Rewriting History: The Construction of the 'Anti-Fascist Myth' in the GDR and the 'Victim Myth' in Austria, 1945–1989

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'All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed exactly as often as was necessary.' – George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Myths of victimisation were the crux of state-sponsored history about the Nazi period in Austria and East Germany during the Cold War. The Third Reich was the shared past of Austria, the GDR (German Democratic Republic), and the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), yet the FRG was the only post-fascist state, which accepted responsibility for the crimes committed under Hitler's dictatorship. How did the other post-war states, the GDR and the Second Austrian Republic, rationalise their role in the Second World War, their active participation in Nazism, and its murderous consequences?

Myths of victimisation were propagated in order to detach the Austrian and East German states from their involvement in the Holocaust, thereby forming a 'usable past.' In Charles S. Maier's view, a 'usable past' is a process of constructing narratives to legitimise a nation's formation and foster national identity.² Austria positioned itself as an occupied nation, Hitler's first victim, and presented the Second World War as the Germans' war that 'no Austrian wanted.'³ East Germany universalised the fight against Nazism as the international struggle against fascism.⁴ The notion that East Germans were anti-fascist resistance fighters became central to the ruling party's version of history, underscored by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Thus, Austria and East Germany rewrote their shared past according to national and ideological agendas.

¹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949): 35.

² Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 121–60.

³ Österreichische Bundesregierung (ed.), 'Proklamation der zweiten Republik, 27. April 1945', Für Recht und Freiheit, Eine Auswahl der Reden des Bundespräsidenten Dr. Karl Renner (Vienna: 2004): 9.

⁴ Peter Monteath, 'Narratives of Fascism in the GDR: Buchenwald and the "Myth of Antifascism," *The European Legacy* 4, no. 1 (1999): 99.

However, this distorted retelling of history disparaged the role of antisemitism in the Third Reich and robbed the victims of Nazi atrocities of proper commemoration and reparation payments.

Although Austria, the GDR, and the FRG were all formerly part of the Nazi regime, this article will focus on the post-war states, which refused to accept the shared responsibility for the Third Reich and the crimes of the Holocaust. It will trace the construction of the Austrian 'victim myth' and the East German 'anti-fascist myth' from the beginning of the post-war occupation in 1945 until their concurrent decline and discreditation during the late 1980s. First, an explanation of the creation of the GDR and the reconstruction of democratic Austria will be given. Following this, this article will focus on a specific case study on how school textbooks taught the Nazi past to children through the lens of these myths of victimisation. Ultimately, this article will explore the wider historiographical concerns about the politics of state-sponsored history and how nations falsify their past to legitimise the present.

To understand this self-portrayal of victimisation, we must define 'myth'. In *Work on Myth*, Hans Blumenberg argued that myths must be understood as a process through which the basic core of a narrative, or *mythologem*, is told and retold.⁵ Over time, myths are reworked and appropriated by different needs and exigencies of a particular society. Christopher Flood defines his conception of political myth as 'an ideologically marked narrative, which purports to give a true account of a set of past, present or predicted political events, and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group. ⁶ In addition to the influence of ideology, Carl Schmitt sees myth as 'the product of national energy'. Myth is constructed upon existing language, tradition, and a sense of belonging to a group or 'imagined community.' A 'consciousness of a common fate' enabled the construction of myths of victimisation in Austria and East Germany. W. L. Bennett's discussion of American politics and myth is useful for this article's treatment of myth. ¹⁰ He argued that myth is located in 'what is not said' and 'what is overtly said.' This paper argues that the victim myth and the myth of anti-

⁵ See Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt am Main: 1979). This definition of myth emerged from the *Mythosdebatte* between German philosophers during the 1970s.

⁶ Christopher Flood, Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction (London: Routledge, 2013): 44.

⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985): 65.

⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁰ See W.L. Bennett, 'Myth, Ritual and Political Control,' *Journal of Communication* 30 (December 1980): 166-179.

¹¹ Ibid., 167.

fascism downplay and exaggerate certain political experiences and deeds to emphasise a universal experience of suffering and victimisation under the Nazi regime

Constructing the Post-Fascist States and Myths of Victimisation

On 1 August 1945 the Allies signed the Potsdam Agreement, which legally reduced the size of Germany to its pre-1938 borders along the Oder-Neiße line, disarmed and demilitarised Hitler's Reich, and dismantled the Nazi Party. 12 Germany was divided into four occupied zones, administered by the French, British, Americans, and Soviets. The provisions set out in the Potsdam Agreement were implemented to weaken Germany, yet the Allies agreed to reconstruct German society based on democratic institutions and values. The Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) with the assistance of members of the German Communist Party (KPD) worked together to restructure German society in the Soviet occupied zone. ¹³ Most KPD members had spent the Weimar years in violent struggles against National Socialists, in exile in Moscow or as political prisoners in concentration camps. 14 In 1945 KPD members peacefully returned to Berlin with the intention of establishing a socialist state. The Soviets shared this goal with the KPD and subsequently allowed the reinstatement of three political parties, the KPD, the Social Democrats (SPD), and the Liberal Democrats (LPDP), which had existed during the Weimar Republic before the Nazi party banned other political parties. 15 The KPD published a manifesto on 11 July 1945 and requested the establishment of an 'anti-fascist democratic regime, a parliamentary democratic republic with all rights and freedoms for the people. '16 Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the KPD, downplayed the importance of Marxist ideology in this manifesto by portraying the KPD as 'less under the control of the Soviets and more conciliatory.'17 As World War II had left Germany in ruins, and the totalitarian dictatorship of the Nazi regime was violent and destructive, the KPD was determined to establish a new

¹² NATO, 'The Potsdam Agreement: Protocol of the Proceedings, August 1, 1945,' (1945) https://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/doc_files/Potsdam%20Agreement.pdf (accessed 3 February 2020).

<sup>2020).

13</sup> See Becoming East German: Social Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

¹⁴ For an overview of the KPD in the Weimar Republic, see Andreas Wirsching, 'A Discussion of the Nature of the KPD during the Weimar Republic,' *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 45, no. 3 (1997): 449–466. ¹⁵ The SMAD also approved the creation of a fourth political party, the new Christian Democrats.

¹⁶ Quoted in Peter C. Caldwell and Karrin Hanshew, *Germany Since 1945: Politics, Culture, and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018): 29.
¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

communist state through peaceful measures to ensure popular support following a time of complete upheaval. Instead of violence against 'class enemies,' the KPD promoted peaceful slogans, such as 'democracy of a new type' and the 'German road to socialism.'¹⁸

Although there were four political parties (re)formed in 1945, the Soviets promoted primarily KPD members to top roles in central planning and administration. The largest political threat to the KPD was the SPD's popularity amongst the working class. ¹⁹ Ulbricht and Stalin met in late 1945 and both agreed the solution would be to amalgamate the two parties. In April 1946, the SMAD created the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which was a forceful merger of the SPD and KPD. Therefore, by 1948 most of the Soviet zone's state and economic apparatus were in the hands of German Communists. ²⁰

As tensions with the United States heightened, the Soviets were determined to establish a communist satellite state on German soil. On 12 February 1948 the SMAD gave the German Economic Commission (DWK) authority as 'the central body responsible for economic planning and administration with full government authority over the entire Soviet zone.'²¹ On 7 October 1949 the German Democratic Republic was founded. Historians, such as Wilke, argue that this was a reactionary measure to the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany exactly one month earlier on 7 September 1949.²² The GDR's state apparatus was already implemented through the establishment of the DWK. Thus, the Soviets waited until the FRG was formed to announce the creation of the GDR to push the blame for Germany's division onto its western counterpart.

With the assistance of the Soviets, former KPD anti-fascist resistance fighters were in control of the SED. They employed the myth of anti-fascism to legitimise the introduction of a communist satellite state in the Eastern zone. However, Nazi resistance was not widespread amongst Germans living in the Soviet zone. In fact,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The ongoing conflict between the two parties started during the Weimar Republic. They had engaged in Reciprocal paramilitary violence and both parties blamed the other for the Nazis' rise to power. To ensure that the Communist Party members held the upper hand over the SPD within the SED, there was a policy of 'party cleansing.' Between 1948 and 1952, surveillance was undertaken of party members to expose 'party enemies,' who were more often than not former SPD members.

²⁰ Manfred Wilke, *The Path to the Berlin Wall* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014): 59.

²¹ Ibid., 65.

²² Ibid., 67.

only one percent of East Germans were resistance fighters.²³ Thus, the notion of East Germans as resistance fighters remains in the realm of exaggerated narrative, or a half-truth, as the anti-fascist resistance fighters were virtually the ruling party members of the SED.

The myth of anti-fascism was also perpetuated due to the stricter process of denazification enacted by the Soviets in the Eastern zone. There were twice as many denazification trials in East Germany as in the FRG.²⁴ Moreover, many former Nazis fled to the West during Soviet occupation as they predicted that the Soviets would implement harsher punishments against former Nazis than the western Allies.²⁵ Until 1965, 12,807 people were put to trial for Nazi and war crimes in the GDR and from this group, 118 were sentenced to death, 231 were sentenced to life imprisonment, and 3,171 to a sentence longer than ten years.²⁶ By the end of the denazification process in East Germany, 520,734 former Nazi party members had been forced to leave their jobs.²⁷ Consequently the SED regarded the FRG as the successor state of the Nazi regime, as they had more successfully punished Nazis and the SMAD had removed Nazis from positions of power and replaced them with KPD/SED members. These institutional and judicial changes led to the SED promoting the GDR as an antifascist state, in opposition to the capitalist West.

Moreover, the SED considered Nazism's popularity as an 'economic phenomenon' in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology.²⁸ The SED defined fascism according to the Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov's 1933 definition that 'fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship that incorporates the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialist elements of finance capital.'²⁹ In essence, fascism was capitalism in its worst form. The GDR had overhauled capitalism through establishing a communist state. Therefore, they had eradicated the possibility of fascism returning in the GDR. As the FRG had embraced a capitalist system, the West was still at risk of a return to fascism. Thomas C. Fox labels this the 'Stunde Null' of the GDR.³⁰

²³ J.H. Brinks, 'Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (1997): 209.

²⁴ Mary Fulbrook, 'Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution,' lecture delivered on 5 February 2020, Merton College, Oxford.

²⁵ Fulbrook, 'Reckonings.'

²⁶ Wolfgang Wippermann, *Antifaschismus in der DDR: Wirklichkeit und Ideologie* (Berlin: 1980): 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Brinks, 'Anti-Fascism,' 210.

²⁹ Wippermann, Antifaschismus, 6.

³⁰ Thomas Fox, Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust (New York: Camden House, 1999): 8.

The GDR's narrative of history was distorted because it was overtly underscored by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Nazism was substituted for the umbrella term 'fascism,' thereby universalising the Nazi past as part of the broader contemporaneous struggle between fascists and communists in the Cold War context. This anti-fascist and pro-socialist interpretation of the past portrayed Hitler and his officials as the 'henchmen' of the German capitalists working to hinder a Communist victory.³¹ This narrative positioned the KPD as the primary victims of Nazism. Thomas Fox argued that 'such constructs left no room for the centrality of racism and especially antisemitism' in explanations of Nazi ideology.³² This pro-communist version of history regarded antisemitism, xenophobia, and homophobia as 'peripheral phenomenon,' caused by the 'manipulation from above to provide a scapegoat for anti-capitalist sentiment.'33 A dictionary published in 1972 in the GDR defined antisemitism as the 'hostile feeling towards, and persecution, of Jews. It serves to distract the masses from the abuses of an exploitative system'. 34 Konrad Kwiet argued that GDR historians understood 'the "Jewish Question" and antisemitism as a problem of the bourgeoisie that would be automatically resolved through the overthrow of the capitalist order.'35 Nazism was not understood as German fascism, rather capitalism in its most violent and extreme form. Through decontextualising Nazi ideology from its German nationalistic traditions, the East German interpretation of the past was over reliant upon, and confined to, economic explanations of Nazism's popular appeal amongst Germans. This simplistic explanation of Nazism only served to derogate the racist overtones of Nazi ideology.

Contradictory narratives of the Nazi past emerged in the FRG, GDR, and Austria. Within the Cold War climate, the post-war states were on a quest for a distinctly democratic or socialist identity, and the responsibility for the Holocaust 'was never a welcomed element in that identity.'³⁶ The GDR exposed the continuities from the Nazi past in the FRG to position the West as dangerous and still vulnerable to a descent into fascism. Thus the anti-fascist myth allowed the SED to 'claim that the capitalist Federal Republic was a proto-or neo-Nazi state, a breeding ground for future

³¹ Konrad Kwiet, 'Historians of the German Democratic Republic on Antisemitism and Persecution,' *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 21 (1976): 173-198.

³² Fox, Memory, 9.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bibliographisches Institut, *Meyers Neues Lexikon in 18 Bänden* (Leipzig: 1972).

³⁵ Kwiet, 'Historians,' 189.

³⁶ Fox, Stated Memory, 5.

wars.'³⁷ Consequently, the SED justified the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 through labelling the wall the 'anti-fascist wall of protection.' In actuality, the wall was constructed to prevent East German citizens from mass flight to the West to escape living under a communist dictatorship.

The former FRG Chancellor Konrad Adenauer published a bulletin in 1960 that exposed East Germany as fabricating their success in eradicating former Nazis from the GDR and promoting the state as 'anti-fascist.' The bulletin was called 'The Man without Conscience: Ulbricht as an Unqualified Judge.'38 It defamed Ulbricht, who served as the First Secretary of the SED from 1950 to 1971. Although Ulbricht spent the Nazi years in exile with the other KPD members, he did have former Nazi party members working alongside him in the SED. The bulletin listed the names of 220 former Nazi party members who had retained their professions in the GDR, focusing specifically on academics and artists.³⁹ Moreover, fifty-six former NSDAP members were listed, who were elected to sit in the East German Volkskammer in the 16 November 1958 elections. 40 The publication of this bulletin named those who escaped punishment during the denazification trials, and shifted the focus away from the former Nazis working alongside Adenauer in West Germany. In 1981 Olaf Kappelt published the Brown-Book GDR.41 In a similar manner to the bulletin, it listed approximately nine hundred former Nazi party members, who were employed in the GDR. On 16 August 1947, the Russians issued Proclamation 201.42 This proclamation made a clear distinction between those in the Soviet occupied zone, who were 'Nazi activists' and 'former nominal Nazi party members.'43 This distinction allowed former NSDAP members to keep their professions, as the Soviets understood that they needed to avoid a labour shortage in the occupied zone. The publication of Adenauer's bulletin and the Brown-Book cement that the GDR was not truly an anti-fascist state. Upon closer examination, the logistics of denazification were never fully completed. Antifascism was a 'slogan pressed into the service of the party and the state,' a foundation

³⁷ Ibid., 9

³⁸ Bulletin des Presse-und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung, 'Man ohne Gewissen': Ulbricht als unbefugter Richter 89 (12 May 1960): 875-876.

³⁹ Ibid., 875-876

⁴⁰ For example, Arno von Lenski, a general and deputy of the *Volkskammer*. He was employed by the *Volksgerichtshof* during the Third Reich and was responsible for signing documents, which sentenced people to death. Ulbricht had awarded him a 'Medal for Fighters against Fascism,' which subsequently seemed undeserved.

⁴¹ Olaf Kappelt, *Braunbuch DRR. Nazis in der DDR* (Berlin: 1981).

⁴² See the sub-chapter on Proclamation 201 in Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg, 1945-1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 97-103.

⁴³ Brinks, 'Anti-Fascism,' 216.

myth which created an identity that was useful in distancing East Germany from its western capitalist counterpart during the Cold War period.⁴⁴

East Germany and the Second Austrian Republic were created due to the Allies' foreign policy following Germany's defeat, opposed to measures of self-determination. This explains the governments' need to promote an official narrative of history to legitimise the creation of their new post-fascist states. While the SED was determined to create a new pro-Soviet identity in the newly established GDR, the Austrian government pushed to promote a distinctive Austrian *Nationalstolz*. Austria found itself in a virtually unbelievable position by 1955, which continues to stimulate a vast corpus of historical research. Austria, unlike Germany, had avoided involvement in the Cold War, was not required to pay war reparations as decreed in the Potsdam Agreement, and was unoccupied by Allied troops. As Tony Judt wrote:

'This stroke of doubly unmerited good fortune authorised Vienna to exorcise its past. Its Nazi allegiance conveniently forgotten, the Austrian capital—a "Western" city surrounded by "Soviet Eastern" Europe—acquired a new identity as outrider and exemplar of the free world.'46

Despite Austria's participation in crimes against humanity while part of the Third Reich, it had re-attained full sovereignty and was reunited as a nation when the Austrian State Treaty was signed on 15 May 1955.

The November 1943 Moscow Declaration on General Security paved the way for Austrians to construct a myth of victimisation.⁴⁷ Written by the USSR, the UK, and the US, it declared Austria the 'first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression (and that Austria) shall be liberated from German domination.⁴⁸ Moreover, it stated that the *Anschluss* 'imposed on Austria by Germany on 15 March 1938 (was) null and void.⁴⁹ They declared that they wished to see a free and independent Austria Reestablished.⁵⁰ The Allies' understanding of the *Anschluss* as an occupation and Austria as Hitler's first victim enabled Austria to implement this notion of victimisation

⁴⁴ Ibid.

 ⁴⁵ See Oliver Rathkolb, *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria, 1945-2005* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010);
 Anton Pelinka, *Austria: Out of the Shadow of the Past* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1998); F.
 Parkinson, *Conquering the Past: Austrian Nazism Yesterday and Today* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'East-West Negotiations over Austria in 1949: Turning Point in the Cold War,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 1 (1989): 125-145; and Tony Judt, *Post War: A History of Europe since* 1945 (London: Penguin, 2005): 1-3 & 803-831.
 ⁴⁶ Judt, *Postwar*, 2.

⁴⁷ Department of Public Information, 'The Moscow Declaration on General Security,' *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1946–1947 (New York: 1947): 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

into their narrative of history. Furthermore, the Moscow Declaration internationally and legally sanctioned Austria's status as Hitler's first victim and an occupied nation. Peter Utgaard states that this interpretation became the basis for 'a number of interconnected themes that turned the Austrian experience from 1938 until 1955 into a positive narrative of redemption to mark the (re)birth of a new democratic, prosperous, neutral non-German Austria.'51 The second paragraph of the declaration states: 'Austria is reminded, however, that she has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany...⁵² The Nazi party had 600,000 Austrian members, and Austrian Nazis held high positions of power in the Party and helped orchestrate the 'Final Solution.' It is widely known that Adolf Hitler was in fact born in Braunau am Inn in Austria. Adolf Eichmann (the head of mass deportations of Eastern European Jews to concentration camps), Ernst Kaltenbrunner (the highest ranked SS officer following Heinrich Himmler and leader of the Austrian SS), and Odilo Globocnik (orchestrator of 'Operation Reinhard,' which deported over one million Polish Jews) were also all Austrian Nazis. Moreover, 1.3 million Austrian men fought in the Wehrmacht on all fronts. The second part of the Moscow Declaration was seemingly forgotten by the Allies when it came to the denazification of Austria and the establishment of the State Treaty. The Second Austrian Republic was constructed upon a distorted view of the recent past.⁵³ Consequently, the victim myth emerged from the Allies' opportunist foreign policy.⁵⁴

On 27 April 1945 the Proclamation of the Second Austrian Republic declared the independence of Austria and a formal departure from the Third Reich.⁵⁵ It was written by the Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ), the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), and the Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ), who put aside their political differences to form the provisional government of the Second Austrian Republic. Following in the steps of the Moscow Declaration, it nullified the *Anschluss* and listed the ways in which Austria was Germany's first victim including forcing Austria into a war 'that no Austrian wanted.'⁵⁶ Austria, in the face of losing the war, aligned itself with the victors despite

⁵¹ Utgaard. *Victim Myth*, 7.

⁵² Public Information, 'Moscow Declaration,' 3.

⁵³ Anton Pelinka, 'Taboos and Self-Deception: The Second Republic's Reconstruction of History,' in Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds.), *Austrian Historical Memory & National Identity* (London: 2017): 95.

⁵⁴ Pelinka, 'Taboos and Self-Deception,' 96.

⁵⁵ Bundesregierung, 'Proklamation,' 9-12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

Austrian men fighting in the Wehrmacht against the Allied soldiers when this proclamation was made.

In 1946 the Red-White-Red-Book: Justice for Austria! was published by the provisional government.⁵⁷ The *Red-White-Red Book* was a 'legal instrument' published to deter any compensation or reparation claims.⁵⁸ It also demonstrated the extent to which the state-sponsored narrative of history was cemented by opportunism. The book's stated aim was to provide justification for Austrian 'demands to be accepted and treated as a "liberated state" in line with the Moscow Declaration.'59 In the chapter titled 'The Austrians and the War' it was stated that:

'The Austrian population had from the start been opposed to the "Hitlerite War"... every Austrian soldier can confirm that the treatment of Austrian soldiers in the German Wehrmacht was particularly unfair and humiliating...the blood tribute exacted from Austria in this war was nothing but an additional terrible burden on the country, which was already suffering under the heavy burden of occupation and thus worse than in other occupied countries.'60

Following the Nazi regime's defeat, it was more convenient for the provisional government to represent Austria as Hitler's first victim, an occupied nation, and that they were forced into a war against the Allies. The Red-White-Red Book stated that 'their first victim, left in the lurch, by the whole world, was Austria' (emphasis not added).61 This text de-contextualises the events of the Anschluss and the Second World War. This narrative of the past detached Austria of any agency in the Anschluss.62 The provisional government published the Red-White-Red Book to elevate the status of Austria from a conquered nation to a liberated one in the face of the Nazi regime's defeat.63 This is the key difference between Austria and the other German states. The victim myth enabled the Austrians to distance themselves from

⁵⁷ Bundeskanzleramt der Republik Österreich. Rot-Weiß-Rot-Buch: Gerechtigkeit für Österreich! (Vienna:

<sup>1946).

58</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, 'The Politics of Memory: Austria's Perception of the Second World War and the Pelinka (eds.), Austrian Historical Memory & National Research (eds.), Austrian Historical Memory & National Research National Socialist Period,' in Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds.), Austrian Historical Memory & National Identity (London: 2017): 81.

59 Bundeskanzleramt, Rot-Weiß-Rot-Buch, 15.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32-40.

⁶¹ Bundeskanzleramt, Rot-Weiß-Rot-Buch, 32-40.

⁶² Utgaard, Victim Myth, 29.

⁶³ Ibid.

their initial support of Hitler's war and to establish a new and positive Austrian identity surrounding a democratic Austria that was 'constructed out of the ruins.'64

Denazification was a transnational process, as it occurred in the GDR, the FRG. and Austria. However, it was applied differently in Austria because the Allies were more concerned with diminishing the size of German territory forcefully obtained under Hitler's rule. Conveniently for Austria, the Allies considered it a victim of Hitler's aggression rather than an integral region of the Third Reich. 65 This occurred because U.S. and British diplomats viewed the Third Reich as the successor state of Prussia, with Nazism linked to militaristic Prussian traditions opposed to those of Austria.⁶⁶ Unlike in Germany, the provisional government enacted the denazification measures opposed to the Allies. Therefore, the Austrians had more agency in the process and a more lenient denazification policy was implemented. Nazi party members were not removed from university posts, administrative and judicial roles, or medical services. Only members of the Nazi elite were prosecuted. Consequently, there was a stronger policy of rehabilitation of former Nazi Party members in Austria than in the GDR or the FRG.⁶⁷ Heidemarie Uhl argued that the Allies' perception of the role of Austrians and Germans in the war altered the denazification and reparation policies.⁶⁸ Thus, the differing denazification processes demonstrate how the Allies' foreign policy determined the construction of the post-war states.⁶⁹

Rewriting History in School Textbooks

Textbook narratives stand as a concrete example of how the official memory, or state-sponsored history, functioned in Austria and East Germany and facilitated the transmission of these myths to children. The following case studies on school textbooks in Austria and East Germany investigate how post-fascist states justified their involvement in Nazism, and how they attempted to teach and 'unteach' their school children about their recent history, which often involved the fabrication of past events, ideas, and personalities. The commonality between the two newly created

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁶ Verdrängte Schuld, verfehlte Sühne: Entnazifizierung in Österreich 1945-1955, ed. Sebastian Meissl, Mulley Klaus-Dieter and Oliver Rathkolb (Vienna: 1985).

⁶⁷ Uhl, 'Memory,' 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 71.

states is that they had actively participated in Nazism and they were both determined to rewrite their shared past according to a new ideology, to construct a new identity, and to reject responsibility for the atrocious crimes that occurred during the Holocaust and World War II.

Following the *Anschluss*, the Nazi policy of *Gleichanschaltung* was implemented across Austria. Consequently, the Austrian Education Ministry closed down and the Austrian education system was amalgamated with the Third Reich's system. Austrian students learnt German handwriting, portraits of Hitler were hung in every classroom, the German school curriculum was implemented, and textbooks, such as *Rassenbiologie für Schüler*, were distributed. With the end of the Second World War and the defeat of Nazi Germany, Austria needed to distance itself from its past with Nazi ideology under the Third Reich. The first step was to implement a new and Austrian-focused school curriculum, which would emphasise the uniqueness of Austrian national identity in an attempt at 'denazification' of the classroom. This curriculum had a selective emphasis on particular historical events and 'Austrianness.' It was also a vehicle for the promotion of the victim myth and ventriloquised the government's official version of Austrian history with the Germans to school children.

A distinctive Austrian identity was constructed around the success of the Habsburg Empire, the imperial architecture in Vienna, and promoting Austria as the *Land der Musik*.⁷² Catholicism was introduced into the school curriculum to distance Austrians through religious belief from the Protestant Prussians.⁷³ From 1945 until 1948 7.3 million copies of new textbooks were printed to replace the Nazi schoolbooks.⁷⁴ Initially, only one history textbook for high school students focused on the recent past.⁷⁵ This remained the most commonly used history textbook covering the Second World War until 1970 and it followed the precedent set out in the *Red-White-Red Book* and thus perpetuated the victim myth. The nucleus of this myth was that the *Anschluss* was an unwelcome occupation by the *Lebensraum*-hungry and militaristic Germans. It was also stressed that Austria was a victim of Neville

⁷⁰ Utgaard, Victim Myth, 25.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 31.

⁷³ It was seemingly forgotten that most of Bavaria was also Catholic.

⁷⁴ Utgaard, Victim Myth, 50.

⁷⁵ Allgemeine Geschichte der Neuzeit von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Franz Heilsberg and Friedrich Korger (Vienna: 1956).

Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, namely that the Allies did not help defend Austria and thus the Nazis seized power from a defenceless Austria. A history textbook for primary school children published in 1962 stated:

'In this desperate hour, Austria tried in vain to find help from Great Britain, France or Italy but none of these powers wanted to guarantee Austria's independence...on 12 March German troops marched into Austria. And the world was silent; merely Mexico protested against the occupation of Austria.'⁷⁶

While it is factually correct that the United Kingdom, France, and Italy did not intervene when Hitler's troops marched into Austria on 12 March 1938, what the textbook ignores is that German troops were welcomed by cheering crowds.⁷⁷ On 12 February 1938 the former Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, went to Berchtesgaden for a meeting with Hitler. In his memoir, Im Kampf gegen Hitler (In the Struggle against Hitler), von Schuschnigg claimed he was against the Anschluss and that Hitler presented him with numerous strong demands, including promoting Austrian Nazi Arthur Seyss-Inquart to the role of Minister of Public Security, which would include full power over the Austrian police force. 78 On 11 March Hitler presented von Schuschnigg with an ultimatum, pressing him to hand over his power to Austrian Nazis or face an invasion. Despite this forceful expression of military power on behalf of the Nazis, von Schuschnigg did not seek support from Great Britain, France, or Italy. When the German 8. Armee Oberkommando marched into Austria on 12 March 1938 von Schuschnigg did not order the Austrian troops to defend his nation. Moreover, von Schuschnigg's initial defiance against Hitler, as emphasised in his memoir, does not reflect the public attitude towards the Anschluss. A photograph taken of Hitler's arrival in Linz on 13 March 1938 demonstrated that he was greeted by cheering crowds of Austrians saluting him.⁷⁹ The pinnacle of Hitler's 'victory tour' around Austria was on 15 March 1938 when a crowd of 250,000 people gathered to watch him deliver a speech at the Heldenplatz in Vienna.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Anton Ebner and Matthias Partick, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte für die 4. Klasse der Hauptschulen und Mittelschulen* (Salzburg: 1962): 125.

⁷⁷ For more on the *Anschluss*, see Rolf Steininger, *Austria, Germany, and the Cold War: From the Anschluss to the State Treaty 1938-1955* (New York: 2008).

⁷⁸ Kurt Schuschnigg, *Im Kampf Gegen Hitler: Die Überwindung der Anschlussidee* (Vienna: 1969).

⁷⁹ See Figure 1, Bildarchiv Wien, Bild 127-0821 – E3/640.

⁸⁰ See Figure 2, Bildarchiv Wien, Bild 183-1987-09222-500.



Bildarchiv Wien, Bild 127-0821 – E3/640



Bildarchiv Wien, Bild 183-1987-09222-500

Austria's amalgamation into the Third Reich was retrospectively approved by a referendum on 10 April 1938. The referendum asked, 'Do you agree with the

reunification of Austria with the German Reich, which was enacted on 13 March 1938 and do you vote in support of our leader Adolf Hitler?' 99.73 percent of the votes were affirmative.⁸¹ It must be noted that Austrian Jews, Roma, and Sinti were excluded from the referendum, as the Nuremberg racial laws were in effect from the *Anschluss* onwards in Austria. When the events of the *Anschluss* are reviewed, it is interesting to note how they were interpreted differently following the defeat of the Third Reich. The referendum and visible support for Hitler were not addressed in the textbooks or in the *Red-White-Red Book*.⁸² According to Peter Utgaard, 'in the official memory of postwar Austria, the absence of Austrian support for the *Anschluss* was essential to the victim narrative and the legitimacy of the state.'⁸³ This represents a state-sponsored distortion of the past.

As the official narrative of Austrian history saw the *Anschluss* as an occupation, Austrian *Wehrmacht* soldiers needed to be depicted as victims fighting in an undesired war. A point of tension with the victim myth was that 1.3 million Austrian men had fought in support of the Third Reich. The solution was to create what Utgaard has aptly labelled the 'one-basket-of-suffering' myth.⁸⁴ This is similar to Fox's notion of the 'peripheral phenomenon' in East Germany.⁸⁵ In the school textbooks, every mention of antisemitic violence in the Third Reich was subsumed with Austrian suffering. Discrimination and violence against Jews were not mentioned in isolation in Austrian schoolbooks.⁸⁶ The victimhood of the Jews, the Austrian soldiers fighting 'Hitler's war,' and civilians who suffered during the Allies' bomb raids were reported to have suffered together. The Germans were to blame for this suffering, for which the Austrians avoided all responsibility. An example from a 1967 textbook stated:

'In the year 1933, Hitler became Reich Chancellor. As unencumbered dictator he persecuted his political opponents, sent Jews, Catholics, Socialists and Communists to the notorious concentration camps and had over 6 million people murdered.'87

⁸¹ 4,453,912 out of 4,471,618 voted for the *Anschluss*. 99.71% of registered voters participated in the referendum.

⁸² Utgaard, Victim Myth, 74.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁸⁵ Fox, Stated Memory, 9.

⁸⁶ Utgaard, Victim Myth, 31-33.

⁸⁷ Franz Berger, Zeiten, Völker, und Kulturen. Ein Lehr-und Arbeitsbuch (Vienna: 1967): 70.

Catholics are listed to denote Austrians in the 'one-basket-of-suffering' myth under Hitler's regime. An example of relativising the suffering of the Jews is found in a 1966 prescribed school text, which stated: '70,000 Austrians died in a murderous war that they never wanted. 25,000 were killed by bombs, further tens of thousands were locked up [and] many were tortured to death or executed in the torture chambers of the concentration camps.'88 This particular example does not reference the Austrian Jews and does not provide the total death toll. More precise information is ascribed to Austrian suffering. Moreover, there are no specific chapters in the textbooks on *Kristallnacht*, violence against Viennese Jews, the stealing of Jewish property and businesses, the forced migration of Jews, or the murder of 65,000 Austrian Jews. This victim-equating and relativisation evident in Austrian schoolbooks is demonstrative of the government's attempt to write a 'usable past' for school children.

In East Germany, the school curriculum was linked to the ideology of the state. In 1946 the Education Act was introduced, which mandated that all children had an equal right to education, which was the state's responsibility. ⁸⁹ As the SED was now responsible for the education system in the GDR, the school textbooks written on the Nazi past promoted a pro-Soviet identity, celebrated the activities of the KPD resistance fighters, and exposed the continuities of the Nazi regime in the FRG's capitalist society.

East German textbooks covered the Holocaust more extensively than their Austrian counterparts. However, the GDR texts sought explanations of the violence and discrimination against the Jews in capitalist terms. The first history book from 1951 listed the *Wehrmacht*, *SS*, and large German corporations as the culprits of the death of eleven million people in the concentration camps. A similarity between the Austrian and East German textbooks is that they diminish the central role of an antisemitic ideology in the events leading to the Holocaust. The 1951 *Lehrbuch* stated that the Nazis' antisemitism was economically motivated, the Nazis were the 'henchmen' acting for the 'German capitalist' and their goal was to eliminate capitalist competition between German and German-Jewish businesses. This explanation is limited by Marxist ideology and represents a de-contextualisation of Nazi atrocities. It

⁸⁸ Klemens Zens and Schaut Ringsumher, Zum Österreichischen Nationalfeiertag (Vienna: 1966).

⁸⁹ D. Benner and H. Sladek, 'Das Gesetz zur Demokratisierung der deutschen Schule und die unterschiedliche Auslegung seiner harmonistischen Annahmen zum Verhältnis von Begabung und Bestimmung in den Jahren 1946/47' in Krüger and Marotzki (eds.) *Pädagogik und Erziehungsalltag in der DDR*, vol. 2 (1994).

⁹⁰ Paul Wandel, Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht, 8. Schuljahr (Berlin: 1952): 265-269.

⁹¹ Lehrbuch, (Berlin: 1951): 52-53.

does not explain why the French, Dutch or other Western European Jews were persecuted. Discussions of Nazi crimes focused on the crimes committed within Germany or Eastern Europe, as this limited geographical focus legitimised the communist rule in East Germany and cultivated a shared narrative of victimisation between East Germans and Eastern Europeans.

In a similar manner to the Austrian schoolbooks, the GDR books also denied the central role of antisemitism in Nazi ideology and equated the victimhood of resistance-fighters and Eastern Europeans with the Jews. In reference to school texts, Fox argued, 'discussions of Nazi anti-Jewish activity are often coupled with or subsumed and relativized by reference to Nazi slaughter of Poles and Russians.'92 A 1960 Lehrbuch contained a picture of Jews wearing the yellow Star of David, one of the most recognisable symbols of the Nazis' oppression of the Jews. 93 In the photograph, the Nazi officers are assembling them for deportation. The caption stated, 'German fascists deported thousands of Poles to Germany and enslaved them to work in German armament factories.'94 One can deduce that this is a photograph of Polish Jews due to the visibility of the Star of David in the photograph. However, the textbook's author has strategically omitted this fact. This overt omission and the mention of the armament factories highlight the East German view of the Nazi regime as an inhumane capitalist state. The selective description of the photograph served to remind East German school children of the dangers of fascism and capitalism, rather than the dangers of anti-Semitism and racially-fuelled hatred. Thus, according to the East German view of the recent past, Nazi racism, oppression, and violence directed toward Jews and other minority groups were subsidiary to the political narrative of the universal struggle between capitalism and communism.95

Furthermore, in school textbooks Nazism was depicted as a class struggle fought between communists and the imperialist capitalists. An extract from a 1951 textbook stated:

'The fascist terror against the Jews had begun with racial persecution and ended with the murder of millions of Jewish people in extermination camps.

⁹² Fox, Stated Memory, 30-31.

⁹³ Stefan Doernberg, Herbet Rüting and Walter Schöler, *Geschichte 10: Lehrbuch für Geschichte der 10. Klasse der Oberschule* (East Berlin: 1960): 11.

⁹⁴ Doernberg, Rüting and Schöler, *Geschichte*, 11.

⁹⁵ Daniela Weiner, 'Tendentious Texts: Holocaust Representations and Nation-Rebuilding in East German, Italian, and West German Schoolbooks, 1949–1989,' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2018): 350.

From 9.5 million Jews in Europe, about 5 million were murdered. Nazi racial persecution had an even more horrible effect on the Slavic peoples, on Poland and above all on the Soviet Union.'96

The SED-endorsed text does not shy away from mentioning the number of Jews killed in the concentration camps, which the Austrian texts tended to avoid. However, these deaths are not addressed as a crime for which the East Germans needed to feel responsible. Instead, they are portrayed as the atrocities of the fascists, not of the Germans. This ideological distinction was an excuse to avoid responsibility for the events under the Nazi regime.

The East German national identity was solidified through exposing, and thereby criticising, the dangerous continuities from the Nazi past in West Germany's democratic and capitalist state whilst simultaneously avoiding the fact that their population was part of the Third Reich and many were active supporters of Nazism.⁹⁷ To further this aim, the SED needed a narrative that depicted resistance to the Nazi regime. In school books, resistance to fascism was said to be widespread and primarily concentrated within the working class.⁹⁸ Götz Aly traced the rise of Nazism through its ability to create a 'racist-totalitarian welfare state,' which conceived of racial conflict as the antidote to class conflict with the promise of national and class unity for the German people.⁹⁹ During the Nazi regime, programmes such as the *Kraft durch Freude* were organised by the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* and benefited the working class. Although historians have shown that the anti-fascist myth and the over-exaggeration of resistance to Nazism were fabrications of history, the SED constructed these myths because they acted to 'displace responsibility [for Nazi atrocities] and justify the existence of East Germany.'100

Textbooks also focused on the activities of KPD members during the interwar years to represent KPD resistance to fascism. The *Lehrbuch für Geschichte der 10. Klasse* glorifies the fate of the resistance fighter Anton Saefkow. ¹⁰¹ Saefkow was the secretary of the KPD during the Weimar Republic, spent six years in Nazi labour camps, then upon his release in 1939 organised the largest communist resistance

⁹⁶ Lehrbuch, 57.

⁹⁷ Von Borries, Bodo, 'The Third Reich in German History Textbooks since 1945,' *Journal for Contemporary History* 38 (2003): 45-62.

⁹⁸ Weiner, 'Tendentious Texts,' 351.

⁹⁹ See Aly Götz, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: How the Nazis Bought the German People* (London: 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Weiner, 'Tendentious Texts,' 350.

¹⁰¹ Doernberg, Rüting, and Schöler, *Geschichte 10*, 11. On socialist heroes, see John Rodden, 'Socialist Heroes in East German Schoolbooks,' *Global Society* 45 (2009): 168-174.

group, which participated in organising the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler's life. Saefkow was sentenced to death following the plan's failure and guillotined in a Nazi prison in July 1944. The *Lehrbuch* stated: 'the murderers of Anton Saefkow and companions live...many of them wear judge's robes in West Germany today, despite their criminal activities.' This text labels West Germany's judges as 'murderers' of communist resistance fighters to demonstrate that West Germany failed to remove fascists from positions of power and amply punish them.

As the tensions of the Cold War heightened, the textbooks in East Germany became more critical of West Germany in their lessons on the Nazi past. Unlike Austrian textbooks, the East German books did not hesitate to depict and discuss wartime violence because it was better suited to their demonisation of the 'other' Germany. In 1963 a *Lehrbuch* stated:

'The Nazis raised this false doctrine into law. Those were the so-called Nuremberg Laws, for which Adenauer's current Secretary of State, Dr Globke, wrote the interpretative commentary. Under the protection of him and other famous anti-Semites, outrages against Jews are increasingly numerous today in West Germany, where the same fascist monster is coming back to life.'103

Historians acknowledge that East Germany implemented denazification more successfully than its western counterpart. ¹⁰⁴ It was known that former West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had numerous former Nazis on his staff. ¹⁰⁵ In East Germany more Nazis were put on trial than in West Germany, with *c.* 12,890 in the GDR convicted opposed to *c.* 6,600 in West Germany. ¹⁰⁶ In the West, 140,000 people were investigated and only 14,000 were put on trial. ¹⁰⁷ By exposing that former Nazi Party members, who had fought against KPD members in the Weimar Republic, were in judicial roles in the FRG, the SED-endorsed textbooks attempted to portray West Germany as the continuation of the Nazi regime, 'where the same fascist monster is

¹⁰² Doernberg, Rüting and Schöler, Geschichte 10, 66.

¹⁰³ As quoted in Fox, *Stated Memory*, 246.

¹⁰⁴ Norbert Frei, Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration (New York: 2002) & P. Reichel, Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute (Munich: 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Fulbrook, 'Reckonings,' lecture on 5 February 2020. In a similar manner to the Soviets' Proclamation 201, the U.S. also allowed party members to be reintegrated and rehabilitated into their former professions as doctors, teachers, and lawyers. The category of 'perpetrator' was narrowed down to the brutal and sadistic Nazis who held high positions of power within the Nazi party, as the U.S. prioritised their new enemy, the communists.

¹⁰⁶ Fulbrook, 'Reckonings,' lecture on 5 February 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

coming back to life.' These textbooks are a product of Cold War competition and anxieties. Consequently, responsibility for the Nazi past was ignored and the narrative is conflated with, and obscured by, a Marxist-Leninist ideology, anti-capitalist sentiment, and the myth of anti-fascism.

Concluding Remarks

The 1986 Waldheim Controversy and the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 were both turning points in Austria and East Germany's process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and represent the end of myth construction and promotion. Both nations 'embraced a number of myths that made memories of the Nazi years more palatable.' However, eventually they were forced to confront the past. This occurred in East Germany primarily due to the collapse of the GDR and the official state memory towards the Holocaust and the Second World War in reunified Germany, following the western narrative. Utgaard attributes the longevity of the myths to politicians' reluctance to commence legitimate discussions of reparations. In 1989 in the face of his collapsing government, Hans Modrow endeavoured to create diplomatic relations with Israel and formally acknowledged that the GDR was also a successor state of the Third Reich, thereby admitting that they shared responsibility with the Federal Republic for Nazi crimes. Mary Fulbrook labelled this 'too little, too late.'

The Walheim Controversy was a public confrontation with Austria's Nazi past, sparked by Kurt Waldheim (a former *Wehrmacht* solider) running for the presidential election. Der Spiegel's cover on 25 January 1988 consisted of two pictures: the first was Hitler at Heldenplatz giving his victory speech following the *Anschluss* and the second was of Kurt Waldheim. On 25 February 1988 the German magazine *Stern* criticised Austria for its lack of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through publishing a cover

¹⁰⁸ Utgaard, Victim Myth, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Fulbrook, National Identity, 134.

¹¹¹ See Eli Rosenbaum and William Hoffer, *Betrayal. The Untold Story of the Kurt Waldheim Investigation and Cover-Up* (New York: 1993).; Robin Edwin Herzstein, *Waldheim: The Missing Years* (New York: 1988).; and Richard Mitten, *The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria* (Boulder: 1992).

¹¹² See Figure 3, *Der Spiegel*, 25 January 1988.

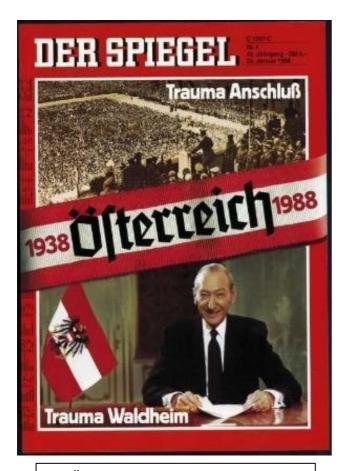
depicting an Austrian woman wearing traditional *Tracht* carrying a *Sachertorte* iced with an Austrian flag with a Nazi swastika in the centre. This cover exposed Austria for their promotion of Austrian uniqueness and identity while trying to hide their Nazi past. Austrians were outraged by their neighbours. Utgaard ventriloquised the Austrian position, how could the Germans, who had invaded Austria in 1938, now have the audacity to judge Austria? The West German press presented the FRG as possessing a moral high ground over Austria as they had not denied their Nazi past and had not fostered a spurious narrative around victimhood. This controversy evoked a rupture in Austria's 'selected remembering and forgetting of their Nazi past.'115

An examination of these myths of victimisation reveals how historical narratives are manipulated to legitimise the present. Governments rewrite their negative histories to create a 'usable past.' Such narratives are employed as vehicles to build national identity in schools and in the public sphere. Ultimately, these myths of victimisation were promoted to construct a distinctive identity, but they obscured historical facts and realities. It was not until the late 1990s that Austria began to have a more historically accurate treatment of its Nazi past, one that did not deny the central role of antisemitism in Austro-Nazism and the widespread support of the *Anschluss*. Following the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War, it was no longer necessary to promote the myth of anti-fascism, as former East Germany had joined the capitalist West. By promoting myths of victimisation both nations repudiated responsibility for mass atrocities. The consequences of these endeavours to falsify the past were that the victims of the Holocaust were deprived of reparations, denied proper and honest commemoration, and acknowledgement of their suffering by the governments of East Germany and Austria.

¹¹³ Stern, 25 February 1988.

¹¹⁴ Utgaard, *Victim Myth*, 161.

¹¹⁵ Ibid



'Österreich 1938-1988. Trauma Anschluss – Trauma Waldheim' *Der Spiegel*, no. 4, (25 January 1988), Der Spiegel Cover Page, Der Spiegel Online Archive, (1 February 2020).



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