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**THE RISE OF THE AUSTRIAN FREEDOM PARTY**

**UNDER JÖRG HAIDER AND RIGHT WING**

**POPULISM IN AUSTRIA 1986-2000**

**AN HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL STUDY OF HAIDER'S FPÖ WITH A**

**CASE-STUDY GIVING A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## Abstract

The extraordinary political success achieved by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) under the leadership of Jörg Haider during the 1990s is widely known as the ‘Haider Phenomenon’ in academic literature. This thesis is a cultural-historical investigation into the roots of Haider’s political breakthrough in Austrian politics during the 1990s. My aim has been to try to understand this political phenomenon in the context of Austrian cultural and historical forces and set out the political developments that enabled Haider (almost) to achieve the Austrian Chancellorship in 2000.

There is already a considerable amount of scholarship available on this subject – particularly in German. This thesis aims to enrich this scholarship by uncovering some previously neglected cultural-historical aspects relating to the rise of Haider. During my research, I found a rich vein of sources pointing to the centrality of *Kultur* in any understanding of political-historical developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century Austria. This is certainly the case in regards to Haider’s FPÖ, which actually initiated a *Kulturkampf* as part of their populist political strategy in the 1990s.

This study will also add to the body of work about the growth of right wing populism throughout Europe in the last twenty years. More importantly however, my thesis highlights the importance of focusing on local and country-specific aspects of such a political phenomenon in order to explain the causes of its success. Otherwise, there is a danger of superficial or generalized conclusions being made that distract from a deeper comprehension of events.

## **Acknowledgements**

I began researching for this thesis back in 2000. Due to some personal circumstances, in particular a move to The Netherlands, it meant that the finished product was delayed. In the first instance I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor, Martyn Housden. Without his positive encouragement, particularly when it looked like the whole project was doomed, I would never have completed this work. My second supervisor, Dr Gabor Batonyi was also a valuable source of straightforward and helpful comments to my work. In addition, I came across a rich seam of research during my visits to Vienna, in particular I would like to thank Martin Wassenair (IG Kultur, Vienna), Michael Wimmer (EENC, Vienna) and Günther Sandner (University of Vienna) for their invaluable help and advice. Finally, I must mention my family, particularly my partner, Niki, who has been a bed-rock of support and encouragement throughout.

Rotterdam, September 2012

## Introduction

This study will contribute to current scholarship that aims to explain the rise of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) – under the leadership of Jörg Haider. This study will initially give the reader a thorough grounding in the historical and political context of the rise of Haider. The dissertation will then (in the form of a case-study) focus on an analysis of the cultural context of Haider's FPÖ with the aim of achieving a deeper understanding of this Austrian political 'phenomenon'.

Haider led his party from relative obscurity in the 1980s to the achievement of equal partnership in a coalition government with the Austrian Peoples' Party (ÖVP) in February 2000. The formation of this coalition was the result of an unprecedented general election result in October 1999 in which the FPÖ managed to gain 27% of the national vote. Before Haider became party leader in 1986 the FPÖ was languishing at only 4% in the polls and in danger of not reaching the 5% threshold necessary for gaining parliamentary seats in Austria's parliament.

The election result of 1999 was interpreted by many as indicating a seismic change in the hitherto staid climate of post-war Austrian politics and perceived as the final deathblow to the consensual system of government in the Second Republic known as *Proporz* (*Proporzdemokratie* - democracy based on proportionality). As well causing a real break to the continuity of the post-war Austrian political system, the entrance of Haider's FPÖ into government caused significant political fall-out both in Austria and abroad, particularly within the European Union. The main reason for this disquiet about the inclusion of the FPÖ

in executive power was the perception, particularly under Haider's leadership, that the FPÖ was an extreme right-wing political force, rooted in the ideology of National Socialism. The new coalition government in Austria was seen as a dangerous source of instability in European politics and the potential precursor of similar right-wing political reconfigurations in other European states.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to a definition of the political colours of Haider's FPÖ. They have been variously described as extreme right-wing, neo-Nazi, far-right, radical right, pan-German or fascist. My personal choice as a working definition for this study is "right-wing populism". I will not dwell on attempting to categorize or define Haider's FPÖ in this study as I do not consider such a semantic exercise relevant to my arguments.

The rise of FPÖ under the leadership of Haider in the 1990s was a remarkable chapter in European politics. After the October 1999 general election, fevered anxiety ensued in the media about a Nazi 'revival' in Austria and there was an international outcry after the ÖVP decision to share power with Haider's party in a government coalition. Massive demonstrations took place in Vienna during the inauguration of the new government and the fourteen other European Union countries immediately imposed an unprecedented sanctions regime on a fellow member state. Suddenly, Austria and the rest of the world were forced to come to terms with a new type of right-wing political formation at the heart of European politics.

The structure of this study involves two distinct parts. The first part gives an historical and political context to the rise of Haider's FPÖ in the 1990s. Here, I will explain how the seeds of right wing populism in Austria were already sown in Austrian 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century history. The political context will map out Haider's rise to power within the party and subsequently the whole country, including an overview of the scholarly interpretations that have tried to explain the Haider phenomenon.

The second part of the thesis is a case study setting out a detailed *cultural* analysis of the rise of Haider. I chose to focus on *Kultur* because I consider it a neglected area in the study of Haider's FPÖ and due to the valuable insights such an analysis offers about this very *Austrian* political phenomenon. 'Very Austrian' in this context refers to the fact that Haider's FPÖ should be treated foremost as a national phenomenon rather than being categorized as simply part of a Europe wide lurch to the right. Secondly, Haider carefully implemented his political strategy in order to take into account the special role of *Kultur* in Austrian political and social fabric.

The FPÖ actually initiated a contemporary *Kulturkampf* against avant-garde artists in Austria. The party drew up the strands in Austrian history of a protracted 'war' on modern art stemming back to the fin-de-siecle at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, modern art is associated with dangers such as radicalism, profanity, communism and is therefore a valid political target. The result has been that avant-garde art in Austria has shown itself to be more radical and politicized than in other countries while also being perceived as a real threat by the Austrian political and religious establishment. So, after giving a context to the FPÖ initiated *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s, the case study will analyze the cultural policies and

rhetoric of Haider's FPÖ. This will be followed by a focus on the artistic responses to Haider's *Kulturkampf* within Austria and then an elucidation of the so-called 'Austrian Idea' - a rhetorical construct from the 1950s that formed the theoretical basis of Haider's entry into Austrian cultural politics. By offering this new perspective on Haider's FPÖ, I hope that my cultural 'take' on the Haider story will deepen our understanding of this political phenomenon.

The reader needs to be acquainted with two basic assumptions before reading this thesis. Firstly, my starting point has been to treat the FPÖ's rise to power as a 'political success story' in itself rather than understanding their rise to power in terms of the 'failure' of the other Austrian political parties to stop or prevent its ascent to power from 1986. The reasoning behind this is that far too many explanations of Haider's FPÖ have neglected the innovative and skillful political strategy employed by Haider to secure executive power. Thus, by focusing too much on the apparent failure of the other political parties in 'allowing' the FPÖ to achieve political power or blaming the 'fossilized' state of the Austrian political system in not 'preventing' Haider, many scholars and commentators have at best underestimated, or at worst falsely interpreted, some salient factors that have contributed to the party's success in the 1990s.

My second assumption concerns the use of a 'cultural' approach in this study. The reasoning behind this is that a key element contributing to the success of Haider as party leader was his ability to steer the Austrian electorate away from the class-based political competition of previous decades by introducing a new type of 'identity' politics into the Austrian political arena. This led to many Austrians choosing the FPÖ not only as a protest vote but also due

to the genuine perception held by many voters that Haider's FPÖ represented a vote for a party that had the 'patriotic' interests of 'real' Austrians at heart.

A wide range of historical, contemporary and interdisciplinary texts will be used in the study from both German and English language sources. Primary material has been used that draws on some interviews that I undertook in Vienna during January 2002 and an analysis of some relevant FPÖ party documents.

It is important to emphasize here that a central thread of argument throughout this study is that in order to obtain a full understanding of the rise of Haider's FPÖ in the 1990s you must take Austrian cultural historical factors into account that enabled this rise and contributed to the party achieving such significant electoral support. By simply dismissing Haider as a neo-fascist or embracing him as some kind of necessary 'modernizer' for an outdated political system misses the fact that the FPÖ's political success in the 1990s occurred in a specific type of Austrian political culture that arose out of the traumatic events of the second world war. Therefore, although on the face of it Austria did manage to achieve economic and political stability in the first decades of the Second Republic, a myriad of social and cultural problems were ignored by political elites that contributed to a very fertile soil being sown for the likes of Jörg Haider to nurture and expand his right-wing populist project.

From 1986 onwards, the FPÖ influenced the voting behavior of Austrians by a mixture of emotionalized, irrational and simplistic political rhetoric depicting Haider as a kind of Austrian 'savior' and haven of 'security' in the troubled and uncertain world of post-

communism and the entry of Austria into the European Union in 1995. This uncertainty was capitalized on by the FPÖ through a focus on issues such as uncontrolled immigration; crime; the corrosive influence of the 'Left' in Austrian society and public institutions; and the abuse of privileges prevalent within the Austrian political class. Haider succeeded, in a manner unprecedented in Europe since before the war, to rise from political obscurity and 'capture the imagination' of a populace with a distinctly reactionary and anti-modernist populist agenda. On a practical level, Haider's political achievement was to assemble a political force that was capable of offering a package of seemingly contradictory policies to different constituencies in the Austrian electorate at the same time. The FPÖ's *Kulturkampf*, as outlined in my case study, is a typical example of one of the political strategies pursued by Haider in the 1990s in his goal for executive power.

On a final note, Jörg Haider's FPÖ subsequently failed in office during the 2000-2002. The party split and their share of the vote plummeted. Haider himself died in a car accident in October 2008. However, the FPÖ managed to shake off their troubles and become, at the time of writing this introduction (summer 2012), the second largest party in Austria. The legacy of Haider and his contribution to the reconfiguration of Austrian politics and European right-wing populism that has taken place in the last decades is beyond doubt. It will remain an important focus for academic study for years to come.

## Chapter 1

### **The Historical Seeds of Austrian Right Wing Populism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century History**

A new type of Austrian right-wing populism emerged in 1986 in the form of Jörg Haider's FPÖ (Riedlsperger, 1991). Their subsequent electoral successes and the establishment of a large (and seemingly entrenched) right-wing populist presence in Austrian politics was not only due to a structural crisis in Austrian post-war political institutions (see chapter 2) or some kind of new Austrian fascism emerging in the form of 'Haiderism' (Bailer & Neugebauer, 1997, p272). There were also deep historical factors embedded in Austrian society that produced some very favorable conditions for the emergence of right-wing populism in Austria by the 1980s. These historical factors (political, social and cultural) help to explain the scale and momentum of the Freedom Party's electoral rise in the 1990s. They also help us gain an insight into the peculiar character of right-wing populism in Austria - as opposed to comparable European countries such as Denmark or The Netherlands. Jörg Haider, the political opportunist *par excellence*, had an acute awareness of these historical conditions - and managed to use them very effectively.

This chapter will connect the rise of the FPÖ to some relevant historical factors – mostly from Austrian history since 1900. I will argue that Haider's populist political message

(including the critique of an 'old' and 'outdated' political establishment; spreading fear about divisive 'foreign' influences; and the construction a new type of Austrian patriotism) had a particular resonance for many ordinary Austrians in the 1990s. He awakened some still unresolved historical scores in Austrian society and fueled a growing resentment towards mainstream politics. Haider also managed to address some fundamental issues which Austria had faced after 1945 that the political élites at the time refused to address for reasons of expediency, opportunism and *Realpolitik* (Pelinka in Steininger et al, 2002, p.323). Among the issues carefully avoided by the Austrian political establishment after 1945 was the treatment of the Austrian Jewish population – in particular questions of the restitution and re-habilitation of Jewish exiles after the war (Pick, 2000, p156). Austrian politicians also chose to ignore (unlike their counterparts in West Germany) the extent and complicity of Austrians involved in Nazi war crimes right up to the 1980s (Ibid, p157). Finally, the many Austrians who were ex-Nazi party members in 1945 formed a reservoir of discontent amongst a 'war generation' that subsequently remained a simmering political issue right up to the present-day.

Instead of addressing such politically sensitive issues, the post-war Austrian political class pursued a cultural, social and economic strategy with the specific aim of uniting the main political camps that had previously been on opposing sides of the Austrian civil war in 1934 by the implementation of a form of governmental power-sharing subsequently known as *Proporz* (Pelinka, p96-115, 1996). The Austrian Provisional Government set up in 1945 made economic growth and political stability its top priority and the post-war years saw the establishment of a stable liberal democracy with a generous welfare state, known as the

Second Republic. The effect of the post-war economic boom coupled with a stable political situation gave rise to an increasing trust in, and support of, this new Austrian political establishment. This support is evidenced by how the two main Austrian political parties Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) managed to achieve over 90% share of the Austrian vote in every general election right up to the advent of Haider in 1986 (Ibid, p98). Austria became a shining example of economic growth, political stability and a functioning welfare state in the heart of Europe. However, the deep wounds and resentments held by many in Austria after the war were left festering by a political class (and population) determined to 'move on'...whatever the cost (Ibid, p.99).

It was not until the 1980s that any proper attempt was made by these political élites to 'deal' with any controversial issues – particularly those stemming from the legacy of National Socialism. However by that time, only a minority on the political Left or a few prominent cultural figures were prepared to challenge the hypocrisy of the Second Republic surrounding these issues (Ibid, p110). In fact, most Austrians felt either threatened or even intimidated by such soul-searching – wishing that such uncomfortable issues were better 'left alone' (Ibid, p.113).

When Jörg Haider entered the Austrian political arena in the 1980s, he well positioned to form an extremely effective opposition to the increasingly unpopular *Proporz* system as well as benefiting from the uncertainty and 'angst' felt by many Austrians resulting from a new (international) focus on Austria's participation in the Third Reich as a result of the Waldheim crisis (1986) and the perceived threat to traditional values coming from the liberalizing forces of modernization like multiculturalism, women's emancipation and permissiveness

(Markovits in Wodak & Pelinka, 2002, pp95-121). In effect, a fertile ground for the take-off of right-wing populism in the 1990s had already been sown by the previous generation of Austrian politicians by their construction of a distinctly Austrian type of cultural and political parochialism that made certain issues (particularly those related to the period from 1934 to 1945 – i.e. the periods of Austro-Fascism<sup>1</sup> in the 1930s and Austria's integration into the Third Reich from 1938 to 1945) basically out of bounds for mainstream politicians.

This chapter will now focus on two historical factors relevant to the cultivation of this fertile ground for the rise of Haider in the 1990s. Firstly, the subject of Austrian parochialism will be brought to light by charting some developments in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that set the scene for Haider's later political success. Secondly, there will be an analysis of how two (very different) minority groups were affected by the Austrian political processes after 1945 – Austrian Jews and Austrian Pan-Germans. Both these groups were marginalized in Austria right up to the 1980s – a process that was an important contributory factor to the political dislocation that occurred in the Haider period.

### **Austrian Parochialism**

Parochialism - when used in a political or cultural context is defined as a certain backward, localized narrow-mindedness and has been connected to social and political manifestations such as xenophobia, nationalism and conservatism (Bollenbeck, 2000, p68). It involves a suspicion of notions such as 'progress' or 'modernity' because they lead to a disruption of

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<sup>1</sup> A debatable terminology – it was not comparable to Italian or German fascism in terms of repression etc however it has since become the most widely used phrase for describing Austria in 1930s

tradition and cultural continuity – it can also be understood as a kind of opposite to multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism. Parochialism is particularly pronounced in the Austro-German context, stemming from a deep mistrust of modernity and unfettered capitalism that was perceived to have brought about a collapse in traditional ‘German’ values, i.e. conventions and beliefs that had underpinned German culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Johnston, 1972, p.19). Such parochialism manifested itself later in the form of a distaste or hatred for ‘modern art’ (Bollenbeck, 2000, p69), famously described as ‘degenerate’ by the Nazis. In the Austrian case, a particular strand of parochialism developed after 1945 that was hidden beneath the façade of a ‘progressive’ Second Republic (Ibid, p.71). By this time, the prevalence of parochial and anti-progressive attitudes was widespread amongst ordinary people and deeply embedded in the political class and amongst many Austrian intellectuals (Hanisch, 1994, p433). The only strand of post-war Austrian society that voiced resistance came from the cultural avant-garde - a very small section of society, located almost exclusively in and around the capital, Vienna (Ibid, p475).

Austrian parochialism was most evident in the widespread antipathy latent in both élite circles and in the majority of the population towards Modern Art – a constant feature of Austrian political and cultural life throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even the renowned period of artistic creativity in Austria known as the ‘Fin-de-Siècle’ (Schorske, 1992, p8) was later deemed to be ‘biologically decadent’ by the Austrian artistic establishment in the 1930s (Segar, p.365). The 1930s saw the Austrian political establishment share with their National Socialist neighbors in Germany a kind of foreboding for the coming epoch of ‘decadence’:

*“Entwicklungsgeschichte der moderne Kunst’ became the ‘Entartungsgeschichte der Epoche’.....The crisis of the arts reflected the crisis of liberal bourgeois society (in Austria) in the process of destroying the bases of its existence, the systems of value, convention, and intellectual understanding which structured and ordered it” (Bollenbeck, 2000, p68)*

In short, an historical strand can be traced of a distinctly anti-modernist, parochial political culture in Austria that formed an essential background to the flourishing of right-wing populism in the 1990s.

Previous to 1918, Austria was just a small part of the vast Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire which spanned a large area of central Europe. The capital’s empire was Vienna - the cultural and political hub of the Habsburg Empire. The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of a particular type of cultural movement known as *Biedermeier*<sup>2</sup>. This was an aristocratic and baroque cultural movement that attempted to perpetuate the values and ideas of the ruling Hapsburg élites. Biedermeier developed into *Bildungsbürgertum* a cultural hegemony already pervasive in bourgeois culture throughout Europe. The political culture in Austria which perpetuated this cultural conservatism was predominantly Catholic and anti-liberal in character (Strong, 1998, p112).

The beginning of the 20th century coincided with a clear failure of liberal forces in Austria achieving any political breakthrough and challenging such conservative forces (Ibid, p.107).

There was a stifling atmosphere of Catholic conservatism in the Austrian political

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<sup>2</sup>A name derived from a satirical fictional figure created in 1850 by a German humorist called Ludwig Eichrodt, the character of Biedermeier was that of a *pious village schoolmaster, law-abiding and serene* (Johnston, 1972, p18).

establishment - a situation that brought the familiar reaction (and subsequent counter reaction) from progressive *cultural* elements in Austrian society. This turn-of-the-century *Kulturkampf* – i.e. the familiar refrain of conservative elements in Austrian society (the Church, Anti-Semitist populists, Pan-Germans etc.) attacking progressive forces, particularly Modern Art, as representing a decadent, anti-patriotic strand in society. This *Kulturkampf* was subsequently repeated in Austria during the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1900s were an intensively creative phase of artistic production during the dying years of the Habsburg monarchy, known as the ‘Vienna Fin-de-Siècle’. It was a period marked by a proliferation of cultural activity in visual arts, music, theatre and literature. Among the many artists active at this time were Adolf Loos in architecture, Arnold Schönberg in music, Klimt and Schiele in the visual arts and Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis, Schorske describes Vienna as a kind of cultural ‘hothouse’ comprising of:

*“A comprehensive rejection of all major formative forces in the Austrian tradition: the Catholic culture of grace, where the Word is incarnate and made manifest in flesh; the secular adaptation of the culture of grace by the bourgeoisie to supplement and sublimate its own primary culture of law; and finally, the turning to art as itself the source of value, as religion-substitute in liberalism’s crisis of the fin de siècle”* (Schorske, 1992, p361).

Parallel to this surge in cultural production and controversy in Vienna, Austria also experienced its first modern political populist movements. The main protagonists were the Christian-Socialist mayor of Vienna, Karl Lüger and the radical German nationalist, Georg von Schönerer. Although they represented different political parties, both these populist

politicians had important similarities that reflected the popular backlash in Austria against the cosmopolitanism of this new 'modernity' that was becoming pervasive throughout Europe. Similarities between these two politicians can be noted in three ways (Ibid, p145). Firstly, they shared a populist style of politics that sought to mobilize mass support through demagoguery, demonstrations and political agitation. Secondly, although Lueger was less outspoken in this matter than Schönerer, both politicians advocated an adherence to German culture rather than the multiculturalism advocated by the Kaiser. They were both anti-liberal and socially conservative while professing to 'champion democracy'. Thirdly, and most importantly, they were openly anti-Semitic, perceiving the Jews as being a 'problem' for Austrian culture and society:

*"Schönerer and Lueger, each after a fashion, had succeeded in championing democracy while fighting liberalism. Both composed ideological systems that unified liberalism's enemies. Each, in his own way, utilized aristocratic style, gesture, or pretension to mobilize a mass of followers still hungry for a leadership that based its authority on something older and deeper than the power of rational argument and empirical evidence". (Ibid, p145)*

The question as to why such an explosive mix of artistic experimentation, political populism, nationalism and anti-Semitism occurred in Vienna at this time has been the subject of considerable historical discussion (Ibid, p.xviii). Without doubt, the consequences of this decade would influence Austrian (and European) culture and politics for years to come – right up to the present day. Several theories have been put forward in an attempt to explain the nature and causes of the Viennese 'Fin-de-Siècle' (Hanisch, 1994, p247). The French historian Braudel (Ibid, p.248) suggested that many 'dying' empires have displayed a similar

phase of intensive creativity – in the case of Austria, the Fin-de-Siècle can be seen as a period of ‘the last days of civilization’ (Ibid, p250) before the complete disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire after the First World War. Another suggestion is that the stifling and anti-liberal attitudes of the ruling élite and populist politicians caused some to attempt an escape from this oppressive atmosphere and form an alternative radical political identity through works of art as a reaction and replacement of the pervading parochial culture (Ibid p.252). Thirdly, Vienna contained a unique sprawl of diverse cultures and nationalities - these multicultural influences formed a basis for experimenting in new forms of art, architecture, music etc. And finally, against the backdrop of entrenched anti-Semitism that was already embedded in Austrian life, the modernist artistic movement came to be perceived and labeled as something particularly ‘Jewish’. Although there were many non-Jewish participants in the Fin de Siècle, there were proportionally more Jews as opposed to other ethnic or religious groups. Thus modernism and its cultural expression, modern art, came to be seen by many as a distinctly ‘Jewish’ project.

*“Viennese modernism was considered to be Jewish, and in the Vienna ruled by anti-Semitism the ‘fight against Jewry’ was in the centre of the cultural battle”. (Hamann, 2010, p79)*

The Austrian born Adolf Hitler, who was living in Vienna at this time, made a direct association between ‘Jewry’ and modernism, stating:

*“...in Vienna, almost everything that was wholesome was called kitsch by the filthy Jews”.*

(Hitler quoted in Hamann, 2010, p72).

The First World War and subsequent break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire put an end to this chaotic political and cultural phase. The battle lines between the avant-garde and the anti-modernist parochial culture were now firmly drawn and would remain entrenched up to the 1960s. In the first decades of the First Republic, after the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain in June 1919, the progressive modernists did find some favor and support from the newly formed SPÖ. However the catholic conservatives and pan-Germans (who were in the majority) were united in their distaste and rejection of this type of modern 'degenerate' art. An anti-modernist coalition of the right (aided by the deteriorating social and political circumstances at the time) would go on and retain its hegemony over Austrian culture and politics until after the Second World War.

The polarization of Austrian politics between the right and left even led to a brief civil war in 1934 in which the Catholic conservatives were victorious. They subsequently banned the political activities of the SPÖ and the Austrian National Socialist Party (Segar, 1991, p57). The 'Austro-fascist' period began, lasting until the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany in 1938. The cultural policies of the authoritarian regime under Dollfuss were basically a watered down version of similar measures being implemented in neighboring Nazi Germany.

The Dollfuss regime's *Kulturpolitik* involved the propagation of a 'hierarchical, Christian and Germanic' cultural vision (Segar, 1991, p363). This included giving moral and financial support to artistic and cultural works that supported the religious, ethical and political status quo, for example, works containing a patriotic Austro-German bias were given extra state support (Ibid, p365). Thus, the policy of repressing modernist cultural tendencies and

the marginalization of Jewish influences was already well established in Austria well *before* the *Anschlöss* with Germany in 1938:

*“The cultural scapegoats of the ‘Austrianfascist’ period were hardly different to the NS period. Both fought against the ‘culturalbolshevism’ of modernism and promoted a ‘Volkskunst’ which was directed against the elitist culture of the avant-garde”* (Hanisch, p324)<sup>3</sup>

This meant that the integration of Austria into the Third Reich after 1938 merely reinforced an already entrenched anti-modernist cultural policy in Austria. The main difference between Austria’s and Nazi Germany’s cultural policies was the fact that Hitler prioritized a specifically National Socialist *Kulturpolitik* in which both *art* and *art criticism* were used as weapons in an overall national socialist political struggle called, *Gleichschaltung*. Here, Nazi policy makers introduced a raft of parallel policies with the aim of achieving total political control. As part of this, Hitler instigated the policy of a ‘*Kampf um die Kunst*’ (Hinz, 1980, p45) after 1934, showing how prioritized a battle against decadent modern art (*Entartete Kunst*). In a speech at the German Exhibition of 1939 he stated the importance of a ‘rigorous’ *Kulturpolitik*:

*“Those who are responsible for the shaping of people’s attitudes in the sphere of politics must endeavor to direct the peoples’ artistic forces - even at the expense of rigorous intervention”* (Adam, 1992, p48)

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<sup>3</sup> All sources that are originally written in German have been translated by the author of this study

It should be noted here that Hitler's political views had already been formed in the milieu of pre-war Vienna. He had entered politics as a result of a failed attempt at a career as an artist and ended up hating the decadent 'cultural élite' that had not awarded him a place in the Vienna Academy of Art in 1907. Hitler rejected the 'degenerate' modern art being produced in Vienna during this decade and saw the 'cleansing' of this type of art and the promotion of a 'wholesome German art' as an essential part of his overall political strategy (Ibid, p49).

The final traces of modernist artistic production were finally eradicated from Austria during the Nazi occupation. Artists who did not conform to the new ethos either fled or were persecuted. Modern art was ridiculed and held up as an example of the *backward development of the human brain*<sup>4</sup>. The two main goals of Nazi cultural policy in Austria became evident after 1938. Firstly, policies that had already been put into practice in Germany were swiftly implemented against Austrian Jewish artists. Secondly, a Nazi cultural policy was introduced which was to have important ramifications for post-war Austria, this entailed an abandonment of pursuing a specific 'Nazi' culture in favour of promoting acceptable aspects of German 'high-culture':

*"Abandonment of a specifically national socialist culture in favor of a reinterpretation of German high culture, this time including specific 'racial' criteria" (Ibid, p128)*

This promotion of German 'high-culture' involved the Nazi regime hijacking Viennese classical German culture for its own specific propaganda purposes. Alarming, this policy became continued in Austria even *after 1945* and was a crucial factor in the persistence of

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<sup>4</sup> Stated in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (London, p354, 1969)

cultural parochialism in the Second Republic, contributing to the conditions needed for the upsurge of right-wing populism during the 1990s (Hanisch, 1994, p430).

In 1945, after the devastation of war, the humiliation of defeat and another occupation (this time from the victorious Allies), many people expected Austria's problems to get even worse, especially with the real prospect of at least one third of the country coming under permanent Soviet occupation (Pelinka, 1998, p17). However, things progressed differently than many thought. In a nutshell, Austria rose out of the ashes of war to become an independent, rich and vibrant economy with a generous welfare system. It managed to rid itself of both the Soviet and American occupying forces and declared itself a 'neutral' country in 1955 (Ibid, p24). Post-war Austria displayed a high level of domestic political stability and consensus.

However, behind this seemingly benign exterior there was another aspect of the historical conditions leading to the rise of the FPÖ in the 1990s – i.e. the notion of Austria having fallen 'victim' to the Nazi aggression rather than being its 'willing accomplice' (Pick, 2000, p.224). After the war, many people held the view that Austria had managed to emerge from the trauma of a war and occupation which had been foisted on Austria by the 'foreign and evil' forces of German Nazism (Ibid, p225). Subsequent governments of the Second Republic were able to reinforce this so-called 'victim thesis' by referring to the 'Moscow Declaration on Austria' signed by Britain, America and the Soviet Union in November 1943 which stated that Austria was the: *'First free country to fall a victim to Hitlerite aggression'* (Ibid, p224).

However, Austrian diplomats managed to let the more controversial final paragraph of the declaration disappear from public view:

*Austria is reminded however, that she has a responsibility that she cannot evade for the participation in the war on the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation... (Ibid, p224)*

Between 1945 and 1986, the façade of Austria as an ‘isle of the blessed’<sup>5</sup> (Hanisch, 1992, p475) was slowly but surely lifted to reveal a darker side of a country where Austrian post-war politicians had deliberately avoided dealing with the issues arising out of the Austro-Fascist and Nazi legacy for the sake of political expediency:

*“Reconciliation (concerning Austro-Fascism and Austrian Nazism) meant a conspiracy of silence about the past. The civil war of 1934 was consigned to an ‘oubliette’. The commemorations on its 50th anniversary caused some surprise and embarrassment....Austria’s part in the Third Reich was even more energetically repressed....the 1980s provided a rude shock in the form of the international debate about President Waldheim’s wartime career. These developments might indicate a suffocating avoidance of controversy and an attempt to stifle the types of conflicts that are inherent in a modern, mature society”. (Pulzer, 1988, p228).*

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<sup>5</sup> “Isle of the Blessed” is a quote by Pope Paul VI on his visit to the country in the early 1970s, and it seemed to denote a place that had become a haven from the ills found in the rest of Europe (i.e. social strife and Communism). At the forefront of this idea was the notion that Austrians were not responsible for the Holocaust, but were Hitler’s first victim and that the period from 1938 to 1945 was a ‘disruption’ of Austrian traditions and history and in no way an extension of them.

The question of whether it was the right or wrong course of action taken by the government of the Second Republic that led to the re-habilitation of so many ex-Nazis, the unresolved restitution question or the construction of the 'victim myth' is a matter for historical discussion. However what does seem to be clear is that the policy and rhetoric of successive post-war Austrian administrations contributed to the 'take off' of right-wing populism in the 1990s.

To finish, this chapter will analyze the fate of the Austrian Jews and the Austrian pan-Germans in post-war Austria – the post-war policies towards both of these groups in Austrian society being a crucial factor in shaping the future character of Haider's FPÖ.

### **Austrian Jews**

During the war, the 'task' of dealing with the Jewish 'problem' was undertaken with particular enthusiasm by the Austrian authorities (Bukey, 2002, p20). There is even evidence that German Nazi officials were worried about the 'over enthusiasm' of some Austrians in the initial humiliation, forced exile and appropriation of Jewish property in 1938/9 (Ibid, p.21). The systematic persecution of the Austrian Jewish population led to the forced exile of 130,000 and the extermination of 65,000 Austrian Jews between 1938 and 1945. After the war, these crimes were mostly forgotten, ignored and eradicated from the Austrian collective memory - in contrast to the more painful and reflective process of coming to terms with Nazism that took place in West Germany (Ibid, p21). Historical evidence clearly indicates that Austria was fully integrated into the Third Reich and that a majority of the population were willing participants and supporters of the Nazi regime's war aims - 700,000

Austrians were in fact members of the National Socialist Party in 1945 a higher proportion of the population than in Nazi Germany itself. (Ibid, p24)

A high proportion Austrian NSDAP members held leading positions in the Nazi apparatus of terror and repression (Uhl, p69, 1996), including, of course, the *Führer* himself - as well as Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Adolf Eichmann and many other Austrians who were put in charge of the 'final solution'. After 1945, Austria managed to avoid international condemnation about its involvement in Nazi war crimes by promoting the view of Austria's 'victim' status. For many people, these leading Nazis were basically perceived as being 'German' rather than 'Austrian'.

In the immediate aftermath of the war there was some official identification with the victims of Nazism and the role of the Austrian resistance in fighting fascism (exhibited in the anti-Fascist exhibition *Niemals vergessen* shown in Vienna during 1946) (Kos in Tabor, 1994, p950). However, Austrian political parties soon recognized that focusing on issues such as the Austrian participation in Nazi war crimes; the implementation of a too rigorous policy of de-Nazification; or highlighting the role of the Austrian resistance were not popular topics for ordinary Austrians. This antipathy led to an official policy of denial concerning the complicity of Austrians in Nazi war crimes that lasted well into the 1980s:

*"The official view of the Nazi era was less a matter of revealing historical truth than of following the 'dictates of political reason'"* (Uhl, p70, 1996)

As a result of Austria's 'victim' status, for many years Austrian Jews were not even recognized as a 'victim group' (Ibid, p.68). They were not even considered for initial

restitution payments, which were only given to Austrians who had been in the anti-fascist resistance or those who had been part of the political resistance to the Nazi regime. Those persecuted on racial or other grounds were given either low priority or not taken into consideration at all (Niederacher, 2003, p16). Evidence of political reluctance to deal with restitution for Austrian Jews can be seen in the protocols of cabinet meetings of the provisional government of 1945 exposing the institutional dimension of anti-Semitism in Austria (Ibid, p18) and the sensitivity of politicians who did not want to 'rock the boat' by pushing such uncomfortable issues into a general public that had still managed to retain, despite the Holocaust, a high level of anti-Semitic sentiment.

Linked to the restitution issue were the attitude and policies of the Austrian government towards Jewish exiles. As late as 1959, only 8,000 had returned to Austria, most of whom:

*"...were met with anything from rejection to downright hostility and anti-Semitic prejudice"*  
(Ibid, p24).

Apart from a few functionaries in the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ), most Austrian politicians took the attitude that these exiles were not welcome in Austria. If anything, such people would be a 'disruptive influence' on ongoing problems such as de-Nazification, latent anti-Semitism or certain government policies. Statements from Austrian politicians at the time clearly indicate a tendency of trying to appeal to a populace that actually felt defeated and occupied by the Allies rather than 'liberated' – especially due to the Soviet presence. Talk of the 'extermination' of the Austrian Jews; or the systematic robbery of their property; or the forced exile of many others – all became out of bounds for Austrian politicians – and

remained so until the 1980s. This state of denial in the Austrian political establishment is illustrated by Alfons Gorbach (ÖVP) who, although he was a concentration camp survivor himself (as a Catholic anti-Nazi), delivered this statement about emigrants in 1949:

*“Nowhere in these events was there so much decency, so much self-denial in the fulfillment of duty as with the soldiers of this war. The gentlemen who emigrated can inject as much moral insulin as they like; those who held their own out in the field in the most testing conditions know better what decency is than those who sought safety abroad as soon as the first ripples appeared on the calm blue ocean....I also dispute the right of emigrants to have any say in discussions of the Nazi question”.* (Ibid, p25)

Post-war Austria seemed to be bent on institutionalizing a kind of collective amnesia in the population in order to achieve specific political and economic goals:

*“The premise of Austria as victim functioned by means of discrediting other victims, since their mere existence called into question the Austrian claim to victim status. Similarly, the re-integration of former Nazis required not only the ignorance but also the defamation of those whose fates constituted evidence of the crimes committed”.* (Ibid, p26)

It should be noted here that the facts concerning the systematic extermination of the Jews in Europe by the Nazis had not, as yet, been properly formulated and disseminated in the public domain - this was the case not only in Austria but throughout the world. In fact, it was not until the 1960s that the scale, planning and execution of Hitler's 'final solution' were publicly talked about. These public debates around the Holocaust only started after the *Eichmann* trial in 1961 and it was not until Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A*

*Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) was published that the term 'Holocaust' came to be widely used.

The growth in public awareness of the Holocaust, particularly in the United States, was an important background factor in the hard-line approach taken by the American authorities towards the Austrian President, Kurt Waldheim, who was banned from entering the US and put on a 'watch-list' in 1986 for his suspected links to Nazi war crimes (Feichtlbauer, 2000, p247). After 1986 there was a significant effort made by many in Austria, particularly intellectuals, academics and artists - to re-think Austria's 'victim' thesis and grasp these thorny questions surrounding Austria's National Socialist legacy. A series of exhibitions took place about the issue; educational programs for schools on the Nazi legacy were taught; and numerous articles were published on the subject in Austrian journals and newspapers. This was a belated attempt at a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ('coming to terms with the past') around the country's hitherto hidden complicity in the crimes of the Third Reich. Finally in 1995, the Austrian Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky, publicly apologized for the first time about the Austrian role in National Socialist war crimes during a state visit to Israel – though with some reservation (Ibid, p195). By 2002, some of the final issues concerning restitution were solved, ironically by the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition.

Two problems arose as a result of this belated attempt to address Austria's role in the crimes of National Socialism. Firstly, it was rather late for many Austrians to confront a collective memory that had been carefully constructed in the context of the 'political realities' of post-war Austria. The fixed attitudes held by many from the so-called 'war generation' were already firmly entrenched by the 1980s. Many Austrians refused to change

their views, especially when being criticized by some left-wing Austrian intellectuals or ‘interfering’ Americans (Steininger et al, 2002, p323). Secondly, the fact that the US government reacted so strongly to the election of Waldheim and the perceived defamation of the war generation by certain Austrian politicians, academics, artists etc – actually led to a hardening of attitudes amongst many Austrians. They thought that their country was being picked upon and unfairly categorized as a hotbed of Nazism. Haider was therefore able to utilize these negative sentiments for the purposes of his own populist political strategy (Ibid, p324).

### **Austrian Pan Germans**

The term ‘Pan-Germans’ refers to those Austrians who believe that Austria is part of a greater Germany - not an independent entity. In fact, right up to the *Anschlöss* in 1938, all Austrian political parties<sup>6</sup> had their own pan-German vision of a *Grossdeutschland*. In other words, the vast majority of Austrians were, right up to 1945, ‘pan-Germans’ – albeit from different political persuasions. After 1945 – pan-Germanism began to be perceived as ‘anti-patriotic’ (Ibid, p75); it was discredited and removed from the main political parties’ agendas. This led to another minority group in Austria that felt ‘victimized’ – although Austrian pan-Germans could not possibly be categorized as ‘victims’ in the same context as the Austrian Jews.

Under a new found slogan of ‘Austrian patriotism’, post-war Austrian élites embarked on a nation-building process with the specific aim of eradicating this pan-German ideology from

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<sup>6</sup> with the notable exception of the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) (Thaler, 2001, p73)

all Austrian public life – the general view of Austrians towards pan-Germans became defined as:

*“Those people of yester-year, who adhere to the ideological monstrosity of Austria’s German character or consider themselves as members of the ‘great’ German Kulturnation. Austrianism stands for progress and democracy, whereas Germanism represents a discredited past”. (Ibid, p133)*

The main political parties in Austria were intent on uniting the population with a new type of Austrian nationalism with the primary purpose of establishing a political distance from Germany. Three aspects of this nation building project would affect the legacy of pan-Germanism in Austria and directly contribute to the future character and ideology of Haider’s FPÖ.

Firstly, after making some initial attempts after 1945 to carry out a systematic de-Nazification of former members of the NSDAP, the provisional government decided to pursue policies of assimilation and integration of this large constituency of the Austrian population - numbering approximately 700,000 (Ibid, p57). In 1949 voting rights were granted to former members of the NSDAP and the previously more rigorous policies of investigation and prosecution were toned down. As a result, these former NSDAP members were now able to join both the main parties, where some rose quite high in the political hierarchy, including two cabinet posts (Ibid, p58). A pragmatic consensus emerged that it was better to integrate former Nazis rather than to treat them as suspected criminals.

Secondly, and following on from this policy of assimilation, a new political party was allowed to form in 1949 called the League of Independents (VdU) (Riedlsperger, 1978, p39). This party was set up with the specific goal of representing the constituency of former Austrian Nazis (Ibid, p.40). The VdU was renamed the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 1954. From the outset it was a marginal force in Austrian politics, seeing its role as an opposition to the system of *Proporz* and the only Austrian political party retaining the ideology of pan-Germanism. Support for the VdU/FPÖ ebbed away from until they were almost extinguished as a political force in the early 1980s – pan-Germanism was, by then, perceived as a wholly redundant political cause (Pelinka, 1998, p33).

Thirdly, a new type of ‘Austrianist historiography’ emerged, though one that was not written by Austrian academics or intellectuals, but instead by non-academic researchers and publicists whose main intention was the promotion of a new, patriotic version of Austrian popular history:

*“This emerging Austrian national ideology centered on demarcation from Germany. Austria and the Austrians had never been part of Germany or the German nation. Some authors traced Austrian separateness back to the ‘privilegium minus’ in 1156; others chose the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. Austrians were of a different descent than Germans and spoke a language that was clearly demarcated from the one used in Germany. Austrian identity was formed by the Counterreformation and the baroque period and represented a Catholic antipode to protestant Germany. The Austrians felt much closer to their East Central European neighbours than to Germans. And finally: the Austrians had been incorporated into Germany against their will in 1938; they had been betrayed by the*

*international community and had resisted as much as they could; they had been a mere victim of National Socialist Germany”.* (Thaler, 2001, p59)

This ‘re-casting’ of Austrian history attempted to reduce and even eradicate its Germanic dimension. This had far-reaching consequences for the political culture that subsequently emerged in post-war Austria, including the ‘victim thesis’ becoming a standard interpretation of the Nazi period in Austria – despite the contrary evidence of widespread support for Hitler’s regime in Austria (Pick, 2000, p150).

The success of this historical re-casting can be seen by the lack of electoral support for the only political party still advocating pan-Germanism, the FPÖ. In addition, opinion polls that were carried out in order to gauge the level of Austrian patriotism showed that 47.3% of Austrians in 1964 described Austria as a ‘nation’ - a figure that rose to 72% of those questioned by 1994 (Thaler, p.168). In contemporary Austria, many commentators point to Austria having one of the most ‘patriotic’ populations in Europe (Bruckmüller in Luther & Pulzer, 1998, pp83-107).

The methods used in order to achieve this identification amongst Austrians with ‘Austria’ rather than a continued allegiance to *Grossdeutschland* entailed the use of three institutional instruments (Bushell, 1996, p.2). Firstly, the Austrian courts enforced laws against German associations, German societies and the use of term ‘German’ in Austrian political discourse. Secondly, in the field of education, a dissemination of ‘Austrian’ history was practiced (as outlined above) through revised versions of school textbooks. Finally, the

notion of 'Germaness', in particular that of Nazism, was systematically 'delegitimized' in social and political discourse and replaced by a new, 'Austrian' patriotism:

*"The Austrian state at this time (1945-1955) gave far greater regard to patriotism than either to the concept of democracy or to anti-fascism in its effort to create an Austrian identity". (Ibid, p6)*

This process of 're-education' successfully marginalised Pan-German ideology and resulted in most Austrians switching from their previous allegiance towards a *Grossdeutschland* to a new patriotic identification with the Austrian Second Republic. This new allegiance was an important backdrop to Austrians now identifying with a specifically *Austrian* culture, which included identification with Austrian landscapes; the music of Mozart etc; Austrian political neutrality in the cold war; and the Austrian economic 'miracle' – all these and other symbolic attachments instilled a new and powerful sense of Austrian patriotism. However, this state-driven air-brushing of history came at a cost - the repression and denial of the extent of the participation of Austrians in Nazi war crimes - and would come back to haunt future generations of Austrians (Pelinka, 1998, p173).

This chapter reveals a clear link to some specific historical forces that contributed to shaping the future content and character of Haider's FPÖ. The rise of the FPÖ in the 1990s was, in fact, the story of a dormant political force in Austrian post-war politics that took advantage of belated attempts to address crucial (and controversial) issues arising from Austria's own style of fascism in the 1930s and the subsequent involvement in Nazism during 1940s. Right-

wing extremism was never 'eradicated' in post war Austria....it just remained silent until the arrival of Haider in 1986.

## **Chapter 2**

### **A Political Context**

Chapter two will set out the political context of Haider's political success in the 1990s. There are two parts to this chapter. Firstly it will address, by analyzing three landmark elections in Austria during 1986, how Haider managed to turn the fortunes of his party and lay the foundations for future political successes. The second part focuses on how Haider's political career has been interpreted in academic literature.

### **Part I: Three Elections**

In 1986, three elections took place that saw the transformation of the Austrian political consensus of the post-war years and laid the foundations for the remarkable political success of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in the 1990s. The first election, held in May 1986, saw Kurt Waldheim become President of Austria. Secondly, in October, Jörg Haider was voted as the new Freedom Party leader during a party conference in Innsbruck – described by some as 'the Haider Putsch' (Riedlsperger, 1999). Thirdly, in November 1986, a general

election was held as a direct result of the political fallout from Haider becoming the new leader of the FPÖ. Here, Haider managed to double the FPÖ vote and cemented his leadership of the party.

## **1. Waldheim**

Haider's leadership 'coup' at a party conference in Innsbruck was preceded by the normally uncontroversial election for the Austrian presidency – a post of considerable symbolic meaning but with little political power. Normally, several candidates stand for office and then two put forward or 'approved' of by the main political parties and voted into office through a national presidential election. Kurt Waldheim stood as a 'non-partisan' candidate in 1986 against the SPÖ candidate, Kurt Streyer. Waldheim held a pragmatic conservative outlook and had the credibility of having held the post of United Nations General Secretary in the 1970s. During the campaign, an article in the Austrian weekly magazine *Profil* stated that there were 'unanswered questions' concerning Waldheim's war record and more specifically his role in Nazi war crimes that took place in the Balkans during the war (*Profil*, 1986). These allegations escalated as a result of Waldheim's initial silence on the matter and eventually made headlines both in Austria and abroad.

The presidential campaign became a polarized affair (Knight, TLS, 1986). On one side there were those who saw Waldheim as symptomatic of the façade that covered the culpability and active involvement of many Austrians in Nazi war crimes. This led to the Waldheim 'affair' swiftly moving from uncovering details about Waldheim's intelligence activities in Greece and Yugoslavia to a radical scrutiny of Austrian anti-Semitism - initiated from

America by the World Jewish Congress (Pelinka 1998 p.192). Austria was now 'in the dock'. On the other side of the Waldheim affair there was significant opposition to 'foreign interference' and the 'media-hyped exaggeration' of Austria's war guilt (Luther, 1987, p377). Waldheim's defence of having only 'done his duty' by serving the German *Wehrmacht* had considerable resonance in a country that was fully integrated into the German Reich between 1938 and 1945. Fuelling this resentment, the ÖVP expressed their support for Waldheim with an election poster stating 'We Austrians elect whomsoever we want!' (Ibid, p.389).

The ÖVP nudged the whole 1986 presidential campaign into a kind of patriotic vote, whereby a vote for Waldheim meant support for Austria in the face of foreign (and implicitly *Jewish*) interference. This heavily politicized campaign became less to do with supporting a particular candidate and much more a vote of protest against the 'foreign' campaign against Waldheim/Austria (Knight, TLS, 1986).

Waldheim won the election with 53.9% of the vote on a 90% turnout:

Austrian Presidential Election Result, 1986 (Binghamton University)

Date of Election	June 8, 1986 (Second Round)	
	Nr of Votes	Percentage of Votes
Kurt Waldheim	2 464 787	53.9%
Kurt Steyrer (SPÖ)	2 107 023	46.1%

The impact of Waldheim's victory encouraged Haider's populist political strategy in two ways. Firstly, Austria's post-war reputation as a respected and neutral European state that had suffered in equal measure to other European countries under the brutal occupation of the Nazis was now undermined. Austria had now revealed a 'darker side' - involving the painful exposure of its complicity and active co-operation with Nazism. For many people in Austria and abroad Waldheim symbolized a passive, unrepentant compliance with Nazism that was now an endemic aspect of Austrian society (Pelinka, 1998, p9).

Secondly, the Waldheim affair polarized Austrian society in a way not seen since the 1930s. The Austrian tabloid press and some conservative politicians contended that 'Jews and Jewish organizations' were responsible for tarnishing the country's image (Pelinka 1998 p.194). On the other side some official representatives recognized Austria's co-responsibility for the Holocaust (Ibid, p.195). Thomas Kleistl (a future Austrian president) stated in 1994:

*All too often we have spoken only of Austria as the first state to have lost its freedom and independence to National Socialism – and far too seldom of the fact that many of the worst henchmen in the Nazi dictatorship were Austrians (Ibid, p194)*

Thus, while it cannot be stated that the events surrounding this affair *caused* the rise of Haider, there is sufficient evidence to show that the Waldheim affair was an important catalyst for a more polarized and less consensual climate emerging in Austrian politics. This was an ideal background for an oppositional party like the FPÖ to gain more political momentum (Luther, 1987, p377).

## 2. Haider's Putsch

While the fallout from the Waldheim affair continued to escalate<sup>7</sup> - a confidence vote in the FPÖ leadership took place at the Innsbruck party conference in September 1986. The party had been minority government coalition partners with the SPÖ since 1983 and the FPÖ party leader, Norbert Steger, held the position of Vice Chancellor. At the time, the FPÖ were plummeting in the opinion polls to below 5%, with a very real danger of the party disappearing off the Austrian political landscape (Riedlsperger, 1999). Steger was perceived by many in the party as incompetent and much too 'liberal' (Zöchling, 1999, p115). Many of the more ideological section of the party wished for a return to the pan-Germanic core values of the 'Third Camp' that Steger was 'compromising' (Ibid, p117). This party faction had a youthful and energetic spokesman from Carinthia – Jörg Haider.

Haider, then still only 36, was at first reluctant to play his hand in a direct leadership challenge. However it became increasingly clear that he had such strong support (particularly from his political power base in Carinthia) that he decided to challenge Steger in a leadership battle. In a tumultuous party session (FAZ, 16.09.1986), which almost degenerated into a violent confrontation, Haider eventually won a decisive vote to become party leader by a margin of almost three to two<sup>8</sup>. Haider's election victory was fuelled by the fears of many in the FPÖ who perceived him as the 'last chance' for the party's survival; others saw his victory as the precursor the breakup of the FPÖ (Höbelt, 2003, p46).

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<sup>7</sup> The American authorities put Waldheim on a 'watch list' and refused him entry to the U.S.

<sup>8</sup> 263 to 179 delegates in favour of Haider or 58% versus 39%

Haider most certainly had struck lucky in 1986 – as well as his political successes he inherited a considerable fortune in the form of a large tract of land and property in Carinthia from his uncle. As a result he became one of the richest people in Austria. The estate he received was formerly owned by a Jewish family and purchased at a considerable discount after the *Anschluss* in 1938 (Zöchling, 1999, p119).

Haider's successful party leadership bid precipitated an Austrian political crisis. It had already become clear that the socialist Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky, disliked Haider and would not relish the prospect of him as a minister in the Cabinet (Ibid, p120). Thus, even though Haider was making overtures to the SPÖ concerning his willingness to keep the coalition together, Vranitzky announced on the radio within 48 hours of Haider's victory that he was dissolving the coalition and calling a snap general election for 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 1986.

### **3. 1986 General Election**

In 1986 Haider was still a marginal political figure, receiving none of the media exposure of later years – positive or negative. He saw his task in 1986 as one of galvanizing a political party that had been through an acrimonious leadership battle and fight a general election on behalf of a party that had slumped to its lowest share of the vote in its entire existence. This election was to be a fight for both Haider's and FPÖ's political survival (Höbelt, 2003, p.50). Haider introduced a new style of political campaigning in which he performed a frantic schedule of political rallies and 'pressing flesh' whereby he was able to project the image of being a 'people's politician' – unlike the distant and arrogant politicians he criticized as 'holed up in Vienna' (Ibid, p51).

Haider identified three key issues for the November 1986 election campaign. (Luther in Kirchner, 1988, pp213-252). Firstly, he criticized the bureaucracy and red tape that was hurting the agricultural sector in particular – an appeal to the rural constituency. Secondly, he focused on the ‘corrupt and outdated’ system of *Proporz*, which had produced an Austrian political establishment that was alienated from ordinary people and propped up by an endemic system of privileges and political perks. This ‘Robin Hood’ image helped Haider construct himself in the eyes of voters as a kind of ‘savior’ for Austria that would ‘clean up’ the system, rooting out privileges and corruption. Thirdly, he promoted the theme of ‘national pride’. Haider had been a keen observer of the Waldheim affair (Zöchling, 1999, p.136), paying particular attention to the ‘patriotic’ vote of many Austrians who were unhappy about ‘foreign’ interference. The surfacing of anti-Semitism and reactionary rhetoric into the public realm at this time was cleverly included into the FPÖ political campaign where Haider portrayed himself as the only ‘real’ and ‘decent’ Austrian politician (Wodak et al, 1999, pp70-105).

The outcome of the election resulted in a grand coalition between the SPÖ and ÖVP. However, the Haider’s FPÖ managed to double their share of the vote to 9.7%. This was their best election result since the 1950s. Haider had gambled successfully by staging a party putsch in September, 1986 – and won. In the ensuing general election in November he made a radical departure into populist politics – and won again. The following table shows a comparison between the results of the 1983 and 1986 Austrian general elections:

*Austrian Election Results Comparison 1983 and 1986 (Binghamton University)*

<b>Date of Election</b>	<b>April 24, 1983</b>	
	<b>Nr of Seats</b>	<b>Percentage of Votes #</b>
Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ)	90	47.65%
Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	81	43.22%
Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)	12	4.98%

  

<b>Date of Election</b>	<b>November 23, 1986</b>	
	<b>Nr of Seats</b>	<b>Percentage of Votes</b>
Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ)	80	43.1%
Austrian People's Party (ÖVP)	77	41.3%
Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)	18	9.7%
United Greens / Alternative List	8	4.8%

From 1986 right up to the general election in 1999, Haider's FPÖ managed to systematically increase their support until they reached a similar percentage as the other two main parties.

Here is a table showing the election result of October 1999 that brought the FPÖ into a power-sharing coalition with the ÖVP:

Date of Election	October 3, 1999	
	Number of Seats	Percentage of Votes
(SPÖ)	65	33.1%
(ÖVP)	52	26.9%
(FPÖ)	52	26.9%
Green Alternative (GA)	14	7.4%

## Part II: Views about Haider

The second part of this chapter will analyze the two distinct interpretations of the ‘Haider phenomenon’ that have emerged in recent academic literature. In the first camp, authors explain Haider in a structural context – locating his rise in the disillusionment of many Austrians with the politics of *Proporz* and the political domination of the SPÖ and ÖVP. Here, Haider represents an overdue modernization and normalization of an outdated Austrian political culture and the supersession of old and redundant political cleavages.

The second category, from the Left, gives more prominence to the notion that Haider

symbolized a deep malaise in the Austrian psyche, resulting from the failure of post-war political élites to deal with the legacy of Nazism. Some of these authors see the rise of the FPÖ as a danger to Austrian democracy and categorize Haider as an extreme right-winger or neo-Nazi.

### **The Structural View**

Luther and Sully note that there is a distinct trajectory in post-war Austrian politics in which the 'old' *Proporz* system of cross-party political consensus had outlived its usefulness by the 1980s. Political 'modernization' was required in order to adjust to the new political and economic forces emerging in Europe – i.e. neo-liberalism. The political risks and economic sacrifices involved in instigating such reforms led to the SPÖ and ÖVP simply not moving in a reformist direction. It was therefore left to the newly revamped FPÖ to shake up this 'fossilized' Austrian political system. In this view, Haider not only modernizes the FPÖ but becomes the figurehead of modernizing the post-war Austrian political and economic system – a process long overdue.

Luther states that Haider's 'structural opposition' lies at the very core of the Freedom Party's ideology rather than purported 'right-wing extremism' coming from the Left:

*“The element of continuity (or 'core') of the Freedom Party's ideology may well reside not in right-wing extremism but in the party's structural opposition to Austria's post-war system”*

(Luther, 2000, p23).

Luther adds:

*“The Freedom Party is neither a neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, nor a right-wing extremist party....no such values govern the operation, or political goals of the party”. (ibid p27).*

Luther claims that by over-emphasizing the 'right-wing extremist' or 'Nazi' aspects of Haider's FPÖ you lose sight of the adjustments the FPÖ had to make in order to adapt to a more mainstream political message and the democratizing effect such a structural opposition was able to have on an outdated political system. Luther notes that Haider's FPÖ actually contributed to a 'normalization' of Austrian politics rather than provoking some kind of systemic crisis:

*“A shift from a system of party competition characterized by hyper stability and accommodation to one in which uncertainty and competition are the order of the day....in some respects (this) can be regarded as a 'normalization' of the Second Republic's party system”. (Luther & Pulzer, 1998, p151)*

Luther also notes that the oppositional dimension of the FPÖ in the 1990s and how the party was singularly unprepared for executive power in 2000:

*“The transition (from opposition to government) is likely to prove especially difficult for a party such as the FPÖ which for so many years and so successfully pursued a strategy of populist agitation”. (Luther, 2001, p28)*

Sully wrote 'The Haider Phenomenon' (1997), one of the few books in English on the subject. In a similar vein to Luther, she puts Haider at centre stage in Austria's 'painful process of modernization' (Ibid, p204). Haider's contribution to this process entailed playing

the 'radical anti-establishment card' in Austrian political culture. This strategy involved targeting an Austrian political class apparently dominated by '1968-vintage pseudo-left Viennese intellectuals' (Ibid p37). Sully implies here that Haider represented a sort of cleansing of a rotten political establishment still hanging on to power. She blames the Austrian left for failing to reform and modernize the Second Republic before 1986 - a failure that opened up a political space that made Haider's political breakthrough possible.

Sully notes that the failure of the Left is evidenced by the subsequent 'hysterical' over-reaction and virulently 'anti' Haider stance taken by many in Austria during the 1990s. The left's 'anti-Haiderism' focused itself on the apparent 'fascism' of the FPÖ, thereby bypassing any self-criticism and ignoring the required process of normalization that was taking place in an 'ordinary western democracy' (Ibid, p200).

For Sully, Haider's politics are a "potpourri" of ideas from all sides of the political spectrum designed to appeal to as many people as possible without completely disenchanting or betraying some core party principles. Her fundamental observation is the fact that Haider's Freedom Party, after becoming such a strong political player in the 1990s, became capable of breaking old political cleavages and reforming an outdated political system:

*"Haider's project to change Austria is built on a potpourri of ideas from the right and left, from neo-liberalism economics, conservative slogans and old socialist rhetoric. It is radical but also conservative". (ibid, p201)*

The third author, Höbelt, is perceived as being 'close' to the FPÖ – a kind of 'party' historian. In his most recent book on the subject (Höbelt, 2003), he emphasizes the crucial role that

Haider played in the transformation of the Austrian post-war political system during the 1990s. He describes Haider as a 'harbinger of change against a system of power-sharing (*Proporz*) that was all-pervasive' (Ibid, p24). The key element of Haider's political strategy to bring about systemic change was to provoke and mobilize a notoriously apathetic voting public into registering their 'disgust' with the ruling political class. Höbelt notes that Haider was the first Austrian politician to focus specifically on undecided voters in his election campaigning (ibid. p154).

Höbelt also states that Haider's electoral successes created some internal party tensions, most significantly between the party's 'old guard' (who were becoming politically irrelevant) and the new breed of Freedomite 'populists' keen on obtaining the trappings of power. The long-standing party members were increasingly perturbed about the developments and events that they had 'kick-started but no longer controlled' (Ibid, p61). They were particularly unhappy after having played the role of 'kingmaker' for Haider in 1986 to get him elected as party leader and then be marginalized by unprincipled career politicians (Ibid, p62).

Höbelt reflects on the issue of the "Nazi question mark" that hovers over the FPÖ, which entailed the assumption that the FPÖ was basically a neo-fascist party masquerading as a mainstream liberal political movement. He states that Haider took a political gamble (which in hindsight he probably lost) by being too 'outspoken' on the various taboos stemming from Austria's past, in particular the Nazi legacy. Haider's intention here was to gain popular domestic support by appearing to 'speak out' on important issues that other Austrian politicians were keeping silent on. However his rhetoric and occasional 'gaffes' about

Nazism led to the unshakeable image (particularly abroad) of a neo-Nazi being in the heart of Austrian politics, endangering the democratic credentials of the EU. It subsequently became clear (especially after the election of 1999) that because of his dubious record of historical revisionism, Haider would never be allowed to take on a government office. Höbelt notes the difficulty Haider encountered in changing course on this matter (by apologizing or showing contrition) - he seemed to have reached a point of no return:

*“Once he had started in that direction, (with ambivalent remarks about Nazism) however, it was difficult for him to turn back”.* (Ibid, p155).

### **The Left View**

Scholars on the Left of the political spectrum also perceive Haider as an important catalyst for political change in Austria. However, it is a change for the worse – a reactionary step backwards. They emphasize issues such as the 'threat' posed to democracy by Haider; his links to the extreme right; his historical revisionism; and his xenophobia.

Neugebauer holds Haider responsible for shifting the FPÖ from the liberal agenda it was pursuing under the leadership of Norbert Steger in the 1980s towards the 'racist and extreme right-wing agenda' that marks out the Haider era (Neugebauer/Bailer, 1997). He contends that although the FPÖ is historically associated with the post-war policies of rehabilitating former Austrian Nazis – it was (by the 1980s) in the process of 'normalizing' itself into a mainstream and moderate European Liberal political party. Neugebauer contends that Haider is responsible for reversing this process and states that many of the contemporary components of extreme right-wing tendencies in the FPÖ can be directly

attributed to "Haider's movement" (Ibid, p172)

In this context, Haider's self-promotion as a 'statesman' and 'Austrian patriot' are a 'camouflage' in order to fool the public about the true nature of Haider's intentions:

*"(The Austrian public was deceived by) the consistently pan-Germanistic, and in the last instance, anti-Austrian, basic stance of the FPÖ....to mobilize or utilize xenophobic attitudes in the population" (Ibid. p169).*

Neugebauer shows that some extreme right-wing groups on the margins of Austrian politics have been integrated into the FPÖ since Haider became party leader (Ibid, p.166). Thus, while Haider was busy raising the 'moderate' profile of the FPÖ with various populist proposals, there was a parallel process going on of an increasingly active, vocal and expanding faction of neo-Nazi elements within the party (Neugebauer et al, 1996, p50).

Neugebauer sees the main reason for FPÖ's success as stemming from the failure and breakdown of democratic Austrian political culture. Haider's strategy is simple - to change the nature of the state and political system according to his own wishes (Ibid, p55)

Ruth Wodak carried out a 'discursive analysis' of Haider and the FPÖ during the 1990s (Wodak et al. 1999). The aim of this type of analysis was to uncover hidden codes and modes of expression that reveal the 'real' nature of Haider's FPÖ. Wodak states that Haider had managed to manipulate language in order to construct a 'new' type of Austrian national identity. For Wodak, this 'constructed identity' had the effect of polarizing the population with the aim of creating the sort of divisive society in which reactionary politics could thrive.

Wodak contends that Haider's Austria is a divided society composed of the 'good guys' (white, Germanic Austrians) and the 'bad guys' (notably black people, Jews, intellectuals and East Europeans) (Ibid, p40).

Similar to Neugebauer she notes that Haider utilizes xenophobic prejudices already held by many Austrians and succeeded in using them to his own political advantage - at the expense of 'progressive' political forces in Austria. Haider even went as far as making a new assessment of Austria's "past, present and future" by postulating in his rhetoric who he considers to be the "*echt, anständig und ordentlich*" (sincere, decent and orderly) citizens of Austria (Wodak, 2000 pp10-11).

Anton Pelinka is probably the most prolific and widely quoted academic on Haider's FPÖ. Pelinka accepts that Haider brought about a 'modernization' process in Austrian politics. However the significance of this is due to the 'Haider effect' which involved many previously left-wing voters from lower social classes switching their allegiance towards the populist right:

*"The thoughts and actions of the 'underdogs' (i.e. lower classes) are increasingly right-wing"*  
(Pelinka 1998, p117).

Pelinka states that this shift to the right in voting behavior did not suddenly begin with Haider's arrival into Austrian politics but arose out of the 'taboos and self-deception' that were endemic to the 'Second Republic's re-construction of history' (Pelinka, 2002, pp1-15). This type of self-deception produced the 'victim thesis' (see chapter 1), a convenient myth that propagated that the Austrians were 'the good Germans' as opposed to the Nazis.

Pelinka locates the rise of Haider in a series of post-war crises in Austrian society. Firstly, in the protests of the 1960s. Here, Austria was no exception where, as in most of Western Europe, there was a challenge to the post-war values of continuity and denial.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, the 1980s brought a decline in the stability and consensus of the political system, making the 'proporz' arrangement a less viable political model. Thirdly, in the 1990s there was the impact and imposition on Austria of a new type of European and international agenda. This 'foreign' agenda became a focal point of critique for Haider.

*"All these crises together changed Austrian society; and when the society and economy changed, the political system had to change also" (Pelinka, 1998, p213).*

By implication, Pelinka points towards historical forces that were already favorable to a right-wing populist such as Haider to enter the political arena. He also argues that while Haider's alleged association with Nazism was not necessarily a 'vote winner' it was indicative of Austria's political culture that it did not seem to *prevent* 27% of Austrians voting for him in 1999 (Pelinka, 2002, pp1 -15).

This chapter has given a political context to Haider. On a final note it is important to emphasize the systemic and ideological reasons for the FPÖ's electoral successes in the 1990s. There are additional writers who have focused on Haider's personality and political marketing skills, for example his notorious and 'telegenic' media appearances. These aspects of the Haider 'phenomenon' were highlighted in Walter Ötsch's book, 'Haider Light'

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<sup>9</sup> Where Austria did differ from the rest of Western Europe (I would argue) is that the 1960s 'protests' occurred almost exclusively in the cultural arena rather than through demonstrations and strikes (see the case study).

(Ötsch, 2000) as well as numerous sources in postmodernist sociological literature. While I think this area of study is a valid investigation into the role of Haider's charisma as a crucial factor for the FPÖ's political gains, I would argue that the subsequent success (after Haider's resignation from the FPÖ in 2003 and subsequent death in 2008) of the FPÖ *without* Haider at the helm is evidence that he really did seem to exploit favorable systemic and historical factors to shift Austria firmly to the right....and it remains there to this day.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Writing in summer 2012...

## **Chapter 3**

### **Haider's Manifesto**

This chapter will analyze the content of the FPÖ political program and strategy in the 1990s. It will focus on the most important issues that Haider incorporated into his populist manifesto for the FPÖ. It will serve as a useful background to the case study in the next chapter, which examines how Haider used issues around culture and identity in order to maximize his populist strategy as well as appeasing the internal disquiet within his party.

### **The Party Machine**

Haider managed to transform a near extinct Austrian political entity into a formidable and modern party machine by the early 1990s. Prior to Haider's victorious power struggle for the party leadership in 1986 it was inconceivable to imagine that such a marginal political party such as the FPÖ would go on to become Austria's second largest party within thirteen years. In the early years of his leadership, one of Haider's most important tasks was to transform the party into a modern, effective and well-oiled party machine that was suited to the new political climate of the 1990s. Haider had the advantage over other political parties in Austria of dealing with a relatively compliant and willing constituency of party members who were hungry for political power and in awe of Haider's charismatic leadership (Ötsch,

2000, p.27). By contrast, the SPÖ and ÖVP suffered from the usual ailments of internal feuding and reluctance to take the politically risky strategy of party reform. A speech by Haider in 1989 indicates his resolve to 'get things done':

*"What counts in a party are fundamental convictions. Something which has been lacking in recent years. Just like the old expression: 'While the cat's away the mice will play'....well, since 1986 the cat is back again!"* (Ibid, p28)

Haider initiated a radical re-organisation of the party. He dispensed with internal opposition and established a strong personal power base. For many in the party, Haider became a kind of 'guru' or 'Führer' and attracted sycophantic behavior from his political cabinet and reverential treatment by party members or supporters. This was no bland politician like previous FPÖ leaders - his colorful, energetic and unconventional style attracted considerable support in his first years of leadership (Zöchling, 1999).

The re-organisation of the party involved a total revamp of the fragmented regional parties, whose outdated structures were basically dissolved and built up afresh. In order to achieve this Haider replaced top personnel in these regional parties with his own set of hand-picked and loyal 'Haiderites' (Ötsch, 2000 p30). His position was strengthened even further when the FPÖ became the largest party in Carinthia after regional elections in 1989, after which he became the regional governor there. Haider was now in a position to not only claim a tight grip on his party but he was also wielding real political power as governor of Carinthia. This regional stronghold became an important source of political legitimacy on which Haider was able draw throughout his political career (Zöchling, 1997, p45).

After the initial euphoria surrounding Haider's leadership, the first murmurings of discontent began to emerge from the liberal wing of the party that was still reeling from the trouncing they received in Haider's leadership coup in 1986. The most potent threat to Haider came from his party deputy, Heide Schmidt, an able politician who was increasingly disconcerted with the right-wing populist agenda and xenophobic leanings of the party (Neugebauer, 1997). Things came to a crunch in 1993 – when the FPÖ initiated a referendum on tightening the immigration laws which they called 'Austria First'. Schmidt interpreted this as an open declaration of xenophobic policy and resigned from the party in protest, taking a small contingent of fellow liberals with her.

Schmidt went on to form a separate party called the Liberal Forum (LIF) (Ibid, p67).

However, to the surprise of many, Haider was able to brush off this challenge and actually managed to *increase* the FPÖ share of the national vote in the subsequent election of 1994. In fact, Haider surpassed the 20% mark in that 1994 election. Haider's authority within the FPÖ was now unassailable. He was able to draw on overwhelming support from his party members; the strong and vocal loyalty of his own political inner circle; and an increasing popularity in the country as a whole (Sully, 1997, p65).

A pertinent illustration of Haider's enduring popularity and dominance within the FPÖ is provided by an official party brochure produced at the end of 2001 (Freiheitliche Akademie, 2001). Haider had already stepped down as party leader in favour of Susanne Reiss-Passer almost two years before the brochure's publication. However the content of this party document reveals, in chronological order with plush photographs and gushing clichés, the so-called 'Haider years' from 1986 to 2001. There is only one picture of the new party

leader, Reiss-Passer, in the whole brochure. The overwhelming impression left by reading this is that without Haider at the helm the FPÖ would never have made its political breakthrough and that the party is completely dependent upon him for continued electoral support.

### **The Freedom Party's Campaign Issues**

As well as tightening the party organisation and purging the FPÖ of its internal opponents, Haider chose a careful mix of campaigning issues, selected mostly on the basis of their populist appeal. Haider had to be wary throughout his leadership, especially in the later years, not to stray too much from the traditional far-right ideology of core members and supporters of the FPÖ. Haider's FPÖ also reflected a general trend in the rest of Europe that saw a distinct move towards political mobilization around right-wing populist issues.

Countries such as France (Front-National), Belgium (Vlaams-Blok) or Italy (Forza Italia) had particularly strong right-wing populist movements. From the wider European perspective various issues emerge that all these populist parties have incorporated into their political strategies, such as increasing voter apathy; the disillusionment of ordinary people with the European Union and their own national politicians; the failure of mainstream parties to deal with issues such as crime or immigration; and the uncertainty created by the march of economic neo-liberalism (Eismann, 2002). All these issues are relevant to the progress of the FPÖ in the 1990s; however there are also some important Austria-specific topics – particularly culture and identity – which I will set out in more detail in the case study.

Meny & Surel (2002, p69) make three points concerning the political issues adopted by

Haider in the 1990s. Firstly, although the party was part of a European-wide shift to the right, the FPÖ was different in that it was an already established and existing political entity. In fact, the party had been specifically established in post-war Austria to cater for the huge constituency of ex-Nazis (Pelinka, 1998). When Haider took over the party in 1986 he inherited a functioning party machine that would qualify for a significant rise in state funding if it improved its electoral appeal. Most of the other European right-wing populist parties were started in the last two decades and have shown inherent tendencies to implode or split due to internal conflicts and lack of experienced political players.

Secondly, the political project embarked upon by Haider during the rise of the FPÖ in the 1990s was essentially an oppositional strategy, with issues being selected often purely on the basis of placating a certain constituency without any real prospect of introducing actual legislation. This factor is borne out by the failure of the FPÖ to retain popularity once in power after 2000. Topics such as immigration or political corruption are highly complex issues for governments to legislate on, but easy for an opposition to campaign about (Meny&Surel, 2002).

Thirdly, Haider's political strategy drew on a rich tradition of anti-modernism, political conservatism and ambivalent national identity that were already prevalent in Austria. Against this background Haider campaigned around a series of Austria-specific issues that were all related to four basic concepts of far-right political ideology, namely: Order; Tradition, Identity and Security (Ibid, p72)

There follows a summary and analysis of the main issues adopted by Haider's FPÖ during

the 1990s to increase the party's electoral appeal and achieve executive power.

### **The Political Class**

A survey undertaken concerning the motives of FPÖ voters taken at exit polls between 1990 and 1999 (Ibid, p97) revealed that Haider's critique of the political class (Proporz) was the main reason people gave for voting Haider. On average, 69% of voters thought that of all the Austrian political parties, only the FPÖ 'seriously combats scandals and privileges'. In addition, 63% thought the Freedom Party had brought a 'wind of change' to Austria. Almost anything written about Haider's FPÖ, whatever political spectrum, shows that Haider's most consistent, and seemingly effective, electoral issue was his critique of the apparent corruption, abuse of privileges and repeated scandals emanating from Austria's political establishment. He repeatedly drove the message home to Austrians that the FPÖ was set apart from the 'old parties' and of his determination to fight the old system of corruption and privilege, i.e. *Proporz*. Haider claimed that the Austrian political establishment had 'lost touch' with the needs of 'ordinary people':

*"The domination of the old parties was justified when Austria was not free...today these parties use Austria to satiate their own greed and ambition. There is no Western democracy in which parties have such power and such a grip on so many spheres of private life as in Austria" (Haider, 1995, p46).*

Ironically, one of Haider's most effective populist claims of being the 'Robin Hood' of Austrian politics came from one of the richest people in Austria. At one stage, he even insisted on FPÖ functionaries taking a salary cut, thereby boosting the 'incorruptible' image

of the party. When the FPÖ attained executive power in 2000, Haider resigned his leadership and later announced that he had withdrawn from any formal links with national politics. This could well indicate the sense of inevitability and hard reality that the coalition of February 2000 with the ÖVP actually meant the absorption of the Freedom Party into the Austrian political class. The FPÖ election campaign of 2002 was notably absent of the usual stinging critique directed towards the 'corrupt' shenanigans of the ÖVP and SPÖ. Haider's style of oppositional politics and constant lambasting of the political establishment will certainly need modification by a political party that was now 'part' of the establishment (Deicke, ECPR Conference Paper, 2004).

### **Immigration**

Like most other right-wing populist parties in Europe, the FPÖ took an aggressive and xenophobic stance on immigration. In fact, the party's xenophobic rhetoric caused the European Union to take the unprecedented step of imposing sanctions on a fellow member state after the FPÖ came to power in February 2000. This was followed by the 'Three Wise Men'<sup>11</sup> being dispatched to Vienna to assess the European Union's position with a remit to check the extent of:

*“The Austrian Government’s commitment to the common European values, in particular concerning the rights of minorities, refugees and immigrants” (EU Report on Austria, 2000)*

Immigration had already become a hot political issue in Austria after the collapse of

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<sup>11</sup> Martti Ahtisaari, Jochen Frowein and Marcelino Oreja – were all high-ranking former ministers of EU states.

communism in 1990 which resulted in a large influx of refugees from the Balkan states due to the Yugoslavian conflict. It was an easy topic to campaign about because of the general perception amongst most ordinary Austrians that there were 'too many' immigrants and that they were contributing to a rise in crime, drug trafficking and unemployment. The FPÖ favoured the introduction of draconian measures to curb the influx immigration and promoted a more rigid policy of making immigrants and asylum seekers learn the German language and Austrian culture. An ideological message, implicit in most of Haider's rhetoric on this subject, was an intention to reverse the trend of 'multiculturalism' in Austrian society, a theme that will be explored more thoroughly in this study in the section on 'identity politics'.

Underlying Haider's rhetoric on immigration or the *Ausländer Problem* (the 'foreigner problem') (Meny & Surel, 2002) are two factors. Firstly, he portrayed immigration as being bad for the economy by connecting it with criminality, job losses and an unnecessary drain on the welfare state. Secondly, Haider spread fear amongst Austrians of an 'Umvolkung' (literally - 'impairment of ethnic stock') and proposed a 'Recht auf Heimat' (the right to an *Austrian* homeland) for Austrian born citizens (Ibid, p77). Therefore, by making immigration out to be a 'threat' to Austria, Haider made it clear that a multicultural, ethnically diverse society is both undesirable and a recipe for social collapse. An example of how the FPÖ played the immigration issue was during the 1999 election, in which the FPÖ polled its highest ever; result, where their main slogan was: *Stop Die Überfremdung* (Stop The Flood Of Immigration)

By highlighting the issue of immigration Haider was perceived by voters as 'grasping a

political nettle' that the other parties seemed incapable of doing and of tackling an issue in accordance with the wishes of the people (Ibid, p.78). As a result, the governing coalition found itself in a no-win situation - if they spoke out on immigration, it was seen by many as only resulting from political pressure by Haider. If they challenged the FPÖ's xenophobic stance, the main parties could be accused of being too 'soft' on the issue. The result was that the SPÖ and ÖVP ended up adopting many of Haider's proposals into their own political manifestos - albeit somewhat toned down. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Austria had some of the most draconian immigration policies in Europe – before the FPÖ even came to power (Ibid, p89)

## **Europe**

Before Haider, the FPÖ was a pro-Europe party. Haider chose to change this stance, especially after the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 which he labeled as being 'anti-patriotic':

*“Those who put the Maastricht Treaty and European unity above our Austrian cultural identity, should not be surprised if the seriousness of their patriotism is doubted”. (Haider, 1995, p63)*

Haider converted his party to the politics of Euroscepticism for three reasons (Profil, 5/8/2002). Firstly, he wished to gain political capital out of the widespread fears in Austria that European enlargement would lead to a wave of 'cheap labour' entering the country from Austria's neighbouring states in Eastern Europe. Secondly, the EU was perceived as being democratically unaccountable, too bureaucratic and as wielding a disproportionate amount of political and economic power compared to individual sovereign nations. Thirdly,

Haider disliked the European political 'establishment' in a similar manner to his domestic critique of *Proporz*. He accused 'Brussels' and also some national governments like Germany and France of being 'out of touch' with the general public. In a similar vein to his critique of Austria's political establishment, Haider claimed that the EU is full of politicians and bureaucrats enjoying lavish perks and privileges at the expense of ordinary taxpayers.

Although Haider never advocated complete withdrawal from the EU, he wished to reverse the trend towards a united Europe by being in favour of bolstering national institutions - a policy pretty similar to that of the British Conservative Party. Thus, similar to the general tone of rhetoric used by the FPÖ in the 1990s, on the issue of Europe they highlighted the negative aspects of the EU and stoked the already existing fears amongst the general public.

### **Church and Nation**

As part of his populist strategy, Haider found it necessary to scrutinize and review some long-standing party policies that were deemed to be outdated or off-putting to the wider electorate. The two main bones of contention were the party position in respect to the Roman Catholic Church and that of the Austrian nation (Mair et al, 2004). This revision of previous policies can be compared to the 'New Labour' ideological project in Britain under Tony Blair<sup>12</sup> that rid itself of unwanted and unpopular left-wing principles that had been enshrined in the traditional Labour party constitution.

The FPÖ's relationship to the Church (in the case of Austria, predominantly the Catholic

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<sup>12</sup> Haider named Blair on several occasions as his 'political example' (FT, 2/2/2000)

Church) has traditionally been antagonistic. One of the features of coming from the 'third camp' was to have a party principle of 'anti-clericalism', not unlike the deeply held suspicion of the church contained in National Socialist ideology. (Pelinka, 1998, p9). This party principle did not manifest itself into any concrete policies such as refusing Catholics entry to the party, it entailed an antipathy to catholicism and the clergy as well as opposition to the traditionally catholic political party, the ÖVP (Hofer, 1998).

Haider, supported by a leading catholic functionary within the party, Erwin Stadler, decided to adopt a more conciliatory stance. His reasoning for this was straightforward; in order to increase the party's share of the vote it was necessary to cast a wider net amongst the general population. In addition, any future political alliance with the ÖVP would have to be forged on the basis of the FPÖ striking a more accommodating stance towards the Catholic Church. Various overtures were made to the Church, including the establishment of friendly relations between the FPÖ and the conservative bishop of St Pölten, Kurt Krenn (Ibid, p56 and case study). Haider went so far as to have an audience with the Pope in December 2000 (Profil, 15/12/2000)

This ideological shift in relation to the Church bolstered the FPÖ in its political posturing on public morality and 'family values'. Haider and others expressed deeply conservative views on these matters which were well received by the Catholic Church<sup>13</sup>. The various issues in which the Catholic Church and Haider's FPÖ adopted similar positions included the wish for a return to the role of women staying 'at home' with the children; draconian solutions for

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<sup>13</sup> Ironically, most Austrian commentators I spoke to claim that Haider was gay (see appendix).

the drug problem; supporting the idea of people taking more 'public responsibility'; and a critique of the contents of certain aspects of modern culture such as pornography, avant-garde experimental art etc. (Hofer, 1998).

The second policy shift by Haider concerned the vexed issue of German nationalism (pan – Germanism) (Höbelt, p.65, 2001 and the case study in this dissertation). Like anti-clericalism, this was another ideology associated with the third camp and involved the pursuit of the eventual goal of uniting Austria with Germany in order to set up a 'German Nation'. The desire for the *Anschluss* (unification with Germany) had actually been a political goal shared across the Austrian political spectrum, particularly just after the First World War, when many people felt that the rump of Austria leftover after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not going to be a viable prospect as a functioning modern state (Segar, 1991). However after the trauma of Nazism and the newly reconfigured post-war world of cold war politics, any notion of an *Anschluss* was completely discredited by the main political parties - apart from the FPÖ.

Haider had always been rooted in the tradition of pan-Germanism, tracing back from his family upbringing to his early political career (Zöchling, 1999). In fact, the core supporters who helped him in the leadership battle of 1986 stemmed mostly from the pan-German faction of the party. Again, however, political expediency came before political principle for Haider. Pan-Germanism was perceived as an unpopular, even unpatriotic position to take in the Second Republic (Thaler, 2001). Haider realized that the party position needed to be modified, although he repeatedly expressed disdain for the concept of an Austrian nation - describing in as late as 1988 the process of Austria becoming a sovereign nation as a having

been an 'ideological miscarriage' (Pelinka et al, 2008, p129), implying that he thought the whole basis and legitimacy of an Austrian nation as being flawed. Despite these views and regular attempts to placate the pan-German core within his party, Haider steered a course of ridding the party 'from harping on about German nationalism' (Zöchling, 1999). The party position on this subject was subsequently modified into a wish to encourage German *Kultur* rather than any political union. Haider extrapolated this further by advocating that the FPÖ was the only truly patriotic Austrian party, a significant semantic turnaround (Ibid, p94). By 1999 he had dealt with the issues of anti-clericalism and German nationalism and enabled a smooth transition for the FPÖ to enter a coalition with the ÖVP in February 2000.

### **The War Generation**

The 'war generation' refers to the generation of Austrians that fought with the German *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War. Many of these former soldiers felt that their bravery and sacrifice was being forgotten due to the defeat of Nazism and the German Army's complicity with Nazi war crimes. Although this issue is not related to specific political policies, it has considerable symbolic value and reflects the FPÖ's connection and association with National Socialism and pan-Germanism (Pelinka, 1998). The war generation is also a theme that is not necessarily connected to the rhetoric of populism (most of the 'war generation' are dead) but is connected to two other factors. Firstly, Haider's National Socialist family background and his continued need for pleasing the right-wing of his party and secondly, the war generation issue fitted well into his role as the 'taboo breaker' in Austrian political discourse (Zöchling, 1999).

Haider's parents were members of the Austrian Nazi Party before the *Anchluss* in 1938. He was brought up, and instilled with, a deep respect for the 'war generation' that had fought so tenaciously in the Second World War. Coming from this background, Haider wanted to 'honour' the war generation for their sacrifice and bravery rather than defaming or incriminating them. While recognizing that Nazi atrocities did indeed take place, Haider was not interested in 'bringing up the past', with a preference in this context to 'look to the future' (Scharsach, 2000, p34). An illustration of this was Haider's vocal opposition to the *Wehrmacht Ausstellung* an exhibition that highlighted the German army's role in Nazi war crimes held in Vienna during 2002 (Profil, 8/3/2002). Haider's inherited ambivalence towards Austria's National Socialist legacy would manifest itself on regular occasions with controversial 'gaffes' about praising Nazi employment policies or the 'decency' of the men who belonged to the Nazi SS (Bailer & Neugebauer, 1997).

Haider's 'speaking out' on this controversial subject, whether intentionally or not, pandered to the FPÖ's core pan-German constituency and extreme right-wing elements in the party. Whether the 'war generation' and revisionist rhetoric about Nazism were of popular appeal to the Austrian electorate is debatable, on balance I think that the idea that Austrians are more 'Nazi' than other European countries, alleged by some authors, extremely suspect (Wodak & Pelinka, 2002). What does seem to have benefited Haider by raising these issues is a respect for a politician that is willing to 'break taboos' and 'speak his mind' on matters of principle. Most other Austrian politicians were seen as too wily and careful to make any meaningful statements. This outspoken rhetoric did carry considerable political risks for Haider however. As Höbelt suggests (2003), Haider might have earned a measure of respect

amongst the general population in Austria for taking such a risk, however on a governmental and international level it was to prove a disaster. Haider's record of Nazi-sympathetic outbursts, such as appearing before former SS veterans and describing them as 'dignified' and 'honourable' or praising 'some' of Hitler's policies (Zöchling, 1999, p103) made him into a person non-grata for executive power and came back to haunt him with a vengeance when the new coalition was established in February 2000.

### **The Economy**

The FPÖ is not associated with being able to manage the economy any better than the SPÖ or ÖVP. However, Haider did manage to make some political mileage out of economic issues, albeit mostly in Carinthia rather than in national politics. On economic policy, the FPÖ was pretty similar to other European right-wing populist parties – offering voters a package of neo-liberal reforms such as lower taxes for the middle classes; a reduced budget deficit; and a program of accelerated privatization. Unabashed neo-liberalism however was recognized as unpopular with ordinary people and unfavourably compared to the 'unfettered' capitalism in the United States. Therefore, Haider also struck a protectionist note, speaking out on behalf of 'saving Austrian jobs and livelihoods' against the march of large corporations and economic immigrants (Scharsach, 2000). Once the FPÖ was in power Karl Heinz Grassler, took over as Finance Minister with the aim of cutting the budget deficit to 'zero'. There was a significant amount of tension between the 'yuppie' Grassler and Haider's protectionist instincts leading to Grassler eventually resigning from the party in order to remain in his ministerial post until 2002.

The biggest impact that Haider made in economic matters was in his role as governor of Carinthia. He introduced short-term, sometimes eccentric, populist measures to bolster local support. One example of this was when Haider 'pulled off' a deal with Colonel Gaddafi in Libya for a supply of cheap petrol to Carinthia in 2000 (Profil, 30/3/2000). For a short period of time when petrol prices were rising, Austrians could obtain cheaper petrol in Carinthia than anywhere else in the country! Other economic measures that Haider proposed included a large increase in state funding for women with children known as 'K-SCHECKS' (Children's cheques) and the reduction of wasteful state subsidies for unwanted artistic or governmental projects.

### ***Kultur***

This chapter has summarized the political issues that Haider exploited for his populist political project. What is shown here are the compromises that Haider was willing to make in order for the FPÖ to achieve more political power. A quite paradoxical picture emerges where, for example, a formerly pro-Europe party becomes a Eurosceptic one or a previously anti-clerical party warms towards the Catholic Church. Haider's leadership shows a distinct willingness to push the political from the right and left as long as he could achieve more votes. So what remains? How can we categorize such a slippery political operator?

Explanations that Haider simply represents a neo-nazi party are insufficient; however there is also clear evidence that Haider's FPÖ was not just a harmless oppositional force that was breaking old political cleavages. This dilemma led me to investigate the role of *Kultur* in the FPÖ's political strategy under Haider in order to make more sense of the Haider 'phenomenon'.

By focusing on *Kultur*, the divergent strands of the FPÖ are all present and a more distinctly Austrian right-wing political ideology emerges, steeped in peculiarly Austrian historical forces and intent on becoming a mainstream political party. By the inclusion of a cultural perspective of Haider, this dissertation enables the reader to understand the FPÖ better while also revealing a distinctly Austrian political phenomenon.

## Chapter 4 – A Case Study: The Austrian Freedom Party’s

### *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s<sup>14</sup>

#### **Part 1. The Cultural Targets**

Chapters 1-3 of this study gave an historical and political context to the rise of Haider’s FPÖ. This case study shows how Haider drew on the peculiarities of Austrian cultural history and combined this with his own political opportunism in order to instigate a new type of modern *Kulturkampf*<sup>15</sup>. I have structured the case study in four distinct parts. Part 1 analyses who and why certain artists and cultural figures became targets of the FPÖ *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s. Part 2 sets out how the party defines its own idea of *Kultur* and the underlying ideology behind this. Part 3 will analyse the response to this cultural battle by those targeted by Haider – the so called *Linkerkulturmafia*. Finally, Part 4 introduces the ideological construct of the ‘Austrian Idea’ – which underpinned the cultural stance taken by Haider’s FPÖ.

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<sup>14</sup> Some of the main arguments and findings of this case study was published in an article by the Author (Murphy in the ÖZP 2004/3, p297 – 307)

<sup>15</sup> Here, *Kulturkampf* refers to an often repeated phenomenon in Austrian history where avant-garde intellectuals and artists are singled out by the populist and/or fascist political parties as a political target – my assertion in this study is that Haider instigated this political strategy for political purposes in the 1990s.

*Kultur* is a concept that plays a far greater role in Austrian political discourse than in countries like Britain or the United States. Indeed, Michael Wimmer (a leading member of an Austrian cultural think-tank) noted that the Austrian-Hapsburg cultural heritage:

*“Was the most enduring institution in Austrian society...outlasting two world wars, Austro-fascism and even National Socialism”.* (Wimmer in Transcript, 2002).

He also remarked that it would easily outlive the current turbulence around Haider. The fact that the FPÖ decided to enter the political arena with their own cultural agenda is (in this context) no surprise. However, there is little evidence of any other Right-wing populist party in Europe prioritizing culture and aesthetics in their party programme to the extent that the FPÖ did in the 1990s.

In their *Kulturkampf* during the 1990s the FPÖ attacked their newly adopted enemy which Haider called the *Linkekulturmafia* (literally – ‘the Left-wing cultural mafia’), a loose term for avant-garde artists, socialist politicians, intellectuals etc. Haider explains this himself in an introduction to a chapter about *Kultur* in one of his books:

*“This section of the book is dedicated to my special friends. The cultural producers, cultural journalists, cultural consumers, cultural politicians, cultural fighters, cultural defenders, cultural revolutionaries, cultural critics, and all the other cultivated people, who in the past pursued a cult that saw itself as part of an élite - separate from others, above all the Freedom Party”.* (Haider, 1997, p67)

Haider's FPÖ took the moral high ground on cultural issues of 'taste' in an attempt to appeal

to a general antipathy towards modern art and avant-garde artists that was already present in the wider population (Menasse, 2005). The party also launched an aggressive campaign against a selection of artists and intellectuals that resonated with the drive against *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) by the Nazis during the 1930s (Scharsach, 1992, p81). This venture into the cultural-political arena by Haider can be seen as part of their overall populist political strategy. In addition, I think it exposes important aspects that contribute to a better understanding of Haider's FPÖ that I shall expand upon further in the study. At this stage it is important to note that *Kultur* did, at various times in the 1990s, take centre stage in the FPÖ's political campaign of the 1990s.

Haider claimed that this cultural élite in Austria was receiving too much state money to produce 'experimental' art, variously described by the FPÖ as 'obscene', 'rubbish' 'provocative' or even 'unpatriotic' (Marinovic, 1995). Two aspects of the party's cultural stance are useful to mention here. Firstly, any analysis of their cultural policies reveals a right-wing core which viewed art as the cultural production of a nation or 'Volk' rather than an individual act of 'self-expression'. This view has a clear parallel with the National Socialist disdain for modern art, which it labelled in the 1930s as 'degenerate' and pursued a state cultural policy of encouraging 'Real German Art':

*"Just like in the time of the Third Reich, many representatives of modern art have now been singled out. With similar anti-art rhetoric as the Nazis, 'cultural experts' from the FPÖ's right-wing faction exploit the fact that many ordinary people have a difficult relationship with contemporary art "* (translated from Scharsach, 1992, p81).

Secondly, In the 1990s, right-wing ‘intellectuals’ within the FPÖ such as Andreas Mölzer<sup>16</sup> started to formulate an ideological stance for the party about *Kultur* based on the theories of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (Zogholy, 2001, p7). The basis of this theoretical analysis was an assertion that the Left in Austria (and elsewhere) were focusing their political strategy on achieving ‘cultural hegemony’<sup>17</sup> as a basis for influencing and setting the political agenda. As a result, Mölzer asserted that most of contemporary artistic production in Austria was brimming with an ‘overt’ left-wing agenda, was of little artistic merit and is usually provocative or obscene in its content. He stated that it was the task of the FPÖ to counter this ‘cultural threat’ from the Left (Ibid, p19).

### ***Kulturkampf 1995***

The FPÖ’s *Kulturkampf* during the 1990s produced many examples of conflicts arising between the FPÖ and the avant-garde in Austria. Demonstrations would take place outside controversial or ‘obscene’ exhibitions, particularly those held by the Austrian actionist artist, Hermann Nitsch. Claus Peymann, the director of the Vienna ‘Burgtheater’ was constantly being accused of showing ‘rubbish’ and of being a ‘dangerous left-winger’ with ‘links to terrorism’ (Marinovic, 1995, p42). The party was also formulating a policy of cutting state

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<sup>16</sup> Haider’s ‘Cultural Advisor’ until 2000

<sup>17</sup> Haider’s use of the term ‘*kulturelle Hegemonie*’ is an important theoretical basis for the whole project of FPÖ *Kulturpolitik* in the 1990s. I shall expand on this later in the study.

subsidies to 'unsuitable' artists and proposed the creation of a 'free art market' in Austria.

The details of this *Kulturkampf* will be analysed in this case study.

However, in 1995 there was a particularly notorious and very *public* display of Haider's *Kulturkampf*. A general election campaign poster that was plastered all over Vienna during the October 1995 formulated a particularly aggressive stance by the party on contemporary art in Austria and set the scene for an escalation of confrontation between the avant-garde in Austria and Haider's FPÖ (*English Translation 'Do you like Scholten, Jelinek, Häupl, Peymann, Pasterk...OR Art and Culture? Freedom of Art instead of Socialist State Artists – The Viennese Freedomites'*):



This poster was a significant statement by the FPÖ in their ongoing clash with contemporary art production in Austria. It was only put up around Vienna, due to the city's overriding importance for Austrian culture and where most artists and cultural figures are located. The poster promoted the FPÖ's populist policies in the cultural arena, notably to curb state subsidies for certain types of art and to not waste tax-payers money on 'meaningless drivel calling itself art' (Ibid, p13). In addition, the FPÖ attempted to position itself as a 'defender'

of public morals and 'common sense' by highlighting works of art considered 'unacceptable to ordinary people'. An FPÖ spokesperson, Magda Bleckmann, stated:

*"Most of what passes as art these days is subsidised by the state and celebrated by an artistic élite and produces rejection and disgust amongst ordinary people. It even leads to citizens disconnecting from art completely". (FPÖ Jahrbuch 1996, p386).*

Apart from the populist electoral appeal of including a cultural agenda in the FPÖ's political strategy, there are four additional aspects of the 1995 campaign poster that illustrate the FPÖ's parochial and anti-modernist political character (Zogholy, 2001, p53). Firstly, the party is indicating that it possesses its own definition of 'art and culture' *according* to the FPÖ. By putting certain artists, cultural figures and politicians in one basket and juxtaposing these against 'art and culture', the implication is that these people are supporting and producing things of no artistic merit. Just what is 'art' is not defined by the FPÖ, their main concern here is to devalue and reject most of the contemporary artistic production in Austria with little effort to replace it with 'suitable' notions of aesthetic criteria.

Secondly, by plastering Vienna with this poster, Haider's FPÖ were embarking on a campaign of attacking individual artists, something unprecedented in political discourse since before the war. This politicisation of culture draws an obvious parallel with the attack against *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) by the Nazis during 1930s. Defaming and openly criticising artists and their works are normally out of bounds for mainstream political parties. Such concerns for the consequences of their actions were set aside by the FPÖ for the sake of electoral gain.

Thirdly, Haider was walking a political tightrope involving his implementation of a populist political strategy while still needing the support and sponsorship of the far-right 'core' of the party. Haider managed this by championing causes like honouring the 'war generation' - which often involved controversial statements understood by many as 'playing down' the brutal and criminal nature of the Third Reich. Another example of an issue that would appeal to this 'core' was to attack modern art. Therefore, by embarking on a *Kulturkampf* with the Austrian avant-garde and 'defending' Austro-German *Kultur*, Haider was placating the far-right core of the party.

The fourth aspect of this *Kulturkampf* was that by attacking artists, the FPÖ targeted a group of people virtually unanimous in their opposition and resistance to Haider, who labelled them the *Linkerkulturmafia* (the left-wing cultural mafia). In effect, Haider was trying to expose these people as belonging to a left-wing cultural élite, bent on producing art for specific political purposes and rejecting any association with 'proper' German cultural values.

### **Targeting 'Left-Wing' Culture**

Who were the 'usual suspects' targeted in the FPÖ's *Kulturkampf* and why? In order to answer this I will illuminate four examples of significant cultural figures that have experienced the condemnation and arguably defamation at the hands of Haider's FPÖ. They

are prime examples of the *Linkerkulturmafia* - an artist, an author, a theatre director and an SPÖ politician<sup>18</sup>.

### **Hermann Nitsch**

Hermann Nitsch is an artist who began doing public performances of his work in the early 1960s. He belonged to an artistic movement called the 'Viennese Actionists', the other main artists in this movement were Günter Brus, Otto Mühl and Rudolf Schwarzkogler (Klocker et al, 2008). They distinguished themselves by holding controversial, 'taboo-breaking' performances which not only challenged the boundaries of artistic taste, but also the legitimacy and credibility of the Austrian post-war political establishment. The most notorious 'happening' took place in 1968 when the whole group performed an 'action' at the University of Vienna (Fellner, 1997, p200). They proceeded to defecate, strip off clothing, and shout abuse and other 'degrading' activities while simultaneously singing the Austrian national anthem. The point of this 'action' was to expose (through shocking performance art) the hypocrisy and 'fascist' character of post-war Austria – a country steeped in parochialism and in denial of its nazi past. Politicians and media reacted by incarcerating two of the artists (Nitsch and Mühl) while another (Brus) escaped to exile in Germany.

The Viennese Actionists broke up in the early 1970s. Nitsch continued his own public performances as well as painting canvasses, where he concentrated on religious and

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<sup>18</sup> Note that three of those I have chosen to mention here were specifically mentioned in the FPÖ's 1995 campaign poster – i.e. Jelinek, Scholten and Peymann

mythological themes. Some of his happenings involve several days of ritualistic activity including the symbolic slaughter of animals, crucifixion and the use of blood as paint on canvas (Klocker et al, 2008). Nitsch intends to instil a catharsis in his audience and participants with an art form that strives for the 'truth and uncovering hidden human traits' (Nitsch in Scharsach, 2000, p248).

For the FPÖ, Nitsch epitomises the 'degenerate' state of Austrian contemporary art. They describe his art as 'obscene' 'indecent' and 'disgusting'. They object to the 'cruel' use of animals, sacrilegious displays of religious symbols and the 'stomach-turning' elements of blood, vomit and urine in his work (Marinovic, 1995, p.59). Nitsch is a main target of FPÖ attacks on the state of Austrian art. The quality of this art does not even merit the use of this term for some in the FPÖ. A leading *Kulturkämpfer* in FPÖ circles, Walter Marinovich describes him as an 'orgy-artist' using 'vomit as art' (Ibid, p60).

Aside from criticizing the content of Nitsch's art, the FPÖ also highlights the support and sponsoring of such art from the Austrian state. As a result of this 'infection' of the *Linkerkulturmafia* in Austrian culture since the socialist dominated Kreisky era (1970-1983), artists such as Nitsch are now held up as 'state' artists, representing Austria in international art exhibitions. This situation, that Nitsch has become the acceptable face of Austrian art, is indicative of how public morals and German-Austrian *Kultur* have been 'dragged through the mud'. A type of 'crusade' is necessary to re-establish 'old' and 'decent' values (Ibid, p71). The manifestation of the FPÖ's distaste for Nitsch is ongoing with regular demonstrations, media attacks and political pressure to prevent his exhibitions and stop state support for his art. While the vilifying of Nitsch became more difficult in the face of his

growing international reputation, he remains a specific hate-figure for the FPÖ under their new leader, Heinz-Christian Strache.

### **Elfriede Jelinek**

Jelinek is a contemporary Austrian playwright and author. Writing since the 1960s, she has become one of the most famous female authors in the German language. Her style and method of writing has been described as innovative and socially critical in a similar vein to the renowned post-war Austrian author, Thomas Bernhard (Konzett, 2000, p.93). Her subject matters are mainly concerned with subjects such as women, sexuality, taboo-ridden Austrian society and anti-Semitism. Her critical and challenging works have long been a thorn in the side of the *Kulturkämpfer* within the FPÖ.

Unlike in the case of Nitsch, Jelinek has also been willing to take a public stance on many political issues. In particular she has tried to expose the hypocritical post-war Austrian myth of Austria having been the 'first victim' of German National Socialism (Konzett, 2000, p.95). Jelinek sees her task as a critical artist to expose and bring such themes up to the surface and in the consciousness of ordinary people:

*"Particularly in countries with strong authoritarian structures like Austria, art is the only critical institution" (Jelinek in Scharsach, 2000, p239)*

Jelinek was targeted by the FPÖ for several reasons. Firstly, the content of her works (particularly her plays) is condemned as 'pornographic', 'perverse' and of 'low quality' (Die Zeit, 2000). She is accused of using 'obscenity' in order to be 'provocative' rather than trying

to produce 'quality' productions. Secondly, her work is seen as 'anti-patriotic'. By focusing on themes such as Austria's Nazi legacy, Jelinek is dredging up her own 'warped' version of the past in order to criticise and condemn the credibility of the Second Republic (Ibid). She is a typical 'Österreichbeschimpfer' (an Austrian 'insulter') intent on bringing Austria's reputation into disrepute (Marinovich, 1995, p7). Thirdly, the FPÖ thinks of Jelinek as a 'darling of the left' – who serves the left-wing agenda of Austrian cultural 'hacks' who are only interested in furthering their own political agenda at the expense of the FPÖ. Her works are staged for the sake of political provocation rather than artistic merit or popularity and the Left is always assured a voice through the 'cultural mouthpiece' of Jelinek. Finally, Haider's FPÖ rejects artists who are intent on political 'interference', artists should concentrate on producing 'works of beauty' rather than wasting their time with political agitation (Haider, 1997, p71).

Interestingly, after the aforementioned poster campaign in Vienna for the 1995 general election, the FPÖ gave a public and 'official' apology to Jelinek for her inclusion in the poster's wording (Profil, 14/2/2000). She was the only 'artist' named in the poster, all the others being politicians and cultural figures. Implicit in this act of contrition by the FPÖ is, as is often the case, the feeling by 'moderates' in the party that the radical right of the party had 'overstepped' the mark again. In this case the unprecedented 'naming' and 'shaming' of an internationally reputable Austrian writer by a political party.

## Claus Peymann

Claus Peymann became director of the prestigious Vienna *Burgtheater* in 1988. He already had a track record as a controversial director with distinct left-wing views. True to form, his first production was Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* in 1988, a play satirising and exposing Austrian complicity with National Socialism (Bailer-Galanda, 1995, p123). The FPÖ was amongst other groups that held demonstrations against the showing of the premiere in 1988. Other notable productions from Peymann were the 'obscene' (Marinovich, 1997, p43) play by Jelinek called *Raststätte* and an 'evening talk' by Otto Mühl (a fellow actionist with Hermann Nitsch) in the Burgtheater shortly after finishing a seven year prison sentence on charges of having sex with minors.

For Haider, Peymann was intent on pushing his own radical-left agenda through a state-cultural institution (Burgtheater) and thereby 'radicalising' the political climate. The FPÖ quote Peymann as saying:

*"Theatre should, in many ways, be an example of socialist cultural politics" (Translated from Marinovic, 1995, p51)*

Peymann was also held responsible by the FPÖ for the declining audience figures during his tenure (he left in 1999). They alleged this was due to the obscurity and radical political content of his productions. The FPÖ maintained that people such as Peymann have no connection with 'ordinary' people who want art to provide them with solace and entertainment rather than abstraction, indecency and agitprop. Haider stated after

Peymann's *Heldenplatz* production (based on a famous quote by the Viennese satirical writer Karl Kraus):

*"Hinaus mit diesem Schuft aus Wien! Throw out the scoundrel from Vienna!" (Bailer-Galanda, 1995, p123)*

### **Rudolf Scholten**

Scholten was the SPÖ's Minister of Art and Science during the 1990s. Haider accuses Scholten of ignoring the wishes and taste of ordinary Austrians by subsidising art which was either blatantly 'left-wing' or 'morally repugnant' (or both!). For the FPÖ he is an example of how art has been used by the left for the propaganda purposes - a politician at the behest of a *Kulturmafia* intent on ruining the cultural inheritance and reputation of Austria:

*"Which, or better said whose, freedom is it, when some artists are scraping an existence while an art minister Scholten, despite empty seats in the Burgtheater, takes the freedom to throw subsidies at the Peymanns, Nitschs and Mühls of this world? Freedom of art is fine, but the waste and abuse of taxpayers' money is not art and has never been free". (Haider in Bailer-Galanda, 1995, p123)*

All these and many other representatives of the *Linkerkulturmafia* in Austria were the object of a significant political campaign by the FPÖ. However once a political party takes a distinct position on culture, the question arises as to what their own definition of *Kultur* is and the aesthetic criteria for an FPÖ *Kultur*. In short, they made it clear what they *dislike* about contemporary Austrian art but what type of culture do they sanction and promote?

## Part 2. A Freedom Party Kultur?

*“The extreme-right goes on a lot about a lot about art and even more about culture. Less is spoken about what these concepts mean to them. What isn’t art and culture, they write whole books about. Their own definition of these concepts, apart from using some Nazi terminology, is not very developed” (Tieber, 1996, p60)*

This quotation can be applied to the FPÖ, most certainly the far-right faction of the party. In fact, defining concepts and formulating policies has been a constant problem for the FPÖ – not only in the field of culture. This was exposed when they entered into government with the ÖVP in February 2000, where they presented a vague and incoherent set of actual policies. The internal strife within the party and pressure from the far-right faction led to the resignation of three FPÖ ministers and the eventual fall of the FPÖ/ÖVP government in 2002 (Sperl, 2000). In the field of cultural politics, a similar pattern can be traced. Opposition to, and condemnation of, the ‘cultural mafia’ might score some political points, but as soon as the FPÖ tried to define what they actually mean by *Kultur* things become much less straightforward.

In order to uncover the content of FPÖ *Kultur* I have used three sources of information. Firstly the FPÖ’s 2000 Manifesto (FPÖ Partei Program, Chapter 15, 2000), which contains a chapter called ‘*Weite Kultur - Freie Kunst*’ (Broad Culture - Free Art). Secondly, the writings of Haider himself and some podium discussions organised by the FPÖ and attended by

Haider on the theme of 'art and culture' (Berchtold, 1998). Finally, various *Kulturexperten* within the FPÖ have attempted to define a 'Freedomite Culture' in interviews, books and pamphlets. Drawing on these sources I will try and piece together what can be understood under the notion of an FPÖ *Kultur*.

### ***Kulturdeutsch***

The FPÖ's 2000 manifesto (FPÖ Partei Program, Ch.15, 2000) states the party view that the basic vehicle of cultural expression is through language:

*"The 'Freedomite' movement emphasises the fact that all Austrians belong to different cultural communities based on their particular language; for the vast majority of Austrians that means German" (Ibid, p132)*

Here, the FPÖ are advocating that Austrian identity is inextricably linked to a German *cultural* identity. By emphasising the German aspect of Austrian identity, Haider wishes to instil a sense of belonging to a wider, historic, cultural community than just Austria. More significantly he wishes to defend this Austrian-German culture from being infected and influenced by *multiculturalism* (Haider, 1995, p28). Here, the FPÖ wishes to promote a sense of belonging to a cultural community by an affirmation of an Austro-German identity through the exclusion of other cultures, ethnic groups and foreign influences that in their view do not belong or 'contaminate' Austrian culture. The components of this 'identity' are vague and are much more defined by what the FPÖ rejects rather than affirms in the context of national identity.

The reasons for this special identification with German culture lie in the historic roots of the FPÖ. The ideological basis of the party since 1949 was 'Pan-Germanism' (Stäuber, University of Zürich, 1974) and it was the only post-war Austrian political party that continued to challenge the legitimacy of an 'Austrian' state. Haider himself, before becoming leader in 1986, was a leading sympathizer with German-nationalist elements in the party. However, on achieving party leadership in 1986, he realised that the popularity of Germany and German nationalism in Austria was relatively small and certainly not a vote-winning issue (see chapter 3). He steered the party away from overt pan-Germanism and its implicit challenge to Austrian state legitimacy. By emphasising the German dimension of Austrian *culture*, rather than in the area of *political* legitimacy, Haider tried to reinforce an Austro-German cultural identity without questioning the legitimacy of the Second Republic:

*"Recognising that Austria forms part of the German cultural region, the cultivation of German culture and language is of special importance to us. We consider it our duty to provide an Austrian contribution to the development of German culture". (Haider, 1995, p95)*

Andreas Mölzer, in an article about the collapse of the FPÖ/ÖVP coalition wrote:

*"The former Third Camp, cultural-German and independent, remains, with a reduced electorate, part of the political landscape of this country". (Kurier, 1.10.2002)*

### **Anti-Modern & Anti-Avant-Garde**

The FPÖ have a marked distaste for 'modern' art, in particular the works of contemporary Austrian artists who they see as intent on producing works they have variously described as

'rubbish', 'filth', 'perverse' (Gratzer, 1998, p109). When the party's critique of modern art was extended to attacking individual artists in the 1990s, a comparison with the National Socialist assault on modern art became inevitable. Hitler was an energetic *Kulturkämpfer*, and was responsible for staging the infamous *Entartete Kunst Ausstellung* (Degenerate Art Exhibition) in Munich, 1937. The exhibition contained a large selection of 'degenerate' works of art by artists labelled as 'Jewish' and 'Cultural Bolsheviks'. Hitler thought that modern art was 'confusing the natural concepts about nature' (Hitler in Chipp, 1968, p475). By the inauguration of the 'Great Exhibition of German Art' in 1937, Hitler noted that Germany's modern decline occurred not only in the political and economic realm, but also the cultural:

*"Germany's collapse and general decline had been - as we know - not only economic or political, but probably to a much greater extent, cultural" (Ibid, p474).*

The zeal and brutality with which the Nazis attacked modern art cannot be compared with the present-day FPÖ. However the linking of moral and social decline to cultural production reflects a distinct tendency of the FPÖ to reproduce aspects of National Socialist ideology in a contemporary setting. No other right-wing populist party in Europe has entered into the field of aesthetics to the extent that the FPÖ did under Haider. For some within the party the former scapegoat of 'cultural Jewish-Bolshevism' has been replaced with the new one - a 'left-wing cultural mafia' (Scharsach, 1992, p83).

The FPÖ's *Kulturkampf* also has roots in an adherence to a kind of German 'fundamentalism' (Klinger, 1992, p.522). Here, the 'rejection' of modernity results from the 'erosion of natural

cultural forces' for which modernity is responsible. To combat this, more traditional and 'healthy' attitudes in people need to be encouraged. In this context, modern art represents for the FPÖ a manifestation of 'pathological' tendencies that should be challenged and eventually eradicated for the sake of a people's 'psychic health'. Marinovic claims that much of contemporary art in Austria should not be called 'art', he even states that whereas the 'degenerate art' of the 1930s could still be described as (albeit misguided) 'art' – most contemporary art production:

*"...has nothing to do with art, it is not even degeneration, but in the best cases an indication of mental or psychological disturbance" (Marinovich in Tieber, 1996, p73).*

The final aspect behind Haider's targeting of the Austrian avant-garde is that modern art is particularly unpopular with ordinary people in Austria. Due to religious, social and political developments, particularly in the twentieth century (see chapter 1), the perception of modern art being comprised of a cultural élite producing meaningless, often abstract works that cannot even be called 'art' has taken root. The FPÖ recognised a political opportunity that by attacking certain artists they were merely representing the views of the majority of Austrians who were 'alienated' from the contemporary art scene. They propagated that for most people *Kultur* is the music of Mozart or the architecture of the baroque - not the ritualistic blood splattering of Nitsch or the 'ugly' verses of Jelinek.

### **Morality and Culture**

Haider's political success affected the 'core' ideology of the party. Its adherence to 'pan-Germanism' was diluted and channelled into the cultural rather than the political arena.

Another party principle to come under scrutiny was 'anti-clericalism' (Pelinka, 1998, p9), which entailed an antipathy to Roman Catholic Church and political opposition to the 'catholic' ÖVP. The FPÖ were traditionally hostile to political interference by the Catholic Church and its perceived pervasiveness in Austrian society. Haider changed this policy (see chapter 3). His reasoning was simple: in order to increase the party's share of the vote it was necessary to cast a wider net amongst the general population. Certain previously held principles, such as anti-clericalism, were off-putting for potential voters, especially those switching from the ÖVP.

This ideological shift was motivated in part by political opportunism but there was another factor influencing FPÖ strategy at this time. This was Haider's idea that the party had to take a stance on 'morality', in particular the notion of 'family values'. Haider's deeply conservative views on these matters, such as the role of women 'at home'; draconian ways of dealing with the drug problem; and other notions of 'public responsibility' - all these and similar issues led to the FPÖ sharing the same moral platform as the Catholic Church (Hofer, 1998).

The FPÖ's reactionary views on contemporary art, especially their criticisms of 'obscene' or 'pornographic' art, are shared by many in the Catholic Church and the ÖVP. Arising out of the FPÖ's electoral successes, Austria experienced a change in the political landscape whereby the main conservative (or reactionary) forged an alliance around certain issues, one of these being *Kultur*. Both parties wanted to promote traditional forms of culture at the expense of modern, critical or experimental art. Thus, while differences remained on issues such as tax or Europe, they saw eye to eye on art and culture. Haider increasingly

portrayed himself as a 'protector' of 'decency, honesty and proper behaviour' (Wodak in Scharsach, 2000, p.180) during the 1990s. The party's distinct stance on *Kultur* reinforced these 'Austrian' values and also helped the political marriage with the ÖVP and the tacit support of the Austrian Catholic Church.

### **Artistic Freedom....But.....**

The Freedom Party's *Kulturpolitik* is played out mostly in the realm of party rhetoric or media posturing. There are also differences of opinion between hard-line *Kulturkämpfer* and 'official' party policy. When scrutinising their party documents, one can identify three areas in which the FPÖ have put forward some specific ideas for cultural policy in Austria. Firstly, on the question of state subsidies for cultural projects and artists; Secondly, their proposals for an 'art market'; and thirdly - the 'Freedomite' notion of artistic freedom and censorship.

1. **Subsidising Art**: The cultural policy proposal that was publicised the most by the FPÖ was for a radical overhaul of the system of state subsidies for artists and cultural institutions.

The FPÖ exploited a view held by many Austrians that their taxpayer's money was being wasted on art and culture that was unpopular and out of touch with the wishes ordinary people. Haider took this public perception further by claiming that these state subsidies are politically motivated in order to support and nurture certain 'types' of art – i.e.

contemporary art. The party provides evidence of this apparent state 'bias' in cultural politics by highlighting the policies of Rudolf Scholten (previous SPÖ Minister of Arts and Science – see above) who is they accused:

*“.....the building up of a social-democratic cultural system, dependent on the subsidised handouts of Mr Scholten” (Bleckmann in FPÖ Jahrbuch, 1996, p390)*

Haider sees this type of state support as having no relation to artistic quality or public popularity but as another example of the Left trying to extend its ‘control’ over society:

*“For me it is clear that in Austria, in many areas of art and culture, there is a sort of subsidised movement towards cultural hegemony, which is being planned and enacted by politicians and powerful institutions”. (Haider in Berchtold, 1998, p84)*

Haider notes that this type of state expenditure on culture benefits only a small and elitist minority of ‘culture hacks’ with the political motivation of marginalising Haider and the FPÖ. For the public, cultural subsidies represent the ‘subsidisation of boredom’ (Haider, 1997, p.70) whereby people are alienated from art as a result of being presented with exhibitions, theatre plays and opera which are either meaningless or simply ‘rubbish’ (Ibid, p.71).

2. **An Art Market:** The FPÖ makes a link between the issue of an ‘over-generous’ and ‘politically biased’ cultural state subsidies to the general question of the role of the state in Austria. One of Haider’s main political messages has been the ‘bloated and bureaucratic’ nature of the Austrian modern state, which is ‘interfering in people’s lives’ (Sully, 1997, p.44). The effect on the Austrian cultural scene is that, unlike in most other European countries, there is no properly functioning ‘art market’. This results in an artificial situation being created where the state ‘props up’ artists and cultural projects instead of allowing an art market to develop based on ‘supply and demand’:

*“We stand for a culture which reflects the free development of the citizen and society. It is the state’s responsibility to preserve our cultural heritage; contemporary art has to orient itself to supply and demand and not political influence and subsidies. State support should be limited to preserving plurality in education and arts”. (Haider, 1995, p110)*

It should be noted here that the FPÖ was not alone in criticising this aspect of cultural policy, in fact, Austria subsidizes the arts more than virtually any country in the world (Menasse, 1997, p.177) For many, on all sides of the political spectrum, the role of the state in, and its overbearing influence on, Austrian culture - is badly in need of analysis and reform (Ibid, p.179). However, for the FPÖ this ‘reform’ would be used as a tool for dealing with political enemies and marginalising critical art forms rather than a balanced policy reform package (Ibid, p180).

**3. Artistic Freedom and Censorship:** The third area of FPÖ cultural policy relates to the controversial question of ‘artistic freedom’. The bulk of Freedom Party writing on this subject concerns how the state should set the ‘boundaries’ of artistic taste:

*“...one shouldn’t just say anyone can do anything, instead I consider there to be a boundary - for example - between artistic expression and pornography”. (Haider in Berchtold, 1998, p92)*

For the FPÖ, art should be supported and displayed within a system of ‘collective responsibility’ and should not be used as an excuse for unbridled individual expression. The public should be protected from art that contains indecency, political provocation, obscenity or ‘irrational rubbish’:

*“...freedom of art, culture and the media can only be looked at when connected with the concept of responsibility” (Bleckmann in FPÖ Jahrbuch, 1996, p388)*

Haider’s notion of ‘artistic responsibility’ involves anchoring culture to the ‘people’ rather than catering for the ‘tastes’ of cultural élites. Another cultural spokesman within the FPÖ, Peter Sichrovsky, criticised artists who are trying to ‘resist’ the FPÖ’s *Kulturpolitik*. He claims that they are doing this within the context of living in a democratic liberal-democracy and that their calls for ‘freedom’ reflect more their own artistic redundancy than a genuine cry for the ‘freedom of art’:

*“The cries of offended individuals (i.e. artists) for freedom in a democratic system - says more about their insecurity in a particular system to produce works of artistic merit”.*

*(Sichrovsky in FPÖ Jahrbuch, 1997, p344)*

For Sichrovsky, a new and reformed Freedom Party *Kultur* would include a fairer system of subsidies; a ‘free’ art market with less state intervention; and more artistic responsibility. In this new *Kultur*, many Austrian contemporary artists and artistic forms (particularly those targeted by the FPÖ!) would simply disappear from the cultural landscape. Their disappearance would not be as a result of draconian censorship but based on a lack of artistic merit; public demand being taken into account; and a more ‘democratically’ functioning art market (Ibid, p347).

Any attempt at a definition of FPÖ *Kultur* reveals the minefield a political party enters when trying to make a specific stance on cultural matters. Issues such as censorship, artistic freedom, aesthetic criteria and political interference all make it a difficult area for

politicians. The FPÖ *Kulturpolitik* of the 1990s was an attempt to make political capital by populist criticism of an easy target - modern art; in fact given that Haider tried to transform pan-Germanism into a cultural phenomenon, this political strategy can be seen as a necessary strategy in the reconfiguration of the party under Haider. However, in the process of doing this, the party unleashed its hard-line *Kulturkämpfer*, exposing itself to accusations of trying to 'purify' Austrian culture in a similar way to the National Socialist project of the 1930s (Scharsach, 1992, p82). In a declaration released in 1989 one of these rightwing 'think-tanks' within the FPÖ called the *Lorenzer Kreis* set out their view on art and culture – a view that is indicative of many within the party:

*“Cultural subsidies must only be for works that belong to our Western tradition and have proper artistic merit...Taxpayer’s money should never be used for such things as ‘Viennese Actionism’; blasphemous depictions; for all works that insult the feelings of our people, our homeland and our traditions and those that exploit these for money. Also the support for works using alien means of expression or those that subvert our Western traditions - e.g. primitive art, far eastern works and ‘sub-cultures’ - are to be rejected”. (Gratzer, 1998, p107)*

## **A War of Ideas**

Behind the FPÖ's cultural-political strategy and their proposals for new cultural policies is a theoretical basis that seeks to justify and explain the party's *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s. It borrows and adapts concepts from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist who wrote most of his work while in prison under Mussolini during the 1930s. Gramsci is noted for extending Marxist theory from the economic-political to the cultural-political realm. He

introduced the concept of 'hegemony' - whereby political power is derived not just from economic control and ownership of the means of production but through a domination of the cultural sphere - encompassing art, media and education.

Intellectuals within the FPÖ such as Mölzer took ideas from right-wing scholars in France, notably those of Alain de Benoist. De Benoist had formed a think tank called the 'New Right' (Zogholy, 2001, p.29), which had revised Gramsci's theory of hegemony and applied it to the political aims of the Right. A central aspect of this theory was the use of *Kultur* as a vehicle for obtaining political power. In the context of Austria in the 1990s, the FPÖ interpreted this as the theoretical basis for attacking the 'domination' of Austrian cultural institutions and ideas by the Left:

*"And the goal of this war of ideas is culture, which is where ideas and values are examined and subsequently distributed" (Benoist in Zogholy, p34)*

In view of the fact that Mölzer was a personal advisor to Haider in the early 1990s, it is of little surprise that Haider formulated a central task of the FPÖ cultural-political strategy as the "fight against the cultural hegemony of the Left" (Haider, 1995, p73).

Zöchling points to the meaning of art and culture for Haider:

*"Art and Culture are the vehicle with which to obtain political hegemony. As the governor of Carinthia his first action was the takeover of the Department of Art and Culture". (Zöchling, 1999, p156)*

The apparent 'necessary war of ideas' (Marinovic, nr.55, November, 1996) in order to achieve political ascendancy involved a *Kulturkampf* targeting the pervasive influence of the left in the cultural sphere and thereby placing the FPÖ in the position of creating some kind of 'new symbolic arrangement for the Second Republic' (Charim in *Kulturrisse*, Jan 2001). Here, political power would be achieved by challenging the 'control' of *Kultur* by the Left. This aim to 'control' *Kultur* also included (apart from targeting the avant-garde) Haider trying to promote the FPÖ as a party that was able to embrace contemporary youth culture. An example of this is the FPÖ staging 'youth events' including a 'Haider Rap' being written and party recruitment taking place at discos. (Gingrich in Wodak, 2002, chapter 5)

Underlying this *Kulturkampf* was the strongly held belief, which took on almost conspiratorial dimensions, that the left had 'taken over' cultural institutions and therefore achieved political power:

*"Social and cultural life have become to a large degree separated. It is this factor which has given rise to intellectual domination by the left in the cultural sector of a system based on market economy". (Haider, 1995, p21)*

Haider traces this 'domination of the cultural sector' to the 1960s:

*"For the generation of 1968 it was necessary to smash domination of bourgeois thought, to criticize capitalism, America and everyone over 30, to get cultural hegemony. Their march through the institutions was successful". (Haider, 1995, p22).*

In effect, the political strategy of the FPÖ was not simply a competition between the Austrian political parties but also a campaign to 're-conquer' the institutions of Austria that had been dominated by the *Linkerkulturmafia* since the 1960s (Marinovic, 1995).

I would argue that the ideological basis for the FPÖ's *Kulturkampf* had several noteworthy aspects. Firstly, it anchored the FPÖ's cultural policies during the 1990s to a specific political goal through which the party would gain political power. Secondly, a (Germanic) fundamentalist strand of thought is revealed within the FPÖ whereby the Left is as not only seen as having gained political power through 'the march through institutions' but has also manipulated and distorted peoples' minds in Austria - creating a so-called 'Dictatorship of Ugliness' (Marinovich, 1995):

*"People are robbed of a connection to belief, to their community and their homeland. There is no longer a concept of good and evil". (Marinovich, 1995, p135)*

Thirdly, Haider's *Kulturkampf* can also be justified as a 'fight-back' on behalf of the Right to re-gain political and moral ascendancy in a society 'plagued' by left-wing influence. And finally, this ideology of the Right and the belief in the 'takeover' by the Left produced a creeping paranoia in the party which explains why *Kultur* took such prominence for the party in their oppositional strategy during the 1990s.

## **Summary**

There is no doubt that the FPÖ made a political-strategic decision to step into the Austrian cultural arena in the 1990s. Although the most public manifestation of this was their poster

campaign in 1995, there were many other factors that contributed to their overt stance on *Kultur*, revealing the distinctly parochial character of this political party. While their cultural agenda can be seen as part of the populist strategy of the Haider's FPÖ, it also shows that a right-wing core within the party was intent on adopting seemingly retrograde and very traditional attitudes towards the avant-garde which were very similar to those of National Socialism in the 1930s. Their *Kulturkampf* also had an ideological rooting which entailed a strategy of targeting the apparent 'hegemony' of the left in Austria. Another dimension of their cultural politics led, in part, to a marriage of convenience with the Catholic Church and a political alliance with the ÖVP.

Once the FPÖ had in fact reached their political holy grail of executive power in February 2000, it became apparent that the *Kulturkampf* conducted in previous years would now be restricted to just influencing budgetary decisions on arts grants and an attempt to have a more direct influence in the state media outlet ORF, Austrian Television (Transcripts, January 2002). The attacks on the avant-garde subsided as the party became absorbed into the Austrian political class. However, a tense and eventually disruptive conflict was played out within the party between those keen on compromise and pragmatism, and the more fundamentalist 'core' of the FPÖ. By Autumn 2002, three FPÖ ministers resigned and precipitated the collapse of the FPÖ/ÖVP coalition.

The aggressive stance on *Kultur* taken by Haider and others in the 1990s was an example of the extent to which the reactionary right wing of the party was actually steering aspects of FPÖ policy. The content of this *Kulturpolitik* was based on an almost paranoid and conspiratorial belief that Austria had to be delivered from the grip of a 'left-wing cultural

mafia'. While this stance became unsustainable in government, it was evidence of a fault-line within the FPÖ of an irreconcilable tension between the traditional *Kultur-Deutsch* faction of the party and the neo-liberal pragmatists.

The cultural politics of the FPÖ also enlisted a 'response' from those targeted that brought artists and cultural figures to the forefront of 'resistance' to Haider's FPÖ. The reaction of artists, combined with the surfacing of antagonism towards modernism, is also part of an historical pattern arising out of a special status that *Kultur* (especially since 1945) has taken on in the Austrian political arena. Austria has been notable for having a weak civil society (Pelinka, 1998) a legacy of authoritarian politics previous to 1945 and the subsequent consensus politics after 1945. The *Kulturpolitik* of the FPÖ and subsequent response of the artistic community should therefore be seen in the context of the historical forces affecting Austria, particularly since 1945.

### **Part 3: The Cultural Response**

So far, this case study has analyzed the context and content of the FPÖs *Kulturkampf* in the 1990s. In this section, I will set out the response from Austrian artists to their political campaign. Haider chose to 'target' *Kultur* in Austria as part of his overall quest for power in the 1990s, however, as with many aspects of the Haider 'phenomenon', there is a revealing paradox – Haider actually *liked* modern art on a personal level – favoring one of the most

prominent of the *Kulturmafia* – Herman Nitsch(!) (Scharsach, 2000, p42). Thus, like many of Haider’s strategies, political expediency would outweigh any more principled concerns. For the FPÖ, the collection of artists and cultural figures comprising of the *Linkerkulturmafia* were a useful political target because they contained an assorted variety of people, groups and issues which were the antithesis of what the far-right represented i.e. the far-left, prominent Jewish cultural figures, multiculturalists, hedonists, degenerate ‘modern’ art and even ‘terrorists’<sup>19</sup>.

As for the Austrian cultural community – they felt besieged, threatened and were subsequently politicized by the actions of Haider’s FPÖ. In fact, my research has shown that some of the most active political opposition to Haider came almost exclusively from artistic circles in Austria, a point that underlines the historical undercurrent of *cultural* opposition to right-wing populism in Austria. The 1990s brought an historical repetition of how left-wing opposition in Austria seems to manifest itself into a *Kulturkampf* rather than in a more mainstream left-wing opposition through trade unions, political parties, student groups etc. This historical ‘retreat’ into the cultural arena seems to be something peculiar to Austrian politics (Hanisch, 1994) and is therefore a crucial factor in any analysis of Haider’s FPÖ.

In order to outline the cultural response I have used both primary and secondary sources to show some of the most representative responses to Haider from a selection of artists and cultural figures in Austria (some of whom have already been mentioned as ‘targets’ of

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<sup>19</sup> Refers to the German born director of the Vienna Burg Theatre, Claus Peymann, who the FPÖ accused of being sympathetic to the Baader Meinhof Group (Marinovic, 1995)

Haider's *Kulturkampf* earlier in this case-study). The responses are varied - ranging from artists who produced works with Haider as their subject-matter to direct political positions taken by other Austrian artists. In general, the artistic reaction to Haider's politics does show a strong and active resistance to the far-right from artists. However, due to the peculiarity of Austrian affairs – this cultural resistance to the FPÖ remains confined to the activities of an Austrian cultural elite. In fact, most of the political capital gained by politicizing *Kultur* has been to the *benefit* of Haider's overall political project of popularizing the far-right by demonizing the artistic avant-garde as a minority elite producing 'ugly' art subsidized by ordinary Austrian taxpayers.

### **Subversive Resistance – the '*Nestbeschmutzer*'<sup>20</sup>**

The cultural avant-garde is perceived by many on the Austrian Right as being 'anti-patriotic' due to their radicalism and willingness to question the ideological foundations of the Second Republic. Hence, a commonly used term for such artists and cultural figures is to call them *Nestbeschmutzers*. This critique of artists comes from various conservative forces in Austrian political culture; as a result, it is not unusual for artists and cultural figures to be 'targeted' in political rhetoric.

This peculiarly Austrian treatment of *Kultur* in the political arena is highlighted by a comparison with the United Kingdom. Within British political discourse it would be very

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<sup>20</sup> '*Nestbeschmutzer*' = a German/Austrian expression meaning to 'foul your own nest' – i.e. a common insult for avant-garde artists intent on producing ugly, obscene, or disgusting art which is perceived as – in effect – anti-patriotic....

unusual for a political party to take a 'stance' on Modern Art and its proponents. There have been ripples of derision in the tabloids about the artistic merit of certain exhibitions, e.g. Carl Andre's 'Pile of Bricks' in 1976 (Daily Mirror, 16/2/1976). However art and culture is basically an off-limits topic for British political parties – mostly due to the fact that there is very little political capital to be gained from the politicization of culture. In fact, there is evidence of the British political class trying to ingratiate itself with the avant-garde in order to display a certain type of 'coolness'. The Tate Modern in London has become a kind of cathedral – devoted to displaying modern art and attracting huge visitor numbers. Critics of modern art in the UK confine themselves to conservative cultural circles with art critics such as Brian Sewell. No political party would achieve anything by campaigning 'against' modern art, it is therefore left alone. All these examples point to a political establishment willing to embrace modern art as just another aspect of cultural output. Austria, by contrast, has from the 19<sup>th</sup> century right up to the present day never experienced a comfortable relationship between the political élite and modern art – leading to outright hostility to such cultural output by many ordinary Austrians.

A logical consequence of this state of affairs is that *Kultur* was, and still is, an important political football in Austria – leading to a state propagation of more traditional, parochial art while at the same time marginalizing the avant-garde. Thus, when Haider took over the FPÖ in 1986 – an essential element in the popularization of his political message was for the party to take an overt stance on *Kultur* and include it as an integral part of their overall political strategy in the 1990s.

There follows a selection of some key Austrian artists, authors and cultural commentators whom Haider perceived as belonging to the 'left-wing cultural mafia'. The artists and cultural figures chosen stem from the cosmopolitan and avant-garde cultural sector as practicing artists, authors or journalists. They perceive Haider's FPÖ as an extreme right-wing revival of a latent Nazi undercurrent in Austrian society – laid dormant by the post-war Austrian 'consensus' politics. In the 1990s, just as in 1900s, Austrian artists entered a political arena left vacant by the inability of the mainstream left to effectively challenge the rise of the populist Right (see chapter 1). Please note that some of the figures mentioned have also appeared when discussing the FPÖs' cultural targets – here I will analyse the response of the avant-garde in Austria to Haider.

### **Herman Nitsch**

Herman Nitsch is a good example of one of the FPÖ's prime cultural targets in the *Linkerkulturmafia*. Although Nitsch actually sees himself as avowedly un-political – he felt 'compelled' to 'take a stand' against Haider's FPÖ:

*"...from the outset, I want to state that I am not political....my art was never political...but this is an emergency situation. and haider is someone who is fishing for votes by targeting and defaming artists" (Nitsch in Scharsach, 2000, p243)*

Nitsch claims that the historical combination of 'Austro-fascism, Nazism and post-war fascism' (Ibid, p244) almost completely destroyed modern art in Austria. This resulted in most Austrians after 1945 perceiving such art as something 'perverse and disgusting – for which all decent Austrians should be ashamed' (Ibid, p243). The avant-garde of the fin-de-

siècle were already 'buried' and the Catholic Church revitalized. Nitsch recalls that most of his problems – especially those he encountered in the 1960s – resulted from being attacked by the ÖVP, for which he ended up spending time in prison and eventual exile in Germany. He was charged with 'public obscenity' (Fellner, 1997).

Nitsch notes that Haider is a politician 'without ideology' who 'profited from the dullness of the two main political parties'. He states that from the outset, the FPÖ saw him as an 'enemy' and a 'philistine' (Ibid, p245). Nitsch recalls how the FPÖ took up the historical mantle of the ÖVP by directly attacking and trying to prevent Nitsch's 'blasphemous' art being displayed and performed. Ironically, while Haider's FPÖ increased pressure on Nitsch in the 1990s, his reputation outside of Austria rose to the point of him being hailed as one of Austria's 'greatest living artists' (Ibid, p247).

On a final note, Nitsch states that the FPÖ despise art that tries to tell the truth or is remotely controversial – favoring 'kitsch' art instead. As a result, Haider plays the dangerous game of using the values of normal people who, not in possession of the necessary artistic insights, are then easy to manipulate for political purposes. In his pursuit of votes, Haider welcomes the entry of *Kultur* into the political arena as a way of popularizing the FPÖ even more. As far as Nitsch is concerned, Haider and the FPÖ simply do not care about art:

*"Basically, they (the FPÖ) don't care about art; however it serves a useful purpose for them by spreading falsehoods and misunderstandings whereby some serious artists are being deeply offended". (Ibid, p249)*

## Robert Fleck

After the ÖVP agreed to enter into a coalition with Haider's FPÖ in February 2000, the European Union (EU) decided to 'boycott' Austria (EU Report on Austria, 2000). The boycott mostly consisted of cosmetic actions and diplomatic snubs. Nevertheless, the EU's action was unprecedented action to take against a member state revealing that the anxiety about Haider was more pronounced abroad than in Austria itself. Taking his cue from the EU, Robert Fleck (a prominent Austrian cultural critic) decided in February 2000 to greet the forming of the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition government by initiating an 'artist's boycott' of Austria. There follows an excerpt from the text – which he wrote in English and circulated on the Internet (please note – his English mistakes have been left uncorrected):

*"Dear Friends,*

*As you know, Austria got today the first federal government since the end of World War Second with a big participation of Nazis. I am born in this country, have lived there for 24 years, now writing for almost twenty years in austrian newspapers, studied political history in this country. Also through my familly, I know in detail the inside stories of the FPOe - a party founded in 1948, after the amnesty for the big nazi rulers, to be a legal cover for their activity.*

*In 1986, Joerg Haider took over the party by a putsch with the aim to re-establish these origins, and to rehabilitate the nazi period in Austria, and if possible in Central Europe.....**For the contemporary arts in Austria, I see only one possible choice:***

## **NO LONGER EXHIBIT OR COOPERATE WITH AUSTRIA!!**

*It has now become absolutely impossible, in moral terms, for any artist, gallerist, museum curator or collector, to exhibit any longer in Austria, or to cooperate with any Austrian institution. There is only one question to ask: would you have exhibited in Nazi-Germany? Only with a complete boycott of the local artlife, we can help the Austrian artists to survive. The new government wants to show that "everything is as before", regarding individual liberty. Since 1995, all international known Austrian artists are under pressure by the party of Joerg Haider; anonymous phone calls, Nazi-signs on their cars, menaces to take their children - since five years, many internationally known artists in Vienna are only moving with their family in the city inside of closed cars. As far as I know, most of the jewish community is also behaving like this, because they were constantly aggressed in the street. During the "100 Years" exhibition in 1998, the Vienna Secession had constantly nazi-signs, painted during the night, on the building; the Austrian federal police refused to consider these facts, saying that "this is normal". The next years will be very hard for Austrian artists. They all talked to me in the last years or months about leaving the country. Even half of the actual students at the Vienna Academy were thinking about leaving the country. For a writer, an intellectual, this is relatively easy. For an artist, to change the country is very complicated. The only way to help them, is to boycott the country itself. If you show to the Austrian population that the new government is outlaw, then - but ONLY then - the voters may consider during the next elections in 2003 that this may have been a bad choice for their country....." (Robert Fleck – open letter published online, 02.02.2000)*

With this appeal, Fleck sets out how the avant-garde in Austria felt attacked and threatened by the FPÖ. It is also an attempt by Fleck to galvanize Austrian artists into taking a political stance against Haider. His particular focus was on the new coalitions' plans for radical cuts in the funding of the arts – which would hit the contemporary arts the hardest.

Fleck's initiative echoed the historical tendency for artists in Austria to take up the mantle of political critique due to a failure of the mainstream Left to mobilize against the populist Right, for example, statistics show that many working class Austrians actually supported Haider (Wodak & Pelinka -eds-, 2002). Fleck's proposed boycott turned out to be a flop in terms of Austrian artists actually withdrawing from exhibitions or participating in the boycott. In fact, the biggest headlines came when the *American* rock star, Lou Reed cancelled his Vienna rock concert due to Haider's FPÖ in March 2000 (MTV Website, 15/02/2000).

### **IG Kultur**

IG Kultur is a left-wing cultural think tank based in Vienna (see website). They were active in producing and disseminating various papers and texts critical of Haider's FPÖ – particularly in regards to his attacks against modern art. One of the areas that IG Kultur focused on was the apparent 'marriage' between the Catholic Church and the FPÖ (IG Kultur, 1995). They pointed out that quite powerful conservative segments of Austrian society (representing the political Right and the Catholic Church) were happy to see Haider blaze a trail of far-right populism in Austria whereby the resurgence of the Austrian avant-garde since the 1970s

could be not only stopped, but potentially replaced by a re-introduction of ‘moral values’ into the public sphere.

The following caption epitomizes the fear held by many on the Austrian Left of an alliance emerging between the Catholic Church and the FPÖ. Note that the original *dritte Kraft* (‘third camp’ or the ‘other’ political camp as opposed to the SPÖ and ÖVP) was initially an *anti-clerical* political movement (see chapter 3). Haider’s populism saw the political advantage of now siding with the Catholic Church – particularly on issues such as morality and culture.

This satirical poster shows a ‘kiss’ (published by IG Kultur) between Haider and Kurt Krenn – the then Catholic Bishop of Vienna – based in part on the famous ‘kiss’ photograph between Honecker and Brezhnev in the 1970s.



Source: (IG Kultur, cover page, 2000)

However, as well as symbolizing the new 'marriage' between the FPÖ and the Austrian Catholic Church – this striking picture also plays on the 'open secret' – certainly amongst everyone I met during my research trip to Vienna – that Haider was gay. The question arises as to why the Austrian media or Haider's opponents do not push this issue more to the fore? The media seems to have reached some kind of tacit agreement not to publish any discussion or speculation about Haider's sexuality. As for Haider's opponents – especially those located in the avant-garde, there seems to have been a fear of raising this subject due to Haider being a litigious politician, with plenty of resources available to fund legal actions. The result was that this subject was ignored in mainstream political discourse in Austria and left to groups such as IG Kultur or comedians to make indirect insinuations.

For the avant-garde, this caption exposes the hypocrisy at the heart of Austria's post-war society. A charismatic, paradoxical politician from the previously anti-clerical FPÖ intimately intertwines with the ultra-conservative bishop of Vienna. In addition, the anti-homosexual Catholic Church joins with (the allegedly gay) Haider in a political pact in order to reinforce traditional 'Austrian' values in a decadent society.

### **Elfriede Jelinek**

Elfriede Jelinek is an author and playwright who became a high-profile target of FPÖ attacks on Austria's 'left-wing culture'. In many ways she sums up everything the FPÖ despised about the Austrian avant-garde – i.e. her left-wing politics, her Jewish ethnicity and her feminist identity. She has grown in international status in recent years, culminating in her being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004. The content of her work is critical and

follows in the footsteps of radical Austrian authors such as Karl Kraus and Thomas Bernhard. Like these writers, she attempts to expose the hypocrisy of Austrian society with a relentless focus on the catastrophic effects of the Holocaust and how this whole episode has been forgotten in consumerist post-war Austria (Konzett, 2000, p96). Jelinek's Jewish identity and critical subject matters qualified her for being singled out by Haider as being intent on 'destroying' the patriotic and moral values that Haider was promoting in the FPÖ political strategy.

Jelinek's response to Haider was a sustained critique of the FPÖ's cultural policies as well as portraying Haider's FPÖ as representing an almost 'homoerotic' (and certainly misogynist) political phenomenon. In a direct response to the election result of October 1999 Jelinek formulated her views on Haider's FPÖ (Scharsach, 2000). Her analysis represents another useful overview on how Haider was perceived by the Austrian cultural sector at this time.

Firstly, Jelinek claims that Haider's *Kulturkampf* is part of an overall project by the Austrian Right to stop or massively reduce state subsidies for art and culture – particularly those funds that support avant-garde art. She states that this basically means that the FPÖ wishes to make art and culture part of a 'free market' – "only those who survive market forces will be left over"(Jelinek in Scharsach, p239, 2000).

The 'leftovers' Jelinek refers to here include categories such as 'Representative Art' or 'People's Art' – both of which have much easier access to private sponsorship for their financing than the contemporary arts. Jelinek points out that this type of cultural policy has

already been implemented in Haider's political base, Carinthia from the early 1990s onwards (Ibid, p239).

Secondly, Jelinek notes that Austria is, historically, an authoritarian state where the art sector stands out as the one and only *critical* institution in Austrian society. She sees Haider's focus on this sector as a kind of political 'coup' – in the sense that it will disable the last existing bastion of dissidence to the Austrian political establishment (Ibid, p.240). Haider can always count on support for his 'cultural crusade' from the tabloid media and the Catholic Church. Jelinek extends this critique by arguing that her Jewish identity and Austrian anti-Semitism also play a role in the FPÖ attacks against her. This argument is in a similar vein to Wodak's discourse analysis (Wodak et al, 1999) of the FPÖ's apparent use of 'codes' to appeal to the 'ordinary people' in Austria. Jelinek states:

*"The whole thing is a code for something they (FPÖ) do not want and in fighting it they can rely on widespread public support – without actually explicitly stating their aim". (Ibid, p241).*

Finally, Jelinek criticizes Haider from a feminist perspective – accusing the FPÖ of popularizing its message with apparent 'homoerotic codes', which have the effect of 'fixating' particularly young Austrian males<sup>21</sup>. She states that in order to optimize and increase his popularity from the young male vote, Haider puts a significant emphasis on political aesthetics:

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<sup>21</sup> there is evidence that Haider's largest measure of electoral support did in fact come from young males aged 18 to 24 (Mair et al, 2004)

*“Haider should never be seen as just a politician, but as a homoerotic phenomenon ...through his clothes (leather!), sport photos, cosmetic surgery and half naked at the Woerthersee Lake”. (Ibid p240)*

### **Christoph Schlingensief**

The German avant-garde artist, Christoph Schlingensief, typified the pervading international concern with the ‘right turn’ taken in Austrian politics in February 2000. He set up an art ‘installation’ in the centre of Vienna in June 2000. Schlingensief’s artwork was called *‘Bitte Liebt Österreich – Erste Europäische Koalitionswoche’* (Please Love Austria – The First European Coalitions Week) (Liliethal et al, 2000). It caused a brief uproar in the Austrian media during the duration of its performance. The intention of the artist was to highlight the plight of immigrants and foreigners in Austria resulting from the newly formed coalition of Haider’s FPÖ with the ÖVP. The installation involved Schlingensief organizing a public happening where 12 (real) refugees awaiting asylum in Austria were put up for a week in containers and filmed 24 hours a day. It was an attempt to expose the anti-foreigner sentiment and legislation of the new government. It certainly had an impact; Jelinek praised how Schlingensief ‘exposed the state of Austria to the rulers like throwing a pie in their faces’ (Ibid, 2000, p273).

Schlingensief’s installation can be understood as an attempt to show solidarity with the actions of Austrian artists under attack from the FPÖ. His aim was to send a ‘wake-up’ call to the Austrian public concerning the right-wing populist thrust into xenophobia and intolerance resulting from the coalition with Haider and the consequences of this for

minorities such as asylum-seekers. It actually had very little effect. In fact, the Austrian tabloid press and the FPÖ seized upon the opportunity to 'expose' that the 'insane' action by Schlingensief was being *subsidized* by the Viennese local authorities. For the FPÖ, this installation was a typical example of the *Linkerkulturmafia* wasting honest taxpayers' money (ibid, p 12). The popular tabloid 'Kronen Zeitung' headline on the opening day of Schlingensief's art installation read:

*"Container-Show costs millions! 245,000 Schilling weekly fee paid to Schligensief!" (Kronen Zeitung, 12/6/2000)*

While there is certainly an argument that the artistic and political intentions of Schlingensief were probably sincere and well-intentioned in his desire to 'expose' the xenophobic policies of the new coalition. The actual result in the Austrian public sphere was a further hardening of attitudes to such 'wasteful', 'provocative' and 'elitist' art. To make matters worse, Schlingensief was also portrayed as another 'interfering foreigner' (in this case a German!) who was arrogantly lecturing the Austrians on how to run 'their' country. His installation was therefore only supported by a small circle of people within the Austrian avant-garde or on the Left. Schlingensief's installation ended up having much more of an impact outside of Austria as an example of agitprop art than influencing a more tolerant policy towards refugees in Austria itself.

### **Heinz Sichrovsky**

A final example used for this case study about the artistic response to Haider concerns Heinz Sichrovsky, the cultural editor of the Austrian weekly periodical 'NEWS'. His response to

Haider's FPÖ gaining executive power in 2000 was set out in an article with the title *'Heimathaftung – Der Kulturkampf in Österreich'* (Caught in the Homeland – The Austrian Culture Wars) (Sichrovsky in Scharsach, p227, 2000). The article gives an historic and contemporary context to the rise of Haider and begins by clearly stating that *any* attempt at the pursuit of right-wing populist politics in Austria *always and must* include taking a position on the issues of *Kunst und Kultur* with the inevitable consequence of attacks on Modern Art:

*"Haider was helped by riding a kind of surfboard...the same one as all (Austrian) populist movements had rode on in the past. Thus it became inevitable that the FPÖ turned to artistic and cultural sectors in order to include them in their political strategy"* (Ibid, p227)

For Sichrovsky, 20<sup>th</sup> century Austrian history contains a continuous thread of legislation and politicization from the Right against Modern Art (see also chapter 1 of this study). The scandal surrounding the staging of Thomas Bernhard's play 'Heldenplatz' in 1988 was fuelled by the ÖVP – at that time the FPÖ were still a marginal political force or as Sichrovsky puts it 'a second address for culture wars in Austria' (Ibid, p228). He then pinpoints the start of Haider's *Kulturkampf* to the election campaign poster from 1995 (see above) – which he perceives as a kind of 'declaration of war' on culture by the FPÖ (Ibid, p229).

On a more pessimistic and/or realistic note, Sichrovsky ends his article (Ibid, p.236) describing how Austrian artists and cultural figures were very prominent in the initial demonstrations against the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition government during February 2000 (Ibid,

p234). However, within a few weeks this 'politicization' of artists dissolved amidst divisions, recriminations and apathy – with a few notable exceptions, in particular Elfriede Jelinek (Ibid, p.234). Sichrovsky claims that there is a fundamental problem involved in the expectation that artists will be at the forefront of a political opposition to Haider because they are easily exposed by the tabloids as 'scroungers, elitists' etc. In addition, the humdrum and minutiae of effective political activism is almost impossible for artists to sustain.

Sichrovsky underlines a key issue here relating to the rise of Haider, namely how politically ineffective the Austrian mainstream Left (SPÖ) has become in challenging the Far Right and their inability to capture the imagination of voters with their political program.

### **Summary**

Several important points emerge from these responses of artists to Haider. Firstly, political dissent seems to be mostly located in the cultural sector in Austria. This leads to a weaker response from traditional progressive forces such as trade unions or left-wing political parties to the threat of right-wing populism. In a sense there is an *expectation* from actors in Austrian politics that artists will take up the mantle of opposition to right-wing populism rather than anyone else. However, as I have made clear in this case study, artists might be effective in producing powerful images and words, but they are not in a position to sustain or lead an effective political opposition.

Secondly, and leading on from the previous point, almost all attempts by the artistic community to rebuff the FPÖ and highlight the reactionary nature of Haider's populism had very little resonance amongst the general population. In fact, the more controversial actions

– such as Schlingensiefel's installation – actually backfired and reinforced Haider's view that the cultural avant-garde was 'out of touch' and that the state was 'wasting taxpayer's money' on them etc.

Thirdly, Haider's FPÖ used their campaign against contemporary artists as part of an overall political campaign with the intention of 'moving' people (Charim, 2001). In this, the FPÖ were indeed very successful. On the other hand, Austrian artists tended to get a resonance to their anti-Haider campaign only with a narrow, culturally informed audience or with various interested audiences abroad.

#### **Part 4: The 'Austrian Idea'**

The concluding part of this case study will underline my argument about the centrality of *kultur* in Austrian politics by giving the chronology of the 'Austrian Idea', based on an article and interview with Michael Wimmer, an Austrian cultural historian in 2002 (Transcripts, 2002). This ideological concept, created in the 1950s, is a very important background factor to understanding Haider's *kultupolitik* in the 1990s.

As I have already outlined in this study, a crucial part of the post-war re-construction of a new type of 'Austrian' identity that would influence the future character of Haider's FPÖ can be traced by focusing on the cultural policies of the Second Republic. In line with the distinctly conservative character of the new government, its cultural policy centered on the promotion of a so-called 'Austrian Idea' – a cultural-ideological notion already promoted during Austro-Fascism in the 1930s (see chapter 1). In the 1950s, the Austrian author Gerhard Fritsch proposed an 'Austrian Cultural Renaissance' (Wimmer, 1996, p42). The aim of this 'cultural renaissance' was to tune in with the political and social discourse of 'moving on' from National Socialism and attempt to ignite a new type of patriotism to post-war Austria. The cultural 'sources' chosen for this 'renaissance' were drawn from the Austro-Hungarian imperial era, where the basis of artistic output was a traditional, catholic doctrine, rather than the more controversial art of the Fin-de-Siècle or the work of 'degenerate' exiled Austrian artists. This led to the cultural policies of 1930s being re-kindled in a post-war Austrian setting with the aim of shoring up a parochial, conservative view of a new Austrian nation:

*“Its cultural policy principles (i.e. Austro-Fascism) were re-interpreted to have been the great alternatives to National Socialism. Thus began the search for a greater Austria, as it was expected to be found in the times of the Imperial monarchy, on the basis of rigid Catholicism.....it was therefore not surprising that there was no room left for the exiled victims of National Socialism in their former homeland”. (Ibid, p42)*

This form of cultural policy was pursued in Austria right up to the 1970s, the main casualty of this emphasis on classical and conservative art being modern, experimental art. Austria had reclaimed its Habsburg past and in the process proclaimed itself as the land of grandiose baroque architecture, Biedermeier artistic style or the ‘*Wiener Klassik*’ of Mozart or Strauss (Bruckmüller, 1994). Ironically, despite attempts by the state to ‘eradicate’ German influences in the political sphere (Thaler, 2001), it was mostly Germanic high-culture that was being proclaimed as the epitome of the new ‘Austrian Idea’:

*“Many of the artists who were successful during the Austro-fascist period were now among friends, provided each other with functions and set about cultural revival. This self-appointed elite saw itself as having a monopoly on cultural values, and was closely connected with the ‘Austrian idea’ of the one and only ‘true Austria’. The ideology of subordination, or the resolution of all social and historical contradictions, was to find its valid counterpart in the Austrian idea”. (Wimmer, 1996, p43)*

During the 1950s and 1960s, nobody in the Austrian cultural sphere epitomized this ‘surge’ in classical Viennese culture more than the internationally famous conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan. He managed to sweep aside his clear links

with the previous Nazi regime and became a kind of musical superstar (Hanisch, 1994, p435). He pertinently avoided doing any contemporary, avant-garde works and symbolized the self-confidence of the re-vamped 'Austrian Idea' that proved to be a crucial underpinning to the political goal of shaping a distinctly 'Austrian' national identity out of the ruins of war:

*"His scandals were in the tabloids, he acted like royalty, his passion for new technologies, his media presence, his purposeful elegance and his business ability – all of this made Herbert von Karajan an icon of that era" (Ibid, p436)*

Austrian *popular* culture (as opposed to 'high' culture) was also influenced by post-war identity politics. There was a surge in popularity for sentimental *Heimat* films, portraying an imaginary world of '*quiet order and a society that displayed a fully intact conservative hierarchy*' (Hanisch, 1994, p434). The traditional and so-called *naturwüchsig* gender roles of men and women were played out against the background of an undisturbed, beautiful Austrian landscape – representing a world seemingly untouched by the calamitous events of war and genocide (Ibid, p435).

This avoidance of dealing with the legacy of Nazism in Austria was in sharp contrast to post-war Germany. Here, a more reflective and confrontational approach was taken by leading German writers who were able to work with far less state interference than their fellow artists in Austria. Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass and others took up National Socialism as their direct subject matter. By contrast, Austrian authors looked instead to 1918 or 1934 as fateful dates in Austria's recent past - not that of 1938 (Ibid, p.439). Artistic production in

Austria was encouraged by the state to cater for a public that eagerly consumed themes centered on nostalgia for Austria's 19th century past, i.e. *'the good old days'*.

The Austrian *Heimat* film was then very successfully 'exported' to international audiences in the form of the Hollywood film, *The Sound of Music*. Here, Austria was depicted as a country of beautiful countryside, brimming with musical culture that then tragically became the 'victim' of German Nazi aggression. There was a definite sense in the film that Austrians were the 'good' Germans - an image energetically encouraged by Austrian political elites:

*"Instead of portraying the von Trapp family in an Austria grounded in political reality, Robert Wise (the director) constructs an Austrian identity based on love of nature, country and family.....an American Heimatfilm set in Austria". (Wodak & Good (eds), 1999, p183)*

This state-driven restoration of traditional cultural values also involved an embattled and marginalized Austrian contemporary art scene. Many of the more innovative artists had already left Austria during the war and were not welcomed back. Artistic taste centered on a conservative paradigm - to the exclusion of any experimental or overtly political works of art. Even pieces by Bertold Brecht were banned due to their apparent 'communist' content. The first murmurings of discontent with this parochialism came in the form of the *Wiener Gruppe* during the 1950s, a group of artists and writers who performed Dadaistic and satirical performances that often ridiculed the Austrian cultural establishment (Denschler, 1999). The 1960s brought an escalation of artistic dissent against the prevailing conservative cultural hegemony. This occurred amidst an international dynamic of student revolts, the Vietnam War and international liberation movements. However, unlike the experience of

other countries, the 1960s revolt in Austria took place mostly in the cultural arena rather than in the form of street demonstrations, strikes or civil unrest (see chapter 1). The content of this type of artistic dissent focused upon themes such as sexual taboos; the legacy of National Socialism; or the repressive and stifling nature of Catholic conservative Austrian society. In literature, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke and Elfriede Jelinek criticized the so-called post-war 'normalization' of Austrian society, attacking:

*"the lingering rhetoric of national consensus that helped shape the fascist paradigms of Austro-German culture and politics" (Konzett, 2000, p.xi).*

And from Bernhard's famous work of 1988:

*"When everything stinks of decay and everything screams out for destruction / the voice of a single person has become useless / it's not as if nothing is said or written against this disastrous process / every day things are being said and written against it / but whatever is said and written against it is not being heard or read / the Austrians do not hear any more and do not read anymore / that's to say they hear something about catastrophic conditions but do nothing about them / and they read about catastrophic conditions but do nothing against them / the Austrians are a people full of indifference toward their catastrophic condition" (Bernhard, 1995)*

However it was in the 'performance art' movement that the most public and controversial cultural dissent took place in Austria during the 1960s, embodied by a group of artists known as the 'Viennese Actionists' (see case-study). This group of young artists challenged the dominant cultural hegemony, accusing it of simply 'fostering tradition' (Klocker et al,

2008). The *Aktionisten* put on performances where the sacred symbols of Austrian 'culture' were 'desecrated' or the religiously imposed sexual taboos of Austrian society were used as a theme for provocative, ritualistic type performances. The audacious and provocative aspect of this artistic movement has been connected to the 'pent-up' and repressed state of modern art in post-war Austria (Hanisch, 1994).

In the 70s and 80s there was a loosening of the strict conservative grip on Austrian culture, overseen by the SPÖ Chancellor who dominated Austrian politics between 1970 and 1983, Bruno Kreisky. He attempted to formulate a new, more progressive cultural policy program under the slogan: 'A Concept of Wider Culture' (Wimmer, 1996, p45). This was to be in tune with the desire for a more open, liberal and modern Austria - supposedly represented by Kreisky (Pelinka et al, 2008). The Kreisky era promised, mostly in a rhetorical fashion, the reconciliation between modernist, intellectual elements of culture on the one side and the Austrian political establishment on the other (Hanisch, 1994, p475). There was also an attempt made to free art and culture from the dominating control of the state and its various institutions (Wimmer, 1996, p47).

In this atmosphere of promoting more 'freedom in the arts', the vulnerable position of contemporary art in Austria actually managed strengthen a little. More subsidies became available for experimental artistic projects and progressive artists began to produce work in a more benign and responsive political atmosphere. However, it was also clear throughout the period that while the political establishment had begun to be more flexible in its attitudes to contemporary artists, the general population remained unmoved or even antagonistic towards modern art (Menasse, 2005). This popular antagonism towards

progressive artistic culture was reflected by repeated headlines in the tabloid press and was subsequently exploited and manipulated for political purposes by Haider in the 1990s.

The 1990s ushered in a much more conflict ridden period in Austrian politics and culture.

Against the background of an increasingly difficult financial situation, the Far-Right under

Haider joined forces with the catholic-conservative Right to condemn the subsidizing of

modern, experimental or socially critical art just as was the case in the early years of the

Second Republic (see my case study). The scene was set for another cultural clash that

entailed a political confrontation with certain Austrian contemporary artists and what they

represented in terms of internationalism, multiculturalism and progressive values. This

confrontation with the contemporary art scene became an integral part of Haider's political

strategy in the 1990s and by pursuing this strategy, Haider attempted to promote, in similar

fashion to previous decades, a new type of 'Austrian Idea' that tapped into the popular

sentiment of antipathy towards modern art that had been institutionalized by Austrian

governments since 1945.

## **Summary**

This case study exposes the deep historical fracture in Austrian society that has created an

'us and them' chasm in art and culture, leading to an artistic community feeling under siege

and the populist Right using them as a pawn for populist electoral gains. An almost

structural parochialism in Austrian society is exposed whereby an acceptance of modern art

prevalent in countries such as Germany and Britain is seemingly *absent* in Austria. It is also

clear from the ideological push for an 'Austrian Idea' that culture plays a prominent role in

Austrian politics and was an important element in the construction of a post-war identity. Unlike most of Europe, art and culture form a political and ideological battleground which I would argue to be an essential area to investigate in order to gain an insight into a political phenomenon like Jörg Haider. My case study also underlines the peculiarly *Austrian* character of Haider's FPÖ by focusing on their attitude and policies towards *Kultur* and the avant-garde in Austria.

## Conclusion

This thesis has tried to give the reader a context and explanation for the causes of Haider's rise in the 1990s. The case study was written in the hope of enriching the scholarship on Haider by focusing on the peculiarly *Austrian* phenomenon whereby *Kultur*, historically and in the present-day, has been politicized to a much further extent than most other European countries. By locating Haider's FPÖ in a cultural study, you are able to get a much clearer insight into the character and ideology of this political party and movement.

There are a few final remarks I would like to mention which are relevant to the study and that would probably be useful to investigate more in further research.

Firstly, this 'culturalist' approach to Haider shows that the populist Right's emphasis on subjectivity pays off with real political capital. Many Austrian people were 'moved' by Haider, he seemed to capture the voter's imagination by a combination of emotional appeal and very skillful political marketing. This type of identity politics has been exploited by the populist Right in Austria and elsewhere with tangible political results. By comparison, the European Left (as opposed to the Left in South America) has been marginalized and appears unable to attract the populist vote it benefitted from earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Secondly, this study indicates that Haider acts almost like a benchmark for the subsequent spread of right-wing populism in Europe up to the present-day. Many populist Right parties copied or imitated Haider's approach to political marketing in countries such as The

Netherlands (Pim Fortuyn & Geert Wilders), Le Pen in France or the Italian *Liga Nord* under Umberto Bossi.

Thirdly, this research underlies the importance of carrying out *country-specific* research of political phenomena such as Haider. Much of the academic literature I read made sweeping and sometimes factually incorrect generalizations about a Europe-wide spread of right-wing populism. There are many aspects of Haider's FPÖ that are rooted in specific events and movements in Austrian history that are an essential part of understanding and explain Haider's rise in the 1990s. One example of this is the centrality of *Kultur* to Austrian politics which is simply not applicable in other national settings – hence this dissertation.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interviews/Research in Vienna, January 2002**

I interviewed and talked to various people during a research trip to Austria in January 2002. Among those I spoke to were Michael Wimmer, Ruth Wodak, Melanie Sully, Wolfgang Neugebauer, IG Kultur and some FPÖ politicians. I have referenced some of the ideas arising out of these talks directly in the text. However more importantly, the whole 'cultural turn' of this study came about as a result of this trip. By talking to various players connected to Haider I was struck by the role and impact of culture in Austrian society – once this was contextualized in Haider's political strategy it became important to unearth more about the relationship between the Austrian avant-garde and Haider's FPÖ in order to understand and explain the Haider phenomenon more fully. In addition to this, all the people I spoke to who were critical of Haider mentioned his alleged homosexuality something I refer to in the case-study.

This primary research reinforced my view that Haider should be understood much more in the context of a specifically Austrian phenomenon rather than simply explaining him away as part of a European trend towards right-wing populism.