The Utilisation of Historically Revisionist Narratives by the FPÖ and the AfD

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SUZANNE KRISTKOIZ, APR 21 2021

The past is studied in order to help understand the present and future through an ongoing process of evaluation and re-evaluation of evidence, new-found or long-known.[i] Such development of new historical theories and interpretations, apart from offering a more comprehensive vision of the past, may also pose dangers: "historical revisionism can open the door to manipulation by regional and national political agendas and the reinterpretation of facts to suit that agenda."[ii] One recent attempt at historical revisionism was connected to World War II and crimes committed under the National Socialist regime: in 2018, Poland attempted to absolve itself from any complicity in Nazi atrocities, by instating criminal penalties on those who accused Poles of having been Nazi collaborators. This forceful rewriting of history was met with intense opposition from Holocaust survivors and their advocates, and the criminalisation of such accusations was retracted. Another dispute happened the following year, when the streaming platform Netflix depicted Poland as a unified country instead of occupied and divided during WWII. The Polish Prime Minister argued the documentary would deceive the audience into thinking, Poland had any choice in what was happening on Polish grounds under Nazi-occupation. Within days, Netflix promised to change this depiction according to the Polish Prime Minister's wishes.[iii] No matter what the context may be, such utilisation of historical revisionism to suit someone's political agenda persists everywhere.

Two counties in which this is played out interestingly are Austria and Germany. They share similar cultures, languages, and an entangled history when it comes to Nazi-collaboration and WWII, but they differ notably when it comes to how they have dealt with this history, which makes them interesting case studies to compare. With populist, right-wing parties on the rise all over Europe, their rhetoric pertaining to the WWII past is not only interesting but important to analyse and compare in order to understand the nearly simultaneous and worldwide rise of the political far right. In line with the rise of the European far right, right-wing parties in Germany and Austria have recently seen significant gains. In Germany's latest general elections in 2017, the relatively new far-right party, the*Alternative for Germany* (AfD), achieved 12.6% only four years after its official founding.[iv] The well-established far-right party of Austria, the *Freedom Party of Austria* (FPÖ), achieved even 17.2% in the country's latest general elections in 2019.[v]

The FPÖ and the AfD have both shown a distinct way of dealing with the history of WWII, using various narratives to fit their political agenda. Looking at these narratives closely, it becomes immediately apparent that the parties use very different narratives to achieve the same goal: increasing their voter basis. Therefore, when comparing the two, it may appear as though their narratives have nothing in common.

As the far right is nationalist by nature, international cooperation is extremely unlikely. Therefore, the almost simultaneous rise of the far right all over the world must either be chance or there must be other factors linking the far right. Identifying common themes in the way the FPÖ and AfD present history to their voter base, potentially means pinpointing these linking factors. This article identifies common themes in the narratives used by the FPÖ and AfD on their country's WWII history to generate support and further their political agenda. By identifying commonalities shared between the two political parties when it comes to their historical framing, a better understanding of the far right's recent rise can be achieved.

For this purpose, terminology on whose narratives are examined here has to be clarified. Broadly speaking, the far right is politically positioned to the right of the mainstream right, which consists of conservatives and liberals/libertarians.[vi] According to Mudde, being far right means to be opposed and outright hostile towards liberal democracy.[vii] Here, he points out that the far right cannot be all grouped together and offers two subdivisions: the extreme right and the radical right.[viii] While the extreme right rejects popular sovereignty and majority rule, i.e. the "essence of democracy", the radical right accepts the essence of liberal democracy but opposes essential features of it, such as minority rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers.[ix]

Research Design

This article uses qualitative methods to conduct inductive research and to address the research question: how do the different historically revisionist narratives that are used by the AfD and FPÖ resemble each other? This analysis is based primarily on the party programmes and statements made by prominent figures in the parties as documented by media outlets. Additionally, previous research conducted on the far right in Austria and Germany is used to provide established knowledge and a comprehensive background. The FPÖ in Austria and the AfD in Germany are the objects of two case studies on right-wing populist parties. These two parties have been selected based on two shared main characteristics: first, they both display an ethnic understanding of the nation and are dedicated to its defence from external threats, and second, they are populist parties as they oppose the political establishment, often demonising the 'other', i.e. immigrant population or the current government etc.[1] Since both parties are situated to the right of the mainstream, more centrist right-wing parties such as Germany's *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU) and the *Austrian People's Party* (ÖVP), the AfD and the FPÖ are classified as far-right parties. Comparability of the two is ensured by the shared history, language, and culture of Germany and Austria, the proportional electoral representation both countries use, as well as the relatively high proportion of immigrants among the countries' general populace.

One important difference affecting the comparison must be acknowledged here. Namely, the fact that the FPÖ was founded much earlier than the AfD and had therefore been a long-established and traditional conservative party by the time the AfD was founded in 2013. An argument could be made, that the FPÖ only developed into a far-right party with ties to right-wing extremism with Haider's ascension to the FPÖ's chairman in 1986, bringing it closer to the AfD's inception.[2] After all, the FPÖ has widely been seen as an example after which the AfD models itself.[3] Nevertheless, even following this view, the AfD was founded more than 20 years later. Therefore, this difference in longevity is acknowledged here and will be taken into account in the analysis.

This distinction, however, does not mean that the two parties cannot be meaningfully compared. One important factor that certainly enables an academic comparison between the FPÖ and AfD is the fact that the circumstances surrounding both parties' founding are comparable: during formatives times in the FPÖ and AfD, coalitions between conservatives and socialists in Germany and Austria resulted in anti-system sentiments the parties could exploit. Evidence suggests that unions between mainstream left and right parties form an advantageous environment for the emergence of right-wing populist parties.[x] In Austria, the socialist SPÖ and conservative ÖVP formed a grand coalition between 1986 and 1999 – the time when Haider was chairman of the FPÖ –, while in Germany, from 2005 until today, 2021, the grand coalition between the socialist SPD and the conservative CDU/CSU has been forming federal government. Therefore, it appears that the circumstances around the inception of the AfD and the biggest developments (towards the right) in the FPÖ happened due to a favouring environment, produced by a convergence between mainstream left and right parties. This shows that, despite the different inceptions of the two parties, the circumstances surrounding the rise of each party are similar and definitely comparable.

After a short discussion of the background, the case studies follow, and the comparative analysis will show how the FPÖ in Austria and the AfD in Germany utilize the past for their political gain. It will further identify how their utilisation of the past is similar and where it differs. The findings will indicate common factors that might be transferable to the political far right in the rest of Europe.

Background

The Austrian Context

In the 1943 joint four-nation declaration of the US, UK, Soviet Union, and China during the second World War, the remarks on Austria read as follows:

The governments of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States of America are agreed that Austria, the first free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression, shall be liberated from German domination. They regard the annexation imposed on Austria by Germany on March 15, 1938, as null and void. They consider themselves as in no way bound by any charges effected in Austria since that date. They declare that they wish to see re-established a free and independent Austria and thereby to open the way for the Austrian people themselves, as well as those neighboring States which will be face with similar problems, to find that political and economic security which is the only basis for lasting peace. Austria is reminded, however that she has a responsibility, which she cannot evade, for participation in the war at the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation.[xi]

Joint Four Nation Declaration, Moscow Conference, October 1943.

This declaration acknowledges two truths: first, the forced annexation of Austria by Nazi-Germany, and second, Austria's participation in WWII at the side of Nazi-Germany.

Since the end of WWII, the popular narrative in Austria regarding its role during the war has shifted. Mostly, Austria subscribed to the victim theory, leaning on the Moscow Declaration's wording of Austria as the "first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression", as demonstrated in the founding document of post-WWII Austria. This *Proclamation of the Second Republic of Austria* was published 14 days after Soviet troops had captured Vienna and describes the country as having been "helpless" against the invasion by Nazi-Germany, and the annexation as "forced."[xii] The wording of the proclamation makes it clear that Austria saw itself and wished to be seen as victim rather than perpetrator of the crimes of WWII.

Only in 1986, with Kurt Waldheim's candidature for Austria's president and the ensuing debate on his participation in WWII as an officer in Nazi-Germany's Wehrmacht, was the victim narrative challenged.[xiii] 1991 marks the first time that Austria's role in the war was officially acknowledged, by Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitzky's speech from the 8th of July – while his words are not an explicit admission of guilt, he recognizes the "good and the bad"[xiv] and the responsibility that comes with it. Since then, laws on Holocaust-denial and war-crime-minimisation have been drawn up and/or tightened, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance has since added revisionism and right-wing extremism to its focal points, among other measures to take responsibility for the past.

This act of (self-)victimisation fits perfectly with Manucci and Caramani's results on victimisation as an important aspect in the collective re-elaboration of the fascist past when it comes to right-wing populism.[xv] While the victim narrative may not be as prominent among today's Austrian society anymore, it has not been eradicated. The FPÖ in particular favours and perpetuates this narrative.

The German Context

Germany's political situation was entirely different from Austria's after the end of WWII, since there was no question of Germany's role in the war. With *Vergangenheitsbwältigung*, a way of coping with the past, Germany has since put great emphasis on maintaining the history of the NS-regime as historically accurate as possible. While the conservative, right-wing party CDU has been and still is the biggest party in Germany, parties positioned politically to the right of the CDU have not rallied much support until recently. There had even been a mantra, originated from CSU politician Strauss in 1986, proclaiming that there must never be a democratically legitimized party of political relevance situated right of the CDU/CSU. With the advent of the AfD, this mantra appears dismantled.

In the 2017 general elections the AfD was the third most-voted party in Germany, granting it a total of 94 (out of 709) seats in the Bundestag.[xvi] As political movements gain momentum, their electorates grow. An increasing number of

voters seems to find the AfD's vision for the future of the country at least preferable to those from other parties. With the AfDhaving grown to its current size, the party and its voters' influence on German politics and Germany's future is undeniable. The impact of the AfD on the German political landscape should not be underestimated. The combination of Germany's past of Nazism, fascism, and WWII, combined with the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is very unique to Germany. Against this backdrop, it is important to assess how the AfD might be using historical revisionism and how it might collide with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*

The Austrian Case Study

The Austrian Far Right

In order to find out how the Austrian far right uses the victim narrative to serve their goals, first it needs to be established who the political far right in Austria is. For practicality's sake, this study will use Mudde's definition by way of looking at Austria's political parties as opposed to the entirety of Austria's far right, which obviously expands beyond political parties. To the right of the biggest centre-right party in Austria, the ÖVP, is the FPÖ, representing just over 17% of the vote.[xvii] Some party members have expressed views that would go more into the extreme right direction, which also belongs to the far-right category. With the FPÖ actively promoting an 'Austria First' agenda in their party programme,[xviii] the party can be classified as a populist and radical right-wing.

Narrative on Austria's Role in WWII

In terms of the FPÖ's handling of Austria's WWII past in light of the insistence on policy changes based on xenophobia and ethnocentrism,[xix] the party's preferred narrative appears to be the victim narrative that was discussed earlier – or rather, a very specific version of it. When looking at the FPÖ's roots, the link to former Austrian Nazis is undeniable: the first two party leaders were former SS-officers Anton Reinthaller and Friedrich Peter, and the party was formed by former Nazis for former Nazis.[xx] Since its inception in 1956, the party has evolved away from earlier images of Austrians belonging to the community of German culture (ger. "*deutsche Kulturgemeinschaft*").[xxi] One of the most shaping figures in the FPÖ's history was Jörg Haider, who succeeded in maximising the FPÖ's electorate by fading out German nationalism and focusing on right-wing populism instead.[xxii] Today, the FPÖ is less concerned with Austria belonging to the German cultural community, and focuses more on Austria's power and independence[xxiii] with a clear 'Austria First' approach.[xxiv] Of course, as a contemporary right-wing party, this approach is not new; however, it is interesting to note this shift from the party's roots and subsequent nostalgia for belonging with Nazi-Germany, towards this nationalistic, populist view and how it relates to the victim narrative.

Since the original victim narrative of Austria having been the innocent, helpless, first victim of an overpowering Nazi-Germany does not fit very well with the FPÖ electorates' sense of nostalgia for that exact time period, the FPÖ originally did not subscribe to the victim narrative. Neither does the party engage in the debate on Austria's forced annexation versus a willing unification with Germany, by simply focusing on the aftereffects of the war. Today, the FPÖ's usage of the victim narrative consists mainly of avoiding the discussion of Austria's active part in WWII, while emphasising the victimhood of post-war Austria under an overpowering, dominating Germany.

The Victim Narrative

When it comes to the commemoration of WWII and its atrocities, the FPÖ has a history of refusing to attend memorial ceremonies, usually when they are being held for victimized groups.[xxv] Obviously, this is not an outright denial of Austria's part in the war, nor its participation in Nazi-Germany's war crimes. The FPÖ does, however, attend certain memorial ceremonies and even pushes for very specific memorials – the common theme in these FPÖ-favoured memorials is an emphasis on Austrian victims of the war. In combination with refusing to attend or condone memorials for the persecuted groups of WWII, such as Jews, homosexuals, Romani people, etc., the FPÖ clearly puts the emphasis on Austria as the most important victim.

This prioritisation of one group in the victim narrative could be clearly observed in the FPÖ's interest in the *Trümmerfrauen*-memorial. The memorial was unveiled in 2018 in Vienna on private ground since the city denied the

FPÖ, who had been pushing for this memorial as early as 1986, to build it on public city grounds.[xxvi] The Viennese government cited concern for the "correct historic lens" in its reasoning, as research showed that a large number of the women who rebuilt Vienna after the war had been former National Socialists.[xxvii] To avoid supporting an undifferentiated view on history, the city denied the request for the memorial on public grounds.

In disagreement, Heinz-Christian Strache, then vice-chancellor of the FPÖ, pointed out that women had always been victims of war, making it highly unlikely that many women took part in the deeds of the NS-regime at all.[xxviii] In line with his party's handling of Austria's WWII past, Strache highlighted Austrian victimhood while not completely denying, but most definitely minimising an active role during the war. Furthermore, by hailing the women who rebuilt Vienna after 1945 as heroines, the FPÖ was able to paint themselves in a progressive light – highlighting women's achievements – while simultaneously preserving the party's view of a strictly traditional family, wherein women are victims in need of protection.

Additionally, in terms of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, as clearly preferred by the FPÖ according to their party programme, praising the women who rebuilt Vienna is a safe strategy for the party. Before 1945, Austria had been cleansed of those groups deemed undesirable according to Nazi-ideology,[xxix] meaning those who were left to rebuild from the rubble would have mainly been surviving ethnic Austrians. Building a *Trümmerfrauen* memorial, therefore, praises only those, whose victimhood the FPÖ wishes to highlight.

Concluding, the FPÖ's victim narrative appears very specific in terms of the topics avoided or denied, and those emphasized. A selective view of the past presents an image of a victimized Austria and minimizes the risk of shedding an overly negative light on those Austrians who actively participated in Nazi-Germany's war crimes. In the minds of the FPÖ's electorate, this may result in selective amnesia when it comes to Austria's WWII history.

The German Case Study

The German Far Right

To find out how the German far right uses historical narratives, first it should be established who the German far right is. For Germany, the mainstream right is the conservative CDU, and to the right of them is the AfD as the most notable and influential party. The party falls under Mudde's definition of the radical right.[xxx] Before the AfD, the *National Democratic Party of Germany* (NPD) was the most widely known far-right party in Germany. In contrast to the AfD, however, the NPD never exceeded more than 4.3% in general elections and achieved only 0.4% in 2017.[xxxi]

The far right is an umbrella term, as it applies to both the radical and the extremist manifestations of the far right. This case study acknowledges that the far right is not just parties or movements: it "mobilizes in different types of organisations (e.g. parties, social movement organisations, subcultures) and through various types of activities (e.g. elections, demonstrations, violence)."[xxxii] It has to be mentioned here, that groups belonging to the extreme right can and have been banned in Germany while radically right-wing groups cannot.[xxxiii] An example of this is the *Flügel*, a grouping within the AfD, which classifies as extreme rather than radical right and was banned in 2020 by the German constitutional court due to its anti-democratic nature.[xxxiv]

Narrative on Germany's Role in WWII

Directly after the war, the narrative in Germany surrounding WWII was mainly based on losing the war. The Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, and other war crimes were neither mentioned nor publicly discussed until much later.[xxxv] In eastern Germany, the Third Reich was regarded as a national mistake, while in western Germany it was seen as an inexplicable moment of national weakness and an affliction with Hitler as a demon leading the nation astray.[xxxvi]

It was only in the late 1950s that substantial political changes were made in terms of rectifying the historical view of the populace: new guidelines were instated for education on history, the concept of *Volksverhetzung* – incitement of

the masses, involving hate speech and the promotion of sedition – was introduced into the criminal justice system, and memorials for the victims of WWII were installed.[xxxvii] A public discussion of the crimes of the NS-regime was growing with the public trials of Nazi criminals, such as Eichmann and the Auschwitz-process. With Willy Brandt as the new liberal chancellor in 1969, political opposition from the conservative CDU warned about the liberal concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as it would irreversibly traumatize German self-esteem.[xxxviii]

Since then, with continuous reforms in education, Germany has tried to teach pupils about the NS-regime, fascism and how it managed to take hold in the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. A recent report showed how remembrance culture is being used in schools to teach knowledge and historical consciousness to students, in addition to empathy and an ability to recognize similar patterns from history.[xxxix] The report criticized that this generally resulted in an emphasis on the responsibility of the contemporary generation without specifying how such responsibility should be taken. Moreover, the report found that the Holocaust was a central point in all curricula, but racist antisemitism was not. Many curricula also failed to recognize victimized groups other than German Jews or did not thematize the role of ordinary Germans in favour of focusing on Hitler and a few influential politicians as the main perpetrators.[xl]

Still, with these changes, Germany has made significant progress with the country's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since the end of WWII. Achieving absolute historical accuracy is impossible in practice, but Germany has made efforts to instill consciousness for the atrocities of WWII in its citizens instead of ignoring them or changing the narrative entirely.

German Patriotism and Vergangenheitsbewältigung

German patriotism is famously one of the lowest in the world – before the inception of the AfD it was already low in former West Germany and even lower in former East Germany.[xli] Like the CDU did during Brandt's term in government, the link between the violent past of WWII and Germans' self-esteem and pride in their nation is easy to spot. Through *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* the country is confronted with the crimes of the past: education on the rise of fascism and the Holocaust, memorials for victimized peoples under the NS-regime, are a constant reminder of Germany's past. Among the general public, expressions of national pride such as the national flag are quickly linked to historical scenes of Germans waving Nazi flags and prompt shame. Extremist right groups were those who waved flags before the 2006 football world cup, even though it was generally the Third Reich's flag of red, white, and black, and not the modern German flag. Until today, German patriotism and expressions of nationalism, especially the German flag, are commonly associated with the far right and Neo-Nazis rather than pride in the modern German nation.

German Shame

The AfD uses this low national pride to build a narrative of unwarranted shame forced onto modern Germans through remembrance culture on WWII and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It turns the victim narrative around, doubles it in a way, by claiming victimisation of modern Germans through the historical victimisation of millions of people by the hands of Nazi-Germany.

According to one of the most prominent political figures in the AfD, Björn Höke, Germans have lived in shame over the country's past and been bullied, by way of dealing with its own WWII past.[xlii] Notably, the general attitude towards this 'shaming for the past' does not seem directly linked with outright denial of any wrongdoing on the side of Germany when it comes to WWII. The far right does, however, equate the admission of guilt and reconditioning of society to discrediting the German nation, people, and identity.[xliii] Consequently, the past is not being denied as such, but the way of dealing with it, i.e. commemoration and admission of guilt, is presented by the AfD as unwarranted and something to be moved on from. On the topic of shaming, it has to be noted here that this rhetoric of German victimisation resembles Hitler's rhetoric on the victimisation of Germans and why there was a need for Germans to rise and fight during the Third Reich.[xliv] After losing WWI, the victorious allies imposed rules and restrictions on Germany, resulting in a prevalent feeling of hopelessness and lack of perspective among Germans. Hitler argued that Germany was being shamed unjustly and therefore did not have to abide by the victors' imposed rules.

Similar to the FPÖ's rhetoric, the AfD's rhetoric of German victimisation often includes a performatively feminist argument: the argument in itself is not actually feminist, rather it is based on "benevolent sexism and hostile sexism."[xlv] According to this argument, German women are in need of protection so they will not fall victim to men of other cultures. Sexism, racism, islamophobia, and xenophobia – all can be negated by the victim narrative with which the far right argues their case. This narrative does not point towards Germans as victims of WWII, but rather as victims of the shame put onto Germans via *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. By painting German women as being in need of protection from men of non-German cultures and combining it with the shaming of Germans for their WWII past, a narrative is created that allows the AfD to campaign for more cultural homogeneity while simultaneously perpetuating their argument against the shaming of Germans for the past. History is utilized to create a sense of victimhood amongst Germans and thereby convince them of the validity of the AfD's vision for a homogenous Germany. The narrative presents *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as pushing shame and guilt onto modern-day Germans for crimes they did not commit, painting Germans as victims who need to be freed from this oppression.

Comparative Analysis

For the case of Austria is has been established that, for a long time after WWII, it subscribed to the victim narrative conveniently painted by a statement in the Moscow declaration, the last paragraph of which was forgotten quickly. During the time when Austrians tended to think of their country as the first victim to fall to Nazi-Germany, the FPÖ rejected this narrative and instead took pride in Austria's collaborative past with the Third Reich. In the wake of the Waldheim affair in 1986, the victim narrative began to be questioned and responsibility on the side of Austria was eventually acknowledged. With the shift in the FPÖ to a nationalistic, populist party under Haider, allowances could be made regarding a negative image of Nazi-Germany's war crimes and the admission of some guilt on Austria's side.

Nowadays, still roughly 17% of the FPÖ's electorate subscribe to German nationalism,[xlvi] but the vast majority of their voters seem to follow the party's brand of populism with 'Austria First' instead of longing to re-unite with Germany. The party has become more interpretative with Austria's past, mainly by way of using the once wide-spread victim narrative. For the most part, denial of war crimes or Austria's participation in them is not what the FPÖ is accused of. However, the party's consistent highlighting of Austria's victimhood while almost completely ignoring Austria's collaboration with Nazi-Germany, skews the view of history significantly. By focusing on the hardships Austria endured after 1945 and not acknowledging Austria's role in WWII, said hardships are presented as unduly imposed upon Austria, without acknowledging its own, not insignificant, role in how those hardships came to be. This creates a false narrative of an essentially innocent Austria suffering from the effects of a war it had no influence over. Today, 17.2% of Austrian voters are willing to subscribe to this narrative the FPÖ uses to minimize, if not outright deny, the Austrian participation in WWII on the side of Nazi-Germany.[xlvii]

In the case of Germany, it can be noted that after WWII, Germany underwent a slightly delayed process of coming to terms with the war crimes committed on Germany's side. The narrative surrounding Germany's role in the war evolved from being the mere losers of the war into a nation deceived by one purely evil, devil-like figure, Hitler. Facing and acknowledging the role the general German populace and their problematic attitude played towards ethnic, sexual, and minorities in general, and Jews in particular, only really started from 1969 onwards. Since then, efforts have been made to not let history be forgotten. Instead, the route governments have taken since Brandt, is the direct and continuous confrontation with WWII and the atrocities committed through *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

This confrontation with the deeds and/or complicity of past German generations has led to a remarkably low feeling of national pride among Germans, going so far as to widely associate waving the national flag with the far right and Neo-Nazis. Symbols of Germany as a nation are generally regarded with unease, patriotism in eastern Germany even lower than in the rest of the country. According to David Art, this low pride has helped prevent the rise of the far right in Germany so far, which makes the rise of the AfD even more notable. Notably, support for the AfD is much higher in the eastern federal states of Germany, than in the western ones, suggesting a connection between low national pride and the effectiveness of the AfD's narrative on German shame.

To sum up, the AfD's shame narrative invalidates the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and allows the party to

completely disregard similarities with Nazi-rhetoric that might be pointed out, by claiming it to be only a tool for shame and not rooted in reality at all. This narrative completely disregards the reason for the reminders of the past: education of new generations in order to be able to spot these same patterns of rising fascism and racism, should they re-emerge, and (hopefully) equip them with the skills to prevent a repeat of history. In the AfD's view, however, remembering and educating on the past serves only to make Germans ashamed of their heritage and country, when they should take pride in it. With this shame narrative, the AfD deflects any criticism on their proposed goals for Germany's future: criticising racist remarks made by political leaders of the party can easily be refuted by pointing to the shame narrative – drawing any parallels between today's Germans, especially the AfD and its electorate, and the German populace under the NS-regime is immediately denied by pointing out that they are different generations and should not be blamed for the crimes of the past. This narrative presents Germans as victims of the past, victims of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung.* This leads right back to the victimisation noted by Manucci and Caramani, and is directly found in the Austrian victim narrative, too. The shame resulting from *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is presented as entirely unsolicited since modern-day Germans are not to blame for the deeds of their ancestors. The AfD has made use of the low national pride by perpetuating the narrative that it is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that serves to make Germans ashamed of their country. While *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* seems to have succeeded in making an outright denial of Germany's WWII history nigh impossible, the far right can and does use the past to build its arguments, regardless. Instead of denying the crimes in Germany's past, the far right uses the prominence of the knowledge about these crimes to substantiate their claim of German victimisation.

This article will address common themes but first, the distinctions between the AfD and FPÖ's narratives will be pointed out. While Austria initially took the opportunity to declare victimhood and ignore all evidence on its participation in WWII by the side of Germany, Germany itself had no such opportunity. To paint itself as the victim was never an option, being on the losing side was the closest to victimhood Germany could get without outright contradicting and denying historical evidence.

In terms of their far-right parties today, it is interesting to note the electoral success the FPÖ, despite its well-known roots linking it to Nazis and Nazi-sympathizers, has achieved compared to the AfD. Such electoral success likely is linked to the legitimisation the FPÖ has been granted via coalitions with bigger mainstream parties, like the ÖVP – a legitimisation, the AfD has not achieved, yet. In addition to legitimisation through coalition, David Art points out that by opposing right-wing populist parties as soon as they appear, "mainstream political elites, civic activists and the media undermine the far right's electoral appeal, its ability to recruit capable party members, and weaken its political organisation."[xlviii] The AfD, as a young right-wing party, faces strong opposition through Germany's established, mainstream parties' refusal to coalesce with the far right party, despite the AfD achieving a considerable amount of votes in most federal states. This is a direct contradiction of David Art's claim of the far right being less likely to succeed in Germany, due to a heavily opposed political environment.[xlix] Of course, this claim was made before the AfD emerged, making the party's rise all the more notable. The FPÖ, having been in government before and frequent coalition partner of the ÖVP, does not face such opposition as it is an already established, traditional party in Austria. Looking at the electoral support of the AfD it becomes clear that, if the mainstream parties start seriously coalescing with the AfD, it will likely become similarly successful as the FPÖ.

Another distinction can be found in the way the AfD, as a relatively young party puts an emphasis on its disconnect from Nazism. This is not claimed by the FPÖ with its widely known direct roots in Nazism among the party's founders and first voter base. Further, there is a noticeable contrast between German and Austrian patriotism, since Austria shows one of the highest levels of patriotism in the world.[l] The selective victimhood narrative of the FPÖ feeds into this patriotic attitude among Austrians by emphasising the traditionally weak and helpless role of Austrian women, which does not appear to be particularly offensive to modern-day Austrians, most likely due to the historical context. This narrative allows the FPÖ to use the victimhood of Austrian women after WWII as a sort of alibi-acknowledgement, since the party is technically making sure the past is not forgotten, even though this only pertains to one specific part of history that is being preserved: the victimhood of Austrian women. This gender dynamic is worth looking into for more in-depth research on this topic.

Common Themes

Despite all these differences, there are two main common themes to be found. First, is the focus on victimhood. As identified by Manucci and Caramani among others, victimisation is a core aspect of the political far right's operational strategy.[li] The FPÖ uses a specific version of the victim narrative to emphasize Austrian victimhood in WWII, while the AfD uses the shame Germans associate with WWII to claim victimhood by *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This common denominator of victimhood perpetuation falls in line with the observed shift in the construction of collective memories: "from heroic martyrdom to innocent victimhood."[lii] On this shift it is notable that such contested memories of victimhood are often used to feed a particular form of nationalism based on the memory of collective suffering.[liii] The utilisation of the FPÖ and AfD's narratives to perpetuate specifically a sense of victimhood among susceptible voters, indicates that both parties aim to feed the same sense of nationalism and are doing so by manipulating history into a collective sense of suffering.

The second common theme is the patriotism both parties are aiming to strengthen with their narratives. Through the FPÖ's selective victim narrative, the Austrian sense of patriotism is left wholly untouched, is even strengthened. The AfD, on the other hand, argues that German shame has overridden German patriotism, and blames *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and remembrance culture. With its narrative, the AfD argues for more patriotism by disconnecting from the past in order to escape German shame over its WWII history. Both parties clearly aim for the goal of strengthening nationalism and patriotism among their voters, even if they are using different narratives to pursue this goal.

The overarching commonality between the AfD and the FPÖ in terms of how they use narratives on history to fit their political agenda, is obviously the manipulative and falsifying nature of the narratives. While the utilized narratives are not the same, this commonality of either an inability to grasp the full picture, so to speak, or the purposeful ignorance of aspects that would weaken their argument, is clearly visible. In general (with some exceptions), the FPÖ and the AfD do not outright deny historical facts. However, the way they present history to their voters is so selective, it changes the meaning entirely. The findings indicate that, when it comes to manipulative, historically revisionist narratives, victimhood and patriotism are the two main interests being pursued by these narratives in order to gather electoral support.

Conclusion

The far right in both Germany and Austria use historical revisionism to manipulate the narrative around WWII to advance their political agenda. By presenting their country as having been or still being victimized, the parties spread a sense of collectivism among their electorate. Patriotism is preserved and strengthened similarly through the manipulation of the narratives, either indirectly by omitting certain historical evidence as in the Austrian case, or directly by insisting on complete disconnection from history as in the German case.

Whether the victimhood aspect is linked to the patriotism aspect, i.e. if they affect each other or even result from each other, might be determined in further research. In the German case they are certainly connected, as the AfD claims direct victimisation of German patriotism due to the perpetuation of German shame. In the Austrian case, however, patriotism and victimhood do not immediately appear connected. The FPÖ's narrative on WWII is rather carefully crafted to create a sense of victimhood and preserve Austrian patriotism. Therefore, it is to be assumed that patriotism and victimhood being causally linked in the AfD's narrative is specific to Germany, rather than a general rule.

The findings of this research suggest that victimhood and patriotism are common themes in manipulative narratives used by the political far right. As existing literature notes: manipulation of the historical narrative is a widely used tool in today's populism to gather support for the far right. A practical example of this would be the way, the Dutch far right has been changing the narrative on the Netherlands' dark history in terms of the slave trade and colonialism to gather support.[liv] This article adds two case studies to the topic of historical revisionism and the far right, but more case studies will have to be conducted to find out if the common themes identified here are consistent across the far right in Europe or perhaps even globally.

Since politically motivated, historically revisionist narratives will always be specific to the country and its history, the

narratives will always differ. However, the goals in both cases compared in this article are the same: perpetuation of victimhood and patriotism. This suggests that, when it comes to selective narratives and historical revisionism, the narrative itself is of far less importance than the goal. As history holds transformative power,[lv] it is important to develop ways to assess the manipulative power of such narratives. With the rise of the far right throughout Europe, it is especially important to assess the far right's narratives.

Overall, the common themes of perpetuating victimhood and patriotism could be markers of a specific, modern kind of far-right party that uses historical revisionism to pursue its political agenda. With further research into this topic, these markers could be solidified and help make parties of the same kind easily recognizable.

All in all, the research has clearly shown how two obviously different narratives, histories, and facts can clearly be used in eerily similar ways. The far right can and does use these narratives as tools, just as much in countries that have been the reason for wars as in countries that were the victims of such wars. The nature of these narratives is extremely manipulative and transferrable, making them all the more dangerous: they can be used in completely different contexts and still achieve the same result, namely that of political, electoral success. The versatility of these tools, (self-)victimisation and patriotism, is what makes them a dangerous threat to democracy.

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