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Matthew P. Berg
John Carroll University, mberg@jcu.edu

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REVIEW ESSAYS

Refocusing the Critical Gaze from Sixty Years' Distance: Austrians' Experiences of the Nazi Past in Recent Historical Studies

**Thomas Albrich, Winfried Garscha, and Martin F. Polaschek, eds., *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht: Der Fall Österreich*
(Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006)**

**Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*
(Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006)**

**Margit Reiter, *Die Generation danach: Der Nationalsozialismus im Familiengedächtnis*
(Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006)**

**Lisa Rettl, *PartisanInnen Denkmäler: Antifaschistische Erinnerungskultur in Kärnten*
(Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006)**

Matthew Paul Berg

Academic historians may shake their heads in frustration or smile patiently at the perception of their discipline in the popular imagination. Expressions such as “the lessons of history show us that ...” reify the discipline into keeper (or embodiment) of eminently practical, perhaps even obvious, wisdom that we ignore at our own peril. Other forms of popular usage consign history-as-academic discipline to the realm

of ivory tower isolation, insofar as they relegate a subject or theme decidedly to the past—that is, by suggesting that it is irrelevant or at best a source of trivia. Those who study contemporary history stand in a particularly challenging relationship to both their fields on the one hand (for example, access to significant archival material remains limited in many instances) and perceptions of the phenomena they study in the popular imagination on the other (insofar as some segments of society may have direct experience with the phenomena under study, or the resonance of that experience in what historian Jan Assmann designated “cultural memory”). The National Socialist regime represents a particularly striking convergence of academic and popular interest, of course. Those who study it and its consequences are quite aware of the extent to which themes they investigate have, at times, become personal, professional, and political flashpoints. These themes include analyses of the structure of the so-called Third Reich; exploration of the nature of everyday experiences, including questions of active participation, complicity, and resistance; investigation into wide-ranging consequences of the NS regime after 1945—particularly, but not exclusively, in Germany and Austria; the adjudication of those charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity and the integration of a far more numerous group who had thrown in their lot with the regime for various reasons; memory, commemoration, and expanded notions of victim status; and the dynamics of reconciliation and restitution.

I do not claim that the themes noted above are new to historians working in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, Günter Bischof explored them in *Contemporary Austrian Studies* ten years ago when he reviewed a number of studies that continue to exercise an important influence over academic historians.² Serious scholars would agree that the attention these themes have received in Germany and Austria remains particularly compelling, precisely because of the range of reception among the broader public in lands with the legacy of *(Mit)Täterschaft*, the ways in which memory has been contested over subsequent generations, and the salience of the past in media representations and political debate.³

Those interested in Austrian circumstances are well aware of the implications of the *Opfer/Täter* dualism for political culture, memory, and identity since 1945.⁴ While the Waldheim Affair and the particular brand of populism through which Jörg Haider has made his career may be the most prominent examples of ambivalent or problematic attitudes towards the Nazi era in recent decades, such phenomena also catalyzed more sustained direct and open discussion of the past than

had previously been the case. More recent developments, such as FPÖ *Bundesrat* Siegfried Kampl’s 14 April 2005 comments concerning the “vicious persecution of former Nazis”⁵ after the war, or the convictions of FPÖ *Bundesrat* John Gudenus and British historian David Irving in 2006 remind us of the persistence of ambivalence among elements of the public, elected officials, or authors.

The Gudenus and Irving cases are particularly interesting, since charges were brought against them under §3 of the *Verbotsgesetz*. The former had engaged in several instances of minimization or denial of Nazi crimes against humanity (most pointedly in connection with the April 2005 commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the war’s end during the same *Bundesrat* debate at which Kampl spoke, and later during a tour of Mauthausen); the latter had published and lectured widely in a spirit that moved from revision to denial, and he was arrested for statements made in several speeches he had given in Austria during a 1989 book tour. Due to his acknowledgement that he had made a serious mistake, Gudenus received three years’ probation rather than the possibility of up to ten years’ imprisonment. Irving sat out just over twelve months of a three-year sentence, only to be released by a presiding appeals court judge with known right-wing sympathies days before Christmas 2006 with the understanding that he would serve the remainder of his sentence at home in Britain on probationary status.⁶ Irving’s experience elicited criticism of *Verbotsgesetz*-mandated punishment from those on the right and left, within and outside Austria, who regarded the law as a limit on the exercise of free speech. The version of the *Verbotsgesetz* currently in effect underwent legislative review in 1992, suggesting that the majority of Austrian politicians deemed the persistence of such legislation valuable for the Second Republic’s democratic, republican values.

The fact that denial continues to flourish is troubling, to be sure—and it is not limited to the West, as the December 2006 Tehran gathering dedicated to “reexamining the Holocaust” convened by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and attended by a number of notorious Western deniers demonstrated. As eyewitnesses, including “political” or “racial” victims of Nazi policy pass away and the indifferent or indignant play a potentially larger role in shaping the contours of cultural memory, credible historical research may well assume an even more valuable public/didactic role than it has to date, even as its guild-specific academic contributions remain important for scholars and students. It is in this spirit that the important new works under review here from Studienverlag must be considered. Taken together, they explore Austrians’ experiences

and memories of the Nazi past at the private, public, and state levels. Each sheds light on themes or topics that have held interest inside the academy and among the public; each suggests new possibilities for additional research by virtue of that which they offer.

Margit Reiter's exploration of the Nazi era through family memory draws on an established body of German literature rooted in psychoanalysis, the cultural dynamics of memory, and oral history, which she applies provocatively to the Austrian experience. The author establishes at the outset that she is *not* interested in the children of the most prominent NS figures, about whom much is already known in popular literature and television talk shows in recent years; instead, she focuses upon the self-perceptions and self-representation of "children of the perpetrators" in a wider sense, namely those whose parents were middle and lower-level Nazi functionaries or SS men. There are two reasons for her focus on this group. First, it is quite larger than the group of *Prominenten* offspring. Second, Austrian society has shown little interest, awareness, or sensitivity to the ways in which such individuals' formative experiences have been remembered.⁷ Memory for these NS progeny, Reiter suggests, operates in a field shaped by the parameters of knowledge about the Nazi past and the roles one's mother and/or father played in the regime (*Wissen*), the lack of such knowledge (*Nichtwissen*), and the extent to which members of this generation had a sense of their parents' relationship to the regime and its crimes that was never discussed openly after the war (*ahnen*).⁸ Within the parameters formed by these dynamic tensions, Reiter's interview partners—and, by implication, Austrian society at large—manifest the reactions that shape both personal and cultural memory: ignorance (in some cases a form of repression, she contends), indifference, or the impetus to ask difficult and searching questions about their parents and society under the Nazis.

Critics of the Reiter's work will focus on a small survey sample that might seem too limited to permit her to draw meaningful conclusions. This was a function of voluntary participation in her project. In the end, she interviewed eighteen individuals in their fifties or sixties, an equal number of women and men with balanced representation across *Bundesländer*, rural vs. urban upbringings, and a wide range of professional and trade occupations—a representative enough sample to begin drawing the provisional, but highly suggestive conclusions at which she arrives. Moreover, Reiter brings an impressive sophistication to a highly qualitative study that is consistent with the findings of comparable work done in Germany.⁹ Indeed, the author is acutely aware of the delicate

dynamics of an oral history project. She understands the interviewer's role as facilitator and has constructed a thoughtful catalogue of questions that would satisfy ethical concerns while simultaneously maintaining focus on recollections that could alternately elicit anger at their parents' values under the Nazis (and subsequently) or embarrassment, or provoke complex feelings of victimization (at the hands of parents, society, or the politics of the postwar Austrian republic).

Interviews with project participants reveal five modes for representing experiences of the NS era and its aftermath within the family framework. Each demonstrates itself capable of coexisting with one or more other modes during the complex processes of transmission of parental experience to children and children's memory formation. First, experience could be conveyed in terms of *victimization*—that is, that mother, father, and/or the individual interview partner had been the innocent victim of the Nazi regime itself, partisans, occupation forces, or Second Republic authorities. Reiter observes that in such cases reversals occurred in the perpetrator-victim dynamic (consider Siegfried Kampl's syntactical choice in the *Bundesrat* speech referred to above). The trope of victimization could be all the more easily drawn upon given the notion of Austrian victim status writ large enabled by the institutionalized *Opfermythos*. Participants also commonly engaged in *justification*; they saw themselves as "accused" who because of their parents' experiences had to answer the reproaches of their own children's or grandchildren's generation; they claimed that they knew nothing of Nazi crimes and violence, or that when they later learned about such actions, people (most frequently the father figure in Reiter's case studies) acted under compulsion or were honor-bound to fulfill their duty or simply acted under a *Befehlsnotstand*. *Distancing* provided a mechanism for interviewees to reject any attraction that National Socialism may have had for their parents—or for themselves—and opened up the possibility of solidarity with the younger generation (for example, interviewees poked fun at Nazi leaders and compared them with Second Republic politicians, or remembered their parents doing so). Others exhibited a particular *fascination* with the ostensibly positive features of the Nazi regime ("cleanliness and order, jobs [...] technological innovations and sense of community"), an enthusiasm that they separated from negative features ("persecution of Jews, war"). Finally, the strategy of *overcoming* facilitated recasting the details of one's own past, transforming the world into which interviewees were born and the role of their parents as life-givers into a family/personal history over which one could be proud.

In such cases, “overcoming” functioned similarly to “fascination,” yet could also manifest itself as fervent rejection of fascism and a steadfast commitment to democratic republican political culture.¹⁰

These tropes must be understood in relation to family dynamics, Reiter reminds us, if we are to account for the translation of communicative memory into cultural memory. Here she is at her strongest, and her larger interview-driven chapters that form the greater part of the volume (“*Vaterbilder*” and “*Mutterbilder*”) find a foundation in an investigation of the social and institutional processes by which certain perceptions, knowledge, and memory are shaped. Not surprisingly, the nuclear family was the source of most initial memories and the earliest locus for socialization for Reiter’s interviewees. They most frequently identified rather closely with their parents when they were children and generally enjoyed hearing stories about the war and their parents’ (again, usually fathers’) work. However, she found that others claimed to have grown tired of such accounts even as children and reported that they ceased to ask questions; in still other cases, interviewees recalled that it was made clear to them verbally or through parental behavior that questions were unwelcome.¹¹ As adults, many of the interviewees who represented themselves as critics of the NS era chose to avoid bringing up questions of their parents’ activities—or National Socialism altogether—in the interest of good familial relations. These elderly parents, they claimed, would have seen such questions as a form of personal attack.¹²

Reiter acknowledges that sites of socialization outside the nuclear family also exercised important influences on development and memory and contributed to her interviewees’ orientation towards conservative or even right-wing milieus, but also into antifascist circles. For example, the presence of other relatives throughout childhood and into adulthood who had not been *Parteigenossen* and who never refrained from making critical comments about the Nazi era could prove an irritant to Nazi parents and provided a model that indicated different ways of thinking and acting were possible. During the later 1940s and 1950s, the years during which interviewees had been children, the NS past remained a taboo theme in most Austrian schools despite Education Ministry directives to address the subject, but extracurricular activities sponsored by organizations such as the *Österreichischer Turnverband* reinforced the right-wing, often extremist sentiments that so many of their parents continued to harbor. Some of the men Reiter interviewed never broke with their parents’ NS worldview; they wound up joining *Burschenschaften* during their university years and became FPÖ supporters. Others were

influenced by the new climate of the later 1960s and distanced themselves, if they had not reported doing so previously, from their parents’ values and became involved in left-wing political and social activism. Finally, while some individuals recalled being horrified by media coverage of legal proceedings against Nazi criminals, others dismissed reports about war crimes or crimes against humanity as fabrications or alternatively were convinced that they shed light on the cruelty—or grim silence—they had experienced in the parental household.¹³ Reiter’s recognition of the importance of primary socialization within the family and the influence of external factors (“secondary institutions”) is a particular strength of her project, and her sensitivity to the delicacy of these processes in the formation and representation of memory provides a firm structural foundation to the more delicate psychoanalytical dimensions of her case study analyses. If one were to quibble with the book in this respect, it would be with the nearly complete absence of important studies directly relevant for elements of her work on popular sentiment, education, anti-Semitism, memory, and postwar treatment of National Socialists published in English. Reiter may have expected an almost exclusively Austrian (perhaps also Germans) readership, but a work as suggestive as this one would naturally attract the attention of a broader international scholarly public. One might have expected her to take into account the work of a broader community of historians working in the field of Austrian *Zeitgeschichte* whose contributions are directly relevant for her study—for example, Evan Bukey, Peter Pulzer, Bruce Pauley, Robert Knight, or Peter Utgaard.

Memory features significantly, too, in Bertrand Perz’s history of Mauthausen since 1945. The author’s treatment of the evolution of institutionalized memory at a physical site is a thorough one, and he offers an interesting counterpoint to Reiter’s exploration of second-generation memory of the Nazi past. The book posits an ambitious agenda. Perz proposes to examine Mauthausen as museum, cemetery, tourist destination, economic institution, and *Gedenkstätte* from 1945 to the present, as well as to compare commonalities between Mauthausen and other concentration camp sites that have become commemorative sites. While he is an undisputed expert on Mauthausen itself and delivers a richly documented and highly detailed study of the central site for remembrance Nazi crimes in Austria, Perz never delivers on his goal of meaningful, sustained comparative analysis—despite occasional references to memory and commemoration associated with former concentration camps in West and East Germany or Poland. Some readers will find this regrettable,

and perhaps consider the work as another example of a project geared toward an Austrian readership. Nonetheless, one would be hard-pressed to find a more detailed study of the way in which the physical site of a concentration camp became an object of conflicting economic and cultural interests during the immediate postwar years, or the political wrangling associated with the establishment of a *KZ-Gedenkstätte*.

Perz identifies three distinct stages of development for Mauthausen's transformation into a *Gedenkstätte*. The first—extending from liberation in 1945 to the official designation of the area as a commemorative site in 1949—was characterized by efforts to secure the main and neighboring satellite camps, regulate jurisdiction, and establish memorial status. The author reconstructs these developments in exquisite detail at both the micro and macro levels, drawing on archival sources in Austria (including federal, provincial, and municipal holdings), in Germany (Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde), the Czech Republic (Military History Archive, Prague), and from the National Archives in Washington, DC. For the first several months after liberation, the very integrity of the camp itself was in question. Prisoners scavenged raw materials, furniture, and anything else they deemed useful before beginning their migrations home (Czech prisoners were particularly resourceful in this respect); Austrian firms, particularly Viennese enterprises, attempted to leverage their positions prior to and during the Nazi regime to lay claim to raw materials and real estate at Mauthausen and in the satellite camps. *Gemeinde* administrations in towns such as Mauthausen and St. Georgen lay claim to former SS living quarters to alleviate housing shortages. At the macro level, Perz's narrative traces negotiations between the U.S. occupation authorities and the Upper Austrian *Landesregierung* and relevant *Gemeindevewaltungen*, the transfer of authority over the territory on which the camp sat to the Soviet occupation authority in 1947, and Soviet interactions with provincial and local authorities into the year 1949—at which point the KPÖ-dominated *KZ Verband* succeeded in working with the *Landesregierung* and a somewhat reluctant federal government to secure *Gedenkstätte* status.

The years between the creation of the *Gedenkstätte* and debate over the establishment of a permanent historical exhibit on the main camp's grounds (from 1949 into the 1970s) form the second phase of Perz's narrative. Questions concerning the politics of memory had surfaced in 1947 when Austrian authorities assumed responsibility for the site; over the next two decades, debate on *what form* commemoration would assume (chapels, plaques)—and for whom (political prisoners vs. “racial”

prisoners, different national groups)—only intensified. Perz reminds us that the debate transcended state borders and political boundaries from the start; different national concentration camp prisoner associations formed shortly after the Nazi regime fell, and in Austria, the umbrella *KZ-Verband* operated under a majority communist leadership. Moreover, leading KPÖ figures associated with the *KZ-Verband* such as Heinrich Dürmayer also played prominent roles in the founding of the International Mauthausen Committee (IMK) in 1953. Perz's second phase is of great importance for issues of memory and commemoration for several reasons, two of which warrant particular emphasis. First, although the federal government had approved the general concept for a Mauthausen *Gedenkstätte*, the terms of the *Kriegsgräberfürsorgegesetz* (July 1948) and the burial of Allied soldiers on the camp's grounds brought administration of the site under the competence of the Interior Minister Oskar Helmer. One may speculate as to whether Helmer's suspicion of the *KZ-Verband* had something to do with its members' bona fides as resisters to National Socialism, whereas Helmer had not experienced such rough treatment. Helmer's anti-communism cannot be disputed, however. When the *Gedenkstätte* opened officially on 8 May 1949, Helmer refused to recognize it with an Interior Ministry presence, arguing that the matter was “not an official celebration, but one of the federal association of *KZler*.”¹⁴ Second, Perz notes that Dürmayer's success in forming the IMK marked the only formal international recognition of an NS victims' association in Austria—not insignificant at a time when less-implicated Nazis (*Minderbelastete*) were on the verge of reintegration into political life and Austrians were more interested in reconstruction and the Cold War than soul-searching over their involvement in the NS regime.¹⁵

The KPÖ's position of prominence in framing resistance and victimhood for so-called political inmates involved not only a willingness to challenge a dominant desire to concentrate more on the present and future after 1949 than on the silent or active complicity in a system that made the Mauthausen camp system possible on Austrian soil. Perz cites a number of editorials in primarily Catholic, conservative Austrian newspapers (for example, *die Furche* and Graz's *Kleine Zeitung*) which stressed, as he puts it “that survivors had the right to forget” and that, in effect, “victims of National Socialism should be able to commemorate, but with as little disturbance as possible. This opinion was joined with the perception that coming to terms with National Socialism had been concluded and now [in 1949 – MPB] it was a matter of criticizing other political systems.” So, under these circumstances, what was the purpose

of devoting hundreds of thousands of Schillings to the preservation of gallows, prison blocks, barracks, and other features of the Mauthausen camps?¹⁶ The ÖVP-led Upper Austrian *Landesregierung* under Heinrich Gleißner supported the creation of the *Gedenkstätte*, admittedly out of cultural/historical tourism considerations, but also as an acknowledgment of the importance of commemoration and out of sensitivity to *KZ-Verband* lobbying efforts. However, the SPÖ affiliated *Linzer Tagblatt* alleged that those who had been behind the authoritarian Fatherland Front [VF] between 1934 and 1938 “had become democrats in the meantime, and established a giant monument to the inhumanity of others in order to wipe clean their own past.”¹⁷ In short, among Austrians it was not unequivocally clear which oppressive regime should be held responsible as the source of Austrian misfortune and which victims deserved greatest recognition (Social Democrats at the hands of the VF or political prisoners regardless of their *Lager* allegiance, as opposed to Jews and other “racial” prisoners). To further complicate matters, Mauthausen was a “green” camp—that is, it was run primarily by criminals—so that efforts by the Communist-dominated *KZ-Verband* to emphasize pride-of-place for political prisoners was something of an exercise in myth-making. This assumed absurd proportions in the 1950 account of Mauthausen’s last days authored by Hans Marsalek—a long-serving inmate who had functioned as camp scribe, worked closely with Dürmayer in the *KZ-Verband*, and served as *Obmann der österreichischen Lagermeinschaft Mauthausen*—which attributed the camp’s liberation to an uprising of communist prisoners shouting slogans in praise of the Red Army, rather than to the appearance of U.S. tanks.¹⁸ For a cold warrior such as Helmer, such representations merely confirmed his suspicion that the *KZ-Verband* stood closer to the Soviet Union than it represented Austrian interests. If there was a point of commonality among supporters of the three original postwar political parties, it was the firm conviction, consistent with the *Opfermythos*, that Mauthausen was a categorically alien, un-Austrian phenomenon. This conviction dominated the official narrative represented at the *Gedenkstätte* into the 1970s.

Perz’s third phase, ca. 1970 to the present, corresponds to initial Kreisky-era emphases on historical and political education and the establishment of the historical exhibit at Mauthausen that—side by side with the commemoration of international victims achieved through fixed memorial installations—ushered in a more systematic effort to move beyond rhetoric and myth to a significant extent. Developments in the direction of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, beginning in earnest with the

Waldheim controversy in the mid 1980s and then continuing into the 1990s revealed an intensification of this trend, culminating in the creation of the new visitors’ center with its oral history exhibit in 2003.

A counterpart to Perz’s thorough, albeit somewhat conventional, narrative study of a “national” site of remembrance, Lisa Rettl’s vigorous investigation into monuments to fallen partisans in mixed German-Slovene speaking regions of southern Carinthia brings a particularly compelling theoretical approach to bear on *local* sites. Although she focuses primarily on the case of a monument installed in Völkermarkt/ Velikovec in October 1947, detonated by ultra-right wing German nationalists in September 1953, and newly erected in a much more modest form in September 1962, she also offers brief examinations of memorials in other towns within the region. Rettl’s point of departure is her observation that monuments to antifascist resistance fighters remain contested—at least in southern Carinthia—whereas the commemoration of soldiers who fell “in defense of the fatherland” in both world wars and in the *Abwehr* along the Carinthian-Yugoslav border after World War I have long remained the normative discourse in postwar memory. Further, she posits what she calls a consensual division in collective memory of the Nazi era and its immediate aftermath in which the majority of the German-speaking Carinthian *Volk* remember their experience of the war as one as a defensive action against Slovene Communists (those who refused to be—or were not selected for—“Germanization”) and the officially sanctioned memory of a mixed-language, antifascist resistance tradition that was not inconsistent with the notion of Austrians-as-victims of the Nazi regime.¹⁹

There is much to commend in Rettl’s approach. One of its most significant strengths is her sophisticated understanding of how commemorative events contribute to the shaping of communal memory and identity. Significant influences on her conceptualization of the project include, among others, Jan and Aleida Assmann, Benedict Anderson, Ruth Wodak, and Heidemarie Uhl’s pioneering work on Austrian monuments commemorating fallen soldiers. She synthesizes the work of these scholars with a reliance on discourse theory derived from Michel Foucault and applied to sources such as newspaper accounts, church records, local police and governmental reports, and documentation from the *Archivbestände des Verbandes der Kärntner Partisanen* as well as from various political parties in the *Kärntner Landesarchiv* and in the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Archiv der Republik*.

Monuments to fallen “Austrian German” soldiers on the one hand and fallen partisans on the other have served to create “an illusion of the

eternal,” Rettl argues.²⁰ Elaborate installations or simple commemorative plaques have not merely lionized duty and sacrifice; Rettl reminds us that they also promote ongoing identification of communities—sometimes defined as much by their opponents’ perception as by their members’ own self-conception—with past, present, even future collective aspirations. Rettl’s focus on three prevailing discourses, each of which became “institutionalized” in the calculus of southern Carinthia’s social/cultural/political dynamic is the book’s other principal strength. The first discursive element is the partisans’ representation of themselves and their critics. The second is right-wing pro-German Carinthians’ (many of whom were former Nazis) representation of themselves, of acceptable, assimilated (“Germanized”) Slovenes, and of Slovene partisans (depicted as Yugoslav agents, Communists, a corrosive element in southern Carinthia). The third is an official state representation that stressed an Austrian identity that (a) has been divorced from the German identity championed by many among the Carinthian majority; (b) has sought to recognize the contributions of resistance fighters against the *Wehrmacht*; (c) has emphasized Austrians’ victim status; and (4) has remained determined to safeguard Carinthia’s territorial integrity while maintaining positive relations with Yugoslavia. Close analysis of these competing discourses, as applied to the contested histories of the *PartisanInnen Denkmäler* in Völkermarkt/Velikovec and in Peršmanhof, makes for what is arguably the most sophisticated and elegantly presented study among the four volumes under review here. Yet as strong as Rettl’s work is, the abrupt end to her study and complete absence of any sort of conclusion—whether it might have been suggestions for further research, or the applicability of her approach to case studies such as South Tyrol, or even a mere *Zusammenfassung*—leaves the reader unsatisfied. This is all the more surprising and disappointing given the purposefulness with which Rettl establishes the grounds for her case study and her bold methodological approach.

The only work of essays under review here, the volume assembled by Thomas Albrich, Winfried Garscha, and Martin Polaschek, offers a consistency of thematic integrity not often found in edited collections. Eleven topical case studies among a total of thirteen chapters focus on various dimensions of Nazi war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Austrians and/or on Austrian soil, as delineated in the *Kriegsverbrechergesetz* (KVG) promulgated by the Provisional Government on 26 June 1945 with Allied approval. These essays are richly based in primary sources (for example, *Gerichtsurteile*, *Tagebücher* generated by the State’s Attorneys, protocols of hearings housed in the AdR, DöW,

and provincial archives) from cases brought before the *Volksgerichte* up to 1955, then before special *Geschworenengerichte* and other judicial bodies after the 1957 amnesty. All of them provide ample detail from the testimony of defendants and witnesses. Each after its own fashion remains true to the questions established in the editors’ introduction that form the leitmotif of the volume: what role did the Austrian judiciary actually play in the prosecution of Nazi perpetrators and in the expiation of war criminals, particularly given the high percentage of prominent and lesser administrators of ghettos, organizers of major deportations, and death camp personnel identified by Simon Wiesenthal and others as Austrians?²¹ Were the death sentences of the 1940s or the lenient sentences and spectacular acquittals of the 1960s and 1970s typical of an Austrian way of dealing with war crimes and crimes against humanity? What was the legal basis for the creation of *Volksgerichte* in 1945 and what sorts of political, structural, or legal difficulties limited their ability to adjudicate and punish? Did the Austrian postwar judicial system fail with respect to adjudication and punishment of such perpetrators?²² Individual essays take up these questions through their foci on particular categories of crimes, for example, participants in the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom, the “euthanasia” program, mass shootings and crimes committed in ghettos in Eastern Europe, deportations, activities in the Auschwitz and Mauthausen camp systems, denunciations, and death marches during the war’s closing weeks.

Winfried Garscha and Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider argue that the great majority of cases brought before the *Volksgerichte* involved suspicion of illegal membership in the NSDAP between 1933 and 1938. Such cases were tantamount to treason, given the Austrian Nazi Party’s emphasis on the integration of Austria into the Third Reich. Consistent with the Moscow Declaration, Austria could, thus, position itself among the “liberated nations” through adjudication of traitors, collaborators, and others who had “sullied the honor of the nation.”²³ The KVG did not take the “racial” component of Nazi criminality into consideration, however—a phenomenon that changed only with the Eichmann Trial and broader public awareness of the genocidal dimensions of Nazi violence at a more abstracted macro level²⁴—which contributed to the perception that juridical considerations (and, for that matter, *popular* concern) did not acknowledge victims of National Socialist criminality on the basis of their ethnic or religious heritage.

It would not come as a surprise then, as Thomas Albrich and Michael Guggenberger point out, that despite a strong evidentiary basis detailing

chains of command and a wide range of perpetrators, not a single murder case was adjudicated in association with crimes that claimed the lives of twenty-two Viennese Jews on *Reichskristallnacht*,²⁵ or that throughout Austria over ninety percent of alleged pogrom perpetrators never found themselves in a courtroom.²⁶ The number of individuals arrested in connection to mass shootings associated with “liquidation” of ghettos was quite minimal, and the percentage of those brought to trial and convicted of murder under the KVG was low and lower still, respectively. Structural factors may have played a contributing factor here, according to Eva Holpfer and Sabine Loitfellner. In a climate shaped by the 1957 amnesty and the Eichmann arrest, Justice Minister Christian Broda urged in the early 1960s that Austria authorities be quick to pursue remaining Nazis, or the Republic would risk losing its good name in international circles as more information became available about NS crimes against humanity in the East. Consequently, the Interior Ministry created a special section, Abt. 2c/18, to engage in the hunt for Nazi war criminals, and the SPÖ and ÖVP agreed to extend the statute of limitations on murder committed under cover of the NS regime. Holpfer and Loitfellner note that Abt. 2c/18 was not particularly vigilant, not least because a number of rehabilitated former Nazis had entered the federal police ranks (including this special section) and were largely uninterested in further investigations into NS-related crimes. Nonetheless, the names of some 5,500 Austrian suspects came to light—in most instances through the efforts of Dutch, Israeli, or West German authorities.²⁷ In the end, only forty-three individuals were tried for murder/crimes against humanity. Twenty received guilty verdicts, and twenty-three were acquitted. In addition to the lack of consistent, inspired work by members of Abt. 2c/18, lackluster prosecution and adjudication may also have been a product of two other factors: the structure and internal dynamics of *Geschworenengerichte* arrangements and a largely indifferent population who had come to accept integration of former Nazis into Austrian private and public life and whose attention had focused on more prominent cases, such as the Eichmann trial.²⁸

While each of the eleven categories of cases presented in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht* is compelling in its own right, many readers will be interested in two particular contributions. Heimo Hailbrainer’s essay on denunciation takes up the adjudication of this widespread practice in Nazi-dominated Austria in cases where the consequences were deadly for those denounced. Most of these denunciations targeted those allegedly critical of the regime or who were said to have

uttered defeatist remarks (“‘heimtückische’ und ‘wehrkraftzersetzende’ Äußerungen”).²⁹ Of the 10,015 cases prosecuted on KVG-related charges, a whopping 61.5 percent of them involved denunciation—a statistic that stands in marked contrast to the Garscha/Kuretsidis-Haider assertion, cited above, that most cases brought before *Volksgerichte* involved illegal membership in the NSDAP, and which provides juridical insight and complimentary findings to studies such as those of Herbert Dohmen and Nina Scholz that study denunciation from the perspective of social history.³⁰ Perhaps the most intriguing essay in terms of its implications for further research is Susanne Uslu-Pauer’s study of cases related to death marches during the winter of 1944/45. The murder and ill treatment committed during the closing weeks of the war did not take place in the relative isolation of death or concentration camps, but increasingly out in the open before the eyes of the civilian population of Austria and Germany. In fact, there proved to be no shortage of willing helpers who acted with or without orders.³¹ Uslu-Pauer notes that cases adjudicated in 1945/46 met with stricter punishment on the whole than those taken up after the initial amnesties of 1948 and reintegration of most *Minderbelastete* by 1949—a political consideration given that a number of SS men who had been responsible had since found their way into the SPO or the ÖVP. Readers will find interesting that it appears a higher percentage of convictions in relation to arrests was meted out for crimes associated with *Todesmärsche* than with any other category of crimes besides denunciation (125 criminal cases involving 265 accused, with twenty-six of twenty-nine death penalty cases enforced and twenty-one life sentences handed down).³² The fact that so many witnesses were able to provide testimony to provide convictions and that Uslu-Pauer identified such a wealth of archival material, promises the possibility for fresh insights into these aspects of the final weeks of the war on Austrian soil.

Minor idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, the four works reviewed here make a strong case that study of the contested place of the Nazi past in both Austrian communicative and cultural memory has broken new ground. For Austrians themselves, the events of recent years underscore the importance of innovative, careful, source-based inquiry into Austrian experiences between 1938 and 1945, with implications for ways in which the Nazi era is remembered at the private, communal, and federal levels. Moreover, these studies contribute to an important ongoing civic pedagogic project that must not be undervalued. Recent work produced by Austria specialists within or outside the Second Republic on the

dynamics of postwar memory in a European context and in the field of Austrian *Zeitgeschichte* more specifically suggests that a still more purposeful internationalization of contemporary Austrian studies will advance scholarship in an even more meaningful, cooperative fashion. The implications for academic work and public didactic possibilities in Europe and elsewhere require nothing less.

Notes

1. On cultural memory, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 2nd. ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997), 48ff.
2. Günter Bischof, "Founding Myths and Compartmentalized Past: New Literature on the Construction, Hibernation, and Deconstruction of World War II Memory in Postwar Austria," *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, vol. 5, *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, eds. Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997): 302-42. Of particular relevance in Bischof's essay, given the foci of the books under review here, are Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster, *Österreichisches Gedächtnis: Über Erinnern und Vergessen der NS-Vergangenheit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993); Peter Bettelheim and Robert Streibel, eds., *Tabu und Geschichte: Zur Kultur des kollektiven Erinnerns* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1994); Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb, and Albert Lichtblau eds., *Schwieriges Erbe: Der Umgang mit dem Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1995).
3. For Austrian circumstances, consider the following studies of media and political treatment vis-à-vis *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: Heidemarie Uhl, *Zwischen Versöhnung und Verstörung: Eine Kontroverse um Österreichs historische Identität fünfzig Jahre nach dem "Anschluß"* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1992); Gerhard Botz and Gerald Sprengnagel, eds., *Kontroversen um Österreichs Zeitgeschichte: verdrängte Vergangenheit, Österreich-Identität, Waldheim und die Historiker* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1994); Heinz P. Wassermann, "Zuviel Vergangenheit tut nicht gut!" *Nationalsozialismus im Spiegel der Tagespresse der Zweiten Republik* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2000); Helene Maimann, *Was bleibt. Schreiben im Gedenkjahr* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2005); Matthew Paul Berg, "Commemoration vs. Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Contextualizing Austria's Gedenkjahr 2005," *German History* 2008 (January) 26:1, forthcoming. See also media coverage of Wolfgang Neugebauer and Peter Schwarz, *Der Wille zum Aufrechten Gang: zur Rolle des BSA bei der gesellschaftlichen Integration ehemaliger Nationalsozialisten* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2005) and Maria Mesner, ed., *Entnazifizierung zwischen politischem Anspruch, Parteienkonkurrenz und Kaltem Krieg: Das Beispiel SPÖ* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2005), Kurt Scholz, "Was macht das B vor dem SA?" *Die Presse*, 11 Jan. 2005; "Zeitgeschichte: Die rote Nazi-Waschmaschine," *Profil* Nr. 3, 17 Jan. 2005: 12-16; Hans Rauscher, "Rot-Braun, Schwarz-Braun: Die SPÖ hat ihre Vergangenheit untersuchen lassen, die ÖVP noch nicht," *Der Standard*, 15 Jan. 2005; Eva Blimlinger, "Der Mut zum Fleck," *Falter* Nr. 27, 8-14 July 2005: 8-10 and Maria Mesner's response, "Das Dilemma der Polemik," *Falter* Nr. 28, 15-21 July 2005: 18.
4. This literature is an extensive one, of course. As representative examples of the ways in which this dualism has been framed, see Günter Bischof, "Die Instrumentalisierung der Moskauer Erklärung nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg," *Zeitgeschichte* 20

(1993): 34566; Anton Pelinka and Erika Weinzierl, eds., *Das große Tabu: Österreichs Umgang mit seiner Vergangenheit*, 2. Auflage (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 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" in *Inventur 1945/55: Österreich im ersten Jahrzehnt der Zweiten Republik*, ed. Wolfgang Kos and Georg Rigele (Vienna: Sonderzahl Verlagsgesellschaft, 1996), 23-32, 51-85, and 181-200, respectively; Ziegler and Kannonier-Finster, *Österreichisches Gedächtnis*.

5. *Stenographisches Protokoll der 720. Sitzung des Bundesrates der Republik Österreich vom 14. April 2005*, 125.
6. For Gudenus' *Bundesrat* comments, see *Stenographisches Protokoll der 720. Sitzung des Bundesrates der Republik Österreich vom 14. April 2005*, 117 and 119-20. On his remarks at Mauthausen, consult "Gudenus wird Immunität erneut aberkannt: Landtag erneut mit einstimmigem Auslieferungsbeschluss—Aussagen zu Häftlingsfotos im KZ-Mauthausen werden untersucht," *Der Standard* 15 Sept. 2005 <<http://derStandard.at>>; "Gudenus wird der Prozess gemacht," *Kurier* 27 Jan. 2006 <<http://kurier.at/oesterreich/1259495.php>>; "Ex-FP Abgeordneter wegen Wiederbetätigung zu einem Jahr bedingt verurteilt," 26 April 2006 <<http://derStandard.at>>. See also 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," *ÖÖ Nachrichten*, 21 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.nachrichten.at/politik/innenpolitik/424435>>; Mark Landler, "Austria Frees Holocaust Denier from Jail," *The New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.nytimes.com>> (archive).
7. Margit Reiter, *Die Generation danach*, 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 14. Put differently, Reiter is interested in the "floating gap" between parents (the *Erlebnisgeneration*) and subsequent generations who serve as carriers of (cultural) memory. See also *ibid.*, 18.
9. See, for example, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, "Opa war kein Nazi". *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im deutschen Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 2002); Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschem Vergangenheit nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999), particularly 19147; and Harald Welzer, Robert Montau and Christine Plaß, "Was wir für böse Menschen sind!". *Der nationalsozialismus im Gespräch zwischen den Generationen* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 1997).
10. Reiter, 48f.
11. *Ibid.*, 68-69.
12. *Ibid.*, 70-71.
13. *Ibid.*, 74-82.
14. Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen*, 109.
15. *Ibid.*, 109ff.
16. *Ibid.*, 113.
17. *Ibid.*, 115. From *Linzer Tagblatt*, 7 May 1949. On memory with respect to the Austrian civil war of 1934 and the authoritarian regime of 1934-1938, see Elisabeth

Klamper, “‘Ein einig Volk von Brüdern’: Vergessen und Erinnern im Zeichen des Burgfriedens” in *Zeitgeschichte* 24 Heft 5/6 (1997): 170-85.

18. Perz, 127-28. Marsalek distanced himself from this fabrication in the 1970s.

19. Rettl, *PartisanInnen Denkmäler*, 12.

20. Ibid., 15.

21. Albrich et al., eds., *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 7.

22. Ibid., 8.

23. Garscha and Kuretsidis-Haider, “Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen—eine Einführung” in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen*, 17.

24. Ibid., 18.

25. Albrich and Guggenberger, “‘Nur selten steht einer dieser Novemberverschreiber vor Gericht’: Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung der Täter der so genannten ‘Reichskristallnacht’ in Österreich” in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen*, 31.

26. Ibid., 52.

27. Holpfer and Loitfellner, “Holocaust Prozesse wegen Massenerschießungen und Verbrechen in Lagern im Osten vor Geschworenengerichten: Annäherung an ein unerforschtes Thema” in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen*, 88-91.

28. Ibid., 119-22.

29. Heimo Hailbrainer, “‘Der Angeber musste vorhersehen, dass die Denunziation eine Gefahr für das Leben des Betroffenen nach sich ziehen werde’: Volksgerichtsverfahren wegen Denunziation mit Todesfolge in Österreich” in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 245.

30. Herbert Dohmen and Nina Scholz, *Denunziert: Jeder tut mit—Jeder denkt nach—Jeder Meldet* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2003).

31. Susanne Uslu-Pauer, “‘Vernichtungswut und Kadaverehorsam’: Strafrechtliche Verfolgung von Endphaseverbrechen am Beispiel der so genannten ‘Todesmärsche’” in *Holocaust und Kriegsverbrechen vor Gericht*, 279.

32. Ibid., 280.