German tourists coming to Braunau. Because there are no photographs of what the apartment of the Hitler family must have looked like in 1889, the room is based on Pommer's imagination. The room served as a small museum, catering to the increasing amount of tourists flocking into Braunau both from Austria as well as from the other side of the border, providing additional income for the inn's owners.

⁴⁰ Antrag Ehrenbürgerernennung Braunau abgelehnt, “Braunau - Hitlers Geburtsstadt – Braunau History,” accessed June 7, 2017, http://braunau-history.at/w/index.php?title=Braunau_-_Hitlers_Geburtsstadt.

⁴¹ See: Angerer and Ecker, *Nationalsozialismus in Oberösterreich*.



Image 2: Postcard from 1936 showing the alleged room where the German chancellor was born

The transformation of one of the guest rooms on the upper floor of the Pommer family's inn into a small museum in the form of the "Führer nursery," plays along well with the invention of the private Führer, since a photo of his birthplace had already been used in *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt*. But the opening of this museum also fits into a global trend of turning the small houses of great men into museums. In 1932, Virginia Woolf noted that London is "becoming full of great men's houses, bought for the nation and preserved entire with the chairs they sat on and the cups they drank from, their umbrellas and their chests of drawers."⁴² The preservation, restoration and selling of the historic houses became such a great concern for museum makers that in 1939 Laurence Coleman, the director of American Association of Museums, noted that "historic houses [...] are beginning to be cherished everywhere."⁴³ His

⁴² Virginia Woolf, "Great Men's Houses," in *The London Scene: Five Essays* (New York: Hallman, 1975), 23.

⁴³ Laurence Coleman, *Historic House Museums* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1939), iii.

book *Historic House Museums* is a manual on how to preserve and restore, but also how to interpret and sell the birth places and homes of great men.

Obviously, it is highly unlikely that the Pommers or anyone in Braunau read Coleman's book or Woolf's essay, or that they were in any kind of way familiar with the global developments in the museum landscape. Pommer was not concerned with authenticity and restoration of a great man's house, only with selling the birthplace of Hitler in the context of an increasing Führer cult. The fact that the Führer was born in the room promoted as Hitler's nursery is only marked by an oversized portrait of him on the wall, and several framed photographs of Hitler on the other walls and on the table. Similar to *The Hitler Nobody Knows*, they were arranged as collages, decorating what appears to be an otherwise average guest room in a rural inn, furnished with a bed, nightstand, washstand, a table and two chairs. The floral wallpaper, a table cloth, the drapes, and a rag rug are there to enhance the coziness of the room that seems to be ready to welcome the next guest on his or her journey through the small town on the Austrian-German border.

In Braunau the local authorities were perplexed by the existence of the small museum and this new kind of tourism, because the Nazi party and all symbols associated with it were banned in the Austrian *Ständestaat* since 1933. But was this reason enough to ban the little museum altogether that brought visitors to the town who were willing to spend money during their leisure time and thus supported the local economy? Local administrators and politicians were reluctant to find a solution to this problem, but in 1937 the Pommer family got an official permission from the town council to show the museum to foreign tourists, but not to Austrian citizens.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Christa Zöchling, "Das Geisterhaus [The Haunted House]," *Profil* 46, November 10, 2014.

This would soon change as on 12 February 1938 Hitler called Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden. In the “warm domesticity” of the Berghof, Hitler forced Schuschnigg to surrender parts of Austria’s sovereignty.⁴⁵ As a last weapon against Hitler’s aggression, the Austrian Chancellor announced a referendum on the question of the Anschluss for 13 March 1938. To prevent an unwanted outcome, Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht to prepare the invasion of Austria and gave the Austrian Nazis in the underground free hand in spreading terror and taking over crucial infrastructure.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the Führer traveled from Berlin to Munich in order to step foot into his native land.

The Anschluss: Hitler Comes “Home” But Does Not Stay

In the light of Nazis’ fondness for symbolic staging, it is unsurprising that Braunau was chosen as the crossing point for the Führer and his entourage from Germany to Austria for the Anschluss in 1938. Hitler’s birthplace obviously mingled well with the carefully crafted image of the private Führer and man of the people. Hitler’s arrival in Braunau in the afternoon of 12 March 1938 was celebrated as “return of the Führer to his hometown” and several sources describe his reaction as very emotional.⁴⁷ However, Braunau was not the final destination of Hitler’s triumphal home coming, but merely a stopover. There was no time to be wasted during the annexation of Austria. Hitler shakes hands with the local population and politicians standing in his car, accepting flowers and other small gifts while proceeding through the streets, passing by 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, but not stepping out of his car.

⁴⁵ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 92.

⁴⁶ Angerer and Ecker, *Nationalsozialismus in Oberösterreich*, 53.

⁴⁷ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 16 March 1938.



Image 3: "Hitler's arrival in his birth place Braunau"⁴⁸

Soon, history books are written about the Anschluss, celebrating Hitler's arrival in Braunau. The Nazi historian Karl Bartz in his coffee-table book *Großdeutschlands Wiedergeburt: Weltgeschichtliche Stunden an der Donau* (*Greater Germany's Rebirth: World Historic Moments on the Danube*) celebrates the liberation of Austria by Adolf Hitler, as Hermann Göring calls it in the foreword.⁴⁹ Hitler's arrival in the town on 12 March 1938 is described by Bartz as a "homecoming to a familiar town, which had seen him as a child, where he had once known almost every house,"⁵⁰ even though Adolf Hitler himself admitted to remembering little to nothing about Braunau, especially not the house in the Salzburger Vorstadt. A similar account of the events in Braunau can be found in the 1938 book by the

⁴⁸ Bartz, Karl, *Großdeutschlands Wiedergeburt: Weltgeschichtliche Stunden an Der Donau* [*Greater Germany's Rebirth: World Historic Moments on the Danube*] (München: Raumbildverlag Otto Wilhelm Schönstein, 1938), 33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 53.

“famous local historian” (“bekannter Heimatforscher”⁵¹) Eduard Kriechbaum. Kriechbaum had acquired a reputation in Germany before the Anschluss through his participation in history conferences where he promoted the Führer’s homeland, therefore it was easy for him to find a German publisher for his book *History of Braunau am Inn*. Kriechbaum’s book, published a few months after the Anschluss, ends with events of 12 March 1938 as a happy ending to an otherwise tumultuous history: “From Braunau, the Führer entered his homeland [...] and this is how Braunau and Austria returned to the motherland.”⁵² On 10 April 1938, with a month delay, the referendum about the unification of Austria and Germany takes places—obviously, under completely changed circumstances. In Braunau 99.87 % vote in favor of the *Anschluss*. The *Gasthaus zum Pommer* served as a polling station, but soon its owner and its purpose would change lastingly.⁵³

These books and the constant publications of articles in the local newspaper keep alive the memory of the Anschluss in Braunau and foster the desire that Hitler might return to his birthplace some day in the future: “The wish of welcoming the Führer and chancellor someday again in these familiar streets lives on in all of us,” concludes an article on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Anschluss in 1939.⁵⁴ While the Anschluss in Braunau was celebrated as the return of the town’s most famous son, he did not even step foot out of his car but soon proceeded to Linz. The events of 12 March 1938 were most of all important to the locals who keep alive the memory of the Anschluss throughout the Nazi period and long for the Führer to come home again.

⁵¹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 4 May 1938.

⁵² Kriechbaum, *Geschichte der Stadt Braunau am Inn*, 73.

⁵³ Volksabstimmung 10. April 1938, “Gemeindepolitik 1918 - 1945 – Braunau History,” accessed May 25, 2017, http://braunau-history.at/w/index.php?title=Gemeindepolitik_1918_-_1945.

⁵⁴ „Ein Jahr befreite Ostmark,” *Neue Warte am Inn*, 8 March 1939.

Acquiring and Restoring Hitler's "Home"

At the beginning of May 1938, *Neue Warte am Inn* reports that the Nazi party already purchased the former homes of the Hitler family in Fischlham and Leonding at a high price to compensate the owners for the historic significance those houses have for the German Reich.⁵⁵ Finally, on 24 May 1938 Martin Bormann, Hitler's secretary seals the deal with Joseph and Maria Pommer in Braunau and buys the property at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt for 150,000 Reichsmark.⁵⁶ Curiously, in July 1938 the now former owners are informed by the Central Authority for Cultural Heritage Protection (*Zentralstelle für Denkmalschutz*) in Berlin that "their" house is to be regarded as a memorial and has to be maintained in the public interest as the birthplace of the Führer and chancellor Adolf Hitler.⁵⁷ Even though the price Bormann paid was exorbitantly high for a property of this size and location, it is highly likely that pressure was put on the Pommers to sell the house. It is only after the war that a telegram resurfaces from *Reichskommissar* Josef Bürkl in Vienna to the owners in which he threatens to take "extraordinary measures" should they not accept the offer of Hitler's secretary.⁵⁸

The first plan for the building announced by the local administration is to restore it to the historic condition of 1889 when Adolf Hitler was born there, and thus to turn it into a actual house museum. To achieve this aim, the *Kreisleitung* (district administration) even hired a Braunau local, an 80-year old woman named Rosalie Hörl, who worked as a maid in the Hitler household during the time. She is said to remember exactly what the house and especially the living quarters of the family looked like in 1889 and would now assist in bringing back the original furniture.⁵⁹ Later during the Nazi period, Hörl is described as cook and nanny of the

⁵⁵ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 11 May 1938.

⁵⁶ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 25 May 1938.

⁵⁷ „Betrifft: Gedenkstätten an den Führer und Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler, Braunau am Inn Nr. 219, Stellung unter Denkmalschutz,“ 20. Juli 1938, Verein für Zeitgeschichte/Florian Kotanko.

⁵⁸ „Hitlers Geburtshaus wird wieder Gastwirtschaft,“ *Passauer Neue Presse*, 9 February 1954.

⁵⁹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 1 June 1938.

Hitler family, and after the war even as the midwife that brought Adolf into this world in April 1889. She has the status of a “direct witness” of a historic event “that arouses deep emotions in groups of people, giving rise to passionate discussions” and therefore would “reconstruct the event according to their beliefs and desires.”⁶⁰ Whether Hörl has changed her memories of Hitler’s early days accordingly, we will never find out. After the war Hörl, now 87, is described as a senile old woman by US Army reporters. Despite her dementia, they believe her to be Hitler’s midwife and her description of him as a “ordinary healthy baby,” and that the family occupied three rooms in one of the building in the back.⁶¹

In October 1939, about one and a half years after the Anschluss the plans for the house changed. *Neue Warte am Inn* reports that the Führer himself expressed the wish that the house should be turned into offices for the Braunau *Kreisleitung* in the front and an “illegal party museum” in the back, with “an exhibition of material that has never been seen before.”⁶² Since no plans survive, it is unclear what happens between then and 1943 when the house is opened as a gallery and library and all the buildings in the back have vanished except for a few colonades that hint at the previous existence of a courtyard.

With the war starting in September 1939 and eating up more and more resources of the Third Reich, the Nazi administration in Berlin took less and less interest in Braunau. In November 1942, *Gauleiter* (governor) Eigruher applies for a *Sonderbeauftragter* (special envoy) for the urban and economic development of Braunau. As the main reason for this he cites the plan to enlarge the aluminum plant in Ranshofen and the need for more housing. However, he does not fail to mention that “due to the great interest the Führer takes in his birthplace the hiring of a *Sonderbeauftragter* is unavoidable.”⁶³ Half a year later, Eigruher

⁶⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 192.

⁶¹ “Adolf’s Midwife is Glad He’s Dead,” *The Black Cat*, 15 May 1945.

⁶² *Neue Warte am Inn*, 5 October 1939.

⁶³ „Sonderbeauftragter für die Erweiterung und Umgestaltung der Stadt Braunau; Haushaltsmittel [Special Envoy for the Urban and Economic Development of Braunau], “ 19 November 1942.

renews the application with the Ministry for the Interior. It is only a year later that the *Reichskanzlei* informs the Ministry for the Interior that “the Führer does not have any objections to postpone the hiring of a *Sonderbeauftragter* until after the war.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, visitors from the outside gradually cease to come to Braunau until in 1942 the Nazi regime actively starts to prevent people from traveling. Even more so, as the Führer myth starts to crumble and Hitler becomes less popular, sites associated with his life do too. Braunau only steps into the limelight again in 1945, when Hitler’s birthplace is liberated by the US army.

The US Army Moves into Hitler’s “Home”

Unlike Hitler’s residence at Obersalzberg, the allies never considered Braunau to be of actual strategic or military importance for the *Alpenfestung*, Nazi Germany’s redoubt, or suspected Hitler to be hiding in the house where he was born. However, Hitler domestic images and with them his birthplace had also been widely publicized in the international media and thus known to the soldiers coming to Braunau on 2 May 1945. In 1932, the *New York Times* even sent a correspondent to Braunau to report on the politicians roots.⁶⁵ In the last days of the war, while the *Gauleiter* of Oberdonau, August Eigruber demanded that the population resisted the approaching US army at any expense and ordered the bridge over the Inn River between Braunau and Simbach to be blown up. The locals were tired of the war and suffering and city officials set over to Simbach by boat to negotiate the capitulation of Hitler’s birthplace with the allies. Braunau was liberated by the US army on 2 May 1945, two days after Hitler had committed suicide in his Berlin bunker. Later that day, in one last desperate attempt, a small Nazi battalion entered Braunau on a mission to blow up the house at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt as

⁶⁴ Bestellung eines Sonderbeauftragten des Reichsstatthalters in Oberdonau für die Erweiterung und Umgestaltung der Stadt Braunau [Special Envoy for the Urban and Economic Development of Braunau], 3 April 1944

⁶⁵ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 234.

not to leave the house where the Führer's cradle had once stood over to the enemy. Their mission was not successful, leaving three men dead.⁶⁶

The first men to enter Braunau that day were reporters who immediately asked for Hitler's birth house.⁶⁷ An article published in the army newspaper *The Black Cat* a few days after the liberation of Braunau was picked up by news outlets all over Europe and in the US. Besides the already mentioned interview with senile Rosalie Hörl it also includes the *vox populi*. One woman on the streets states that Hitler "was a thief, dumb in school, and he used to steal the butcher's meat."⁶⁸ Only a few days after the liberation, people tell anecdotes from the war, but already forget and omit the dominant narratives from the Nazi period, with one man stating that "only 36 people in Braunau liked [Hitler]. The other 6,000 hated him."⁶⁹

While the US army moved into Hitler's birth house and started to use it as the local headquarter for the military intelligence agency Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), the ghosts of Hitler and National Socialism remained in the house and in Braunau. It was only after the war that Braunau, albeit for a short period, had a Jewish community. However, eight years of racist ideology left their trace. The local residents did not welcome the Jews who had just survived concentration camps and were now waiting for emigration back home or to the United States or Israel in the native town of Adolf Hitler. While the survivors prepared to emigrate, some residents of Braunau wanted to make sure that they would not make Braunau their home. After locals had protested unsuccessfully at the US administration for the Jewish DPs to be removed, overnight anti-Semites demolished the provisional synagogue in the camp.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Peter G. Krebs, *Kriegsende in der Geburtsstadt des Führers* (Munderfing, Innsalz, 2017), 57.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁸ "Adolf's Midwife is Glad He's Dead," *The Black Cat*, 15 May 1945.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ John, Michael, "Upper Austria, Intermediate Stop: Reception Camps and Housing Schemes for Jewish DPs and Refugees in Transit," in *Escape Through Austria: Jewish Refugees and the Austrian Route to Palestine*, ed. Albrich, Thomas and Zweig, Ronald W. (Portland: Frank Cass, 2002), 34.

The Pommer Family Fights to Get Back the House

Already less than one year after the liberation of Austria and under the growing tensions between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union in Europe, the United States “had switched their ‘enemy image’ from getting rid of Nazis to containing communists.”⁷¹ As a consequence, the US administration also turned a blind eye on former Nazis attempting to reclaim property opening up a window of opportunity for the Pommer family. In lieu of her brother Joseph jr. who had a criminal record as early Nazi sympathizer, Kreszentia Pommer in February 1948 filed an *Antrag auf Rückstellung* (*Application for Restitution*) for the property her parents had sold in 1938 at a horrendous price.⁷²

Since Bormann’s whereabouts were unknown she filed the application against the Republic of Austria which meanwhile was managing his estate. The Braunau mayor issued a statement that the town would like to keep the house as a school and library, hinting that the city would not support the return of the property, because the Pommers had received a high price anyway.⁷³ Pommer’s application was declined, but she tried again in 1952. Pommer and the Republic reached an agreement in February 1954.⁷⁴ Pommer pays 150,000 Schilling, a fraction of what Bormann paid in 1938 and what the Nazis invested in the house for renovations, and plans to open it as an inn again.⁷⁵

The strategy of privatizing the space and consequently the memory of the birthplace of Adolf Hitler in Braunau and thus in the whole of Austria might have seemed appealing in 1954

⁷¹ Günter Bischof, *Austria in the First Cold War 1945 - 55: The Leverage of the Weak* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 111.

⁷² Rückstellungsantrag [Application for the Restitution of Property], 11 February 1948.

⁷³ Rückstellungskommission beim Landesgericht [Restitution Commission at the District Court], 26 April 1948.

⁷⁴ Vergleichsausfertigung [Official Copy of the Agreement], “ 29 January 1954.

⁷⁵ “Hitlers Geburtshaus wird wieder Gastwirtschaft,” *Passauer Neue Presse*, 9 February 1954.

when the dominating trope in collective memory was that of collective victimhood. But “collective memory cannot be privatized by definition,” Jan-Werner Müller observed.⁷⁶ If memory is forced out of the public sphere, into the realm of whispering and gossiping, “it might in fact become aggravated or distorted in ways which will one day exact a price.”⁷⁷ The price Braunau and Austria still have to pay for the house is unwanted attention from international media and constant public and political debates.

Conclusion

While Hitler’s birthplace has been privatized in 1954, the images of the literary depiction of the Führer’s life as a private citizen have unfolded a fascinating yet haunting afterlife in the decades since the Second World War. Meanwhile, Braunau is still haunted by the ghosts Hitler called upon in *Mein Kampf*. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler used the location of his birthplace to justify his goal to unite Germany and Austria. This short note on the first page was then picked up by both the outside Nazi propaganda as well as the local residents in order to declare 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and Braunau as a whole significant. While at the time everyone forgot that Hitler only lived at this address for a few months and in the town only for a few years, after the war it was forgotten that the connection between Hitler and Braunau as destiny was a constructed narrative. However, it was all that remained after the war as no one had any interest in remembering what has actually happened.

The narrative of Hitler’s “home” was adopted and adapted by different actors from Braunau and elsewhere: First, the Pommer family sought to profit from Hitler’s birth in their inn by turning it into a museum. This was, second, tolerated by the local authorities before the

⁷⁶ Müller, Jan-Werner, “Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory,” 32.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 32.

Anschluss. Third Bormann bought the house and hands authority over to the local administration, who first wants to restore it, then plans to turn it into party offices and a museum—citing Hitler’s personal wish—but ends up opening a gallery and library there. When Hitler comes home, he does not stay, but still the local residents remained fixed on the connection, even though Berlin takes little interest in the house during the war. After the war, the local residents want to forget how they had engaged with the birthplace of the Führer and the narrative of fate and destiny constructed around it, how Nazi propaganda had used it to construct the image of the “private Führer.” But these narratives remained and continue to remain powerful in the image Braunau has today.

4. TOURISM AND COMMERCIALIZATION

“Braunau muss sich schon heute für einen großen Fremdenverkehr rüsten.”

“Starting today, Braunau has to prepare for an increased tourism in the future.”

Neue Warte am Inn, 13 April 1938

This chapter investigates how the image of Hitler as a private citizen was commodified and commercialized through tourism in Braunau. It traces how Braunau was subjected to and influenced by different developments outside of its ancient town walls, and even outside of the *Gau*. Hitler’s birth place as part of a network of sites associated with the Führer’s life did and does not exist outside of the wider context of the developments in the Third Reich up to 1945 and in Austria under allied occupation until 1955. During the Allied occupation, Braunau again became a tourist destination, this time for Allied soldiers who visit “Hitler’s home” as a tourists. They were eager to visit the house where the man they defeated was born.

Tourism, Orvar Löfgren maintained, is also defined by the “relations between the local, the national, and the transnational,” and “has always been a transnational mode of production.”⁷⁸ John Urry has defined tourism as a commodity which gains its status in opposition to regulated work and is organized through the movement of people to places and destinations outside their spheres of residence and work. Attractions thus involve “complex processes of production in order that regular, meaningful and profitable tourist gazes can be generated and sustained.”⁷⁹ Urry further distinguishes between travel as an individual experience and tourism with its mass character.⁸⁰ Because Braunau at least for a short time, alongside other places associated with the Führer’s life, became a popular tourist attraction, the

⁷⁸ Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 8.

⁷⁹ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990), 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-5.

history of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt should be examined in the wider context of organized leisure in the Third Reich. This will show again, that it was not Hitler himself who rendered his birthplace significant, but other actors, namely the locals and the tourists who visited.

For a long time in the post-war period, the history of tourism under National Socialism has been swept under the rug in historiography and memory culture together with other aspects of the *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) of the Third Reich. Tourism remained omitted in the historiography of National Socialism due to the uncanny dissonance “between holiday and horror, vacations and violence, tourism and terror.”⁸¹ Only more recently tourism in general has become a viable research subject across academic disciplines and consequently for historians of National Socialism. Shelley Baranowski’s *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* from 2004 was the first major study on the Nazis’ main leisure and tourism agency *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF, Strength through Joy) and examined the interplay between provision leisure and preparation for war, community and coercion, vacationing and expansive politics.⁸² Kristin Semmens’ *Seeing Hitler’s Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* later examined commercial tourism of Germans and foreign visitors in the Third Reich, which celebrated the German *Volksgemeinschaft* and its racial aspects, and thus normalized the regime.⁸³ When the Nazis annexed Austria in March 1938, the regime had already been well established and normalized. But Braunau was still a welcome addition to the network of attractions associated with the Führer’s life or the history of National Socialism more generally.

⁸¹ Kristin Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.

⁸² Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸³ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany*.

Omitted Tourism Before the Anschluss

Before Hitler came to power in Germany, Braunau was present in German tour guides. A 1931 *Grieben* guide for Austria praises the well-kept *Bürgerhäuser* from the sixteenth and seventeenth century—15 Salzburger Vorstadt must have been one of them—and the gothic church with its intricate altar and cenotaphs.⁸⁴ Notable sites then included the old city gate, the *Glockengießerhaus* (bell founder building) and the *Palmpark* with the monument for Johann Philipp Palm erected in 1866. Johann Philipp Palm (1768-1806) was a German book seller who was executed in Braunau during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) for publishing the anti-French pamphlet *Deutschland in seiner tiefen Erniedrigung* (Germany in her deep humiliation). Palm became an icon for German nationalism and unification of all German lands. Hitler mentions Palm's execution on the first page of *Mein Kampf* as one of the reasons why he deems it destiny that he was born in Braunau. The memory of Palm as a martyr for German nationalism would later become an important aspect in selling Braunau as Hitler's birthplace. The 1931 *Grieben* guide furthermore refers to Braunau's function as a trading post on the Austrian-Bavarian border when praising the town's accommodation infrastructure. While *Gasthaus zum Pommer* was certainly part of this infrastructure, it is not mentioned specifically in the guide.

After Hitler is sworn as *Reichskanzler* in Berlin in January, in May 1933 the *Freie Gewerkschaften* (independent trade unions) were resolved and replaced by the unified *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF, German Labor Front). A new sub-organization was, *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF, Strength through Joy) was established in November 1933 to provide affordable leisure activities and promote *mens sana in corpore sana*, a healthy mind in a healthy body. Thus, at KdF provided hiking, gymnastics and other sporting activities, but soon also enabled workers to take cruises abroad as a reward for their hard labor. KdF proved to be a huge success,

⁸⁴ *Österreich-Reiseführer 1931* (Austria Travel Guide 1931), *Grieben* Band 219.

allowing the state to focus “on what made the nation great, generate comparisons with other countries deemed inferior, and promote the healthfulness of its people.”⁸⁵ Hasso Spode estimates the numbers of holiday makers to be 7.5 million until the outbreak of the war, in addition, “some 31.5 million excursionists and more than 6 million hikers had been clients of the KdF travel department. Participants in all trips amounted to more than 45 million.”⁸⁶

While tourism was thriving in Nazi Germany, Hitler’s government imposed economic sanctions on Austria in June 1933, the so-called *1,000 Mark Sperre*. The *1,000 Mark Sperre* imposed a tariff of one thousand *Reichsmark* on every German visitor to Austria and was aimed at weakening the Austrian economy dependent on German tourists and to lead consequently to the overthrowing of the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg Regime.⁸⁷ Before the tariff was introduced, it seems that Bavarian Nazis used the last opportunity to visit Braunau. *Neue Warte am Inn* reports that three Bavarians in Nazi uniforms strolled the town on the last weekend of May 1933, “to the astonishment of the uninformed population.”⁸⁸ Because the Nazi party was only banned in Austria later in June 1933, there were no consequences for the three men and the article does not mention whether they were looking for Hitler’s birthplace or not.

The sanctions were abolished in 1936 with the *Juliabkommen* (July Agreement) between Austria and Germany, a settlement of the two regimes regulating their relationship. Soon after the Pommer family opened a small Hitler museum in one of the guestrooms on the second floor of their inn to exhibit the room the Führer had allegedly been born in to the tourists. Tourists must have been flocking the streets of Braunau during this time, however, neither there are no stats to be found in the local archive, nor is there evidence of organized KdF tours to Braunau

⁸⁵ Eric G. E. Zuelow, *A History of Modern Tourism* (London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 136.

⁸⁶ Spode, Hasso, “Some Quantitative Aspects of Kraft Durch Freude Tourism, 1934-1939,” in *European Tourism and Culture: History and National Perspectives*, ed. Dritsas, Margarita (Athens: Livanis, 2007), 125.

⁸⁷ See: Otruba, Gustav, *Hitler’s ‘Tausend-Mark-Sperre’ und die Folgen für Österreichs Fremdenverkehr (1933-1938)* [Hitler’s “Thousand-Mark-Sperre” and the Consequences for Austria’s Tourism (1933-1938)] (Linz: Trauner, 1983).

⁸⁸ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 1 Juni 1933.

at that time. The local newspaper *Neue Warte am Inn* does report on the lifting of the *1,000 Mark Sperre*, but does not give any implications on concrete consequences for Hitler's birthplace.⁸⁹ The reason for this could be that the Nazi party and its organizations, including the DAF and the KdF were still banned in Austria at that point. Consequently, all information on individual German tourists in searching for Hitler's birth place is omitted from the newspaper.

Tourism Booms After the Anschluss

Immediately after the Anschluss and Hitler's own visit to Braunau in March 1938, organized tours start coming to his birthplace. Meanwhile, Austrians got the opportunity to participate in KdF tours to the Altreich. Already at the beginning of April 1938, the first KdF trains left Vienna for Passau. Among the circa 2,000 participants was *Reichskommissar für die Wiedervereinigung* (Reich Commissioner for the Reunification) Josef Bürckel.⁹⁰ With the referendum about the Anschluss scheduled for 10 April 1938, those first KdF tours certainly played a central role in winning over the workers for National Socialism and the unification of Austria and Germany through the provision of leisure activities and short trips.

The city archive of Braunau does not hold any records about the number of tourists coming to Braunau after the Anschluss. When wanting to estimate numbers, one has to look for them in the local newspaper which documented the groups coming to the town with surprising meticulousness from the end of April on until the end of the tourist season of 1938. Unfortunately, while the newspaper still reports on tourists in 1939, it does seldom mention concrete numbers for this season and the ones that follow until 1945. As for 1938, most of the

⁸⁹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 16, 23 and 30 July 1936.

⁹⁰ Anna Rosmus, *Hitlers Nibelungen: Niederbayern im Aufbruch zu Krieg und Untergang [Hitler's Nibelungen: Lower Bavaria on its Way to War and Downfall]* (Grafenau: Samples, 2015), 142.

tourists counted come with tours organized by Kdf, the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ, Hitler Youth), *Bund deutscher Mädel* (BdM, League of German Girls), or other Nazi organizations.

For day trips, many groups come from Southern Germany, namely Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. For example at the end of April 1937, 700 people from the small town Schwandorf in Bavaria visit Braunau and nearby Burghausen combined.⁹¹ But KdF and the other organizations bring people from all over the Reich to Braunau to visit the birthplace of the Führer. Groups come from Munich and Frankfurt,⁹² Berlin, Potsdam and Thuringia,⁹³ one thousand mine workers on a KdF trip from Hanover,⁹⁴ Leipzig, Dresden, Cologne and Freiburg.⁹⁵ Furthermore, there are smaller groups of Germany coming from abroad. In July 1938, a group of 37 tourists from Budapest visits Braunau, probably organized by a travel agency and not by KdF or any other Nazi organization.⁹⁶ After the occupation of the Sudetenland at the end of September 1938, KdF also takes Sudetengerman children staying with host families in Braunau to visit the Führer's homeland.⁹⁷

As the Führer's homeland was now part of the Reich, "Braunau-am-Inn, Linz and other towns in Austria, which were linked to his earlier days, now joined the Reich Chancellery in Berlin and the Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden as potential sites for touristic homage. The phenomenon of Hitler tourism was on the rise."⁹⁸ While Germans were overjoyed that they now could not only visit Berchtesgaden and Landsberg, tourism officials were worried that the sites in the *Ostmark*—not only those connected to the Führer, but also for example Vienna and the

⁹¹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 27 April 1938.

⁹² *Neue Warte am Inn*, 25 May 1938.

⁹³ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 8 June 1938.

⁹⁴ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 13 July 1938.

⁹⁵ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 28 July 1938.

⁹⁶ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 13 July 1938.

⁹⁷ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 23 November 1938 and 22 February 1939.

⁹⁸ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 170.

Salzkammergut region—would become a competition for the tourism industry in Southern Germany (Bavaria and the Black Forest).

Braunau in Brochures and Travel Guides

These concerns were not unfounded. Immediately after the Anschluss, before German tourism laws could be applied to the *Ostmark*, the *Oberösterreichisches Landesverkehrsamt* (Upper Austrian State Tourist Office) published a brochure for the German market titled “Ober-Österreich – Salzkammergut: Die Heimat des Führers” (Upper Austria – Salzkammergut: The Homeland of the Führer).⁹⁹ This brochure features a lake surrounded by mountains on the cover promoting innocent *Sommerfrische im Salzkammergut* (Summer resorts in Salzkammergut), a popular holiday destination since the Habsburg Empire, however, the second page already features an image of Hitler announcing the Anschluss in Linz of 12 March 1938 and a photo of the birth house in Braunau—decorated with swastika flags and guarded by uniformed men. This brochure was not directed the KdF mass tourism but addressed travelers who could afford an individual trip to Hitler’s homeland.

The brochure advertises Upper Austria as an ancient land of culture with a German history going back into the fifth century, a center of Germanic and Celtic culture exhibited in the archeology and prehistory museums in Linz and Hallstatt. While it also traces the life of the Führer in the region from Braunau to Linz, the Upper Austrian tourism office does not only put an emphasis on the Hitler tourism, but also praises the region’s natural and cultural treasures, such as the lakes of the Salzkammergut region with their international health resorts surrounded

⁹⁹ Brochure “Ober-Österreich – Salzkammergut: Die Heimat des Führers” (Upper Austria – Salzkammergut: The Homeland of the Führer)

by Alpine mountains and the historic towns of Steyr and Enns, as well as the monasteries of St. Florian and Kremsmünster.

The Anschluss also made a re-edition of the *Grieben* guide necessary, which got a new title: *Deutsche Ostmark*. The guide now pays much more attention to Oberdonau as homeland of the Führer, putting a special emphasis on Linz and Braunau. Linz is promoted as *Jugendstadt des Führers* (City of the Führer's Youth) and important industrial center and as the city where Hitler proclaimed the “homecoming” of his fatherland to the Reich. The guide mentions three houses where the Führer lived in Linz, which were conveniently included on the route proposed for a city stroll, among historic sites such as the Adalbert Stifter memorial, the State Museum, but more importantly embedded within the many religious sites, Linz has to offer, such as the Old Cathedral, St. Mary's cathedral and the Holy Trinity Column.¹⁰⁰

The same strategy for advertising attractions connected to Hitler is used in the Braunau chapter of the guide. The text about Braunau is similar to the 1931 edition, except that the passage about the Innviertel as “insignificant tourism region” has vanished and the emphasis on Braunau as *Geburtsstadt des Führers* (birth town of the Führer) and the status of the whole region as Hitler's native land was added. While again the old town and its churches are praised, 15 Salzburger Vorstadt is the only site in Braunau marked with a star, the symbol reserved for the most significant attractions, but the guide does not mention whether it was possible visit the inside of the building.¹⁰¹

Like other travel guides from the Nazi period, the *Grieben Ostmark* guide omitted certain historic aspects about sites and attractions, while emphasizing their significance for Nazism and often their connection to Hitler. This “ideologized discourse [...] not only generated a distinctly Nazi tourist culture; it also helped to create a public memory of

¹⁰⁰ *Deutsche Ostmark 1939* (Austria Travel Guide 1931), Grieben Band 219, 50.

¹⁰¹ *Deutsche Ostmark 1939* (Austria Travel Guide 1931), Grieben Band 219, 53.

Nazism.”¹⁰² In Oberdonau as homeland of the Führer, the focus of the ideologized discourse was put on the ancient Germaneness of the land and the connection of certain sites and attractions to Hitler. The houses where he had lived in Linz and Braunau were embedded within the wider discourse of the region’s German history and its sites. Similar to the KdF tours, the travel guides and brochures did not only focus on Braunau or Linz and their connections with Hitler, but also embedded these destinations within the wider landscape of the region, promoting picturesque old towns or the beauty of nature too.

From Braunau with Love: Postcards and Souvenirs

Travel guides were promoting Braunau to the outside world. Meanwhile, the birthplace of the Führer was preparing to welcome the masses of tourists that would start coming to the town soon and to sell them postcards and souvenirs. After Hitler passed through Braunau, the local party administration started to produce postcards from this event. At the end of March 1938, locals are encouraged to obtain them directly from the *Kreisleitung* and to resell them to the tourists that are expected to come soon.¹⁰³ In general, postcards are an inexpensive souvenir as well as an easy way to let the ones staying behind at home participate in one’s travels. When the tourist season 1938 was in full bloom in Braunau, there was a run on the postcards with pictures of Hitler in Braunau in March and his birth house. Postcards were definitely in high demand when at the end of June 1938 one thousand members of the Hitler Youth from Berlin stopped over in Braunau. *Neue Warte am Inn* finds it worth reporting that they “stormed the postcard stores” and soon could be found all over the place, sitting on fountains and sidewalks, sending greetings back home from the Führer’s birth place.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See: Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany*, 58.

¹⁰³ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 23 March 1938.

¹⁰⁴ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 6 July 1938.

The Doppler photostudio which had already produced the 1936 postcard of the room of birth (Image 1 in the previous chapter) now started to design and produce postcards according to the taste of the Hitler tourists from the *Altreich*. The first postcard (Image 4) provides a glimpse through a gate into the arcade courtyard of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt. It provides a more intimate look into the house where Adolf Hitler had been born and might show the actual living quarters of the Hitler family.

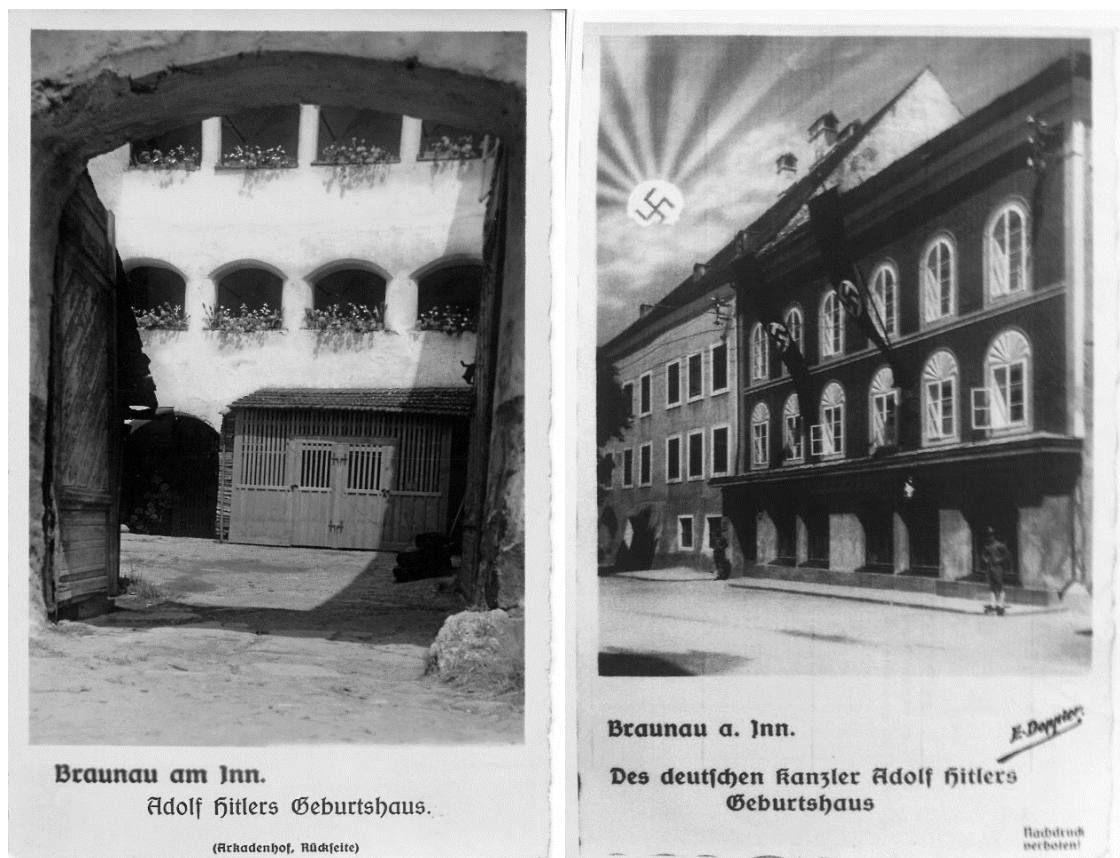


Image 4: (left) Braunau am Inn. Adolf Hitlers Birth House (Arcade Courtyard, Back Entrance), ca. 1938.

Image 5: (right) Braunau a. Inn. The Birth House of the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, ca 1938.

The second postcard (Image 5) uses a common motive of the iconography of National Socialism and the Hitler cult: It shows the front of the house with the sun breaking out from behind the clouds, with a swastika in the middle. This motive was especially used in the depictions of Hitler as the messiah and self-sacrificing martyr for the German people, turning him into a

savior figure who would bring back light after dark times.¹⁰⁵ While first postcard can be traced back to traditional depictions of rural life by providing a glimpse into a building ensemble common in the region, the second postcard is clearly based on outside influences, attesting to Braunau's interconnectedness with other sites of National Socialism and the Hitler cult. Similar to travel guides, postcards which were sent to homes all over the Reich established an ideologized discourse that associated Braunau with the popular notions of the intimacy of childbirth and traditional rural life in the region as well as picking up on the widespread iconography of the the Führer as messiah and martyr for the German people—buying into the already established tastes in Nazi Germany for party and Hitler merchandise. This furthermore perpetuated a narrative established by Hitler himself and illustrated by the photos of him as a child and his birthplace circulated in the media: The Führer's birth in Braunau was destiny.

While producing postcards was a business under control of the *Kreisleitung* outsourced to a local photo studio, not all kinds of souvenirs were officially sanctioned and welcomed by the higher levels of Nazi administration in the *Ostmark*. On 23 March 1938, only eleven days after Hitler has passed through Braunau, Heinz Begsteiger the head of the *Kultur- und Propagandaleitung des Kreises Linz* (Head Office for Culture and Propaganda for the Linz District) issued two warnings in *Neue Warte am Inn*. The first article is more general and titled “Profitgeier der nationalen Erhebung” (Profiteers of the National Uprising). In it Begsteiger employs common anti-Semitic stereotypes and warns the locals about the “business instinct of the Jewish race” and the “book of the Führer appearing in bookstores where it definitely would not fit.”¹⁰⁶ The second one is an actual order. Titled “Gegen den Kitsch” (Against the Kitsch), Begsteiger chastises the Braunau residents for exaggerating their enthusiasm for the Anschluss and Hitler, and their eagerness to profit from the new situation: “Shop windows exhibit the

¹⁰⁵ See: Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹⁰⁶ „Profitgeier der nationalen Erhebung,” *Neue Warte am Inn*, 23. March 1938.

emblems of the new Reich on items, which can only be called downright tacky. Among other things, we can find the swastika on sweaters, heart-shaped pillows, in pastry shops.”¹⁰⁷ Begsteiger shows sympathy for the enthusiasm of Braunau locals for the Anschluss, but urges them to remove the knick-knack from the shop windows.

The use of German national symbols—including the swastika—was regulated by the *Gesetz zum Schutze der nationalen Symbole* (Law for the Protection of National Symbols) issued in May 1933.¹⁰⁸ While “Nazi emblems, signs, words and concepts permeated everyday life,”¹⁰⁹ their use was strictly regulated through the legislation issued by Joseph Goebbels’ *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* (Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda). Matchboxes, cake tins, thimbles, clothes brushes, and many other kitsch products embroidered with the swastika, other Nazi symbols or the face of Hitler were produced after the *Machtergreifung*.¹¹⁰ While Goebbels’ legislation was “concerned with safeguarding the ‘dignity’ of the Nazi swastika and preventing its unauthorized commercial use,”¹¹¹ thus effectively trademarking, “Hitler did not always follow his own laws, but having these objects appear in public images of the house at the same time that NS authorities were campaigning to eradicate Nazi kitsch clearly would have been problematic.”¹¹²

This legislation is also what Begsteiger refers to, when urging people to remove the kitschy items from the shop windows in Braunau: “These insignia are sacred and cannot be profaned by associating them with kitsch.”¹¹³ But the situation so soon after the Anschluss with the referendum still more than two weeks away, presented a legal loophole the locals capitalized

¹⁰⁷ „Gegen den Kitsch,” *Neue Warte am Inn*, 23. März 1938.

¹⁰⁸ For the exact wording see: “Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt, Jahrgang 1933, Teil I,” ALEX: Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte Online, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=dra&datum=1933&page=410&size=45>.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*. 211.

¹¹⁰ Rolf Steinberg, *Nazi-Kitsch [Nazi Kitsch]* (Darmstadt: Melzer, 1975).

¹¹¹ Malcolm Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

¹¹² Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 78.

¹¹³ „Gegen den Kitsch,” *Neue Warte am Inn*, 23 March 1938.

on. There is no further order issued, therefore it seems that the problem was somehow resolved and conflicts about unauthorized souvenirs never came up again in the Braunau newspaper. An undated porcelain box from the Nazi period bears witness that the locals might have in fact just changed their strategy when producing souvenirs from selling swastika cakes to promoting the image of the house as such as to avoid any future conflicts with the local propaganda administration. After all, the house had been already popularized within the framework of the private Führer and was known to people all over Germany.



Image 6: Porcelain box depicting the "birth house of the Führer and Reichskanzler," Braunau am Inn, ca. 1939.

For Hitler's fiftieth birthday on 20 April 1939 Braunau goes out of its way and produces special postcards with a special stamp and postmark for the occasion (Image 7). The front shows Hitler on a street greeting BdM girls, a picture that could not have been taken in Braunau. As already mentioned, Hitler did not step out of his car when passing through his birth place in March 1938. The picture is framed with a swastika border. While the special stamp depicts *Der Führer in seiner Geburtsstadt Braunau, 12-3-1938*, but the drawing is most likely a collage too based on someone's imagination, since no photo exists that shows Hitler from this perspective on the town square in front of a house with a swastika flag and the bell tower looming in the back in March 1938. The postmark then explicitly commemorates celebrations of the fiftieth birthday of the Führer in Braunau, showing Salzburger Vorstadt and the city gate but curiously not the

birth house. Significant are also the two *Lebensrunen* (Life Runes). The Life Rune \mathbb{Y} was used in Nazi symbolism, for example on gravestones and obituaries to signify the birth date of the person deceased. On the postcard, the Life Rune obviously marks Braunau as birth place of the Führer without showing the actual space of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, contrary to the porcelain box. The Life Rune presented a universal symbol that could be understood by all Germans rather than using the actual icon/index of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt to signify that this was the place where the Führer had been born.

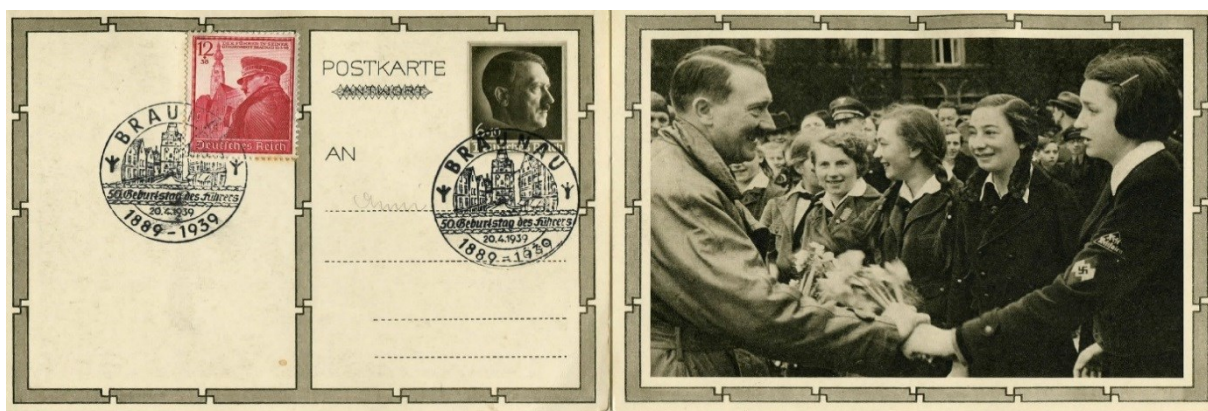


Image 7: Postcard, special stamp and special postmark from Braunau on the occasion of Hitler's fiftieth birthday in 1939 (Verein für Zeitgeschichte)

In the 1938 and the 1939 tourist season, the local government, the *Kreisleitung* and the *Gauleitung* have big plans with Braunau as a whole and with the tourism branch in particular. As already mentioned, first plan first is to restore the house to its original condition with the help of Rosalie Hörl. In 1939, the plan changes to turn the house into offices and an “illegal party museum,” educating people about the July Putsch in 1934 and commemorating the Nazis who had died in the coup as martyr. Nazi tourism culture was not only about providing affordable leisure to everyone, but also about constructing a public memory of Nazism. References to history and the “commemoration of the most recent past—the Nazi past—created

a whole range of new attractions honoring the movement's 'martyrs' and its 'period of struggle'" in Nazi tourism culture.¹¹⁴

Re-Opening as a Gallery: *Heimat* for the Locals

During the first period of the war, between the Invasion of Poland and the Battle of Stalingrad, leisure travel and tourism in the Third Reich continued as usual to maintain an image of normalcy. But the winter of 1942/43 was a turning point for Nazi tourism: "After Stalingrad, the Nazis' efforts to curtail the public's Wanderlust increased dramatically," and the regime realized that "victory would not come through concessions to consumerist aspirations and popular desires."¹¹⁵ While tourism propaganda was curtailed and means of transportation were increasingly used to transport soldiers and weapons to the front and to deport Jews to the concentration camps in Eastern Europe, something else changed which affected Braunau: the Hitler myth collapsed. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the notion of heroic self-sacrifice at the front and at home became unappealing to many people who desired peace. Even more so, Hitler became less and less popular: "Hitler's earlier successes began to be seen in a new light, and he was now increasingly blamed for policies which had led to the war, and for his failure to terminate the war and produce the desired peace."¹¹⁶

Both developments must have affected Braunau. *Neue Warte am Inn* reports regularly about the general limitations of train service in the region from mid-1941 on. These restrictions did not just affect the locals wanting to go to another town, but also influenced how many people might have come to visit the Führer's birthplace. At this point, no information about the

¹¹⁴ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 52.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁶ Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 201.

tourist numbers or about the developments in this branch have been published in the newspaper for over a year. Adapting to the lack of tourists coming to Braunau and at the same time preventing locals from traveling, the local administration bought into the new strategy announced by State Secretary of Tourism Hermann Esser: “Previously we were able to make propaganda for travel in order to point out to the German comrades the beauties of their Heimat. [...] Today we must attempt with limiting measures to slow down the course of the development, which has been brought into being by us ourselves.”¹¹⁷ The order to keep attractions open for the locals in order to “entertain the home front,” as Shelley Baranowski has called it,¹¹⁸ is picked up in Braunau as the birth house of the Führer is turned into gallery and library.

All in all, thirteen exhibitions take place in the *Galerie im Führer Geburtshaus* (Gallery in the Birth House of the Führer) between August 1942 and August 1944. In March 1943, an exhibition of paintings by Hugo von Preen (1854-1941) attracts more than 2,000 visitors within two weeks and is consequently turned into the permanent exhibition of the gallery.¹¹⁹ Hugo von Preen, a local artist, had gifted Hitler with a collection of drawings immediately after the Anschluss.¹²⁰ The grand opening of the Führer birth house as center for arts and education takes place on the occasion of Hitler’s 54th birthday on 20 April 1943, in the presence of *Gauleiter* August Eigruber. While people visit the exhibitions inside, the Hitler Youth is sworn in in front of the house.¹²¹ The exhibitions over the next two years center around the theme of *Heimat* (Home) depicted by regional artists as the reviews in *Neue Warte am Inn* testifies to. For example, in October 1943 an exhibition titled *Vier Oberdonauer Maler (Four Oberdonau Painters)* takes place. While the review completely omits Hitler, it emphasizes the artists’

¹¹⁷ Quoted after Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany*, 161.

¹¹⁸ Baranowski, *Strength through Joy*, 214.

¹¹⁹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 10 March 1943.

¹²⁰ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 30 March, 1938.

¹²¹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 20 April 1943.

ability to depict their “love for nature,” the “poor yet dreamy *Mühlviertel*,” “the world of the Danube with its meadows and landscapes,” and the “healthy peasantry.”¹²² This review echoes KdF’s mission to promote the healthfulness of the people, albeit in a different way and on a smaller scale. The last exhibition in the house takes place only after the war under a completely different motto.

Hitler’s Birthplace as a Site of Forgetting National Socialism

The last exhibition in Hitler’s birth house opened on 1 November 1945, almost seven months after the capitulation of Germany, and was titled *Die Wahre Kultur des Nationalsozialismus* (The Real Culture of National Socialism). The exhibition was initiated by the new Mayor Ferdinand Fageth and was opened in the presence of the Mayor of Linz and representatives from the US administration in Austria. Again, *Neue Warte am Inn* was there to review the exhibition and traces a continuous theme, spanning from “the seductive rise to the bitter fall of National Socialism,” showing ruins and the misery of refugees.¹²³ In the room where Hitler had been allegedly born, photographs from concentration camps were shown. However, the exhibition ended on a positive note, exhibiting “true and good German art” in the form of traditional Upper Austrian handcraft, and paintings by Hugo von Preen and Martin Stachl, both of whom had exhibited at this place before.

While the exhibition at this very location did emphasize the connection to Hitler as an eternal stigma to Braunau, it does not mention the town’s own entanglement with the narrative of being Hitler’s birthplace through commercialization and commodification for tourists. Artists who had exhibited in the house during the Nazi period and had even shown their

¹²² *Neue Warte am Inn*, 20 October 1943.

¹²³ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 5 November 1945.

admiration for Hitler became agents of omission, forgetting and silencing of the recent past. Their depictions of the *Heimat* were cleared of their previous ideological function of entertaining the home front. During the Nazi period and after the liberation, these paintings were cited to depict true Germaneness and the healthfulness of the people. Their innocence was put vis à vis Hitler's destruction and genocide, effectively externalizing National Socialism and removing it to a faraway place. This was clearly not what the US allies had in mind, when stating that "Hitler's childhood home" should become a museum "to house a record of Hitler's 'works' – his wars, his concentration camps, the ruins of his cities."¹²⁴

Conclusion

This chapter examined the actual movements of people through the space of the Third Reich to Braunau within the framework of seeking leisure and knowledge about the history of Germany and the life of the Führer. For a long time, tourism history has been a banal and forgotten subject which seems to have "existed outside the world of politics and ideology," just like Hitler's homes.¹²⁵ But tourism was both political and ideological because it normalized the Nazi regime. In general "Hitler rarely displayed much interest or was actively involved" in Nazi tourism, not even in the sites associated with his life which became must-see attractions for Germans.¹²⁶

Today for Braunau, the opposite seems to be true: While no one remembers tourism to Braunau during the Nazi period and likes to speak about its continuities well into the present, everyone remembers that Braunau was Hitler's birthplace. This veiled mnemonic talk silences what has actually happened in and with Braunau during the Nazi period mostly independent of

¹²⁴ Testimony of Joseph W. Eaton, "Kriegsende – Braunau History," accessed June 7, 2017, <http://braunau-history.at/w/index.php?title=Kriegsende>.

¹²⁵ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 4.

¹²⁶ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 27.

Hitler, while emphasizing his relationship to the town he himself emphasized in *Mein Kampf*. Again, the narratives created by Nazi propaganda still exert a powerful draw in public memory and continue to fascinate us, just like the images of Hitler as private citizen. And as so often with the history of National Socialism, it is being forgotten that the Nazi regime had millions of collaborators, in the execution of genocide, in committing atrocities, but also in keeping up the façade of normalcy on the home

While after the Anschluss, KdF and other organizations start to take the masses to Braunau and other sites associated with the Führer's life in the *Ostmark*, local agents embrace the opportunity and started to produce brochures, postcards and souvenirs. The brochures and travel guides promoted other sites as well, conflating the Hitler cult with other historic sites and natural gems of the region. This created an ideologized discourse that omitted certain aspects while emphasizing the region's connection to the Führer, normalizing both the regime and the Anschluss. The postcards from the period created a similar discourse, in their case, based on already established notions and iconography of Hitler's martyrdom or traditional and regional motives.

As the warning "Against the Kitsch" has shown, the production of these discourses through travel guides, brochures, postcards and souvenirs was subject to change and adaption to outside circumstances. In a similar way, the strategy of using the house was changed as the war stopped people from traveling to Braunau. It was adapted to become a gallery and library for the local residents. Yet, it still exhibits similar idiosyncrasies of an ideologized narrative as the tourism and its commodities did: The gallery and the artists who exhibited there served the purpose of providing affordable leisure and entertainment while at the same time promoting the healthfulness of the people and of the regional way of life in the artworks.

The paintings and drawings establish a continuity into the postwar period when they were used as allegedly innocent depictions of true Germaneness opposite of images of atrocities as false German culture, effectively externalizing National Socialism. Meanwhile, Hitler could not be externalized and pushed out of the house he had been born in. This also means that tourism was externalized and forgotten while the narrative of a mythological connection between Braunau and Hitler was emphasized again—and continues to be well into the present.

5. SACRALIZATION AND PILGRIMAGE

“Und fortan, meine jungen Kameraden und Kameradinnen, soll dieses Braunau ein Wallfahrtsort der deutschen Jugend sein!”

“And from now on, my young comrades, this Braunau shall be a site of pilgrimage for the whole German youth!”

Baldur von Schirach

Hitler’s birthplace changes its function several times during the Nazi period: From a secret gathering place for illegal Nazis in 1933, to a small museum exhibiting the room where the Führer was born before the Anschluss, to the plans for a museum about illegal Austrian Nazism and its martyrs, to becoming an exhibition space for local arts and culture, and lastly becoming a contested tourist attraction again after the end of the war. All of these developments, events and watersheds in the history of the house have been covered by the previous chapters. The present chapter takes the space to another level, namely that of reading National Socialism not as a political ideology and Hitler’s birthplace as a space where this ideology manifested itself but, as it has been suggested by George L. Mosse, as a “secular religion,” and to understand the narratives created around the space as gospel or dogma.

In *Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* Mosse maintains that “the invention of a new political style was the chief invention of National Socialism,”¹²⁷ but he suggests to read this not as propaganda or, as we would say today, political marketing. Mosse argues that “this is to misunderstand the organic development of the Nazi cult and its essentially religious nature.”¹²⁸ And by this Mosse

¹²⁷ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: New American Library, 1975), 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 10.

refers to the cues National Socialism took from Christianity to portray its ideology as a religious dogma or liturgy. Consequently, this chapter on the sacralization of Hitler as a savior figure or even Messiah and the status of Braunau as the “Bethlehem of the German Reich” argues along this line: Namely, that Braunau did not only appear on the mental maps of German through tourism propaganda, but that there was another strategy at play.

As this thesis is about a space in relationship to National Socialism and how locals and outsider engaged with it, I would like to add an analysis of pilgrimage as a practice of religion to render a space sacred through movement to it and to missionize new believers by movement away from it. This chapter first explains what distinguishes tourism and pilgrimage. Second, I will examine “Pilgrimage in the Other Direction,” that is accounts of travels of Austrians to encounter Hitler before the Anschluss begging him to deliver them from the Austro-fascist regime. Third, this chapter examines the portrayal of Braunau as “Bethlehem of the German Reich” in Nazi poetry. While the actual number of pilgrims coming to Braunau cannot be measured in the same manner as tourists, the poems give a good impression of how the gospel of the Führer’s birthplace was spread in Nazi Germany through popular literature. Fourth, it examines the attempt of Braunau residents to establish a Passion play tradition in their town to enforce their connection to Hitler via the martyr legend around Johann Philipp Palm, evoking motives from the Passion of Jesus Christ. In conclusion this chapter argues that reading National Socialism as a secular religion, and the developments and movements through the space of the Third Reich to sites associated with Hitler’s life, can help us to better understand why some places of Nazi self-representation are still contested and controversial.

Pilgrimage as a Religious Practice

Pilgrimage is a much older than tourism, just like religion is much older than nationalism. Eric Zuelow emphasized religious pilgrimage as the matrix of modern tourism, in the sense that “pilgrimage enters into the language of leisure travel as well as of faith and the idea of ‘making pilgrimage’ to Disneyland or to see some famous historic site or beauty spot is central to the motivation of many modern travelers.”¹²⁹ But pilgrimage goes into two directions: On the one hand, the presence of pilgrims renders holy sites more significant and enhances their importance for the religion, on the other hand, pilgrims always transcend the boundaries of empires, nation states or other entities by traveling from and to a sacred destination. On their route and when they return to their homes, pilgrims spread stories of what they have experienced at the holy site, thus contributing to the spread of religions. Pilgrimage as a practice exists in many if not all religions, however, due to the limited scope of this MA thesis and because I base my argument about pilgrimage to Braunau on Mosse’s model of National Socialism as a “secular religion,” I will primarily focus here on the meaning of Christian holy sites and the practices associated with them.

Maurice Halbwachs has maintained that holy sites do not commemorate “facts certified by contemporary witnesses, but rather beliefs.”¹³⁰ Halbwachs interprets the places and sites associated with the life of Jesus Christ in the Holy Land not as historic sites but as spaces where invented stories are conflated with much older myths in order to render them universally significant. Through the repetitive practices of liturgy and pilgrimage, the holy sites occupy a significant place in the believers’ imagination. “In fact there is nothing indicating that Jesus was born in Bethlelehem,”¹³¹ but Bethlehem is also known as the City of David and contains other holy sites, linking the Messiah to Jewish royalty. Bethlehem alongside Jerusalem and

¹²⁹ Zuelow, *A History of Modern Tourism*, 8.

¹³⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 199.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

Nazareth functioned as a network of pilgrimage sites in the holy land since the early days of Christianity. A similar network of sites and pilgrimage as an institutionalized practice began to develop in Central Europe during the high middle ages. It was through pilgrimage, Gabor Klaniczay has argued, that “the cult of saints developed into an articulated system,” promoting “ecclesiastical or dynastic exchanges, some related to imported relics, and some related to emerging new local cults.”¹³²

In the Third Reich, obviously, there was only one saint to worship: Adolf Hitler. Over the years, the personality cult which was started with the invention of the private Führer unfolded a life of its own, and a network of pilgrimage sites associated with his life began to emerge in Germany. In 1938, Braunau, alongside Leonding, Linz and Fischlham and other sites in the *Ostmark*, became part of the already established routes in Southern Germany, taking pilgrims to Munich, Nuremberg, Berchtesgaden and the Landsberg fortress. Landsberg used slogans such as “National Socialist Site of Pilgrimage” and “Birthplace of the ideas of National Socialism”¹³³ to promote itself not only as a tourist attraction, but promised a spiritual experience in the space where Hitler had written *Mein Kampf*. Hitler believers could be found in Austria too. Before the Anschluss, Austrians, among them Braunau residents, made pilgrimage in the other direction.

Before the Anschluss: Pilgrimage in the other direction

Soon after Hitler had been sworn in as chancellor in January 1933, pilgrims started to come to Hitler’s residence in Berchtesgaden to pay tribute to the new leader. As images of the domestic

¹³² Klaniczay, Gabor, “Conclusion: North and East European Cults of Saints in Comparison with East-Central Europe,” in *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c.1000-1200)*, ed. Antonsson, Haki and Garipzanov Ildar (Turnhout: Brespols, 2010), 287.

¹³³ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany*, 68.

Führer in an Alpine setting have been widely publicized through the photography of Heinrich Hoffmann, the Berghof became “the icon of the private Führer.”¹³⁴

The people who came were not only mere fans who were curious to see how a famous person lived. In *The Hitler ‘Myth’* Ian Kershaw describes the “the constant streams of ‘pilgrims’ heading for the Berghof near Berchtesgaden, hoping to catch a mere glimpse of the Führer.”¹³⁵ Kershaw even notes in a footnote that pieces of the fence were taken by the pilgrims as relics. Stratigakos has maintained that “the pilgrimages to Haus Wachenfeld can be seen not just as paying homage to the Führer, but also as a desire to travel to the Promised Land, the place of abundance that Hitler held as the ultimate reward for sacrifice and suffering.”¹³⁶ Berchtesgaden and by extension all of Bavaria also became a promised land for Austrian Nazis “suffering” in the underground from 1934 on. Angerer and Ecker have shown in their extensive study of *National Socialism in Upper Austria* that leading up to the Anschluss, thousands of Nazis fled across the border to receive military training. This unit, the *Österreichische Legion* (Austrian Legion), was supposed to play a key role in the conquest of Austria by Nazi Germany.¹³⁷

Not all Austrian Nazis or Hitler sympathizers fled permanently from the country as political refugees. There are also stories of Austrians making pilgrimage to see Hitler in Berchtesgaden or elsewhere. First, there is a story in Bartz’ book *Großdeutschlands Wiedergeburt*. The author describes in dramatic words Austrian pilgrims seeking out Hitler at the Berghof to beg him to deliver them from the oppressive Austro-fascist regime: “Men cried at this house at Obersalzberg, and the Führer saw these tears. Every year. In silence they descended from the mountain and carried the message to the oppressed and desperate: We saw

¹³⁴ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 170.

¹³⁵ Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth,”* 60.

¹³⁶ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 183.

¹³⁷ Angerer and Ecker, *Nationalsozialismus in Oberösterreich*, 35.

him, he knows about our suffering, he won't forget us.”¹³⁸ The Austrian pilgrims had an emotional and spiritual experience at the Mount Olympus of National Socialism and spread this message about it beyond the borders of Nazi Germany back to Austria. These interactions and the mobility promoted National Socialism not as a political ideology but as a religion with Hitler as a messiah figure at its center. Bartz' account also evidences two more aspects mentioned in other accounts of pilgrimage: Encountering Hitler as an emotional and inspiring experience and the description of the Führer as a higher being marked by the spatial difference between him and the people who seek him out.

In a “witness testimony” published in *Neue Warte am Inn* in 1942 about a trip of the Braunau city choir to the *Deutsche Sängerkunst* in Breslau (German choir festival in today's Wrocław in Poland) in 1937, the author, describes downright miracles occurring on the top floor of a hotel in July 1937 during a private audience the group had with Hitler.¹³⁹ She describes that they ascended the stairs to Hitler's room in trance to beg him to lead Austria back home to the Reich. Hitler makes no concrete promise but gifts the group with autographed pictures of him. The pictures would usually fall under the category of souvenirs but because the Führer touched them, they became relics for the group, sacralized by the Führer's touch. The epilogue of the story is significant as well: When the group from Braunau exited the hotel, they were greeted by thousands of people, who wanted to touch them and take pictures with them. The members of the group have become saints, not only because they had just touched the Führer, but also because they came from his birth place, the witness reports.

One more episode of pre-Anschluss pilgrimage of Austrians to see Hitler in Berchtesgaden is described by Despina Stratigakos. This account does not only bear witness to the occurrence of religious mobility at the Obersalzberg, but also as to how the powerful grip

¹³⁸ Bartz, Karl, *Großdeutschlands Wiedergeburt: Weltgeschichtliche Stunden an Der Donau [Greater Germany's Rebirth: World Historic Moments on the Danube]*, 7.

¹³⁹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 26 August 1942.

National Socialism as secular religion has unfolded in its afterlife through the circulation of these stories in the present:

“An incident that allegedly occurred during a pilgrimage to the Berghof by some Upper Austrians, who craved a glimpse of his all highest presence. They found themselves debarred from the sanctum by Hitler’s sister (and housekeeper) who curtly informed them that Adolf was asleep and she could not possibly disturb him. At that precise moment, a voice boomed out “I never sleep”—it was Hitler’s.”¹⁴⁰

In this anecdote, the theme of ascending to a higher place recurs—both spiritually and in actual altitude—where the Führer would await the pilgrims. But this story is also evidence to the image of Hitler as “a man of the people whose qualities would embody struggle,”¹⁴¹ and who was dedicated to his duties and sacrificed himself for the nation. The image of the self-sacrificing Führer was soon used as an argument to keep pilgrims away from Hitler’s own personal sanctum in Berchtesgaden. From 1938 on “it became necessary that not all visitors were welcome” on the Obersalzberg, as the place where the Führer wanted to work undisturbed, Martin Bormann argued.¹⁴² Thus, pilgrims were redirected to other holy sites of National Socialism where people could worship the Führer without disturbing him, for example the Landsberg fortress, and from March 1938 on Braunau.

Spreading the Gospel of “The Bethlehem of the German Reich”

Hitler’s “home coming” to Braunau and Austria in March 1938 is described by contemporary sources as an emotional and spiritual experience for the Führer himself, and thus his itinerary from Braunau to Vienna via Linz and Leonding is interpreted as a kind of pilgrimage by Karl

¹⁴⁰ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 116.

¹⁴¹ Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth,”* 19.

¹⁴² Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 95.

Bartz and Eduard Kriechbaum in their books soon published after the Anschluss.¹⁴³ Soon, Hitler pilgrims would follow the path of the Führer and establish a network of sites associated with the life of the Führer in which Braunau was embedded. In addition, the Austrian Hitler sites were included in the much larger network of religious mobility which had previously included Munich, Berchtesgaden and the Landsberg fortress.

Less than one month after Hitler's visit to Braunau, *Reichsjugendführer* Baldur von Schirach leads a mass pilgrimage of 1,800 Hitler Youth members to Braunau and holds a campaign rally for the upcoming referendum, conflating the political and the spiritual. In his speech, von Schirach explains that Braunau is in the thoughts and prayers of all Germans and that the more than one thousand Hitler Youth members will spread the gospel of Braunau to the millions of Germans in the *Altreich*. Consequently, he promises, Braunau will become a site of pilgrimage for the whole of German youth.¹⁴⁴ After the rally, von Schirach visits the birth house while the Hitler Youth continued to Linz, following the path of the Führer, indicating that such a visit to the sanctum of Braunau was reserved for special guests. After von Schirach's speech, the pilgrimage motif in connection to childbirth starts to come up in poems written about Braunau which are published in *Neue Warte am Inn*, mostly on the occasion of Hitler's birthdays. As they were sent to Braunau from other cities and towns all over the Third Reich, it is probable that they were also published elsewhere.

The first poem to take the *Reichsjugendführer* at his word is "Braunau am Inn" by one Otto Eichhorn from Nuremberg. Eichhorn is the poet actually describing Braunau as "Bethlehem of the German Reich" and predicts that it will consequently become a "site of pilgrimage for all German hearts" because "the people's greatest son was born here." In the last

¹⁴³ See: Bartz, Karl, *Großdeutschlands Wiedergeburt: Weltgeschichtliche Stunden an Der Donau [Greater Germany's Rebirth: World Historic Moments on the Danube]*. and Kriechbaum, *Geschichte der Stadt Braunau am Inn [History of the Town Braunau am Inn]*.

¹⁴⁴ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 6 April 1938.

lines, he calls upon his compatriots to “pray to the heavenly throne to guard the one you have chosen, o Lord.”¹⁴⁵ On the occasion of Hitler’s fiftieth birthday, *Neue Warte am Inn* prints a poem by Mathilde Melkus, a German-nationalist school teacher and poet from Vienna.¹⁴⁶ Titled “Des Führers Mutter” (The Führer’s Mother), the poem can be regarded as a Nazi version of the Ave Maria prayer. Without mentioning Klara Hitler’s name—she is simply “the mother”—Merkus praises her and the “fruit of her womb,” onto whom she passed on the “holiest of all gifts,” true German virtues.¹⁴⁷

In the spirit of the popular saying of “it takes a village to raise a child,” the notion of womb is transferred to 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and the whole of Braunau, omitting of course that Hitler did not actually grow up there and himself admitted to having little to no memories of the town.¹⁴⁸ Another poem, published on both of Hitler’s birthdays in 1942 and 1944 by an unknown author also uses the motif of the womb, however he or she refers to Braunau. The author calls Braunau a “queen” and praises “her motherly womb” as a source of a “genius illuminated by divine light.”¹⁴⁹ The notion of womb is not only popularized through poems, but also through accounts of the history of Braunau in the local newspaper, telling the history of Braunau as a story of German martyrdom under Austrian occupation between 1779 and 1938 out of which Hitler was born. The room where Hitler was born is described as cradle of National Socialism and sanctum of Germaneness, associated with great emotions and spirituality: When entering the room, “every German will stand in awe in light of the greatness and eternity that grates the birthplace of a man chosen by god—or other places associated with his life.”¹⁵⁰ This notion implicitly connects Braunau to Bethlehem and the birthplaces of other great men as sites

¹⁴⁵ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 20 April 1938.

¹⁴⁶ John W. Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897-1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17.

¹⁴⁷ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 19 April 1939.

¹⁴⁸ See: Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 20 April 1942.

¹⁵⁰ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 19 April 1939.

to spirituality. It furthermore hints at a connection of Braunau to other sites associated with the Führer's life and embeds it within a wider network of sites associated with National Socialism as secular religion.

While the depictions of pilgrimages to see the Führer at the Obersalzberg, the emphasis lies on his tireless work and selfless dedication to the German people, embedded within the Alpine landscapes of Bavaria. Hiking up the mountain did not only mean that pilgrims might catch a glimpse of the Führer, it also meant seeing *like* Hitler. Berchtesgaden and its surroundings became the Promised Land of the German people, "the place of abundance that Hitler held as the ultimate reward for sacrifice and suffering."¹⁵¹ Since Braunau's connection to Hitler lay merely in the fact that he was born there, the self-declared cradle of the Third Reich had no such thing to offer. While Berchtesgaden played with the motive of actual proximity to the Führer's body, Braunau adopted Hitler's description of the location of his birth as fateful and put an emphasis on the past to establish an eternal link that went beyond Hitler's lifespan.

The Passion of Johann Philipp Palm

In his chapter on religion, Richard Grunberger in his *Social History of the Third Reich* claimed that Hitler's personality was associated with various saints and mythological and historical figures, for example Frederick Barbarossa, Goethe's *Faust*, St. Francis or the Royal Touch.¹⁵² In general, Hitler as savior of the German people was also associated with Jesus Christ. In Braunau, another dimension was added, and Hitler became associated with Johann Philipp Palm, the German bookseller-turned-revolutionary who was executed in the town by Napoleon's troops in 1806 and worshipped as a martyr of the German nation from the middle

¹⁵¹ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 183.

¹⁵² See: Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 120.

of the nineteenth century on. A downright Palm cult was developing in Braunau, crowned by the *Palmspiel* (Palm Play), which was planned to take place annually on the anniversary of his death in the style of a medieval Passion play, usually depicting the trial suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

The Nazis were not averse to adapting or embracing these kinds of ancient medieval rituals, as long as they fit their ideological purposes. Hitler himself attended the world's most famous Passion play in Oberammergau, sometimes referred to as "Alpine Jerusalem," in 1934.¹⁵³ This version was criticized by international guests for their anti-Semitic depiction of Jews.¹⁵⁴ The *Spiel vom Leiden, Sterben und Auferstehen unseres Herrn Jesus Christus* (*Play of the Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*) is a tradition maintained since the seventeenth century and performed once a decade by the residents of the town. Oberammergau was not the only spectacle or festival the Nazis showed affinity for and appropriated for their purposes. For example, Hitler was a regular guest at the Wagner festival in Bayreuth from 1923 on.¹⁵⁵

The Braunau residents attempted to establish their own passion play, taking cues from Oberammergau in staging the life of Johann Philipp Palm. Since the passion of Jesus Christ was already occupied by Oberammergau and many of the Germanic myths legends were taken by Bayreuth, Braunau established its own Passion: The Passion of Johann Philipp Palm. At the end of August 1938, the play was performed by Braunau residents, staging *tableaux vivants* to depict the trial, suffering and death of Johann Philipp Palm in Braunau in 1806, and consequently the suffering of all Austrians until they were redeemed by Hitler in 1938. The

¹⁵³ Goldmann, A. J., "New Kind of Passion in an 'Alpine Jerusalem,'" *The Forward*, May 26, 2010, <http://forward.com/news/128345/new-kind-of-passion-in-an-alpine-jerusalem/>.

¹⁵⁴ For a detailed study about the 1934 edition of the Passion Play and Oberammergau's history during the Nazi period, see: Helena Waddy, *Oberammergau in the Nazi Era: The Fate of a Catholic Village in Hitler's Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner, oder Hitlers Bayreuth [Winifred Wagner, or: Hitler's Bayreuth]* (München: Piper, 2013).

review in *Neue Warte am Inn* does not forget to mention the fateful connection between Palm and Hitler, who was born more than eighty years after the execution.¹⁵⁶ The Passion of Palm was accompanied by large commemorative events, attracting thousands of visitors, especially from Palm's native town Nuremberg. Palm continues to be cherished and worshipped throughout the Nazi period in Braunau, emphasizing the town's German character and its status as cradle of Hitler and National Socialism. Just like Bethlehem as the city of David linked Jesus Christ to other religious figure and Jewish royalty, Braunau as the city where Palm was executed linked Hitler and National Socialism to an older and eternal version of German nationalism.

In the 1942 stage version, the play has lost its Passion play character. Still exhibiting the “*Zeitgeist* of the national rising of Germans against the fist of Napoleon,” the plot seems to have lost its religious dimension of suffering and resurrection.¹⁵⁷ Unlike the 1938 version, it was no longer performed by local residents, but by professional actresses and actors from the Linz State Theater of which the Braunau Theater had become a branch in 1939.¹⁵⁸ This performance is one expression of the Nazis' strategy to “entertain the home front,” mentioned in the previous chapter. The newspaper review describes the staging as intimate in the style of an eighteenth century Bourgeois tragedy, not mentioning any motives from the Passion of Jesus Christ.

After the war, the attempts to establish a spiritual connection between Braunau and Hitler via the cult of Palm, re-enacted through a ritual in the style of the medieval Passion play, were forgotten. Johann Philipp Palm is still an important figure in the history of Braunau. Today, Braunau still maintains the Palm memorial from 1906, and has a park, a street and a square named after Palm. Palm was cleaned of his unholy connection to Hitler, just like the

¹⁵⁶ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 31 August 1938.

¹⁵⁷ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 3 June 1942.

¹⁵⁸ *Neue Warte am Inn*, 27 September 1939.

festivals in Bayreuth and Salzburg could become beacons of high German and Austrian culture again. Braunau however could not get rid of the ghosts of the past.

“Desacralization”

After the war, the local residents made attempts to clear out the ghosts they have called inhabiting the house and haunting Braunau. But for the US soldiers coming to Braunau, the birthplace of Hitler had a too high a symbolic value after having liberated Europe from his grip. Before putting Hitler’s birthplace on the title pages of the allied newspapers across Europe, soldiers made Braunau Nazi functionaries clean the street in front of the house.¹⁵⁹ The narrative about the spirit of Hitler inhabiting the space could not be swept away. The soldiers and journalists dispersed the dust all over Europe in newspaper articles and all over the world by taking memorabilia back home. While the local residents started to forget the connections they had wanted to make with Hitler and the religious connotation of Braunau as the “Bethlehem of the German Reich,” US soldiers came searching for the *genius loci* of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt. Similar to Berchtesgaden, US soldiers left messages and signed their names on the walls inside 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, turning it into a “personal, self-made memorial to the long and bitter struggle to defeat the homeowner.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Peter G. Krebs, *Kriegsende in der Geburtsstadt des Führers [The End of the War in the Führer’s Birthplace]* (Munderfing, Innsalz, 2017), 68

¹⁶⁰ Stratigakos, *Hitler at Home*, 287.



Image 8: US soldiers signing their names on the walls in 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, May 1945.

Testimonies from US soldiers about the liberation of Braunau have been recorded only long after the war, but they exhibit how entering the very house where the man they had just defeated was born had a religious or spiritual dimension for them. Joseph W. Eaton was one of the war reporters coming to Braunau. Born in Nuremberg as Joseph Wechsler into a Jewish-orthodox family, he managed to immigrate to the United States and was drafted into the army in 1943. In his testimony from 1987 he remembers that “the house where Hitler was born stands undamaged. It is empty and unnoticed,” that their sergeant was actually disturbed by its uncanny emptiness.¹⁶¹ Eaton also mentions another American-Jewish soldier originally from Germany. This could be Ralph Leeser whose testimony was recorded for the *Visual History Archive* in 1996. After the liberation of Buchenwald in April 1945, Leeser and his unit went south and ended up in Braunau where he went into “Hitler’s home.”¹⁶² He remembers that “I threw a bust of Hitler out of the window, from there, from the second story and I picked up a couple of books, which we also shipped to the Holocaust museum. And I remember, he had a lot of books on Judaism, Jewish books and things.” A picture Eaton sent to Braunau alongside his testimony shows a soldier and a woman posing in front of the Hitler bust Leeser mentions (Image 9).

¹⁶¹ Testimony of Joseph W. Eaton, “Kriegsende – Braunau History.”

¹⁶² Leeser, Ralph, Interview Code: 20993, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online on 6 May 2017.



Image 9: US soldier posing with Hitler bust in the house, May 1945.

Written notes and testimonies from US soldiers recorded long after the war are testimony to the continued spiritual dimension the house had even after it had been neutralized as a gallery and library, even though the local residents wanted to forget this religious and spiritual dimension of Braunau as Hitler's birthplace.

Conclusion

If the Nazi cult was essentially religious in nature, its effectiveness goes beyond mere marketing and trademarking of souvenirs and became bigger than what the propaganda offices could control. Writing poems, staging a Passion play, or selling splinters of the bed the Führer had been born in,¹⁶³ are not orders from Joseph Goebbels but were strategies to adopt and appropriate the image of Hitler as savior and martyr created by him and his office. Pilgrimage and Passion plays are religious practices that go beyond the established narratives of political propaganda, spatial and temporal boundaries. Pilgrimage as a form of mobility and exchanges turns historic sites into holy sites and puts the present and history into the realm of the eternal.

¹⁶³ Franz Jetzinger, *Hitler's Youth* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 54.

This chapter examined the importance of Braunau as a site of pilgrimage for National Socialism in the light of the image of Hitler as messiah and martyr. As I have shown, this image even drew Austrians, among them Braunau residents, to the sites where the Führer lived, as made pilgrimage to the *Berghof* and later spread the accounts of their experiences in Austria. After the Anschluss, it was the gospel of the “Bethlehem of the German Reich” that was spread all over Nazi Germany. Hitler himself was the first to associate his birth in Braunau with the legend of Johann Philipp Palm as martyr of the German nation. In Braunau, Palm became a medium to associate Jesus Christ and the Führer through the century old tradition of the Passion play that enacted suffering and martyrdom, and consequently enforced the beliefs of the spectators and the players.

The notion of Braunau being the womb and cradle of the Third Reich made everyone forget that Hitler did not actually grow up in the town on the Austrian-German border. The notion of “destiny,” of being born at this exact location was invented by Hitler himself, however, it was appropriated into the narrative of the “Bethlehem of the German Reich” by others, those who published their poems in the newspapers or participated in the Passion play. While the locals wanted to omit these powerful spiritual connections, the narrative of sanctum was picked up again by the US soldiers entering the space in May 1945. The narrative had been constructed around religious motives and practices that could not be swept away by Hitler’s suicide the capitulation of Nazi Germany in May 1945. Thus, the stories of Hitler’s sainthood and his spirit inhabiting certain spaces, such as the house he was born in, have unfolded an uncanny and controversial afterlife in the decades since 1945.

6. CONCLUSION

In 1989, with Hitler's 100th birthday looming and the prospect of unwanted pilgrims coming to Braunau, the town made an attempt to face the history of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and erected a *Mahnstein* (memorial stone) in front of the building. This small memorial bears the inscription "for peace, freedom and democracy—never again fascism—millions of dead remind us" but no reference to the function and meaning of the building it stands in front of. To Braunau, Austria and the whole world the birth house of Adolf Hitler is familiar because of the debates and controversies surrounding it. At the same time it is unfamiliar, because the history and memory of this space have become aggravated and distorted. Silencing and forgetting have turned the building into a screen onto which all kinds of rumors and gossip are projected. One of the anecdotes I heard during my research in Braunau was that Hitler was actually not born in this house, but that his mother went into labor on her way over the Inn River and gave birth right in the middle of the bridge—an anecdote that might as well have been circulating during the Nazi period.

The purpose of this thesis was to unsilence the histories and memories of this space by inquiring about it not as Hitler's "home" but as an attraction that people wanted and to some extent still want to see as tourists, pilgrims or history enthusiasts. It conceptualized this contested space not through its actual relation to Adolf Hitler, but through the image of the Führer as a private citizen that was deliberately staged and created by Nazi propaganda. This image was then adopted by an infinite number of actors and agents throughout the Third Reich and beyond 1945. For Braunau, two strategies of producing the narrative of Hitler's birthplace were examined in this thesis. The first strategy was the commercialization and commodification through organized mass tourism. The second strategy was the sacralization through pilgrimage and the ritual of Passion play in the framework of National socialism as a secular religion and the cult around Hitler as messiah and martyr for the German people.

The narratives were adopted and appropriated, produced and reproduced by local actors and outside agents. There was the Pommer family, whose actions to sell and later reclaim the house were both times welcomed. First they sold the house for an exorbitantly high price to Martin Bormann, an action celebrated all over Nazi Germany. After the war, the family reclaimed it by paying a ridiculously small sum to the state. This action was, if not welcomed, still tolerated by the town's fathers and residents as well as the allied administration. Privatizing Hitler's birthplace effectively declared its past *another country* while the actual building remained in the *same town*, which chose to forget the tourists and pilgrims of the past and ignore those of the present.

Bormann as well as *Gauleiter* August Eigruber, who pushed hard for Braunau to receive attention from Berlin, did not survive the war, but most of Braunau's residents did. Rosalie Hörl, who was either a maid, nanny or cook in the Hitler household, first was a witness who testifies to the Führer's birth at 15 Salzburger Vorstadt and vows to help to restore the building to the original condition of 1889. After the war when she is interviewed by US journalists, Hörl is suffering from amnesia, standing *pars pro toto* for the forgetting the birthplace in Braunau and the collective amnesia of Austrians regarding the nation's involvement in National Socialism.

Lastly, but perhaps most of all, it was the myriads of locals and the masses of tourists and pilgrims who engaged with each other in Braunau, inside and around 15 Salzburger Vorstadt. They read travel brochures and guides, or sold and bought postcards and souvenirs—both authorized and illegal. They visited Hitler's birthplace and they posed for photographs in front of it and inside. They wrote poems praising Braunau as the “womb of Germaneness” or as the “Bethlehem of the German Reich.” They watched the Passion of Johann Philipp Palm or participated in the performance. The artists who exhibited their artworks in Hitler's birth house

during National Socialism and after the liberation both times served as agents of exhibiting “true Germaneness,” albeit under different circumstances.

Many of these interactions and exchanges went beyond the walls of 15 Salzburger Vorstadt, beyond the ancient town gates of Braunau and beyond the historic watersheds of the Anschluss and the end of the war—and some of them continued well into the present. For example, the fascination with Hitler’s private life and domestic spaces did not stop with his suicide in 1945 or the subsequent destruction of his residence in Berchtesgaden. His homes and the images of them still draw large crowds and continue to sell. Recently, an album of private photographs of Hitler sold for \$ 41,000 in a British auction house and attracted bidders from Great Britain, the United States, Germany China and South Africa.¹⁶⁴ In 2016 a reconstruction of the *Führerbunker* was opened in Berlin with the purpose of attracting tourist masses, not to educate high school students.¹⁶⁵

Not only the fascination with the staging of the private life of Hitler in his homes, but also the continuities of tourism and pilgrimage to the holy sites of National Socialism and the life of Adolf Hitler unfolded a life of their own after 1945. In 2015 the Hungarian branch of the Neo-Nazi biker gang *Blood & Honour* made pilgrimage to places associated with Hitler’s life. According to the German newspaper *Die Welt* the tour was organized by a regular travel agency and led the “military history enthusiasts” to Vienna, Braunau, Nuremberg, Munich and Berchtesgaden.¹⁶⁶ This tour of Hungarian Neo-Nazis strangely echoes the trips organized by the Nazi tourist agency KdF which took people to the same destinations, and the religious

¹⁶⁴ Christine Hauser, “Candid Hitler Photos Sell for \$41,000 to Unidentified Bidder,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2017, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/world/europe/eva-braun-hitler-photo-album.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Alison Smale, “Berlin Attraction Reveals an Uneasy Phenomenon: Hitler Sells,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/28/world/what-in-the-world/berlin-attraction-reveals-an-uneasy-phenomenon-hitler-sells.html>.

¹⁶⁶ Ulrich, Bettina, “Blood & Honour: Neonazis Aus Ungarn Planen Hitler-Gedenktour Durch Bayern [Blood & Honour: Hungarian Neonazis Plan Hitler Remembrance Tour to Bavaria],” *Die Welt*, August 12, 2015, <https://www.welt.de/regionales/bayern/article145132631/Neonazis-planen-Hitler-Gedenktour-durch-Bayern.html>.

dimensions of the Hitler cult which expressed itself in a network of pilgrimage routes between the exact same sites.

The past's narratives and strategies of selling and sacralizing Braunau as Hitler's birthplace still exert a powerful grip over the small border town. Much of what has actually happened between 1933 and 1945 still lies in the dark. This thesis was one of the first attempts to shed light onto the history of this dark and allegedly dangerous space in the period between 1933 and 1955. It has shown that spaces such as the birthplace of Adolf Hitler where the destruction and the terror of the Nazi regime are not as apparent pose a difficult task to history. It is difficult to unsilence the narratives and strategies inhabiting and surrounding them as they go beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the space itself, the actors engaging with it, and lastly history and memory.

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