

# **THE VICTIM'S MANTLE:**

## **Foundations of Austria's First Victim Theory and the Waldheim Affair in the Quadripartite Occupation of 1945-1955**

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Submitted to Central European University - Private University  
Department of History - 1 Year Comparative History MA

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*

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Vienna, Austria  
2023

# ABSTRACT

## **The Victim's Mantle: Foundations of Austria's First Victim Theory and the Waldheim Affair in the Quadripartite Occupation of 1945-1955**

The world press was astounded in 1986 when Austrian Presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim, ten-year chief of the United Nations, was accused mid-campaign of involvement with the Nazi SA. Even more astonishing was the rallying of his generation around him as the evidence became irrefutable, resulting in a decisive win. How had Austria created a foundational myth on being 'the First Victim of Nazi Aggression,' only to contradict itself so fundamentally 40 years later?

From 1945 until about 1988, Austria had styled itself a victim rather than perpetrator of the Nazi regime, a stance which its post-war occupiers had allowed. While this victim stance was geopolitically convenient in allowing Austria to escape the reparations and international condemnation that beleaguered (West) Germany, it is based on a historic untruth. In 1938 many Austrians welcomed the German annexation and served enthusiastically as part of the Reich and Holocaust. Critically, the suffering Austrians remember is a consequence of the Nazis *losing* the war, not of the Nazis themselves, and precious few Austrians were active resisters. This victim myth becoming the banner of Austria's wartime memory was due to political opportunism in the critical memory-making years of 1945-1948. Using a little viewed archival collection, I document the rise of this myth, its promulgation by Austria's liberators, and being enthusiastically carried by the Austrian postwar government, to become a founding narrative of the Second Republic.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**Anschluss:** (Connection) The March 1938 entry of German troops into Austria and Austria's annexation into Germany.

**DP:** Displaced Person. Hundreds of thousands transited Austria in the post-war period.

**FPÖ:** *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, the Freedom Party of Austria. Right wing populist party. Founded 1955 after the collapse of the VdU and is usually the third-largest of the Austrian parties. Their color is blue.

**German Nationalism:** In Austria's case, this advocates for a Greater Germany, and thus joining Germany and Austria, and Germanic parts of surrounding countries, into one state.

**KPÖ:** *Kommunistische Partei Österreichs*, The Communist Party of Austria. Established 1918 and banned 1933-1945. It was represented in parliament until 1959. Their color is deep red.

**KZ:** *Konzentrationslager*, German abbreviation for concentration camp. Sometimes also KL.

**Mitläufer:** (Fellow traveler, with-walker) A person believed to be tied to or passively sympathizing of certain radical movements, especially the Nazis.

**NS:** *National Sozialist*. National Socialist, 'NS' is commonly used in Austria and Germany as a descriptor for Nazi ('NS Zeit' would mean in the National Socialist, or Nazi times). A pejorative color descriptor is brown, after the brownshirts that Nazi paramilitaries wore. See NSDAP for the political party.

**NSDAP:** *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*. The Nazi Party, National Socialist German Worker's Party. Active 1925-1945.

**Opferthesis:** The "Victim Theory," from the Moscow Declaration's "First victim of Nazi oppression." Literally 'Victim thesis.' Also referred to as 'first victim,' 'victim.'

**ÖVP:** *Österreichische Volkspartei*, Austrian People's Party. A Christian democratic and liberal-conservative party in Austria, often dominating in the countryside, and traditionally the strongest party in Austria. It was re-founded in 1945 as a sequel to the Christian Social Party, the previous Austro-fascists. Its color is black.

**SPÖ:** The Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*). Along with the ÖVP it is one of the country's traditional two political parties. Founded 1889, it is the oldest extant political party in Austria. Their color is red.

**VdU:** *Verband der Unabhängigen*, The League of Independents, in action from 1949-1955. It positioned itself as the political representative of former Nazis. After a split in direction away from a Peoples' Party conservatism towards direct German nationalism, it disbanded to form the FPÖ in 1955. Sometimes translated as Union, Association, of Independents.

**WJC:** World Jewish Congress, founded 1936 to advocate internationally for Jewish protection from the Nazis, and later, demand responsibility from perpetrators. Prominent in Waldheim Affair.

## THE VICTIM'S MANTLE:

### Foundations of Austria's First Victim Theory and the Waldheim Affair in the Quadripartite Occupation of 1945-1955

#### I. Introduction

Austria need not search long for a partner at the waltz of European states who had embellished a heavy cosmetic over their past in World War II. But perhaps nowhere else had the waltz spun so completely as upon Austria, in a 1986 scandal that hurtled international criticism upon the stage of dignified Vienna. After WWII, Austria's strategic position in Central Europe marked it as state neither of the Cold War camps wanted to fall to the enemy's sphere of influence, but the nation was, by itself, rather negligible. And in certain respects Austria was gladdest to be forgotten. The Cold War vacuum allowed for Austria to maneuver its postwar memory identity for forty years as a quiet First Victim of Nazi Aggression, rather than deal with its accountability in Nazi war crimes.

The 1986 Waldheim affair, in which Austria had elected Kurt Waldheim (1918-2007) to its presidency even after his Brown past had become indisputable,<sup>1</sup> was, I contend, the turning point for Austria's self-perception. Historical scholarship critiquing Austria's positioning as the First Victim of Nazi Aggression went from a trickle to a deluge in the late 1990s, though mostly not in English. My contribution to this field is using newer sources on foreign policy to examine how the *Opferthese*, or first victim theory, was adapted in policy by Austria to ground a useable national narrative and ensure a favorable outcome for itself. Austria's Anschluss ("connection") by Nazi Germany on March 13 1938, allowed Austria to claim a date well before the more headlined seizure of the Sudetenland in September 1938, Czechia in March 1939, or the invasion of Poland September 1939. This mantra of being a victim of the Nazis had become essential to Austrian internal and foreign policy in the Cold War. The First Victim was used as a shield not only against an unfavorable public image and paying reparations to Jews, but to safeguard independent statehood in an identity struggle that

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<sup>1</sup> Since historians found no evidence that Kurt Waldheim was registered an official member of the Nazi Party, we avoid unequivocal statements that 'Waldheim was a Nazi.' We must refer longwindedly to his actions as being Nazi-involved, rather than him being a direct Nazi. 'Brown' is sometimes a solution word.

had dogged Austria for centuries. We see the roots of the theory establishing in the critical memory forming years of 1945-1948, until historical reckoning in the late 1980s would force a reshape of European memory culture.

Unlike Czechia, Poland, or Hungary, who had strong national movements underneath their multiethnic empires, Germanic Austria has struggled to cultivate a sense of nation under the Habsburgs. In the Great War's shattering aftermath, Austria gained the ignoble label of "the state no one wanted."<sup>2</sup> It was the rump state of an aging empire which had specialized its factories in Bohemia and its farms along the lower Danube. Vienna was viewed a nucleus of bureaucrats: in a mountainous land in a hungry time with lean prospects at self-sufficiency. A joining with Germany had been the natural conclusion by politicians in this era of Wilsonian ethnic nation states, and a Republic of German Austria was attempted in 1918, with eventual plans to join Germany. Wary of creating a strong Germany, and with Sudeten territory disputed, the allies forbid Austria's attempted union state.<sup>3</sup>

So, Austria had to forge into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a lonely nation-state unsure of its viability. Unlike some constituents in the former Hapsburg empire, Austria had little of an ancient nation to grasp at: Austria's 1000 year history had done remarkably little to shape its national identity, according to Franz Mathis.<sup>4</sup> Rather than a land or Volk, the 'Austria' term in its many forms had been linked to the monarch. But Austria today does have an identity separate from Germany, a strong one growing only stronger. This meteoric progress is a result of the last mere 70 years— throwing off occupiers it learned to hate and forging its own path.<sup>5</sup> In a prosperous democracy of star skiers, diplomats, and Mozartkugeln, a pan-Germanism of today's Austria is unthinkable. But Austria's tumultuous early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marred by its failure to define itself, first in 1918, and ultimately in 1938, with the failure of Austro-fascism to secure the State against Hitler's Greater Germany. I argue this final failure was well-remembered by Postwar Austrian policy shapers as a fatal flaw of the

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<sup>2</sup> Andrea Stangl, "The State That Nobody Wanted—Nobody?" Trans. Leigh Bailly. *Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.h.* 2023.

The titles of two books, *Der Staat wider Willen* (The Reluctant State) and *Der Staat, den keiner wollte* (The State that Nobody Wanted) became synonymous with Austria between 1918 and 1938.

<sup>3</sup> "Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, the Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Volume XIII," Section VI.-Austria, Article 80, *Office of the Historian, US Department of State*, accessed May 2023.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch12subch6>

<sup>4</sup> Franz Mathis, "1000 years of Austria and Austrian Identity: Founding Myths," in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Mathis, 23.

First Republic, and added necessity to the creation of a usable national narrative. For in the 1940s and 1950s, the Opferthesis offered Austrian government a scaffold upon which to build a nation separate from Germany and its crimes: contending 1) Austria was not German, and 2) as a victim, could not be responsible. And the Cold War occupiers and Austrian political bodies were willing to acquiesce to this mistruth to ensure their geopolitical goals.

## Historical Background and Historiography

The following section intersects relevant points regarding Austria's entrance into the Second World War, along with the pertinent historiography. The Nazi German Army crossed the Austrian border on March 12, 1938, annexing Austria placidly to the German Reich in an event called the Anschluss, or 'connection.' Hitler was hailed by ecstatic Austrians on his route to Vienna, especially in his border-town birthplace, Braunau am Inn. An estimated 100,000 Austrians attended his opening speech at the Heldenplatz in Vienna, a sizeable portion of the city 1.9 million city, which was home to some 170,000 Jews.<sup>6</sup> Political offices were quietly filled by German Nationalists the days after Hitler's arrival, and about 70,000 Austrians who showed anti-Nazi sympathies were arrested by secret police.<sup>7</sup> The daily *Wiener Zeitung* greeted the public with a blank space, as the previous Austro-Fascist dictator Kurt Schuschnigg's farewell address had been rapidly excised.<sup>8</sup> Germany's other small neighbors such as Belgium looked upon the Anschluss anxiously, while British newspapers were hesitant to blow the trumpets of war over keeping Germans apart, even though the unification of Austria and Germany was yet another of Hitler's departures from the Versailles Treaty.<sup>9</sup> Lootings of Jewish businesses erupted across Austria after the Anschluss, and virulent anti-Semitism characterized the chaos months before *Kristallnacht*. Well-known British foreign-correspondent G.E.R Geyde in the *Daily Telegraph* reported the horrors that swept Jews in Vienna, where a couple were forced to scrub down posters of the freshly deposed Kurt Schuschnigg<sup>10</sup> with caustic chemicals:

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<sup>6</sup> "Vienna," *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2023.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/vienna>

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic 1815-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 224.

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Wagner and Gerhard Tomkowitz, *Anschluss: The Week Hitler Seized Vienna*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 178.

<sup>9</sup> Wagner and Tomkowitz, *Anschluss*.

<sup>10</sup> Kurt Schuschnigg was the Austro-fascist dictator of the Christian Social Party (predecessor to the ÖVP) in 1934, until the Anschluss in 1938. While he and Hitler were both fascists, they fundamentally disagreed on the manner of an independent Austria. Being being an obstacle to Anschluss made him

Through the delighted crowds storm troopers dragged an aged Jewish working man and his wife. With tears rolling silently down her cheeks, looking straight ahead through her tormentors, the woman held her old husband's arm, and I could see her trying to pat his hand. "Work for the Jews at last, work for the Jews," the mob howled. "We thank the Führer for finding work for the Jews."<sup>11</sup>

On April 10, 1938, a month after the Anschluss, and confronted with international accusation, the Nazis presented the already occupied Austrian population with a referendum on if they had desired their "re-unification with Germany." The turnout of eligible voters was 99.71%, and of those 99.73% voted in favor of the Nazi occupation.<sup>12</sup> While these percentages are damning, there was almost no secrecy in the vote, and pressure from the Nazi Secret police was likely immense. Therefore, Austrian support at the time of Anschluss is difficult to quantify, but I do not deem it especially important in terms of war guilt, rather it is a symptom of a weak idea of the Austrian state as separate from Germany. In terms of war guilt, more important are Austria's contributions only after 1938.

According to Austrian historian Gerhard Botz's statistics, 688,000 Austrians were members of the Nazi Party in 1942, accounting for 8.2% of the Austrian population. This is higher than the percentage of Nazi Party members in Germany. With political membership usually only falling upon the male head of a household, it can be inferred about one quarter of the Austrian population were ardent Nazis in 1942.<sup>13</sup> A joining of Germany itself in 1938 is not an action of war guilt, but the actions undertaken by Austrians in Austria 1938-1945, such as the expulsion of its Jewry, lending its strength to the Nazi war machine, and the Mauthausen concentration camp system, were. At last Austria was invaded by a closing pincer of Western and Soviet troops in March and April 1945. After a ten-year quadripartite occupation, the State Treaty was signed 1955, and a neutral Austria would finally be free of all its "occupiers."

Tony Judt's "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," elucidates the problem with viewing a European past through a convenience which was

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an enemy of Nazi Germany. Schuschnigg was arrested and spent WWII in Sachsenhausen and Dachau. He survived the war after narrowly escaping a 1945 execution order by Hitler.

<sup>11</sup> G.E.R Geyde for the *Daily Telegraph*, quoted in Wagner and Tomkowitz, *Anschluss*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver, *Elections in Europe: A data handbook*, (Nomos Publishing, 2010) 176.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Botz in Heidemarie Uhl, "The Politics of Memory: Austria's Perception of the Second World War and the National Socialist Period," Trans. Ursula Stachl-Peier. *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*. Contemporary Austrian Studies, Vol 5. 1997, 66.

fundamentally false. Judt reminds us that life in occupied western Europe for a non-persecuted class was routine until the front reached them in 1944, and that dissidents at this time may have been denounced by their neighbors due to threat of ending this constancy by bringing the Nazis sniffing. Slovakia, Croatia, even Flemish Belgians, were opportunistic to use the Nazi surge to idealize their sovereignty and border disputes. After an allied invasion reached most European civilian populations in 1944 and 1945, individuals and institutions surged to identify themselves with the winners.<sup>14</sup> Judt categorizes the time period of 1945-1948 as being the period in which Europe's postwar memory was molded, and that blaming Germany was one of the few factors that just about every aspiring government could agree on.<sup>15</sup> Why then, did the true resistors across Europe allow their heroism to be requisitioned by the wider bystanding, or even collaborating, masses who represented the main parties? Judt supplies two reasons: firstly, a need for baseline social cohesion. Secondly, in the case of Eastern Europe, where communism in most cases came as tutelage of the Red Army rather than self-imposed, it was beneficial to "[flatter] the recalcitrant population by inviting it to believe in the fabrication deployed on its behalf... that they were an innocent victim of a German assault, had played no part in the crimes perpetrated on its territory, and were a full partner in the work of liberation."<sup>16</sup> While this second claim is fittingly softer in the case of Austria due to the integration to the Reich and Soviet influence being limited to 10 years, we will explore that Soviet stratagem being applied unsuccessfully in the early post-war.

A European phenomenon of the late 1980s was historical debates breaching academia and spilling messily onto the public forum. The West-German *Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung*, or reckoning with its past, started slowly in the late 1960s, and *Historikerstreit* around 1986<sup>17</sup> brought new, popular attention to the debate between historians of how to handle the Nazi past. In France, the war crimes cases of Rene Bousquet, Maruice Papon, and Paul Touvier were widely circulated. Kurt Waldheim was the analogous Austrian version of the 'Could we have been the bad guys?' realization. Judt reinforces that despite most older French and Austrian men having no culpability in war crimes, polls suggested that the elder generations 'saw little benefit in rehashing the atrocities committed by Vichy,' and those over 50 in

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<sup>14</sup> Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 87, 1996, 38.

<sup>15</sup> Judt, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Judt, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Historikerstreit*: Historians' dispute, ~1986. The argument settled on how to view the Nazi past in Germany, and was publicly carried out by conservative and more liberal historians through popular newspaper editorials. Questions included if Nazism was inevitable, should Nazi crimes be compared with Stalin's, and do future generations of Germans owe a special burden of guilt.

Austria saw their country more likely a victim of the Anschluss than an accomplice.<sup>18</sup> The collapse of European communism also opened a wider re-examination of wartime memory politics around this time. While a certain subset of the European population would remain unpersuaded by any evidence, and would prefer bygones to die out quietly, by the 1990s a general reevaluation of the pan-European role in the dirty viscera of WWII was underway, with Germany no longer as the sole butcher.

Integral to understanding Austria's stance as a victim is a conclusion drawn by a leading Austrian scholar of the subject, Heidemarie Uhl, who began publishing on the topic in the late 1990s. In "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II in Austrian Memory" (2011), Uhl qualifies the previous simplicity of the first victim status often spoken of by her and others. Rather, she says, Austrians saw themselves not victims of the Third Reich, but victims of the war *against* the Third Reich. By 1947, as the main parties fought for the sizeable share of former Nazis who had been re-enfranchised, the idea of true resistance to the Nazis had been relegated away from the centrist ÖVP and socialist SPÖ towards the fringe Communist Party.<sup>19</sup> In this view, the idea of Nazi-resistance became fundamentally one of un-Austrianness. And it was true: the average Austrian was no antifascist rebel, only a few thousand in a population over six million were active. Austrians survived the war about as hungry and in mourning of their slain family members as the Germans did. From the late 1940s, it became the tactic of the ÖVP to memorialize the veteran and returning soldier, often in countryside *Kriegerdenkmaler*, (veterans memorials).<sup>20</sup> And it was the tactic of the SPÖ to highlight their anti-fascist rebellion in the 1934 civil war that preceded the Austro-fascists (the fascists, the proto-party of the rivals the ÖVP).<sup>21</sup> To these main parties, funding things like the Mauthausen Memorial were seen as lending their funds to a dangerous communist Lieu de Memoire.

Hella Pick and Gunter Bischof, also offer excellent monographs and books on the subject of Austria's historical memory and political maneuvering, especially in a contextual

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<sup>18</sup> Judt, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, "Of Heroes and Victims: World War II in Austrian Memory," *Austrian history Yearbook* 44, 2011, 188.

<sup>20</sup> Uhl, "Of Heroes and Victims," 189.

<sup>21</sup> Important for a non-expert to note, is Austria was a fascist country in the Italian model already from 1934, led by the Christian Socials (right wing). The Austrian dictators were no friends of Hitler: it had in fact outlawed the German nationalists and Nazis, along with all other parties. They were staunch supporters of keeping Austria as a separate state, a struggle they would lose in 1938 when Hitler arrived.

manner.<sup>22</sup> Hella Pick's brilliant term of "The Guilty Victim" is a common theme in this piece and provides rich contextual data. As well as Gunter Bischoff's "Legacy of the Weak," and his articles and edited volumes. I expand upon and differentiate myself from these authors by 1) focusing on how the victim theory was adapted as a shield by diverse factions, 2) using the below mentioned source body, and 3) expanding upon the theory's fracturing during the Waldheim affair. I also finally add a comparative lens of Austria to West Germany, who was held accountable by world demand, and to East Germany, who saw themselves as inheritors of anti-fascist Germany and heaped their responsibility on the fascist West.

Strict categories of 'Identity' and 'National Identity' are rightfully viewed with skepticism. Identity is a moving target, created and reflected anew in every situation. A refracted stone beneath a river of time, a different color or place in every angle of light. And when an inquisitive hand breaches the surface to grasp at it, may find a surprising historical reality. Identity is never fully defined and sometimes kept nebulous on purpose. There can be a plurality of offers and competition between them. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper contend that "Identity" is a hopelessly overburdened term, somewhere between 'richly and hopelessly ambiguous,' in their 2000 critique, "Beyond Identity."<sup>23</sup> A term which had struck an odd resonance across fields of humanities and social sciences since the 1960s, but is weak when used as a catch-all.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, in this piece, the term identity may be used similarly 'national narrative' or 'foundation myth.' Being the first victim was an invisible part to a postwar Austrian identity, -subtle under more concrete symbols of dialect and Danube, waltzes and alps- but a pervasive cement gluing factions into a foundation. Austrian identity here is acknowledged as a construct: a nebulous idea, but one that exists on the merit that its actors think it real.

### Sources

A primary body of sources for this piece comes from the British Foreign Office collection, located at the Vienna State Archives at Nottendorfergasse, in the Archive of the Republic collection. Therefore this is the British position in occupied Vienna, and is compiled of intelligence documents relating to Austria, and the presence of the other interests of the

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<sup>23</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1. 2000. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 7.

USSR, USA, and France.<sup>25</sup> The Foreign Office levies careful eyes on Austria's nurturing as a non-communist state at the crossroads of European trade. The documents are in English and German, with translations from the Russian and French. The collection of formerly classified documents consists of 2643 folios with documents from 1945-1954, and had been awarded to Vienna from London in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the critical Waldheim period. According to the archivist, the collection is relatively untraversed, no one was quite sure what was inside, and I was the first to request the exact folios used in this project. I have paid special attention to topics labeled foreign policy of UK, USA, USSR, denazification, education, Jews, political parties, political movements, and Austrian attitudes to all of the above. Outside periodicals and intelligence briefs have also been diversely consulted.

Holdings of the Foreign Office collection are rich, as they were a diverse compendium of anything the British Foreign Service found interesting, representative, or threatening. One source often consulted for this project are newspaper clippings, in original that would be pasted onto sheets of cardstock, or translated typed summaries from the original. Using newspapers from this time is twofold useful: firstly, they emphasize the Austrian (over foreign) agency. Second, Austria at this time essentially had a different newspaper for each political party for each region, allowing us to read well how they positioned themselves to the public.

Also prominently referenced are intelligence reports, in which a member would write a report or summary of a general theme of a problematic month. Perceived threats were a common topic: whispers of terrorism and unrest, communism, civilian anger at the occupiers' policy, any too egregious mistreatment of Jews. They also kept tabs on general Austrian public opinion, including protests movements. Intercultural exchange was tracked in vectors like international student exchanges of Austrian students and teachers to places of the occupying powers (and special attention upon those invited to the USSR). Also of interest was the purging of Nazi-affiliated professionals or students, and personal letters sieved by the censors speaking of former Nazis or their grudges with denazification. Also included were speeches by prominent politicians. As well as visits of foreign dignitaries and their receptions, like for example, dignitaries spending a transatlantic visit unexpectedly dogged by demands for restitution by Jewish organizations.

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<sup>25</sup> Some direct shared intelligence from the United States is also included, signified by documents starting with "HQ/USFET," -- US Forces European Theater.

This thesis structures its argument accordingly: after this introductory chapter, the second chapter deduces the *external*: how foreign powers enabled or checked Austria in upkeeping the victim myth. In this we examine the 1943 Moscow declaration synthesizing the idea of “the first victim.” Then we analyze the USSR’s dual mandate, and the West’s nurturing of a state that would be financially, politically, and socially cohesive enough to not be enticed to communism. We also explore here the main war crimes trial for Austria concerning Mauthausen, which was hastily draconian, and then the swift exonerated any life-sentences who survived the noose. The third chapter, and in my opinion the richest chapter, concerns how Austria *internally* crafted and allowed this myth to persist for its geopolitical benefit. In this we have an examination of the varying positions of each of the main parties: The ÖVP, SPÖ, KPÖ, and VdU. We also examine here the state of Austrian Anti-semitism and Denazification in the post-war period. The third chapter examines how the victim myth, so carefully constructed in the last chapters, falls asunder in with the 1986 Waldheim Affair in a larger trend of Vergangenheitbewältigung. The chapter also compares similar debates at the time, including the Historikerstreit in West Germany, and the similarly egregious externalization of Nazi guilt in East Germany; namely, claiming to be inheritors of anti-fascist Germans, and heaping its blame on West Germany for WWII and the Holocaust. I close with a brief epilogue with the current trends in Austrian memory culture, *lieux de memoire*, and concluding thoughts.

## **II. The Exteran Forces Shaping Austria**

### **The Moscow Declaration: Rug Sweeping**

Integral to Austria’ victim stance in the postwar was a little known but long remembered Moscow Declaration. Decreed by the foreign secretaries of the USSR, USA, United Kingdom, and China at the 1943 Moscow Conference, the declaration’s goal was to sliver away the potentially ambivalent allies of Nazi Germany. In it, Italy and Austria were deemed unjustly occupied, and were offered promises of favorable treatment post-war if they would surrender or rebel. The Allies had witnessed how domestic fractionalization and rebellion had worked toward their advantage in WWI, and were eager to encourage it to hasten this war’s end. The text introduces Austria as such:

The governments of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States of America are agreed that Austria, **the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression**, shall be liberated from German domination.<sup>26</sup>

However, the declaration's goal in encouraging resistance in Austria went largely unheeded. Austrian historian Hella Pick sums up Austria's stance as the guilty victim: "The country is both victim and perpetrator. But there is no equivalence between the two: Austria has been far less victim than perpetrator."<sup>27</sup> However impotent in raising the desired rebellion, the Declaration's opening statement seeing Austria as "the first victim of Nazi oppression," became a protective mantle for the Second Republic during the Cold War.

The Declaration's righteous tone seems to reverse in its conclusion, including a warning against complacency: "Austria is reminded, however that she has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation."<sup>28</sup> One could be forgiven for thinking this was a vague attempt to establish punishment for Nazis. But the responsibility clause was not merely to invoke a vague concession of responsibility, but was added by the Kremlin to exact damages from Austria.<sup>29</sup> If Austria failed to rebel, which was likely, then the USSR would have a freer hand in extracting reparations. Failing to exact explicit financial reparations from Austria in the postwar treaties à la Versailles, (as the western allies feared, and strictly forbid), the Soviet Union instead had to satisfy itself upon Austria's industrial materiel and physical wealth inside its occupied quarter. Smartly said by Hella Pick, 'rather than turn Austria Red, Stalin planned to bleed it white.'<sup>30</sup> The industrial material and relative wealth of Austria was carted off to the Soviet Union in the amount the Soviets deemed justifiable by the horrors left in Barbarossa's wake. The USSR's policy on Austria in many cases mirrored the Red Army's actions unto Germany, which suggested Soviet brass understood Austrians as highly responsible for contributing to the Reich, even if ideologically it was preferable to separate the Austrian from the Nazi and nurture them as potential sympathizers to the USSR.

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<sup>26</sup> "The Moscow Declaration." Joint Four Nation Declaration: Declaration on Austria. Moscow Conference, 1943.

<sup>27</sup> Hella Pick, *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), xv.

<sup>28</sup> "The Moscow Declaration," 1943.

<sup>29</sup> Günter Bischoff, *Austria in the First Cold War 1945-55: The Leverage of the Weak*, (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Pick, 17.

Before the war ended, on April 27, 1945, an Austrian provisional government issued a Declaration of Independence that a democratic republic of Austria was reestablished. By saying the Nazis had subdued the Austrian population, and led it to a ‘pointless and hopeless war of which no Austrian ever wanted,’ they intoned that the new republican government would not be held as accountable for what happened in Austria under the National Socialists.<sup>31</sup> It is not the subject of this essay to quantify Austrian guilt, but rather this essay functions on the assumption that Austria must carry partial responsibility. In the manner of Germany, in 1945 Austria was quartered into four occupation zones (headed by the USSR, US, UK, France) with a further division of Vienna. However, unlike Germany, this occupation would only last until 1955 upon the creation of the State Treaty, where Austria declared itself neutral, and with it the departure of all foreign troops.



Figure 1. “Austria Zones of Occupation.” Note contrary to the deep red, that Vienna, like Berlin, was also divided in four. *Central Intelligence Agency, Library of Congress Maps Division, Washington, DC. G6491.S73 1950 .U5.*

<sup>31</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, “The Politics of Memory: Austria’s Perception of the Second World War and National Socialist Period,” in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 64.

## The Occupiers: Policy over the Pieces

For elephants sat in a rowboat, trumpeting unconcerned and often contradictory orders to their overworked Danubian rower, whose skiffy could scarcely stay afloat under the presumptuous pachyderms. Such was the favored metaphor of provisional Austrian chancellor Karl Renner (SPÖ), who first voiced “four elephants in a rowboat” in London during a 1945 plea to lessen the scale of occupation.<sup>32</sup> The motif of the helpless, tireless, Austrian bureaucrat in the boat would repeat in many May Day parades. The cost of allied occupation to impoverished Austria was about 10% of the federal budget, despite it being offset in part by the Western Powers’ partial funding of their own units. Foreign Minister Dr. Gruber (ÖVP) advocated for an army for Austria, which would most certainly cost more than that,<sup>33</sup> but at least it would rid the struggling boat its gargantuan guests. Austria’s occupation was a duration much longer than the victimized country was right to endure, intoned any Austrian lawmaker with political instinct. It was a complaint agreeable to every Austrian, even though self-governance had been restored in most functions in the months and years after the war, with the Four Powers constitutional overseers, keeping an eye on each and squabbling over the leaving conditions other by the end. By its end in 1955, the occupational period’s curtailing of freedom and funding was perhaps a quite small price endured of many possibilities for Austria. The outcome of neutrality and independence from either block was a positive one to Austrians, even if it took a long time. Austria’s neighbors warned them against hubris with less-pleasant realities, with the sudden tumble of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet sphere in 1948 after a similarly ambiguous occupation, or the collapse of the Quadripartite in Germany, resulting in its division to East and West in 1949.

In a miracle or a curse, somehow quadripartite rule in Austria persisted for ten years (a period whose long length would flabbergast any Austrian politician in 1947—for Austria was a victim and the state treaty was already being negotiated. Avoided somehow was the situation the befell Germany in March 1948, in which Russian Marshall Sokolovsky walked out of the Control Council, bringing cohesive four power rule to an end, and led to the

<sup>32</sup> “Four Elephants in a Boat,” Nov 4, 1945. *The Observer*. Mappe 861, Occupying Armies 1, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Occupiers, at least.

“Austria Forces Summary: June 1949,” Mappe 341, Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations USA, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

establishment of two Germanies in 1949.<sup>34</sup> Despite this uneasy convocation, Foreign Office memos in Austria remarked, 'It is the rule that the three western elements never join the Soviets in vetoing an ordinary law, the Soviet never joins the westerners in approving a constitutional law.'<sup>35</sup> A distrust of the other and quarrelsome procedure surrounding the approval of many laws and the proposed State Treaty would contribute to the occupation lasting ten years. An explanation given for why the USSR did not leave cooperations in Austria and retreated to its occupation zone, as it had in Germany, is that the Potsdam declaration allowed them to easily seize German assets in Eastern Austria (which was easier than in Germany). As well as the Communists only controlling 5% of the Austrian electorate not being enough to justify a separate state (which unlike the GDR, would be quite small).<sup>36</sup>

### **Policy of the USSR:**

The exact strategic goals of the Soviet Union in Austria are open to interpretation, and changing after Stalin's death, but can be categorized as raising support for a Soviet system and extracting means of production to assuage the damage done by the Nazis to their own manufacturing and labor supply. Stalin had calculated by 1946 that if Soviet influence persisted long enough in Austria, they might be enveloped into the Soviet sphere; and for that reason the US was eagerest among the West to push for the State Treaty and force their leave, according to Pick. That the Soviets had gotten this far was already a strategic disappointment to the West: Soviet troops needed in distant Austria allowed them to insist on their occupation in Romania and Hungary, and with Prague falling under communist sway as late as 1948, Vienna was rightfully afraid.<sup>37</sup> However, any chance of a Soviet-friendly electorate was soundly crashed in the first 1945 elections, with the communist party receiving a mere 5.4% of the votes.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the American CIA was convinced in the early years that the USSR's endeavor in Austria was to establish a Soviet dominated government there, regardless of how far-fetched that ambition would become.

Multiple media outlets served the Austrian postwar public, each divided by region and political party. We may look at the main Soviet newspaper in Austria to understand their

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<sup>34</sup> "Quadripartite Control in Austria," 1. Intel: No 140. June 22, 1951. Mappe 1034. Policy of Occupying powers- Policy towards Austria as a whole, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>35</sup> "Quadripartite Control in Austria," 1.

<sup>36</sup> "Quadripartite Control in Austria," 2.

<sup>37</sup> Pick, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Pick, 41.

strategic positioning of the situation, and their phrasing of it to the population. The first German language and postwar Austrian newspaper, the *Österreichische Zeitung: Frontzeitung für die Bevölkerung Österreichs*<sup>39</sup> became the official paper of the Soviet occupying power. A superficial understanding would expect that, with the anti-fascist Soviets being the strictest in denazification measures, their newspaper would be conscious of blame and the dangers of viewing Austria as a victim country in spring and summer 1945. Certainly the soldiers fighting in Austria did not ascribe to this notion of victimized Austria as they uncovered the concentration camps, and whose vengeful anger spurred them to rationalize plunder, and perhaps the 87,000 reported cases of rape in Vienna the three weeks after their arrival.<sup>40</sup> But an integral political goal of *Österreichische Zeitung* was emphasizing Austrian independence from the German Reich. While this separation of the Austrian and the German had its use in wartime, as per the Moscow Declaration, the separatist rhetoric postwar did not nurture Austrians into acceptance of perpetration. A July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 article titled “Kriegsverbrecher zur Verantwortung” (War Criminals to be held Responsible) contains language as such:

Austria fought on the side of the Hitlerite German lands in the felonious war against freedom-loving nations. Here, too, the defeated German fascism left behind its agents, who do everything in their power to disturb peace and prevent Austria from rebuilding.<sup>41</sup>

We see the blame is placed on the foreign, German, agents for any remaining fascism, while the ideological topography was scarcely different from Germany in Austria. The ÖZ authors, leftist Austrians under Soviet editors, used distancing terms like ‘the Hitler Army’ in their articles when referring to the Wehrmacht and SS, or ‘Nazi bandit units,’ likely referring to the Volkssturm. The ‘Hitler people,’ too, was a common phrase to isolate the imagined perpetrators from everyday Austrians. These leftist writers, having worked with the Soviets in the weeks before the war’s official end, had certainly established themselves as anti-Nazi. But intending to or not, even they evoked the First Victim mythology, blanketing from blame the countrymen who would have executed them months earlier. They facilitated the seamless continuity of the Moscow Declaration stance, ignored during the war, as a protection into the postwar period.

<sup>39</sup> “The Austrian Paper: Front-line paper for the Austrian Population” Later subtitled, „Zeitung der Sowjetarmee für die Bevölkerung Österreichs.“

<sup>40</sup> Judt, “The Past in Another Country,” 38.

<sup>41</sup> “Kriegsverbrecher zur Verantwortung,” *Österreichische Zeitung*, (Vienna), July 1, 1945, 1.

An argument of this paper rests upon a power being selective when insisting on Nazi guilt when ideologically or geopolitically convenient. Including in the case of the Soviet Union, seeing the Austrians as a people to be liberated from the Nazis rather than complicit Nazis themselves, but still being able to enrich itself from materiel in the eastern zone. While important to nurturing socialist reconstruction in Austria, this facade was of little practical use to allied armies in the immediate postwar. Especially in the Soviet case, we can observe this doublespeak phenomenon. Political organs were eager to see Austrians as liberated and separate from (West) Germans, but this was seldom a distinction the Red Army soldier was swift to make.

Following direct orders from Stalin, Vienna was ‘liberated’ by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ukrainian Front on April 15, 1945, (as attests huge Red Army Soldier statue and colonnade installed in 1945 near Vienna’s Schwarzenbergplatz, confirming the ‘liberation’/Befreiung of Austria from the fascists). The official position of the Red Army High Command was signed in an April declaration, by Stalin himself. Officers of the Ukrainian Front were to issue statements in April 1945 to the Austrian population that professed:

The Red Army has come to Austria not to occupy Austrian territory, but with the sole aim of destroying the hostile German-fascist troops and freeing Austria from dependence on Germany... it is to be made clear that the Red Army stands on the position of the Allies’ Moscow Declaration concerning Austria’s independence and will contribute to the restoration of the social order that existed until 1938, that is until the German invasion of Austria.”<sup>42</sup>

Importantly, the actual intention of the army, as anything different from this goal, is not delineated in the document. Rather, these statements are curated attitudes, to be made public to civilian Austrians as their liberators. Long-marched liberators who would benefit from a calm civilian population not frenzied by Goebbel’s goading to fight to the death before a propagandized Soviet horde.

The NKVD in July 1945 was under no such optimistic tint yet, nor was it eager to elevate the good Austrian from the not, as in the previous document. A July directive to the Ukrainian Third Army, the wing of Soviet forces which liberated Austria, warned the army officers to educate against the naivety of their troops after a few tried to defect. The note

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<sup>42</sup> Stalin, Antonov, “Stavka Directive on the Publication of an Appeal to the Austrian Public.” April 2, 1945. Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Ministerstva Oborony, In *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria 1944/45–1948/49*, edited by Csaba Békés, László Borhi, Peter Ruggenthaler, Ottmar Trașcă, and Silke Stern. Central European University Press, 2015. 158-159.

states: “The Staff of the troops is to be informed that the total and unconditional surrender of Hitler’s armed forces does not mean that the subversive activities of the German National Socialists against the Soviet People and Red Army have come to an end.”<sup>43</sup>

Observed through the Soviet case is no monolithic policy, but one shaped by the person in charge and mediated by what is advantageous to the situation at hand. We will see for example later, cases Austrian former Nazis being treated stricter by the Soviet Commission than their East German counterparts, who had been ‘washed clean’ by 1947. The Soviet and Western cooperation was characterized by functional disagreement. Four-way meetings, in which each state had a voting member, repeatedly show the members of the three western-aligned states voting for ye a motion, and it being denied by the Soviet representative. Often for not being strict enough on denazification in favor of progress, or for forbidding the allocation of materiel to the Soviet Union. A cynical explanation for this supplied by the foreign service is that it benefitted the Soviet plans that Austria remain in a state of limbo, and perhaps, they extrapolate, nurture a situation where they may be allowed to increase their influence in all or part of Austria. Generally a desire for stricter denazification and reparation characterized Soviet attitude, and wanting strict punishments for former Nazis. But we see large portions of civilians being forgiven, deemed as oppressed workers, when suitable, as was similarly the case in the German Democratic Republic.

### **The Western Allies (USA, UK, and France)**

The position of the Western Allies, though not identical, are similar enough in opposition to the Soviet interests. A CIA document evaluates the strategic importance of Austria to United States Cold War views as entirely negative: not how the USA could *gain* from closer cooperation, but what could be *lost* in geopolitical grounds if cooperation failed. “Austria, from a US point of view, is of considerable importance but almost entirely in a negative sense. The country contains little of intrinsic value to the US: it is economically weak... militarily negligible...”<sup>44</sup> But it warns that a defeat of their policy by the USSR would have an effect on US-European position as a whole. It warns that if Austria falls, there will be a psychological impact on western Europe, and which would surely help establish the

<sup>43</sup> Naneyeshvili, “NKVD Directive Regarding Ideological Training among the Third Ukrainian Front Staff: July 4, 1945.” In *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria 1944/45–1948/49*, edited by Csaba Békés, László Borhi, Peter Ruggenthaler, Ottmar Trașcă, and Silke Stern, NED-New edition, 1., 298–99. RGVA, f. 32902, op.1, d.11, ll 158-159. Central European University Press, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> “The Current Situation in Austria: April 1948” 28.4.1948. Document 2 (source: NA RG 263m /oRE report 13-48, box 2)

communist party in Italy.<sup>45</sup> US intelligence also valued Austria as a font of intel on the USSR, being a rare direct point of contact of Soviet and American troops.<sup>46</sup> Therefore it was a US priority that Austria not fall to communist sway, and the US saw dedicated reconstruction after the war as a major enforcer of this. Notable is that the United States saw its position in Austria as not so much for what it could gain from friendship, but from what a failure there would cause it to lose.

In support of this anti-communist goal, the United States let Marshall money flow generously, causing Chancellor Leopold Figl (1945-53, ÖVP) to remark in 1949 that without it, Austria would have most certainly collapsed.<sup>47</sup> A 1949 report suggests that economic recovery since 1949 is considerable, mostly due to US aid, though the Soviet economic policy (and requisition of factory material) still emitted a drag. “The main political concern of the population is the desire for a Treaty, and they are not sure it will be signed.”<sup>48</sup> Despite wanting to be welcomed as saviors, the occupying troops were rarely popular: first as a reminder of defeat, and second, their presence was an unwelcome burden on Austria’s scant food and housing resources.<sup>49</sup>

The rival Soviet stratagem is perceived by the US as such: “Regardless of any tactical moves the soviets may make with or without a treaty, their ultimate objective will continue to be the establishment of a soviet dominated government in Austria, and the integration of that country into the satellite and political economic bloc.”<sup>50</sup> This assessment is in direct conflict to historian Hella Pick’s: wherein Stalin never intended to turn Austria red, but rather bleed it white.<sup>51</sup> The CIA may have been correct or incorrect in its 1948 assessment, or the Soviet position may have changed after the Communist Party exceeded even the Americans’ hopes by receiving only a few percent of the electorate in the first 1945 elections. Despite ambitions or accusations of conspiracies by the CIA, the Soviet Union was relatively unable to instill a Soviet friendly government in the Austria, though, the socialist SPÖ was always a coalition member checked by the ÖVP, who was especially cozy to the USA in the immediate postwar years.

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<sup>45</sup> “The Current Situation in Austria April 1948.”

<sup>46</sup> “The Current Situation in Austria April 1948.”

<sup>47</sup> “Gratitude for US Aid,” 2.4.49, Mappe 341, Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations USA, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>48</sup> The current Situation in Austria: August 1949” Document 4 (Source: NA, RG 263, ORE Report 56-49, 31 Aug 1949, Box 3).

<sup>49</sup> “Opinion on Allied Occupation,” Nov 18, 1945. Mappe 861, Occupying Armies 1 - Austrian Attitudes, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>50</sup> “The Current Situation in Austria April 1948.”

<sup>51</sup> Pick, “Guilty Victim,” 17.

Britain and France fell in line largely to US policy with small differences, alongside ending an occupation that was unprofitable for them, when their troops were better spent achieving their wounded colonial empires outside of Europe. Britain extended a credit of 10,000,000 pounds to Austria by 1947.<sup>52</sup> But by summer 1948, there was unanimous discontent by Austrians about the costs of the occupation, totaling 10.5% of their federal budget,<sup>53</sup> and a note of protest was delivered to the occupying administrations.<sup>54</sup> The *Wiener Zeitung* notes, that 2.1% of the Austrian budget was being used to pay civilian employees of the British Element.<sup>55</sup> But the same article clarifies, “By far the greater part of the occupation costs are met with funds from the British foreign office and the War office, by means of British taxes.”<sup>56</sup>

France would offer no compensation to Austria, but they adopted a strange financial policy straddling well-meaning minimalism and opportunism. In 1948 they had wanted to limit their troops and their associated costs to ease Austria somewhat, ameliorating the Austrians’ in part of a 95,000,000 shilling burden for the second quarter of 1948. This suggestion struck so the ire of the USA that, in a sharply worded confidential note, the US State Department threatened to withdraw Marshall plan funds to France in the same amount.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, in France’s “rather unproductive zone of occupation” Tirol, they had taken rather “arbitrary requisitions”<sup>58</sup> including transformers, hotels, and racehorses.<sup>59</sup> Another French scandal included the recruitment of Austrian teens to the French Foreign Legion without their parents’ permission, evoking cries of kidnapping by Soviet outlets.<sup>60</sup> But on a macro level, France agreed with the US and UK on policy, and despite wanting a

<sup>52</sup> “The situation in Austria, February 1947,” 20.2.1948, Document 1 (Source: NA, RG 263, ORE Report 13/q, 20 Feb 1947, Box 1).

<sup>53</sup> „Forces Summary: Austria: June 1958,“ Mappe 861, Occupying Armies 1 – Austrian Attitudes, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>54</sup> “Britten hoben keine besatzungskosten ab,” 4.6.1948, report from *Wiener Zeitung*, Mappe 1012, Austrian Attitudes (British), Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>55</sup> “The Cost of the British Occupation,” 8.6.1948, report from *Wiener Zeitung*, Mappe 1012, Austrian Attitudes (British), Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>56</sup> “The Cost of the British Occupation,” 1948.

<sup>57</sup> “US Rebukes France for Occupation Costs Gesture” 20.9.1948. Mappe 1012, Austrian Attitudes (France), Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>58</sup> “The situation in Austria, February 1947,” US National Archives, RG 263, ORE Report 13/q, 20 Feb 1947, Box 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Race Horses Requisitioned,” report from *Wiener Zeitung*, June 1948. Mappe 1012, Policy of Occupying Powers (French), Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>60</sup> “The Foreign Legion Again,” June 1. report from *Österreichische Volksstimme*, June 1, 1948. Mappe 1012, Policy of Occupying Powers (French), Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

minimalization of troops, the West was united in not condoning a communist foothold in Austria.

A 1946 report of Austria's representative, Dr. Kleinwächter, on an American visit with President Truman noted that, "[Truman] also stated that it was the US government's view that Austria should be treated as the first victim of Nazi aggression."<sup>61</sup> Of course, that this is being brought up in 1946 reflects a wider doubt and conflict, and recognition of these years as a critical period. The First Victim is then embodied in a later Austrian diplomatic visit to the United States.

During a 1954 visit to the US and Canada by Chancellor Julius Raab (ÖVP), intended to bolster economic relations, the chancellor found himself unwelcomingly peppered by Jewish Organizations with letters and even questions during TV interviews about Jewish restitution. Austrian presses and citizens condemned Jewish organizations (never the United States) for this inhospitality, one saying that Austria would never be able to sustain these innumerable claims, which totaled about \$1,200,000,000: about half of Austria's national wealth.<sup>62</sup> Another dared it the task of the state of Israel to unpoise the atmosphere between themselves and Austria created by these claims. "However weighty the moral right of Jewery, it is not weightier than Austria's standpoint that the Austrian state from which reparations are demanded did not exist at the time of question."<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, as a side effect of the geopolitical goals, and the arguable failure of Austrian denazification, which is to be extrapolated on in the next chapter, the allied interests actively and passively allowed this narrative of the First Victim to persist and integrate into Austrian statecraft.

## Postwar Military Justice

Austria's most-visible sin of the NS period was undoubtedly the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration-camp system, which sprawled central Austria in a network of mines and misery. In these early cases, justice was imposed by the foreign powers rather than by the Austrians themselves. American soldiers liberated the hub concentration camp, Mauthausen, located in Upper Austria, in April 1945, and were horrified by the conditions in the open pit

<sup>61</sup> "Truman's View on Austria," from *Alpenland*, Dec 12, 1946. Mappe 341: Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations - United States, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>62</sup> Neuer Kurier Reports on Jewish Organizations, *Neuer Kurier* Nov 19, 1954. Mappe 508, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>63</sup> Note on Richard Graner Article, *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, Dec 17, 1954. Mappe 508, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

mine. The inmates at Mauthausen were never intended to be rehabilitated, but were political enemies of the Reich, deserving of a painful and humiliating death. Often these intellectuals, Socialists, and Spanish Republicans would die hauling white marble to be used for Nazi edifices in Linz. The population of the camp was international rather than Austrian (who only made up 1% of inmates), and were not overwhelmingly Jewish.<sup>64</sup> The SS considered Mauthausen the harshest penal institution in the Reich by 1941. Its death rate in 1941 was 52%, versus 36%, 19%, 16% at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen respectively.<sup>65</sup> Infamous too would become an incident known as the Muhlviertler Hasenjagt, (Mühl-quarter hare hunt, its name given by the SS), in where about 500 Soviet POWs slated for death attempted a mass escape from Mauthausen into the surrounding upper Austrian forest and village, and all but twelve were killed by the SS, police, and the local civilian population.<sup>66</sup> The event largely forgotten until the 1980s, as the handful of survivors were then later persecuted by the Soviet Union. But the flighted being denounced and shot by the local Mauthausen villagers bars them claiming shield of ignorance of the camp's horrors, or even of being mere Mitläufer.

With their liberation of Mauthausen, it made sense that the liberating Americans would be the main outside party to administer Austria's military postwar justice. The allies would insist the Austrians would do their own trials later and for smaller cases. However, American postwar justice for the masses, rather than the Nazi elite at Nuremberg, was characterized as initially hasty and severe. But by the early 1950s, under American tutelage, quite lenient to any survivors of the first high hurdle. The result of this was being too strict and losing trust while having a weaker long term impact as well. The main case we can look at for Austria is the case of the 1946 Mauthausen Concentration Camp Trials. These trials were, according to Nazi war crimes trial historian Thomas Jardim, not so diligent as the famed Nuremberg and International Military Tribunal, which tried the top Nazis with reams of evidence and top lawyers, and were provided with the resources to stand up to the world's scrutiny.<sup>67</sup> Rather, these trials were for the common man, and in the Case of the Mauthausen Trials, many of the accused viewed the charge as a sham. The sixty-one accused Mauthausen

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<sup>64</sup> Uhl, 70.

<sup>65</sup> Tomaz Jardim, *The Mauthausen Trials: American Military Justice in Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 55.

<sup>66</sup> Matthias Kaltenbrunner, *Flucht aus dem Todesblock: Der Massenausbruch sowjetischer Offiziere aus dem Block 20 des KZ Mauthausen und die „Mühlviertler Hasenjagd.“* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Jardim, *The Mauthausen Trials*, 4.

personnel were a wide swath of camp workers: the arbitrary minority who had failed to escape the net. All were deemed guilty of an unprecedented charge: “participating in a common design to commit war crimes.”

An observer to the trials, Englishman Lieut.-Colonel H. Wade, recorded the confusion of the accused in a report to the United Nations War Crimes Commission:

Before being called on to plead, the prisoners were asked if they understood the charge. Defence counsel said that they did not, as the term "common design" (see above) was obscure and incapable of definition, and no such crime was known to exist. The Prosecution observed, on the other hand, that the term "common design" was merely descriptive, and needed no legal definition.<sup>68</sup>

Through the ‘common design’ charge, a supply manager was as guilty as a commandant since they all took part in the killing machine. Most of the accused were not particularly high ranking Nazis, unlike Nuremberg. The trial outcome had an unusually high execution-rate atop its 100% guilty ruling, sentencing some four fifths of the guilty to hang. However, the twelve Mauthausen defendants who had not been executed were freed by 1952.<sup>69</sup>

Against this background, the trials held by Austria against Austrians in the postwar years were lenient. 130,000 people were investigated for war crimes; of these 23,000 were tried, 13,600 found guilty, 43 sentenced to death, and 30 had that sentence carried out. This was fewer than Denmark.<sup>70</sup> The allies could have pushed against this but were unzealous or ineffective. And with a slow start to denazification, many civilian Nazis only being penalized and removed from their posts in a 1947 law, efforts to convince Austria of its guilt in this shortening critical period were running out of time.

### **III The Austrians: Coalition, treaty, and betrayal**

The foreign powers took an overseeing role, but political agency was returned to Austrian voters and institutions within the first months and years. The occupation period was categorized by cooperation at first between all three anti-fascist Austrian parties from 1945-1949 (ÖVP SPÖ and KPÖ), and later by the two traditional Austrian parties, the ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei, the People’s Party) and SPÖ (Sozialistische Partei

<sup>68</sup> H. Wade, “Notes on Visits to Trials at Nuremberg and Dachau,” *United Nations war Crimes Commission*, April 12, 1946, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Jardim, *The Mauthausen Trials*, 200.

<sup>70</sup> Judt, “The Past is Another Country,” 45.

Oesterreichs, Social Democrats). Their highest goal was a shared one: Foreign Minister Gruber (ÖVP) would remark in 1947 that “Austria had no more urgent desire than to terminate, by the early conclusion of a treaty, the occupation which is a mockery of the Moscow Declaration.”<sup>71</sup> The parties would enter a stable coalition which would categorize Austria’s prosperity throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, their stability does not mean that cloak and dagger fighting and embarrassing scandals between them on the matter of Nazis did not occur. The following sections provide a short illustration of the goals and impact of each party in the Occupation period, and how their policy or interests related to the idea of building an Austrian narrative that included is being the First Victim of Nazi aggression. The communists were the true inheritors of the resistance, as per Judt and Uhl, but were rarely appreciated by the population as such. Meanwhile the far-right VdU positioned itself to be a representative for previous Nazis. The following section uses archival documents to illustrate how each of the four parties of note adapted the victim theory to serve their needs in this period. Later in the chapter, denazification, Anti-Semitism, and restitution are discussed.

### **ÖVP: The Opportunist**

The ÖVP was the further right of the central parties, and predictably the party on the coziest terms with the US-led anti-communist West powers, especially before criticism on this caught up with them in late 1947. The ÖVP had won a decisive victory in the 1945 elections, enough to govern alone with two parliamentary seats above majority, but Chancellor Figl welcomed a three-party coalition with the Socialists and Communists (who with 5% of the vote, only received one cabinet position). Visible in the ÖVPs positioning is an elevation of the First Victim view. They also defend against being viewed as the West’s lackey, and contended that their alignment with the West, and receiving of Marshall funding, and the discouragement of communism, were only undertaken as part of Austria’s best interest. The ÖVP would be the major coalition for decades, as normal for a country whose countryside was dominantly conservative with socialism existing in the cities. However, the ÖVP was not without its allegations or scandals.

Public opinion was worth bringing up in the presses. The *Wiener Tageszeitung* (Vienna daily paper, aligned with the ÖVP) reported of a speech by foreign minister Karl

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<sup>71</sup> “Foreign Relations and Internal Administration,” Sept 9, 1947. Mappe 1034. Policy of Occupying powers- Policy towards Austria as a whole, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

Gruber in September 1947, which bespeaks the criticism that the party faced as well as their logistical strategy:

Allegations that the USA is pursuing certain political aims in Austria are completely unfounded. The US representatives had hitherto scrupulously refrained from influencing Austrian politics... On the other hand, it is obvious that it is in accordance with the genuine interests of US security, as it is with the genuine interests of Austrian democracy, to prevent a forcible expansion of communism....The Austrian people have no more urgent desire but to terminate, by the early conclusion of a treaty, the occupation which is a mockery of the Moscow Declaration. But we should not dream of securing this treaty by acceding to every unjust demand presented to us.<sup>72</sup>

Appearing saving face to the Austrian population took a backseat in ÖVP priorities after minor Nazis were allowed to vote. As the voting limits on former Nazis expired in 1948, in time for the second elections, a June 1948 Forces Summary remarks, "It will be interesting to observe the "open wooing" of this block of nearly half a million."<sup>73</sup> But the wooing of Nazis was more public and egregious than many expected. In a country where the main parties were so evenly matched, the stakes were high. In their keen competition for Nazi votes, the ÖVP committed an embarrassing fatuity, one which the Soviets were especially damning of. One May 28, 1949, in Oberweis, a meeting occurred between representatives of the ÖVP, headed by Chancellor Raab, and a group of leading Austrian former Nazis, SS, and SA (including the secretary to Ernst Kaltenbrunner, successor to Reinhard Heydrich, one of Austria's major perpetrators of the Holocaust). Aim being to ascertain how the ÖVP stood with this voting block and which principles former Nazis would find agreeable. When news of the meeting broke unexpectedly to the press, and the Nazis were arrested, the ÖVP was forced to put on the best face they could. Raab took "no hesitation in confirming that he was authorized to conduct negotiations at broadening the electoral base of the Peoples Party."<sup>74</sup> Apologizing would win them little favor with their detractors, nor their intended quarry, and so they showed no humility. The SPÖ pounced on the affair, and in response the ÖVP accused them of splitting Austria into 'Austrians vs Nazis.'<sup>75</sup> The infraction failed to convince

<sup>72</sup>"Foreign Relations and Internal Administration," Gruber speech in *Wiener Tageszeitung*, 2.9.1947, Mappe 341: Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations- Attitude to other countries- United States. Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>73</sup> "Forces Summary June 1948." Mappe 30, Denazification and War Crimes - War Criminal Trials – Laws, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>74</sup> "The extent of a revival of Neo-Nazi activities in Austria," 25, 2, 1950, Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>75</sup> "Austria Forces Summary July 1949," Mappe 844, Nazi and other subversive activities - Foreign office papers, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

the SPÖ leave the coalition, though they warned their partners against attempting any more Nazi rapprochement--<sup>76</sup> an area where the SPÖ also boasted a shameful record.

### **SPÖ: The Third Way**

The Social democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) was the junior coalition partner from 1945. For fear of alienating most of its voting base, it placed its heroism not on its resistance during Nazi occupation, but on viewing itself as the shrewdest path away from the tyranny of Great Powers. And arguably, the foreign entanglement which had gotten Austria into its past troubles. Their party publicity was designed to highlight the universality of the party in the sense of international harmony, exchange of ideas and standardization of working hours and wages, rather than the internationalization of labor in the Marxian sense. These aims can be compared with the narrower ‘our Austria’ of the People’s Party.<sup>77</sup> Despite being the further left of the traditional two parties, the SPÖ was also a suitor of the reinfranchised Mitläufer in 1949, and that done, even supported the creation of a banned far-right party to carve away the ÖVP electoral lead.

Anti-Nazi pandering by the SPÖ in 1945 had been vociferous—A voter pamphlet from pre the first 1945 election titled “We are all responsible!” was pitiless. It told an account of the author, who a prominent SPÖer had been in exile in Switzerland, and was approached in the postwar by a former Nazi who expected his sympathy. The former Nazi claimed they had always wanted the best for their families and their country, claimed to be against the war, and despite it, suffered and lost everything. This idea of the fellow suffering by the war against the Nazis, rather than the Nazis themselves, is not lost on the author. He accuses the approacher of claiming to want one thing (peace) and then doing everything in his power against it (joining the Nazis). And still, wanting sympathy as the victim! And had Hitler won the war, he would still have his apartment and he wouldn’t be sorry right now. “We are all responsible—think of that when you go to vote! -SPÖ”<sup>78</sup> ends the four-sided leaflet, appearing to emphasize that, to show greater understanding for and to undo the wrongs of fellow-traveling, would be to vote for the SPÖ.

<sup>76</sup> “Forces Summary July 1949,” Mappe 30, Denazification and War Crimes - War Criminal Trials – Laws, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>77</sup> USFET/G)2 WIS No. 40 18.4.46, Mappe 1442, Political Trends - Socialists, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>78</sup> “Wir Alle sind Verantwortlich!” 1945, Mappe 1442, Political Trends - Socialists, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

But by 1949 this reveling in anti-fascist principles had changed. The SPÖ's courting of the Mitläufer in media was more obvious than that of the ÖVPS, perhaps out of necessity due to the ideological disadvantage as a further left party. Included here is the translated text of a 1949 flyer from the SPÖ. Note the rhetorical appeals:

"A question of conscience to every former National Socialist [Nazi]!

If you were ever really and out of honest conviction a National Socialist, then remember: Who stood by your side in 1934 and in the years 33-38, and who even then threw you into prison and deprived you and your family of bread out of pure envy of competition and position and personal hatred? Why did we become National Socialists at that time? First and foremost, because we rejected the treason of the Dollfuß system. Today, the same people are starting the same system all over again in a different form. Let us look at Germany, where the same black forces are at work to dismember the German people and divide it up separately...Who votes for the ÖVP, has dishonorably forgotten his past!<sup>79</sup>

The appeal of comradeship between the Social Democrats and the Nazis in the period of Austro-Fascism, in which the parties were both outlawed by the Dollfuss regime, is bewildering. The use of 'we' as putting the Socialists and the Nazis in the same victim group under Dollfuss, whose inheritor the ÖVP, was again a threat to freedom in Austria. The comparison is drawn to the German Nationalists' ideal big brother to the north, both as a role model of what should be in Austria, but also of what has gone wrong under a 'black' Christian social government in Germany. Namely, partition. For important too to the remaining National Socialists, and a high goal of all parties, was that Austria never meet the cleaver which befell occupied Germany in 1949. The "has dishonorably forgotten his past" as a call to action, reinforcing that a Nazi past should be remembered with pride, is equally bizarre. The election results would yield in this respect better than expected for the centerleft SPÖ.

Another scandal tarnished the SPÖ's relation to anti-fascism. Prior to the VdU (the main Neo—Nazi party, to be founded 1949), a different Neo-Nazi party was proposed and subsequently banned. The Verfassungstreue Vereinigung (Association of Austrians loyal to the Constitution) had fourth party aspirations, but was found to have Neo-Nazi ideology and was headed by former Nazis. It had the strategic blessing of Oskar Helmer, the Socialist Minister of the Interior, who allowed the party, sure that it would carve more away from the ÖVP vote than of his own party. But ultimately, with its leaders being former Nazis, it was

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<sup>79</sup> "Gewissensfrage an jeden ehemaligen Nationalsozialisten!" 1949 SPÖ flyer. *Dokumentationsarchiv.at* [http://www.dokumentationsarchiv.at/SPOE/1949\\_Gewissensfrage.htm](http://www.dokumentationsarchiv.at/SPOE/1949_Gewissensfrage.htm)

forbidden (since former Nazis could not run for election as part of Law 25). Further proof of Nazi ideology was in its main organ *Alpenländische Heimatruf*. Communist press seized upon this opportunity over their socialist rivals as heartily as had the Socialists to the ÖVP for the Oberweis Nazi meeting. And the ÖVP readily took its vengeance on the SPÖ too. To his embarrassment, Minister Helmar would have to ultimately ban the party he had authorized.<sup>80</sup> But it was a mere setback to the Nazi political base: another Neo-Nazi faction would form in 1949, and this one just careful (or lucky) enough to stay inside the law.

### **KPÖ: Inheritors of the True Resistance**

While the Communists had struck a heroic tone in the postwar, their barely managing 5% of the vote in the first November 1945 elections was a surprise to all. However, the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) were included in this first 1945 coalition government anyway. It was a superficially generous -albeit strategic- gesture by the ÖVP. Who with their absolute majority in 1945, needed not even include the SPÖ (which, wise not to exclude some 40% of Austrians in a national rebuilding effort, they also did). The KPÖ had little hope of improving their numbers as the Mitläufer returned to the electorate in 1949, and they would naturally be removed from the coalition, though they would maintain control of a few seats in parliament until 1959. Unlike all other parties, they made no overt courting of the former Nazis. In perception and deed, they stayed a true opposition party, and this would contribute to their downfall.

KPÖ policy focused mostly on independence from foreign entanglements, while taking a suspicious view towards the Western powers' relationship with the dominant ÖVP. A piece published in *Oesterreichischer Volkstimme* (communist) by Deputy Ernst Fischer, the key communist member of the provisional government and parliament until 1959, criticized the reliance on American credits at the expense of political tutelage, renounced anti-Soviet agitation, and rallied against the idea of joining either block, Bulwarkism.<sup>81</sup> The exit of the main parties from the league of concentration camp survivors, to lend their supportive imagery to veterans' memorialization, left only the communists with the mantle of resistor.

<sup>80</sup> "Forces Summary Austria October 1948," Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>81</sup> "Fischer's Pleas for an Independent Foreign Policy," Mappe 341: Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations- Attitude to other countries- United States. Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

But with only 5% of the vote, they were of minimal consequence, and the acerbic Communist press often disregarded as fringe.

### **VdU: Uncomfortably Brown**

While the ÖVP and SPÖ jockeyed over the votes of the lesser Nazis, a browner party had formed in the short advance of the 1949 elections, the VdU: The *Verband der Unabhängigen*, or Association of Independents. It would learn from the lessons of the banned *Verfassungstreue Vereinigung* to become the main Neo-Nazi part in Austria, until the VdU metamorphized further in 1955 to become the FPÖ.

The VdU was headquartered in the Salzkammergut in Western Austria.<sup>82</sup> This picturesque mountain region is reminiscent of the never actualized Nazi *Alpenfestung* plan (alpine redoubt) suggested by Heinrich Himmler and propagandized by Goebbels in the war's final months, which schemed a fictitious Nazi stronghold enduring in the alps. The VdU paper "Die Neue Front" was the "central organ of the Neo-fascist movement in the Western Occupation zones of Austria," and had appeared in Salzburg under US license in March 1949, some seven months before the big elections. It featured Anti-Semitic cartoons and appealed to Pan-Germanist sentiment, according to the Americans, who kept careful watch on it and several times suspended it several times in penalty.<sup>83</sup>

Typical of a small opposition party, the VdU made demands that were intended to be heard by voters rather than heeded by powers. Among these were demanding that the Allies "renounce occupation costs, finance buildings for their own people, pay compensation for the occupation damages, stop their arrogant propaganda, and drop interference with Austria's internal politics and policy."<sup>84</sup> A report on Neo Nazi Revivalism in Austria reinforced that the VdU, while an advocate for unrepentant former Nazis, was not a movement to revive the Third Reich. Instead, "just as the Nazis joined the party for the first time for reasons of political expediency, personal advancement, or professional security, they are now willing to vote for any party which will bring them the greatest redress for their various grievances."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> 'The salt domain.' A picturesque geographical redoubt, spiked with mountains and glacial lakes, prized for its resorts and nature. It is located in central-western Austria, including parts of Upper Austria and Salzburg (US Zone), and Styria (UK Zone).

<sup>83</sup> "New Periodical in US Zone," 11.3.1949, Mappe 506, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>84</sup> "Die Neue Front" 23.8.52.

<sup>85</sup> "The extent of a revival of Neo-Nazi activities in Austria." 25, 2, 1950, Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

The VdU took some 11.6% of the total votes in 1949, a decisive chunk when the main parties were so close. Surprisingly, the SPÖ and ÖVP lost similar ground in the 1949 elections, down about 6% each.<sup>86</sup> With it, the ÖVP had lost their absolute majority of 1945 and entered into coalition with just the SPÖ, excluding at last the Communists who had been previously allowed one cabinet post in 1945. The SPÖ and ÖVP losing similar amount to the VdU was unexpected, as the SPÖ had predicted it had less to lose than the ÖVP to a right-wing party, suggesting that the SPÖ's effort to retain Nazi perhaps had some merit. While a coalition with the tiny VdU would give the leading ÖVP more parliamentary seats, such a coalition with the Austrian Neo-Nazi party would be unthinkable in the postwar, until the SPÖ, long in the shadow of their slightly larger conservative rival, controversially dared it in 1983.<sup>87</sup>

## Denazification

Unlike in West Germany where Denazification was administered by the Allies, the Austrian state was ordered by the Allied Council in February 1946 to carry out Denazification themselves.<sup>88</sup> The intricate problem was challenged by a simple solution. Nazis in Austria would be broken into Greater and Lesser Nazis: a system proposed by the Austrians and critiqued by just about every politician, journalist, or occupying power. This two-grade system lacked the individual treatment every accused wishes. It paralleled the compromise that needed to be made, for example, with ideal postwar justice like at Nuremberg and the IMT (leading Nazis had the best resources and legal counsel) versus the relative compromises in jurisprudence made at the Mauthausen Trials by the Americans for these smaller war criminals. The Austrian justice administration did not have the resources for a careful character analysis of each of the half million people affected. And even so, this law applied only to actual registered NSDAP members. One could pale to consider how many people thought and acted just as Nazi, but received not an iota of sanction since they had not registered politically. Deliberations on the so-called National Socialist law took nearly two years, with the Allies eventually making some 50 amendments, which tightened the net and

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<sup>86</sup> "Nationalratswahl vom 9. Oktober 1949," *Bundesministerium Inneres*.  
[https://www.bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl\\_1949/start.aspx](https://www.bmi.gv.at/412/Nationalratswahlen/Nationalratswahl_1949/start.aspx)

<sup>87</sup> "Regierungen seit 1945," *Bundeskanzleramt*.  
<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/bundeskanzleramt/geschichte/regierungen-seit-1945.html>

<sup>88</sup> "Report On The Internal Affairs Directorate On The Process Of Denazification," Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

intensified punishments.<sup>89</sup> Former NSDAPs lived in insecurity about their futures and feared to start investing in their lives and homes. The British and the Americans by fall 1946, according to the British, were ready to waive their discontent over the proposed denazification law just so that the process could begin, and were beleaguered by the usual Soviet objections: “[Soviet] stubbornness is hard to understand, since it has long been apparent that sabotage of Denazification is part of Russian strategy to perpetuate political unrest.”<sup>90</sup> No more viable solution being forged, the two-grade system was eventually promulgated in February 1947. Though, this nearly two-year delay in ratification, was surely a factor hampering denazification efforts itself.

**The breakdown of in the ‘Law 25’ National Socialist Law is as follows:**

**Greater Nazis:** (Belasten) All war criminals, SS, SA, Gestapo, all members of associated organizations with a rank of Untersturmführer or higher, convicted writers and businessmen.

Must pay an additional 20% “atonement tax” on income and assets until May 1950. They cannot ever stand for election, cannot vote until 1950. Pensions nullified, and they may have their homes taken away.

**Lesser Nazis:** (Minderbelasten) All others. They paid a 10% additional tax, may vote and join parties as of 1948, but cannot be elected. Students from both categories are excluded from continuing their education until 1950 (to many protests). Mitläufer were part of this *Minderbelasten* category.<sup>91</sup>

The final bill version was submitted by the ÖVP-SPÖ-KPÖ coalition, deliberated and edited finally approved by the Allies.

And so, Austria was to denazify itself under the four powers. The Austrian Nazi underground in the immediate postwar years was not deemed a threat to societal *stability*, but to societal *direction*. After about two years the *Werewolves* had lost their subversive moonlight, and had become part of the political system as mere voters. A 1950 report

<sup>89</sup> “Austrian Purge Speeded,” *Reuters*. Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>90</sup> HQ/USFET/WIS/G-2 No. 66 Oct 18, 1946, Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>91</sup> “Austrian Nazis’ Punishment,” Feb 19, 1947, Mappe 54, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

summarizes how actual guerilla Nazi groups were by 1948 insignificant threats, but their political normalization of National Socialist beliefs was being integrated into the normal political channels in the coming years.

The general impression gained from the evidence available is that the extent of Neo-Nazi activity which can be definitely proven is not very great. The only important subversive groups were uncovered as early as the end of 1947, and even in this case there was little evidence of any large-scale organizational planning. There are, however, a number of rather dangerous Nazi personalities... who hover in the background of the People's Party [ÖVP] and the Association of Independents [VDU] in hope of finding eventual rehabilitation and scope for their political activities in either of those two parties.<sup>92</sup>

Denazification was seldom as didactic as holding classes on 'how not to be a Nazi,' but, as seen through the law, rather firing party members from their positions of power. A simply dealt with concern by this logic then, was that of teachers. Rather than a spirited discussion and intensity of judging individuals' merit, it was simple enough to demand the ousting of teachers who had been party members. In the immediate postwar there were too few educators, with some Nazi affiliated ones having to stay in their posts until a replacement could be secured. And with inflation in the Austrians schilling high alongside an increasing cost of living, teachers had a difficult negotiating position. With the trickle of POWs and returnees becoming a stream a few years post-war, Austria surprisingly found itself with a glut of school teachers. But in certain areas, the removal of Nazi teachers was sloth, causing the Allies to complain later in 1947.

Austrian collegiate students suffered the same as their adult instructors. While the original law said affected persons 'might' be excluded from study, it had been amended at the behest of the Soviets in January to 'must.' In February 1947, 1,500 students were thrown out of the University of Vienna for their Nazi affiliation, and this would effect about 20% of university students nationwide. Former Nazis would remain barred from higher education until April 30, 1950.<sup>93</sup> Higher education in Austria was no bastions of progressivism: A 1946 fight, which started at University of Vienna by students and organized workers after heading the students jeered at concentration camp survivors, involved 30 people, killing one.<sup>94</sup> Another incident

<sup>92</sup> "The Extent Of A Revival Of Neo-Nazi Activities In Austria," 25, 2, 1950, Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>93</sup> USFET/G-2/WIS No. 2 28.2.47. Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>94</sup> "Former Nazis in Austria: An Intractable Problem," Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

known as the living Swastika Incident saw 14 students acquitted, and so to came an acquittal for a former Hitler Youth who disseminated Nazi propaganda (the mandatory 5-year minimum imprisonment for this being acknowledged even by the SPÖ as too harsh for young people).<sup>95</sup> The barring of Nazi students elicited huge outcry in Austrian presses, but no change was permitted by the Allied Council—the USSR representative would have to agree to it. The Soviet stubbornness on the case of the Austrian Student is unusual. In the Russian occupied zone of Germany, with order 201 of Marshall Sokolowski, the Mitlaufer in East Germany had gone through a “Säuberungsprozess,” a cleaning process, and minor Nazis were allowed back to their positions by late 1947. In the rest of Germany, those born after 1913-1919 were immune to Nazi repercussions, and there was no barrier to young former fascists in Italy.<sup>96</sup>

Chancellor Figl (ÖVP) did not wish to condemn forever the less guilty, and refused to accept responsibility for the amendments to the new Denazification law by the allied council in January 1947. The *Kleine Volkblatt*, the daily paper of the ÖVP, tried to needle the SPÖ for supporting the law as being contra the working class they were meant to protect. “The real, big Nazi criminals either fled in time or committed suicide. Well-to-do Nazis rarely have been compelled to make compensation, while the less implicated, the Mitläufer, like tramway and municipal employees, really have lost everything.”<sup>97</sup> The Communist Dr. Fischer was disturbed by some acquittals by the People’s Court of those who shot the Mauthausen ‘Hasenjagd’ KZ inmates, since they were under orders of the SS. “What is the reason to applying fines to the hangers-on when the seriously guilty are left unmolested?”<sup>98</sup> wondered Fischer in a sentiment echoed by many. The Austrian Institute for Political and Economic Research conducted an interesting study on attitude towards Law 25: 90% of the ÖVP, 73.6 of the SPÖ, and 57.5% of the KPÖ replied they were in favor of a conciliator policy towards National Socialists. The abolition of the law was favored by 45% of ÖVP, and 20% of SPÖ voters.<sup>99</sup> Despite the wording being suggested by their own government, it seemed the law

<sup>95</sup> “Living Swastika Incident: Suspension of Students Demanded,” Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>96</sup> “Unerfüllte Hoffnung auf Weihnachtssamnestie,” *Wiener Zeitung*, Dec 21, 1947. Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>97</sup> “Justice or arbitrary action?” *Das kleine Volksblatt*, June 1946, Mappe 844, Nazi & Other Subversive Activities, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>98</sup> “Denazification: Mauthausen Camp Case Scandalous,” *Österreichische Volkstimme*, Dec. 7 1946, Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>99</sup> “Electorate’s Views on Denazification Law,” October 47. Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

\*It is unclear if this are just percents in Styria, or all of Austria.

was popular with no one. Perhaps then, popularity of a denazification law is an impossible goal.

There was varying disagreement in how pleased the Allies were with Austria's efforts to implement their denazification themselves. A Soviet comment on an allied report to the Austrian government, which the other three elements did not join, remarks, "The Austrian government did not conclude its work on Denazification by that date and concluded to do it slowly and unsatisfactorily...it is proposed that the Austrian government take decisive steps to speed up the Austrian State and economic organs and the punishment of Nazi criminals and war criminals, so as to complete its work in the very nearest future."<sup>100</sup>

Austrian governing bodies were against a hard denazification for the sake of economic prosperity and social cohesion. The Western allies demanded it and the Austrians were forced to go along, and the Soviet demands at a harsh denazification (while relaxing it in comparably guilty Soviet Occupied Zone in eastern Germany) further slowed down the ratification of the law to quite late in this critical memory shaping period of 1945-1948. As we will further explore, while Nazi party members were purged from most offices, many individuals in the Austrian population and governance were also not washed of these beliefs, chief among them their disfavor towards Jews.

## **The Jewish Question – Antisemitism and Restitution**

Naturally Anti-Semitism in central Europe had no miraculous vanishing with the Third Reich's end. The pre-war attitude towards Jews in Austria was at least as Anti-Semitic as in Germany, and not dissimilar afterwards.<sup>101</sup> In 1945, only 28% of Austrians favored Jewish returns.<sup>102</sup>

Anti-Semitism in Austria was made no secret by the Jewish press. "Vienna, now as before, is the center of the ugliest and most treacherous anti-Semitism. It is not considered wise now to talk about it, but it is applied in practice. Anti-Semitism is not even asleep, it has

<sup>100</sup> "Report of the Internal Affairs Directorate on the Progress of Denazification," Section A: Introduction. 1947. Mappe 54, Denazification, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>101</sup> Heidmarie Uhl, "The Politics of Memory: Austria's Perception of the Second World War and National Socialist Period" in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 64.

<sup>102</sup> Edwin Herzstein, "The Present State of the Waldheim Affair: Second Thoughts and New Directions," in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 118.

merely become more careful and more poisonous,” wrote the Vienna Jewish organ in June 1946. “Morale in Austria is lower than ever and people are bitter, dejected, and aimless,” said Ira A. Hirschman in the *New York Times*, as special inspector general of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Speaking as a private citizen, he added that he “questioned Austria’s ability to control a vengeful population with considerable Nazi elements.”<sup>103</sup> As this sentiment was circulated embarrassingly in the World presses, Austrian policy makers were resolute in denying it, or variously hinted it was done out of greed for reparation funds. While anti-Semitism was varying evidence in the private sphere, and arguably in certain local institutions, there were no large scale pogroms in Austria as seen in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, it seems the Jews no longer found Austria a welcoming place to task themselves with this experiment.

Chancellor Figl (ÖVP) responded to these rising allegations in the world press that Austria remained an Anti-Semitic country.<sup>104</sup> He would later defend himself to a Shanghai paper. The Chinese city found itself the refuge of a distinct community of over 17,000 Austrian and German Jews, as Dr. Ho Feng Shan of the Chinese Consul in Vienna was one of the last to give the Jew visas out of Austria.<sup>105</sup> Figl responded that anti-Semitism was no problem in Austria, and that the Jews would be welcomed back and helped to the best of their ability. He responded to their correspondent, “There was no longer any Jewish problem in Austria. It would be foolish to assert that Nazi propaganda had not elicited some response from some Austrians in this respect [anti-semitism], but this was not astonishing in view of the means employed. However, those victims of propaganda were soon cured....”<sup>106</sup> The suggestion of being ‘cured’ months after the Reich’s fall is revealed as mere talk the further examined this problem. In another article in the *Wiener Zeitung*, Figl appeals to the current Jewery, “I shall support all endeavors.... to combat any remnants of anti-Semitism. On the other hand, I call upon the Jews of Austria not to make the present Austrian democratic government responsible for their sufferings during that national socialist period, and not to term themselves alien elements, but as good Austrians to help in the reconstruction of a

<sup>103</sup> “Austrian Attacks on Jews Forecast,” *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 1947, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>104</sup> “Austrian Anti-Semitism denied by the Chancellor,” *Wiener Zeitung*, Dec 30 1946. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>105</sup> “German and Austrian Jewish Refugees in Shanghai,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-and-austrian-jewish-refugees-in-shanghai>

<sup>106</sup> “Anti-Semitism dead in Austria” *RAVAG*, May 10, 1947. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

common fatherland.”<sup>107</sup> The plea for gracious Jews to help rebuild Austria now that it needed them cannot help but feel a bit imperious: many Jews had tried to be good Austrians before the war and had been rewarded with deportation.

Vienna Mayor Theodor Körner (SPÖ) responded to allegations of anti-Semitism in Vienna impatiently.

I often think that some of these stories are part of a planned campaign....the allegation that only the occupation troops prevent further excesses was either pure nonsense or intentional calumny. Austrian Jews returning from prisons, concentration camps, or abroad were treated just as citizens from other denominations. Their restitution claims were recognized and given preferential treatment... Viktor Adler and Otto Bauer had been leaders of the Party which now held a leading position in the Vienna administration. It was foolish to think that such a party could harbour anti-Semitism.”<sup>108</sup>

Körner’s subtle blame placing away from the SPÖ when the ÖVP was a far easier target was perhaps predicated by the leader of Parliament, self-proclaimed Anti-Semite Leopold Kunschak (ÖVP), who had been a deep friend of the (in)famous Viennese mayor Karl Lueger.<sup>109</sup> A notice by the British Foreign Office remarks that Austrian Nazi ‘diehards’ seemed to have found encouragement in Kunschak’s retention, and his toleration by the Allied Powers due to his parliamentary skill. The note then considers “it may seem advisable to consider a policy which, by tolerating anti-Semitism in high places, encourages it and other Nazi ideas among the mass of the Austrian people.”<sup>110</sup> The Soviets would also accuse the slackness of Denazification in Austria as attributable to the hands-free nature of the Western element, which had trickled down to the government.

The hundreds of thousands of displaced persons living in DP camps in Austria were viewed as an unwelcome threat to reestablishing a status quo, and Jews, often from Poland or Romania rather than Austria, were numerous among them. By October 1946 there about a

<sup>107</sup> “Austrian Anti-Semitism denied by the Chancellor,” *Wiener Zeitung*, Dec 30 1946. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>108</sup> “Anti-Semitism denied by Bürgermeister,” *Wiener Zeitung*, 9, Feb, 1947. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>109</sup> Karl Lueger (1844-1910), Christian Social Mayor of Vienna, credited with modernizing the city. His anti-Semitism was virulent, and he is sometimes viewed as a model for Hitler.

<sup>110</sup> USFET/G-2/WIS No. 3621.3.26 Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

quarter million DPs in the US Zone of occupation alone, about 30,000 of them Jews.<sup>111 112</sup> Refugee camps were viewed by Austrians as harbors for criminals and angry drifters with nothing to lose. They were no concentration camps and left unguarded, with the usually unemployed and hungry inhabitants able to leave at any time for friends or mischief. The ration situations inside were often dire.<sup>113</sup> Bombing attempts at a British headquarters, a aborted train bombing, and the alleged kidnapping of a Baron's daughter,<sup>114</sup> believed to be instigated by Jews and mutinous DPs, further stoked an Austrian hysteria against the transient masses.<sup>115</sup> Jewish organizations claimed their folks played no part in these cases, and that their rations from allied gifts allowed the Jews to sustain a meek existence while they waited for transport.<sup>116</sup>

An additional problem was that Austrian Jews in DP camps were thrown in with their abusers. The head of the international committee for Jewish Concentration Camp Inmates and Refugees, Hr. Teichholz, "The 'We are victims of fascism whilst the majority of other displaced person are our torturers.'" Teichholz also remarked that of the Jews staying in Austria at that moment, they only constituted 5% of the displaced people in Austria.<sup>117</sup>

With the Allies seemingly sated on their 1947 Denazification law, the Austrians tried to lessen the burden on themselves through their own legislature. A proposed 1950 amendment to the Restitution laws which aimed to help the Aryan recipients of Jewish property prompted uproar in the Viennese Jewish community. The Aryan acquirer would be allowed to keep the property if the Jewish owner could be proven to have been in debt, or if the acquirer could prove he had made considerable investments. A Vienna paper suggested that the Jews would have their revenge on the bill by using their foreign influence to halt

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<sup>111</sup> "Jews and/or DPs suspected to be originators of recent bomb outrages and threats," September 1950, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>112</sup> HQ/USFET/S.2/WIS No 065. Oct 10 1946, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>113</sup> 1520 W.S PSI Div No 65, Oct 14 1946, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>114</sup> 1520 W.S PSI Div No 65.

<sup>115</sup> "Jews and/or DPs suspected to be originators of recent bomb outrages and threats," 1947. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>116</sup> "Jewish refugees: Vienna Board's Bulletin," Dec 31, 1946, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>117</sup> "Views of the Jewish DPs in Austria," *Neues Oesterrich*, Jan, 1947. Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

Marshall Plan allocation to Austria.<sup>118</sup> Fortunately this amendment was unanimously quashed by the Four Powers.

The Austrians who feared the Jews would stay need not have worried: by 1949, only 11,000 did.<sup>119</sup> In most cases, Jews waited for no second lesson on the hospitality of Austrian neighbors, and Austria served only as a stop-over from the East to Palestine. Most experts were convinced that Jewish flight from Eastern Europe and Austria was motivated by fear than a desire to build a Zionist state.<sup>120</sup> But their fear is evidenced by their refusing to settle in Austria, and without settling, they would not be permitted to regain their homes or lost property—arduous enough a procedure as it was. So while minimal retribution legislature was created, the vast majority of Austrian victims could claim no benefit from it. Figl's sentiment that through the cathartic cataclysm of the Reich's end, 1946 Austria had been cured of what caused the Jews to flee, was mere fantasy.

In essence, the 1940s and 50s allowed most institutions in Austria moderate success in their goals. Assuming the USSR's goal was not to convert Austria to communism, but to extract some economic recompense and have a safe buffer state, this was largely achieved by the plunder of the occupied zone and establishment of neutrality in 1955. The United States expended Marshall plan funds, and kept Austria wealthy enough that socialism became no appealing alternative. Both parties failed to envelop Austria into the Warsaw pact or NATO, but that would only be an unexpected bonus to either foreign policy. Austria's interest as avoiding the brunt of reparations, an indefinite occupation, through positioning themselves as victims was also achieved. Achieved too for the first time was Austria's other imperative goal that had failed in 1918 and 1938: to construct a national identity of Austria, this time as guiltless non-Germans through the Opferthesis. Rid of the chains which now adorned the updated Austrian Coat of Arms eagle in their broken form, Vienna spent the decades of the Cold War as a diplomatic nucleus. Austria punched well above its weight class in international affairs, hosted prestigious institutions such as the United Nations, brilliant political acrobats such as Karl Renner and Bruno Kreisky, and a certain controversial UN

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<sup>118</sup> "Forces Summary for September 1950," September 1950, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

<sup>119</sup> Herzstein, "The Present State of the Waldheim Affair," 118.

<sup>120</sup> "Jewish Refugees in Vienna," August 1946, Mappe 805, Jews, Foreign Office General Zone, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

secretary General Kurt Waldheim. One who in 1986, would tempt the world to Vienna's stage, and caused the world to aim its interrogator's spotlight upon Hitler's First Victim.

## IV The Waldheim Affair and Contemporary Debates

This chapter serves to underline the foundations poured in the 1940s, as expressed in the previous two chapters, with the scandals in Austria surrounding its role in WWII. The Waldheim Affair is chronicled as Austria's main case due to its hubristic scale, though there were other, smaller and earlier tests of Austria's conviction to victimdom. Also examined and compared are the other Germanies: West Germany as the inheritor of the fascist state, and while always further right than the GDR, had been internationally 'forced' to come to terms with itself. In East Germany, a fallacy as egregious as Austrias had been nurtured by the Soviet Union, claiming East Germany as the inheritors of anti-fascist Germans and heaping responsibility on the West. Similarly to Austria, the GDR was no centuries old nation-state, and searched to build a 20th century identity separate from Germany. This identity was constructed on the idea of a worker and partisan and thus, also unapproachable for Nazi crimes due to their ardent anti-fascist work in the present. But this was neither convincing domestically nor abroad.

### The Waldheim Affair

Kurt Waldheim would title his January 1986 memoir, "In the Eye of the Storm." It lined the windows of Vienna bookshops as the presidential campaign of the Austrian high statesman commenced in 1986. Little did he expect the newest storm that was to envelop his country-- its eye centered upon himself.

Kurt Waldheim was born in 1918 outside Vienna, to a middle-class catholic family headed by a Czech schoolmaster Wenzel Watzlawick, who Germanified the family name then in 1918.<sup>121</sup> Waldheim married fellow law student Elisabeth "Sissi" Waldheim (nee Ritschel, 1922-2017) in 1944. Elisabeth had been an ardent BDM girl,<sup>122</sup> and according to a *NY Times*

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<sup>121</sup> "Kurt Waldheim," *The Telegraph*, June 15, 2007.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=%2Fnews%2F2007%2F06%2F15%2Fdb1501.xml>

<sup>122</sup> BDM: *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, the female analogue to the *Hitler Youth*. BDM was the only legal female youth organization in Nazi Germany, and participation during ages 10-18 was often mandatory. Waldheim himself was not an official Nazi member, but displayed at least opportunism in joining Nazi student organizations in 1938 (age 22), and must have had some sympathy for Elisabeth's choices if he married her.

obituary, she had applied for Nazi party membership as soon as she was able.<sup>123</sup> Waldheim would return to Vienna “after being wounded on the Eastern Front in 1941 and no longer fit for front line service.”<sup>124</sup> He describes his political career as beginning with his doctorate in Jurisprudence at University of Vienna in 1944. Then he entered the Austrian Foreign ministry in 1945, where he had been sent to Paris, London and Moscow in help for negotiating the State Treaty. Among the vivid feathers in his diplomatic cap are serving as Austrian Foreign Minister and Ambassador to Canada, and most impressively, Secretary-General to the United Nations (1972-1981).<sup>125</sup> The 68 year old ÖVP candidate should have been a shoo-in for the 1986 Austrian presidency, a role prestigious but mostly ceremonial in Austria. The SPÖ-controlled parliament was battered by scandals, and their candidate, Kurt Steyrer, had been briefly imprisoned in the post-war on allegations of carrying out abortions, damning in Catholic Austria.<sup>126</sup> As Secretary-General of the United Nations, Waldheim had brought prestige to diplomatically proud Austria as essentially the highest-ranking international statesman on earth. His voice was recorded on the Golden Disc of the voyager spacecraft, greeting any aliens on behalf of Earth. He was, boasted an Austrian political billboard of him before the Twin Towers, “An Austrian who the world trusts.”<sup>127</sup>

Waldheim’s murky wartime past had been rumored before the scandal, mostly in Austria, but had repeatedly been quashed by the supporters of Waldheim and even his rivals in the SPÖ as fringe and opportunistic slander. Mostly these rumors circled ‘merely’ around his younger participation in the Nazi student organization or the SA riding corp. The World Jewish Congress in New York had been suspicious of Waldheim, but were unable to bring concrete evidence to headlines. The American CIA conducted its own quiet investigation prior to Waldheim’s rise at the UN, and found it unlikely he had been an actual Nazi party member. After all, Waldheim had been a secretary to Dr. Gruber during the postwar, (Gruber being a catholic Austrian resistor) and they surmised it unlikely Waldheim would have climbed the political ladder then without his Nazi membership coming to light. Waldheim’s

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<sup>123</sup> “Kurt Waldheim, Former UN Chief, is dead at 88,” June 15, 2007.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/15/world/europe/15waldheim.html>

<sup>124</sup> “Kurt Waldheim,” *Telegraph*, 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Altaf Gauhar, and Kurt Waldheim, “Kurt Waldheim,” *Third World Quarterly* 4, no. 1, Jan 1982, 1.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3991505>.

<sup>126</sup> Michael Dobbs, “Waldheim Easily Wins Presidency in Austria,” Jun 9, 1986, *The Washington Post*.

<sup>127</sup> “Ein Österreicher, dem die Welt vertraut,” 1986. *Plakatdokumentation Kunisch* via *Demokratiezentrum Wien*.

father, too, had been fired by the Nazis.<sup>128</sup> The besmirching of Waldheim's past lay settled and dormant until the 1980s.

That was until a blurry photograph reached the desk of the 29-year-old investigative news editor Hubertus Czernin, depicting a young man who strongly resembled Kurt Waldheim with a group of others in NS student garb. And a few weeks later, Otmar Lahodynsky secured something as new as it was damning. No longer was Waldheim's worst possible reflection a mere student with questionable choices. Invoked was the career-ending name the statesman likely meant to dodge in his memoir: Alexander Löhr, the Austrian Luftwaffe commander executed for war crimes in Yugoslavia.<sup>129</sup>

Under the guise of viewing his pre-1942 Wehrmacht duties, journalist Czernin then asked Waldheim's office for permission to inspect his file in the state archives, which was immediately granted. This acquiescence struck Czernin as odd, especially since a brief perusal unequivocally confirmed Waldheim had been a member of the Nazi student union and a member of the SA Reiterstandarte.<sup>130</sup> Czernin that day followed Waldheim to a reception to ask him about the documents. Waldheim greeted him affectionately and had told Czernin not to worry, for 'everything could be explained.' The last few weeks, due to a case of eavesdropping in the ORF urinals (Austrian national broadcaster), the ÖVP had become aware Waldheim's brown past was being investigated by reporters,<sup>131</sup> and the statesman had assumed the young reporter had tried to warn him: Czernin was from a household of old Austrian nobility, and Waldheim had been friends with his industrialist grandfather. But in a lapse that belied the political opportunist's keen instinct, Waldheim had judged the young Czernin gravely false.<sup>132</sup>

The storm hit on March 3, 1986, with "Waldheim and the SA," published by Czernin in the Austrian news magazine *Profil*.<sup>133</sup> Czernin would release daily damnations to

<sup>128</sup> CIA note doubting Waldheim as NSDAP member. 17 Jan, 1972, CIA.

[https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/WALDHEIM%2C%20KURT%20%20VOL.%201\\_0007.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/WALDHEIM%2C%20KURT%20%20VOL.%201_0007.pdf)

<sup>129</sup> Herbert Lackner, "Der Fall Kurt Waldheim: Pflicht und Dunkel," *Profil*, March 1, 2016.

<sup>130</sup> SA Reiterstandarte (similar to cavalry) and the Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbund (the Nazi student union). Additionally he was in a Wehrmacht Unit in close proximity to war crimes. But he had not registered as a Nazi Party member, so responsible journalists and historians avoid saying Nazi directly.

<sup>131</sup> Astoundingly, this slip can be traced from a bathroom conversation of Red ORF members (Austrian national broadcaster) discussing this in the pissoir, being overheard by a Black colleague in a stall, who informed the TV director, who through several others eventually informed the ÖVP campaign manager. The whisper trail is detailed in the Lackner *Profil* article.

<sup>132</sup> Lackner, "Der Fall Kurt Waldheim," 2016.

<sup>133</sup> Hubertus Czernin, "Waldheim und die SA," *Profil*, March 3, 1986.

Waldheim's time in the Balkan theater, and other journalists joined in. Under Löhr's notorious Army Group E in the Balkans, Waldheim had worked as an interpreter in Bosnia, and been awarded a Zvonimir Medal from the Ustasha. After the Kozara rebellion in Greece, 68,000 victims were executed or deported.<sup>134</sup> Waldheim had also served as an intelligence officer in Saloniki, Greece, during the height of its Jewish deportations. Some 50,000 Jews were deported from Saloniki, a quarter of the population, leaving daily on trains of 2000 people to Auschwitz and Treblinka.<sup>135</sup> Waldheim's situation started to reflect Austria's: he didn't pull the trigger, but he helped the machine run, and he surely knew what it burned.

The torrent surged the next day to the United States, awakening a spirited enemy in the World Jewish Congress in New York, and later the US Congress. But the WJC, while successful in sending their researchers capable of besmirching Waldheim, their rhetoric had assembled Austria's conservative base. Steyrer (SPÖ) was wary to attack Waldheim's veteran's service for fear of alienating Austrian patriotism. ÖVP General secretary Michal Graff said it well: Waldheim's generation had rallied to him, and Austrians "who were obliged to serve in the German Army were not going to allow themselves to be described as war criminals."<sup>136</sup>

The election on 8 June, 1986, awarded Waldheim 53.9 percent of the vote, and 46.1 percent to socialist Kurt Steyrer. In a televised broadcast, Waldheim said he would try to use his "moral authority" to further a climate of tolerance in Austrian politics. He said he was gratified by the margin of his victory, which had succeeded his expectations.<sup>137</sup>

Fallout to the Waldheim triumph swirled internationally. Reactions by western states were generally cold, and the new President found himself receiving few guests. This would be further exacerbated by the USA placing him under a travel ban, effectively drying up any invitations. The Soviet Union, which was also criticized at this time for its treatment of Jews and Refuseniks, was sympathetic in its press to Waldheim. Though the USSR's mildness went unthanked in Austria, who was largely of a western mindset nervously surrounded on three

<sup>134</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein. *Waldheim: The Missing Years*. (New York: Arbor House/William Morrow, 1988), 74-76.

<sup>135</sup> Herbert Lackner, "Der Fall Kurt Waldheim: Pflicht und Dunkel," *Profil*, March 1, 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Michael Dobbs, "Waldheim Easily Wins Presidency in Austria," *Washington Post*, (Washington), June 9, 1986.

<sup>137</sup> Dobbs, "Waldheim Easily Wins Presidency in Austria."

sides by socialist states.<sup>138</sup> Even the SPÖ feared to capitalize on Waldheim's wartime record in the campaigning, a cowardice perhaps, which further relegated the threat upon the foreign Jews.

The Soviet and Austrian Left's toleration of former Nazis was emblematic of another previous Austrian scandal, the 1975 'Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal affair.' Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky (SPÖ), himself an assimilated Viennese Jew who had been persecuted and interned by the Gestapo, considered before the 1975 election, in which the SPÖ was predicted to fail an absolute majority, if he must create a coalition with the far right FPÖ's leader Friedrich Peter. After it became clear the SPÖ maintained the majority, Vienna's most (in)famous and relentless Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, detailed that Peter had been in an SS unit which was responsible for the mass murder of tens of thousands of civilians. The Jewish and Socialist Kreisky supported Peter, and accused Wiesenthal of mafia tactics, and accused the Nazi hunter of collaborating with the Nazis himself, a dark blemish on Kreisky's otherwise impressive leftist career.<sup>139</sup> In the previously mentioned 1940s vote jockeying, the Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal affair, and the Waldheim affair, we see that the Austrian center-left would sooner protect their center-right rivals from shame, rather than provoke calls of *Nestbeschmutzung*<sup>140</sup> by critically examining Austria's (or even one Austrian's) role in WWII.

The Austrian ambassador to the United States, Thomas Klestil, would write the *New York Times* to in part clear his country's smeared reputation in 1988. He would acknowledge Austrian involvement in the Holocaust. He would highlight Austrian resistance during the war, citing 35,000 died against the Nazis, became home to 600,000 displaced persons, and had 100,000 active resisters (significantly higher than most counts)-- about as many people as reported as attending Hitler's Anschluss speech at Heldenplatz. He emphasized Austria having a shining human rights record in contemporary times and being no more anti-Semitic than its neighbors, then and today.<sup>141</sup> While all this is true (arguable number exaggeration aside) it is a modern version of holding Austria as no more guilty than its contemporaries. Meanwhile the President of the World Jewish congress, Edgar M. Bronfman, wrote the *New*

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<sup>138</sup> Basset, *Waldheim and Austria*. (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1988), 156.

<sup>139</sup> "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Österreich—Die Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal-Affaire," *Österreichisches Mediathek*, accessed June 2023.

<https://www.mediathek.at/unterrichtsmaterialien/vergangenheitsbewaeltigung-in-oesterreich/>

<sup>140</sup> 'Dirtying one's own nest.'

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Klestil, "In Austria, the Past Is Far From Forgotten," Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, June 2, 1988.

*York Times* recalling a different Austria from Klestil. Bronfman recounts a memory of himself as an eight-year-old boy along the Viennese boulevards in 1938. “I am haunted by pictures of the Austrian girls kissing German soldiers. The Anschluss has been called the rape of Austria. The Anschluss was no rape. It was a love affair, a marriage made in hell,” he wrote in a letter imploring young Austrians to re-examine the stances of their elders. “Let us be able to say that Austria is not Kurt Waldheim.”<sup>142</sup>

The Waldheim Affair would spur Austria to seriously examine its past in the 1988 *Gedenkjahr* in Austria, the Year of Memory, marking 50 years since Anschluss and 70 since the First Republic’s founding. Austria would in 1988 also appoint a historical commission to investigate the historicity of the Waldheim claim. While the committee found no direct evidence of war crimes, they surmised that the allegations of his involvement in Nazi student groups and his service in the Balkans under Löhr were true. And that while Waldheim likely committed no war crimes, it was incredibly unlikely that this intelligence officer did not know they were occurring. His being placed on the Travel Ban by the United States after would dry up invitations to Western countries and handicap his effectiveness and President. He would not run again.

### **West Germany:**

Unlike 1980s Austria, West Germany, and the united Germany it would become in 1990, is lauded as the paragon of responsibly handling the guilt of contemporary historical atrocity. But this is a largely modern viewpoint, and much was debated in Germany before it adopted the leading position it has today. Of course, this ‘position,’ if it exists, is nebulous as ‘identity’: each politician, public school teacher, and human react to the Holocaust individually. But by the 1990s, there was a general respect of Germany for taking responsibility for the Nazis, unlike for example, Japan’s slackness in recognizing Korean Comfort Women or the Rape of Nanking. In 1990 it was West-German sociologist Mario Rainer Lespsius who termed that Germany had “internalized” its role, while Austria had “externalized” theirs.<sup>143</sup> This chapter supplies some interesting case studies to the West German case: namely, forced recognition, the Myth of the Clean Wehrmacht, Vergangenheitsbewältigung, and the Historikerstreit.

<sup>142</sup> Edgar M Bronfman, “Letter to the Editor,” *New York Times*, Feb 14, 1988.

<sup>143</sup> Uhl, “Austrian historical memory,” 73.

Most Germans were confronted with the Holocaust in the form of compulsory newsreels, and tours were ordered to concentration camps when they were local. The population's avoidance of this in Germany, similarly to Austria, was more likely a general apathy than a fear of the truth. Regarding the war crimes trials, the sensationalism of cases like Ilse Koch and her skin lampshades hardly made these criminals relatable, and enabled Germans to impose a sense of distance. Trial fatigue also set in after the first few years.<sup>144</sup> Under Konrad Adenauer the idea of West German resistance to Nazism was focused on instances outside political organization, such as the July 1944 bomb plot, spearheaded by Klaus von Stauffenberg. But the timing of the act still amounted it to treason to many Germans, and in 1952 about 50% of Germans would be opposed to naming a school after him.<sup>145</sup> Appropriate for the construction of a useable German past, and cooperation with their Western allies, and the freeing of prisoners, was promoting the myth of the Clean Wehrmacht. This myth delegated all war crimes to registered Nazis, SS and SA, though this black and white view is never the case. As the years passed, the West German public was re-engaged with the subject during the televised Eichmann Trials in 1961-1962, the student protests of 1968, the 1979 documentary *Holocaust*, and *Shoah* in 1985.

The time was mounting for a new evaluation and continuing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by the time of the 1986/1967 *Historikerstreit* (the historians' debate). Unlike with Waldheim, little new historical information came to light to challenge an existing perception, but rather how the light shone on the narrative that existed. Historian Ernst Nolte seemed to pave the way for an apologist approach to history by comparing the Holocaust with other 20<sup>th</sup> century European genocides. The publication drew critique from Jürgen Habermas, who publicly replied in *Die Zeit*. In Habermas's view, conservative historians opened a door to historical revisionism and 'whataboutism' in suggesting that the Holocaust was one of many crimes.<sup>146</sup> Had Nazi Germany occurred as part of a German *Sonderweg*, special path, with the Holocaust justified as its horrific yet inexorable conclusion? Another question raised was, if collective responsibility was valid, how many generations of Germans must suffer responsibility for Nazi crimes? This became more the concern of the

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<sup>144</sup> Caroline Sharples, *Postwar Germany and the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 19.

<sup>145</sup> Sharples, 21.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Rutschmann, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Historikerstreit and the Notion of Continued Responsibility," *New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 25, no. 1. 2011. 5.

conservative branch, who were trying to create a normalized a useable past for German identity at the time.<sup>147</sup> It seems in academia that the liberal wing emerged the victor of the debate, with comparative genocide studies seeming tasteless, but the question of how long does and can guilt follow innocent Germans pervasively remains. A torch surely to be picked up by a new generation of historians or philosophers.

### **East Germany:**

In the case of East Germany, we take a closer scrutiny upon the idea of Founding Myths, as this is where the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and Austria have a striking similarity. Both were then relatively new states, barred the Wilsonian idea of a national identity based on a distinct ethnicity or ancient culture, as they shared the same ethnic background as their neighbors. Deriving an identity based off the minor regional differences would be as distasteful in post-Nazi time period as it would be weak. So the GDR, like Austria, would have a much easier time out of the pits of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, -a time rife with pervasive ideologies permeating the state and identity- if it could also construct a historical narrative conducive to its success.

The Second World War did not prevent the GDR from reaching back to the pre-Nazi times in search for this identity. GDR propagandists and culture creators nurtured this through fashioning the GDR as the heir to progressive German traditions. Bismarck was painted as a progressive leader; Bach, Marx and Engels, were acclaimed as continuation of the German art and culture. In Bismarck's case, implicit was the consolidation of a unified German someday under a socialist system.<sup>148</sup>

The mast upon which the thinly hanging sail of this GDR myth rests is built in the 1935 Comintern understanding of fascism as a phase: inevitable as it is terminable. Ingo Loose explains, "On this very meager theoretical basis Fascism, as the most radical form of imperialistic monopoly capitalism, was—for the regime of the GDR, too—not specifically a German phenomenon, but only one stage, albeit a terrible one, in the march of history towards Communism.... for many Germans, who had more or less passively benefited from the Nazi regime or at least definitely did not belong to its victims, this was not an unwelcome

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<sup>147</sup> Rutschmann, 6.

<sup>148</sup> Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989." *Central European History* 26, no. 1 (1993): 91–113. 101.

interpretation of their own role; it released them from responsibility for the period after 1933.”<sup>149</sup>

Common is this thread between Austria, East Germany, and West Germany, that these narratives given to them by the occupiers, or their politicians, would suit themselves. According to East German politicians and intellectuals, the East-German went through an *Umwältzung*<sup>150</sup> in 1949—Fascism was eradicated in the soviet occupied zone of Germany, and *only* there. Any good German, even former Nazis, could continue this fight by becoming a supporter of the Socialist party. But the gloomy reality, echoed in all East bloc during the Stalinist period, was those Socialist and Communist East Germans who had actually resisted the Nazis, were passed over in favor of the less rebellious new-generation, or even imprisoned in the Soviet-run internment camps at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Waldheim, and Bautzen.<sup>151</sup>

Any foundational narrative of the GDR identity, according to Alan Nothnagle, had to serve the following goals: 1. Inspire unity, pride, and dedication domestically, and 2. inspire respect and tourism from abroad. And at a barest minimum, keep its population from fleeing to the West.<sup>152</sup> Flight had become a strong enough threat to its integrity that the GDR needed to impede it in 1961 with the construction of the “Anti-fascist defensive wall.” Hence this purpose-granting narrative was even more important, even if its veracity was suspect.

The myths that blamed West Germany collapsed in both Austria and East Germany in the 1990s, but Austria lived on as a state while the GDR did not. Unlike in the GDR, the myth of the First Victim collapsed in Austria at a time when it was no longer necessary to the survival of the state: Hitler’s wretched attempt at Pan-Germanism was 50 years ago, and even if Austrians were quite similar to Germans, the Austrians had survived the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century quite fine without being within the same state. This is in contrast the existential doubt of Austria’s ability to survive as a state and provide a sustainable lifestyle for its citizens in 1918. Despite being technically neutral and politically non-aligned, this did not mean that Austria was non-aligned culturally or economically. Austria had reaped a successful rebuilding from the Marshall Plan in the 1950s more like the FRD’s economic

<sup>149</sup> Ingo Loose, “The Anti-Fascist Myth of the German Democratic Republic and Its Decline after 1989,” in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*. Ed. Michal Kopeček (Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2008), 59-74.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Waltzing around,’ ‘Dancing over.’

<sup>151</sup> Alan Nothnagle, “From Buchenwald to Bismarck,” 100.

<sup>152</sup> Nothnagle, 95.

miracle than the GDRs stagnation and repression. An older generation of Austrians was also not forced by a fallen regime to abandon the myth of the First Victim, or their sympathy of Waldheim. Time would end this train of believer with inevitable effortlessness, it seemed. But the collapse of the GDR and its population voting for, and later absorption by the FRG, confronted East Germans with the inalienable truth that the socialist Germany's vision had failed. A distrust of historical narrative, even a futility of it, took root in many in the disillusioned East in the 1990s, which likely served as fertile ground for the alt-right movements that arise there in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the lack of a cogent national narrative is not the whole, or even main fracture which caused the collapse of the GDR (which were intricate) national identities were a powerful tool in creating cohesion for 20<sup>th</sup> century states. For Austria, the myth of victimhood was a bandage: convenient, healing, and shed when it was no longer needed to salvage the nation. In the GDR, it was blown off after the larger crisis of dissolution, and the myth could do little to rescue the state from larger historical forces.

## V: Conclusion

### The Current State of Austrian Memory

My engagement with this question of Austrian guilt and narrative began on a bleak December Friday in 2017. Determined to visit the concentration camp Mauthausen on the tail end of an undergraduate study abroad in Salzburg, I stepped alone off a regional train to an empty platform in the dormant Danubian town of its name. The Mauthausen memorial was not designed to be reached by public transportation, and the dark two weeks before Christmas was hardly high tourist season. I intended to ask for directions upon arrival, but the station had no employees: just unplucked glossy pamphlets shining from its newspaper racks. A closer inspection entreated tourists to visit 'sunny Mauthausen' with panoramas of the glittering Danube. I saw first life in the form of a public bus rumbling in the parking lot. Climbing aboard, I asked the driver, "Excuse me, would you know how best to reach the concentration camp?" He seemed perplexed. "Concentration camp—oh, you mean The Museum?"

*The Museum.* Was calling it the Museum a form of psychological erasure? Certainly a 21<sup>st</sup> century town should be allowed to create an identity separate from the house of murder it had become synonymous with—tasteless as a resort town called Mauthausen seemed to an

egghead and outsider like me. As I climbed the landscape of the *Hasenjagd*, a silent residential road to the hilltop camp, looking at the spearlike pine trunks that offered no cover, feeling vulnerable before the panopticon-like houses from which no one could hide, I considered that this rebranding was surely a topic in local politics.

A lot has changed in Austria since the days of the *Hasenjagd*. Kurt Scholz of the Future Fund for the Republic of Austria, surmises the trajectory within education as teleological improvement. “When our parents went to school, history teaching ended at the First World War. In our school days, Mauthausen was already spoken of, if only in passing. Our children, by contrast, are growing up in a system that considers a visit to the Mauthausen Memorial an integral part of every young person’s civic education.”<sup>153</sup>

The Mauthausen Memorial Museum also serves as a foundational piece of the Austrian memory landscape. It was handed over by the Soviet Union to the Austrian government to be used as a memorial, though was underfunded and ignored by the Austrian government in the early years. To keep costs low, most of the camp’s wooden construction was demolished quickly after the war. In 1970 a museum was added, though its tone didactic and maintaining a stance of victimdom. A 1982 exhibit presented Austrians in other concentration camps and ghettos—as only 1% of Mauthausen inmates were Austrian.<sup>154</sup> But the Memorial has since the 1990s received a wealth of interest and overhaul—Austrian as well as international. The memorial grounds find themselves home to a massive sculpture park with donated memorials from many victims’ countries. Austrian class trips are common. In 2023, Austrian school classes are supported with 500 euros for a visit to Mauthausen-Gusen, from a fund of 1.5 million.<sup>155</sup>

Vienna has a richly textured memory landscape, whose attitude, I argue, started to change with the Alfred Hrdlicka Monument Against War and Fascism at Albertinaplatz, whose planning began years before the Waldheim Affair but only completed in 1988.<sup>156</sup> This

<sup>153</sup> Kurt Scholz and Herwig Hösele in *The Concentration Camp Mauthausen, Catalogue to the Exhibition at the Mauthausen Memorial*. Edited by the Association for Remembrance and Historical Research in Concentration Camps, (Vienna: New Academic Press) 2013.

<sup>154</sup> Uhl “The Politics of Memory,” 70.

<sup>155</sup> “Fonds soll Schulklassen bei Besuch von KZ-Gedenkstätten unterstützen,” May 4, 2023, *Der Standard*. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000146146020/fonds-soll-schulklassen-bei-besuch-von-kz-gedenkstaetten-unterstuetzen>

<sup>156</sup> The Albertinaplatz is the site of a mass grave due to an Allied bombing, which collapsed and air-raid shelter. Hundreds of bodies remain unrecovered, and the site had long been earmarked for some kind of anti-fascist memorial.

was the first monument in Vienna to depict a suffering Jew rather than a suffering Austria(n), though, Austrians were not yet depicted as the perpetrators. However, Jewish reaction to the monument and its humiliated ‘street-washing Jew’ figure, scrubbing the ground in the aftermath of Anschluss, were mixed. Wiesenthal had his establishment in the city, with an archive and museum now at its heart. The Vienna Jewish Museum was the first in the world in 1895, was closed and its collection raided by the Nazis, and re-announced two weeks after Waldheim’s election in 1986, reopening in 1990, eventually having two locations.<sup>157</sup> Vienna is peppered with humble Stolpersteine, or tripping stones, reminding passersby of the names of the Jews who lived in the adjacent housing, and their last known places of deportation. The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial (2001) and the Shoah Wall of Names (2021) are other notable editions since Waldheim. Since the 1990s, Austria’s Fund for “Victims of National Socialism” has paid out hundreds of millions of euros to tens of thousands of applicants for restitution.<sup>158</sup>

The Austrian House of History is a recent 2018 addition to mark the centenary of Austrian independence. It enjoys one of the most prominent spaces in Austria—the Hofburg former royal palace at the heart of Vienna, upon whose balcony Hitler gave his famous Anschluss speech in 1938. With the city naturally unsure how to use this tainted space, the museum opens a dialogue. But this I interpret as hollow conciliation in place of action. It is a result, similarly mirrored by an imperial scandal in the House of History’s nextdoor neighbor, the Vienna Welt Museum (World Museum). One of the crown jewels of the Welt Museum’s collection is a quetzal feather headdress, which some argue was worn by the last Aztec king Moctezuma himself. It is the only headdress from this period to survive, leaving Mexico no comparable artefact. Vienna has been evasive on taking action, preferring the possession of the status quo.<sup>159</sup> Rather, the Weltmuseum instead included a museum section on the state of returning artefacts. But a museum section ‘opening the discussion’ on a potential injustice is hardly decisive action. In The Hofburg’s case, while ‘opening the discussion’ is different and more forgivable in that few are wounded by or particularly care about changing the status quo of the infamous spot. It seems the balcony not being used for politics is satisfactory for most.

<sup>157</sup> “About Us,” *Jewish Museum Vienna*. Accessed June 10, 2023.

[https://www.jmw.at/en/about\\_us](https://www.jmw.at/en/about_us)

<sup>158</sup> “Victims of National Socialism and Restitution,” *Austrian Consul General*, New York. <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-consulate-general-new-york/service-for-citizens/victims-of-national-socialism-and-restitution/>

<sup>159</sup> “The Feather Headdress,” *Welt Museum Wien*.

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/the-feather-headdress/#condition-and-conservation>

The key is action, rather than hollow proclamations of betterment, as had begun to characterize chancellor Figl's speeches in the 1940s.

The current state of Austrian memory has improved to engage with a more historical past, albeit only at the twilight period to help actual victims. Vienna's actually Jewish population remains dynamic but small—only about 12,000.<sup>160</sup> This number is almost exactly the same as the amount that stayed in 1949, though Austria's total population has increased some 25% since then. While nothing is perfect, Austria's Jews certainly need not contend with the virulent anti-Semitism, victim complex, or fatal bystanding that characterized the neighbors of their predecessors.

Austria thrives today as one of the most liveable countries on earth, and has no political need of its victim's mantle, nor aspirations of joining a greater Germany. Its occupation-era statemen would have considered themselves clever, lucky, or both to ground such a thriving Austria republic. But important to remember is how this independence was founded in part on a myth that took victimhood from true victims. It had been established and tolerated by the Allies, and persisted in Austria for decades due to careful maneuvering of political organs, to Austria's own advantage at the expense of accountability. Making sure that 'Austria is not Waldheim,' is a continuous process and an admirable one, and one that is applicable beyond the historical case of Austria.

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<sup>160</sup> "About the Jewish Community of Vienna," Israelitische Kulturgemeinde Wien. <https://www.ikg-wien.at/en/about-the-jewish-community-of-vienna>

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