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"Unsere mutigen Feiglinge": Remembrance of Austrian Wehrmacht Deserters in Hanna Sukare's *Schwedenreiter*

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*Schwedenreiter* (2018), the second novel by German-Austrian writer Hanna Sukare (1957-), focuses on the eponymous grandson of a Wehrmacht deserter, and his quest for his grandfather's story to be rehabilitated in the village from where he originated. The narrator's attempts to counter the falsification of his grandfather's and great-grandmother's history, who were persecuted at the hands of the Nazi regime, come in the wake of the rehabilitation of Wehrmacht deserters in Austria at the national level in 2009, which is explicitly thematised in the narrative. Ultimately, while *Schwedenreiter* underlines the significance of developments in memory culture at the central level, there is implicit criticism of the extent to which this official cultural memory of the deserters is able to impact memory practices at the local level, in the communities from which these deserters actually came, where, as Sukare's novel illustrates, their legacy remains severely contested. Instead, in what Sukare terms a *Heimatroman*, we are presented with a rural Austrian village community - the aptly-named fictional village of Stumpf - where the narrator is repeatedly confronted with an overwhelming climate of continuing falsification and repression of the village's Nazi past. Throughout, Sukare weaves a rich intertextual quilt of allusions to landmark Austrian postwar novels dealing with the repression of the Nazi past in the Austrian countryside, notably Thomas Bernhard's *Frost* (1963) and Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* (1969). The evocation of these antecedents in the present day (the novel is set in the late 2000s and early 2010s) is used to underline the slow progress in Austria's reckoning with its Nazi legacy. Drawing specifically on Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory, on Ute Frevert's thinking on shaming and humiliation, on historical scholarship pertaining to deserters in the Austrian context, as well as on relevant scholarship on memorials and memorialisation, this article argues that Sukare's *Schwedenreiter* presents continuing fault lines in the process of coming to terms with the past vis-à-vis the memory of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters, which are shown to

persist, despite the ostensible line in the sand of official rehabilitation. Moreover, as will be shown, the reception of Sukare's novel mirrors the vicissitudes of the "memory contests" described in *Schwedenreiter*.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the publication of *Schwedenreiter* in August 2018, Sukare had published the short story "Zwischen zwei Sätzen" in 2016, which contained *in nuce* the core theme of what would become *Schwedenreiter*. Indeed the short story is lightly reworked and incorporated into *Schwedenreiter*, under the same heading, with character names added to the previously anonymous figures in the 2016 short story (16-18).<sup>2</sup> Commissioned by the *Salz* literary journal to write a contribution on the topic of "Geschichte erzählen," the story focuses on the reminiscences of the son of a Wehrmacht deserter (the narrator's father, Kaspar, in *Schwedenreiter*), who recalls the family stories of the SS attack on the deserters in the local region, the poor treatment that he and his grandmother faced after the war, and the continuing historical fault lines in Austria, which persist especially at the local level: "eine Rehabilitierung, sie kam erst, als ich schon fast siebzig war, und sie war nur in Wien" (*Zwischen zwei Sätzen* 9). Sukare has said that the short story was inspired by an interview she read with the son of a Wehrmacht deserter in the Salzburg region (qtd. in Frei).<sup>3</sup>

When Sukare's second novel *Schwedenreiter* was published in August 2018,<sup>4</sup> it was very positively reviewed in the cultural pages of the Austrian national media. Andrea Heinz, writing in *Der Standard*, praised Sukare for putting her finger on the wounds of Austria's national history, and for bringing the human tragedy of Wehrmacht deserters and their descendants to light. Although the culmination of several years' research, the book's publication coincided with the 2018 Austrian Gedenkjahr (memorial year), which saw the publication and release of a number of literary works and films reflecting on Austria's Nazi past (among these

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<sup>1</sup> The term "memory contests" is used by Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove (2007) to characterise German memory debates since unification, but is just as applicable to the Austrian and other contexts.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth, all page numbers in parentheses refer to this text, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> As Sukare explicitly thanks Erhard Gassner (son of Wehrmacht deserter Franz Unterkirchner) and the Verein der Freunde und Freundinnen des Deserteurdenkmals in Goldegg (as well as historian Michael Mooslechner) in the acknowledgement following the short story, one can assume that Sukare was inspired by the story of Rosina Unterkirchner, her son and grandson, described here: "Rosina Unterkirchner, geb. Rainer," *Die Goldegger Wehrmachtsdeserteure* website, <https://www.goldeggerdeserteure.at/rosina-unterkirchner.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Sukare's first novel, *Staubzunge*, was published in 2015, and deals with the uncovering of a family past, including that of the Nazi era. The novel won the 2016 Rauriser Literaturpreis.

Arno Geiger's novel *Unter der Drachenwand*, as well as Erich Hackl's *Am Seil*, Christian Frosch's film *Murer* and Ruth Beckermann's documentary *Waldheims Walzer*). Frosch's and Beckermann's films in particular, as will be further elaborated, are especially attentive to the missed opportunities of the past, with regard to prominent Austrian public figures' Nazi biographies. Geiger's and Hackl's novels meanwhile focus on the fates of the ordinary man and woman, caught up in the maelstrom of the Nazi era – an unpolitical Wehrmacht soldier on convalescent leave in Upper Austria (Geiger), and on an Austrian-Jewish mother and daughter hidden in a workshop by a non-Jewish man in war-time Vienna (Hackl) respectively. Sukare's novel is less concerned with historically-accurate literary reconstructions of neglected narratives in the vein of Hackl or Geiger; rather, her focus is on the mediation of historical narratives across generations, and, as a former journalist, Sukare's novel also has more in common with the documentary approach of a filmmaker like Beckermann. In the radio Ö1 literature programme, *Ex libris*, Paula Pfoser termed the novel "eines der wichtigsten Bücher des Gedenkjahrs" (one of the most important books of the memorial year). *Schwedenreiter* was subsequently included in the Austrian shortlist for the European Union Prize for Literature (OTS). However, the novel received more mixed reviews in the Goldegg region where it is set, as will be further elaborated below. *Schwedenreiter* has also been adapted into a fifty-minute one-man play for the stage by Viktoria Pichler, whereby the novel was compressed to its two central characters of Schwedenreiter and the Gebirgsjäger. The play was performed in October 2020 at Salzburg's Rupertinum Museum of Modern Art, with Bijan Zamani playing both roles (Halus).

While the novel's characters and narrative are fictional, the novel's subject matter is firmly grounded in reality, drawing on the persecution of Wehrmacht deserters and their relatives in the municipality of Goldegg-Weng in the state of Salzburg, which culminated in a raid by the SS on the night of 2 July 1944. In total, fourteen deserters and their family members were either shot on 2 July 1944 (three people), or were murdered before or afterwards, including in concentration camps (Mooslechner 11). A further twenty-one individuals were interned in concentration camps and survived (Mooslechner 12-13). The official rehabilitation of Wehrmacht deserters in the Austrian parliament in October 2009, following years of campaigning by former deserters and their supporters, signalled the arrival at an understanding of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters in official Austrian memory culture as "victims" of the Nazi regime, rather than as "traitors", which is how deserters had been predominantly viewed for large swathes of the postwar era, as Pirker and Kramer trace (59-76).

The official rehabilitation of Wehrmacht deserters also led to the commissioning of a central memorial to victims of Nazi military justice, encompassing Austrian deserters, but also victims of the Nazi military courts throughout German-occupied territories (Pirker and Kramer 78). Following a competition to design the memorial, launched in 2012, the German conceptual artist Olaf Nicolai's design emerged as the winner and the *Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz* was unveiled on Vienna's Ballhausplatz on 24 October 2014. This is both a very central and symbolic location - located opposite the office of the Austrian President and the Austrian Chancellery, the memorial is meters away from the Heldenplatz, where Hitler proclaimed the annexation of his native Austria "heim ins Reich" on March 15, 1938. The memorial takes the form of a three-step concrete plinth, with the words "all alone" imprinted on top of it. The words, taken from a poem by Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006), emphasise the isolation of the deserter.<sup>5</sup> In Goldegg too, the 2009 rehabilitation of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters paved the way for the unveiling of a memorial stone to the victims in Goldegg on 8 August 2014, marking the seventieth anniversary of the events of 2 July 1944. The Goldegg memorial stone, designed by sculptor and artist Anton Thuswaldner (1929-2021), had originally been planned for the courtyard of Goldegg Castle (which now primarily functions as a cultural center) but, following opposition from the local council and politicians due to the controversy with which the topic of Wehrmacht desertion is still viewed by the local population, it was instead placed in a less central location of a Goldegg convalescent home, managed by the Salzburger Gebietskrankenkasse, which allowed the space to be used for this purpose (Lehner, "Nazi-Debatte").

While *Schwedenreiter* explicitly reflects and comments on these recent developments in Austrian memory culture (including the official rehabilitation of deserters and the Vienna and Goldegg memorials), the novel in turn also contributed to debates surrounding the memorialisation of the deserters at the local level. The reception of the novel in the Salzburg region, where it is set, was notably more mixed than that in the Viennese feuilleton and the ORF's cultural radio broadcaster Ö1, echoing the fractures in the collective memory of the deserters described in Sukare's novel. Following the publication of press reports on *Schwedenreiter* on 1 September 2018, the Goldegg deserters' memorial was defaced in the night of 1-2 September 2018 (Auinger, "Aufregung"). It later emerged that two further memorial plaques for those persecuted by the Nazi

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<sup>5</sup> For a further discussion of this memorial, see Krylova, *The Long Shadow of the Past*, 140-42.

regime were defaced that same night at the nearby Goldegg cemetery (Brinek and Auinger). Those responsible have not been apprehended to this day (Auinger, "Gedenkstein"). Notwithstanding these acts of vandalism, a letter to a local newspaper by a former Goldegg mayor (Mayr), accused Sukare of portraying the region in a bad light as a marketing strategy, and there were accusations of "Nestbeschmutzung" at the author's presentation of the novel at Goldegg Castle (Thuswaldner). More positively, while there were already avowals in 2014 to revise the reactionary Goldegg Ortschronik, published in 2008, which described the local Wehrmacht deserters as a "Landplage," echoing the language of the Nazi era (Lehner, "NS-Jargon"), the publication of Sukare's novel (which explicitly treats the Goldegg Ortschronik) and the defacing of the deserters' memorials gave these plans further urgency. Indeed, the local reception of *Schwedenreiter* ironically played out some of the issues thematised in Sukare's novel, reinforcing the novel's thematisation of the aversion on the part of some in the local population towards the deserters being commemorated, even following their official rehabilitation, and thereby underlining the tension explored in *Schwedenreiter* between memory and official history, in coming to terms with the past.

My discussion of *Schwedenreiter* will draw on the following definitions of collective memory, cultural memory and post-memory. Collective memory, as defined by Maurice Halbwachs, connotes the shared memories of a group or society, while the term cultural memory, as developed by Jan Assmann, encompasses the ways in which memory is mediated via objects and institutions. Post-memory, as conceptualised by Marianne Hirsch, describes a deeply personal relationship to a traumatic event experienced by a family member, mediated via objects such as photographs and the subject's imaginative investment. As we shall see, *Schwedenreiter*, in its representation of the ongoing tensions in the commemoration of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters, puts the complex workings of memory in individuals and groups center stage.

### **"Gestempelt" - the post-memory of Austrian Wehrmacht desertion**

The narrator of *Schwedenreiter* is the eponymous Paul Schwedenreiter, a Brückenmeister, a bridge engineer - or more metaphorically, a bridge builder - by profession. He is the grandson of Wehrmacht deserter Felician, who, following his decision not to return to the Wehrmacht in 1944 from convalescent leave for a back injury, hid on an alp and then a hay barn near his home until the end of the war. Schwedenreiter's great-grandmother Rosa, we learn, was tortured and deported to a concentration camp (which she survived) on account of her son's desertion. As becomes clear from the

very outset of the narrative, the narrator grew up in the shadow of his ancestors' stories and his existence is dominated by the "post-memory," in Hirsch's terms, of these narratives - that is, his life, is "dominated by narratives that preceded [his] birth" (Hirsch 22), despite not having directly experienced the traumatic events that his grandfather and great-grandmother did. The story opens with Schwedenreiter travelling from Vienna to visit his family home in the fictional village of Stumpf, on the occasion of an imminent presentation of a new local chronicle. He marks his arrival at his inherited family home by humming an "Ankunftslied" (*Schwedenreiter* 11): "Oh Rosa, Felician, Kaspar, ihr meine Toten, singe ich und schmiege mich in die Verneigungen, ich grüße euch alle in Rosas Haus im Graben von Hinterstumpf" (10). In addition to this ancestor worship, which is symptomatic of the pride the narrator feels for his family, it just as quickly becomes evident that his family history is also a source of pain and trauma.

Lying down to sleep after his train journey, Schwedenreiter dreams that he and his late father Kaspar are out for a walk on a nearby mountain slope, whereupon he chances upon a secret hollow that his father had shown him previously. Brushing away the loose branches which cover it (in contrast to the thicket that the protagonist remembers from previous visits), and perplexed by the stench coming from it, he is aghast to find a decayed animal corpse in the hollow, with its head missing (12). The protagonist awakes in a cold sweat from this nightmare, troubled not only by the image of "der Gestank, das blutverkrustete Tier" (13), but also by the discovery of the hollow that turns out to have a particular significance for the Schwedenreiter family. It is the hideout where the protagonist's grandfather spent the last winter of the war, and which the narrator assumed that only he, his late partner, grandparents and father had known about. The irrefutable evidence of the hideout's discovery in the shape of the left-behind animal corpse and the sense of foreboding upon this confrontation with mortality point to - in what Freud termed the distorted logic of dreams<sup>6</sup> - the repressed trauma of Felician's desertion, specifically the life-threatening danger of discovery which hung over him as he hid in the woodlands, a trauma which his grandson has inherited.

This first introduction to Schwedenreiter's painful family history is symptomatic for the hold that it has over the narrator's life, who has grown up in the shadow of his ancestors' stories and experiences. Following Hirsch, the protagonist's life is dominated by "the stories of the previous

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<sup>6</sup> "Traumverschiebung und Traumverdichtung sind die beiden Werkmeister, deren Tätigkeit wir die Gestaltung des Traumes hauptsächlich zuschreiben dürfen" (Freud, *Traumdeutung*, 307).

generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). These are precisely the impulses which govern the narrator's existence, as his life becomes overwhelmed by attempts to reconstruct the truth about the history of Wehrmacht deserters in his home region and, by extension, in Austria as a whole. The nightmare involving a bloodied dead animal is also evocative of the opening of Thomas Bernhard's debut novel *Frost* (1963), where the medical-student protagonist travelling to Weng (that is, in the Salzburg region where *Schwedenreiter* is also set) is confronted, in a state between waking and dreaming, with the "Blutspur" from a dead bird on the train carriage floor (Bernhard 8). Indeed, the intertextuality with Thomas Bernhard's treatment of the enduring legacy of the Second World War in the Salzburg region in *Frost* is explicitly highlighted through *Schwedenreiter*'s reciting of lines from the novel as he walks through his grandmother's house: "jeder Geruch, ist hier an ein Verbrechen gekettet, an eine Mißhandlung, an den Krieg".<sup>7</sup> As will be further elaborated, *Schwedenreiter*'s intertextuality with one of the foremost writers of the Austrian postwar era underlines the timelessness of Bernhard's diagnoses with regard to Austria's insufficient confrontations with its past. More than four decades lie between Bernhard writing *Frost* and the contemporary setting of Sukare's narrative, yet Bernhard's depiction of the legacy of the Second World War in the Austrian countryside continues to resonate in the present.

The narrative of *Schwedenreiter* becomes centered on the narrator's attempts to write a report, which aims to correct the falsification of his grandfather's and great-grandmother's experience, which the protagonist encounters at every turn in Stumpf. At the outset of the narrative the protagonist expects and hopes that the deserters' story will be thematised and re-integrated into the community's history and narrative by means of the new local chronicle: "die Chronik wird ihre Rehabilitierung sein" (19). These are high hopes, however, for a work which usually represents a cohesive understanding of itself at which a community has arrived, rather than one which integrates marginalised perspectives. As the majority Stumpf community is presented as having had a deeply troubled attitude to the Stumpf deserters since the end of the war, it is perhaps unsurprising - albeit not to the narrator - that these are inadequately treated in the chronicle. As the chronicle is presented in front of assembled local dignitaries and residents, a former mayor introducing the book speaks about discoveries from the Neolithic period in the region, the flora and fauna of

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<sup>7</sup> A footnote to Bernhard's *Frost*, without a page number, is provided in *Schwedenreiter* 14. For the original quotation see Bernhard 56.

the area, leisure, tourism, and local customs, but "die Kriegszeit" is conspicuously omitted in his speech (21). Leaving the event hastily, Schwedenreiter continues reading the book late into the night, simultaneously recording his reactions to the chronicle in a *Totenbuch* that he keeps, where he addresses his ancestors in written form. To his great-grandmother Rosa, he writes that the chronicle "findet kein gutes Wort für dich und die anderen, die in dunkler Zeit das Selbstverständliche getan haben" (22). To his grandfather Felician, who deserted from the Wehrmacht, he writes that the chronicle describes him and others as "eine gefährliche Landplage" (23). To his father Kaspar, the narrator writes that he now understands why he did not like living in Stumpf and why his entire family did not wish to be buried in the area. The narrator's displeasure at the book further manifests itself in an early morning phone-call to childhood friend Cornel Pertil, who still lives locally, and whom the narrator accuses of inadvertently giving the book his seal of approval as an "erfolgreicher Unternehmer aus Stumpf" (23).

This brief telephone exchange is the first indication of a personal fault line between the narrator as a supporter of the deserters, and others in Stumpf who, decades after the war, continue to display little understanding and sympathy for the deserters' stories. This further manifests itself in a letter from Cornel Pertil that the narrator receives several days after he returns to Vienna, following the disappointing book presentation in Stumpf. In the letter, Pertil accuses the narrator of being overly focused on the past, while he himself displays a *Schlussstrich* mentality<sup>8</sup>: "Kannst du die alten Geschichten nicht endlich ruhen lassen?" (50). Pertil's argument is that Schwedenreiter should be content with his lot, rather than seeking to dig up the past, citing the fact that the narrator's grandfather was one of the few Stumpf deserters who survived, in addition to his great-grandmother Rosa, who also survived her internment in a concentration camp "nördlich von Berlin" (based on the biographies of supporters of the Goldegg deserters, likely Ravensbrück) and "hatte danach noch viele gute Jahre" (50). In contrast to what Schwedenreiter's childhood friend views as a positive outcome for the Schwedenreiter family, he asserts that the deserters brought much suffering to Stumpf, leading to families being divided, in cases where family members either supported or turned against a deserter in their midst (50-51). Pertil's questionable

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<sup>8</sup> This is the idea that a line should be drawn under the past, especially the Nazi past. There are notable instances where the idea of the *Schlussstrich* has been evoked in postwar Germany and Austria, especially in the historians' debate in West Germany of the late 1980s. For more on this, see, for example, Pearce.

model of dealing with the past is one of wilful repression and forgetting, until such a time as eye-witnesses are no longer around, and their stories die with them (51). This sloppy approach to confronting the past is not one to which Schwedenreiter can subscribe. The narrator further takes issue with Pertil's use of the collective "we" form in the letter, a "we" which excludes Schwedenreiter and his ancestors' uncomfortable narrative. It is a collective from which Schwedenreiter felt excluded throughout his childhood and adolescence in Stumpf, prompting him to leave his native region for Vienna at the age of eighteen, as a means of escape:

Erst Jahre später verstand ich, dass ich den Graben verlassen musste, weil ich nicht gestempelt leben wollte, wie mich die Stumpfer gestempelt hatten, als Urenkel der KZlerin Rosa, als Enkel des Deserteurs Felician. (35)

While his pride in his ancestors only increases with age and understanding, the narrator recalls how Vienna rendered him "frei von Stempeln", and was akin to "eine zweite Geburt," allowing him to forge his own identity (35). A contrast is set up here between Vienna and provincial Austria. However, this seems to be less because of a necessarily more progressive attitude in Austria's capital to Wehrmacht deserters (after all, it took until 2009 for the nationwide "Aufhebungs- und Rehabilitationsgesetz" to be passed) than due to the Viennese simply being oblivious to Schwedenreiter's biography as the descendant of a deserter, with the specificity of his origins becoming erased in the Austrian capital. Meanwhile, the history of the Goldegg/Stumpf deserters understandably looms large in the small Stumpf community. His identity as the descendant of a deserter remains inescapable, he remains "gestempelt" (35), and excluded from the Stumpf collective.

The language that Sukare uses here underlines the shaming practices at work in Stumpf. In her 2017 study *Die Politik der Demütigung*, Ute Frevert discusses societies' use of "Beschämung und Demütigung als soziale und politische Machttechnik" (13). Shame is commonly regarded as an emotion experienced primarily in public, as Frevert traces, with the public action of shaming others serving as a display of power for those involved in doing the shaming, and a symbolic exclusion from the collective for the individual(s) being shamed (13-15). While shaming practices as a means of policing behaviour can be traced back to the earliest human societies, under National Socialism the *Volksgemeinschaft* (or people's community) was placed above all else, with those who dared to step out of line subject to ostracism by the community, as well as the severe punishments meted out by

the regime (61-62). Most recently, new Hollywood director Terrence Malick draws attention to such shaming and ostracisation practices in his 2019 film *A Hidden Life*, through his depiction of Franziska Jägerstätter and the Jägerstätter children following her husband Franz Jägerstätter's refusal to fight in Hitler's army.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as is vividly brought out in Sukare's novel, in the case of conscientious objectors or deserters from the Wehrmacht, the ostracism and shaming of these and their families continued long after the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft ostensibly ceased to exist in 1945.

As a child growing up in Stumpf, Schwedenreiter would be vilified as "Partisanenbrut" (140), illustrating how shaming practices with relation to Wehrmacht desertion are far from historical, not merely applied to deserters themselves, but also to their descendants; these continue, to follow Frevert, to be shamed and excluded from the Stumpf collective. There is a marked example of this in a 1992 meeting with local Stumpf dignitaries that Schwedenreiter recalls being invited to. While Schwedenreiter gives a speech about the Stumpf deserters, he can hear the assembled men in the inn muttering their opinions: "Banditen, Viehdiebstahl, Kleinkriminelle, ja Lumpen [...] Schwarzschlachter, feige Hund, so wars, ja die feigen Hund, Wilderer, richtig" (54). Overhearing these statements, the narrator demonstratively leaves the inn, but not before reminding the assembled dignitaries "dass Stumpf seine Freiheit diesen Opfern verdanke" (55). The "Freiheit" that is alluded to here is the restoration of Austrian sovereignty in the Austrian State Treaty of May 15, 1955, encapsulated in Austrian foreign minister Leopold Figl's words "Österreich ist frei!"

The role of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters in facilitating the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 is referred to more explicitly several times in Sukare's novel ("Ihnen verdanken wir und ganz Österreich den Staatsvertrag, sagt Wawi," 67). Indeed, as historians Peter Pirker and Johannes Kramer describe, the presentation of "deserters and their supporters in the context of resistance" in the late 1940s (for example, in an official document published by the Republic of Austria in 1946) formed the basis for "negotiation of a state treaty with the Allies" (63). However, across the political spectrum and among the wider Austrian population, these initiatives were unable "to effectively challenge or overcome the popular condemnation of desertion that persisted during the breakdown of National Socialism" (Pirker and Kramer 63). This condemnation therefore persisted in the postwar era. The language of the local dignitaries that Schwedenreiter encounters in Stumpf is symptomatic of what Maria Fritsche has

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<sup>9</sup> The film is based on the 2009 English translation of Franz Jägerstätter's correspondence with his wife Franziska.

characterised as the defamation of deserters with regard to their perceived lack of courage ("die feigen Hund"), a quality which is traditionally associated with masculinity. Additionally, the references to the deserters' alleged anti-social practices such as poaching and theft, serve to further ostracize the deserters (and, by extension, their descendants, such as Schwedenreiter) from the majority community, nearly fifty years, at the described event (56), following the SS attack on the Goldegg deserters. A further insult levelled at the deserters, both muttered by the local dignitaries and perpetuated in the Stumpf Ortschronik, is unmistakably National-Socialist in character, that of constituting a "Landplage," or a "gefährliche Landplage" (23, 56, 57, 63).

More than two generations separate Schwedenreiter from the National Socialist era, yet it is made clear to him, through defamations which aim to wound and shame, that he as a descendant of a deserter does not belong to the Stumpf community, in the same manner that his grandfather was vilified and made to feel ashamed: "Felician desertierte und überlebte die Nazizeit, sein weiteres Leben lang hat er sich geschämt. Geschämt fürs Desertieren, geschämt fürs Überleben, geschämt fürs AufderWeltSein" (19). It is a shame which, as Sukare makes clear, is passed on through generations: "Felicians Angst und seine Scham gingen in meinen Vater, und mit ihnen bin ich aufgewachsen" (19). The cycle of shame is unbroken due to the local community's continued vilification of the deserters. Sukare's narrative illustrates how, in the postwar era, the Stumpf community reinforced who does and does not belong in the Stumpf community; that is the surviving deserters, who through various public shaming practices were excluded from the Stumpf collective, while former Nazis such as the Gebirgsjäger (who will be explored in more depth later in this article) were reintegrated into the community. This vilification of those persecuted by the Nazi regime and exoneration of the perpetrators at the micro-level in postwar Austria is symptomatic of the self-same trends at the macro-level, where former Nazis were seamlessly integrated into the Austrian government, while the issue of restitution for victims was brushed under the carpet (Pick 206-07).

With the vilification of the Stumpf deserters as a "gefährliche Landplage" in Sukare's narrative, once again *Schwedenreiter* offers a thinly-veiled fictionalisation of actual events in Goldegg recent history, as the Goldegg deserters were in fact described as a "gefährliche Landplage" in the Goldegg chronicle published in 2008, something which prompted fierce criticism from the Goldegg deserters' association, Goldegg's then mayor Hans Mayr, and local historian Michael Mooslechner (Salzburg ORF). Mooslechner stated that the language used to describe the

Goldegg deserters in the Ortschronik is indistinguishable from that used in official reports during the Nazi era.<sup>10</sup> The Goldegg deserters are, however, not the only group to have been defamed using the Nazi-era term of "Landplage," as can be gleaned from the 2019 Lewit v. Austria case in the European Court of Human Rights, and the events leading up to it. In a 2015 article, the right-wing (and Austrian Freedom Party-supporting) publication *Aula* described liberated Mauthausen concentration camp inmates as "Massenmörder" and, again, as a "Landplage".<sup>11</sup> Both the case of the Goldegg Ortschronik, thematised in *Schwedenreiter*, and the *Aula* defamation case, illustrate once more the pervasiveness of the Nazi legacy, here in the uncritical continuing use of language from the Nazi era.

### **The Gebirgsjäger – An Exemplary Case Study for Repression and Forgetting**

In addition to the persistence of National Socialist thought structures on the level of ideological language use, one figure in Sukare's novel serves as an exemplar for the insufficient *Aufarbeitung* of the Nazi past on all levels of Austrian postwar society, as well as for the persistent continuation of Nazi structures. For the most part, he is pejoratively referred to as a "Gebirgsjäger" by the narrator, which is part of a broader endeavour to reassess the enduring reputation of a man hailed as the "Retter" (51) of Stumpf. A primary school teacher by profession, and a popular local raconteur, famous for his hunting stories, the Gebirgsjäger is described as having joined the Nazi Party in 1932 and the SS in 1936 (83), at a time when SS membership was forbidden in Austria. The

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<sup>10</sup> "Diese Wortwahl in einer aktuellen Goldegger Ortschronik ist unfassbar. Es ist Sprache der Nationalsozialisten, die hier unkritisch verwendet wird. In den zeitgenössischen Behördenberichten kann man das nahezu in identischer Form nachlesen." Mooslechner (as qtd. in Salzburg ORF).

<sup>11</sup> The case caused a furore in December 2015, when it was dismissed by the Graz regional court because it was "nachvollziehbar" that the liberated inmates in 1945 would have posed a "Belästigung" for the local population (APA). There followed another article in the *Aula* in February 2016, where the publication reported on this decision, and again repeated the defamations from 2015. This led to Mauthausen survivor Aba Lewit, along with nine others, bringing a case against the newspaper on grounds of violation of media law, which was again not upheld (APA). Lewit then brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights), where it was upheld on the grounds of violation of Article 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, with the European Court ruling that "the Austrian courts had failed to comply with their positive obligation under Article 8 of the Convention to protect his [Lewit's] reputation and his personal integrity against untrue, defamatory statements made in a right-wing periodical" (European Court of Human Rights). The European Court declared that expenses and compensation of €5000 should be paid to Aba Lewit and ordered Austria to re-examine the case against the *Aula* newspaper (Ibid.). At the time of writing, this re-examination is still ongoing.

biographical basis for Sukare's Gebirgsjäger is revealed towards the end of the narrative: "Er hieß Herbert Mader. Als Mader Bascht wurde er in der Nachkriegszeit im Land Salzburg bekannt" (161). Mader's *Jaga G'schichtn* are well known in the Salzburg region; his Nazi past (as high-ranking Nazi and aide to Salzburg Gauleiter Dr Gustav Sheel) is now well documented, also on the popular Salzburgwiki site. In *Schwedenreiter*, the biographical figure of Mader becomes a powerful symbol for postwar repression and forgetting of the Nazi past. Researching the Gebirgsjäger's biography becomes an obsession for the narrator. In his quest, *Schwedenreiter* becomes a frequent visitor to Vienna's libraries and archives, with the narrator stating: "Diese Suche ist mein Dienst für meine Toten" (93). Uncovering the truth of the Gebirgsjäger's biography, as opposed to the yarns spun by the man himself, which were incorporated into the Ortschronik, becomes a means of attempting to rectify the falsehoods surrounding the deserters, which the Gebirgsjäger fervently promoted. It is, of course, ironic that such a large proportion of Sukare's narrative is devoted to a perpetrator, rather than their victims. However, this also serves as a critique of the postwar narratives and falsehoods that were perpetuated and spun by former perpetrators and underlines whose stories were able to be told and listened to after the war.

The figure of the Gebirgsjäger resonates with the historical figure of politician Kurt Waldheim, whose duplicity about his wartime past in the 1986 Austrian presidential election inadvertently inaugurated a long-overdue process of coming to terms with Austria's National Socialist legacy. The election campaign was marked by inconsistencies with regard to Waldheim's account of his National Socialist trajectory - he claimed, for example, only to have indirectly become enrolled as an SA member by dint of his participation in equestrian exercises at the Vienna Consular Academy (Tagliabue). More recently, Ruth Beckermann's award-winning 2018 documentary *Waldheims Walzer* reconstructed the events and inconsistencies surrounding Waldheim's presidential candidacy and reflected on these from the perspective of today. There are similar inconsistencies with regard to various accounts of the Gebirgsjäger's National Socialist past, with the narrator finding three different dates for when the Gebirgsjäger joined the Nazi party (97). The narrator learns that the Gebirgsjäger freely volunteered to join the Wehrmacht in August 1939 ahead of the invasion of Poland on 1 September (87), and continued to France, Rumania, Greece, and Russia, where he formed part of the notorious Division Reich, and where he was injured by a mine in Rzhev, losing his lower leg, in the summer of 1942. Following this injury, the Gebirgsjäger claims to have returned to teaching in the Salzburg region in 1942 (103-4). In actual fact, he did not

resume teaching duties in 1942, but instead became part of an SS Einsatzgruppe Nord in early June 1942, before returning to Salzburg to become the aide of Gauleiter Scheel from October 1, 1943 (142). This is a further parallel to Waldheim's biography, who claimed to have returned to Austria in 1941, following an injury on the Eastern front, and to have spent the rest of the wartime in Vienna, recuperating and working on his doctoral dissertation (Finger and Saltzman 6), rather than as aide-de-camp in the Balkans to convicted war criminal General Alexander Löhr, as was the actual case (Beller 287).

In addition to the inconsistencies in the Gebirgsjäger's wartime biography comes the wholesale whitewashing of this biography after the war. He is pardoned by the National Assembly in Vienna due to the fact that the "Gebirgsjäger habe seine Mitgliedshaft in der NSDAP, SS, SA usw. niemals missbraucht" (119). The narrator is flabbergasted by what this statement can even mean in the context of a priori murderous organisations, as well as what postwar "Persilscheine" (119)<sup>12</sup> for individuals like this facilitated, with regard to broader "großkoalitionäres Vergessen, großkoalitionäres Buhlen um die Stimmen der Nazis" (119). The vested political interests referred to here surfaced time and time again in several high-profile court cases in postwar Austria, notably in the case of Franz Murer, "the Butcher of Vilnius," who was first sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labour under Soviet jurisdiction in 1948 (thanks to the efforts of Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal), but was released in 1955 under the amnesty afforded for prisoners of war by the Austrian State Treaty (Sachslehner). Again, following the efforts of Wiesenthal, in 1963, Murer was once more put on trial in Graz on seventeen counts of murder, with thirty-seven Holocaust survivors giving testimony during the ten-day trial (Ibid.). Murer was acquitted of murder by the jury on June 19, 1963. From a contemporary vantage point, Christian Frosch's 2018 film *Murer* presents the trial as a missed opportunity for postwar Austria to face up to its Nazi past,<sup>13</sup> due to party-political interests of the two leading political movements in postwar Austria (the Austrian Socialists and the Austrian People's Party). Supported by the conservative Austrian People's Party,

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<sup>12</sup> Roderick Stackelberg discusses the etymology of the word Persilschein, as deriving from the German detergent brand Persil, thereby signalling the pervasive "whitewashing" of perfunctory postwar denazification processes (291). He also analyses the ease with which such Persilscheine were obtained from churches or other bodies attesting to the person's alleged good character (173).

<sup>13</sup> The film has won numerous national and international prizes, including Best Austrian Feature Film at the Diagonale Festival of Austrian Film, and Best Austrian Film at the Austrian Film Awards, and Best Political Film at the Cinepolitica International Film Festival.

Murer had by that point risen to the ranks of Chairman of the Chamber of Agriculture for the Liezen Region (Sachslehner), and both parties were conscious of the need to bring old Nazis on board in order to win elections, as Sukare also highlights. In a play on words, the pardoning of former Nazis is referred to as "Amnesie durch Amnestie" (122), facilitating a drawing of lines under the past. Continuing with the whitewashing imagery evoked by "Persilscheine," Sukare describes how the Gebirgsjäger was able to emerge squeaky clean from the denazification process, his moral stains erased for all time, in the ruling postwar grand coalition partners' quest to build bridges:

Der Gebirgsjäger steigt 1951 hochweiß aus der präsidialen  
Waschmaschine, hochweiß betritt er die zweite Hälfte seines Lebens.  
Jetzt, sagt ein sozialdemokratischer Politiker, müsse man Brücken  
bauen, um die Vergangenheit zu vergessen. Brückenmeister verstehen  
diese Worte nicht, denn Brücken, so denken wir, taugen nicht dazu,  
etwas abzuschneiden, sie sind vielmehr steingewordene Verbindungen.  
(124)

The references to the process of washing the Gebirgsjäger clean resonate with Robert Schindel's fictional depictions of Kurt Waldheim as Johann Wais in his 2013 novel *Der Kalte*. Homophonic to the word *weiß*, the fictional surname evokes ironic associations with a whiter-than-white image, while Wais's (Waldheim's) supporters are referred to as "die Waiswäscher," (Schindel 340), calling to mind the same process of "präsidial" laundry that Sukare (124) also does. Further, as the bridge-engineer narrator, points out, the postwar consensus on building bridges, connotes a permanent interconnection between two sides, with the postwar whitewashing of the past paradoxically welding Austria's unconflicted National Socialist past to the country's present.

The narrator himself is interested in a different kind of bridge building, one that allows him to forge a meaningful connection with his past and integrate it as part of his present. The lack of any willingness of Austrian postwar society to meaningfully engage with the past of the Gebirgsjäger, who representatively stands for thousands of other former Nazis, allows him to resume his pre-war career as a primary-school teacher, where he penalizes the slightest misdemeanour with brutal corporal punishment and which he later openly glorifies in autobiographical stories published in the 1980s (156-57). Sukare hereby draws on a tradition of German-language writing about how violence, which was omnipresent in the National-Socialist dictatorship, is perpetuated in the instruction of

children, and thereby passed down from generation to generation,<sup>14</sup> together with, first, the open glorification of the Nazi past and, later, the silencing of it:

Er ist begnadigt, damit er im Innergebirge mit seinen Erfahrungen an der Seite der Kriegsverbrecher Kinder erzieht. Er ist begnadigt, damit er mit seinen SS-Erfahrungen den Kindern verschweigt, dass ihre Väter für eine Illusion gekämpft haben. Er ist begnadigt, damit er mit seinen Kriegserfahrungen den Kindern beibringt, die Kameradschaft zu pflegen, die Gräber der Wehrmachtssoldaten und das Brauchtum. Zwanzig Jahre später werden die Schüler des Gebirgsjägers meine Lehrer. Sie geben mir sein Erbe mit: die Kopfnüsse, die Demütigungen und das Beschweigen des Nationalsozialismus. (155)

The threefold anaphora of "er ist begnadigt," laden with religious connotations of redemption, underlines the perversity and damaging long-term effects of an insufficient denazification process. Instead, the Gebirgsjäger is able to proceed to fashion his own individual historical narrative, where he stylises himself as the saviour of Stumpf, unhindered by anyone in this self-presentation, including a local historian, who is content to collude in and lend her authority to the Gebirgsjäger's stories (157). The Gebirgsjäger's stylisation as the saviour of Stumpf rests on the hearsay that SS leader Heinrich Himmler wanted to deport the Stumpf population to Volhynia in 1944 (130). Volhynia is a historical region (situated between modern-day Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus), which had become part of the Soviet Union in 1939, was occupied by the Wehrmacht in 1941, but by 1944 - when the Stumpf population was allegedly to be deported to this region - it had fallen back into Soviet hands (131), thereby undermining the plausibility of such a threat. The credibility of this threat of deportation is further undermined by the imprecision with which Himmler's alleged order is discussed in the *Chronik*: "Zwischen wollen, planen, beschließen und befehlen sind weitläufige Unterschiede" (132).

The narrator can find no support for the assertion in the *Chronik* that ninety trains stood ready to deport the whole of the Stumpf population (132). His attempts to find some official note corroborating this rumour in the Austrian Train Archive are similarly unsuccessful. Despite this, the falsification of history is perpetuated in the *Chronik*, with the "Rettung" (again, the religious overtones are inescapable) of Stumpf from deportation

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<sup>14</sup> Notable classic examples of this include Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, 1976, and, in the Austrian context, Anna Mitgutsch's *Die Züchtigung*, 1985.

ascribed to three individuals, consisting of the Gebirgsjäger, the Salzburg Gauleiter Gustav Adolf Scheel and the Nazi mayor of Stumpf, without further specifying what this salvation of Stumpf consisted of, or the particular role played by these individuals (132). A biography about the Salzburg Gauleiter that the narrator reads is unveiled as a hagiography, where the author "verwandelt den SS-Obergruppenführer und nationalsozialistischen Multifunktionär Gustav Adolf Scheel in den größten Widerstandskämpfer Nazideutschlands" (136). Wikipedia searches that the narrator undertakes further undermine the biography's presentation of the Gauleiter as someone who helped "Personen jüdischer Herkunft," instead revealing him as someone who organised the deportation of 6,500 Jews from Karlsruhe in October 1940 (136). As founder of the Salzburger Heimatwerk (local history society), he establishes an information center and *Trachten* shop on the city's most central square, the Residenzplatz, in 1942. For this reason the narrator tries to avoid the square, and suffers profound topophobia when he is even in the near vicinity of the Residenzplatz:

Ich meide den Salzburger Residenzplatz. Ich kann über diesen Platz nicht gehen, ohne dieses Wort Heimatwerk zu lesen und sobald ich das Wort Heimatwerk über dem Geschäft sehe, denke ich, Salzburgs SS- und NS-Chef Scheel hat dieses Werk gegründet, nach dem Krieg hat es ein früherer Nazi weitergeführt, und im 21. Jahrhundert trägt es immer noch denselben Namen, und in Salzburg stört das niemanden, weil ja die schönen Trachten undsoweiter. ... Ich bin noch nicht einmal am Residenzbrunnen vorbei, habe immer noch das Heimatwerk im Augenwinkel, und sehe die Bücher brennen, auf diesem Platz haben die Lehrer sie ins Feuer geworfen. Ich kann niemandem sagen, wie ich an diesem Residenzplatz leide, und ihn deshalb nur betrete, wenn mich etwas dazu zwingt, ich will das niemandem sagen, man hielte mich für verrückt, wüsste man von dem Ekel, der mich befällt, wenn ich den Platz betrete... . (138)

The narrator, born long after the war, is too young to have experienced or remembered the Nazi book burning on Salzburg's Residenzplatz on 30 April 1938, which was in fact the only Nazi book burning to have taken place on Austrian territory (Czuma and Ecker). Yet the event is etched in cultural memory, that is memory mediated through objects or institutions in Jan Assmann's (111) definition. Schwedenreiter cannot have really "seen" the books burning ("und sehe die Bücher Brennen"), but the protagonist is likely familiar with photographic images of the historical event. Schwedenreiter is haunted by this mediated image of the books burning, as

the use of the present tense indicates. Salzburg's past is psychically preserved in its topography, collapsing into the present, and eroding clear demarcations of time, which is symptomatic of a lived - or inherited, as in Schwedenreiter's case - experience of trauma (cf Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 238). This marked example of topophobia is reminiscent of that described by Ingeborg Bachmann in her novel *Malina* (1971), where the first-person narrator experiences profound unease around Vienna's most notable landmarks, sites of collective traumatic memory.<sup>15</sup> For the narrator of *Malina*, Vienna's Justizpalast continues to burn in a "tägliche Brennen," being indelibly haunted by the Justizpalast fire of 15 July 1927, which prepared the way for the Austrian civil war (Bachmann 384). Notably, in the case of both Bachmann and Sukare, these are historical events that the narrators of *Malina* and *Schwedenreiter* respectively could not have witnessed (Bachmann's Ich spent her earliest childhood in Klagenfurt and only arrived in Vienna after the war). In both cases therefore, we are dealing with a mediated cultural memory. Ultimately, for Schwedenreiter, the Salzburg Residenzplatz is irrevocably associated with the legacy of National Socialism and the falsification of history - the image in the narrator's mind's eye of the books burning is symptomatic for this falsification of history reaching into the present.

However, Schwedenreiter does not merely document the "Halbheiten der Chronik" (146) - he also attempts to counter these by staging a striking intervention into Stumpf memory politics, with a mailshot distributed to all Stumpf households. The narrator offers a reward of €10,000, the inheritance left by his deceased partner, to anyone who, within a period of twenty-four months, can prove the following three statements. These are that Heinrich Himmler personally ordered the deportation of the entire Stumpf population to Volhynia in 1944, that ninety train wagons stood ready in nearby Zach and Pinz for the deportation, and that Herbert Mader and Gustav Adolf Scheel rescued the entire population of Stumpf from this fate. The narrator receives many anonymous threats and abuse, as well as reports from those who claim precise knowledge of the alleged deportation threat:

Wenn sie die Waggons nicht selbst gesehen haben konnten, weil sie dafür zu jung waren, so kennt doch plötzlich jede jemanden, der mit eigenen Augen die Waggons gesehen haben will. Doch auch Leute, die 1944 Kleinkinder waren, wie sie selbst zugeben, erinnern sich nun ganz genau an dieses traumatische Ereignis, von dem die Chronik sagt, die

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this see chapter on *Malina* in Krylova, *Walking Through History*, 137-83.

Einheimischen hätten zum Zeitpunkt des Geschehens nichts davon gewusst. Nun wollen manche, als Kleinkinder, die Waggons sogar in beiden Orten stehen gesehen haben. (164-65)

The narrator's attempts to seek further details and clarification from the letter writers are met with inconsistencies or silence and, ultimately, there is no worthy recipient of the reward. Instead, Schwedenreiter's intervention serves to highlight the inconsistencies and fabrications in the Stumpf residents' accounts, which do not stand up to scrutiny. The narrator is only able to speculatively conclude that the deportation of Stumpf may have been a threat spoken by the Gestapo if the Wehrmacht deserters were not handed over, and that the opportunistic Gebirgsjäger developed this rumour for his own benefit. Originally conceived as a genuine attempt to ascertain historical facts, Schwedenreiter's intervention inadvertently develops into a conceptual memorial or art work.<sup>16</sup> Through its semi-public nature (of mailing flyers to local residents, which in turn provoke responses to the narrator), it stages an intervention in Stumpf's memory politics. The responses the "Auslobung" (161) elicits are predictable in the context of the historical amnesia that is pervasive in Stumpf, yet this public intervention in Stumpf's memory landscape serves to underline the falsification of memory, which is shown to persist even among the second generation in Stumpf, whose lives have been dominated with hand-me-down rumours and hearsay surrounding the Wehrmacht deserters to such an extent, that they accept these to be true.

### **Memorials and Memorialisation**

Schwedenreiter's intervention in Stumpf's memory politics through his *Auslobung* is just one aspect of the novel's explicit and sustained engagement with Austria's evolving memory culture. Besides his own research and writing project to discredit the Gebirgsjäger and rehabilitate the Stumpf deserters, the narrator puts a great amount of energy into trying to get a memorial erected in the town, commemorating the deserters. As is the case in many Austrian towns and villages (Uhl 109), Stumpf has a memorial commemorating Wehrmacht soldiers fallen in the war, only the deserters "unsere mutigen Feiglinge, unsere feigen Mutlinge haben weder Grab noch Gedenkstein" (65). Both Schwedenreiter and his friend Wawi, the daughter of a deserter, who was executed at Mauthausen when Wawi was four-years-old, endeavour to get a memorial stone to the deserters erected in the center of

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<sup>16</sup> Here I draw on the definition of conceptual art by Sol LeWitt, whereby "[i]n conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work" (80).

Stumpf. They are mindful of the symbolic value that a central memorial has and the message that it sends out to residents and visitors alike on what a community is actively choosing to remember and commemorate. The local mayor voices his support for their endeavour in principle, yet asserts that the stone should be placed in Tagsee (a fictional place, which may be equated with the placing of the memorial stone's real-life counterpart in front of a Goldegg convalescent home - as discussed earlier - instead of the courtyard of the central Goldegg Castle). This is interpreted as a banishment of the nascent idea of the memorial to the periphery, where the memorial would be out of sight and out of mind: "Am Tagsee sieht den Stein niemand, sagt Wawi, wir brauchen ihn im Ortszentrum" (67). Wawi's fears here are symptomatic of what James E. Young has termed "the initial impulse to memorialize events," springing "from an opposite and equal desire to forget them" (5).

The mayor forecloses the idea of what he himself terms a "Gegenstein" (70) to the deserters at the site of a current *Kriegerdenkmal* (war memorial, including to Wehrmacht soldiers who fought in World War II), taking the term from a local therapist in the area. The term is striking in its resonance with James E. Young's concept, developed in his 1993 book *The Texture of Memory*, of the counter-monument, that is a monument which resists fixity, disrupts public spaces, and engages us in "memory-work," rather than the monument doing the work for us (30). A *Gegenstein* for Stumpf Wehrmacht deserters, placed next to the *Kriegerdenkmal*, would certainly fulfil this definition, disrupting and countering the monument it is placed alongside. Yet, this proposition remains hypothetical, with the mayor concerned about such a memorial perpetuating a "Totenkult" and disconcerting visiting tourists (70). Wawi further recalls another attempt to install a memorial plaque for her father in the Stumpf church, which was met with the response that an "allgemeine Gedenktafel für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus" (73) would be possible, but one which did not include names. This, however, understandably defeats the object for Wawi - remembering deserters by name would restore to them the dignity and individuality of which they were deprived by the persistent silencing about their lives in Stumpf. This is why naming has become so central to transnational commemoration practices. For example, in the conclusion of her year-long *Vienna Project*, American-Austrian artist Karen Frostig incorporated a temporary "naming memorial," whereby the names of 91,780 victims of National Socialism in Austria (including Jews, Roma and Sinti, Jehovah's witnesses, the physically or mentally handicapped, homosexuals, persons persecuted on political grounds, and Carinthian Slovenians;

Frostig, "Home") briefly appeared on the façades of the Austrian National Library (Frostig, "Closing Events").

However, while Frostig's project constituted a highly sensitive one, attuned to the importance of individualised commemoration and remembrance, the pastor's suggestion in *Schwedenreiter* for an "allgemeine Gedenktafel für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus" (73) manifests the same undifferentiated remembrance notably displayed in Alfred Hrdlicka's *Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus*, unveiled in November 1988 in Vienna. Hrdlicka's memorial came under fierce criticism for essentially grouping all Austrian victims of the Second World War together in an undifferentiated manner - fallen Wehrmacht soldiers, Jews, victims of Allied bombings (Art 124). It is this lack of differentiation, which would erase the specificity of Wehrmacht deserters, together with their diverse motives for deserting Hitler's army, into a general commemoration of wartime suffering, that the Stumpf pastor favors. It would serve to facilitate a covering over and drawing a line under the past. In this manner, through her explicit thematisation of debates surrounding the commemoration of Wehrmacht deserters, Sukare explicitly comments on broader trends regarding memory and memorialisation in Austria.

Among the more successful memorial initiatives discussed in *Schwedenreiter* is composer Thomas Doss's *Symphonie der Hoffnung* (2005), which is implicitly alluded to in a description of the symphony's premiere (74-75), whereby collective and personal memories of the deserters and their relatives are evoked for the protagonist by the music. Doss's symphony is written for brass orchestra, soprano and alto voice, and incorporates texts by writers who experienced Nazi-era persecution (*Symphonie der Hoffnung*, "Home"). These include the poem "Fragelied" (1986) by Austrian-British poet Erich Fried, written during a visit to St. Johann im Pongau, which thematises postwar forgetting of the legacy of Nazi-era forced labor in the region, as well as the differing treatment of ethnic groups making up the Western and Eastern Allied forces. Divided into three movements, Doss's symphony begins with "I: Krisis" spanning the interwar years and the *Anschluss*. The second movement "II: Tyrannis" treats the deaths of Soviet POWs in STALAG XVIII C in Markt Pongau, the persecution and deportation of Austrian Roma and Sinti, the Nazi euthanasia programme, and what is termed "die Tragödie in Goldegg Weng" - that is the 2 July 1944 attack on the Goldegg group of Wehrmacht deserters (*Symphonie der Hoffnung*, "Thomas Doss"). Sukare alludes to this part of the symphony in particular, with the description of a folk melody being ruptured by two shots (75). The third movement "III: Katharsis" thematises the Allied bombing raids on Salzburg, incorporating the music of the occupation forces, especially

American jazz, and alludes to Salzburg's new role as a transit point for postwar refugees. Sukare's description of the symphony, however, ends with the shots above, with the prolonged applause at the end of the performance in Stumpf giving Schwedenreiter and his friends a feeling of their ancestors' story finally being understood and empathised with. It is referred to by Schwedenreiter's friend Wawi simply as "das Stumpfer Wunder ... . Die Musik versetzt Berge" (75).

Notably, music appeals to the emotions; that is, although the deserters' story may be emotionally grasped and empathised with through Doss' symphony, it is still far from being incorporated into a written narrative, as the insufficiencies of the Chronik make clear. There is, also a note of cynicism in Sukare's depiction of this music performance, hinting that the authorities' and local community's enthusiastic support for this event may have been, in part, motivated by more banal concerns than fostering reconciliation and understanding of the Nazi past. The narrator notes that the symphony's premiere put Stumpf on the map, attracting three thousand visitors, some of which would surely return for their holidays (75). Sukare hereby offers a subtle yet powerful critique of memorial event culture, whereby a cultural art work commemorating suffering becomes a tourist draw.

#### **"Kein Text von Thomas Bernhard, sondern die Wirklichkeit": An Intertextual Mosaic**

The allusions to Thomas Doss's *Symphonie der Hoffnung* are far from the only intertextual references in *Schwedenreiter*. Sukare weaves a rich intertextual quilt, which positions her novel firmly in a tradition of postwar Austrian writing on the Nazi past. This begins with the novel's genre definition. On the title page, the novel's title is given as *Schwedenreiter: Ein Heimatroman*, which places Sukare's novel in a long tradition of the *Heimatroman*. Translated into English as "regional" or "patriotic" novel, traditionally the *Heimatroman*, which emerged in the nineteenth century, has been associated with valorising the German or Austrian countryside and rural traditions (Long 226). Its privileging of conservative traditions "made it ripe for appropriation by the National Socialists," whereupon, after the war, the *Heimatroman* was viewed by many as what Jonathan Long describes as "a compromised genre" (226). As a reaction to this, as Long traces, the critical or anti-*Heimat* novel emerged. This genre contrasted the idyllic image of the countryside seen in Austrian novels prior to 1945, instead portraying the Austrian countryside as a place for brutality and violence. It is this critical *Heimatroman* tradition that Sukare adjoins, which is further signalled by the novel's

epigraph, from a landmark novel of postwar Austrian literature, Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* (1967): "Kamerad, sagte ein Kamerad, wir bleiben die Alten" (107). The quoted lines, spoken in the context of a fateful *Heimkehrerball* in the novel's fictional Austrian town in 1955, reveal the persistence of the Nazi legacy in postwar Austria, despite the country's ostensible transition to a democratic present. In Fritsch's novel, the town is unnerved by the return of the deserter protagonist Felix Golub, who hid his identity by disguising himself in women's clothing and was inadvertently able to persuade the local Nazi commander to capitulate to the Red Army, thereby preventing the destruction of the town. The protagonist's return, however, culminates in violence, as Golub is an uncomfortable reminder of the local population's former enthusiastic support for Nazism, in the same way that the legacy of the now deceased Wehrmacht deserters in Stumpf is. As posited by Robert Menasse, Fritsch's landmark novel succeeds "den Wandel der Nazis und Mitläufer zu Demokraten als 'Transvestismus' zu entlarven" (242).

Following *Schwedenreiter's* epigraph, *Fasching* is explicitly referenced once more in Sukare's novel - it is one of a number of books that the narrator receives from his Viennese friend Leo to read, which also include Thomas Bernhard's first novel *Frost* (1963), Franz Innerhofer's debut *Schöne Tage* (1974), and Peter Handke's dramatic poem *Über die Dörfer* (1981). All of these works present a very demythologised and, frequently unsavoury, image of the Austrian countryside (for example, the landlady in Bernhard's *Frost*, also set in the Salzburg region, infamously cooks with dog meat), earning their writers the sobriquet of *Nestbeschmutzer*. Together, their works may be described as forming a canon of Austrian anti-*Heimat*- or critical *Heimat*-literature. For the narrator, they provide a sense of recognition: "Jeder dieser Texte hatte auf unterschiedliche seltsame Weise mit meinem Leben zu tun," and make him feel less alone: "du bist nicht der einzige Außenseiter in diesem Land" (Sukare 2018, 45). Further intertextuality may be found in the name of the fictional village of Stumpf, which resonates with the similarly evocatively-named village of Schweigen in Hans Lebert's canonical Austrian *anti-Heimatroman*, *Die Wolfshaut* (1960), where six so-called "Fremdarbeiter" (forced labourers) were executed by local villagers in 1945. If, in Lebert's text, the village's name of "Schweigen" stands for the wilful repression of the Nazi past in the immediate aftermath of the war, in Sukare's novel the village name of "Stumpf" is symptomatic of an on-going apathy and resistance to engaging with the stories of Wehrmacht deserters in twenty-first-century rural Austria, and to an honest examination of the Nazi legacy more broadly.

The intertextual references to landmark texts of postwar Austrian literature point to a continuity and a lack of progress with regard to confronting the Nazi past in rural Austria in particular, which Sukare's narrative itself highlights. A line spoken by Pertil to his friend Schwedenreiter in order to encourage him to accurately perceive reality in Stumpf, actually serves to underline the veracity of the fictional treatment Pertil is disparaging: "das hier ist kein Text von Thomas Bernhard, sondern die Wirklichkeit in Stumpf" (55). More than four decades lie between Bernhard writing his ground-breaking novel *Frost* and "die Wirklichkeit in Stumpf," yet this now canonical novel, similarly set in the Salzburg region, still provides a framework for the narrator, through which to make sense of Stumpf's present. As previously mentioned, a quotation from Bernhard's *Frost* is referenced in a footnote in *Schwedenreiter*, as are additional explicit quotations to Innerhofer's *Schöne Tage*, and Ingeborg Bachmann's "Alle Tage," her 1952 poem thematising the continuity of war in peace time. Although these are not the only texts which Sukare footnotes in this way,<sup>17</sup> the engagement with these Austrian literary forebears is the most striking. Beyond stressing the continuation of phenomena which postwar Austrian writers diagnosed, it is also a way for Sukare to inscribe herself into an Austrian literary tradition, one which drew attention to the persistence of the Nazi legacy in poetry and prose. This is something that Sukare has also stressed in interviews, seeing herself as contributing to a "Mosaik der österreichischen Bitterkeiten," which was begun by her Austrian literary antecedents, and which will continue after her.<sup>18</sup>

#### **A counter-monument to the deserters**

Ultimately, throughout Sukare's novel, Stumpf is shown to display a highly ambivalent attitude with regard to the memory of its Wehrmacht deserters, which can be seen in the absence of an official memorial and in the inaccuracies present in the Ortschronik on the one hand, as well as the successful performance of the *Symphonie der Hoffnung* on the other. The insufficiencies of Stumpf memory culture are even presented as having a potential positive benefit in *Schwedenreiter*:

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<sup>17</sup> Others include aforementioned historical texts, and works by Hieronymus Bosch, Leonard Cohen, and Hannah Arendt.

<sup>18</sup> "'Schwedenreiter' ist lediglich ein Steinchen im Mosaik der österreichischen Bitterkeiten. So viele Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller, Philosophinnen oder Historiker haben dieses Mosaik lange vor mir angelegt und wieder andere werden nach mir neue Steine hinzufügen. Dieser Mosaizistenfamilie fühle ich mich zugehörig und freue mich, die Namen einiger nennen zu dürfen, deren Gedanken mein Text nah ist" (Sukare, as qtd. in Haiden).

Vielleicht, sagt Wawi, hält die Erinnerungsverweigerung die Erinnerung an die Deserteure länger am Leben, als es ein Gedenkstein könnte. (75)

This statement echoes that of American memory scholar James E. Young, albeit spoken in a different context. Reflecting on the series of design competitions preceding what would eventually become the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (designed by Peter Eisenman, 2005) in Berlin, Young recalls telling other members of the memorial competition jury "maybe it's better to have a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions, than any final solution to your Holocaust memorial problem" (sic, Greenfield Community College). However, this approach also has its pitfalls, as Wawi points out. A prolonged debate about memorialising the deserters can also lead to paralysis and an indefinite postponement of adequate commemoration: "So lange ein Dialogprozess dauert, muss sich nichts ändern" (76).

Faced with resistance to the deserters' families' desire for a central memorial, in an imaginative leap, the narrator takes matters into his own hands. He takes one final leave of the house formerly inhabited by his great-grandmother, grandfather and father, before allowing it to be razed to the ground and a memorial to the Stumpf Wehrmacht deserters to be built in its stead. While this is a fictionalisation, in its essence it captures the roundabout manner in which the Goldegg deserters' memorial was erected, whereby the proposed central location for the memorial of Schloss Goldegg was denied by the local council, and the memorial was instead placed in the more secluded setting of a Goldegg convalescent home (Lehner, "Nazi-Debatte"). In *Schwedenreiter*, the eventual memorial is constructed out of a metal frame from which memorial plaques - bearing the names, dates of birth and death, and causes of death, of the Stumpf deserters - are freely suspended, together with a dedication plaque explaining the history of the Stumpf (Goldegg) deserters' persecution. The inscription plaque once again evokes the bravery of the deserters' perceived cowardice: "In Liebe und Dankbarkeit denken wir an euch und eure mutige Feigheit" (168).

Certainly, both the inscription and the manner in which the plaques are freely suspended departs from the real-life memorial in Goldegg, which consists of a simple memorial stone, laid in the ground, with the names of the Goldegg deserters inscribed on it.<sup>19</sup> In a manner that resonates with

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<sup>19</sup> A large-scale photograph of the Goldegg deserters' memorial may be viewed at "Von der Erforschung der Goldegger Tragödie bis zur Verlegung des Gedenksteins - eine lange Geschichte," *Die Goldegger Wehrmachtsdeserteure* website, <https://www.goldeggerdeserteure.at/gedenkstein.html>.

other fictional interventions or improvements on existing memorials,<sup>20</sup> Sukare's fictional depiction offers a more visually and conceptually interesting memorial – one that draws attention to and does not shy away from the ongoing memory debates surrounding the "mutige Feigheit" (168) of the Wehrmacht deserters. The design of the Stumpf memorial precludes a drawing of lines under the past – it holds the past in suspension, encouraging an ongoing engagement with the legacy of the Wehrmacht deserters specifically and the region's Nazi legacy more broadly. In its resistance of fixity and enigmatic inscription, Sukare's fictional memorial may be described as a counter-monument in James E. Young's definition (30). The inscription and the memorial as a whole prompt questions on the part of the visitor that he or she is unable to immediately answer, thereby facilitating the kind of "memory-work" that Young associates with the counter-monument (30). Moreover, reference to the SS, who were responsible for the attack on the Stumpf deserters, is omitted from the memorial's final design. While this "Nichtnennen der Täter" is presented as a gesture of reconciliation by Wawi and the "Deserteursfreundinnen" (169),<sup>21</sup> the omission may also be regarded as a prompt to the viewer to seek further explanations themselves, in Young's conception of the counter-monument's benefits, rather than expecting a memorial to "shoulder[] the memory-work" (5).

The final sentence of Sukare's novel, where the first-person narrator, following a relatively large, if unofficial, opening ceremony for the memorial, states "Ich säe Grass" (170) echoes Erich Fried's "Fragelied," previously mentioned in conjunction with Thomas Doss's *Symphonie der Hoffnung* (2005). Fried's (1986) poem includes the lines: "St. Johann im Pongau!/ Du hast Gras wachsen lassen/ über den Gräberweg". In "Fragelied," the grass growing over the grave path symbolises erasure and forgetting. However, in Sukare's novel, the conscious sowing of grass by the protagonist is less indicative of letting "grass grow over" the past,

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<sup>20</sup> One notable recent example of this may be found in Robert Schindel's *Der Kalte* (2013), where Schindel corrects, on a fictional level, the insufficiencies of Hrdlicka's *Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus*, staging his own intervention in it. In his fictional treatment, Schindel adds sneering Viennese onlookers to the controversial figure of the "Straßenwaschender Jude," completing what Ruth Beckermann, in a 2015 temporary installation in front of the figure, would call the "missing image," reinstating the perpetrators into the picture. See Beckermann, "The Missing Image".

<sup>21</sup> The Goldegg deserters' memorial also does not specifically mention the SS, although the reference to the "'Sturm' am 2. Juli" would be comprehensible to those familiar with the deserters' story. However, there is a full explanatory board, elaborating on the actions of the Gestapo and SS, immediately next to the memorial (Salzburgwiki, "Erläuterungstafel").

but rather on now being able to personally incorporate the deserters' narrative into that of Stumpf. This resonates with Martin Pollack's idea of "kontaminierte Landschaften", whereby landscapes are irrevocably imprinted with the historical trauma which occurred there. Despite not being universally accepted by the Stumpf residents, the sowing of grass emphasises the memory of the Stumpf deserters being irrevocably rooted into the ground, like the grass, for all seasons.

As this article has shown, Sukare's *Schwedenreiter* treats the insufficiencies of Austria's politics of memory in the specific case of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters. *Schwedenreiter* illustrates the ongoing fractures in Austria's collective memory regarding the deserters, specifically with regard to local memory and official history. Thereby Sukare's narrative draws attention to the falsifications and hypocrisy surrounding the deserters perpetuated in the postwar era, which linger into the present, despite the deserters' official rehabilitation. *Schwedenreiter* highlights the shaming practices to which the Wehrmacht deserters and their descendants were subjected, and the dominance that the post-memory of the deserters' experience continues to exert on the lives of relatives several generations removed. As such, Sukare's novel both comments on and - as can be gleaned especially from the reception of *Schwedenreiter* upon its publication - intervenes in memory discourses in Goldegg Weng. Both Sukare's novel and its reception underscore that Austrian Wehrmacht desertion continues to constitute a contested memory in localised contexts, despite the perceived line in the sand of central rehabilitation and commemoration (as exemplified by Olaf Nicolai's 2014 *Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz* on Vienna's Ballhausplatz). Sukare underlines that there is clearly some way to go before commemoration of Austrian Wehrmacht deserters can be fully integrated into local - as well as official - memory practices. However, in spite of the manifold persistent tensions in the commemoration of the (Stumpf) Wehrmacht deserters highlighted throughout Sukare's novel, *Schwedenreiter* concludes on a note of cautious optimism. The eventual erection of *Schwedenreiter*'s memorial, or counter-monument, to his relatives, preserves their contested memory in Stumpf ground, while also orienting itself to a future time and generation, one which may have a less fractious relationship to the memorialisation of Wehrmacht deserters.

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