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John Bunzl Vansant, Wolfgang Hirczy, Jacqueline. *The Sound of Austria: Ö?sterreichpolitik und Ö¶ffentliche Meinung*. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumueller, 1995. x + 184 pp. $20.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7003-1118-8.

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American Perceptions of Austria

"Hardly heard, or even heard of, at all" has characterized Austria through much of its recent history. And now a prominent scholar and author presides over a study of Austria's purported "sound." What is the story?

The answer derives mainly from relatively recent events (1986 on) which indeed caused Austria to be heard, and heard about, especially in the United States, to wit the election of a president with a clouded past in the Nazi era–the Waldheim debacle. As for other relevant literature, beyond the periodicals, this reviewer is aware mainly of polemical works cited by this book's authors themselves.

The book's scope and purpose respond directly to the question: How is Austria perceived in the United States? As for content, it consists of three parts:

1) "Austria-policy and Public Opinion in the USA," by John Bunzl (65 pages); 2) "Waldheim in the USA," by Wolfgang Hirczy (47 pages); 3) "Harry Lime and Maria von Trapp meet 'at the Stammtisch': The Denazification of Austria in American Motion Pictures," by Jacqueline Vansant (14 pages).

A one-page summary of the book's content is provided in the English language. Parts 1 and 2 each have appended data; all three include bibliographies, but there is no index. As indicated by the mixed language title, the book is bilingual, German-English. Hirczy's piece was written in conventional German, and Vansant's is a German translation of a paper she delivered at an academic meeting in Minneapolis. The survey data sets and the analysis by Janine Prader, appended to Bunzl's article, are about half in German and half in English, the latter having been previously published in *Austrian Information.*

This unpretentious work is a treasure chest of historical data presented in concise language supplemented by statistical tables of, for example, Austro-Hungarian immigration to the United States and the ethnic breakdown of percentages of immigrants from the Dual Monarchy. We are taken through U.S. relations with Vienna; with Hungarian, and then Czech, dissidents prior to World War I; the *Anschluss* issue after Hitler's coming to power in Germany; and, under the subtitle "Finis Austriae," the American reaction (or perhaps relative lack thereof) to its dreary consummation.

The Moscow memo of 1943 declared Austria a "victim" of Nazism, a notion which emerged from Big Three strategy and politics, though watered down by a reminder that Austria also bears some responsibility. But it played a crucial part in creating the problems with the Austrian mindset (which obviously was/is never shared by all Austrians!) regarding the country's role in history (p. 44).

One bullet-list sets forth the reasons why de-Nazification soon became even weaker in Austria than in Germany, and another presents basic parallels in the underlying concepts; among these that "the Jewish question and the Holocaust were *not* at the center of American analyses of National socialism" (p. 29). And, Bunzl adds, what was marginal for Germany had even less relevance for Austria. This is a key point for his analysis.

Another important theme of the Bunzl piece is the dichotomy between a cultural and a political image of Austria. The cultural consists of such stereotypes and cliches as music, waltz, opera, operetta, mountains, the Danube, and Salzburg…and the both cultural and political concept of "bridge between East and West." In contrast, the political image emerges as anti-Semitism, unresolved burden of the past (*unbewaeltigte Vergangenheit*), xenophobia, struggles with terrorism, scandal, and corruption.

Bunzl associates the relatively inactive status of relations, i.e. when nothing untoward happens, when Austria appears as primarily the land of Mozart and the Danube in American perceptions. During the Kreisky

era, however, relations became politicized, and that, Bunzl writes, clearly meant "worsening" (p. 38).

A wealth of other evidence is summarized, tracing the ups and downs of Austria's image in American public opinion, mostly in the media. The method mainly applied is content analysis of *The New York Times* (Marboe, 1984, cited on p. 37), measuring what percentage of the references to Austria related to cultural matters (e.g. music, arts)–it was 66 percent–contrasted with political items (e.g., Qaddafi in Vienna)–16 percent.

Using the *The New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, the Karmasin study (Karmasin, 1987, cited on p. 37) compared Germany's image in U.S. public opinion with that of Austria, finding that in the United States "the dimension antisemitism/unresolved past (*unbewaeltigte Vergangenheit*)" became a more central concept when related to Austria than in reference to Germany (p. 37). The data are tabulated in the book and indicate how the shift from the cultural image to the political represents a clear degrading, the "worsening."

And then there was the Waldheim affair. As Kurt Waldheim's dubious World War II activities became public knowledge while he was a candidate for the presidency of Austria, American public opinion was engaged. The resulting complex public relations and diplomatic fiasco is dealt with by Bunzl in only a few pages, as the other major article in the book is devoted exclusively to that issue.

The thrust of the argument is that the individual case soon led to conclusions about the collectivity. Bunzl asserts that the Waldheim affair provided parts of American society with the possibility of "making up" (*nachzuholen*) what it had missed during and after World War II. He points to "an apparent paradoxical heightening of consciousness of the Holocaust correlating with *increasing* passage of time since the historical event" (p. 42).

It is important that the United States government was substantially involved: the revelations about Kurt Waldheim's past had been channeled through a special investigative section of the U.S. Department of Justice. This had triggered an executive decision under U.S. law that Mr. Waldheim was barred from entry to the United States. It became known that the exclusion order would be enforced even if he were elected president of Austria, and this troubled even some Austrians who were not necessarily enthusiastic supporters of Kurt Waldheim.

The intellectual framework for American perception of Kurt Waldheim and of Austria, Bunzl argues, is "Americanization of the Holocaust." A number of trends and events coincided and came to a head in the late 1970s, creating, as Bunzl puts it, a "boom" of Holocaust remembrance through programs, curricula, museums, new archives, films, and other publications (p. 50). Thus by 1986, the year the Waldheim affair played itself out, intense concern about the Holocaust had become very much American rather than mainly Jewish.

Subtleties of the multi-faceted American-Jewish psyche, and its interactions with the general American public are skillfully and correctly brought into play. Bunzl speculates that to some degree American Jews, or their offspring, apparently felt a need to make up for their inability to act, or their relative passivity many years before, when the terrible magnitude of the plight of European Jews became known (p. 45).

Bunzl's enormous depth of knowledge and experience with the various players and stages of this drama, such as both Austrian and American politics, the American Jewish community, American media, and others, clearly enables him to weave all these factors together in a masterful way. He generally lets his data and his fair-minded explanations speak for themselves. Anyone looking for an impressive set of "conclusions" will be disappointed. We have been informed and educated; it is not suggested what we are to conclude. In a sense that feels frustrating. The answer (perhaps, with apologies to the authors of certain American bumper stickers) is "History happens."

The second major contribution, Wolfgang Hirczy's more detailed study of how the Waldheim affair played out in the United States, is essentially of the same quality as Bunzl's work. This Austrian author too, apparently by spending time in the U.S., displays talent and skill in dealing with the complexities of American society and political system.

Hirczy traces the issue of admittance of some immigrants to the United States with Nazi or war crimes backgrounds, an act of the U.S. Congress to deal with these, and the establishment of an Office of Special Investigations (OSI) to help carry out that law. Clearly the OSI sought and welcomed the proffer of information just as any police or prosecuting organs depend on leads and cooperation from the public. Thus it hardly required a Jewish conspiracy, as charged by some Austrians during the Waldheim controversy, to find the OSI receiving leads from Jewish organizations about individuals whose backgrounds were long suspected, or even firmly established, as questionable. Hirczy explains this relationship, leads the reader through some of its ramifications, and also lays to rest speculations and suspicions about political interference with the OSI due to Waldheim's special

importance.

Next, one finds an interesting discussion of the symbolic aspects for American society of the hunting down of Nazi criminals. Here the reviewer's view differs on a small point. Clearly some moral and ethical compromises came about in dealing with this policy. Soon after World War II, a handful of Germans and Austrians known to have Nazi backgrounds *were* knowingly permitted to enter the United States because their special talents were needed, for example to attain the lead in long-range rocketry. Some American retrospective judgments about these decisions, which Hirczy labels "Realpolitik," show tendencies of black and white absolutist moralism.

Referring to this, Hirczy asserts that "America can afford the luxury of manifesting moral strength, where Austria's younger generation must work through the legacy of the past and is called upon to cope and deal with it" (*Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung*) (p. 123). While the somewhat plaintive tone here is understandable, the notion of "luxury" is misplaced. It reveals a slightly incomplete understanding of the difference between American and European states. European states are ancient historical/geographic/ethnic entities, even if their borders change from time to time. Europeans tend to know who they are, although for Austrians it has been less clear than for most. American identity is a very different matter. America is founded on the basis of a set of principles (some would say an ideology), namely those of the Declaration of Independence. Thus the American world view always rests on the twin pillars of idealistic values on the one hand, and the hard, practical pursuit of state interest. Whoever governs America cannot afford to overlook the moral dimension, which in foreign affairs nowadays is usually labeled "human rights," for he or she will soon be called to account. The human rights theme, clearly moralistic, is for American political and social identity distinctly *not* a luxury, as Hirczy asserts, but at least half of its very essence.

Perhaps most interesting in this article are the substantial sections dealing with the role of the media. Several pages are devoted to the special stature and influence of *The New York Times*. This and other parts of the media discussion may be of special value to non-American readers. In explaining the part played by the *Times*, by other print media, and by television, Hirczy engages most intensively in analysis and interpretation. He questions whether the American press has any legitimate interest in evaluating other societies' choices of leaders–in this case, of course, Kurt Waldheim (p. 140).

The problem addressed by Hirczy is the American image of the Waldheim affair, and not his guilt or innocence. And that story played out in 1986. This book, however, is a useful compendium of a piece of history. There is one item of "aftermath" that might well have been mentioned, at least in an extended footnote, considering especially the book's potential usefulness to students. I refer to the "Report of the International Commission of Historians." In the spring of 1987 political pressures caused Mr. Waldheim himself to ask the Austrian government to appoint an independent international commission of scholars of military history to examine and evaluate the entire body of evidence in the light of the charges being levied against the President of the Federal Republic. Seven noted and established historians were appointed, representing the United States, Britain, Germany, Belgium, Israel, and Greece, and worked intermittently from September 1987 until February 1988. They had access to and studied literally mountains of material.

The Commission Report was published in full text as an insert by the Austrian opinion and news weekly *profil*, and comprises 48 pages of fine print [1]. The historians explicitly refrain from pronouncing in a definitive way on Waldheim's guilt or innocence. They do, however, clearly document and assert that his duty assignment made him privy to knowledge of the horrors being perpetrated by the German army in Greece and Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Report concludes that Waldheim's depiction of his military past is on many points not consistent with the evidence adduced by the Commission. "He made an effort to let his military past slip into forgetfulness, and once that was no longer possible, to trivialize it" (Report, p. 43). Thus it can be said that the approach by American media, and the resulting attitudes of the American public, were amply vindicated. This, it would seem, *is* quite relevant to the question of the American image of the Waldheim case: It was an image supported by the facts.

Even beyond the specifics of the Waldheim case, readers of Hirczy's article will be enriched by his lively discussion and thoughtful speculation about the role of the media in modern democracy.

The final article also makes for a rewarding read; indeed, an allusion to its content provides the book's title. Two motion pictures, well known in their time, are examined as influences on the American perception of Austria: *The Third Man* and *The Sound of Music*.

Jacqueline Vansant spins a fascinating tale of how *The Third Man* was shaped and sold as a Cold War propaganda instrument, and how it depicted a glorious "Merry

Widow" pre-war Vienna in contrast with a bleak, unhappy, partly Soviet-occupied one. Moreover, Vienna's World War II Nazi past was not mentioned at all. As for *The Sound of Music*, any resemblance to reality is purely coincidental. It is interesting that the town council of Salzburg objected to having Swastikas draped around the well-known *Residenzplatz* square and crowds cheering the Nazis. But when the filmmakers proposed using newsreels of the actual event instead, the city fathers quickly changed their minds and settled for a compromise: Swastikas, yes, cheering crowds, no.

Vansant goes to some length to come up with a semblance of systematic analysis despite the vapid story, and despite its being, after all, a Hollywood musical. She deals with symbolic identity notions of the film's characters, especially the Trapp family, juxtaposing Austria vs. Germany, Salzburg vs. Vienna, singing children vs. pavement-pounding German jackboots. She concludes that with this film, director Robert Wise completely "dissolves the historic Austria," and that Hollywood thus contributed significantly to the American image of Austria, not only as a victim of National Socialism, but also of history. Although the film was certainly seen by enormous masses of people, this reviewer remains skeptical as to the significance to be assigned to its impact. In any case, Vansant's study was enjoyable, thought-provoking reading, and certainly adds interest to this book, which is a valuable contribution to the literature about current Austria.

This review cannot conclude, however, without drawing attention to a somewhat peripheral issue regarding the Bunzl article, namely the matter of language. As noted at the outset, the entire book is bilingual, and Bunzl's piece is unabashedly and almost recklessly so.

Bunzl's piece abounds with such concoctions as:

Es blieb auch nicht unbeachtet, dass Klestil "well placed" war, "to patch up relations with Washington..." (p. 64)

Er fasst Beziehungen zusammen... die waehrend der Waldheim-Affaire "hit rock bottom" (pp. 64-65).

Good grief! What is the need for this mishmash?- It's really rather comical, reminiscent of comedy acts of the past. Does it really make one a stodgy old purist to be somewhat distracted and put off by these awkwardly contrived gene-splicings of speech?

Enough of that. Get this book and read it, and get your students to read it!

NOTE

[1]. "Der Bericht der Internationalen Historikerkommission," *profil*, No. 7, 15 February 1988. Separately bound insert, 48 pp.

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