

Karl Klambauer. *Österreichische Gedenkkultur zu Widerstand und Krieg: Denkmäler und Gedächtnisorte in Wien 1945 bis 1986. Der Nationalsozialismus und seine Folgen.* Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2006. 333 pp. EUR 37.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7065-4076-6.



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Memorials in Post-Nazi Vienna

Since the Waldheim affair more than twenty years ago, Austria's postwar history has been viewed by the outside world as a sorry tale of collective evasion. Earlier benign accounts of Austria's social harmony have been displaced by the new received wisdom. The shift was understandable and in many ways justified, but it was also reductive and, as some of the reporting of the recent abysmal "Josef Fritzl affair" suggests, has encouraged stereotyping by journalists in a hurry. Within Austria, meanwhile, both academic and popular historiography have sharpened their critical edge considerably, so that not even the most jaundiced observer could now argue that the National Socialist period is a taboo zone. Admittedly, there are still pockets of Holocaust denial and, more significantly, a widespread adherence to a complacent master narrative in which Austria is either uniquely successful or uniquely fortunate in escaping the menace of communism. But these hardly outweigh the extensive intensive scrutiny applied to all aspects of Nazi rule. The postwar legacy of National Socialism has also come un-

der examination, from denazification (ineffective) to re-education (patchy), restitution and compensation (tardy). Last not least, postwar representations of National Socialism in book and film (or their absence) have moved center stage. All this forms the first context to Karl Klambauer's analysis of memorialization in Vienna from the end of the war to the Waldheim affair. The other context is the wider "memory turn" and the enormous literature—from psychology to politics to cultural studies—which it has produced. As recent Austrian works have shown, the meeting of the specific Austrian malaise and the wider discussion can be fruitful.[1] But it is not without dangers and in my view, Klambauer's book, despite its clear merits, does not avoid them. At its heart lies an unresolved tension between an anti-Nazi critical position, which in the end assumes the possibility of enlightenment through truthful engagement with past events, and the wish—or perceived need—to engage with "meta-level" theorizing about the way collective or social memory functions in modern societies, in particular since the Holocaust.

I suspect that Klambauer's motivating interest is closer to the first than the second, but this stance rarely emerges unambiguously. Close to the end of the book, for example, he seeks to refute the claim that the view of Austria as a collective victim of Nazi rule might have been a functionally necessary evasion. On the contrary, he protests, the "victim thesis" was "historically to an overwhelming extent not true, contradictory and untenable, and especially as an argumentative basis for dilatory state recognition of the material compensation claims of racial victims of persecution, morally reprehensible as well (*auch moralisch verwerflich*)" (p. 246).

If such a direct affirmation of the possibility of truthfulness, not to mention morality, comes as a surprise, it does so because it follows an extensive discussion of memory that is at least ostensibly valueless, concerned as it is with plotting the shifting and often elusive connotations of memorials and texts. In the process, many of the canonic figures in the modern memory canon, from Pierre Nora to Paul Ricoeur are referred to and, in this vein, with Aleida Assmann's hypothesis of a shift from "function memory" to historical "storage memory" (*Funktionsgedächtnis* to *historisches Speichergedächtnis*) take Klambauer to his conclusion: that (despite some retarding factors) "storage memory"—which I take to mean something akin to the possibility of empirical reconstruction of the past—"could be important in the future development of Austria's history culture and politics of history" (p. 254). It seems a rather anticlimactic contrast to the earlier outburst.

The route to this point is a journey through the highways and byways of several of Vienna's main memory sites. The most illuminating part is the opening section comparing and contrasting the victims' memorial at Vienna's central cemetery and the memorial to returners home (*Heimkehrer*) at Leopoldsberg hill just outside Vienna. Klambauer weaves together skillfully the political and artistic discussions that preceded the unveiling of the two monuments in the autumn of 1948.

The memorial to the victims, following a design by the sculptor Fritz Cremer, aimed at a "cathartic and teleological intensification," moving from figures of suffering to those of triumphant liberation (p. 40). As Klambauer points out, clear parallels are apparent here between Catholic and communist narratives of salvation (Cremer himself later moved to the GDR). He also points out the continuity with triumphant Nazi iconography, as well as its clearly gendered division of roles—men were ultimately triumphant fighters, while women were allot-

ted the role of mourning and warning. The politics of the memorial emerged clearly from communists' desire to stress their prominent role in the resistance, social democrats' concern with the persecution they had suffered under the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg regime (1934-38), and the People's Party narrative of Catholic martyrdom that often exonerated it. The outcome of three years' discussion was essentially that the communist position was marginalized while the leadership of the two main parties reached a compromise designed to minimize offense and blur differences. (Jewish victimhood was not in the picture at all.)

This kind of arrangement is a well-known aspect of Austria's postwar settlement, of course, but it is still interesting to see how it played out in the detailed design of the memorial and its dedication. Early in 1948, the text was changed so that instead of "to the victims who fell in the fight against Nazi-fascism" it was now dedicated to "the victims for a free Austria." At the same time, the time referred to was broadened to cover the whole period from 1934 to 1945. At first sight, the broadening appears to reflect a move to the Left, but, as Klambauer convincingly argues, when combined with the changed text it actually diluted this effect. Now the Catholic narrative of Austria as a state victim before the *Anschluss* (and of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß himself as the martyr of the 1934 Nazi putsch attempt) could come into play.

Klambauer's contrapuntal site, the Leopoldsberg, has a much longer history, going back to its destruction and rebuilding after a decisive moment in the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683. A number of proposals were aired for its decoration in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; some were meant to underpin a Hapsburg myth of leadership in the victory of Christian civilization against the barbaric East, others had an anti-Prussian, anti-Lutheran thrust. Perhaps most important was the idea of the Leopoldsberg as an Austrian Valhalla, commemorating Austrian soldiers as fallen heroes. But heroizing the dead of the Second World War was clearly a tricky operation, especially under the conditions of Vienna's four-power allied occupation, and so had to be carefully encoded as a memorial to soldiers returning from captivity. The coding was easily deciphered, Klambauer argues, given the history and location of the memorial, and it was not difficult to read the messages that Austria was still a bulwark against a barbaric East and even that aspects of the recent war had been part of a worthy tradition.

After this interesting comparison, Klambauer seems

to me to lose his way, choosing to be guided by the monuments he looks at rather than the logic of his argument. He visits (in the order they appear): St. Stephan's Cathedral; the "O5" (meaning Oe[sterreich] inscribed on its façade as a sign of Austrian defiance in 1945) and its mutation into the focus of anti-Waldheim mobilization in 1986; the Votivkirche memorial to Austrian soldiers killed at Stalingrad; the window in the same church dedicated to Franz Jägerstätter (executed for his Catholic conscientious objection to fighting in the Wehrmacht); the memorial to the liberation from the Turks in St. Stephan's; the cathedral's "Pummerin" bell destroyed in the 1945 fire, but later re-cast and returned to the cathedral in 1952; the Madonna cult of "Maria Pötsch" (1954, 1969); the 1930 memorial for fallen artillery in both world wars, also in the Votivkirche; the heroization of Prince Eugene; and the 1968 Mauthausen window, also in the Votivkirche. Klambauer's discussion of these and other sites is often insightful and at his best, he successfully integrates politics, iconography, and even biblical exegesis. However, as the dates suggest, any sense of narrative development or chronological periodization goes out of the window. This is a pity because it would have been interesting to read a direct investigation of the three milestones or turning points which Klambauer at various points claims, or more often, implies, were the decisive in his story.

The first shift, between 1945 and 1964, has been called an anti-fascist "basic consensus" (*Grundkonsens*). Klambauer uses this term several times, but on other occasions he appears more skeptical. If so, I think his stance is probably right, because what he describes is surely at best the successful papering-over of fundamental disagreements, not the result of shared values. In short, what we see in this period is an old-fashioned deal, based not on antifascism (a term the People's Party rejected) but a pragmatic allegiance to the new state. Second, Klambauer also seems to subscribe to the argument that the mid-1960s saw a turning-point, marked by a new readiness by the state to assert the "victim myth" against attacks from the German national and neo-Nazi Right. Yet, much of the evidence he produces for the period after the mid-1960s—including the attitude of the church—rather undermines this case.

The final putative turning-point is the "Waldheim affair" itself. Here, too, Klambauer seems rather uncertain.

While he points to its antecedents, he also refers to it variously as a caesura, an "implosion" (p. 246) or the start of a "gradual erosion" (p. 254). Furthermore, if the preceding decades had really offered an unqualified assertion of a hegemonic version of the "victim thesis" by "official Austria" it becomes rather difficult to explain how the trend toward critical research into contemporary history, of which Klambauer himself is a part, could ever have emerged. Indeed, at this point Klambauer reaches for convincing but quite different arguments about generational change.

In the end, Klambauer's uncertainty seems to be more methodological than political. With his antifascist hat on, he criticizes the contradictions and vagueness of the messages transported by these memorials (nearly all of them Catholic). From this perspective, the blurring of the distinctions between victims of the Nazi regime and other victims of the war is wrong, or a hypocritical use of "doubletalk." But when he puts on his theorizing hat, and follows James Young and others, then the "multivalency" and ambiguity of monuments, or their openness to divergent interpretations, reflects their inherent quality. (Diversity may even be seen, as he argues at one point, as evidence of a healthy democratic political culture.)

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to reproach Klambauer for failing to resolve this kind of difficult issue at a theoretical level. It would be also churlish not to acknowledge that he has reviewed a wide range of published and archival material, and that the result is often illuminating. For this reason, despite its flaws, this book deserves to be read by anyone interested in contemporary Austria, or the memorialization of the Second World War and National Socialism.

Note

[1]. See, for example, Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster, *Österreichisches Gedächtnis: Über Erinnern und Vergessen der NS-Vergangenheit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993); Stefan Riesenfellner and Heidemarie Uhl, *Todeszeichen, Zeitgeschichtliche Denkmalkultur in Graz und in der Steiermark vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1994); and Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006).

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