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A "War Child" as a Historian of Austria's Nazi Past [2016]

Gerhard Botz*

Abstract: »*Ein Kriegskind, das als Historiker Österreichs Nazi-Vergangenheit erforscht*«. This article presents four interwoven lines of argumentation: first, it describes the trajectory of a common Austrian in the first half of the 20th century, my father, his political inclinations towards authoritarianism and Nazism, and his "career" and death as a *Wehrmacht* soldier in the light of changing societal and political contexts; secondly, the author's process of interpreting scarce written documents, photographs, and vague oral accounts in an attempt to establish some historic "truth" is reported; third, this ("traditional") historiographical work is juxtaposed with Austria's conflicting "collective memories" since the 1960s and with the historical-political struggles around prominent Austrian figures (like Waldheim, Friedrich Peter, and other forgetful or silent participants in the Nazi war of extermination or the NSDAP and the SS) in which the author himself participated actively. In this way, the recent cultural historical dimensions of a modern (and successful) European state which has been struggling to come to terms with a strong dictatorial past are illuminated. But the author also discovers as a "participant observer" or "ego-historian" in how fragile and deceptive his own critical opinions and attempts to overcome the Nazi structures of his own society had been: they have unconsciously and indirectly perpetuated taboos about a harmful past and influenced his political as well as professional activities.

Keywords: Gerhard Botz, Austria, National Socialism, autobiography.

I didn't know my father. I have only vague memories of a time – I was born in March 1941 in Schärding, Upper Austria – when I must have been about three. These recollections are hazy; they're associated with a pleasant sensation of being picked up and held in the air, and feeling something like admiration. A few black-and-white snapshots among my mother's effects show such an image. One taken in an orchard is of a young *Wehrmacht* soldier holding a boy of about one-and-a-half whose right arm is extended like the Nazi salute that was common in those days, even among kids. Perhaps this photo shaped my remembrance, or maybe created it in the first place

But my most distinct memory is connected with an overcast day in late autumn. I'm playing with a friend in a sandbox in the front yard of a two-family house on

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the outskirts of the little town that we – my working mother, my grandmother and I – lived in. Suddenly, a stranger, a man in a dark coat, is standing at the gate, ringing the bell. My grandmother comes to the door and lets him in. Later, she comes back outside with a peculiar expression on her face and escorts the man to the gate. Then, with uncommon severity, she tells me that my friend has to go home at once, and I'm brought into the kitchen. My mother is seated on the settee, her elbows on the table, head in her hands. Her face, visible between locks of brunette hair, is red and tear-stained. She's sobbing inconsolably. It was the shocking immediacy of this tableau that frightened me, the scene itself more than the notification that my dad's dead, killed in action.

This image and the significance I've ascribed to it ever since I've been capable of political thought have stayed with me to this day. Even when I was a child, they were accompanied by my mother's and grandmother's admonition: "War is bad, politics is bad!" I think this influenced the decision I made in my third semester at university to switch majors from biology to history, and the choice of the topic of my doctoral dissertation: the history of political violence.¹ Devastated above all by the first TV documentaries showing the atrocities of the Third Reich and coverage of the Eichmann Trial, my aim was to prevent violence and the afflictions of dictatorship and war in the future. For years after 1945 in Austrian society, the term "politics" was often a veiled allusion to Nazism, which would be one of the chief subjects of my scholarly research.

But it wasn't until I was 62 years old that – challenged by students in one of my seminars at the University of Vienna and encouraged by the intellectual exchange with them – I began to engage in a more intensive "encounter" with my father's past² and to use my professional skills to (re)construct his story.

In a sort of "ego history"³ that merges subjective recollections (personal and familial), official documents from the Nazi era, and structural historical analyses, I attempted to sketch four episodes in my father's life.⁴ That is the subject of this essay, the original purpose of which was to serve as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of history; as such, it endeavors to provide a step-by-step account of the process of research and reflection. Nevertheless, I intentionally steer clear of consideration of the extent to which this captures the "actual" behavior of my father – who can be taken as a proxy for many similar Austrians and Germans during the Nazi era – or

¹ Gerhard Botz, 1983, *Gewalt in der Politik: Attentate, Zusammenstöße, Putschversuche, Unruhen in Österreich 1918-1938*, 2nd ed., Munich: Fink.

² On the subject of shocking cross-generational after-effects of fatherlessness as a war consequence among Germans, see: Matthias Franz, 2013, Fatherless children of World War II in Germany: Persistent psychosocial impairment in adulthood, in *Children and War: Past and Present*, ed. Helga Embacher et al., 188-133, Solihull: Helion, here 122 et seq.

³ Pierre Nora, ed., 1989, *Leben mit der Geschichte: Vier Selbstbeschreibungen*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer; see also Lutz Niethammer, 2002, *Ego-Histoire? und andere Erinnerungs-Versuche*, Vienna: Böhlau, 103-9.

⁴ Gerhard Botz, 2005, Nazi, Opportunist, "Bandenbekämpfer", Kriegsoffer: Dokumentarische Evidenz und Erinnerungssplitter zu meinem Vater, in *Schweigen und Reden einer Generation: Erinnerungsgespräche mit Opfern, Tätern und Mitläufern des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Gerhard Botz, 135-59, Vienna: Mandelbaum; expanded version from 2005 in: *Bios. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen* 18 (1): 28-47.

whether it's rather a product of my recollections and projections. Likewise, I consider the narrative of my occupational involvement in contemporary history to be typical of no small number of my colleagues born at around the same time I was. Their parents' Nazi past was a prime motivational factor. In Germany too, Barbara Stambolis has established the fact that historians in the 1943 cohort cite similar contexts of experience as what brought them to a life lived in and with history.⁵

Nevertheless, it behooves me and other such authors of (auto)biographical histories in cultural and social studies to heed a warning: Don't be taken in by the illusion of a biographical developmental logic!⁶ Thus, in this essay too, I have deemed it appropriate to keep in mind the fragmentariness of the historical narrative, the ambiguous significance of historical evidence, and the imprecision of one's memories. This is an abridged account, supplemented by particular details, of the above-mentioned paper⁷ written in 2003-04.

I. Familial Milieus: More Proximity than Distance to National Socialism

I grew up in Schärding, a town on the Bavarian border, among my maternal relatives – originally farmers' sons who hadn't inherited their family spread, and female hired hands, who, during the interwar years, had become cabinetmakers, tailors, clerks and petty officials. In the 1930s, they had also drifted away from their family's Social Democratic tradition – some turned to National Socialism; two became Communists, though, together with some National Socialists, they helped transport Richard Bernaschek, the Social Democratic leader who sparked the Socialist uprising on February 12, 1934, to escape to Nazi Bavaria.⁸ My grandmother, mother and a few aunts remained more or less faithful to the Catholic Church, attending Mass on Sundays and holidays, though also maintaining a critical distance to the clerics whom townspeople had long since "seen through" as holier-than-thou hypocrites.

My mother, born in 1912, went to work as a legal secretary. During the post-*Anschluss* wedding boom, she married Anton Botz, then a court clerk. Amidst the pervasive optimism following the defeat of France that seemed to betoken a peaceful future, they decided to conceive a child in 1940.

I never developed close relations with my father's relatives, folks in Lower Austria who thus resided until 1955 beyond the demarcation line dividing the US from the Soviet occupation zones. His father had been a small-scale farmer as well as a harrow maker who worked until a ripe old age at this craft that has long since sunk into agricultural oblivion. His ancestors came from the Middle Rhine Valley.

⁵ Barbara Stambolis, 2010, *Leben mit und in der Geschichte: Deutsche Historiker Jahrgang 1943*, Essen: Klartext, 113-246.

⁶ Cfr. Pierre Bourdieu, 1986, *L'illusion biographique*, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62/63: 69-72.

⁷ See the footnotes for more detailed literature and source information, in Botz, Nazi, *Bios* 18 (1).

⁸ Family histories often told by my uncle Josef Parzer; also see Inez Kykal, Karl R. Stadler, and Richard Bernaschek, 1976, *Odysee eines Rebellen*, Vienna: Europaverlag, 108.

They're said to have been among those sent by Empress Maria Theresia to settle along the Danube on the Habsburg Monarchy's military perimeter, but they didn't remain for long, and were already headed back half-way westward in the 18th century. This family saga is documented by *Ariernachweise*,⁹ both "short-term" and "long-term" (going back almost 200 years) versions of documents drawn up to prove "pure-blooded Aryan ancestry" to high-level Nazi officials. Before Emperor Josef II freed the peasants, the Botzes had already settled in the foothills of the Alps in Lower Austria. Between the two World Wars, some of these people too began to give up family farming. The daughters remained in the rural milieu, but both sons took up non-agricultural occupations – a not uncommon pattern of social mobility. The older son, uncle Leo, learned the trade of baker, joined the SA and headed the local Nazi Party (NSDAP) organization.

My father, the younger son born in 1912, completed a commercial apprenticeship. In the summer of 1932, he was unemployed. Many young retail clerks, civil servants and transportation sector employees moved in German Nationalist circles then and proved especially receptive to the new, anti-democratic, anti-socialist as well as anti-bourgeois, radical German Nationalist movement of the Nazis.¹⁰ These must have been among the factors that socially motivated my father and shaped his *Weltanschauung*.

Already in August 1931, my father joined the NSDAP¹¹ and was soon advancing up the ladder – as a sort of local propaganda speaker – even before the world economy hit rock bottom and the NSDAP became a mass movement in Austria too.¹² Thus, my father was one of about 68,000 *Alte Kämpfer* in Austria who were admitted to the NSDAP even before it was banned in this country,¹³ and he would have enjoyed tremendous prestige here after March 1938 had he not resigned from the party at the end of 1932. This is even more astounding in light of the fact that, when he quit, Hitler's movement was on the verge of taking power in Germany. One

⁹ *Ahnenpass* (genealogical table compiled 1938-39) and documents of peasants' emancipation since the late 18th century; copies in the private archives of G. Botz.

¹⁰ Gerhard Botz, 2007, Arbeiter und andere „Lohnabhängige“ im österreichischen Nationalsozialismus, in *ArbeiterInnenbewegung und Rechts-extremismus*, ed. Jürgen Hofmann and Michael Schneider, 35-61, Leipzig: Akad. Verl.-Anst. (ITH-Tagungsberichte 41).

¹¹ Here and for the following see: Nazi Party membership cards and party correspondence (Berlin Document Center), Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. Even in 1994-95 access to these documents was denied to me during work subsidized by a research grant awarded to me by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung in Berlin; the reason given was "close relationship."

¹² See: Radomír Luža, 1975, *Austro-German relations in the Anschluss era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Bruce F. Pauley, 1981, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis: A History of Austrian National Socialism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Dirk Hänisch, 1998, *Die österreichischen NSDAP-Wähler: Eine empirische Analyse ihrer politischen Herkunft und ihres Sozialprofils*, Vienna: Böhlau; for a different opinion about the Nazi rebels of July 1934, see: Kurt Bauer, 2003, *Elementar-Ereignis: Die österreichischen Nationalsozialisten und der Juliputsch 1934*, Vienna: Czernin.

¹³ My own calculations: Gerhard Botz, 1980, Die österreichischen NSDAP-Mitglieder. Probleme einer quantitativen Analyse aufgrund der NSDAP-Zentralkartei im Berlin Document Center, in: *Die Nationalsozialisten*, ed. Reinhard Mann, 98-136, Stuttgart: Klett.

possible explanation is that he had applied for enlistment in the Austrian Army in November 1932.

In March 1933, he entered military service as a member of a bicycle battalion based in a Vienna suburb¹⁴ just as Christian Social Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was going about shutting down Austria's National Assembly, abrogating the constitution and paving the way to his authoritarian dictatorship. However, my father soon incurred a foot injury that severely diminished his fitness for service. Although his performance assessment had been no better than "satisfactory," instead of being discharged he was transferred to another branch of the public sector, as was often the case with members of the Christian Social *Wehrbund* and the *Vaterländische Front* to which he belonged since June 1, 1933. After passing a sort of high school equivalency course for bureaucrats,¹⁵ he got a job in Upper Austria in Ried im Innkreis and then in nearby Schärding. Considering the relatively high social status of government employees in those days, the fact that he had yet to turn 25, and that times were still tough, his advancement had been impressive indeed.

But in 1936 an incident occurred in the course of the performance of his duty that would cause him troubles aplenty beginning in 1938. While executing a court-ordered seizure at the home of an illegal Nazi, he came upon "an SA uniform, a steel helmet and an SA dagger," which he dutifully reported to the police. The individual against whom charges were filed promptly fled to Germany, but after the *Anschluss*, in turn, charged my father with treason. Although a disciplinary procedure governed by the provisions of German employment law was initiated against my father in 1938, he was not dismissed. Nor does he seem to have been disadvantaged professionally. In any case, he was promoted from office assistant, the position he still held in 1938, to judiciary inspector in 1942.

In May 1938, he applied for readmission to the NSDAP and recognition as a former "illegal," but the party organization refused to go along. They wanted cadres with an unshakable *Weltanschauung* and a calling to assume leadership, an elite made up of no more than 10% of the populace. This barrier threatened to tumble when, beginning in March 1938, more than half a million Austrians were suddenly vying for admission to the party with a monopoly on political power to garner that magic acceptance date – May 1, 1938, uniformly for all former illegals (joining the NSDAP between June 19, 1933 and March 11, 1938) – that was seen as a sure source of privileges.¹⁶

But in the wake of the *Anschluss*, Hitler and Josef Bürckel, the *Reichskommissar* who was dispatched to what had become the *Ostmark*, didn't want their rank-and-file diluted by a massive influx of opportunists and "March violets" who hadn't discovered their Nazi sympathies until the party was already in power. Initially, a membership freeze was instituted, and then the admission process was made more selective. Nevertheless, many Austrian Nazis attempted, often successfully, to

¹⁴ Bundesheer-Grundbuchblatt Botz Anton, Archiv der Republik / BMFLV, Österr. Staatsarchiv.

¹⁵ *Beamtenmatura*, external school-leaving examination that was less rigorous than those for graduation from a college preparatory school but nevertheless allowed access to the middle echelons of public service.

¹⁶ Gerhard Botz, 2008, *Nationalsozialismus in Wien: Machtübernahme, Herrschaftssicherung, Radikalisierung 1938/39*, expanded edition, Vienna: Mandelbaum, 272-6.

evade these restrictions and get as many of their like-minded cronies as possible into the party – like my father, for instance, with the help of his brother.

In going about it, he obviously applied two social strategies that were not atypical in Austria: mobilizing any and all personal connections, and demonstrating tremendous zeal on behalf of the regime. In exploiting various familial and party networks, it was helpful that his brother Leo was a well-known Nazi and a local party leader in Lower Austria. In interviews with Leo in 1974-75 and, later, with his widow, they told me that Leo pulled all the strings he could to help my father out of his jam. My father had indeed been associated with the NSDAP before 1938, but he hadn't really been a permanent party member during his time in Lower Austria though he had done promotional work for them. Aunt Lex said that Leo succeeded in getting help from friends in high places "to make the necessary arrangements" for my father after 1938. Her account was accompanied by a mischievous wink of the eye, which I didn't completely understand at the time. Now, in light of my extensive research into the social structure of the Austrian NSDAP, I realize that she must have meant that an early admission date and a low membership number were not necessarily reliable indicators of how soon an individual got on the Nazi bandwagon or how genuine his commitment was.¹⁷

Nonetheless, it took ages. The party machinery's wheels began to turn slowly in a protracted, meticulous investigation that went all the way to the top echelon in Munich. It wasn't until my father was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* that the readmission process picked up speed. The local and district NSDAP groups gave up their opposition, and even the head of the Upper Danube region, Gauleiter August Eigruber, could be persuaded to put in a word for him. All the same, Anton Botz was expressly refused his old membership number of 1931; he was issued a new one, much higher and less prestigious. In autumn 1944, my mother, who had gone back to work during the war at the District Court and likewise displayed zealous commitment to the Nazi regime as a member of auxiliary social organizations, was informed that her "husband has been accepted for membership in the NSDAP and will be inducted during his next furlough." That never happened, since he was killed in action before getting a leave. Nevertheless, my mother still had to pay his back dues – a not inconsiderable sum – from 1941 on. After all, the NSDAP was actually a huge financing apparatus¹⁸ in which the head of the membership division didn't report directly to the executive director but to the party treasurer in Munich.

In addition to efforts to put his party affairs in order, Anton Botz also displayed high-profile loyalty to the regime from 1938 on. That was the other career strategy. He resigned from the Catholic Church and registered as a "believer in God" with no denominational affiliation. Accordingly, Christmas 1940 was celebrated in the Botz home beneath a picture of the *Führer*.

¹⁷ Gerhard Botz, 2011, Expansion und Entwicklungskrisen der NSDAP-Mitgliedschaft (1933-1945), in *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs. Beruf(ung): Archivar. Festschrift für Lorenz Mikoletzky, part II* 55: 1161-86.

¹⁸ See Hans Mommsen, 1991, Zur Verschränkung traditionaler und faschistischer Führungsgruppen in Deutschland beim Übergang von der Bewegungs- zur Systemphase, in *Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. idem, 39-66, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

According to my mother and grandmother, in my father's absence and at their behest, I was given a Catholic baptism. They claimed to have rejected my father's political ardor as a convinced National Socialist. He had even wanted to give me the awful name Horst in honor of Horst Wessel, a young German Nazi activist murdered in 1930.

In 1943, the district leader's assessment of my father's performance was much more positive than before – after all, the party needed more dues-paying members in wartime:

Since the upheaval, Botz's conduct has been impeccable. He has worked assiduously in the district administration of the NSV [Nazi social welfare organization] as leader of the youth welfare division, and, with his general attitude, has shown that he affirms National Socialism and is prepared to do his utmost for the movement.

II. No "Hero" in Stalingrad

On March 17, 1942, exactly on my mother's 30th birthday, Anton Botz was drafted into the German Army. He's said to have been appalled that the war had now made its presence felt in his life too, a man whose 1938 medical examination had classified him as suitable only for limited service. The Greater German Reich, at the highpoint of its bloody war to assert continental hegemony in Europe, was calling up age cohorts that had previously been spared, those less than 100% fit for action, and men whose professions had gotten them an exemption. After five months of training, he was deemed ready for deployment as a "rifleman," which was later modified with the addition of "clerk, equipment administrator, company/troop leader." He was assigned to the 132nd Regiment of the 44th Infantry Division, a unit whose insignia featured Austria's red-white-red bordered escutcheon and which included the former 4th Regiment of the Austro-Hungarian and then Austrian Army that was famous for its *Hoch- und Deutschmeister* March. Indeed, Hitler had ordered the extirpation in the *Ostmark* of anything suggestive of Austria; nevertheless, as the military situation worsened, glorification of the homeland and regional traditions was encouraged to foster the men's loyalty to the regime and fighting spirit.

In August 1942, Anton Botz was transferred to the Eastern Front to participate in the major offensive that had been launched in Southeastern Russia to take the Volga and the Caucasus. In the last few months, the 6th Army, which included many Austrians, had left a swath of destruction in its wake as it moved through Soviet territory from Dubno to Charkiv. This fighting resulted in many thousands of casualties on both sides, and huge numbers of POWs – most were consigned to starvation in the German detention camps and the rest were transported back to the Third Reich to perform forced labor. War laid waste to whole districts; what remained following the military requisitions in so-called *Kahlfräß* (total defoliation) zones¹⁹ were villages stripped of foodstuffs in which civilians faced mass death – for the Germans, a not

¹⁹ Ulrike Jureit, ed., 2002, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 288 et seq., Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

undesirable outcome and often their intention in the first place. These actions along with culling and executing Communist commissars as well as the systematic liquidation of partisans and those suspected of assisting them amounted to a policy of annihilation of Slavs deemed to be *Untermenschen* (subhumans). This is also where, in 1941, the mass murder of Jews began to be carried out by the SS *Einsatzgruppen* that followed, accompanied and received support from advancing *Wehrmacht* units. Many soldiers in the 6th Army, whose ranks my father joined on August 23rd, were active participants in, or at least witnesses to, these acts; however, I don't recall ever hearing about this in the stories told within the family. There are snapshots that my father enclosed in the letters he sent home, but I hadn't examined them closely until I began preparatory work on the essay about my father for my seminar during the 2003-04 academic year. Mindful of the admonition "War is bad," I had previously avoided doing so.

One series of photos must have been taken by my father northwest of Stalingrad. As is to be expected, they capture scenes of army life that was rather leisurely and hardly heroic: one shows the unit's baggage train in a tarpaulin-covered trench, an expansive plain in the background, my father with a lost expression, squinting into the sun; reclining against a machine gun; naked to the waist down at an encampment in the woods with the other guys in his unit; "ironing" his uniform trousers or darning a shirt. There are also wide-angle shots showing an almost endless column of obviously Soviet POWs on a dusty country road and close-ups of their weary faces. One photo taken from a short distance away shows a captured trench that had been dug into the steppe and, inside, two fallen defenders, their limbs twisted crazily. Presumably the last pictures in this series are two shots of crosses and flowers adorning freshly dug graves of the 44th Division's dead; in the background: an empty landscape and a deserted stone house.

Nothing captured in these images suggests that this had been anything other than a "normal" war with the "usual" horrors. Nevertheless, in an op-ed piece about Austrian President Waldheim's hushed-up wartime service²⁰ I wrote in 1987 for a Viennese daily – one of the many such commentaries I published in those days without having realized that my father too could have been directly involved in these war crimes – I stated:

And they were not just brutal wars of aggression and invasions of many nations in Europe and other parts of the world. What makes it even worse is that, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, they were wars of annihilation targeting civilians. After all, not only the SS (and the Waffen-SS) but also the *Wehrmacht* were ordered by the 'Führer' to employ 'the most brutal means' in waging war against partisans. 'In this unrestrained combat, regular troops were authorized to use any tactics at all, even against women and children, as long as they led to success.'²¹

²⁰ Dr. Kurt Waldheim (1918-2007), as a staff officer, must have known about these war crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* but kept quiet about them; after 1945 he was an Austrian diplomat and politician in the ÖVP (conservative party), Secretary-General of the UN (1971-1981) and President of the Republic of Austria (1986-1992); see: Barbara Tóth and Hubertus Czernin, eds., 2006, *1986: Das Jahr, das Österreich veränderte*, Vienna: Czernin.

²¹ Gerhard Botz, 1987, Pflichterfüllung (I), *Kurier*, May 15, p. 2; for a more detailed discussion, also see: Gerhard Botz, 1987, Österreich und die NS-Vergangenheit. Verdrängung, Pflichter-

In autumn 1942, the 6th Army reached Stalingrad, but met tough resistance by the Red Army. In November, Soviet forces launched an operation to liberate the city and pincer movements that encircled the *Wehrmacht*. Thus, instead of being in a position far to the rear, my father was now pinned down in the *Kessel* (cauldron) in which German units and their allies, a total of 300,000 men, were trapped.²² Noted in his military service book: “19-21 November 42 Battle to defend Stalingrad” and “22 November – 31 December 42 Defense of Fortress Stalingrad 5/132.” The catastrophically bad conditions in the *Kessel* – more than 100,000 killed in action, the increasing shortage of food and supplies for those still alive, the cold, the misery of the wounded, the hunger and desperation of the *Wehrmacht* soldiers surrounded by the enemy – have been graphically described in novels, both good and bad.²³ In a veritable library of memoirs and apologias, films and made-for-TV documentaries, and in more or less scholarly disquisitions, these events have been orchestrated into a myth of mass heroism – and that even after 1945, no less – but they give short shrift to the great sacrifices on the part of the enemy and the slaughter of Soviet soldiers and Russian civilians. Nor did they come up in my mother’s terse mention that my father too had been in Stalingrad. But I can also say that when I was a child and my mother alluded to this, I don’t recall her ever evoking any of the heroic-mystical tropes that characterize the usual tales of Stalingrad told by veterans who got out alive, accounts from which children were excluded and that women shunned.²⁴ The talk was mostly about the terrible hunger and daily rations that were barely enough to stay alive. And that my father said that, afterwards, his first piece of bread tasted like cake. Six weeks after he was flown out of Stalingrad, his medical chart still recorded a body weight of only 68 kilograms (150 pounds) and indicated that there were edema on his legs, probably caused by hunger or intense cold.

My mother also told me that my father was incredibly lucky to have received wounds that enabled him to get out of Stalingrad in the nick of time on December 31, 1942. He just happened to meet an acquaintance who was a member of the crew of one of the last flights out and who got him a spot in the overcrowded aircraft.²⁵ But something mentioned in his military service book must have been decisive: “4 December 42. Shot through the left hand and back. 5. I.R. 132 near Stalingrad, by his own account.” A soldier’s only chance of being flown out was to obtain an attestation from a military physician that his wounds were not too severe and not too minor. Following a series of stays in military hospitals – one photo shows him standing up though still weak – two months later, “two stopwatch-size, receded

füllung, Geschichtsklitterung, in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner, 141-52, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

²² Wolfram Wette and Gerd R. Ueberschär, eds., 2013, *Stalingrad: Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht*, 7th ed., Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch.

²³ Jörg Bernig, 1997, *Eingekesselt: Die Schlacht um Stalingrad im deutschsprachigen Roman nach 1945*, New York: Lang, 231 et seq.

²⁴ On the subject of soldiers maintaining silence towards women, see: Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster, 1993, *Österreichisches Gedächtnis. Über Erinnern und Vergessen der NS-Vergangenheit*, Wien, et al.: Böhlau, 114-7.

²⁵ There is an equivalent scene in this novel: Theodor Plievier, 1947, *Stalingrad*, Munich: Desch, 201.

scars, still covered with a scab in the middle” were discovered on his back. But at this point his medical records make no mention of a hand injury.²⁶ My guess is that the attending physician omitted that intentionally.

Then, one time, my mother told me that my father had been in danger of being court-martialed on charges of self-mutilation. Such cases of self-inflicted wounds were not unusual – in many of them, soldiers shot themselves in the hand or foot in order to get away from the front.²⁷ In the only still-extant letter he sent home from the battlefield, there’s a passage that seems to raise the suspicion that a wound he sustained in Stalingrad was self-inflicted. In 1944, when he found out that my mother was related to Adolf Sinzinger, a *Wehrmacht* general originally from Austria, he wrote: “Maybe we could have gotten some help from him that time back then with the court martial and all.” Maybe he actually had intentionally inflicted his “million-dollar wound” on himself because the real injury on his back hadn’t been serious enough. The wound to his hand – one that didn’t cause any long-term disability – could have been what enabled him to garner a spot on one of the 146 airplanes that flew 982 wounded soldiers of the trapped 6th Army out of Stalingrad on the last day of December 1942.²⁸ Then, my father, like about 3 million other *Wehrmacht* soldiers, was awarded the German equivalent of the Purple Heart, the Badge of the Wounded in black.

III. Partisan “Hunter” in Slovenia and with the *Wehrmacht* in Central Italy

While Goebbels’ Third Reich propaganda department was already busy spin-doctoring²⁹ the “sacrifice of the 6th Army” into a “heroic epic of German immortality” that continued to have an effect long after 1945, the *Wehrmacht* immediately got started reconstituting its 44th Division out of fresh troops and the meager remainders of old units. After my father had spent three months in rehab at military hospitals in the foothills of the Alps and Central Austria’s Salzkammergut region, he was called back to duty and prepared for new assignments on Belgium’s Channel coast. Meanwhile, my mother and I, accompanied by an aunt and an uncle of mine, were having fun on a visit to Vienna’s Prater amusement park. When the overthrow of Mussolini deprived the Third Reich of its Italian ally, the 132nd Grenadier Regiment was transferred in early August 1943 to the formerly Austrian province of South Tyrol, which my father, an Italophile cyclist, had gotten ac-

²⁶ Archiv der Republik / Deutsche Wehrmacht / Lazarettakten, Österr. Staatsarchiv.

²⁷ Informational letter from the *Deutsche Dienststelle für die Benachrichtigung der nächsten Angehörigen von Gefallenen der ehemaligen deutschen Wehrmacht*, Berlin 28.2.2005, to me (G.B.); see Carl Schüddekopf, 2002, *Im Kessel: Erzählen von Stalingrad*, Munich: Piper, 201.

²⁸ Bernd Wegner, 1992, Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1942/43, in *Die Welt im Krieg 1941-1943, vol. 2: Von El Alamein bis Stalingrad*, ed. Horst Boog, et al., 877-1270, Frankfurt a. M., here 1188.

²⁹ Hans Ebert, 2003, Organisation eines Mythos, in *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, ed. Idem, 333-402, Berlin: Wallstein, here 350 et seq.

quainted with during a prewar vacation. Following Italy's surrender, this regiment was part of the German force that captured and disarmed two Italian Army corps in Northern Italy, an action that did not proceed completely without bloodshed.³⁰ The fact that this regiment's troops were, for the most part, natives of Hitler's homeland is why the *Führer* selected it to be transferred to the "interior danger zone" – Friuli, Istria and Slovenia, where partisans were putting up broad-based, armed resistance. The mission of the *Hoch- und Deutschmeister* was now to eradicate these guerillas and all those who came under the slightest suspicion of aiding and abetting them.³¹ In September 1943, no less a personage than Odilo Globocnik, the man responsible for carrying out the industrialized murder of Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*, was appointed Supreme Commander of the SS and Police in the Adriatic Coastal Operations Zone headquartered in Trieste. He was in charge of not only anti-partisan warfare but also Aktion R, the mass murder of Italian Jews.

Hoch- und Deutschmeister as well as SS units were initially assigned the task of "systematically combing through the area from Görz [Gorizia] as far south as Fiume and then northwards to Laibach [Ljubljana], and exterminating the various Italian, Croatian and Slovenian partisans" – the brutally frank terms used to describe this mission in the history of the 44th Division published in 1969 in Austria.³²

The numerical relationship between enemy casualties and the unit's own losses clearly reveals what kind of "military operation" this was. "Gang members captured in the field or who surrender" were to be shot in most cases. It may be assumed that many of those left alive – fighters, supporters, uninvolved civilians – were sent either to concentration camps or to the *Reich* as forced laborers.

Most accounts explicitly record the involvement of my father's regiment in this war of extermination in Northern Italy and Slovenia. But it wasn't until I conducted my final research for this paper that it became clear to me that my father, who had just been promoted to lance corporal and decorated with the Infantry Assault Badge, must have been involved in it in some way – either as a clerk chronicling the "bloody harvest" of the eradication campaign and the results gleaned by interrogation and torture, or as the man in charge of the pieces of equipment that were the instruments of murder. Was he occasionally commandeered into a firing squad? Or, despite his foot injury, did he take part in hunts in the land of the "invisible enemy"? Was he also involved in close combat? This was probably the case considering the medal he subsequently received.

There now exists a parallel narrative – the story of a young Berliner, Hans Stock, who served in my father's regiment until he deserted in Monte Cassino. The letters he sent home from the front contain surprisingly open and critical accounts of hei-

³⁰ Anton Schimak, Karl Lamprecht and Friedrich Dettmer, *Die 44. Infanterie-Division: Tagebuch der Hoch- und Deutschmeister*, Vienna: Austria Press, 263 et seq.

³¹ Lutz Klinkhammer, 1999, Der Partisanenkrieg der Wehrmacht 1941-1944, in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann, 815-36, Munich: Oldenbourg, here 832 et seq., Michael Wedekind, 2003, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien 1943 bis 1945: Die Operationszonen „Alpenvorland“ und „Adriatisches Küstenland“*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 317 et seq., particularly 323 (map).

³² Schimanek, Lamprecht, and Dettmer, *44. Infanterie-Division*, 270.

nous massacres committed by men in the 132nd Regiment on Slovenian and Italian civilians, of plundering, robbery and rape. Stock had the courage to write in letters to his parents:

Early in the morning, even before breakfast, officers and troops executed the men who had been rounded up during the night, shot them from behind. After all, in their eyes, every male between 15 and 70 is a 'partisan,' and the whole population 'deserves the treatment they get from us.'

Another time:

The girl – they called her 'the partisan bitch' – was up first. She said to our people, pointing to the red star on her partisan cap, that she wanted to be shot from the front, and not in the back of the head like the others. The next morning, she lay there, totally disrobed [...].³³

I didn't pick up the slightest hint of any of this – or don't recall it, at least – in the family accounts of my father's wartime experiences. There was just this one time, during a trip to Italy, when my mother told me that my father had been stationed for quite a while in the area around Udine and Gorizia, though she made no mention of what he had done there. In any case, I picked up a certain hint of jealousy about a brief affair she suspected my father had carried on. His brothers-in-law and his brother Leo were the only ones he told that he had once sustained a neck injury from a partisan armed with a sickle, and insisted that nothing about this be said to my mother. Later, this was confirmed to me both by one of my uncles and even my mother herself. In my father's military service book, there actually is a notation of this injury dated May 26, 1944, a time when he and his unit had long been retreating through Central Italy.

In any case, until 2004, I didn't have even a clue about my father's possible involvement in "warfare"³⁴ conducted in this way, and certainly not in 1963 and afterwards in conversations during my travels in Peloponnesus and with my future Greek in-laws, who often talked about the wicked reality of these anti-partisan tactics and German occupation policies, including mass executions of civilians and hostages and what role the *Wehrmacht* played in them.³⁵ In 1985 I published a piece in *Kurier*, a Viennese daily, that sketched a general picture of anti-partisan warfare. The occasion that called for such an elaboration was the handshake with which

³³ Jens Ebert and Thomas Jander, ed., 2009, *Endlich wieder Mensch sein: Feldpostbriefe und Gefangenenpost des Deserteurs Hans Stock 1943/44*, Berlin: Trafo, 165, 183.

³⁴ This does not mean positioning him automatically on the same level of war criminality as those *Wehrmacht* soldiers and officers mentioned below; these men had probably been involved in war crimes to a much higher degree. I do not want to equate him with the case of "Mr. F," which is described by Sandra Paweronschitz, „Damit der Krieg ein anderes Gesicht kriegt ...“, in *Schweigen und reden*, ed. Botz, 39-46.

³⁵ Hermann Frank Meyer, 2002, *Von Wien nach Kalavryta: Die blutige Spur der 117. Jäger-Division durch Serbien und Griechenland*, Mannheim and Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 268-78; Hagen Fleischer, 1999, Deutsche „Ordnung“ in Griechenland 1941 – 1944, in *Von Lidice bis Kalavryta: Widerstand und Besatzungsterror*, ed. Idem and Loukia Droulia, 137-223, Berlin: Metropol, here 188 et seq.

Austria's Defense Minister Frischenschlager³⁶ greeted a war criminal being returned after release from prison in Italy: SS-Sturmbannführer Walter Reder,³⁷ the man primarily responsible for the bloody "retaliatory measures" carried out in Northern Italy³⁸:

What took place in Marzabotto on September 29, 1944 was not an isolated incident. Dozens of similar or even more horrific massacres were committed on civilians in 1943-44 in Oradour, France, Kalavrita, Greece and throughout the Balkans, where they were perpetrated not only by the SS but also by regular Wehrmacht units and often those that consisted mostly of Austrian troops! Such 'retaliatory measures' (1 'German' = 100 'Untermenschen') were an outgrowth of the same sick rationale that in Eastern Europe produced systematic murders by SS-Einsatzkommandos whose members could end up without blood on their hands only in exceptional cases.³⁹

Nevertheless, for me, it was simply inconceivable that the same charge I vehemently leveled then against FPÖ Chairman Friedrich Peter,⁴⁰ who had been part of an SS-*Einsatzgruppe* in the "East," and somewhat later against Kurt Waldheim too could also apply even remotely to my father. Thus, I can confirm on the basis of my own experience how subtly the strategies of avoidance and repression functioned, even among "those born afterwards" who were utterly horrified by National Socialism and its crimes.⁴¹ Probable (or even potential) involvement by members of one's immediate family could obviously be dealt with only in an impersonal form and in structural history, theories of fascism, research on anti-fascism and resistance, and other such approaches.⁴²

³⁶ Dr. Friedhelm Frischenschlager (born in 1943) is an Austrian political scientist and former politician –first with the FPÖ; beginning in 1993 with the Liberal Forum party; minister of defense in the FPÖ coalition government with the Social Democrats (1983-1987).

³⁷ See: Heidi Trettler, 1995, *Der umstrittene Handschlag: Die Affäre Frischenschlager – Reder*, in *Politische Affären und Skandale in Österreich: Von Mayerling bis Waldheim*, ed. Michael Gehler and Hubert Sickinger, 592-613, Thaur: Druck- und Verlagshaus Thaur.

³⁸ Cfr. Gerhard Schreiber, 1993, *Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Italien: Täter, Opfer, Strafverfolgung*, Munich: Beck.

³⁹ Gerhard Botz, 1985, *Unsere unbewältigte Vergangenheit*, *Kurier*, February 13.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Peter (1921-2005) served, in 1941-42 in the 1st SS-Infanterie-Brigade, which was responsible for murdering thousands of Jews and other civilians behind the Eastern Front. In postwar Austria, he was the long-time party leader of the post-Nazi political faction (FPÖ) and supported Bruno Kreisky's Social Democratic government in the 1970s; see Ingrid Böhlner, 1995, "Wenn die Juden ein Volk sind, so ist es ein mieses Volk". Die Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal-Affäre 1975, in *Politische Affären und Skandale in Österreich vom Ende der Monarchie bis zur Zweiten Republik*, ed. Michael Gehler and Hubert Sickinger, 502-31, Thaur, et al.; Simon Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache: Erinnerungen*, Frankfurt a. M., et al., 360 et seq.

⁴¹ For this and the following, see: Margit Reiter, 2006, *Die Generation danach: Der Nationalsozialismus im Familiengedächtnis*, Innsbruck: Studien-Verl., 61-73; Meinrad Ziegler, 2000, *Das soziale Erbe: Eine soziologische Fallstudie über drei Generationen einer Familie*, Wien, et al.: Böhlau, 246-50.

⁴² Frank Biess, 2010, *Feelings in the Aftermath. Toward a History of Postwar Emotions*, in *Histories of the aftermath: The legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, 30-48, New York and Oxford: Berghahn, here 34 et seq.; cfr. also

IV. A "Hero's Death" in Southern Hungary

My father's regiment was transferred in November 1943 to Central Italy, where Allied advances following their landing in Southern Italy had led to a critical situation for the German Army. The 132nd Regiment then spent several months engaged in combat in and around the Monte Cassino monastery, action that produced extremely heavy losses on both sides. In the spring and early summer of 1944, my father and his *Wehrmacht* unit, retreating northward, were already north of Rome.

On July 14, he wrote my mother a letter that bears the number 162 and is the only one of almost 180 such letters that was either not lost by the *Feldpost* or did not later disappear from our attic. He must have written home about once a week until then,⁴³ convincing testimony to the intensity of the correspondence with family members that took place even when soldiers were stationed in war zones, and the fact that the packets they sent home as well as their luggage when they went back on furlough contained not inconsiderable amounts of foodstuffs, everyday objects and all sorts of gifts – some of which had undoubtedly been “requisitioned” – that slightly relieved some of the shortages on the home front.⁴⁴ I can still recall my father bringing a whole crate of oranges home with him, probably in the winter of 1943-44, and how I was immediately overcome by the desire for one of the strange, round, reddish fruits in the latticed tray, and, biting into it with joyous anticipation, my mouth filling with the taste of bitter acidity.

Like many other *Feldpost* writers, my father's letters dealt primarily with the everyday problems of his wife, child and relatives, but workaday life from which he had been separated for two years was still present in his mind. Mentally, he must have been living in two separate worlds: the “big one” of warfare and the camaraderie among brothers-in-arms, and the “small world” of civilian life and the family.⁴⁵ The military censor might have been able to decipher the shorthand used to write these letters, but he probably wouldn't have had any grounds to black-out any of the text. Nevertheless, sometimes my father does express something like rebelliousness against local big-shots – for instance, the court superintendent's wife. But he also articulated a skeptical, dismissive attitude towards the sanguine enthusiasm for the

Nicolas Berg, 2003, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 568-615.

⁴³ It seems as if each of the 17.4 million members of the *Wehrmacht* had posted on average 500 pieces of *Feldpost* (letters and parcels, including official post). This produced a total of 9 to 10 billion pieces of mail during the Second World War on the German side: Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Sterz, eds., 1982, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939-1945*, München: Beck; cfr. Klaus Latzel, 2005, *Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle*, in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte*, ed. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter and Ulrike Jureit, 171-81, Munich: Beck.

⁴⁴ Götz Aly, 2005, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus*, Frankfurt a. M., 118 et seq.

⁴⁵ Cfr., Katrin A. Kilian, 2005. *Kriegsstimmungen: Emotionen einfacher Soldaten in Feldpostbriefen*, in: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 251-88, Munich: Dt. Verl.-Anst. (Vol. 9.2: Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzung, ed. Jörg Echternkamp).

war displayed by a fellow party member safe behind the lines. He also intimated sexual longing in a passage following mention of the fact that his body weight was up to 75 kilos (165 pounds): “A pretty nice weight, huh! You’ll see, and feel it too, the next time I’m home on leave.” (My mother, blushing slightly, had to be asked repeatedly to translate this letter, which was written in shorthand.) Then, six weeks after the Allies landed in Normandy, he expressed the hope to be home by next winter at the latest – when the war would probably be over.

Up to that point, it seems as if my father’s unit had been moving mostly in reverse gear, which might have been why he was only awarded the War Merit Cross 2nd Class on September 2, 1944. This might also explain why he had had better chances of survival.⁴⁶

But then he was sent to the front as a squad leader. In mid-November his unit was transferred to the Hungarian-Croatian border to spearhead the defense against the Red Army that was crossing the Danube. Even before the fighting got heavy, he was mortally wounded and buried in Udvar, about 10 kilometers behind the front.

The communiqué notifying my mother of his death stuck to patriotic clichés and didn’t go into much detail:

On November 16, 1944 in Draz, Hungary, your husband, Cpl. Anton Botz, gave his young life for the *Führer*, *Volk* and Fatherland in Greater Germany’s struggle for freedom, in fulfillment of his duties as a soldier, true to his oath of allegiance. At the height of an intense defensive struggle, your husband received such a severe head wound from shrapnel that he immediately died a hero’s death without having suffered.

The assistant director of the local party organization delivered this letter to my mother on November 18th, the date of the childhood recollections sketched above.

When I was in Hungary more than 60 years later to find out more details, I had an opportunity to speak to the mayor of Udvar, who said that her father had told her “that two young *Wehrmacht* soldiers were buried in our cemetery here.” The villagers hadn’t dared to tend the grave, since, as German-speakers in postwar Hungary, they risked reprisals. Accordingly, two Hungarian dead were interred on top of the two unidentified Germans.⁴⁷ Perhaps one of the two unknown soldiers actually is my father who, severely wounded, died here while being transported back from the front to the nearest field hospital in Mohács. This was the end of the line for him.

⁴⁶ Christoph Rass, 2003, „*Menschenmaterial*“: *Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront: Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939-1945*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 142 et seq.

⁴⁷ Letter from the village mayor, Anna Fischer, to Roman Eccher (Vienna), Sept. 9, 2004; this was confirmed in my interviews with Anna and (her daughter) Valeria Fischer, Nov. 25, 2010 and Nov. 29, 2014.

V. Conclusion

The question I have to face now is why I waited so long⁴⁸ to investigate the neck injury my father had sustained from a partisan – something I had heard a bit about – as well as the details contained in his military service book, and the facts and circumstances of his wartime action that could be reasonably deduced from them. A possible explanation is that it was the “pact of silence” between parents and children – mothers and sons; fathers and daughters – that, for many years, also prevented others in my generation of “wartime and postwar children” from considering their own father’s (possible) personal involvement in the atrocities of the war the Nazis waged and their campaign of extermination.⁴⁹ I and many others in my age group have been aware of this ever since we first saw the documentaries and other films that the U.S. Army, our liberators, screened in their Info-Bus parked on summer evenings on the main square of my hometown and in our little cinema. I and many of my classmates were quite upset by what we saw, just as I was later by volumes of photographs about Hitler and the murder of the Jews published by Erwin Leiser and Robert Neumann⁵⁰ and, after that, the “Waldheim Affair” of 1986-92.

Or maybe it was exactly the way German historian Jürgen Reulecke put it: Children who grew up in the immediate postwar years had too excessively “experienced right up close the misery of the adults, their utter distress, abysmal emptiness and desperation [...] for them to ask pointed questions that amounted to poking around in open wounds.”⁵¹

Nevertheless, the Nazi era remained very much present after 1945 in the various forms of interwoven memories: individual, familial, collective-political, cultural⁵² – neither denied nor hushed up. “It went without saying.” National Socialism and post Nazi societies had developed a strict set of rules regulating “what could be talked

⁴⁸ Cfr. Heinrich August Winkler, 2000, *Warum haben wir nicht den Mut gehabt, kritische Fragen zu stellen?*, in *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad H. Jarausch, 369-82, Stuttgart and Munich: DVA.

⁴⁹ Dan Bar-On, 1996, *Die Last des Schweigens: Gespräche mit Kindern von Nazi-Tätern*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 22; Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, 2002, *„Opa war kein Nazi“: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verl., 202 et seq.

⁵⁰ Erwin Leiser, 1962, *„Mein Kampf“: Eine Bilddokumentation*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer; Robert Neumann, 1961, *Hitler: Aufstieg und Untergang des Dritten Reiches: Ein Dokument in Bildern*, Munich: Desch.

⁵¹ Hermann Schulz, Hartmut Radebold and Jürgen Reulecke, 2004, *Söhne ohne Väter: Erfahrungen der Kriegsgeneration*, Berlin: Links; Ulrich Herbert, 2003, *Drei politische Generationen im 20. Jahrhundert*, in *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Reulecke and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, 95-114, Munich: Oldenbourg, here 105 et seq.; Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt, eds., 2005, *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition; also: Lu Seegers, 2009, *Vaterlosigkeit als kriegsbedingte Erfahrung des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, in *Die „Generation der Kriegskinder“. Historische Hintergründe und Deutungen*, ed. Lu Seegers and Jürgen Reulecke, 59-83, Gießen.

⁵² Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, eds., 1999, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945*, Stuttgart: DVA, 35 et seq.

about, how it could be said, and, above all, what had to be left unmentioned,” and this made possible “after its demise, a prevailing silence about personal attributions of guilt, responsibility and involvement, which carried on the policy of muzzling discussion and rhetorical trivialization of what had happened.” In this way, the Nazis’ breaches of the generally accepted norms of civilized human beings – beginning with the Shoah and the mass murder of Slavs and others they termed *Untermenschen*, to the exterminatory shootings of hostages – could be consistently “silenced” for decades. “Every form of communication on this subject was controlled and conducted as impersonally as possible.”⁵³ The Nazis and their deeds were alien, and, in communication of the contents of family members’ memories, there was “no continuity between the members of one’s own family and the perpetrators and collaborators.”⁵⁴

Furthermore, the members of the “experience generation” – those who participated in National Socialism and its war, or suffered as its victims – weren’t the only ones who kept quiet; as part of an unspoken consensus, there was even more deafening silence heard from the children of the perpetrators and fellow travelers. In postwar society and especially among the women – mothers and grandmothers – who dominated private life in the postwar period, the subjects of “war” and “politics” in the sense of involvement in National Socialism became strictly taboo, and precisely in accordance with Freud’s definition: “Taboo refers to [...] something that is holy, above and beyond the ordinary, but at the same time dangerous, unclean, eerie.”⁵⁵

The existence of such a pact of secrecy between two generations in Austria and Germany, as well as in other countries convulsed by the National Socialist threat, also offers an explanation for various cultural-historical phenomena that emerged in the postwar era. A taboo having been put on politics in general could have yielded the apolitical attitude of the time after 1945; declaring war to be taboo also led to the growth of radical pacifism among so-called postwar children and the adherents of the ‘60s peace movements until, in a remarkable partial reversal of previous postwar taboos, the rebellion of the so-called ‘68ers took place⁵⁶ in Germany (and in a much weaker form in Austria). One of the motives of these ‘68ers seems to have been to act as proxies for their fathers – whom they couldn’t or wouldn’t call to account for what they did or didn’t do – and rebel as a means of belatedly making up for the “revolt that didn’t occur against the dictator (the father of the fatherless society)”⁵⁷ during the Nazi era.

The taboo that was placed on war and violence seems to have been so strong that instead of young people “working out” their own family history, they became activists against war and violence elsewhere – Vietnam, for instance – and protested

⁵³ Helene Maimann, 2005, *Zeit des Schweigens*, in *Was beliebt. Schreiben im Gedankenjahr*, ed. idem, 176–84, Vienna: Czernin.

⁵⁴ Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, *Opa*, 356.

⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, 1994, *Totem und Tabu: Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker*, 6th ed., Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 69 et seq.

⁵⁶ For a critical stance towards the concept of the ‘68 generation, see: Tanja Bürgel, 2005, *Nachdenken über Lutz N., der kein „68er“ sein will*, in *Zeit-Geschichten: Miniaturen in Lutz Niethammers Manier*, ed. Jürgen John, Dirk van Laak and Joachim von Puttkamer, 50–6, Essen: Klartext, here 50 et seq.

⁵⁷ Odo Marquard, quoted in: Schulz, Radebold and Reulecke, *Söhne ohne Väter*, 153; cfr. also: Ziegler and Kannonier-Finster, *Gedächtnis*, 240 et seq.

against the efforts of “substitute fathers” in politics and academia to hush up their Nazi entanglements and what the parents did during the war. At the same time, attempts by me and many other historians of my generation to thus distance ourselves from these doings⁵⁸ can be understood in terms of an ongoing impulse to take a rational, scholarly approach to dealing with the still-unresolved “burden of the past” that was an upshot of the cultural and social interrelationship of the generations. It is astounding how long it took for the Austrian historians and social scientists who made essential contributions to research on National Socialism to begin to take a scholarly approach to such latent connections.⁵⁹ Writers and German scholars in the arts and humanities got started somewhat earlier.

Members of the grandchildren generation – my former students – were really the first to strive to get away from subtly “repressing” the continuing impact of their families’ involvement with the Nazis, since they, as latecomers, were free of “suspicion of any direct connection to misdeeds.” This means that National Socialism is not totally “past” in conscious and unconscious family memories and, though it can be expected to become weaker and weaker among the next generation of young people and students, it will still smolder just below the surface.⁶⁰

That and the indeterminacy of whether people’s fathers and grandfathers were culpable fellow travelers or active perpetrators and their mothers and grandmothers accessories to those facts – and not just the difficulty to decode artifacts of the past – are what motivated the activities of those born decades after the Nazi era, people who are writers, historians and journalists today, as well as their children and future descendants. The massive scale of the Nazi phenomenon, the long-enduring consensus with the regime in Austria as well, and the ambivalence of the behavior of most of those who lived through those times are what constitute an intransient element of inquietude.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Cfr. Norbert Elias, 1987, *Engagement und Distanzierung: Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie I*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 34 et seq.

⁵⁹ Botz, *Nazi*, 135-59, subsequently: Walter Manoschek, 1986, Die Generation Waldheim, in Czernin, ed. Tóth, 124-31; Ernst Hanisch, 2011, Was ein Landpfarrer über die Jahre 1938 bis 1945 in seine Chronik schrieb: Versuch einer „dichten Beschreibung“, in *Politische Gewalt und Machtausübung im 20. Jahrhundert: Zeitgeschichte, Zeitgeschehen und Kontroversen*, ed. Heinrich Berger, et al., 265-86, Vienna: Böhlau; also see an earlier work: Martin Pollack, 2004, *Der Tote im Bunker. Bericht über meinen Vater*, Vienna: Zsolnay.

⁶⁰ Gerhard Botz, Peter Dusek and Martina Lajczak, eds., 2014, „Opfer“-/„Täter“-Familien-geschichten: Erkundungen zu Nationalsozialismus, Verfolgung, Krieg und Nachkrieg in Österreich und seinem europäischen Umfeld, Vienna: LBIHS (LBIHS-Arbeitspapiere 20).

⁶¹ I am grateful for valuable information, critique and support received from: Thomas Jander (Berlin), Walter Kissling, Henny Parzer, Doris Sottopietra, Edith Saurer, Helene Maimann, Renate Riegler, Lars Müller and Roman Eccher (all in Vienna), Max Parzer and Ingeborg Veits (Schärding), and particularly to Regina Fritz, Sandra Paweronschitz and other participants in my oral history seminars at the University of Vienna, particularly during the 2002-03 academic year, and Heinrich Berger of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Social Science History (LBIHS), Vienna.