Transnational Memory Spaces in the Making: World War II and Holocaust Remembrance in Vienna

Peter Pirker · Johannes Kramer · Mathias Lichtenwagner

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Abstract

The authors examine three recent large-scale mnemonic projects and transformation processes in Austria’s capital, Vienna: The staging of celebrations of May 8 as a “day of joy” at Heldenplatz in the city center, the subsequent reshaping of Heldenplatz, and the placing of pavement memorials dedicated to victims of the Shoah throughout the cityscape. The article is based on the sociological concepts of “synthesizing” and “spacing” as well as a recently conducted survey of all signs of remembrance referring to political violence during National Socialism in Vienna. In order to identify differences and similarities, the authors examine mnemonic actors that drive transnationalization, specific practices of producing spaces of remembrance that reach beyond national and municipal borders, as well as the effects of transnationality, normative frameworks, and esthetic means developed and used by agents of transnationalization. One of the key findings is that “transnationality” is rarely an explicitly intended objective of actors. Rather, it emerges through specific practices applied by actors located at diverse political scales in an attempt to achieve their objectives in a particular local political and spatial setting.

Keywords Memory politics · Vienna · World War II · Holocaust · Memorials

Peter Pirker
peter.pirker@univie.ac.at

Johannes Kramer
johannes.kramer@univie.ac.at

Mathias Lichtenwagner
mathias.lichtenwagner@univie.ac.at

1 Department of Government, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
2 Department of Contemporary History, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
3 Independent researcher, Vienna, Austria
Introduction

The culture of remembrance in Austria relating to the country’s National Socialist past has changed considerably over the past 20 years. By comparison with Berlin, Austria’s capital, Vienna, was for decades after 1945 a city in which the Nazi past was “remarkably quiescent,” as Mary Fulbrook rightly stated (Fulbrook 2009, p. 126). With regard to the dissemination of knowledge about the political violence of National Socialism in exhibitions and museums, her findings remain true to this day. In Vienna, there is still no place comparable to the Topography of Terror, the House of the Wannsee Conference, or the permanent exhibition at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. Nevertheless, a recently conducted survey of memorials erected in Vienna from 1945 to 2015 revealed a significant increase in their numbers in the cityscape (POREM 2018). Evolving from social and political processes in the late 1980s, when the Waldheim debate shook the Austrian postwar memory regime (Lehnguth 2013), significant changes in the public culture of memory have taken place. With respect to memorialization, hundreds of prominent and smaller monuments, plaques, street signs, and pavement stones addressing anti-Semitic violence against Jews, eugenic violence against patients of psychiatric hospitals, military violence against disobedient Wehrmacht soldiers, and in remembrance of other victims of Nazi persecution can now be found in the streets of Vienna. For scholars such as Heidemarie Uhl, this “new culture of remembrance” in Austria is intrinsically tied to a general mnemonic move away from positive, mostly heroic representations of national achievements toward more self-critical engagements with wrong-doings of the past, trickling down from the international to national, regional, and local scales (e.g., Uhl 2012; Olick 2007). The term “transnational” has been widely used to grasp processes of cross-national transfers in the articulations of memory, especially with reference to an emerging European memory (Sierp 2014).

During the last decade of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first centuries, the political integration of Europe became a powerful project of anchoring justifications of identity-building in addition to or beyond the traditional nation state (Prutsch 2015). Regrets concerning problematic national pasts were to serve as common ground for engendering a joint success story of a peaceful and transnational unification process. However, such idealistic and normative approaches quickly met with considerable opposition from center and right-wing parties, not only in Central and Eastern Europe. These actors preferred to adhere to a more traditional memory culture of national pride and the defense of sovereignty. In the case of Western Europe, the actual loss of some national sovereignty in the process of integration and a feared loss of national identity became central issues for actors defending national memory cultures. In the case of the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe, the criminalization of the communist past quickly emerged as a competing memory frame in addressing issues of national sacrifice and liberation (similar to those of Western European postwar national memories with respect to German occupation) and as an alternative to the politics of regret favored by Western European political elites (Mark 2010; Littoz-Monnet 2012; Neumayer 2015; Uhl 2016a).

This article traces the ways in which transnational memories have been manifested in public spaces in Vienna since 1995. Specifically, we will examine three large-scale mnemonic projects. First, we will discuss memory conflicts on May 8 with a focus on how opposing actors put forward different perceptions of the surrender of the German Wehrmacht and the victory of the Allies at specific sites in the city by invoking transnational histories embedded in or relating alternative transnational memories to those sites. Second, we will look into the
reshaping of Heldenplatz (Heroes’ Square) in the city center and the adjacent Austrian Heroes’ Monument, a process that evolved from the preceding conflict on May 8 and dealt with the challenge of overcoming both an outdated postwar national memory culture and a revisionist transnational pan-German vision of the past. Third, we will address the placing of pavement memorials throughout the cityscape of Vienna since 2005. By investigating their social and spatial practices, we will argue that new remembrance associations generate territorially unbound social spaces of remembrance, which are related both to a common sense of belonging to a specific local environment and universally to humanity.

As Karen Till rightly argued, “places of memory are not simply imposed onto an empty landscape” (Till 2003, p. 295). Rather, we have to acknowledge that different parts of society “negotiate understandings of the past (and of social identity) at multiple scales through place” (ibid.). In addition, Yvonne Whelan made the point that a city’s memorial landscape represents “more than the impress of state power or elite ideologies,” rather embodying “many interwoven layers of power and overlaps with issues of race, gender, class and local identity politics” (Whelan 2005, p. 168). Thus, we understand public spaces as processual and relational social spaces and, in doing so, we proceed according to an action-oriented conception of space that can register the multidimensional activities of diverse actors involved in and engaged with processes of memorialization in public spaces (Von Seggern and Werner 2008, p. 39). To begin with, we will discuss the concept of analyzing space-making through social practices of “spacing” and “synthesizing” for our purpose of tracing transnational agency in urban memorialization processes. Drawing on the theoretical considerations of sociologist Martina Löw, we argue that two interacting social processes generate spaces. While (1) “synthesizing” refers to peoples’ ability to actively link things and people by their capacities of perceiving, imagining, and remembering, (2) “spacing” suggests that such linking often implies the placing of people and goods in relation to one another within a specific physical environment. Positioning symbolic markers such as memorials and performing memories in public space can indicate such relations between people and goods. Spacing then refers to the performance of erecting, building and positioning symbolic markers, as well as staging demonstrations, commemorations, or celebrations in relation to other places (Löw 2001, p. 158, p. 178; Digan 2014).

Spacing is not necessarily bound to specific geographical scopes or “containers,” such as the cityscape or the nation state (Agnew 2011; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Erll 2011). In examining the localization of memorials and the performance of memory in the cityscape of Vienna, we conceptualize spaces of remembrance not only as physical. They are social and mental spaces, as well, and are not confined by the political boundaries of their location. Shared “senses of belonging” (Agnew 2011, p. 24) can connect actors and sites regardless of their place of residence or location. Taking up the challenge of leaving “methodological nationalism” behind (De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Erll 2011; Sierp and Wüstemberg 2015), we trace places of remembrance located in Vienna and the creation of spaces of remembrance, some of which may extend across and beyond the city and nation scales or may be multiscale by virtue of their making and meaning. The decisive point for our analysis of making transnational memory spaces is that actors locate memorials and stage memorial events locally. Yet in synthesizing and spacing, they reach out and refer to people, historical incidents, or mnemonic activities in other than the political entity within which they live or act. In conclusion, while the place of the urban memorial landscape we refer to is Vienna, the arenas of social activities related to the deliberation and making of that landscape in Vienna exceed municipal and national borders. Our aim is to identify differences and similarities of
transnational spacing related to the cityscape of Vienna. As the first two cases will show, transnationality may not necessarily be an intended aim or always be effectively realized in the shaping of sites. Instead, transnationalization may appear as a strategy applied by actors to alter power relations in domestic disputes. Alternatively, established forms of transnational policy transfer, as the third case will demonstrate, improve local actors’ agency to generate transnational spaces of remembrance. Thus, we will investigate the mnemonic actors and institutions that drive transnationalization; the specific practices of localizing spaces of remembrance that reach beyond municipal and national borders; the effects of transnationality in the respective processes; and the specific normative frameworks and esthetic means that the respective agents of transnationalization have developed and used. Finally, we will draw conclusions on the political implications of transnational spacing and synthesizing, above all concerning whether such practices have helped agents of memorialization to realize their respective aims and where the new boundaries of transnational mnemonic transfers have emerged.

**Staging May 8 as a Day of Liberation and Joy**

The surrender of the Wehrmacht on May 8, 1945 as an occasion for remembrance had scant significance in Austria’s official culture of commemoration until 2012 (Uhl 2015). The only exception was on the first anniversary in 1946, when this “Liberation Day” was celebrated in all Austrian provinces with parades of the Allied armies. In Vienna, the Austrian government, Parliament, and the Allied military authorities also staged ceremonies. They culminated in a parade of Allied troops to Schwarzenbergplatz, where the residence of the Allied Commission of Austria was located and the Soviet forces together with Austrian officials had inaugurated the huge “Heroes’ Monument of the Red Army” in August of 1945 (Marschik 2005, Tabor 2005). In the period following the achievement of full national sovereignty in 1955 until the country’s accession to the European Union (EU) in 1995, May 8 remained entirely in the shadow of April 27, the anniversary of Austria’s Declaration of Independence; of May 15, the day of the signing of the State Treaty in 1955; and of October 26, the day of the proclamation of Austria’s neutrality, also in 1955. On each of these anniversaries, the Austrian governments paid tribute to the country’s achievements and sacrifices made since the end of the war. As Austria remained a deeply Catholic country, All Souls’ Day on November 2 became the most important day for World War II (WWII) remembrance. Since 1955, when Austria re-established an army, official commemorations for Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers killed in action took place at the Heroes’ Monument in the Burgtor (Castle Gate) on Heldenplatz.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, large state ceremonies were held in Paris, London, Warsaw, Moscow, Berlin, and other cities, while the Austrian federal government contented itself with a brief special session of the Council of Ministers and with laying wreaths for the Austrian “victims of war and National Socialism” at the Heroes’ Monument. At the municipal level, however, the City of Vienna marked the day for the first time with a gesture of mourning for the victims of the Holocaust. The municipal authorities renamed a fallow stretch of land at the former Aspang railway station in the municipal district of Landstrasse, from where the Nazi regime had deported approximately 50,000 Viennese Jews to extermination camps, “Platz der Opfer der Deportation” (Square of the Victims of Deportation). May 8 was consciously chosen for the ceremony, as it was regarded the international official date of death for victims of the Shoah, whose fate had not been clarified (Scheidl 1995). At the same time, in a revival of a long-faded perception of May 8, what remained of the Communist Party (KPÖ) staged a demonstration in honor of the Red Army at the Soviet
War Memorial on Schwarzenbergplatz. Separately, radical left-wing groups that evening announced a “Rave against Fascism” on the same square, in order to provocatively celebrate the “unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany and Austria” (Raver gegen Rechts 1995).

Both events at Schwarzenbergplatz remained marginal counterpoints to the large-scale “Festival of Freedom” that had taken place on April 27 at Heldenplatz, organized by prominent journalists and intellectuals with the support of the federal government to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Politically, the festival was a kind of patriotic defense of the achievements of the Second Republic against the successful right-wing populist and xenophobic mobilization of the electorate by the Freedom Party (FPÖ) under Jörg Haider who called for a “Third Republic.” The FPÖ was the successor party of the Pan-German nationalist political camp of the 1920s and 1930s, which had incubated the National Socialist German Workers’ Party in Austria. Since his rise to prominence in the late 1980s, Haider reanimated this tradition within his party and staged himself as the defender of what he called the “war generation” (Pelinka 2005).

Remarkably, it was neither a memorial year nor politicians or intellectuals that generated controversies surrounding the meaning of May 8. Right-wing Pan-German nationalist academic fraternities under the “Wiener Korporationsring” (WKR) umbrella organization, which formed the ideological and intellectual core of the FPÖ, provided the basic structure of the conflict. One year after the large Europe-wide memorial events on May 8, 1995 and following a ban from the University of Vienna, the fraternities chose the Heroes’ Monument and May 8 as the location and date, respectively, for a mourning ceremony in memory of fallen Wehrmacht soldiers, initially without media publicity (Weidinger 2014). In 2000, the FPÖ entered into a governing coalition with the conservative People’s Party (ÖVP), which met with strong protest and sanctions by the other 14 EU member states (Seidendorf 2005). However, it was not until April 2002 that the fraternities’ mourning ritual attracted critical attention. The Social Democratic (SPÖ) municipal government of Vienna had invited the German exhibition “Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944” (Crimes of the Wehrmacht: Dimensions of the War of Annihilation 1941–1944) to be displayed in Vienna. Neo-Nazis seized the chance to protest on Heldenplatz against the exhibition and were countered by antifascist groups on the adjacent Ringstrasse.

When the fraternities then announced their annual commemoration on May 8, the SPÖ, the Green party, a diverse range of actors from civil society including the Vienna Jewish community organization (IKG), students associations, and antifascist groups for the first time demanded that May 8 be celebrated as a day of liberation and announced rallies at Heldenplatz, as well. The opposing demands were met by police authorities with a ban on all demonstrations at Heldenplatz. While the WKR, supported by FPÖ politicians, gathered on an adjacent square within the Hofburg, the former imperial palace, their counterparts celebrated festivals for “tolerance and democracy” and “liberation” at several places in the inner city, including Judenplatz, the location of the Memorial to the Austrian Victims of the Shoah, and Schwarzenbergplatz, the location of the Soviet War Memorial. The media spoke of a “separated city” (Pink 2002).

Against this background, one might have expected that the dispute over May 8 would reach a climax in the 2005 commemorative year, similarly to 1985 in Germany. Quite the opposite was the case. An internal crisis of the FPÖ that resulted in a party split benefited the strategy of Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel to avoid controversies on May 8. He centered the government’s remembrance schedule almost entirely on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Austrian State Treaty with a strong emphasis on Austrian suffering and sacrifices until 1955 (Wegan 2007).
With the FPÖ out of government, the conflict lost much of its edge. The new grand coalition made no efforts to reclaim May 8 during the following years, for example, in the commemorative year of 2008. The conflict began to pick up again in 2011, when the FPÖ, now led by Heinz-Christian Strache, had regained electoral strength through massive anti-immigration and anti-EU campaigns (Luther 2009). In the following year, the authorities permitted for the first time a close counter-demonstration organized by the newly founded NGO “Jetzt Zeichen Setzen” (Setting an Example Now) and supported by the SPÖ/Green Viennese city government, survivors’ organizations, the IKG, Catholic groups, and human rights organizations. At the same time, the federal government launched an official ceremony in the chancellery situated at the adjacent Ballhausplatz to celebrate the “day of liberation.” It was the first such ceremony since 1946. However, the face-to-face confrontation at Heldenplatz with heavily armed police forces produced an image of serious political conflict and deep polarization, which governing politicians on both the municipal and federal levels wished to avoid for the future, since they themselves were held responsible by critics for continuing to tolerate the WKKR ritual at Heldenplatz (e.g., Zeilinger 2012).

Taking up a proposal by the “Mauthausen Committee” (the successor organization of the Mauthausen concentration camp survivors committee, MKÖ) and the IKG, the federal and municipal governments decided to occupy the entire Heldenplatz on May 8, 2013 by launching a huge cultural and political event called “Fest der Freude” (Festival of Joy). Its major attraction was and (continues to be) a free concert by the Vienna Symphony, known as “Vienna’s cultural ambassador.” Speeches were held by Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ), Vice-Chancellor Michael Spindelegger (ÖVP), leading figures of the SPÖ/Green Viennese municipal coalition, as well as Holocaust survivors and resistance fighters. The ambassadors of the USA, UK, France, and Russia relayed messages. With some 10,000 people taking part in 2013, all those involved portrayed the Festival of Joy as a huge success and an important step in establishing May 8 in Austria as a “historical day of rejoicing” (Rathauskorrespondenz 2013).

We now turn to analyzing this history of commemorating May 8 in terms of practices of synthesizing. The liberation ceremonies in 1945 and 1946 were shaped by the strategy of the Austrian government to represent the country as a liberated victim of Nazi Germany and to participate in the victory celebrations of the Allies. In contrast to this initial linking up with the Allies, official commemoration ceremonies during the Cold War took a different direction. They were not primarily characterized by mourning for Wehrmacht soldiers as victims of Nazi Germany, as they had been previously presented to the Allies in the Declaration of Independence. Rather, the Republic paid tribute to the fulfillment of duty on the part of Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers and their commitment to the “homeland,” a widely used term that aimed at neutralizing the inherent contradiction of their fight for Nazi Germany (Perz 2005). As Wehrmacht veterans also made up the officer corps of the Austrian army, May 8, a day of surrender and defeat in their perception, could not be made part of the national politics of memory. A double disentanglement from transnational relations took place: Narratives of liberation were transferred from the end of WWII in 1945 to the end of the Allied occupation in 1955, which separated Austria from the Allies. At the same time, soldierly sacrifice was to be dissociated from the German Wehrmacht and transferred into an exemplary patriotic behavior for the recruits of the new Austrian army.

Although Austrian politicians since the Waldheim affair had conceded co-responsibility of Austrians for Nazi crimes, the honorable recognition of Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers remained an integral part of state ceremonies in the 1995 commemoration year. By contrast, the left-
wing groups that celebrated May 8 on Schwarzenbergplatz in front of the Soviet War Memorial associated themselves thoroughly with May 8 celebrations outside Austria. They argued that for many Austrians, veterans’ organizations, active Nazis, but also parts of the military, May 8 was essentially still a day of defeat. In order to emphasize their criticism on the domestic scale, they honored the military efforts of the Allied armies. Symbolically, waving Allied and Israeli flags remained a constant feature of their protest against both national memory politics and pan-German commemorations. On the other end of the political spectrum, the WKR countered any criticism of German criminal warfare, as well as the official delineation of Austrian soldiers from the German Wehrmacht, by publicly reenacting pan-German nationalism in their mourning ceremonies in front of the Heroes’ Monument.

During the government coalition of the ÖVP and the FPÖ/Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ; 2000–2006), politicians from the ÖVP and the SPÖ related May 8 very differently to Austrian history and the European perceptions of the date. Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel (ÖVP) reinforced the Austrian tradition of instead commemorating Independence Day, April 27, which he termed a “true day of joy” (“Politiker rufen zu Gewaltverzicht auf” 2002), thus implying that May 8 somehow lacked this quality. The only reference to the supranational level he made was an appeal to the conflicting parties “not to produce a distorted picture of Austria.” By contrast, the Mayor of Vienna, Michael Häupl (SPÖ), rejected the portrayal of May 8 as a day of mourning and designated it a “day of joy for our country.” He wished to present a different image of Vienna to the world than that of demonstrating right-wing extremists (Rathauskorrespondenz 2002). However, adopting opposing positions on May 8, both argued within a national historical frame and referred to the international scale mainly with concern for the country’s and the city’s international reputation. Still, the strategies were different. Schüssel tried to prevent drawing international attention to the conflict, because he worried that it might damage the international appreciation for his governments’ policy of restitution of looted Jewish property and compensation of forced laborers. Häupl, by contrast, initiated a counter-demonstration to attract international attention for activities against right-wing extremism.

Apart from these one-sided strategies of avoiding and gaining supranational attention, and although the fault lines of conflict ran between domestic political forces on federal and municipal scales and within local civil society, the conflicting narratives were also linked to European politics. Two opposing versions of transnationality emerged: While Social Democrats and the Green Party promoted the Western European policy of placing and maintaining the Holocaust in the center of politics of memory, the WKR and FPÖ politicians adopted both the new Central and Eastern European narratives focusing on Communist suppression and a revisionist German nationalist narrative focusing on victims of Allied bombings and expulsions. The latter kind of transnational synthesizing of ethnic German suffering and heroic fulfillment of the German soldiers’ duty was the main feature of the last prominent FPÖ speaker at the fraternities’ ritual at Heldenplatz in 2011 (“Wirbel um Strache-Rede, die nicht stattfand,” 2011).

Unlike during the dispute in the mid-2000s, the last phase of the conflict was directly shaped by general political developments on the European level. Now, the main point of reference in statements on May 8 by governing politicians was the multifaceted institutional crisis of EU policy-making since the financial crash in 2008, which had reinforced already exceptionally pronounced Euroskepticism among the Austrian population (Plasser and Seeber 2011). Thus, it is questionable whether the reclaiming of May 8 by government officials can be understood simply as matching up an established European commemorative consensus (Uhl...
While it is true that official representatives of the Republic had avoided taking a clear position on this subject until 2012, an analysis of their synthesizing of May 8 points to a different entanglement. The rejection of the WKÖ ritual now served as an opportunity to take a stand against the political exploitation and reinforcement of Euroskepticism by the FPÖ through dramatic reminders of the historical achievements of the European unification process. This strategy was reminiscent of the grand coalition’s defense of the achievements of the Second Republic against Haider’s FPÖ, whereas it now was the EU that was to be defended against the rise of right-wing extremism. In the first state ceremony on May 8 under the banner of “Umbruch—Aufbruch—Europa” (Change—New Beginning—Europe), leading politicians directly addressed the Euroskeptics: “Less Europe is not the solution, but more European cooperation,” said Chancellor Werner Faymann (SPÖ), while Vice-Chancellor Michael Spindelegger (ÖVP) recalled the Schuman declaration of May 9, 1950, citing this as the hour of birth of the EU (“Wir brauchen kein ewig gestriges Gedankengut,” 2012). In subsequent years, the defense and promotion of the EU remained a constant feature of political speeches on May 8 at Heldentplatz. The rendition of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” the EU anthem, at the closing of the festival was a powerful symbolic and positive reference to European integration. The organizers’ mission statement had a clear European dimension, too, as it referred to the defeat of the National Socialist regime and the criminal war of aggression and annihilation in Europe, in which numerous Austrians had willingly participated (MKÖ 2013).

A main character of synthesizing local or national perceptions of May 8 with perceptions outside of Austria was its lopsidedness. Actors from outside Austria were rarely involved in the transfer of meanings or took part in the controversy. The observation suggests that transnationality was an effect of domestic actors’ strategies to foster their positions by adopting convenient narratives from elsewhere rather than an explicit objective to generate transnational memories.

We will now turn to the opposing strategies of spacing mnemonic actors applied to publicly synthesize their positions in the domestic memory conflict over May 8 with supranational narratives. Up to the first climax of the conflict in 2002, mnemonic actors had staged their demonstrations at three different sites: the original memorial site of European liberation in Vienna, Schwarzenbergplatz with its monumental Soviet War Memorial, the site of the former Aspang deportation station, and Heldentplatz. When left-wing antifascist groups staged their celebrations of liberation at Schwarzenbergplatz in 1995, they did so in order to restore the original transnational mnemonic place-making. In popular perception, the Memorial had barely gained the meaning of a liberation monument but very soon figured as the “Russians’ Memorial” (“Russendenkmal”). Thus, since the inauguration ceremony in August 1945, and the first and only celebration of liberation on May 8, 1946, the sacrifice of Soviet soldiers has been gradually replaced by rather negative attributions as a symbol of Soviet occupation. In addition, the reshaping of the square in the 1960s shifted the Memorial from the center to the background of visual perception (Marschik 2005). In 1986, the Soviet Union added an inscription explicitly stating that the Memorial was dedicated to Soviet soldiers who had been killed in action for the liberation of Austria from fascism. The late dedication may be interpreted as a reminder to Austrians of the original meaning and a countermeasure to its marginalization since the 1950s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the FPÖ even called for the removal of the Memorial, which was ruled out by the fact that Austria is obliged by the 1955 State Treaty to maintain Allied memorials and war graves. Even though the Memorial celebrated the liberation of Austria and certified the country’s innocence (Tabor 2005), Austrian politicians avoided taking part in gatherings of Red Army veterans at
Schwarzenbergplatz, for example, on the day of Viennese liberation in April 1995. Thus, left-wing groups chose the place to unpack the suppressed narrative of European liberation and reconnect it with Allied May 8 celebrations in Europe as a spatial counter-strategy to the federal government’s ceremony of laying wreaths at the Heroes’ Monument on Heldenplatz.

By contrast, the municipal Viennese authorities together with the IKG celebrated May 8 neither as a day of joy nor as a day in memory of patriotic resistance fighters and Austrian soldiers. In a joint ceremony at the site of the former Aspang deportation station, they commemorated the victims of the Shoah. By naming the abandoned site “Platz der Opfer der Deportation,” the City Council reinforced its commitment to place the Holocaust in the center of WWII memory. Some months earlier, Viennese mayor Michael Häupl had already announced the erection of a Shoah Memorial at Judenplatz. In 2002, at the first climax of the conflict over May 8, the City Council chose Judenplatz with the established Shoah Memorial as the stage for opposing the right-wing fraternities’ mourning celebrations for German war victims at Heldenplatz.

However, both spatial strategies of synthesizing local May 8 commemorations with transnational memories on liberation and the Holocaust were overdetermined by the spatial strategy of the WKR to place their mourning ritual at the Heroes’ Monument. First, by countering the left-wing transnational celebrations at the Soviet War Memorial of the year before, it set the scene for the transformation of an internal affair into a public conflict. Second, the WKR made the same choice as the federal government on May 8 the year before. However, the decisive trigger for the dynamics of the conflict was the different transnational synthesizing of the memorial: the WKR revived the officially suppressed yet inherent pan-German meaning of the Heroes’ Monument. While the rallies at Schwarzenbergplatz, the Square of the Victims of the Deportation, and Judenplatz were used to stage liberal types of transnationality, albeit failing to lead to a transnational reshaping of the design of the sites, the spatial choice of the WKR brought up a fierce dispute surrounding sovereignty over Heldenplatz and the historical layers of this place which were to be remembered in a positive or negative way: Pan-German “national unity,” Austrian independence and sovereignty, or European liberation and integration. Thus, the escalation of the conflict in 2012 also advanced claims for a thorough screening and subsequent transformation of the Heroes’ Monument from military-heroic national memory into civic transnational European memory, as discussed in the next section.

**Ruling Out the Wehrmacht: the Transformation of the Austrian Heroes’ Monument**

Some short remarks are necessary here on the history of the Heroes’ Monument, which is actually portrayed on the Austrian Ministry of Defense webpage as the “only state memorial site for the fallen soldiers of both world wars and the victims of National Socialism.” The Burgtor, located between Heldenplatz and the Ringstraße, was erected by the Habsburg Empire to commemorate its final victory during the Napoleonic wars. Originally, it was primarily characterized by the attempt to integrate previous armed encounters and fallen soldiers into the military narratives of new political orders and conditions during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 1934, the Austrofascist regime had converted one part into the so-called Heroes’ Monument to honor the fallen soldiers of WWI. When the Nazis took power in Austria in 1938, they continued to use this place as a memorial site. Significantly, the new Republic of Austria and its democratic governments also continued to use it after 1945 to commemorate the fallen Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers of WWII. The Austrian army and its
chaplaincy also found the place suitable to commemorate its soldiers who had died in the line of duty since 1955. The only major and exceptional innovation in the first decades after the war was the installation in 1965 of a “Weiheraum” (Memorial Room; literally a “space/room of consecration”) for the “Victims of the Fight for Austria’s Freedom” in the opposite wing of the Burgtor. However, this update must be regarded as the manifestation of a memory regime by then aiming for pacification and parity, and not solely as opposition to the dominant Wehrmacht-friendly commemorative practices. Yet within the framework of honoring sacrifice, both memorials in the Burgtor are typical examples of ideal male heroic representations of the past in public space. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense, directed by the FPÖ, refurbished the place and even enforced the heroic design of the crypt by engraving the motto “In Erfüllung ihres Auftrages ließen sie ihr Leben” (They lost their lives carrying out their assignment) in large letters in the ceiling of the entrance hall.

Though critics had pointed to the problematic interior and the official state ceremonies since the mid 1980s, it was not until 2012 that the Ministry of Defense came under strong pressure to reconsider the site. In 2012, the WKR, who also staged the controversial May 8 rituals in front of the crypt, celebrated its annual ball in the Hofburg on January 27—International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In protest of the ball, which was characterized by critics as a venue of right-wing extremists from all over Europe, the antifascist “Jetzt Zeichen Setzen” platform staged the first memorialization of International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Austria in the Heroes’ Monument memorial room for the resistance fighters. On this occasion, the IKG demanded to have the victims of anti-Semitic persecution integrated in the dedication of the memorial room. The most decisive turn in placing demands for a general reshaping of the Heroes’ Monument on the political agenda occurred a few weeks later, when Green Party Member of Parliament Harald Walser discovered the name of war criminal and Sobibor extermination camp guard Josef Vallaster in the books of honor for dead soldiers stored in the crypt (Echternkamp 2016). Consequently, Minister of Defense Norbert Darabos (SPÖ) ordered the excavation of the main figural object in the crypt, the sculpture of a dead soldier, which confirmed unverified rumors that artist Wilhelm Frass had in 1934 hidden a message underneath the soldier expressing praise for National Socialism and the idea of Austria’s annexation to Germany. Frass himself had publicly boasted about his hidden message in the Nazi newspaper Völkischer Beobachter in 1938. Thus, the discovery of the message actually did not come as much of a surprise. A second, hitherto unknown hidden message written by Frass’ assistant Alfons Riedl contained a pacifist counter-message (Binder 2014). However, Frass’ message ultimately disqualified the Heroes’ Monument as an official place of remembrance, revealing the problematic practices of war commemoration in Austria after 1945 in such a drastic way that hardly any politician could argue against a fundamental transformation of the place (Bonavida 2012).

Reacting to public pressure, the Minister of Defense decided in 2013 to commission the scholarly community with considerations regarding any further use of the provisionally closed memorial. The decision for a transformation was made top-down, with no further deliberation process either in the legislative bodies of the Republic or through closely involving traditional stakeholders, such as officers’ associations, veterans’ associations, or the military vicariate. Within the military camp, the Defense Minister’s decision was met with much reluctance, yet in “soldierly” fashion, these actors acquiesced without open opposition. The Defense Minister appointed an external advisory board consisting of national and international experts, including Aleida Assmann, Jörg Echternkamp, Jay Winter, Oliver Rathkolb, and Heidemarie Uhl. Outsourcing the problem to renowned experts certainly satisfied domestic criticism while
exemplifying the aim of finding a solution according to the latest state of the art on international levels. The board’s first recommendation was to “musealize” the memorial in order to make visible “the fault lines of Austrian history” and to separate mnemonic rituals of the Austrian army and the heads of the Republic from the Heroes’ Monument by erecting a new memorial to the soldiers and members of the executive who had died in the line of duty since 1945 (Scientific Advisory Committee 2014).

Although two preliminary measures were implemented, namely the deconsecration of the Memorial and the reallocation of the memorial plaque of the Austrian army to the façade of the Burgtor, the federal government buried the transformation project in March 2015 by integrating it into a newly launched project of establishing a museum of modern Austrian history on Heldenplatz. When the museum project was downsized considerably 2 years later following personnel changes in governmental departments, the Heroes’ Monument project turned from a promising project of reconfiguring a national memorial based on transnational knowledge exchange into a politically evaded place, a void, or as Heidemarie Uhl put it, a place “no one feels responsible for […] anymore” (Weiss and Weißensteiner 2016).

Regarding the strategies and practices of what we termed synthesizing, it seems noteworthy that this process was characterized and initiated by the exclusion of undesired users and undesired transnational practices of remembrance. As argued above, it was the usurpation of the crypt of the Heroes’ Monument and Heldenplatz by pan-German fraternities that ultimately placed the topic on the political agenda and triggered coalitions of diverse actors with shared interests in the policy field. In a broader framework, this process was the result of a paradigm shift that made the commemoration of national sacrifice and heroism with regard to the Wehrmacht and WWII appear outdated. While the process was clearly initiated by a local political conflict between antagonistic actors, it was acted upon because the practices and signatures associated with the place no longer corresponded to international or, more precisely, Western European standards. Instead, the new transformation synthesized the place with historical incidents and people hitherto unrepresented. It aimed at replacing the promotion of supposedly eternal and universal patriotic military values with a dissemination of historical knowledge on war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht and the SS. Placing victims of persecution in the foreground, the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) displayed two temporary exhibitions that focused on (1) the intensification of political and military violence during the last stage of the war (“41 Tage. Kriegsende 1945—Verdichtung der Gewalt” [41 Days. The End of the War in 1945—Aggregation of Violence]) and (2) on the locations in Vienna where Jews were interned before their deportation (“Letzte Orte vor der Deportation”).

Esthetically, the attempt to delete unwanted linkages and perceptions was epitomized by an intervention of artist Victoria Coeln. She displayed a light installation at the Burgtor in 2014, which was named after Nobel Peace Prize winner and pacifist Bertha von Suttner and also pointed to the male dominance of the mnemonic texture of the site. According to the artist, the installation aimed to “simply neutralize the place for a certain period of time” and open up space for new interpretations, debates, and questions (“Chromotopia,” 2014). The objective of the expert commission to overcome the national and heroic military sense-making of the place in favor of a post-national, post-heroic, and civic memory of “Europeanization” was especially emphasized in Coeln’s second light projection, “Dystopia Eutopia,” from May 3 to June 13, 2016. The impetus for her artwork was the question formulated by Heidemarie Uhl: How can Europe’s utopian potential, the vision of an open, democratic, and just social order, be reactivated as a resource for an atmosphere of new beginnings? Referring to the messages discovered under the soldier sculpture, Coeln projected raster patterns and barbed wire as symbols of the simultaneity of utopia and dystopia, of expanding space and drawing borders in
the imperial architecture of the Burgtor. Coeln’s answer was: through the exercise of personal political responsibility (Coeln 2016; Jesse 2016).

This aspect turns our attention to what we have termed spacing, for it is worth examining Ballhausplatz at the entrance to the government quarter. Partly parallel to and partly entangled with the contestation of the Heroes’ Monument, a new memorial took shape there under the aegis of the municipal government to counteract the texture of the Monument in a direct visual axis: the “Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz” (Memorial to the Victims of Nazi Military Justice or simply the Deserters’ Memorial). The construction of the Memorial was the physical culmination of a 15-year campaign by a group of Wehrmacht deserters and supporters from the political, civil, and academic spheres to achieve the deserters’ full legal and social rehabilitation. From the outset, the group maintained links to equivalent actors in Germany who had pushed the political and legal recognition of Wehrmacht desertion as a righteous act in their country. Alongside political advocacy, an intense exchange of knowledge took place. One result was the display of an exhibition, “‘Was damals Recht war.’ Soldaten und Zivilisten vor Gerichten der Wehrmacht” (“‘What was Right/Lawful Then.’ Soldiers and Civilians before the Courts of the Wehrmacht”), staged by the German “Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe” foundation in several Austrian cities. In 2009, Parliament finally passed a rehabilitation law by majority vote. To achieve memorialization in public space, the advocates changed the political scale. The SPÖ/Green coalition in Vienna offered much better chances for erecting a memorial than did the federal scale. The Memorial can be regarded as a late outcome of demands articulated in Germany and Austria by the anti-militaristic movements and the Green Parties ever since the late 1980s (Dräger 2017). Originally, political interest in Wehrmacht deserters in both countries developed from counter-mnemonic actions against the supremacy of Wehrmacht veterans’ organizations in WWII remembrance, as well as against both personal and cultural continuities from the Wehrmacht to the armies of the successor states.

Such conflicting entanglements certainly motivated the claims of the deserters’ camp to have the Memorial placed in the center of the city, close to the ever-contested Heldenplatz. A corner of Ballhausplatz owned by the City of Vienna (unlike Heldenplatz) offered the chance to realize these intentions. Esthetically, the X-shaped, horizontal monument, designed by German artist Olaf Nicolai, recalls early counter-monuments in Germany. In contrast to most other prominent memorials in Vienna, it is not dedicated exclusively to Austrians, as it also commemorates people convicted by the Wehrmacht military justice in occupied Europe. Transcending the narrow historical context of the rehabilitation campaign, the inscription contests the central motif of the Heroes’ Monument in a universal sense, commemorating “all those who take their own decisions, defy heteronomy, and through their independent action position themselves against the prevailing system.” At least temporarily, however, Victoria Coeln’s artistic interventions with their liberal and transnational messages as well as the exhibitions staged at the Heroes’ Monument converted the symbolical confrontation into a symbolical dialog on civic engagement beyond the national frame. In fact, a crucial difference to the controversy over May 8 in terms of transnationality was the participation of international actors and effective cross-border transfers and inputs for reshaping Heldenplatz/Ballhausplatz, which did much to challenge long-lasting national-rooted positions.

**Remembrance Plaques of Victims of Anti-Semitic Persecution**

A recently published digital map shows that until the late 1980s, there was very little remembrance of anti-Semitic violence in public space in Vienna (POREM 2018a; Uhl 2016). Mnemonic actors confined such remembrance to a few semi-public spaces, such as
the peripheral Central Cemetery (Corbett 2016) and the city’s main synagogue, both of which were almost exclusively frequented by members of the small Jewish community. We lack space here to discuss the stepwise integration of the Holocaust into Austrian memory as represented, for instance, by the Monument against Fascism and War and the Holocaust Memorial on Judenplatz (e.g., Uhl 2016).

By the late 1990s, in part due to biographical research on Jewish victims of the Holocaust, generational change, and the development of internet-based worldwide communication, demands for place-based and personal memorials in public space had increased considerably. At the same time, a number of individuals and remembrance associations failed to obtain private owners’ approval to place such plaques on the façades of buildings in order to produce collective memory on anti-Semitic violence in public space. Thus, mnemonic actors searched for new ways of achieving public memorialization. The strategy was to avoid the disapproval of or lengthy conflicts with private owners by using publicly owned space.

A crucial invention for advancing the mnemonic demands described above was the cross-border transfer and adaption of the memorial concept of “stumbling stones” created by German artist Gunter Demnig. In 1996, he installed the first stones with the names and biographical data of deported individuals in the pavements in front of their former homes and businesses in Cologne (Cook and Van Riemsdijk 2014; Apel 2013). Demnig, by his own account, was interested in placing stones in Vienna, as he had already done in at least 12 countries, but the public authorities asked him to obtain the building owners’ consent before laying stones in front of their houses, which Demnig refused to do (Conrad 2012).

However, in 2005, descendants of a Jewish family living in Israel and Vienna adopted Demnig’s idea after having failed to get approval to place a plaque in remembrance of murdered relatives on the façade. From this initial, single project, the “Steine der Erinnerung” (Stones of Remembrance) association emerged and concentrated its activities until 2008 on public spaces in the Leopoldstadt district of Vienna. In the memorial year of 2008, it found likeminded activists in three other districts (Landstrasse, Mariahilf, Josefstadt) and consequently expanded its own scope to the Innere Stadt, Alsergrund, Brigittenau, and other districts. In 2014, a similar initiative began laying plaques in sidewalks in the district of Liesing. With the exception of the project in Mariahilf, where the initiative originated directly from the district council, these remembrance associations are a new kind of mnemonic actor in Vienna, reaching beyond traditional party, community, and institutional affiliations.

We have argued elsewhere that mnemonic actors choose different types of sites at different points in time in order to produce specific places of remembrance. The remembrance associations devoted their activities almost exclusively to retracing and remembering people who had lived in their local environments until they were expelled or deported (POREM 2018b). They mostly relate people’s memory to sites where victims had their apartments, made their living, received their education, practiced cultural activities, or were detained shortly before deportation. Thus, remembering anti-Semitic violence was driven by strategies of placement or producing senses of place by attributing bonds between people and sites, which some researchers have characterized as entirely novel in terms of mnemonic actors using “authentic” places of social life and/or political violence (Johler et al. 2014).

By contrast, the data of our survey on all memorials on resistance and persecution erected in Vienna since 1945 (POREM 2018) revealed that practices of memorializing resistance in working-class districts during the first postwar years presented a structure similar to practices of remembering anti-Semitic persecution during the last two decades in other districts. Thus, the difference is not based on entirely new modes of synthesizing and spacing, but stems
instead from social, cultural, and political reasons. Socially, different initiators and changing hierarchies of those who are to be remembered in public spaces are crucial factors. Culturally and politically, the designation of the kind of public and semi-public spaces in which actors find it appropriate and acceptable to establish memorials determines where memorials are located.

Although the plaques differ in some details, many have in common that they provide the victims’ first names and surnames, for women also maiden names, the dates of birth and death, and/or references to forced emigration and survival. Many allude to the fate of entire families. The similarity to gravestones is obvious. We mentioned in the beginning of this section that the victims of the Shoah were commemorated earlier in two semi-public spaces: at the Jewish sections of Vienna’s Central Cemetery and in the city’s main synagogue. In the 1950s, the hope among the few survivors living in Vienna to receive information on missing relatives gave way to the certainty that they had disappeared in the horrors of the Shoah, and some began to mark the names of those murdered on family gravestones. This can be observed impressively at the Jewish sections of the Central Cemetery (Gates 1 and IV, Corbett 2016). On hundreds of tombstones, survivors have added the names and data of murdered relatives, often with the addition “In Memoriam.” Similarly, relatives have installed a few dozen golden memorial plaques on the walls of the main synagogue. Thus, in both cases, memory is in principle perceptible to anyone, but it has de facto been confined to places almost exclusively used by the Jewish community. As the longing for name-based commemoration of the Jewish victims in non-community public spaces failed to materialize in earlier memorials, the commemorative practice of the new remembrance associations can be interpreted as answering a decades-long desire for a visible, generally understandable and public representation of the losses caused by the Shoah.

Compared to the early personal, private, and community-based memorialization in assigned semi-public spaces, the placing of memorials on pavements has a “distinct political implication” (Stevens and Ristic 2015). Assigned as a place for everyone, the use of pavements as vehicles of remembrance of people who were discriminated against, displaced, and expelled, not only serves to commemorate those who once belonged to the city and to condemn their exclusion in a historical sense. Long-neglected forms of violence, such as the ethnic cleansing of districts and neighborhoods, systematic deprivation, and deportation—all of which constituted preludes to mass murder—are now increasingly remembered precisely where they happened, in the midst of urban society. Thus, mnemonic actors assign a meaning of restating and reclaiming civil rights that had been taken from those being remembered. They reactivate their belonging and “right to the city” in the secondary mental space of memory, anchoring this sentiment physically in the public space of the present. Unlike the early memorialization of martyrs of the resistance and the victims of the Shoah, such articulations of belonging and synthesizing abandon references to nation and class or ethnic community and family as frames of belonging, emphasizing rather the local social environment and residents’ universal rights. Thus, we could argue that initiators and agents of memorialization have generated a sort of secondary intersectional and intergenerational identity-building of belonging, both to the same local social space and universally to humanity.

In terms of spacing, the “Steine der Erinnerung” association never faced demands by city authorities to prove the consent of house owners. On the contrary, starting with the support of the urban renewal office and district authorities, the municipal council approved and subsidized—against the votes of the FPÖ—the project on a large scale, since the first “Steine der Erinnerung” caused much attention and extensive positive media coverage (E. Ben David-
Hindler, Interview, June 3, 2015). The agency of the remembrance associations derived from new institutional ties established with their activities since 2006. The associations perform the role of central nodes in networks consisting of private initiators and demanders on both the local and global scales, and public institutions on the local, municipal, and national scales, which continuously support the ongoing installation of plaques with subsidies and institutional backing. At the national level, funding comes from the “National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism” (National Fund) established by Parliament in 1995 and from the “Future Fund,” which evolved in 2006 from the “Reconciliation Fund” that had administered compensation payments for former forced laborers. The associations connect locally based mnemonic actors, including politicians, residents, teachers, unionists, and local amateur historians, with survivors and refugees of Nazi persecution and family members of those persecuted across the globe. A powerful incentive for linking up current residents with those who had lived at the same location until their displacement, and a crucial scholarly incentive for transnational memory agency, was the compilation of names of more than 60,000 murdered Austrian Jews, which the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) published in 2001. For the first time, information relating to their lives and deaths was available online and for the world to see, which was in high demand both among the victims’ relatives worldwide and local memory activists.

In order to highlight the transnational dimensions of spaces of remembrance the associations create, we take a closer look at the social and political entanglements of the activities of one such association, “Steine des Gedenkens” (Stones of Commemoration, SdG), active mainly in the Viennese district of Landstrasse.

Figure 1 illustrates the relations of the SdG to crucial collaborating actors and their respective relations to other relevant actors in a network diagram. The graph is based on data extracted from an interview with one of the main activists (G. Burda, Interview, January 20, 2015), and an analysis of the actors involved in creating 52 places of remembrance and institutional backing. First of all, it is interesting to see that the association not only benefits from transnational political initiatives fostering Holocaust remembrance on a global scale (left side of the horizontal axis), but also from a transnational political scheme that is concerned

**Fig. 1** Policy network of Steine des Gedenkens (SdG). Demand linkages (light gray edges) on local (green vertices) and global scales (red vertices). Municipal institutions (gray vertices) provide policy support (purple edges), whereas national institutions (black vertices) provide financial support (green edges). Red edges indicate institutional relations advancing policies of memory and black edges those for urban renewal policies; yellow edges show crucial links for knowledge transfer. The widths of edges in the core of the network indicate numbers of involvements.
with promoting sustainable urban development on a global scale (right side of the horizontal axis). The left side of the horizontal axis depicts the fostering of Holocaust remembrance; here, the National Fund plays the role of a crucial broker between supranational and national political bodies and the association. Since Austria signed the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and joined the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2001, the National Fund acts as the Austrian coordination office responsible for advancing the commitment to Holocaust education and the commemoration of Holocaust victims (National Fund 2018). As a funding agency, it is the main source of financial support for the SdG.

The right side of the horizontal axis depicts the benefit the SdG receives from the commitment of the City of Vienna to the Charta of European Cities and Towns toward Sustainability (Aalborg Charta), which resulted from the UN Agenda 21 action plan decided upon in Rio de Janeiro and which Austria signed in 1992. Subsequently, the City Council undertook to establish and support local Agenda 21 offices at the district level in order to involve citizens in the development of social and cultural projects in public spaces. In 2008, the initiators of the SdG constituted themselves as a working group of the local Agenda 21 office founded in their district in 2005 and benefited from its infrastructure, publication opportunities and links to political and administrative bodies on the district and municipal scale, as well as to the local community. By approving the memorialization of Holocaust victims as a subject of a citizen participation program that aims at improving local living conditions, the Agenda 21 office acts as a broker for locating globalized and Europeanized Holocaust memory based on cosmopolitan values, as represented by the Stockholm Forum and the IHRA (Levy and Sznaider 2007) in everyday life. Thus, transnational policy transfers on both Holocaust memory and urban sustainable development considerably constitute the agency of the SdG to perform a specific re-localization of de-territorialized or globalized Holocaust representations in a district of Vienna. Levy and Sznaider (2007, 28) adopted the term glocalization in order to grasp such dialectics of global and local dynamics inherent to a cosmopolitan Shoah memory.

The glocal dimension of the network is also visible on the vertical axis, which maps the initiators of plaques of remembrance. These initiators come either from the local environment or from the global scale, mostly relatives from the UK, France, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Israel, and the USA. They take part in the research by providing or complementing biographical data and narratives, co-finance the production and layering of the plates, contribute to leaflets, and participate in the opening ceremonies. Needless to say, establishing contacts and transferring knowledge between initiators and the SdG mostly relies on electronically based digital communication. At first sight, memory activism, such as that practiced by “Steine des Gedenkens” may be assessed as a strictly local phenomenon. By analyzing the entanglements of its activities, we show that the agency of this group derives from a crucial position on the intersection between transnational policy networks and local and global demands of memorialization.

Conclusions

This article analyzed three cases in which transnational memories have been manifested in the City of Vienna over the past two decades. These have in common that they arose primarily from local memory conflicts: First, a rescheduling of memorial days with the successful
invention of May 8 as a semi-official memorial day of joy; second, an interlinked yet partly interrupted transformation of a national memorial into a transnational European memory place at Heldenplatz; and third, the creation of a transnational or glocal space of remembrance based on the laying of memorial plaques for victims of the Shoah.

A comparison between the three cases revealed that the driving forces of transnationalization were different in each case. Contending civil society actors articulated opposing views on the meaning of May 8 and staged the controversy in public space by way of commemorations, demonstrations, and celebrations to such an extent that governing political parties on the federal and municipal scales were forced to take a stand. Following governmental changes, a coalition of governing parties from the federal and municipal scales and civil society actors established May 8 as a new semi-official memorial day on the political calendar. Partly entangled with the conflict of May 8, the process of reshaping the Heroes’ Monument at Heldenplatz was a top-down decision taken by politicians in power, which was met with some reluctance by traditional stakeholders. Historians and memory experts at the national and international levels that were in favor of “musealizing” national heroic representations of the past and posing questions regarding the present and future political developments in Europe replaced them as crucial actors. However, without a broader deliberation process linked to legislative bodies, the realization of their ideas depended heavily on the political agendas of the responsible political personnel. By comparison, the process of erecting the Deserters’ Memorial close to Heldenplatz was deliberated by the municipal legislative bodies and incorporated civic stakeholders who used transnational bonds for knowledge exchange. By contrast, global and local civil actors demanded individual remembrance for the victims of anti-Semitic violence in Vienna, which initially encountered restrictions related to issues of ownership and the designation of public spaces. These issues were overcome by strong advocacy on the part of newly formed remembrance associations and transnational policy networks fostering both Holocaust remembrance and urban renewal processes.

Processes of transnationalization occurred in the first case by synthesizing local forms of provocative action and protest with some actors’ already firmly accepted perceptions outside of Austria of May 8 as a day of liberation. The case showed that severe internal implications may arise when one side of a controversy engages transnationally. Another form tied in with controversial supranational European discourses of memory. Finally, it aimed at the reframing of a domestic conflict concerning visions of the past within the current political crisis of the EU and its exploitation by the political far right. Decisive activities on the part of the remembrance associations established bonds with global and local relatives of Jewish victims, engendered biographical research, and established semi-professional, formalized procedures of placing memorials in public space, all of which was strongly fostered by tools of digital communication and global-scale knowledge exchange.

With regard to transnationality, establishing May 8 within a European narrative served to delegitimize both Pan-German nationalism as a deviant form of transnationalism and the durable national memory of honoring the sacrifice of Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers. Both of these effects pertain to the process of reshaping Heldenplatz, too, though the outcome with respect to the Heroes’ Monument remains unclear for the time being. In addition, civic and political regard for hitherto dissenting memories related to disobedient soldiers generated more scrutiny of the dominance of male heroic representations of the past in the city center. The large-scale laying of pavement plaques added a layer of memorials to the cityscape that relates strongly to social life and the persecution of systematically disfranchised citizens, which detached memory from durable national frames, and which intensified personal links between mnemonic actors at local and global scales among the post-war generation.
Finally, we wish to point to some political implications of transnationalism in memory culture observed in Vienna. “Transnationality” has rarely been an explicit objective of mnemonic actors, emerging rather through specific practices applied by actors from diverse political scales to achieve their particular objectives in particular local political and spatial settings. Memorial practices of mourning by right-wing fraternities on May 8 at Heldenplatz evoked a Pan-German unity that had constituted the substance of the National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft (racial people’s community) and politics of annihilation. In doing so, they publicly broke a taboo buried underneath an Austrian nationhood carefully constructed since the 1950s through a memory culture that was built on the notion of Austrians’ sacrifices during the war and their efforts of reconstruction. Thus, they devalued the national frame of memory considerably. The political reactions to this taboo breach were manifold: downplaying, condemnation, and finally displacement by a new positive memory formula envisioning the EU as a righteous political project since the “zero hour” of 1945. Coupled with the calls to “rejoice,” this suggests that “Europeanization” was just an inverted form of negative Holocaust-related memory in a positive identification frame surrounding a post-war “success story.” Though it has reinforced the need for political parties, including the FPÖ, to rhetorically denounce the National Socialist past in public, the replacement of a national by a transnational frame has not succeeded in keeping that party away from political power or improving the image of the EU in Austria. A similar saturation of liberal interventions in favor of Europeanization became visible at Heldenplatz. Recently proposed ideas of renaming the square “Platz der Demokratie” (Square of Democracy) or “Platz der Republik” (Square of the Republic) have met with strong public disapproval (ORF, 2018). Somewhat disconnected from the rather elitist promotion of transnational memories, the activities of the remembrance associations, however, to some extent reflect a global phenomenon linked to the rise of the human rights paradigm in memory culture and the inclusion of “forgotten victims” of state violence and discrimination, which continues to flourish on the scale of glocal entanglements.

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