

Heinz P. Wassermann, ed.. *Antisemitismus in Österreich nach 1945: Ergebnisse, Positionen und Perspektiven der Forschung*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2002. 296 pp. EUR 29.00, paper, ISBN 978-3-7065-1751-5.



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Manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Post-Holocaust Austria

Heinz P. Wassermann's collection of articles tackles the thorny issue of Austrian anti-Semitism after 1945. While several previous works have focused on Austrian anti-Semitism in earlier periods, and events such as the Waldheim Affair and the rise of the radical right Freedom Party under the leadership of Jörg Haider have attracted international attention, until recently, there has been little systematic research on anti-Semitism in Austria after the Second World War.[1] The articles in this volume aim to fill the gap by presenting new research on postwar anti-Semitism in Austria in a de-politicized and objective manner.

Each article explores a different aspect of this topic by concentrating on a specific area of Austrian life. By doing so, the contributors once again challenge the notion that the Nazi years constituted a radical break in Austrian history in terms of prejudices and attitudes toward Jews. According to many of the authors, the persistence of anti-Semitism in Austria stems in large part from the "first victim myth" and the resulting reluctance to

assume responsibility for the destruction of Austrian Jewry in the Shoah. The incidents and trends described in this book, therefore, lend support to the position argued by scholars who have asserted that anti-Semitism has deep and lasting roots in Austrian culture, politics and society, and that the Nazi years should be understood in this context.[2]

The book opens with a brief foreword by Wassermann in which he suggests through a series of quotations that anti-Semitism in Austria persists in many areas of Austrian life. While recognizing that in some respects anti-Semitism has lost its credibility in the post Holocaust climate, the contributors to this volume seek to demonstrate that anti-Semitic prejudice persists in many varieties. The collection aims to present anti-Semitism as a socially relevant object of research, providing an inventory of recent and unpublished research on the topic, and to take stock of the research on Austrian anti-Semitism after 1945.

The first article by Evelyn Adunka presents a general overview of anti-Semitic incidents and Jewish responses to them in the period from 1945

through 1997.[3] Adunka demonstrates that anti-Semitism continued in Austria following the end of the war without interruption. Leopold Kunschak, a notorious anti-Semite who had been the head of the Christian Social party until 1932, praised anti-Semitism and described himself as an anti-Semite in a public speech in September 1945. The Austrian chancellor, Leopold Figl, explained that Kunschak was an economic, not a racial, anti-Semite. Apparently he considered economic anti-Semitism to be acceptable.

A key incident highlighted by Adunka involved the professor of history at Vienna's College of World Trade (today's University of Economics), Taras Borodajkewycz, whose anti-Semitic remarks during lectures led to demonstrations for and against him in the 1960s. [4] Following this controversy, anti-Semitism in the universities decreased but found a fertile ground in the Austrian rightist press. For example, in 1974 a series of articles by Viktor Reimann on the Jews of Austria appeared in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, a widely read Austrian newspaper. The series contained half-truths and outright distortions such as the assertion that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were formulated at the First Zionist Congress and that the Jews exaggerated the number of Jewish victims in the Holocaust. Adunka's piece, in summary, gives a fairly detailed account of the various anti-Semitic controversies in Austria. However, she assumes a familiarity on the part of the reader with the postwar Austrian political scene. The use of abbreviations for political parties without explanation is confusing.

The remaining articles focus on more specific aspects of post Holocaust Austrian anti-Semitism. While some examine political outlooks (Reiter, Terpotitz) or areas of culture (Müller, Binder, John & Marschik, Gugenberger & Schweidlenka), others concentrate on isolated problems (i.e. Albrich, Wassermann), and yet others contemplate the phenomenon of anti-Semitism or reflect on how to best utilize the media to educate the public

(Dusek, Schmid). While this lends the volume a rich diversity in approaches, it at the same time makes for a somewhat uneven quality to the work, making it difficult for the reader to decipher the thread that ties the various contributions together, apart from the obvious fact that they deal with some aspect of anti-Semitism in post Holocaust Austria.

Margit Reiter and Günther Terpotitz both examine anti-Semitism found in political movements, with Reiter focusing on the traditional leftist parties in Austria and Terpotitz writing about the rightist media, its notions of history and the role of Jews. Reiter analyzes the relations of the Left with anti-Semitism, whether and to what extent the theoretical claim of anti-anti-Semitism was politically motivated. She also discusses the displacement of anti-Semitic discourse after Auschwitz onto Israel, focusing on the relationship of the Austrian Left to Israel.

Terpotitz analyzes the portrayal of Jews in a variety of publications of the Austrian Right. Common stereotypes such as the Jews' love of money and the existence of a Jewish world conspiracy pervade in the right wing press. Simon Wiesenthal and other public figures of Jewish origin, even those who eschewed their own past such as Bruno Kreisky, were commonly portrayed with anti-Semitic stereotypes. Terpotitz also discusses the cult of *Anderl von Rinn*, a bizarre cult around the legend of ritual murder that originated in the 17th century and continued on until outlawed in 1994 by the Bishop of Innsbruck, Reinhold Stecher. Despite this official ban the cult remains active and members still visit the grave of *Anderl*. The Internet has recently become a new source of dissemination for anti-Semitic propaganda.

The bulk of the articles deal with anti-Semitic tendencies in Austrian cultural life. The two articles on literature present very different perspectives on the topic. Karl Müller writes more generally on the lack of acknowledgement of the Jews' role in Austrian literature until the 1980s, despite

their exceptional contributions, while Dieter Binder focuses on a specific writer, Bruno Brehm and his stereotyped depictions of Jews. Müller concludes with cautious optimism that recent developments in Austrian Universities and the Austrian Center in Jerusalem are encouraging. In contrast Binder demonstrates a tendency on the part of Austrian writers to distort history in order to propagate the myth that the Austrian war generation heroically defended the homeland and did not know anything about politics.

Shifting to popular culture, Michael John and Matthias Marschik look at anti-Semitism in Austrian sport while Eduard Gugenberger and Roman Schweidlenka examine anti-Semitism in the environmentalist movement. Both articles suggest that anti-Semitism finds more open expression in popular culture as opposed to high culture. While after the war it became taboo to express openly aggressive anti-Semitism in Austria, these sentiments often found only indirect expression. However, in soccer stadiums, anti-Semitic slogans have been a disturbing phenomenon even without Jewish players and spectators. Also some environmentalist circles have perpetuated anti-Semitic myths as well as myths of world conspiracy. Pioneer of the environmentalist movement in Germany, Mathilde Ludendorff (wife of General Erich Ludendorff) blamed the Jews for the destruction of nature. Her writings became very influential in the *Vereinte Grüne Österreichs* (VGÖ) in the 1980s. While many environmentalist groups in Austria and Germany, leftist and liberal in orientation, rejected anti-Semitism and racism, the tendency of rightist reactionary environmentalism to disseminate anti-Semitic and world conspiracy theories persists.

Thomas Albrich focuses on the relations between the Jewish Displaced Persons, the native population, other groups of DPs, and the allied liberators in DP camps in Austria in the immediate post war period. The article describes a time in which countless refugees, many of whom were

eastern European Jews, passed through Austria. Jealousy, xenophobia, and latent anti-Semitism tainted the attitudes toward the Jewish refugees who survived the Holocaust. Furthermore, the presence of Jewish Holocaust victims proved to be an unwelcome reminder of the crimes of the Nazi period, threatening the "victim thesis" of the Second Republic.

Heinz P. Wassermann examines four daily newspapers, *Neue Zeit*, *Die Presse*, *Kleine Zeitung* and *Neue Kronen Zeitung* focusing on the reception of German anti-Semitic scandals in the Austrian media. Using Werner Bergmann's scheme of periods of post Holocaust anti-Semitism in Germany, Wassermann gives a detailed account of the Austrian press coverage of these incidents. He demonstrates an Austrian preoccupation with covering German scandals, such as the Bitburg Affair and the Walser-Bubis debate, and a tendency to portray the Jew as the cause rather than the victim of anti-Semitism.

In the final two articles, Peter Dusek and Georg Schmid turn to more theoretical questions. Dusek discusses whether or not audio-visual media such as radio and television can be used to combat anti-Semitism. He argues that the media is both a powerful and at the same time ineffective tool against anti-Semitic prejudice. Focusing attention on the crimes of the perpetrators in the media does not necessarily undo the deep prejudice and stereotypes of the Jews. According to Dusek, no amount of education through media can be completely effective against anti-Semitism because prejudice is emotionally based, caused by aggression, fear and lack of education. The resulting tensions and prejudice brew under the surface and can be triggered to erupt by an external cause. Dusek hopes his article will not be taken as a plea against using the mass media for enlightenment against anti-Semitism and xenophobia, but warns that the most crucial influences on popular beliefs lie in the political climate, schools, families and work place.

The final article by Georg Schmid presents a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. Where do the causes lie? Is it inexplicable? If one deems it inexplicable, how does one carry on a discussion on how to combat it? To deem it inexplicable is to admit that there is nothing that can be done to change it. He discusses the historiography, the focus on Hitler as a cause of the Holocaust, and the "new anti-Semitism" in order to demonstrate that anti-Semitism is an "auto-generative system." New manifestations of anti-Semitism are becoming more widespread and intense.

While Wassermann's collection of articles goes a long way in exploring a variety of perspectives on the topic of anti-Semitism in Austria after 1945, the book does not provide the reader with an overarching analysis of the abundant data and numerous incidents described in the various chapters. How are we to add up all the parts? The collection would benefit from a longer more informative introduction, setting out the issues and presenting some relevant background information in order to put the material presented in the articles into context and tie the individual chapters together.

We as readers are left to our own devices to discover the underlying themes and trends running through the book as a whole. This is compounded by the fact that the volume also lacks a concluding essay tying the articles together. By not providing an introduction setting out the issues and background and a conclusion tying together the various themes presented, several important questions remain unanswered. For example, is Austrian anti-Semitism after the war in any way a continuation of Austrian anti-Semitism from before the First World War or the interwar period? Have the stereotypes of the Jews changed or remained the same?

The volume also gives rise to larger questions. For example, does the examination of anti-Semitism in various areas of Austrian life present-

ed in these articles help us to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Austrian anti-Semitism after 1945? In order to answer these questions it would be important to compare post-war Austrian anti-Semitism to that of other European countries as well as to look at anti-Semitism as part of the larger phenomena of anti-immigration sentiments and Austrian nationalism. On a more practical note, the volume lacks a bibliography and index.

Nevertheless, the book contains a great deal of interesting and new research. It should especially be of interest to those specializing in the study of anti-Semitism, post-war Austrian politics and history, and the aftermath of the Holocaust. It brings a very important and timely topic to attention as Europe deals with the rise of the new anti-Semitism and Austria struggles with the issue of reparations and taking responsibility for its role in the Holocaust. For those interested in the history of anti-Semitism in postwar Austrian politics, culture, and society, this book is an important contribution.

Notes:

[1]. Bruce Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992); John Bunzl and Bernd Marin, *Antisemitismus in Österreich: Sozialhistorische und soziologische Studien* (Innsbruck: Inn-Verlag, 1983); and Richard Mitten, *The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1992).

[2]. For example, Robert S. Wistrich, *Austria and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1999), and Ruth Wodak, "Das Ausland and Anti-Semitic Discourse: The Discursive Construction of the Other," Stephen Harold Riggins, ed., *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse* (Communication and Human Values 24, Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage Publ., 1997).

[3]. This article is derived from Adunka's book *Die vierte Gemeinde: Die Wiener Juden in der Zeit von 1945 bis heute* (Geschichte der Juden in Wien 6, Berlin-Vienna: Philo, 2000).

[4]. See Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution*, p. 303.

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