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The Rise of the Austrian Freedom Party in the 1990s: A Culturalist Approach

Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über unterschiedliche wissenschaftliche Erklärungsansätze zum bemerkenswerten Aufstieg der FPÖ Jörg Haider in den 1990er Jahren. Daran anschließend werden einige kulturelle und historische Aspekte, die von anderen Ansätzen nicht beachtet wurden, welche aber einen wesentlichen politischen Hintergrund für Haider's Erfolg bildeten, beleuchtet. Es wird argumentiert, dass die FPÖ eine ausgesprochen erfolgreiche Strategie verfolgte, indem sie ein auf traditionellen und anti-modernen Werten basierendes österreichisches Identitätskonzept (re-)konstruierte. Besonders deutlich wurde dies im aggressiven „Kulturkampf“, den die FPÖ gegen KünstlerInnen und Personen des kulturellen Lebens Mitte der neunziger Jahre führte. Haider's Version des rechten Populismus erwies sich deswegen als besonders erfolgreich, weil sie einen in der österreichischen Gesellschaft nach 1945 stark verankerten Parochialismus politisch zu instrumentalisieren vermochte.

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Österreichischer Parochialismus, Kulturkampf, Haider, (österreichische) Identität,
Anti-Modernismus*

The rise of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in the last two decades has been a remarkable chapter in European politics. This is not just the story of a previously marginal political force gaining a bigger share of the Austrian political cake. The rise of the FPÖ also resulted in considerable controversy and endless theorizing about the party's democratic credentials and the role of its former party leader Jörg Haider. After gaining 27% of the vote in the 1999 general election, fevered anxiety ensued in the media about a Nazi 'revival' in Austria and there was an international outcry about the decision of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) to share power with Haider's party in a government coalition. Massive demonstrations took place in Vienna and the fourteen other European Union countries imposed an unprecedented sanctions regime on a fellow member state. The precipitous fall in the popularity of the FPÖ has been equally dramatic since they joined a government coalition in 2000. At the time of writing this article their national vote

has dropped to 10.01%, with a real prospect of dropping even further.

The political success of Haider's FPÖ produced a prolific amount of scholarship. This article describes and critically examines some of this literature and then puts forward a different perspective on the 'Haider Phenomenon'. It will state that a key element of Haider's political strategy was to address anti-modernist notions of 'tradition' held by many ordinary people and construct his own version of Austrian patriotism. Thus, while Haider was seen by some scholars as being at the forefront of 'modernizing' Austrian politics out of the inertia of *Proporz* or by others as ruthlessly exploiting issues like immigration and crime to gain a populist vote – he was also appealing to a deeply rooted parochialism in Austrian society and political culture. Haider recognized that an apathetic electorate would respond to his rhetoric of making the FPÖ vote synonymous with voting for an Austrian *Heimat* (homeland). He drew on a rich tradition of anti-modernism, political

conservatism and ambivalent national identity in Austria in order to forge a new and vigorous political force that promised more “order, tradition, identity and security” (Diamond/Gunther 2001) in the precarious world of post-communism and Austria’s integration into the European Union.

Evidence of Haider’s use of tradition in his political strategy can be traced by analyzing two areas. Firstly, in the political culture underpinning the Austrian system since 1945 with its unique blend of consensus, an advanced welfare system and a suppression of identities once widespread in Austria before 1938 – especially that of pan-Germanism (Pelinka 1994, 169). Secondly, in the FPÖ’s anti-modernist political rhetoric, with its appeal to conservative values, tradition and the establishment of a new type of Austrian *Heimat*. Haider managed a clever strategy of adjusting the political message according to his different audiences (Ötsch 2000). Before expanding on these points, I shall set the scene by reviewing the scholarship on Haider already available. My contribution should be treated as an *Ergänzung* to current academic literature, not a revision.

Views of Haider

I have chosen two categories of analysis from the abundant literature that is now available on the ‘Haider Phenomenon’. Firstly, I will review those authors who explain Haider’s success more in a structural context, i.e. stemming from a deep disillusionment among many Austrians with the politics of *Proporz* and the domination of political and civil institutions by the SPÖ and ÖVP. In this context, Haider’s FPÖ represents the modernization of Austrian politics and the breaking of old political cleavages. The other view of Haider comes from writers who, while recognizing the obvious structural dynamics of the FPÖ’s political breakthrough, also emphasize Haider as being a symptom of Austria’s failure to deal with its National Socialist legacy and the promotion of Austria as the ‘victim’ of Nazi aggression rather than its willing accomplice. Here, Haider represents the

ugly face of a reactionary Austrian political culture that should be dealt with through a combination of resistance and education (Pelinka 2002a, 227).

The more general scholarship on the recent rise of the ‘Far-Right’ in Europe (Eismann 2002) serves as a general context for studying Haider’s FPÖ. It deals with factors such as voter apathy, the disillusionment of ordinary people with politics, the failure of mainstream parties to deal with issues such as immigration or the march of neo-liberalism. All these issues are relevant to the FPÖ’s political progress in the 1990s, however in this article I shall dwell on the more Austrian-specific circumstances that propelled the FPÖ into the position as Europe’s most successful far-right political party.

The authors included in the first category focusing on the structural context – are Kurt Luther (University of Keele), Melanie Sully (Diplomatic Academy, Vienna) and Lothar Höbelt (University of Vienna).

Kurt Richard Luther and Melanie Sully see Haider as representing the ‘normalization’ and ‘modernization’ of Austrian politics after decades of domination by the two main political parties. Although this system might have brought a necessary stability in the post war period, by the 1980s it was clear that *Proporz* and the post-war Austrian consensus were beginning to crumble and were in need of political reform. Haider deftly formulated an opposition that had considerable resonance with the Austrian public. For Luther, this ‘structural opposition’ lies at the core of the Freedom Party’s ideology rather than its purported ‘right-wing extremism’:

the element of continuity (or ‘core’) of the Freedom Party’s ideology may well reside not in right-wing extremism but in the party’s structural opposition to Austria’s post-war system (Luther 2000, 23).

He states in the conclusion of his article ‘Austrian Democracy Under Threat from the Freedom Party?’ that “the Freedom Party is neither a neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, nor right-wing extremist party (...) (no) such values govern the operation, or political goals of the party” (ibid. 27).

Luther notes that despite the various associations with Nazism within the party, the infamous neo-Nazi utterances of Haider or the xenophobic rhetoric of other party members, the FPÖ have contributed to a ‘normalization’ of Austrian politics that represent:

a shift from a system of party competition characterized by hyper stability and accommodation to one in which uncertainty and competition are the order of the day (...) in some respects (this development) can be regarded as a ‘normalization’ of the Second Republic’s party system (Luther 1998, 151).

By focusing on the oppositional aspect of the FPÖ and placing this in the context of the post-war Austrian political system, Luther correctly points to a central problem with the continued success of the party once it achieved executive power in February 2000:

the transition (from opposition to government) is likely to prove especially difficult for a party such as the FPÖ which for so many years and so successfully pursued a strategy of populist agitation (Luther 2001, 28).

In her book, ‘The Haider Phenomenon’, Melanie Sully also puts Haider at the centre of Austria’s “painful process of modernization” (1997, 204). She points to the role of Haider in playing a “radical anti-establishment card” in Austrian politics, an establishment dominated, according to Sully, by “1968-vintage pseudo-left Viennese intellectuals” (ibid. 37). Haider’s success is therefore partly due to a failure of the Austrian Left to reform and modernize the Second Republic before 1986. She draws on the work of Menasse (ibid. 199) to show that Haider took up the gauntlet of critique of the Austrian system that the Left had failed to put into practice. The Left’s subsequent ‘hysterical’ anti-Haider stance focused only on the apparent ‘fascism’ of the FPÖ while ignoring the crucial process of normalization in an “ordinary western democracy” (ibid. 200).

For Sully, Haider incorporates a “potpourri” of ideas from all sides of the political spectrum in his project of change for Austria. The FPÖ is an important force of modernization, capable of breaking the old cleavages of an outdated Austrian post-war political system:

Haider’s project to change Austria is built on a potpourri of ideas from the right and the left, from neo-liberalism economics, conservative slogans and old socialist rhetoric. It is radical and also conservative (ibid. 201).

The Austrian historian Lothar Höbelt describes Haider in his recent book, ‘Defiant Populist: Jörg Haider and the Politics of Austria’, as a “harbinger of change against a system of power-sharing (*Proporz*) that was all-pervasive” (2003, 212). He adds that when Haider turned the FPÖ into a populist party, the “old guard” became “increasingly irrelevant”. On the one hand these long-standing party members were relieved at the rejuvenation of the FPÖ, but they were also perturbed about developments and events that they had “kick-started but no longer controlled” (ibid. 61) after making Haider their party leader in 1986. For Höbelt, a key element of Haider’s political strategy was to provoke and mobilize an apathetic Austrian electorate into registering their disgust with the ‘system’ by voting for the FPÖ. Haider had managed to capture a new phenomenon in Austrian electoral politics – “the swing vote” (ibid. 154).

Referring to the “Nazi question mark” that hangs over Haider, Höbelt reckons that Haider made a political gamble by being too ‘outspoken’ on taboo issues stemming from Austria’s past in order to gain domestic support. It led to the image of Haider as a neo-Nazi in the heart of European politics, endangering democracy. As a result of these ‘gaffes’, it became subsequently impossible for Haider to take part in government politics after dabbling in such historical revisionism: “Once he had started in that direction, however, it was difficult for him (Haider) to turn back” (ibid. 155).

For the view of those authors who see Haider more as a threat to Austrian democracy than those in the first category, I have selected from books and articles by Wolfgang Neugebauer (Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes), Ruth Wodak (University of Vienna) and Anton Pelinka (University of Innsbruck).

Neugebauer presents a convincing case for making Haider firmly responsible for shifting the FPÖ from the more liberal agenda under the

leadership of Norbert Steger in the 1980s towards the “racism and right-wing extremism” that marked out the Haider era (Neugebauer/Bailer 1996; Neugebauer/Bailer 1998). He shows that many components of extreme-right wing policies can be directly applied to ‘Haider’s movement’ (Neugebauer/Bailer 1998, 172).

For Neugebauer, Haider’s promotion of himself as a “statesman” and “Austrian patriot” is simply a camouflage to deceive the public about “the consistently pan-Germanic, and in the last instance, anti-Austrian, basic stance of the FPÖ (and) to mobilize or utilize xenophobic attitudes in the population” (ibid. 169). The extreme-right margins of Austrian politics have warmed to the FPÖ since Haider became party leader in 1986 and were subsequently integrated into the party (ibid. 166). Thus, while Haider was busy mobilizing mainstream support amongst the wider electorate there was a parallel process of an increasingly active and vocal faction of neo-Nazi elements within the party.

Ruth Wodak has made a detailed scrutiny of the language and rhetoric of Haider (Wodak et al. 1999). By focusing on the discourse of Haider’s FPÖ, she shows the way in which Haider manipulated language in order to construct a new type of national identity that polarizes the population, creating a divisive society composed of “good guys” (white, Germanic Austrians) and “bad guys” (the rest, particularly brown-skinned, Jews etc.) (Wodak 2002, 40). Haider plays on the prejudices already held by many Austrians and turned them into political capital. He made a new assessment of Austria’s ‘past, present and future’ (Wodak 2000) by postulating in his political rhetoric who he thinks are the *echt*, *anständig* und *ordentlich* citizens of Austria.

Anton Pelinka has been a prolific writer on Haider’s FPÖ. He accepts that the ‘modernization’ of Austrian politics opened up a new sort of political culture in Austria, however the significance of this development lies in the fact the “thoughts and actions of the *underdogs* (i.e. the underclass) are increasingly right-wing” (Pelinka 1998a, 117). Historically, this right-wing ascendancy arose out of the “taboos and self deception” in the “Second Republic’s re-

construction of history” (Pelinka 1997, 96). A self-deception that is encapsulated in the ‘victim thesis’ promoted by post-war Austrian elites, who portrayed Austria as the victim of Nazi aggression rather than an active participant.

Pelinka locates Haider’s rise as resulting from a series of crises in Austrian society since the 1960s. These included the search for more democracy in the 1960s, the decline of stability in the 1980s and the impact of the international and European agenda in the 1990s. As Pelinka states, “all these crises together changed Austrian society; and when the society and economy changed, the political system had to change too” (Pelinka 1998b, 213).

Austria has continued a tradition of historical ‘exceptionalism’ (Pelinka 2002b), to the point where it is perceived as a country ‘outside the European mainstream’ due to having the most successful far-right party in Europe. For Pelinka, in contrast to the general trend of right-wing populism in Europe, the FPÖ has one crucial difference – their specific roots in, and ongoing ambivalence towards, National Socialism. Haider’s FPÖ is symptomatic of what Pelinka terms as the ‘x-factor’ (ibid. 9) which denotes Austria’s specific negligence in dealing with its Nazi past, reflected in the FPÖ’s prominence in Austrian politics. Thus, while this aspect of the FPÖ was not necessarily the main factor in the success of the FPÖ – it did not *prevent* 27 per cent of Austrians voting for them in 1999.

Another Perspective

By mostly falling into these two categories of analysis, the scholarship on the rise of Haider’s FPÖ has not focused enough on some cultural-historical factors that have also had considerable bearing on the success of right-wing populism (or extremism) in Austrian mainstream politics. I noticed this when, in the course of my research, I came across the party’s aggressive campaign against artists and intellectuals in the early 1990s, which cumulated in an election poster that appeared in Vienna during 1995 stating: “Lieben Sie Scholten, Jelinek, Häupl, Peymann, Pasterk...oder Kunst und

Kultur? Freiheit der Kunst statt sozialistischer Staatskünstler" (Tieber 1996, 40). A statement that has obvious connotations with the National Socialist drive against 'entartete Kunst' in the 1930s, implying an FPÖ party policy of censorship and the promotion of a particular 'healthy' form of art. The 'official' intention of the FPÖ was to attack the 'wasted' state subsidies on artistic projects that no one likes, however the wider implications of this type of campaign show a political party engaged in some kind of latter-day *Kulturkampf*:

Vieles, was heute als Kunst ausgegeben, von der öffentlichen Hand gefördert und von deren Vertretern bejubelt wird, erregt Ekel und Ablehnung, die soweit führen kann, daß mancher Bürger gar nichts mehr von Kunst wissen will (Bleckmann 1996, 386).

No other right-wing populist party in Europe was prioritizing culture and aesthetics in their political strategy to this extent, apart perhaps from some cultural skirmishes stemming from the regional politics of Le-Pen's *Front National*. Haider obviously thought he would gain political capital out of an attack on artists and cultural figures, I wished to uncover why the issue of *Kultur* seemed to have such a resonance and importance in mainstream Austrian political culture.

In this 'Kulturkampf' of the 1990s, the FPÖ attacked a newly constructed enemy – the '*linke Kulturmafia*'. They took a moral high ground on cultural issues of 'taste' in an attempt to appeal to a general antipathy towards modern art, the avant-garde and certain aspects of modernity in the general population (Menasse 1997, 177). The venture into cultural politics by the FPÖ was part of the overall populist strategy of appealing to various constituencies in Austria in order to increase electoral support. Haider managed to package this critique of *Kultur* in the Second Republic as part of his overall attack on the 'fossilized' system of *Proporz* in Austria. Apart from its populist appeal, I have uncovered four other factors that underpin the FPÖ's inclusion of culture as an intrinsic part of their populist political strategy in the 1990s.

Political Marriage: Reactionary conservative elements in the ÖVP found a natural ally in

the *Kulturkampf* of the FPÖ. Many in the ÖVP could identify with a political campaign against the Austrian avant-garde and their 'left-wing backers'. In addition, the moralistic stance of 'upholding' family values and 'protecting' decency within Austrian cultural production could also be supported. Another example of the newly found common ground between the two parties was Haider's alliance with the Catholic church, which included a visit to the Pope in December 2000 and a friendly relationship with the bishop of St. Pölten, Kurt Krenn during the 1990s (Hofer 1998, 235). In this context the marriage of these parties can be seen not only as a neo-conservative political and economic project but also as a moralistic cultural project that aims at supporting a certain type of artistic production at the expense of experimental contemporary art.

Targeting the Left: Haider singled out the '*linke Kulturmafia*' as a political target. This was a loose term for left-wingers, the avant-garde, anti-fascists and the more progressive element of the SPÖ – basically the most emphatic opponents of Haider. As Haider states in one of his books:

Diesen Abschnitt in meinem Buch widme ich meinen speziellen Freunden. Den Kulturschaffenden, Kulturjournalisten, Kulturgenießern, Kulturpolitikern, Kulturkämpfern, Kulturlandschaftmalern, Kulturgutbewahrem, Kulturrevolutionären, Kulturkritikern, Kulturgutverteidigern und all den anderen kultivierten Menschen, die in der Vergangenheit einen Kult betrieben, sich als Teil einer Elite im Lande von der Nicht-Elite abzusetzen. Und damit vor allem von den Freiheitlichen (Haider 1997, 67).

Among the many artists, politicians and cultural figures targeted in the 1990s were:

Hermann Nitsch, who was an example of 'ugly' and 'disgusting' contemporary art, which has a sacrilegious content and 'celebrates' cruelty. *Elfriede Jelinek* is seen as 'un-patriotic', obsessed with Austria's national socialist past and feminism. *Claus Peymann* was portrayed as a typical 'leftie' intent on using his role as director of the *Burgtheater* in order to promote leftist propaganda or obscure avant-garde production for selected elitist audiences. And

Rudolf Scholten was singled out as a corrupt SPÖ politician who supported and subsidized experimental art during his tenure as Minister for the Arts in the early nineties.

A War of Ideas: Underpinning the FPÖ cultural rhetoric was a political theory seeking to justify and explain the party's *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s. FPÖ *Kulturkämpfer* such as Walter Marinovic and Andreas Mölzer borrowed and adapted concepts from the writings of Antonio Gramsci and transformed them into a rightist critique of the apparent left-wing 'hegemony' that was dominating many Austrian institutions (Zogholy 2001). A prime example of this left-wing 'takeover' was the support and financial assistance given by the Left to experimental modern art in Austria. Haider introduced Gramsci's vocabulary of 'hegemony' into his political writings and it became a staple part of his oppositional discourse in the 1990s. As Zöchling comments:

Kunst und Kultur sind für Haider der Angelpunkt, die politische Hegemonie zu erlangen. Als Kärntner Landeshauptmann hat er sich als erstes das Kunst- und Kulturressort geschnappt (Zöchling 1999, 156).

The Right-Wing Core: In its transformation into a populist political force, the FPÖ dispensed with certain items of ideological baggage. These included German nationalism i.e. pan-Germanism, anti-clericalism and any overt connections to National Socialism. New career politicians emerged to prominence in the party such as Susanne Riess-Passer and Karl-Heinz Grasser, hungry for the status and privileges of political power. Haider had to perform the delicate balancing act of appealing to a wider electorate and maneuvering for executive power while placating an ideological right-wing core of the party to prove that he had not given up FPÖ 'principles'. Haider became a chameleon, attempting to appeal to all types of voters from poor working-class families to entrepreneurs. Of the various issues, certain ones like *Kulturpolitik* had more of an appeal to these right-wing fundamentalists in the party – those who wished for 'healthy' values to be re-established in a society degenerated by the '68 generation.

By appropriating *Kultur* as a political issue, Haider was able to mobilize a historic tradition of cultural parochialism more accentuated in Austria than in other European countries – a tradition that survived world wars, Nazism and decades of liberal-democracy (Wimmer 1996). It should be noted that Haider's methods of political mobilization, in contrast to the content of his rhetoric, were innovative and showed a distinct ability to exploit modern methods of political marketing. The term 'parochialism' has no direct German translation, the nearest interpretation being *provinziell*. Its basic meaning is to have opinions, views or attitudes that are 'restricted or confined within narrow limits'. While this phenomenon is obviously not restricted to Austria, cultural parochialism has penetrated mainstream politics to quite a significant degree in Austria, enabling a fertile soil for the growth of reactionary movements like Haider's Freedom Party. This is reflected in the long-standing distaste for modern art amongst the Austrian political establishment:

(...) Wobei ein Phänomen auftrat, das leider zu einem bestimmenden Element österreichischer Kulturgeschichte geworden ist: Borniert gegen moderne Kunst gerichteter Aggression gelang es und gelingt es durchaus immer wieder, die Welt der Kreativität und des Geistigen zu beschädigen, Künstler in ihrer Arbeit zu behindern und sie in ihrer materiellen – und im Extremfall auch physischen – Existenz zu gefährden und zu bedrohen (Denscher 1999, 5).

The tenacity of parochial attitudes in the Austrian establishment can be attributed to the historical, political and social forces that combined during the twentieth century to shape Austrian political culture in a different way from other European countries. In Germany, the trauma of Nazism was dealt with more rigorously than in Austria, it was reflected by German writers such as Böll or Grass who thematized Nazism directly in their works (Konzett 2000, 10). Avant-garde culture was specifically allocated space in public broadcasting, particularly through initiatives like DCTP (Development Company for Television Programme). In Great Britain, political discourse has steered clear of cultural matters and the flourishing multiculturalism in the British art scene is in

marked contrast to the narrow confines of Austrian public art. Haider managed to use these specific cultural factors in order to capture the imagination of the Austrian electorate with a new type of political program – based on ‘identity’ politics – and promising something ‘new’ and ‘radical’ while appealing to deeply conservative traditions and attitudes in Austrian society. The next sub-section gives a deeper insight into this specific Austrian political and social climate that Haider inherited and exploited.

Austrian Identity

There is a deep tension in modernity between those embracing the dynamic, liberal, technological, and cosmopolitan version of modernity and the conservative reaction of those regretting the ‘loss’ of cultural identity, religious belief and hierarchical societal order. This anti-modernist ideology crystallized itself in the fascist movements of the 1930s. Austria has been no exception to this conflict. In fact, as outlined in Schorske’s (1980) classic work on *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* – Vienna became a hotbed of both avant-garde radicalism and deeply reactionary populism at the beginning of the 20th century. The subsequent effects of two world wars, the disintegration of the empire, the civil war in 1934 and Nazi occupation has had deep social consequences. Amid all this political and social turmoil, a deeply engrained parochialism in Austrian elites, probably arising out of the traumas of the first half of the 20th century, has remained a constant feature of Austrian politics – right up to the present-day. These political elites – whether black or red – set up a progressive social welfare system and practiced a remarkable level of co-operation in government. However, at the same time, they were resistant to the progressive social and cultural manifestations of modernity and distinctly failed to ‘modernize’ Austria in the cultural sense of the word.

Haider’s political project incorporated an ideological undercurrent of cultural anti-modernism. While embracing neo-liberalism, competitive party politics and eventually a coalition

with conservatism – it is clear from the party’s stance on *Kultur* that it retained a deep suspicion of any form of progressive cultural tendencies. Cornelia Klinger highlights this tension in her article titled ‘Fascism – a German Fundamentalism?’

Die Problematik des Faschismus hat weniger mit dem Prozeß ‘sozialer’ Modernisierung zu tun als mit dem Prozeß ‘kultureller’ Modernisierung bzw. ihrer Verhinderung und Verfehlung (Klinger 1992).

In this context Ernst Hanisch (1994) has sketched some illuminating aspects of the parochial nature of post-war Austrian society. During the 1950s, the previous decades of instability, war and dictatorship were overcome in the cultural arena not by some kind of confrontation or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – instead there was the widely popular *Heimatfilm* – a distinct manifestation of Austrian cultural parochialism:

Im Trivialfilm (Heimatfilm) (...) kristallisieren sich die kollektiven Träume, das Imaginäre einer auf Ruhe und Ordnung bedachten Gesellschaft aus. Gegen die brutalen Zivilisationsbrüche der vorhergehenden Jahre, gegen die Technikeuphorie der Gegenwart setzte der Heimatfilm auf eine ungestörte Natur als Ort der Zuflucht, auf eine intakte konservative Werthierarchie, wo die gesellschaftlichen Ränge klar bestimmt, die Rolle von Mann und Frau ‘naturwüchsig’ ausformuliert werden (Hanisch 1994, 433).

Parallel to this ‘trivial’ culture, ‘high’ culture was dominated by the looming figure of Herbert von Karajan. An undoubted master of his art, but also a perfectionist who “mit einer herrisch ungeduldigen Geste schob seine NS-Verwicklung beiseite” (ibid. 434). The background to this conservative ‘Kulturparadigma’ was a nation putting the bulk of its energy into economic reconstruction, in which there was little effort made to bring back exiled Jewish or communist artists and intellectuals. As Michael Wimmer states in his article, the cultural policies of the post-war era primarily involved a “cultural policy of exclusion” (1996, 42).

The main political parties established a system of ‘Consociationalism’ (Pelinka 1998b, 15), giving Austria decades of stable coalition gov-

ernments and compliant trade unions. The political turmoil, economic difficulties and civil unrest prevalent in other European countries, particularly in the 1960s, were notably absent in Austria. Pope Paul VI famously called the country “the land of the blessed” during a visit to the Vatican by the Austrian President, Franz Jonas, in 1971. The extent of the Austrian establishment’s ‘Kompromissbereitschaft’ after the war was the ‘pragmatic’ policy of integrating numerous ex-Nazis into the SPÖ and ÖVP as well as allowing the embryonic version of the FPÖ – the VdU (Verband der Unabhängigen) to become a political party. The VdU explicitly aimed to serve (as stated in 1949), amongst other constituencies, the “respected and unincriminated representatives of the interests of registered National Socialists” (Riedlsperger 1978, 40).

Right up to the 1980s, Austria managed to sustain political and economic ‘stability’. In the cultural arena, an image of wonderful landscapes, Mozart and of being the ‘first victim’ of Nazi aggression in Europe was successfully exported. The only significant response to this benign construction of Austrian identity came from a few writers and artists. Amongst others, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek wrote polemics, plays and novels that tore down the hypocritical facade of the Second Republic (Konzett 2000). In the plastic arts, Viennese Actionism exposed the fault line of moral hypocrisy and repression in Austrian society with outrageous artistic ‘happenings’ (Fellner 1997). However, the *Kulturrevolution* of the 1960s actually changed very little in Austrian political culture. If anything, the conservative Right could characterize this artistic challenge to the political order as the outpourings of ‘Nestbeschmutzer’ – whose intent it was to de-stabilizing the hard won moral, political and economic foundations of the post-war Austrian state.

Underlying and contributing to the conservative *Kulturparadigma* that affected post-war Austria was the vexed question of Austrian identity. As Pelinka states:

No other European country at the end of the 20th century whose identity has changed so many times, whose objective, as well as subjective, substance

has been altered so often and so significantly since 1800 (Pelinka 1998, 9).

Austrian identity after 1945 was a crucial issue for political elites who had the task of post-war re-construction and the formation of an Austrian liberal-democracy. In a sense, the claim on ‘Austrianness’ was up for grabs – and the post-war Austrian establishment spared little time in constructing a new national identity. Peter Thaler (2001) notes in his book that the Austrian case of “nation-building” after 1945 was a highly successful project resulting from the “conscious efforts of elites” to build an Austrian “nation” (2001, 1). This process from above involved not only the formation of a distinctive political culture, it also entailed the development of an explicitly ‘Austrianist’ historiography after 1945, which aimed at the eradication of pan-German ideology and the reinforcement of a new *Austrian* national identity. History books were re-written, based on a highly selective interpretation of the past – with the specific intention of giving historical credence to the notion of an independent Austrian nationhood.

However, as Thaler notes, the flipside of this successful political process was that Austrian nation-building had its “foremost impact on consciousness, but did not significantly affect the general economic and cultural environment” (ibid. 175). In other words, while the populace identified with the Austrian state, this identification came as a result of a process ‘from above’ – dependent on economic success and political consensus. Deep-rooted changes in social and cultural identity did not take place. The fate of Austria’s Jewish population, the complicity of Austrians in Nazi war crimes and the legacy of Austro-fascism were pertinently avoided by politicians, the media and academics for well over a generation, right up to the Waldheim crisis of 1986.

Enter Haider

Coinciding with the election of the controversial Austrian president, Kurt Waldheim, Jörg Haider entered the Austrian political stage by

his dramatic and successful bid for party leadership in 1986. He then embarked on his political strategy of capturing the mood and imagination of the Austrian electorate by an emphasis on ‘identity’ politics and an appeal to ‘traditional values’ (Haider 1995; 1997). In this important respect, the main political parties were unable to adapt to the new political landscape of late-modernity. They were left behind by the political dynamic of a brand of right-wing populism that was particularly suited to the Austrian conditions of cultural parochialism and political stalemate. Haider managed to fill a psychological vacuum in an Austrian society that had failed to grasp the nettles of dealing with the legacies of the past, reforming the Proporz political system and the retention and promotion of parochial cultural values, at the expense of cosmopolitanism and inclusion. The FPÖ did not offer Austrian people any real political alternative – it merely carried on the established political traditions that had remained unchallenged by Austria’s political establishment since 1945 (Bauböck 2002, 249).

The way in which Haider managed to ‘capture the imagination’ of many Austrians can be seen in three areas of Freedom Party policy: *Heimat*, anti-modernism and traditional values.

Heimat translates into ‘homeland’ in English – an insufficient translation of a word with significant cultural connotations in German. In the regional elections of Carinthia (March 7, 2004), the FPÖ gained 42.4% of the vote and Haider remained governor. In his election campaign he has included the slogan: “Jörg Haider heißt für mich: Heimat”, which continues: “Volkskultur und Tradition haben mehr Stellenwert als je zuvor”. This is a direct and emotional appeal towards people’s cultural identity, used so effectively by Haider throughout the 1990s. The FPÖ has constantly re-iterated that this special identity was in danger of being eroded – whether by immigrants, asylum seekers, left-wing politicians, cultural figures, artists or the European Union. Haider also appealed to the deep-seated desire for belonging and identity that had been absent from the bureaucratic and distant politics of the Second Republic – a political culture that pertinently avoided issues

of identity by focusing on economics and welfare. Haider’s success lay in as Isolde Charim states, ‘redefining the passions that move a regime’:

Darin besteht ihr größter Erfolg: Sie (die extreme Rechte) hat – und sie ist weiterhin dabei –, das symbolische Dispositiv der Zweiten Republik, jene „Leidenschaften, die ein Regime bewegen“, **neu** bestimmt (Charim 2001, emphasis added).

During the first few years of his leadership, Haider led a successful grassroots campaign in which many new party members were recruited and political support was mobilized. He chose unconventional channels of political mobilization such as targeting young people in discos or the older generation in ‘beer-tent’ gatherings (Gingrich 2002, 69). Therefore, while Haider’s FPÖ became increasingly identified with Nazi revisionism and xenophobia in the international context, within the domestic setting many saw his party as representing the preservation and promotion of traditional values and beliefs – an Austrian *Heimat*.

A cultural rhetoric was expounded by the party in which a ‘Kulturdeutsch’ identity was specified as opposed to the ‘political’ German identity:

Die Freiheitliche Bewegung betont die Zugehörigkeit der Österreicher zu der durch ihre jeweilige Muttersprache vorgegebenen Kulturgemeinschaft; für die überwiegende Mehrheit der Österreicher also die deutsche (FPÖ Parteiprogramm 1997, 32)

Haider propagated the notion that Austria was in the throes of a rampant cosmopolitanism, an *Überfremdung* that was eroding the ‘Austrian’ way of life. He made the preservation and support of a healthy ‘Volkskultur’ a central plank of his political strategy during the 1990s (Gratzer 1998).

The political journey embarked on by the FPÖ under Haider was understood as a hegemonic project in which Austrian politics would come under the domination of the FPÖ by appealing to people not only on the basis of policies or sound bites but by affecting ordinary people’s emotional world and instilling a sense of fear that something was being ‘lost’ in the

chaotic society of the late 20th century. In this respect the FPÖ ventured further than any other European far-right party, with the exception of France's *Front National*, into positioning itself as being the 'true' representatives of a national identity.

By 1999, the FPÖ represented a formidable force in Austrian politics. A charismatic leader had convinced his party and a third of the country's electorate that the Freedom Party was the only true alternative to the bankrupt politics of the old political camps. Jörg Haider had indeed captured a nation's imagination – and almost became chancellor in the process. This political achievement would not have been possible without the appropriation and transformation of Austrian 'identity' and 'tradition' into burning political issues.

Conclusion

In this article I have added some additional pieces to the Haider jigsaw puzzle with the aim of obtaining a fuller picture of this extraordinary (and ongoing) political story. My goal has been to highlight and emphasize some cultural, historical and political factors that have been overlooked in understanding the Haider phenomenon. Haider was able to appropriate and re-cast a new type of Austrian 'identity' based on traditional, parochial and conservative forces in Austria that had been left unchallenged by the political elites of the Second Republic. It is not enough to simply state that Haider's FPÖ was part of a 'normalization' or 'modernization' of the Austrian political system – if anything the old system is pretty much intact with a new type of conservative hegemonic control. It is also too easy for the left to reject Haider as a 'fascist', then to mobilize significant resistance, only to inherit yet another ÖVP/FPÖ coalition in 2002. The only difference being that this time round the FPÖ is the junior partner of the same neo-liberal project.

The success of Haider lay in his ability to galvanize a new type of identity politics in Austria, which has been copied by the far right (in different cultural settings) throughout Europe.

What used to be the domain of the Left – to capture the imagination of the working class to achieve equality and wealth re-distribution – has been taken over by the Right and transformed into an unpleasant mix of xenophobia and anti-cosmopolitanism. The Right has become more adept at moving the passions of ordinary people, with Haider being an effective and dangerous example. It would be useful for the Left to recognize this and incorporate it into a political strategy for the 21st century – a strategy that recognizes cultural identity and tradition as potent political forces and not merely part of some kind of Marxian 'sub-structural' element in modern capitalist human society.

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