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1-2008

## Commemoration versus coping with the past: contextualising Austria's commemorative year 2005

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### Recommended Citation

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# Commemoration versus Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Contextualizing Austria's Gedenkjahr 2005\*

## Abstract

This essay explores the politics of memory in post-1945 Austrian political culture, focusing on the shift between the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss and the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Postwar Austrian society experienced a particular tension associated with the Nazi past, manifested in communicative and cultural forms of memory. On the one hand, the support of many for the Third Reich—expressed through active or passive complicity—threatened to link Austria with the perpetrator status reserved for German society. On the other, the Allies' Moscow Declaration (1943) created a myth of victimization by Germany that allowed Austrians to avoid confronting difficult questions concerning the Nazi era. Consequently, discussion of Austrian involvement in National Socialism became a taboo subject during the initial decades of the Second Republic. The 2005 commemoration is notable insofar as it marked a significant break with this taboo. New forms of cultural memory expressed in 2005 are examined here as the culmination of two things: first, criticism from the centre and left of the Austrian political spectrum that began during the Waldheim Affair of the mid-1980s and the 1988 commemoration; second, efforts by successive Social Democratic chancellors and certain federal party leaders, beginning in the early 1990s, to break the pervasive silence that made Vergangenheitsbewältigung difficult, and to challenge the Austrian right wing's glorification of elements of the Nazi past. This process included the novel step of acknowledging the Nazi skeletons in the Social Democratic Party's own cupboard.

**Keywords:** German/Austrian history, Vergangenheitsbewältigung, World War II memory, holocaust commemoration, Austrian Social Democracy, Austrian right-wing.

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# Commemoration versus Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Contextualizing Austria's Gedenkjahr 2005\*

Matthew P. Berg

Caroline Gay, in her study of 'national memory management and the dialectic of normality' in present-day Germany, offers that '[m]emory of the [National Socialist] period has of course never been a mirror image but rather a reconstruction viewed and modified through the prism of present circumstances.'<sup>1</sup> This statement might appear a simple truism, yet Gay's point is far more suggestive. 'What is at stake,' she argues,

is rather the transmission of knowledge or interpretation and its translation into national memory, an officially promoted version of events which can inform the identity of younger generations ... It is shaped by elite groups in society, in Germany largely politicians, intellectuals and, increasingly, the media. The perception of the National Socialist past held by younger generations is then heavily influenced by the cultural memory transmitted to them as historical consciousness. It is subject to instrumentalization, manipulation, and ritualization, depending on the nature of the elites that are dominant within the national discourse.<sup>2</sup>

Former chancellor Gerhard Schröder's assertions of German achievement of 'normality' by the twenty-first century and, simultaneously, his unequivocal acknowledgment of the scale and scope of Nazi crimes have provided scholars with fresh opportunities to reflect upon the relationship between memory and the ongoing process of nation-building in Germany six decades after National Socialism's collapse, and more than a decade and a half after German reunification. The examination of experiences under the Nazis (particularly during the war years) in German literary, media and academic circles seems concerned to portray Germans as both perpetrators and victims—for example, with respect to Allied bombing, the Soviet assault on East Prussia and Berlin, or four-power occupation.<sup>3</sup> M. Rainer Lepsius has

\*I would like to express my thanks to Maria Mesner for her comments on an earlier draft of this article manuscript, and my appreciation for the critical points raised by the anonymous scholars who read the piece for German History.

<sup>1</sup> Caroline Gay, 'Remembering for the Future, Engaging with the Present: National Memory Management and the Dialectic of Normality in the "Berlin Republic"', in William Niven and James Jordan (eds), *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Rochester, NY, 2003), p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> The last two decades have seen a wide range of literature that in various ways has considered Germans as victims. Works in this area have been received warmly by some, and critically by others. For examples of works of this kind, see Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: die Zerschlagung des deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1986); Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *Anmerkungen zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten* (Stuttgart, 1986); Winfried Georg Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur: mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch* (Munich, 1999); Volker Hage (ed.), *Hamburg 1943: literarische Zeugnisse zum Feuersturm* (Frankfurt/Main, 2003); Walter Kempowski (ed.), *Das Echolot*, 10 vols (Munich, 1993–2005), and the response offered by Iris Radisch, 'Phrasen, die keiner mehr kennt', [www.zeit.de/](http://www.zeit.de/), ZEIT Online (Sept. 2005). For a critical evaluation of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany see, for example, Aleida Assmann, 'Zur (Un-)Vereinbarkeit von Leid und Schuld in der deutschen Erinnerung', *Zeitgeschichte*, 33 (2006), pp. 68–77; David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*

observed that, in contrast to a process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that has at times been controversial, but nonetheless quite open in the Federal Republic of Germany, comparable efforts in Austria have tended to proceed in a considerably more hesitant fashion.

The ‘Opfermythos’—rooted in the Moscow Declaration of 1943, in which the Allies referred to Austria as the first victim of National Socialist aggression—allowed that the ‘preconditions, substance, and consequences of National Socialism could be externalized; they had only secondary relevance for Austria, they belonged to Germany’s history, not to that of Austria,’ Lepsius noted.<sup>4</sup> Although individual Austrians could be recognized as perpetrators (usually as Nazis, rather than as Austrian Nazis), the discourse of Austria-as- victim of National Socialism remained the de facto official *Geschichtsbild* of the Second Republic well into the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Several factors combined to open up debate over the Opfermythos by the later 1980s: the controversy accompanying Kurt Waldheim’s election as federal president; the emergence of Jörg Haider as leader of the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) and the subsequent regeneration of the far-right wing of the Austrian political spectrum; fiftieth anniversary reflections on the Anschluss; and generational/attitudinal shifts in Austrian political culture, academia and the arts.<sup>6</sup> Any one of these developments

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(Cambridge and New York, 2006); Norbert Frei, 1945 und wir. *Das dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Munich, 2005); Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton and Oxford, 2003), particularly pp. 1–60, 111–148, and 317–341; Bill Nevin, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London and New York, 2002); Jeffrey Herf, ‘The Emergence and Legacies of Divided Memory: Germany and the Holocaust after 1945’, in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge and New York, 2002), pp. 184–205; Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001); and Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit/Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> M. Rainer Lepsius, ‘Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des “Großdeutschen Reiches”’, in Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland: Soziologisch-historische Konstellationsanalysen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Göttingen, 1993), pp. 232 and 245 (emphasis in original). On the Moscow Declaration and Austrian politicians’ references to it after 1945, see Robert H. Keyserlingk, *Austria in World War II: An Anglo-American Dilemma* (Kingston, Ontario, 1988); Günter Bischof, ‘Die Instrumentalisierung der Moskauer Erklärung nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg’, *Zeitgeschichte*, 20 (1993), pp. 345–66. All translations mine unless noted otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster (eds), *Österreichs Gedächtnis: Über Erinnern und Vergessen der NS-Vergangenheit* (2nd edn, Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 1997); Anton Pelinka and Erika Weinzierl (eds), *Das große Tabu: Österreichs Umgang mit seiner Vergangenheit* (2nd edn, Vienna, 1997); Anton Pelinka, ‘Von der Funktionalität von Tabus: zu den “Lebenslügen” der Zweiten Republik’, Gerhard Botz, ‘Geschichte und kollektives Gedächtnis in der Zweiten Republik: “Opferthese”, “Lebenslüge” und Geschichtstabu in der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung’, and Brigitte Bailer, ‘Alle waren Opfer: der selektive Umgang mit den Folgen des Nationalsozialismus’, all in Wolfgang Kos and Georg Rigele (eds), *Inventur 1945/55: Österreich im ersten Jahrzehnt der Zweiten Republik* (Vienna, 1996), pp. 23–32, 51–85, and 181–200, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> On the Waldheim controversy see Berthold Unfried, ‘Versionen der Erinnerung an Nationalsozialismus und Krieg in Österreich und ihre Veränderungen in der Waldheim-Debatte’, *Zeitgeschichte*, 24 (1997), pp. 302–316; Josef Haslinger, *Politik der Gefühle: ein Essay über Österreich* (rev. edn, Frankfurt/Main, 1995); Gerhard Botz and Gerald Sprengnagel (eds), *Kontroversen um Österreichs Zeitgeschichte: verdrängte Vergangenheit, Österreich-Identität, Waldheim und die Historiker* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1994), particularly Gerhard Botz, ‘Krisen der österreichischen Zeitgeschichte’, pp. 16–76 (on the Waldheim controversy more specifically, see pp. 28–36); Richard Mitten, *The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria* (Boulder, 1992); Helmut Gruber, *Antisemitismus im Mediendiskurs: die Affäre Waldheim in der Tagespresse* (Wiesbaden, 1991); Milo Dor (ed.), *Die Leiche im Keller: Dokumente des Widerstandes gegen Dr. Kurt Waldheim* (Vienna, 1988). On Haider and the FPÖ, see Anton Pelinka and Ruth Wodak (eds), *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria* (New Brunswick, 2002); Melanie A. Sully, *The Haider Phenomenon* (Boulder, 1997); Brigitte Bailer-Galanda and Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Haider und die*

in itself might well have stimulated critical reflection on Austria's recent past. Taken together, they catalyzed contentious debate over the nature and significance of Austrians' experiences under the Third Reich, and challenged the tidy and comforting notion of collective victimization at the hands of the Nazis.

This essay examines 2005 as a new phase in Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. That year marked not only the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, but it was also fifty years since the State Treaty that restored full sovereignty to the Second Republic. These commemorative moments provide an opportunity for critical reappraisal of Austria's relationship to its National Socialist legacy and for reflection upon contemporary Austrian identity more broadly. Rather than present detailed commentary on the full range of media, political, and scholarly treatments of the 1945 and 1955 observances, I will confine the scope of this inquiry to three areas. The first outlines the discursive modes dominant during the 1938/1988 commemoration, modes which had been foundational to conceptions of Austrianness since 1945 and would be revisited in 2005. The year 1988 is also significant in that it marked the beginning of a shift in how cultural memory is being reconceived in early twenty-first century Austria. Since this essay is concerned primarily with the 2005 commemorations, this section will be brief; historians such as Heidemarie Uhl and Heinz Wassermann have already addressed popular representations of 1988 through the media quite thoughtfully and in admirable detail.<sup>7</sup> The second section examines an initiative on the part of the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) to come to terms with its *braune Flecken*—former Nazis integrated into the party after its reconstitution in the spring of 1945—a discussion that was limited to inner-party circles in the late 1940s and then effectively repressed after the early 1950s. The third section considers the highly controversial statements made by two right-wing political figures during *Gedenkjahr* 2005. It is the reaction to these statements—one a reiteration of the *Opferthese* in some ways reminiscent of 1988 memory narratives, the other a case of Holocaust 'revisionism'—that is particularly interesting, and allows us to recognize a shift in the way that memory has been reconstructed from the late 1980s to the present.

### Gedenkjahr 1988

It would be something of an oversimplification to suggest that memory of the Nazi past in postwar Austria involved a higher degree of management into the 1980s than in the

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Freiheitlichen in Österreich (Berlin, 1997); Lothar Höbelt, *Defiant Populist: Jörg Haider and the Politics of Austria* (West Lafayette, 1997). For Haider's self-representation, see Jörg Haider, *Wofür ich meinetwegen entschuldige: Haider, beim Wort genommen* (Vienna, 2000). In the realm of literary arts see, for example, Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* (Frankfurt/Main, 1988); Robert Menasse, *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften* (Vienna, 1992); Barbara Jelinek, *Burgtheater* (Cologne, 1984). For a critical review of leading postwar Austrian authors' perspectives on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and identity, consult Steven Beller and Frank Trommler, 'Austrian Writers Confront the Past, 1945–2000', and Egon Schwarz, 'Austria, Quite a Normal Nation', *New German Critique*, 93 (Fall 2004), pp. 3–18 and 175–91, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Verstörung: Eine Kontroverse um Österreichs historische Identität fünfzig Jahre nach dem 'Anschluß'* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 1992) offers the most systematic and farthest-reaching analysis of academic reflections on 1938 by historians, politicians and journalists, from a perspective five decades removed. Heinz P. Wassermann, 'Zuviel Vergangenheit tut nicht gut!' *Nationalsozialismus im Spiegel der Tagespresse der Zweiten Republik* (Innsbruck, Vienna and Munich, 2000), pp. 374–477, provides detailed content analysis of newspaper treatment.

two Germanys and in the unified Federal Republic. Nonetheless, 1988 provided the occasion for a prolonged and public juxtaposition of competing memory narratives in a fashion never before experienced in the Second Republic, comparable perhaps to the way that the *Historikerstreit* became part of the West German public domain through the print and electronic media.<sup>8</sup> The *Opferthese* had allowed Austrians to avoid the sort of pressure to engage in the kind of introspection to which West German society had become accustomed (even if it had not been uniformly embraced in the Federal Republic).<sup>9</sup> Margit Reiter and Caroline Gray explain this phenomenon, in Austria and Germany respectively, as an expression of what Jan Assmann described as the replacement of communicative memory—‘the exchange of direct, biographic experience in the framework of the collective’—with cultural memory—‘non-direct ... memory, which is exclusive, formal, and structured, requiring ‘props’ to keep it alive, such as monuments, speeches, books, and films.’<sup>10</sup> According to Reiter, ‘externalization of National Socialism, the self-stylization as victim, retreat into structural lack of responsibility’ contributed to a de-burdening in the Austrian context, so that family members who had first-hand experience of the Third Reich could be understood as heroes or, alternatively, as victims of historical developments.<sup>11</sup> The formal treatment of the Nazi past in history lessons within Austrian schools served as part of a broader process, through which the Second Republic allowed for reconceptualization of individuals who experienced the Third Reich as victims; in turn, this provided validation and reinforcement of such a narrative in intergenerational communication.<sup>12</sup> The *Gedenkjahr* 1988 challenged this broad consensus, in no small measure because it came so closely on the heels of vigorous domestic and international discussion of the past related to the nature of President Kurt Waldheim’s military service. The later 1980s may also have been a crucial turning point for another reason. A critical mass among the children (‘the ‘68ers’) or grandchildren of those who had been adults during the Third Reich had become interested in learning from the failures of history and of the older generation, and they began increasingly to call into question the ‘collective exoneration’ that allegedly came with what, in the context of the Federal Republic, Chancellor Helmut Kohl

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that memory and historical understanding had not become topics of controversy prior to 1988. Examples include: the 1972 Auschwitz Trial; Bruno Kreisky’s defence of former SS-man and FPÖ leader Friedrich Peter against criticisms levelled by Simon Wiesenthal, and the very public Kreisky-Wiesenthal dispute that began in 1975 and resurfaced several years later; as well as Defence Minister Friedhelm Frischenschläger’s hearty handshake greeting of former Waffen SS-man Walter Reder in 1985, after Italian authorities released Reder from a life sentence for executing civilians.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996) and Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Gay, ‘Remembering for the Future’, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> Margit Reiter, ‘Nationalsozialismus als historische Erbe? Die zweite Generation in Österreich’, in Martin Horváth, Anton Legerer, Judith Pfeiffer and Stephan Roth (eds) *Jenseits des Schlussstrichs. Gedenkdienst im Diskurs über Österreichs nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Vienna, 2002), pp. 29–30. Since completion of this article manuscript, Reiter’s research has appeared in monograph form: *Die Generation danach: Der Nationalsozialismus im Familiengedächtnis* (Innsbruck, Vienna and Bozen, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York and Oxford, 2003) and Peter Thaler, *The Ambivalence of Identity: The Austrian Experience of Nation-Building in a Modern Society* (West Lafayette, 2001).

referred to as the ‘Gnade der späten Geburt’.<sup>13</sup> While many of the second generation (or those younger still) had embraced the family stories passed down to them, others sought critical confrontation with that very past through their work as politicians, journalists or historians.<sup>14</sup> Heidemarie Uhl argued in her definitive study of the Anschluss commemoration that the great challenge of Vergangenheitsbewältigung leading into 1988 was to process and reconcile the two camps into which Austria found itself divided as a result of the Nazi era—‘a world,’ to employ the words of novelist and political essayist Josef Haslinger, ‘of the official political self-conception that reintroduced the old republican constitution and negotiated the State Treaty with the Allies, and ... a world of sentiments and political opinions.’<sup>15</sup>

According to historian Gerhard Botz, one of the most outspoken proponents of a critical Vergangenheitsbewältigung into the 1980s and beyond, the fundamental purpose of Austrians’ confrontation with their past did not rest so much with tracking down suspected war criminals as it did with ‘stimulating reflection and processing among those people who were not far removed from criminal occurrences at the time—and upon whom only a glimmer of indirect moral complicity falls—that might open their eyes to the entanglement in which they found themselves.’<sup>16</sup> Uhl understood the difficulties that this would entail and why they lay at the heart of vehement, opposing reactions to official reflection on the Anschluss:

how should the wartime generation suddenly arrive at dissociated insight with respect to events that were scarcely discussed for forty years, and for which no model for coming to terms with its past had been offered, particularly when the basic conditions of this process were closely associated with individual connections to National Socialism and linked to the concept of ‘complicity’?<sup>17</sup>

Positions advanced by journalists, politicians and scholars in the Austrian media—as well as in readers’ letters in the opinion pages of major weeklies or dailies—revealed the same spectrum of possibilities (reticence, confusion, self-criticism, claims to victim status) sketched out by Botz and Uhl.<sup>18</sup> The following survey offers representative print media examples of central motifs that had framed memory narratives since at least 1945, and which were subjected to fundamental challenge for the first time in connection with 1938/88.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Reiter, ‘Nationalsozialismus’, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Debate and reflection took place in the print media, through television broadcasts, even in the arts when one takes into account the range of virulent reactions to Bernhard’s ‘Heldenplatz’ and to sculptor Alfred Hridlicka ‘Denkmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus’ on the Albertinaplatz in Vienna, or the gadfly journalism of Günther Nenning. For historical analyses see Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds), *Austrian Historical Memory & National Identity* (Contemporary Austrian Studies, 5, New Brunswick, 1997) and Botz and Sprengnagel, *Kontroversen*.

<sup>15</sup> Josef Haslinger, *Politik der Gefühle* (1st edn, Darmstadt, 1987), p. 65, quoted in Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Zerstörung*, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Gerhard Botz, ‘Österreich und die NS-Vergangenheit. Verdrängung, Pflichterfüllung, Geschichtsklitterung’, in Dan Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987), p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Zerstörung*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Siegfried Mattl and Karl Stuhlpfarrer, ‘Abwehr und Inszenierung im Labyrinth der Zweiten Republik’, in Emmerich Talos, Ernst Hanisch and Wolfgang Neugebauer (eds), *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich 1938–1945* (Vienna, 1988), pp. 601–624; Pelinka and Weinzierl, *Das große Tabu*; Botz and Sprengnagel, *Kontroversen*; Ziegler and Kannonier-Finster, *Österreichs Gedächtnis*.

<sup>19</sup> Uhl calculates that 5,058 articles on the Gedenkjahr 1938/1988 appeared in 330 different print sources. Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Zerstörung*, pp. 463–70.



For instance, representatives of the Burgenland branch of the Austrian veterans' association insisted that the Anschluss would never have taken place had it not been for the humiliation visited on the defeated German-speaking peoples after the First World War.<sup>20</sup> Such an argument found resonance among many Wehrmacht veterans in Austrian society, insofar as it emphasized victimization at the hands of essentially the same enemies faced in the Second World War. Responsibility lay with outsiders; righteous indignation could be justified without the nuisance of strenuous introspection.<sup>21</sup> A variation on this theme can be found in the words of Otto Schulmeister, at the time influential editor-in-chief of the independent but conservative-leaning daily *Die Presse*. While Schulmeister did not venture to place blame at the feet of former enemies who had since become friends of the Austrian state, he could not free himself completely from the notion of Austrians' victim status, even as he acknowledged that the fate of Austrian and other European Jews had long been ignored. His rumination over the effects of the Anschluss and the Second World War juxtaposed 'the army of the fallen, the widows and orphans'—members of what had been the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft*—with the racial and political outsiders consigned to imprisonment, forced labour, and murder.<sup>22</sup> On the Left, it had become commonplace for Social Democrats to blame the authoritarian Fatherland Front (or 'Austrofascist') regime for the Anschluss, in that it destroyed Austrian democracy, eliminated pluralism in 1933/34, and proved incapable of rallying Austrians to support the First Republic in March 1938. This indigenous fascist government was unwilling to unify the republic, according to this narrative, if it meant resurrecting democracy and the social democratic labour movement.<sup>23</sup> The Austrian Social Democratic tradition has prided itself on being the only Austrian political current never to embrace dictatorial or authoritarian principles, and the first left-wing European political force to combat fascism in February 1934. While the extent to which Austrian Social Democrats mythologized resistance against 'Austrofascism' has been the subject of scholarly debate since the 1930s,<sup>24</sup> this perception had long been a truism for the

<sup>20</sup> Excerpt from *Pressereferent des Österreichischen Kameradschaftsbundes im Burgenland* cited in Geschl, 'Das Gedenkjahr der Bewältigung', in *OZ: Die unabhängige Wochenzeitung für den pannonischen Raum* (9 March 1988), reproduced in Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Zerstörung*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> For an examination of Austrian veterans and the (re)historicization of service in the Wehrmacht, see Matthew Paul Berg, 'Challenging Political Culture in Postwar Austria: Veterans' Associations, Identity, and the Problem of Contemporary History', *Central European History*, 30 (1997), pp. 513–44. On perceptions of Second World War military service in Austria's print media, consult Alexander Pollak, *Die Wehrmachtslegende in Österreich. Das Bild der Wehrmacht im Spiegel der österreichischen Presse nach 1945* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2002). On the commemoration of fallen Austrian members of the Wehrmacht, see Reinhold Gärtner and Sieglinde Rosenberger, *Kriegerdenkmäler* (Innsbruck, 1991), particularly pp. 33–66 and 93–103, as well as Heidemarie Uhl, 'The Politics of Memory: Austria's Perception of the Second World War and the National Socialist Period', in Bischof and Pelinka, *Austrian Historical Memory*, pp. 64–94.

<sup>22</sup> Otto Schulmeister, 'Das erste und das letzte Opfer', *Die Presse* (12 March 1988).

<sup>23</sup> See the statement of the Viennese SPÖ organization 'SP will gemeinsamen Kampf gegen Gefahr von rechts: Erklärung zu den Ereignissen des März 1938', reproduced in Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Zerstörung*, p. 340, and Manfred Scheuch, 'Der Gewalt gewichen. 9. bis 13. März 1938: Die dramatischen letzten vier Tage Österreichs', *THEMA* (11 March 1988), cited in *ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Theodor Veiter, *Das 34er Jahr. Bürgerkrieg in Österreich* (Vienna and Munich, 1984), Erich Fröschl and Helge Zoitl, *Der 12. Februar 1934 in Wien* (Vienna, 1984); Anson Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War, 1927–1934* (Chicago and London, 1983).



party's members and broader base of supporters. The antifascist narrative found only occasional challenge from the Left during Gedenkjahr 1988, such as when journalist and historian Peter Pelinka argued that workers tended to accommodate themselves more strongly than other social groups in Vienna to Nazi pro-Anschluss slogans, with the expectation that only the Third Reich could resolve the chronic unemployment brought about by the Depression and by Fatherland Front marginalization of those who had been strong supporters of a Social Democratic Party declared illegal in 1934.<sup>25</sup> Still other journalistic voices urged concentration upon the future, rather than the past. The Catholic *Furche* spoke for many Austrians when it expressed concern that too much introspection threatened to 'scratch open barely scarred-over wounds.'<sup>26</sup>

### The 1990s: Beginnings of a Paradigm Shift in Cultural Memory

The preceding cursory survey identifies examples of fundamental positions, expressed with some variation, in the thousands of articles in national or regional publications and in television discussions during the weeks leading up to and immediately following the March

1988 commemoration. We begin to get a sense for what many Austrians understood as intractable differences rooted in personal experience and selective memory, for the ways in which historical and personal interpretation could take on mythic qualities. While it could not be reasonably expected that opening public discussion of the past would quickly and radically alter perceptions of the Nazi era, vigorous debate and subsequent developments contributed to a very conscious re-staging of Austria's image both domestically and internationally. For example, one might point to Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky's statement before the Nationalrat on 8 July 1991 that Austrians had shared responsibility for the suffering visited upon other individuals and peoples, followed by an even more candid and strongly worded remarks to this effect in Jerusalem on 9 July 1993 that clearly identified Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, the physically and mentally handicapped, and members of other groups who were persecuted on political or religious grounds. Moreover, Federal President Thomas Klestil's 15 November 2004 speech before the Israeli Knesset acknowledged that some of the worst scoundrels of the National Socialist regime were Austrians. Additionally, Viktor Klima, Vranitzky's successor, called into existence an independent Historikerkommission in 1998 to investigate the looting of Jewish assets and the exploitation of forced and concentration camp labour by firms that had been nationalized by the Second Republic, and to offer compensation where claims could be verified. Even private firms employed historians to research possible claims against them for such brutal and exploitative labour practices during the Third Reich.<sup>27</sup> We might also recall that Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel of the conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) reiterated Vranitzky's list of Nazi victims groups in a cabinet meeting marking the sixtieth

<sup>25</sup> Peter Pelinka, 'Warum stimmten 99.73% für Hitler?', *THEMA* (1 April 1988), cited in Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Verstörung*, p. 330.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Paul Kaspar, 'Die Erinnerung an 1988', cited in Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Verstörung*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> In some cases, historians received permission to publish their findings as scholarly studies. See, for example, Dieter Stiefel (ed.), *Die politische Ökonomie des Holocaust. Zur wirtschaftlichen Logik von Verfolgung und 'Wiedergutmachung'* (Vienna and Munich, 2001); Stefan Lütgenau and Alexander Schröck, *Zwangsarbeit in der österreichischen Bauindustrie. Die Teerag-Asdag AG 1938–1945* (Innsbruck, 2001); Wolf Gruner, *Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung. Österreichische Juden im NS-Staat 1938–45* (Innsbruck, 2000).

anniversary of the Second Republic on 28 April 2005, followed by his remark in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, printed on 10 November 2000, that Austria's status as first victim of Nazi aggression (which he appeared to accept uncritically) in no way diminished moral responsibility for subsequent events.<sup>28</sup>

Statements made and decisions taken by leading Austrian political figures might be criticized as either belated or as gestures insufficient to induce a paradigm shift among a citizenry largely hostile, or simply indifferent, to accepting notions of historical or moral (co)responsibility for the experiences of many Austrians during the Third Reich. Nonetheless, historian Oliver Rathkolb argues persuasively that, despite at times halting movement, the Austrian parliament has played an increasingly significant role in the business of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since the later 1940s, and particularly from the 1990s onward. More recently, its work has taken the form of 'revision of the Opferdoktrin through a clear majority' during debate creating the Nationalfonds that recognized the obligation that Austria shared in compensating those who were victims of NS terror (1995), as well as the creation of a 'Day of Reflection Against Violence and Racism in Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism' (1997).<sup>29</sup> Efforts such as these, together with teacher training and curricular initiatives in historical and civics education, exemplified good faith efforts to shape cultural memory. Nonetheless, a strong tendency persisted to accept individual narratives as cultural memory, which were then received as definitive versions of communicative memory. These narratives, together with instrumentalization of the state-sponsored victim myth, largely rejected notions of (co)responsibility. Victimization represented only one form of rejection, however. The other, perhaps more volatile expression of it involved glorification or playing down of the Nazi past, albeit from a far smaller segment of the population. This minority became more of an embarrassing nuisance with Haider's emergence as FPÖ leader concurrent to the Waldheim controversy and the 1988 commemoration.<sup>30</sup>

Majority opinion rejected external 'meddling' in Austrian affairs, and many people supported Waldheim's election in the 1980s as an appropriate assertion of Austrian sovereignty. Yet by the time the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition formed in 2000—and promptly met with EU censure due to some FPÖ politicians' xenophobic declarations and statements tinged with Nazi rhetoric—the public reacted largely with resigned indifference or even tired agreement when it came to foreign and home-grown criticism of the new federal government. Nonetheless, certain FPÖ figures continued to make controversial

<sup>28</sup> [www.versoeohnungsfonds.at/](http://www.versoeohnungsfonds.at/), 'Vranitzky, Klestil. Schlüssel: Deutliche Worte'. For Vranitzky's address to the Nationalrat, see *Stenographische Protokolle der Sitzungen des Nationalrates*, XVIII. GP (8 July 1991), 3, 283.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver Rathkolb, 'Das Parlament als Ort des Gedenkens und der Vergangenheitspolitik', *Forum Parlament*, 3 (2005), pp. 46–47.

<sup>30</sup> Almost twenty years after his election, Waldheim shared his thoughts about this turbulent period, and expressed his frustration with both domestic and international criticism that he perceived as a relentless and overwhelming assault that tolerated no counterargument: 'I was no "hero"'. No resistance fighter—I never tried to "sell" private activities [in this regard] to exculpate myself. But I also was surely no "hero" in service of the NS dictatorship. Within my own family I had my own awful experiences with the regime. I knew therefore where I stood. My goal was somehow to come through that time unscathed. To do that, I had to reconcile myself to that to which the dictatorship obliged me. My formulation "Pflichterfüllung" was bad—and it was also counter to every sense of inner truth. Recently, schoolchildren asked me why I didn't opt for Zivildienst. Despite all reprocessing [of the past], obviously much remains too difficult to explain', 'Waldheim: "Natürlich habe ich Fehler gemacht." Der Ex-Bundespräsident bilanziert das Jahr 1986: Wenn die Debatte über seine Vergangenheit zu einem neuen Zugang zur Geschichte beigetragen hat, dann sei das "sicher positiv"', *Der Standard* (25 Jan. 2006).

statements at veterans' association meetings and in other venues. One of the more controversial incidents occurred when Ernest Windholz, giddy with triumph upon his June 2000 election as FPÖ leader for Lower Austria, trumpeted the SS motto 'Unsere Ehre heisst Treue' before assembled party delegates. Austria's print and electronic media turned Windholz's rhetoric into headline news the next day, eliciting condemnation from the ÖVP and from the opposition Social Democrats and Greens. FPÖ responses exhibited the persistent difficulties that some still had with addressing the Nazi past. Windholz's half-hearted excuse for his statement convinced few of his sincerity: 'If I had known that the saying comes from the SS, I would most certainly have avoided it. I am forty years old, and thus don't know with whom the saying originates'<sup>31</sup>—which prompted Vienna's Social Democratic mayor Michael Häupl to quip 'he's either a Nazi or an idiot.'<sup>32</sup> Jörg Haider attempted to defend Windholz, declaring 'it can't be bad if one pledges one's self to [such values as] decency, fidelity, honesty, and efficiency.'<sup>33</sup> The fact that such statements could receive extensive media coverage and meet with more pointed criticism than had been the case during the 1980s suggests that a certain demographic, attitudinal and educational shifts had begun to manifest themselves more profoundly in Austrian society—despite the persistence of self-justifying and apologetic tendencies.<sup>34</sup>

'Braune Flecken' in the SPÖ: A New Stage in Vergangenheitsbewältigung The year 2000 was significant in another respect for efforts at Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Former NS physician Heinrich Gross, who had been a Social Democrat for decades and a prominent member of the Bund sozialistischer Akademiker, Intellektuellen und Künstler (BSA), went on trial for his involvement with the Third Reich's euthanasia programme. This proved a considerable point of embarrassment for the SPÖ leadership and much of the rank-and-file.<sup>35</sup> To his credit, SPÖ leader Alfred Gusenbauer made no attempt to deflect or minimize criticism of a Social Democratic legacy that included solicitation of former Nazis as early as the later 1940s, when modifications to existing denazification legislation allowed for rehabilitation and integration of those who had been NSDAP members or member-applicants. Rather, Gusenbauer declared '[W]e deeply regret our mistakes and ask forgiveness from injured survivors and the family members of victims.'<sup>36</sup> 'I belong ... to a new generation which must be able to permit itself an uninhibited, but also objective look at the history of its own party,' he added. 'Indeed, one has to be able clearly to see

<sup>31</sup> 'Riesenwirbel nach "spontanem" SS-Sager von FP-Chef Windholz', [www.diepresse.at/](http://www.diepresse.at/), Die Presse—Online Ausgabe (6 June 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Häupl, quoted in 'Letzte Worte', *Falter*, 24/00 (16–22 June 2000), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Falter*, 24/00 (16–22 June 2000), p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism*; Heinz Wassermann, *Verfälschte Geschichte im Unterricht: Nationalsozialismus und Österreich nach 1945* (Innsbruck and Munich, 2004); Wassermann, *Naziland Österreich!?: Studien zu Antisemitismus, Nation und Nationalsozialismus im öffentlichen Meinungsbild* (Innsbruck, 2002); and Reiter, 'Nationalsozialismus als historische Erbe?'

<sup>35</sup> Gross was not convicted. University of Innsbruck political scientist Anton Pelinka identified the implications of the Gross revelation succinctly when he commented 'the SPÖ needs credibility in order to demarcate itself from the Austria that is represented by Haider.' Anton Pelinka, 'Die SPÖ ist Österreich', *Format*, 14 (2000), p. 25. For the larger exposé, see 'Braune Sozis—Rote Nazis. Jahrzehntelang hat die SPÖ ehemalige Nationalsozialisten—Mitläufer genauso wie Verbrecher—hofiert, protegiert, gefördert und verteidigt', *Format*, 14 (2000), pp. 20–27.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald John, 'Wir bedauern', *Falter*, 50 (2002), p. 12. Reference to Gusenbauer's 2000 statement appeared within the context of release of the SPÖ self-study on restitution claims released in July 2002, examined below.

what the objective conditions of history were, yet at the same time examine individual behaviour in the light of sin and atonement.’<sup>37</sup> In a separate speech he acknowledged that although many Social Democrats had paid either with their lives or with bitter exile,

[t]hese historical facts do not change the fact that, after Austrian Social Democracy was outlawed and the parliamentary system destroyed by the Dollfuss regime in 1934, a number of disappointed, embittered and politically uprooted Social Democrats were driven into the hands of the National Socialists. Moreover, there were not a few workers and salaried employees who saw a glimmer of hope in the promises of the National Socialists and allowed themselves to be influenced by the opportunistic slogans and crafty populism of the National Socialists.<sup>38</sup>

Such comments elicited indignation from older Social Democrats who cherished the myth of belonging to the only Austrian party to have been free from the taint of fascism, authoritarianism, or dictatorial aspirations, of belonging to the first European Social Democratic party to have organized a defence of democratic republican principles against fascist aggression.

As a result of the Gross case, Gusenbauer promoted further inquiry into braune Flecken in the SPÖ after 1945. In effect, this had already begun when the Gross case drew public attention, as Gusenbauer’s own comments indicate. However, respected historians such as Oliver Rathkolb and Wolfgang Neugebauer had already offered critical appraisals of Anschluss justification among prominent party figures (Karl Renner and Heinrich Schneidmadl, for example, saw it as a historical necessity), or antisemitism among SPÖ leaders and governmental ministers (such as Adolf Schärf and Oskar Helmer) in Austria’s most respected news magazine, the independent weekly *profil*.<sup>39</sup> Between the Gross trial media coverage and the *profil* story, the SPÖ found itself ‘outed’. Despite opposition from the ‘older generation’, BSA President Caspar Einem commissioned a study of restitution claims in which the SPÖ was involved (including both inquiries into SPÖ claims for return of property confiscated between 1934–1945, and whether the SPÖ had acquired ‘aryanized’ property after 1945), a study of braune Flecken in the BSA not limited to the Gross example, and a broader study into the SPÖ-at-large. Journalist Herbert Lackner’s exposé ‘Schwarz- braun wie die Haselnuss’ seemed to open up the possibility of a far-ranging investigation of former Nazis in the ÖVP and the FPÖ, but the ÖVP proved unwilling to pursue a rigorous self-study at the time<sup>40</sup> and the FPÖ rejected the prospect altogether. Despite a history of provocative statements by prominent FPÖ political figures, the party’s parliamentary fraction leader Peter Westenthaler denied that the organization had any Nazi connections at all. Yet Lackner observed: ‘the FPÖ and its predecessor, the VdU [Verband der Unabhängigen], did not tender a service to National Socialists who had become [politically] homeless—from the start it was a political collection point for ex-Nazis.’

<sup>37</sup> ‘Kreisky ist falschgelegt’, *Format*, 14 (2000), p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Erklärung des designierten SPÖ-Vorsitzenden Dr. Alfred Gusenbauer “Zur Aufarbeitung des NS-Erbes in der Zweiten Republik im Rahmen der SP-Zukunftsdiskussion”’, 6. April 2000’, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Wie aus Braun Rot wurde. Die SPÖ und der Nationalsozialismus: die fragwürdige Gratwanderung der sozialdemokratischen Nachkriegspolitiker, die in den kommenden Monaten aufgearbeitet werden soll’, *profil*, 14 (3 April 2000), pp. 34–37. See also ‘Braune Flächen auf rotem Grund’, *Die Presse* (30 March 2000).

<sup>40</sup> See Herber Lackner, ‘Schwarz-braun wie die Haselnuss. Braune Flecken (II): Auch die ÖVP pflegte nach 1945 einen eher entspannten Umgang mit der Nazi-Vergangenheit—auf etwas andere Weise als die SPÖ’, *profil*, 15 (10 April 2000), pp. 52–54.

The readily given FPÖ account that former Nazis found themselves a political home in equal thirds among the SPÖ, the ÖVP and the VdU/FPÖ is perhaps quantitatively true, but is misleading. Those who turned to the SPÖ and ÖVP were mostly those who had learned their lesson—those who never broke with their past gathered with the FPÖ.

The personnel correspond [to this assessment]. The first FPÖ chief, Anton Reinthaller, was agricultural minister in the 1938 Nazi cabinet of Seib-Inquart; the second, Friedrich Peter [was] a member of an SS killing squad; the third, Alexander Götz, [was a] Hitler Youth leader. The fourth, Norbert Steger, wanted to bring the FPÖ on to a liberal path, [but] failed and was toppled by the fifth, Jörg Haider and the nationalist wing.

If, in connection with the Gusenbauer initiative, FPÖ parliamentary fraction leader Peter Westenthaler opines ‘the FPÖ has no brown stains’, then he proves conspicuously how necessary such an exercise in self-reflection would be for his party.<sup>41</sup>

Undoubtedly Gusenbauer sought not only to embarrass the ÖVP-FPÖ governing coalition partners into issuing definitive, public repudiations of their parties’ own Nazi-related pasts, but also to make the case that only the Social Democrats could face the past with honesty and the future with the confidence of Austrians and neighbouring EU citizens. Yet this decision should not be dismissed cynically as merely an opportunistic stratagem of an opposition leader. Gusenbauer risked the displeasure of well-connected senior Social Democrats who had lived through the Nazi period and its immediate aftermath, and thus he could not be absolutely certain that his position as Parteivorsitzender would remain secure. There is also no reason to doubt his rationale that members of the ‘new generation’ to which he belonged were in a position to focus their critical gaze upon their (grand)parents’ generation without the burden—as Margit Reiter argued—of being directly complicit in the events themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Results of the first self-study, undertaken by historians Maria Mesner, Margit Reiter and Theo Venus under the auspices of the University of Vienna’s Institut für Zeitgeschichte and the Karl Renner Institut, the Social Democratic think tank, gave the SPÖ mixed reviews. The investigation focused upon post-1945 restitution of social democratic property—e.g., gold, cash, bank accounts, real estate, party press equipment—confiscated after the February 1934 civil war, and drew on extensive research in federal, municipal and SPÖ archives. ‘During the entire SPÖ restitution debate’ of the later 1940s and early 1950s, the report concluded, ‘compensation for its own losses remained a far more pressing concern than [its concern] for Jewish victims ... the SPÖ hesitated in adjustment of restitution for Jewish victims when it saw its own claims threatened.’<sup>43</sup> Interviewed in the weekly *Falter*, Mesner explained that research yielded no definitive proof that property the SPÖ had (re)incorporated during the early years of the Second Republic had been ‘aryanized,’ particularly none involving much-specified upon party press (Vorwärts Verlag) assets.<sup>44</sup> Release of these conclusions seemed to promise that more evidence, no less illuminating and perhaps more damning, would be forthcoming in future studies.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Reiter, ‘Nationalsozialismus als historisches Erbe?’, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Mesner, Margit Reiter and Theo Venus, ‘Vermögensentzug und Restitution im Bereich der SDAP/SPÖ 1934/1945ff. Projektendbericht verfasst für das Institut für Zeitgeschichte der Universität Wien im Auftrag des Renner-Instituts Wien, Juli 2002’, p. 127. This study has since appeared in monograph form: Maria Mesner, Margit Reiter and Theo Venus, *Enteignung und Rückgabe: Das sozialdemokratische Parteivermögen in Österreich 1934 und nach 1945* (Innsbruck, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> John, ‘Wir bedauern’, p. 12.

### Gedenkjahr 2005: Two 'braune Flecken' Studies

In April 2002, the Austrian Resistance Archive received a commission from the BSA leadership to engage in a comprehensive examination of braune Flecken within the organization. Wolfgang Neugebauer and Peter Schwarz—two well-known and highly-regarded independent historians—presented their findings in mid-January 2005. Their conclusion was a scathing indictment: wholesale courtship of hardly repentant ex-Nazis into the BSA had taken place, and party leaders demonstrated great willingness to treat them with kid gloves.<sup>45</sup> The reasons for this were twofold. Party leaders such as Adolf Schärf and Oskar Helmer—who, like others in the SPÖ and more widely in Austrian society harboured antisemitic prejudices that predated the Nazis—feared that a postwar return of old-school Social Democratic and Revolutionary Socialist 'left-wing Jewish intellectuals' from exile would challenge the still-fragile coalition government forged with the ÖVP, and unleash a reaction within the population against the SPÖ as a 'Jewish' party. On the other hand, the return of these dedicated functionaries could have challenged the leadership claims of Schärf, Helmer, and others who neither went into exile nor suffered comparably under the Third Reich. Many exiled Jewish Social Democrats would readily have returned and helped to address the dearth of qualified SPÖ personnel in party administrative positions, posts at the federal, provincial or local levels, or in the trade unions and other institutions of Social Partnership. But, as Neugebauer noted, 'return [of exiles] did not merely go unsupported, it was also thwarted.'<sup>46</sup> The perceived necessity of reintegrating former Nazis in the late 1940s and early 1950s to make up for exiled or murdered Jewish Social Democratic intellectuals and academics (and also a significant number of non-Jewish party colleagues)—while in some respects understandable as a pragmatic measure—must be evaluated in light of Neugebauer's conclusion.<sup>47</sup>

No less incriminating was the extent to which former Nazis, or Ehemalige, made their way into the ranks of the BSA, beginning with the first amnesties for 'less incriminated' (minderbelastete) Nazis in 1948. This process continued through to the amnesties of the mid-1950s, which were extended to 'incriminated' (belastete) Nazis who had been SS and SA members, functionaries, or had joined the NSDAP between the time when Austrian authorities outlawed the party in July 1933 and the Anschluss. In fact, 1948 data revealed that in Styria some 70% of BSA members had been required to register as Ehemalige, in Upper Austria 58%, in Salzburg 50% and in Tyrol nearly 31%.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the BSA did not serve as an organization conducive to the political reeducation of former Nazis into

<sup>45</sup> The report was quickly published in book form and met with critical acclaim. See Wolfgang Neugebauer and Peter Schwarz, *Der Wille zum Aufrechten Gang: zur Rolle des BSA bei der gesellschaftlichen Integration ehemaliger Nationalsozialisten* (Vienna, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33. See also the comments of Neugebauer and Schwarz to Peter Mayr in 'SPÖ: Buhlen um die Ewiggestrigen', *Der Standard* (14 Jan. 2005). On antisemitism in the SPÖ, see also Richard Mitten, "'Die Sühne ... möglichst milde zu gestalten.'" Die sozialdemokratische "Bearbeitung" des Nationalsozialismus und des Antisemitismus in Österreich', in Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb and Albert Lichtblau (eds), *Schwieriges Erbe. Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1995), pp. 102–119.

<sup>47</sup> Neugebauer and Schwarz, *Der Wille zum aufrechten Gang*, p. 306.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64. The number of Ehemalige in the BSA was lowest in the capital, where the antifascist tradition of left-wing Social Democrats and Revolutionary Socialists and the memory of 'Red Vienna' remained strong and proud (pp. 65–66).



democratic socialist, humanist values, as had been hoped. 'In the majority of cases we investigated,' Neugebauer and Schwarz concluded,

we came upon the species of opportunist who was able to return to his profession with help of the BSA [author's note: denazification legislation had barred academics, teachers, physicians, and lawyers from working in their fields] or attempted to launch a new career ... and opportunistic free-riders often left the BSA after they achieved their goals ... A successful Social Democratic socialization or politicization may have taken place with the second generation, a group who had a chance to grow into the democratic self-conception and the tradition of the SPÖ.<sup>49</sup>

Ehemalige continued to count among the senior membership of the BSA into the 1990s; while a number of them may well have come to embrace democratic and humanistic principles, their influence in the party had been considerable and their past a taboo subject until the findings of this project were shared with the public.<sup>50</sup> It should come as no surprise that there were protests from their ranks, and even from second-generation types who felt it best to let this phase of the organization's development remain very much in the past. BSA President Caspar Einem insisted upon unsparing confrontation with the history of Ehemalige membership, and it is to his credit that the study received institutional support and wide-ranging publicity.<sup>51</sup>

Although Neugebauer and Schwarz devoted their energies to the braune Flecken project in one specific SPÖ case study, they were careful to point out that Ehemalige had also found a home in the ÖVP as well. Research they conducted into the field of judicial affairs yielded evidence that Volkspartei officials intervened on behalf of former Nazis far more frequently than did the BSA, particularly in the case of several prominent judges. Schwarz emphasized that the ÖVP would also benefit from a critical self-study without reservations—particularly, as Einem remarked drily, since ÖVP-affiliated print media had directed 'derisive commentary' against the SPÖ when preliminary findings of the BSA study were made public several months earlier;<sup>52</sup> and, as Kurt Scholz, former president of the Viennese city school board and authorized representative of the municipality of Vienna for restitution questions, commented in *Die Presse*: 'Sometimes the old madam Social Democracy has impressive features. Especially when she "outs" her own past—freely ... Only a hypocrite would use [the self-critical BSA report] as a cudgel against those who now confess their sins.'<sup>53</sup> Like Gusenbauer or Einem, Scholz himself is a member of the second generation not prepared to accept the communicative memory of the older generation uncritically, or to regard flashes of persistent antisemitism or intolerance as the natural state of things. 'It would still interest me, after more than

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to say that left-wing Social Democrats, including those with Jewish backgrounds, were not aware of the presence of Ehemalige within the BSA. For example, Bruno Kreisky noted that as early as 1953 he knew that some people referred to the BSA as the B-SA 'because many of its members were said to have been in the SA.' Matthew Paul Berg et al. (eds), *The Struggle for a Democratic Austria: Bruno Kreisky on Peace and Social Justice* (New York and Oxford, 2000), p. 366.

<sup>51</sup> Einem remarked at the book presentation of the Neugebauer-Schwarz project that the endeavour was a 'painful task of clarification', but necessary 'if wounds are to be healed'. On the SPÖ's coverage of the book presentation, see [www.startklar.at/www/page\\_17818.html](http://www.startklar.at/www/page_17818.html); for an independent treatment, see 'Zeitgeschichte: Die rote Nazi-Waschmaschine', profil, 3 (17 Jan. 2005), pp. 12–16.

<sup>52</sup> [www.startklar.at/www/page\\_17818.html](http://www.startklar.at/www/page_17818.html).

<sup>53</sup> Kurt Scholz, 'Was macht das B vor dem SA?', *Die Presse* (11 Jan. 2005).



thirty years,' he ruminated, 'to know who was behind the pithy election poster in the year 1970.'

It carried the slogan 'A Genuine Austrian' under the portrait of Federal Chancellor Josef Klaus. When we sassy students telephoned the unsuspecting election headquarters, announced ourselves as young Volkspartei members [author's note: as president of the school board in Red Vienna, Scholz would hardly have been affiliated with the ÖVP], and asked for an explanation—'the people out in the countryside keep asking us what does a "genuine Austrian" mean?'—we were told 'Bruno Kreisky is a Jew,' an answer that betrayed a subtle sense of the Austrian soul at that time. Certainly there will be a self-critical examination [within the ÖVP]. The bar appears to sit quite high after the Neugebauer and Schwarz BSA report.<sup>54</sup>

The ÖVP leadership team issued no formal response, but remarks made by Nationalrat President Andreas Khol offered anything but a willingness to explore the Volkspartei's past in the same spirit. Khol claimed in an interview on 19 January 2005 that the ÖVP was in 'an entirely different situation in this question. All of those who founded our party came out of concentration camps or the resistance,' and thus had no similar brown stains to contend with. This prompted political scientist Anton Pelinka to note sharply that while neither the SPÖ leaders themselves nor the core group of ÖVP founders had Nazi pasts, '[I]t would not be in the spirit of a Gedenkjahr simply to emphasize the brown stains of others.'<sup>55</sup> SPÖ executive director Norbert Darabos chimed in too, arguing 'if this is the way in which the ÖVP faces up to a Gedenkjahr—namely, with expensive jubilee celebrations instead of a reflective and open interaction with a past that is painful, too—then good night.'<sup>56</sup>

The FPÖ response is remarkable, insofar as it reflected a degree of denial that strayed even further into the absurd than had Khol's remarks. Jörg Haider, governor of Carinthia and at the time still behind-the-scenes FPÖ leader, suggested that opposition leader Gusenbauer would 'soon run out of options' in his efforts to build an alternative structure to the ÖVP-dominated governing coalition. With a confidence bordering on arrogance, he challenged Gusenbauer to rethink his refusal to cooperate with the FPÖ; the SPÖ leader would have to turn to the FPÖ—more particularly, to its self-appointed power broker, Jörg Haider—as a coalition partner, as it had between 1983 and 1986.<sup>57</sup>

Undoubtedly Haider sought to enhance his position after several years removed from the hot glow of the federal-level political spotlight. His history of controversial statements and several embarrassing, self-promotional publicity stunts had prompted the refusal of the ÖVP to include him in the VP-FP coalition team in 2000; subsequently, Haider had relinquished his FPÖ federal leader position and became what he called 'a perfectly normal party member' (albeit one who continued to use his provincial executive post to convey a right-wing populism that sounded increasingly self-serving).<sup>58</sup> In the wake of

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Hans Rauscher praised the SPÖ and chided the ÖVP to expedite a similar study in his column in the centre-left independent daily *Der Standard*. 'Rot-Brau, Schwarz-Braun: Die SPÖ hat ihre Vergangenheit untersuchen lassen, die ÖVP noch nicht', *Der Standard* (15 Jan. 2005).

<sup>55</sup> 'Die Balken im Auge des Andreas Khol. Zum selektiven Umgang mit 'braunen Flecken': Der Politologe Anton Pelinka antwortet dem Nationalratspräsidenten', *Salzburger Nachrichten* (7 Feb. 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Originally posted on SPÖ website [www.spoe.at](http://www.spoe.at) on 19 Jan. 2005, but the page no longer exists. The article can be found at [www.ikg-wien.at/IKG/Members/irene/1049709045631/1109682959849?portal\\_skin=Gemeinde&id=1109683665816](http://www.ikg-wien.at/IKG/Members/irene/1049709045631/1109682959849?portal_skin=Gemeinde&id=1109683665816).

<sup>57</sup> 'Haider zur SPÖ: "Mehr braune Flecken als ihr haben wir auch nicht"', *Der Standard* (17 Jan. 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Just a few short months later, Haider would create a new political party from the ranks of FPÖ dissidents, the *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*, which seized upon the orange colour and message of renewal associated with the recently successful and widely popular Ukrainian reform movement.

the BSA study, Haider claimed, one should no longer ask—as Gusenbauer had—if the FPÖ was suitable for a role in government; rather, one should ask the SPÖ: ‘Are you actually suitable for the FPÖ? ... We certainly do not have more brown smudges on our vest than you do.’<sup>59</sup>

Within three weeks, the FPÖ found itself in a more embarrassing position, with implications for the Austrian government’s reputation among the very European neighbours who had rebuked the ÖVP for including the FPÖ as its junior coalition partner. After EU parliamentary deputy Andreas Mölzer had distanced himself from an EU resolution against antisemitism and xenophobia, asserting that the Austrian republic was not burdened with any responsibility for the crimes of Auschwitz, FPÖ leader Ursula Haubner, Jörg Haider’s sister, attempted to explain hastily that ‘in this sensitive question the issue really is that all that happened between 1938 and 1945 shall not happen again. Each one of us has a responsibility for that. Mölzer meant what he said in this sense ... The most important thing is that one draws proper conclusions from a terrible past and becomes a member of a democratic system.’<sup>60</sup> While it is true that the Second Republic itself has no responsibility for National Socialist crimes, Mölzer attempted a sleight of hand that was clearly not in the spirit of honest confrontation with the past. Particularly in the context of the EU censure of 2000, Gedenkjahr 2005, and Austria’s impending assumption of the rotating EU presidency in January 2006, Haubner seems to have appreciated the importance of Austrian face-saving after Mölzer’s outburst, as well as of placating liberal elements within her own party who were liable to be shocked by such statements. All the same, Haubner could not resist offering a variation on her brother’s statement, when she announced ‘there are no brown smudges in the leadership of the FPÖ.’<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the second and grandchildren’s generations who shared in its leadership at the beginning of the twenty-first century had no direct Nazi connection, but her formulation did not squarely address how and to what extent Ehemalige had found a political home in the FPÖ, nor the extent to which this phenomenon had implications for political culture and value orientations within her party.

If the BSA study created shockwaves among circles within the SPÖ, defensive reactions on the part of the FPÖ, and confusion within the ÖVP, then the second braune Flecken study, coordinated by Maria Mesner, created a benchmark for broader critical self-study with implications for the Volkspartei and FPÖ. As a member of the project team I can offer insights into the project’s evolution but must be careful not to wax too enthusiastic about its implications. Thus, with respect to the latter, I will limit my comments to an exploration of media reactions in order to provide readers with a sense for the project’s reception. However, I can state unequivocally that when work began in the summer of 2003, SPÖ officials in the party’s federal offices in Vienna and in the office of then Second Nationalrat President (now Federal President) Heinz Fischer provided us with unfettered access to Parteivorstandsprotokolle and other relevant documentation, dating from the later 1940s into the early 1950s. We also enjoyed support from archival staff in municipal and provincial archives, and in the Österreichisches

<sup>59</sup> ‘Haider zur SPÖ: “Mehr braune Flecken”’.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Fleckenfreie FPÖ-Führung: Haubner vermeidet Kritik an Mölzer, der sich von Auschwitz-Resolution gegen Antisemitismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit distanziert hatte’, *Der Standard* (6 Feb. 2005).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Staatsarchiv/Archiv der Republik. The one minor point of friction concerned the intended release date. Apparently, internal outrage elicited by the BSA study contributed to postponement of the formal presentation of *Entnazifizierung zwischen politischem Anspruch, Parteienkonkurrenz und Kaltem Krieg: Das Beispiel der SPÖ* from February to April to July 2005.<sup>62</sup> It would seem that older party functionaries who still had influence hoped that a July release would lend itself to a gentler impact than had been the case with the Neugebauer/Schwarz study in January. Early July is the beginning of the so-called Sommerloch, and with parliament out of session and not in a position to take up controversial issues, many people on holiday and not following the news as closely as usual, potentially controversial stories do not stand out quite so much. Even if the book presentation had taken place before the summer holiday season began in earnest, reactions might well have been somewhat muted in the wake of reactions to the BSA study. Perhaps any potential sense of outrage had been exhausted between January and June, both given the furor unleashed by the BSA project, and—as we shall see below—in the wake of the Kampl and Gudenus controversies.

*Entnazifizierung* explores the party leadership's tactical and organizational perspectives on the 'Nazi question' after 1945 with an eye to Cold War developments and within the context of wider domestic political debate over denazification between 1945 and 1949. Other case studies combine quantitative and qualitative methods in analyses of former Nazis in party bureaucracy positions on a province-by-province basis and in the SPÖ print media landscape. The conclusion that attracted most consistent media attention was that 10.7% of SPÖ deputies in the Nationalrat, Bundesrat, provincial legislative councils, and in positions of governmental responsibility—representing some 1,400 individual cases—had been National Socialists. For the sake of comparison, an investigation of former Nazis among ÖVP parliamentarians alone yielded a total of 12.8%.<sup>63</sup> As historians can appreciate, it proved impossible to provide a quantitative assessment of the number of SPÖ members who sympathized with elements of the Nazi programme (such as the Anschluss or antisemitism) but did not become members themselves. In such cases one must be content with qualitative evidence.

My own particular contribution examined the possibilities for and limits to rehabilitation of former Nazis who had been Social Democrats—ordinary citizens, rather than prominent figures or former social democratic party functionaries—during the initial postwar years in the case of the party's Vienna stronghold. We thought that a perspective from *Alltagsgeschichte* would serve a valuable function in a study of *braune Flecken* in the SPÖ, insofar as the sources I identified included detailed *Lebensläufe* that accounted for the social democratic bona fides of petitioners for rehabilitation, what had driven them to seek NSDAP affiliation, and whether SPÖ review boards at the local, Land and federal levels felt that there had existed

<sup>62</sup> Maria Mesner (ed.), *Entnazifizierung zwischen politischem Anspruch, Parteienkonkurrenz und Kaltem Krieg: Das Beispiel SPÖ* (Vienna, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342. See also 'Renner wäre "brauner Faschismus lieber als der schwarze"' gewesen: Zweiter Bericht zu SP-Geschichte erschienen' and 'SP-Studie: Zehn Prozent Nazis', *Der Standard* (5 July 2005); 'SPÖ: Studie über "braune Flecken"', [www.diepresse.com](http://www.diepresse.com); (3 July 2005); 'Rote Gewissensforschung', *profil*, 27 (4 July 2005), p. 20; 'SPÖ: "Wo viel Licht, da viel Schatten"'. Gusenbauer forderte bei der Präsentation des Historikerberichts über "braune Flecken" der Parteigeschichte einmal mehr auch die anderen Parteien auf, sich ihre Geschichte zu stellen', [www.kurier.at](http://www.kurier.at); (5 July 2005).

excusable grounds for these people having become Nazis. The standards to which the SPÖ held these people were much higher than those to which they held party functionaries or people who held positions in the municipal civil service or private sectors—at least from the end of the war to the re-enfranchisement of less-implicated Nazis in 1948/49—unless the former had special skills useful to reconstruction of party or civil administration and were not heavily-implicated National Socialists. There are two likely reasons to account for this: first, the SPÖ was keen to make sure that its rank and file were politically reliable; second, the SPÖ was determined not to sacrifice any potential advantage to its ÖVP partner/rival in sectors vital to economic or civil administration.

As an academic historian this constellation of issues fascinated me, and I saw this research as an opportunity to delve into the experiences of the average person. Perhaps this revealed a certain naïvety on my part, at least insofar as reactions to the project were concerned. Media treatment of the volume forced me to rethink the focus of those who might shape, or perhaps merely reflect, broader interest in the larger braune Flecken problem. Reactions focused overwhelmingly on the number of individuals in positions of responsibility that emerged from the excellent quantitative work of my colleagues (to reiterate, 10.7% in the SPÖ versus 12.8% in the ÖVP), as well as on the qualitative research that revealed who many of these people actually were. My initial thought was that this media fascination represented for some a delight in outing individuals who had been former Nazis (in most cases now deceased), for others a vindication that the SPÖ had been less politically compromised during the formative years than its principal rival. These motivations were very likely to be the driving forces in some instances. At the same time, one cannot let any potential political advantage that the SPÖ or social democratic-friendly journalists might have envisioned (such as the projection of unsparing integrity) completely eclipse the fact that a younger generation of social democratic elites chose to countenance their tradition's past with an honesty inconsistent with a jubilant self-representation as legions of victims and resistance fighters.

Alfred Gusenbauer opened the book presentation with the remark '[I]t is not a particularly pleasant set of facts for me, for my party and for Austria's history that is thematized in this study—but it was necessary to do this work.'<sup>64</sup> In response to a profil journalist's observation '[I]n the SPÖ there were many who were very sceptical when you commissioned this study,' Gusenbauer replied

[N]aturally there were sceptics among us, above all among the older functionaries ... They were aware of the large-scale recruitment efforts of the ÖVP towards former NSDAP members. Some of them said to me: well, is that really necessary? But it is important to carry out this scholarly analysis for the identity of Austria and for the identity of Social Democracy too, even if some of the details are painful.<sup>65</sup>

For some critics, such as historian Eva Blimlinger, the revelations offered by *Entnazifizierung* were too little, too late.<sup>66</sup> The study's findings may have come too late for some—but only if

<sup>64</sup> 'SPÖ stellt sich ihrer Vergangenheit. Die SPÖ stellte sich in einer Studie über "braune Flecken" ihrer eigenen Vergangenheit. Sechs Wissenschaftler haben im Auftrag von SPÖ-Vorsitzendem Alfred Gusenbauer fünf Jahre lang an der Untersuchung gearbeitet', [www.spoe.at/ireds3/page.php?P=22087](http://www.spoe.at/ireds3/page.php?P=22087); (5 July 2005).

<sup>65</sup> 'Erstickende Verklärung: SPÖ-Vorsitzender Alfred Gusenbauer über Fallstricke in der eigenen Geschichte', *profil*, 27 (4 July 2005), p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> See Blimlinger's sometimes shrill analysis of the project in 'Der Mut zum Fleck', *Falter*, 27 (8–14 July 2005), pp. 8–10, and Maria Mesner's response 'Das Dilemma der Polemik', *Falter*, 28 (15–21 July 2005), p. 18.

we assume that we can control the social-cultural processes that catalyze transitions from accepted communicative memory to forms of cultural memory capable of challenging communicated assumptions. The results of *Entnazifizierung* were certainly not too little, even if they did not address the range of issues that historians such as Blimlinger might have preferred; they are the result of sound research and derived from existing archival documentation. (Since I am too close to the project to detach myself significantly enough from my own subjectivity, I leave it to readers to render their own judgments.) As part of the three-part series spanning five years that includes restitution and the BSA, the larger *braune Flecken* challenge Gusenbauer issued must be taken seriously as a significant turning point in macro-level *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, with potential for informing cultural memory on a par with Vranitzky's and Klestil's comments during the 1990s.<sup>67</sup>

Like the BSA study, *Entnazifizierung* is significant beyond the fact that it represents an additional facet of critical self-scrutiny for Social Democrats. After *Entnazifizierung* suggested that the ÖVP had been no less complicit in integrating ex-Nazis, Helmut Wohnout, director of the ÖVP's Karl von Vogelsang Institut, announced that the Volkspartei would engage in its own self-study. A preliminary report, which was to be released by the end of

2005, would detail how many ÖVP politicians were involved in the resistance, the Wehrmacht, and in the NSDAP—in other words, it would focus on the period from 1938 to 1945.<sup>68</sup> At the time I took up this topic in July 2006 the report had yet to materialize, and no word of it had been released to the media. Historians will have to wait and see if the report is considered 'too late' by critics both outside and within the ÖVP—if it is ever completed and made public. Gusenbauer's standard of thoroughness is not unreasonable:

[I]f the ÖVP is not prepared to concern itself with the role of its predecessor organization during the era of Austrofascism, if it is not prepared to confront its role in the integration of National Socialists after 1945, then the reasonable suspicion exists that there is considerable material here that the ÖVP does not want to reveal to the public.<sup>69</sup>

If one is to apply this standard, then Wohnout's proposed plan would appear to offer too little and certainly to be much overdue. For critical historians, the SPÖ's emphasis on continuity with the pre-1945 social democratic tradition, despite *braune Flecken*, would appear consistent, whereas the ÖVP's long-standing assertion that the Catholic Conservative/Christian Democratic party that came into existence in 1945 was fundamentally different from the Christian Social tradition and its authoritarian/ corporatist manifestation during the interwar years is far less convincing. It is precisely at this nexus of politics and historical inquiry that Gusenbauer's challenge and the Vogelsang Institut's great opportunity are situated, with a rigorous (*schonungslose*) examination of the past as a way to (re-)affirm one's ongoing commitment to present and future democratic realities. It cannot be clear to observers of contemporary Austrian politics that the Social Democrats could definitively trump the ÖVP in the eyes of voters with a belated but genuine claim to moral high ground with respect to developments now three generations past—namely, that while Austrian social democracy, as an institution,

<sup>67</sup> According to journalist Herbert Lackner, the Neugebauer/Schwarz BSA study and the Mesner-led *Entnazifizierung* volume both ranked among the top ten of works related to the 1945/1955/2005 commemoration. 'Die Bestenliste: Das profil-Ranking der neu erschienenen Bücher zum Jubiläumsjahr 2005', *profil*, 50 (12 Dec. 2005), p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> 'Auch die ÖVP prüft Biografien ihrer Nachkriegs-Politiker', *Der Standard* (5 July 2005).

<sup>69</sup> 'Erstickende Verklärung'.

never supported any form of dictatorship, it did eventually demonstrate its willingness to acknowledge the active or passive complicity of many of its members in the Third Reich. The vast majority of the Austrian electorate would invariably remain preoccupied with issues such as standard of living, economic growth, full employment and social welfare viability. However, for historians, social scientists and cultural critics, a willingness to face difficult truths at the expense of comfortable silences or insulating myths remains compelling—particularly as Austria (like other EU or North American states, for that matter) addresses questions such as the rights/responsibilities of a democratic citizenry versus the challenges/opportunities posed by immigration, or diversity versus intolerance in the wake of dictatorial or intolerant regimes.

#### Challenging the Gedenkjahr 2005 Consensus: Kampl and Gudenus

A definitive critical analysis of Gedenkjahr 2005 as represented in the media, comparable to Heidemarie Uhl's work on 1938/1988, has yet to be written. I cannot certify the number of articles pertaining to 1945 and 1955 that were published during the latter part of 2004 and through 2005, but it would undoubtedly range well into the hundreds.<sup>70</sup> Features carried in major daily newspapers commemorating, for example, the liberation of Mauthausen concentration camp and the collapse of the Third Reich were frequently unsparing in their criticism of Austrians' roles in the Third Reich. Still other treatments of the last weeks of the war (re)connected with the concept of victimization, whether at the hands of Nazi—that is to say, German—occupiers, as a result of Allied air raids, or through subsequent four-power occupation. Still others offered glowing retrospectives on the events that culminated in the State Treaty and the restoration of full sovereignty.<sup>71</sup> A subtle shift in explanatory paradigms can be discerned from the 1988 to the 2005 commemorations, however. Our overview of 1988 revealed that popular media treatments were dominated by the competing discourses of denial and by recrimination vis-à-vis the circumstances that led to the Anschluss. Manifestations of (self-)critical introspection remained limited. Indeed, these tropes did not disappear entirely over the subsequent seventeen years. What is evident in the language of 2005 in official SPÖ, Green, and most ÖVP statements, as well as in the tone of most media accounts, is acceptance of Austrian co-responsibility for the machinations and crimes of the Third Reich.

In the midst of commemorations both solemn and festive, the controversies surrounding FPÖ Bundesrat members Siegfried Kampl and John Gudenus are all the more significant. Their remarks, which garnered headlines in the major Austrian print and electronic media, would have prompted far more bitter and divisive reactions in 1988. Indeed, the fact that reactions to Kampl and Gudenus were overwhelmingly critical suggests the extent to which official public and mainstream media positions

<sup>70</sup> Several dozen of the major pieces have been reproduced in Helene Maimann, *Was bleibt. Schreiben im Gedenkjahr* (Vienna, 2005). This is a valuable volume in that it identifies many of the articles that contributed to Gedenkjahr debate, but it would be inaccurate to call the work a critical analysis of competing discourses.

<sup>71</sup> See for example, 'Der Himmel über Wien hing voller: Vor 60 Jahren, am 10. September 1944, erfasste der alliierte Luftkrieg erstmals die Wiener Innenstadt', *Kurier* (5 Sept. 2004), pp. 20–21; 'Als öffnete sich ein Massengrab: Vor 60 Jahren wurde das KZ Mauthausen von einem amerikanischen Kommando befreit. Sieben Jahre eines der schlimmsten Konzentrationslager im NS-Regime hatten ein Ende', *Kurier* (5 May 2005), p. 6; *Wiener Journal: Das Magazin der Wiener Zeitung*, 19 (14 May 2005), devoted an entire edition to the State Treaty and its consequences under the rubric 'Österreich ist frei!'



reflected a shift in the transmission and reception of communicative memory over a generation. While these two men were not the only individuals to challenge a more thoughtful, self-critical understanding of Austria's Nazi past, their positions as politicians with regional profiles and Bundesrat seats certainly made them more prominent among those who would minimize that past and obfuscate the category of victim.

Sparks began to fly in reaction to comments Kampl made during a 14 April 2005 Bundesrat debate. The topic was a joint SPÖ-Green proposal to the Justice Ministry concerning rehabilitation for victims of the National Socialist military justice system, specifically Wehrmacht deserters. Gudenus began with a defence of Wehrmacht judges, namely that they were ostensibly less bloodthirsty than those sitting on the Volksgerichtshof. Only one tenth of 1% of Wehrmacht soldiers, he argued—some 13,500 servicemen of all ranks—had been prosecuted for desertion, and some 6,000 ‘unfortunates’ were condemned to death.<sup>72</sup> To this he added provocatively: ‘[I]f deserters committed sabotage, for example by blowing up bridges during a withdrawal and thereby making a pull-out difficult—if not completely impossible—for their comrades, then there is nothing therein which is honourable and constitutive for the Republic.’<sup>73</sup> Gudenus's remarks appeared to underscore the old notion of the dignity of Wehrmacht service, at least insofar as it involved defending the Heimat against a Soviet military intent on ‘conquest’ rather than ‘liberation.’<sup>74</sup> Further, he rejected the idea of resistance through desertion because it undermined troop strength or imperilled orderly movement in the field. He also implied that fear was not a sufficient excuse for desertion (‘there is probably hardly a soldier who is without fear ... [he] would be a case for a psychiatrist’), and that most fled the colours because of impending court martial for ‘misappropriation, robbery, [or] black market activity’ rather than noble reasons—assuming there could, in fact, be reasons designated as such in Gudenus's eyes.<sup>75</sup>

Kampl went further than Gudenus, declaring with a curious, staccato delivery that ‘deserters were, in part, Kameradenmörder, linking them with ‘deserters, partisans in Carinthia who shot the father dead beside the children—not isolated cases. Catastrophic conditions ... As concerns the postwar period: Nazi persecution, many homeless, expulsions, without rights—who was responsible, then, for the initial period after the war?’<sup>76</sup> Kampl noted the case of his own family: his widower father spent three years in detention—the implication was he had been a Nazi, and perhaps one of some rank if he spent so long in custody—and Kampl and his four siblings struggled to survive hunger and homelessness. Yet, like Haubner's double message in response to Mölzer's EU remarks, Kampl would have had it both ways. ‘We know the history,’ he concluded. ‘Where dictatorships reigned, and still do today, misery, destitution, and lawlessness are [to be found], and there we still have much to do. Let us work together to do everything possible, so that our homeland never again finds itself in such a situation!’<sup>77</sup> By juxtaposing victims of aggressive war launched by the

<sup>72</sup> Stenographisches Protokoll der 720. Sitzung des Bundesrates der Republik Österreich vom 14. April 2005, p. 119. Gudenus did not take up the question of punishment units to which the vast majority of the remainder was assigned, which involved dangerous duty on the front lines—and was tantamount to a death sentence.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 119–120.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



NS regime and citizens of the Third Reich caught up in Allied invasions from east and west, he obscured distinctions between cause and effect. He subsumed the NS regime in the broad category of dictatorship, so that the distinctive elements and abuses of the Third Reich became one case among many, and people became victims of regimes rather than of individuals responsible for their actions. However, references to cases of soldiers allegedly ‘murdered’ by their comrades and his own family’s experiences stand out in his account (his father a victim of a ‘vicious persecution of Nazis’ at the hands of partisans and the occupation forces).<sup>78</sup> The common denominator is that distinct individuals were victimized by those who either intended to undermine efforts to defend the Heimat, or promoted denazification in postwar Austrian society. It would be difficult not to conclude that Kampf felt unjust suffering could have been avoided if Austria, indistinguishable from the Third Reich at that time, had been able to defend itself, and that denazification had been excessive (if it had been desirable at all). It would have been problematic had an elected official uttered these remarks at any time during the Second Republic, but during the Gedenkjahr they proved a source of particular embarrassment.

The sixty-five year old Gudenus, a retired Bundesheer colonel, had been known as an extreme right-winger within his Vienna FPÖ constituency and elsewhere in the country. Ten years earlier, as an FPÖ Nationalrat deputy, he had argued in favour of revisionism when he said, with respect to his doubt that gas chambers had ever existed in the Third Reich, ‘one should not erect taboos, one should engage in physical and academic inquiry.’ In response to criticism shortly thereafter he attempted to clarify his position:

‘the existence of the industrial annihilation of countless people in the Third Reich, especially through gas chambers, stands firmly for me as a historical fact that is not open to revisionistic utterances.’<sup>79</sup>

This ambiguity notwithstanding, Gudenus created a sensation still more incendiary, given the Gedenkjahr commemorations, when he again called the existence of gas chambers into question during a television interview on 26

April 2005.<sup>80</sup> Faced again with criticism, he modified his comment with the statement

‘there were gas chambers, but not in the Third Reich. Rather, [they were] in Poland.’<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> For critical reaction to Kampf’s comment on the persecution of Nazis see, for example, ‘Gab es in Österreich eine “brutale Naziverfolgung”?’ Es antwortet: Sabine Loitfellner von der Forschungsstelle Nachkriegsjustiz—Projekt: Justiz und NS-Gewaltverbrechen’, <http://derStandard.at/> (8 June 2005). See also Michael Völker’s interview with Federal President Heinz Fischer, ‘“Bereit, etwas weniger Populäres zu sagen”’, *Der Standard* (18–19 June 2005). ‘I can well imagine,’ Fischer said, ‘an NS-Blutordensträger who was already active illegally for the National Socialists prior to 1938 [the authoritarian Fatherland Front government outlawed the NSDAP in Austria from July 1933 until February/March 1938—MPB] and who denounced fellow citizens did not have a comfortable time after 1945. Of course. But one cannot designate that as a “brutal persecution of Nazis”’. It is a logical fact that someone who conspired against the Republic prior to 1938 and supported a regime after 1938 that had to answer for those murders and crimes [ ... ] would be called to responsibility after 1945.’

<sup>79</sup> ‘Nach Entrüstung um Gudenus-Aussage: Bundesrat legt FPÖ Mitgliedschaft zurück!’, [www.networld.at/index.html?articles/0517/10/111223\\_s5.shtml](http://www.networld.at/index.html?articles/0517/10/111223_s5.shtml), originally appeared via AustriaPresseAgentur (29 April 2005).

<sup>80</sup> ‘Gudenus im Porträt’, *Die Presse* (27 April 2005).

<sup>81</sup> ‘Gudenus diskutiert “Auschwitzlüge”’, [www.vienna.at](http://www.vienna.at), Vienna Online—Österreich (21 June 2005); ‘Gudenus: “Es gab Gaskammern, aber nicht im Dritten Reich. Sondern in Polen”’, FP-Bundesrat steht im Standard zu seinen Zweifeln, sieht keinen Anlass zu einer Entschuldigung und will [im Bundesrat] bleiben’, *Der Standard* (8 June 2005); ‘Gudenus in Mauthausen: Diskussion um “Auschwitzlüge”’, *Die Presse* (21 June 2005). Gudenus offered his remarks in late April and early May; these June articles were published in connection with debates over whether he would lose his seat in the Bundesrat and face prosecution for violation of the NS Verbotsgesetz.

(Historian Oliver Rathkolb pointed out that Gudenus attempted to place responsibility for death camps on a Polish state that did not exist at the time. The territory on which the Auschwitz camp system sat had been annexed by the NS regime and was administered by it.<sup>82</sup>) Then, during a visit on 4 May 2005 to Mauthausen, as part of a larger governmental delegation associated with the remembrance event for victims of violence and racism, he expressed doubt either that Nazi gas chambers had ever really existed at all, or that the number of Jews ‘allegedly’ gassed could be correct. Moreover, when examining images of camp inmates, Gudenus remarked that young prisoners in one photograph actually looked quite good [with respect to their physical condition] and that [he himself] looked worse.<sup>83</sup>

Although he chose to ignore calls from the ÖVP, the SPÖ, the Greens, and the Haider-led FPÖ splinter party Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) to relinquish his Bundesrat seat,<sup>84</sup> Gudenus succumbed to pressure from party colleagues to resign from the FPÖ. Nonetheless, he stayed on as an independent Bundesrat deputy until his term ended in November 2005, but deputies from all parties in the Viennese Landtag voted unanimously in September to strip him of his parliamentary immunity. In the meantime, Gudenus had been indicted according to §3 of the Verbotsgesetz, under which an individual, if convicted, could be sentenced to a maximum of ten years’ imprisonment for denial or minimization of Nazi crimes.<sup>85</sup> Although Gudenus was found guilty in April 2006, his one-year sentence was commuted to a three-year probationary period due to his acknowledgement that he had made a serious mistake.<sup>86</sup>

Kampl, on the other hand, did not step down or face charges—his words were problematic and embarrassing, but not in violation of the Verbotsgesetz—but relinquished his right to serve as rotating Bundesrat chair when his turn came around at the beginning of July 2005.<sup>87</sup> He returned to the Bundesrat for another term in November 2005, with overwhelming support (80%) from the population of the Carinthian town of Gurk, where he has long served as mayor. Kampl complained that the media had misquoted him and made him out to be a political die-hard locked in the past; he expressed regret for his remarks and emphasized the importance of reconciliation and pardon for deserters, National Socialists, DPs, or Sinti and Roma.<sup>88</sup> The fact that he considered Austrians subjected to denazification measures—or to unsympathetic treatment by the occupation forces, indigenous antifascists, or Yugoslav partisans in southern Carinthia—as equal (or

<sup>82</sup> ‘Einserfrage: Keine Gaskammern im “Dritten Reich?”’, *Der Standard* (9 June 2005).

<sup>83</sup> ‘Gudenus: “Es gab Gaskammern”’, ‘Gudenus in Mauthausen’.

<sup>84</sup> Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel said sharply: ‘[I]f precisely during these [commemorative] days the relativization of the horrors of the Holocaust occurs that awakens the impression that annihilation of millions of Jews, those who thought or believed differently, [and] sick people did not take place to this extent, one who denies or relativizes simply does not belong in a democratic body.’ Schüssel: ‘Wer den Holocaust relativiert passt nicht in demokratisches Gremium’, *Die Presse* (27 April 2005).

<sup>85</sup> ‘Gudenus wird Immunität erneut aberkannt: Landtag erneut mit einstimmigem Auslieferungsbeschluss—Aussagen zu Häftlingsfotos im KZ-Mauthausen werden untersucht’, <http://derStandard.at>; (15 Sept. 2005); ‘Gudenus wird der Prozess gemacht’, <http://kurier.at/oesterreich/1259495.php>; (27 Jan. 2006).

<sup>86</sup> <http://derStandard.at/> (26 April 2006), ‘Ex-FP Abgeordneter wegen Wiederbetätigung zu einem Jahr bedingt verurteilt.’

<sup>87</sup> ‘Gestolpert über “Naziverfolgungs”-Sager: Kampl legt Mandat zurück’, *Die Presse* (28 April 2005).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Kampl: “Meine Aussage war anders gemeint”’, <http://kaernten.orf.at/stories/46959>.

perhaps even privileged?) members of a broad category of victims that included those designated external to the NS Volksgemeinschaft was not a new narrative thread in the fabric of postwar Austrian identity. The text of Kampf's comments in the Bundesrat debate protocol does suggest that he is a man who had not reflected upon the implications of the discourse of victimization and who remained influenced by formative memories that were devoid of a keen appreciation for broader context. What was quite new was the fact that conservative and centre-left media alike effectively concentrated on these remarks, rather than on his apparently earnest call for reconciliation. This would suggest a 'heightened sensitivity to insensitivity'—a reluctance, if not outright opposition, to continue to accept an established form of communicative memory as the basis for Austrian identity after sixty years and some three generations.

### Concluding Thoughts

The virtual absence of support for Kampf's remarks concerning duty and victimization in the major print or electronic media is noteworthy, particularly when compared to fairly widespread defence of the Opfermythos and a certain pride in *Pflichterfüllung* in the Third Reich's armed forces expressed during 1988 commemorations.<sup>89</sup> Reactions to Gudenus's utterances were of a qualitatively different nature, for he flirted with a form of Holocaust revisionism—tantamount to denial—that had long been illegal in the Second Republic and inconsistent with a prevailing sense of core Austrian and European values in the early twenty-first century. (Indeed, the arrest of British historian and Holocaust denier David Irving in November 2005 and the three-year sentence handed down subsequently by a Viennese court in February 2006 is a clear indication of the readiness of the Austrian authorities to uphold the NS Verbotsgesetz.<sup>90</sup>) Prevailing attitudes in 2005 seem to have largely embraced a form of cultural memory that—while it did not entirely jettison various manifestations of the Opfermythos—actively encouraged critical examination of the past. This process had begun with the work of historians, political scientists, artists, journalists and politicians during the sometimes vicious *Gedenkjahr* 1988 debates.

The climate of *Gedenkjahr* 2005, characterized by the absence of mutual recrimination and self-righteous justifications so evident a generation earlier, suggests that a significant shift is under way in the Austrian project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It would be an overstatement to attribute this transformation to Austrian Social Democrats alone. Nonetheless, we must recognize that it was Vranitzky's acknowledgement of Austrian co-responsibility for National Socialist crimes, Klima's call for the creation of an independent Historikerkommission (and the subsequent research into NS theft of Austrian- Jewish property, the treatment of other minorities, the exploitation of forced and slave

<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that a certain pride in service within the Third Reich's armed forces was not considered inconsistent with a sense of Austrian identity, nor was it necessarily an indication of sympathy for Nazism.

<sup>90</sup> Irving was convicted under §3g of the Verbotsgesetz revised in 1992. See Richard Bernstein, 'Austria Refuses Bail to Briton Accused of Denying the Holocaust', *The New York Times* (26 Nov. 2005); 'Austria Imposes 3-Year Sentence on Notorious Holocaust Denier', *The New York Times* (21 Feb. 2006); 'Drei Jahre Haft für David Irving', *OÖ Nachrichten* [www.nachrichten.at/politik/innenpolitik/424435](http://www.nachrichten.at/politik/innenpolitik/424435) (21 Feb. 2006). After thirteen months in an Austrian jail Irving was released to serve out the remaining 23 months of his sentence at home under terms of probation. The decision of presiding judge Ernst Maurer—a man widely known for his FPÖ connections—met with sharp criticism among moderate and left-leaning commentators within Austria. See 'Austria Frees Holocaust Denier From Jail', *The New York Times* (21 Dec. 2006).

labour, and restitution issues<sup>91</sup>), and ultimately Gusenbauer's and Eitem's resolve to have the SPÖ examine its braune Flecken unsparingly—and, thereby, to challenge Austrian political and other institutions outside the Social Democratic tradition to do the same—that contributed significantly to the creation of space for a new, self-critical expression of cultural memory. Future research into the NS era in Austria and Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the Second Republic can only profit from the publications that emerged from the Historikerkommission's work and from the three SPÖ self-studies. We can speculate that future meta-narratives addressing Austrian social, political and cultural history since 1945 must take Vergangenheitsbewältigung very much into account; Oliver Rathkolb's bold study of the Second Republic suggests that the topic,<sup>92</sup> even if not the leitmotiv of every such account, must remain a vital element that historians would be well advised to ignore only at their own peril.

Literary scholar Egon Schwarz, who fled Vienna with his family after the Anschluss, claimed in 2002 (roughly at the same time that Gerhard Schröder declared that Germany had achieved 'normality' through prolonged and difficult introspection) that 'Austria is inextricably implicated [in the crimes of the NS regime], the behavior of its politicians and parts of its public is hardly unique. We are dealing with quite a normal nation'.<sup>93</sup>

Schwarz's intention was not to relativize Austrian complicity vis-à-vis any number of twentieth century societies in which egregious human rights violations have occurred. Instead, he argued that Austrians—not merely Austrian academic historians—had begun to question perceptions of the past and that an Austrian version of the Historikerkontroversie had been underway.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps it is only when a society which has experienced tremendous upheaval begins to question its fundamental self-conceptions, when it challenges the taboos that protect memory and myths from pitiless self-criticism, that Schwarz would begin to consider it 'normal.' That being said, an uneasy coexistence of these more recent self-understandings with a still-institutionalized Opfermythos is likely to lie at the heart of Austrian cultural memory for some time to come. Perhaps this is indeed 'normal', if one considers the persistent juxtaposition of uglier elements of the past with the founding myths of a society—for example, the legacies of racism, xenophobia, and sexism in the United States or Great Britain, and their at times uneasy coexistence with notions of liberty, fundamental respect for human dignity and opportunity. If this is the case, then a

'normal' nation struggles openly to close the gap between its noble aspirations and its sometimes appalling shortcomings. At issue, then, is perhaps not the nature of the excesses, abuses, or crimes for which a particular society is (co-)responsible; these must be considered both in their own historical context and within the broader context of human rights considerations. We might submit those crimes and violations to debate; we might posit comparative degrees of guilt or horror relative to other examples, or we might generalize

<sup>91</sup> See Clemens Jabloner et al., Schlussbericht der Historikerkommission der Republik Österreich. Vermögensentzug während der NS-Zeit sowie Rückstellungen und Entschädigungen seit 1945 in Österreich (Vienna and Munich, 2003). Members of the Austrian Historikerkommission have contributed to four dozen studies published by Oldenbourg since 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Oliver Rathkolb, *Der paradoxe Republik. Österreich 1945 bis 2005* (Vienna, 2005), particularly pp. 47–49 and 365–404.

<sup>93</sup> Egon Schwarz, 'Austria, Quite a Normal Nation', p. 191.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182–83.

them into context-free abstractions. Or, we might do better to avoid this politicized interpretive minefield and suggest that a society achieves a kind of normality when it begins to transcend self-imposed ghettoization, perhaps (in some cases) shedding pariah status, when it achieves a breadth of vision and greater depth of critical self-knowledge. Perhaps it might be more reasonable to recall Vaclav Havel's notion of 'living in truth,' instead of operating with a normative notion of normality. Developments during Gedenkjahr

2005—a kind of first flowering of a process catalyzed in 1988—seems a reasonable indication that Austrian society has begun definitively to question established memory and live more comfortably in a truth that does not spare itself critical self-scrutiny.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> We might anticipate the completion of the Austrian 'Haus der Geschichte' in 2015 as an important marker in the ongoing process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung. The museum's focus will be Austrian history since 1918, and will undoubtedly raise questions and criticisms from those who contend that exhibits spare Austria/Austrians such schonungslose self-scrutiny, and from those who will argue that exhibits are unnecessarily or unfairly self-critical.