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## Counter-Monument Practices in Vienna, Austria: Multidirectional Memory and Transnationality in Contemporary Struggles Against Antisemitism, Racism and Anti-Romaism

### Keywords

multidirectional memory, transnationality, counter-memory, monuments, antiracism, anti-Romaism, antisemitism

### Abstract

This article researches multidirectional memory and transnationality in recent examples of counter-monument practices in Austria's capital city, Vienna, specifically in regard to fights against antisemitism, racist discrimination and anti-Romaism. How have multidirectional strategies shaped counter-mnemonic struggle? Additionally, to what extent are they influenced by transnationality? Three examples of counter-monument practices are discussed in parallel: (1) The protests against the "Lueger monument," commemorating an antisemitic former mayor of Vienna; (2) the illegally installed Marcus Omofuma Stone, commemorating the racist police murder of a Nigerian asylum seeker in 1999; and, (3) the ongoing struggle to commemorate the Porajmos, the genocide of the Roma under Nazi rule, with a monument in Vienna. Seemingly unrelated to one another, each case constitutes a struggle between national, hegemonic, commemorative narratives, on the one hand, and agents of civil society that challenge these narratives, on the other. While none of the three examples constitutes an obvious case of multidirectional memory making, each of these struggles to counter racist, discriminatory pasts did generate a platform to speak about more than just one memory, also such that transcend national boundaries.

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## Prakse protispomenikov na Dunaju v Avstriji: večsmerni spomin in transnacionalnost v sodobnih bojih proti antisemitizmu, rasizmu in antiromstvu

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### Ključne besede

večsmerni spomin, transnacionalnost, protispomin, spomeniki, antirasizem, antiromstvo, antisemitizem

### Povzetek

Članek raziskuje večsmerni spomin in transnacionalnost v nedavnih primerih praks protispomenikov v avstrijski prestolnici Dunaj, predvsem v zvezi z boji proti antisemitizmu, rasistični diskriminaciji in antiromstvu. Kako so večsmerne strategije oblikovale protimnemonični boj? In v kolikšni meri nanje vpliva transnacionalnost? Vzporedno so obravnavani trije primeri praks protispomenikov: (1) protesti proti »Luegerjevemu spomeniku«, postavljenemu v spomin na nekdanjega antisemitskega dunajskega župana; (2) nezakonito postavljeno spominsko obeležje Marcusu Omofumi tj. rasističnemu policijskemu umoru nigerijskega prosilca za azil leta 1999; in (3) nenehni boj za prvo obeležje na Dunaju v spomin na Porajmos, genocid nad Romi med nacističnim režimom. Čeprav se trije primeri na prvi pogled razlikujejo, vsak od njih predstavlja boj med nacionalnimi, hegemonističnimi komemorativnimi pripovedmi in akterji civilne družbe, ki se tej hegemoniji zoperstavljajo. Medtem ko nobeden od teh primerov ne predstavlja očitnega primera ustvarjanja večsmerne spomina, pa je vsak od teh bojev proti rasistični, diskriminatorni preteklosti ustvaril platformo za razpravo o več kot le enem spominu, vsak od treh bojev pa tudi presega nacionalne meje.



This article researches the extent to which a multidirectional thinking of memory is shaping contemporary counter-monument struggles in Austria's capital city, Vienna, and to what extent those struggles and their practices connect to transnational events and movements in solidarity with their cause. I will discuss three contemporary examples that are either critiquing an existing monument, clandestinely making a new monument, or advocating for the establishment of new ones: (1) The protests against the "Lueger monument" (1926) at Vienna's Stubenring, commemorating an openly antisemitic former mayor of Vienna; (2) the illegally installed Marcus Omofuma Stone (2003) at Vienna's Opernring, now located at the Square of Human Rights, commemorating the racist police murder of a Nigerian asylum seeker in 1999; and, (3) the ongoing struggle to commemorate the Porajmos, the genocide of the Roma under Nazi rule, with a monument in Vienna. Seemingly unrelated to one another, each case constitutes in its own right a struggle between national, hegemonic, commemorative

narratives, on the one hand, and agents of civil society that challenge these narratives, on the other. The former act to materialize specific memorial sites and prevent the erection of others, while the latter are activists, artists, as well as marginalized and structurally excluded individuals and collectives. Each of these contemporary struggles, as I will show, has been marked both by traces of thinking memory in multidirectional terms, and by transnational efforts that in some cases reformulated national strategies and practices.

After a brief introduction to the terminology, I will discuss the genealogy of the three counter-monument struggles and their multidirectional qualities. That genealogy proffers the necessary contextualization that brings to light their parallel, transnational aspects, of which I dwell on in the concluding section.

### Multidirectional Memory and Counter-Monument Practices

When speaking of multidirectional memory, I follow the seminal work of Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, in which he defines a broad notion of memory as a term that “captures [. . .] the individual, embodied, and lived side *and* the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past.”<sup>1</sup> I am limiting the focus of this article to collective memory practices, which existing literature often frames in a competitive way, as a “zero-sum struggle over scarce resources,”<sup>2</sup> leading to seemingly clashing histories and memories that compete over what is understood as limited space in public memory culture. Rothberg advocates against such a competitive thinking and proposes a notion of collective memory that is multidirectional instead, “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than thinking different memories in competition and comparison to one another—his central focus being the memory of the Holocaust—this approach seeks to understand collective memory as a platform to speak about many memories, in a productive and intercultural manner. Approaching memory productively creates a dynamic through which people start to connect different memories to one another. Rothberg calls this multidirectional memory:

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rothberg, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Rothberg, 2.

*Multidirectional Memory* considers a series of interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present.<sup>4</sup>

The Lueger Monument, the Marcus Omofuma Stone and the claimed monument for the Porajmos each constitute an example for counter-memory practices that provide—to different extents—such a platform to speak about heterogeneous memories. The counter-mnemonic practices connected to them are shaped by acts of collective, public and social composure that derived their urgency amongst others from connecting past violence with the presence. This leads to a second key defining feature of the term of memory, as I am applying it here: Borrowing from Richard Terdiman, Rothberg has highlighted that “memory is the past made present.”<sup>5</sup> As much as the material monument in itself, it is also the making of it—which includes the struggles that precede its conceptualization, creation or transformation—as well as the later use of it as a public space, and the meanings attributed to it by visitors and spectators, that contribute to this process of “making the past present.” And, as James Young pointed out in regards to state-built monuments specifically, “memorials take on lives of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state’s original intentions. [. . .] New generations visit memorials under new circumstances and invest them with new meanings.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, materialized remembrance in the form of a historical monument does not remain static, but becomes subject to forms of destabilization and rethinking, critiquing or altering a site and what it serves to commemorate. This is what Michel Foucault encapsulated with the notion of counter-memory, which is constructed by a use of history that “severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model.”<sup>7</sup> Such a “destabilizing and productive energy of counter-memory,”<sup>8</sup> as Verónica Tello writes in reference to Foucault, can also be part of practices that take place around a monument, and of what viewers attribute to it. Following Tello, counter-memory “resists the repression of [. . .] history

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<sup>4</sup> Rothberg, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Rothberg, 3.

<sup>6</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 160.

<sup>8</sup> Verónica Tello, *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics: Refugee Histories and the Politics of Contemporary Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic), 23.



in dominant discourse.”<sup>9</sup> Tello adds, in regard to the “counter-monument” that “counter-memory fissures the singular and the homogenous, allowing for the excess of the heterogenous so that it may become a site of disagreement. To a certain degree, the same can be said of the counter-monument.”<sup>10</sup>

In this sense, I regard the contested Lueger Monument, the clandestinely built Marcus Omofuma Stone, and the ongoing fight for the commemoration of the Porajmos as counter-monument struggles with multidirectional qualities, qualities that I elucidate in the next section as I consider the genealogies of these particular struggles.

### Countering a Monument: The Lueger Monument

The Lueger monument, standing at twenty-seven meters, was built in 1926 at the Stubentor, a central location in Vienna. The monument honors the former mayor of the city (1897–1910), Karl Lueger, who was also a noted racist and antisemite. Widely regarded as a predecessor to modern day political populism<sup>11</sup> as well as a role-model to Adolf Hitler,<sup>12</sup> the openly racist mayor has gone down in Vienna’s official history with accolades, having been in charge of numerous groundbreaking infrastructure and public welfare programs. Only since the early 2000s has the monument become the object of public criticism, spanning from proposals to leave the historic site untouched, contextualizing it, altering it, or tearing it down altogether.

The monument is the largest amongst several sites dedicated to Lueger and depicts him in the form of an upright, bronze figure measuring four-and-half meters, placed on three stepped wreaths, with the lowest wreath measuring over ten meters in diameter. On top of the wreaths stands a three-tiered pedestal with four scenic reliefs of achievements during his time in office. An octagonal

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<sup>9</sup> Tello, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Tello, 16.

<sup>11</sup> See Ljubomir Bratić, “On Past and Present Populism,” in *Open Call: Handbuch zur Umgestaltung des Lueger-Denkmal*, ed. Jasmina Hirschl and Lilly Panholze (Vienna: Arbeitskreis zur Umgestaltung des Lueger-Denkmal in ein Mahnmal gegen Antisemitismus und Rassismus, 2011), 127.

<sup>12</sup> See Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler’s Vienna: A Dictator’s Apprenticeship* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks), 165.

center-piece underneath the statue shows four allegorical figures, also dedicated to his work as mayor.

Lueger's antisemitism and vital role in the spread of German nationalism were always well known and documented. The monument itself was designed by a sculptor who was an active supporter of the Nazis from 1938 to 1945. Despite all that, the monument remained untouched until the early 2000s, when the Austrian right-wing politician Jörg Haider led the far-right freedom party FPÖ into federal government for the first time, resulting in international outcries over Austria's political move to the right. Back then, it was voices from outside of Austria that pointed out the similarities between Haider and Lueger, and the influential roles each of them had in the rise or return of fascism.<sup>13</sup> This sparked a vocal public debate on the monument and its problematic existence. In response to a growing public dispute, academic staff and students of the University of Applied Arts Vienna issued a call in 2009 for proposals to redesign the monument, and two-hundred submissions were received.<sup>14</sup> Several critics—many of them from outside of Austria—did not agree with the idea of changing or contextualizing the monument, but advocated for the removal of it. In 2020, a petition to tear it down was launched by the Jewish Student Union of Vienna. The claim was repeated in an open letter from Holocaust survivors who fled Austria during the Nazi era. They issued a joint statement to the mayor of Vienna in June 2022, pledging for the removal of the monument and the renaming of the square. They stated:

It pains us that Karl Lueger, one of the most pronounced antisemites of the 19th and early 20th centuries, is still honoured in the heart of Vienna. We believe that the square must be renamed and the memorial removed. The city's inaction in this matter—despite long public debate—is shameful.<sup>15</sup>

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The city of Vienna argued against both renaming the square and removing the statue. The city government instead opted for a strategy of contextualization. In 2016, after mounting public pressure, a small plaque was added to the site,

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Rolf Schneider, "Die Furcht vor Haider ist berechtigt," *Die Welt*, February 4, 2000, <https://www.welt.de/103582524>.

<sup>14</sup> Jasmina Hirschl and Lilly Panholze, eds., *Open Call*.

<sup>15</sup> Evelyn Torton Beck et al., "Offener Brief an Bürgermeister Ludwig," Internationale Liga gegen Rassismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, June 27, 2022, <https://lueger.licra.at/>. Paragraph translated by S. Uitz.

calling Lueger a “legend” and a “controversial figure” at the same time, demonstrating the city government’s unwillingness to distance itself from Lueger entirely.<sup>16</sup> Increasingly, academic discourses started to inform the debate, such as a November 2021 Colloquium called *Marmor. Bronze. Verantwortung*, organized by the *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l’antisémitisme en Autriche* and the Museum of Modern Art Vienna mumok.

In 2022, a temporary art installation called *Lueger temporär* was commissioned by the city and installed from October 2022 to September 2023. Designed by Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch, the installation consisted of a wood-frame edifice, thirty-nine meters long, five meters wide, and eleven meters tall. The designers placed *Lueger temporär* across the square, facing the monument to Lueger. It featured “true-to-scale, fragmentary contours of all the memorials or monuments we are currently aware of” dedicated to Lueger in Vienna, a total of sixteen.<sup>17</sup> The installation marked the intent and need for altering the monument, playing into the aesthetics of construction scaffolding, yet it was criticized specifically by members of the Viennese Jewish community for not confronting antisemitism explicitly.<sup>18</sup>

Parallel to the initiatives taken by the city, public letters, and academic work, anonymous protestors took to clandestine action. In contrast to the institutional approaches, they unleashed an immediate, public effect: In July 2020, the word *Schande* (shame) was graffitied multiple times in large red letters on the foundation of the monument and in other colors around the monument. The graffiti made the indeed shameful presence of this monument immediately visible to everyone. When the city decided to remove the graffiti, in October the same year, in another clandestine action, the word “shame” was placed in concrete letters onto the monument. A group of activists then organized a *Schandwache*, a protest against the planned removal of the letters and graffiti, in front of the monument. The protest was supported by the Jewish Student Union, the Socialist

<sup>16</sup> Contextualizing plaque “Wienkl” at the Lueger-Monument, Stubenring, Vienna. Written by Oliver Rathkolb in cooperation with the Cultural Commission of Vienna’s first district.

<sup>17</sup> Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch, “Lueger Temporary,” accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.luegertemporär.at/en/>.

<sup>18</sup> Liam Hoare, “New Art Installation Inflames Row over Vienna’s Statue of Antisemite,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, October 27, 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/new-art-installation-inflames-row-over-viennas-statue-of-antisemite-yumqyb7m>.

Youth, the Muslim Youth Austria, the KZ Verband<sup>19</sup> and activists and artist campaign Sodom Vienna, marking the multidirectional dimension of this grassroots engagement. In the course of these protests, racist violence was addressed as a threat in the present, and not reduced to the particular history of antisemitism, that concerns the Lueger monument and its past. This broader political meaning became evident through the events immediately after the application of the concrete graffiti, when a group of right-wing activists (“Identitarians”) forcefully removed the concrete writing. Police forces, that were present, did not intervene in the removal, even though the *Schandwache* at the monument had been declared officially as a political rally in order to protect the monument against the removal of the so-called shame-writings.

In June 2023, the city decided to realize a proposal by artist Klemens Wihlidal, who suggested to leave the monument mostly intact, but to tilt the statue by three-and-a-half degrees. This proposal received criticism, as Austrian art historian Tanja Schult voiced in a newspaper commentary: “We do not have to subscribe for all time to the logic of a vain man who skillfully knew how to inscribe himself in the city.”<sup>20</sup> Such an intervention, she added, marks in no way the very reason for which this monument is so disputed, i.e. the racism and antisemitism of Karl Lueger. Despite the persistent criticism, the reconstruction will begin in 2024 and it remains to be seen whether protests will subside or reemerge even stronger.

### Making a Counter-Monument: The Marcus Omofuma Stone

The second case concerns the Marcus Omofuma Stone, illegally placed in 2003 in the city center of Vienna. It commemorates the violent police-murder of Marcus Omofuma on May 1, 1999, and is to-date the only monument in Austria dedicated to the racist violence of the Austrian asylum and migration regime. Migrants’ experiences and memories rarely ever enter the collective memory of a majority society, and migration history in Austria, too, is marked by its chronic neglect of memories of migrants in public spaces and discourses.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Association of Concentration Camp Survivors.

<sup>20</sup> Tanja Schult, “Wien braucht dieses Lueger-Denkmal nicht!,” *Der Standard*, June 20, 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000175312/und-ewig-gr252223t-der-lueger>.

<sup>21</sup> See Christiane Hintermann, “Migrationsgeschichte im öffentlichen Raum: Die Konstruktion eines Gedächtnisortes am Beispiel des Marcus Omofuma-Steins in Wien,” in

The memorial is a three-meter tall and five-ton heavy, abstract, granite sculpture that was modeled by Ulrike Truger with cutting disks, perched on a concrete base with a metal plaque and the German inscription:

Marcus Omofuna Stone

African Granite 2003

Ulrike Truger

In memory of the Nigerian Marcus Omofuma who died during deportation due to shackling and suffocation.<sup>22</sup>

Marcus Omofuma was murdered by three Austrian police officers tasked with his forced deportation on a flight from Austria to Nigeria via Sofia, Bulgaria. Omofuma had protested against his deportation, in response to which the officers tied him with tape to his airplane seat, taping his entire torso, head, mouth, and parts of his nose. Despite obvious signs of breathing difficulties and vocal concerns raised by other passengers on the civil aircraft, the police officers kept Omofuma tied up and gagged, letting him suffocate to death. Upon arrival, Omofuma was pronounced dead by a doctor who had been called.

The news of Omofuma's death had led to immediate and broad anti-racist and anti-police protests in Austria. During multiple rallies and political events, protestors demanded the three police officers to be tried for murder, as well as the immediate resignation of their superiors and the politicians in charge, including the Austrian interior minister, the general director of public security, and the head of the responsible section in the interior ministry. A broad, collective, grassroots alliance coalesced, consisting of Viennese migrant communities hailing from several African nations as well as migrant activists of other nationalities. This alliance was further supported by leftist political organizations and human rights campaigners.<sup>23</sup> From the outset, political responses in Austria car-

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*Migration und Integration: Wissenschaftliche Perspektiven aus Österreich*, ed. Jennifer Carvill Schellenbacher et al. (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 241n.

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Edore, "The Marcus Omofuma Memorial in Vienna (2003)," Black Central Europe, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1989-today/the-marcus-omofuma-memorial-in-vienna-2003/>.

<sup>23</sup> See Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte von Marginalisierten und MigrantInnen, *1000 Jahre Haft: Operation Spring und institutioneller Rassismus; Resümee einer antirassistischen Gruppe* (Vienna: Verein für Antirassistische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, 2005), 12.

ried the marks of the very racism that had led to Omofuma's murder: the three acting police officers were allowed to stay on-duty and were suspended only after weeks of mounting public pressure. Three years later, they were found guilty for "negligent manslaughter in particularly dangerous circumstances" and were sentenced to eight months suspended prison terms in March 2002, a very mild sentence, given the evidence and circumstances of Omofuma's death; they were permitted to remain employed by the police force despite being found guilty.<sup>24</sup> Concomitantly, the yellow press launched a smear campaign against Omofuma himself, Nigerian refugees, and asylum seekers in general.

Parliamentary hearings, witness reports, and court records exposed a deeply rooted regime of racism<sup>25</sup> embedded in the Austrian police and ministry of interior, openly justifying forms of torture like gagging and binding of people of African descent during pre-deportation detention or the deportation itself.<sup>26</sup> Acting politicians failed to recognize their responsibility for, or knowledge of, the repeated use of torture methods in deportation processes. In this environment of mounting anti-racist resistance, only four weeks after Omofuma's murder the Austrian police launched on May 27, 1999 what they called "Operation Spring": the largest organized police action of Austria's recent past, during which 104 people—almost all of them of African origin—were arrested in the course of multiple, simultaneous police raids involving 850 police officers. The raids were followed by years of trials, marked by racist prejudice and profiling, criminalizing politically active members of the Black Community in Austria, including those involved in the protests against the murder of Omofuma.

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Report 2003 – Austria," Refworld, May 28, 2003, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/amnesty/2003/en/57229>.

<sup>25</sup> See the Amnesty International report on police brutality in Austria from 2000: "The image of a brutal and sometimes racist police force is an ugly one. The Austrian government faces major embarrassment in Europe and abroad if it allows rogue police officers to beat people up and get away with it." "Austria: Incidents of Police Brutality Continue," Amnesty International, March 24, 2000, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur13/007/2000/en/>.

<sup>26</sup> See opening statement by Alexander van der Bellen (Green party) during parliamentary hearing concerning the death of refugee Marcus Omofuma (6217/J): "168. Sitzung des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich: XX. Gesetzgebungsperiode Montag, 10. Mai 1999," Parlament Österreich, accessed July 3, 2023, [https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XX/NRSITZ/168/fnameorig\\_114325.html](https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XX/NRSITZ/168/fnameorig_114325.html).



It was in this historic conjuncture of culminating racism and the surge of far-right politics—with the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) entering the halls of federal government in early 2000—that the Marcus Omofuma Stone was clandestinely placed in the city center of Vienna. The monument was created upon the private initiative of the artist Truger, after having been approached with the idea by human rights activist Ingrid Popper in 2002.<sup>27</sup> Truger tried to receive public approval for the memorial, but her applications for public funding and permission were all rejected. The artist then decided to fund it privately and placed it without permission next to the Vienna Opera house on October 10, 2003.<sup>28</sup>

With the monument in place, Truger appealed in an open letter to Vienna's mayor, after which the city authorities decided not to remove the illegally installed monument entirely, but to relocate it to another central location, a so far unnamed square near another central and well-frequented location, Vienna's Museum Quarter. The square was later renamed in 2014 to "Human Rights Square."

In 2022, the Austrian Federal Monuments Office officially placed the Omofuma Stone under monument protection. In the Office's written justification, the authors emphasized the fact that it is the only monument in Austria of its kind. While there are many memorials against war and fascism, all of which dedicated to the terror of the National Socialists, there is not a single other monument in Austria dealing with the recent history of violence against migrants and asylum seekers, or of structural racism and racial discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

While the Omofuma memorial itself was placed by the initiative of a few private individuals, the monument and its site provide a rare example of successfully inscribing the remembrance of a migrant's story into a public discourse and space, particularly the racism and police brutality that had led to the murder of Marcus Omofuma. As a monument, it also reminds of the anti-racist protests that were sparked by Omofuma's murder, that were directed more broadly

<sup>27</sup> Ulrike Truger, "Omofuma Stein," Bildhauerin Ulrike Truger, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.ulriketruger.at/omofuma-stein>.

<sup>28</sup> "Gedenkstein für Marcus Omofuma," *Der Standard*, October 13, 2003, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1446536/gedenkstein-fuer-marcus-omofuma>.

<sup>29</sup> Ulrike Truger, "Denkmalschutz für Marcus Omofuma Stein," Bildhauerin Ulrike Truger, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.ulriketruger.at/denkmalschutz-f%C3%BCr-marcus-omofuma-stein>.



against racism, fascism and xenophobia in Austrian politics, society and media. Moreover, the Omofuma Stone has also become a site of exposure of the persisting and ongoing racist and fascist currents in Austria. For many years it was the target of repeated attacks from racists and fascists. These racists and fascists vandalized the monument several times, sometimes with color, sometimes with inscriptions. The plaque was stolen and replaced. By being attacked openly, the memorial exposed the strong racist and fascist sentiments present in Austria's society, bearing again the marks of a "counter-memorial" that destabilizes established, historical narratives that, left unchallenged, obfuscate the persistent racist, fascist sentiments and violence in Austria.

### Claiming a Missing Monument: Remembering the Porajmos

My third and final example concerns a memorial site that does not yet exist: a monument in Vienna to commemorate the Porajmos, also referred to as Samudaripen or Roma Holocaust, the genocide of the Roma and Romnja during the Holocaust by the Nazis and their collaborators from 1939 to 1945. Before 1938, Austria had a population of around 12,000 Roma. Anti-Roma racism long predated the Racial Laws of Nazi-Germany of 1938, stripping Roma and Sinti of their civic rights. Relative to their population, the Roma became the most persecuted minority in Austria under the Nazis.<sup>30</sup>

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Today, only a handful of small memorial sites have been established in Austria, such as the Porajmos memorial in Weiz (Styria), initiated by Holocaust-survivor Ceija Stojka. Vienna, from which most deportations were organized, has no dedicated memorial site, and for many years now Roma communities have pointed this out. In 2022, the creation of such a memorial site was positively commented on by members of the Austrian parliament and government spokespeople, yet a concrete commitment never materializes.<sup>31</sup>

Based on a Council of Europe estimate from 2012, about 10–12 million Roma live in Europe today, of which Austria's Roma population totals 50,000 people.

<sup>30</sup> See Roman Urbaner, "Der blinde Fleck: O koro than," *dROMa* 56, no. 2–3 (Summer/Fall 2019): 10.

<sup>31</sup> "Zentrales Mahnmal in Wien: Bald ein Denkmal für die Roma und Sinti in Wien?," *Roma\_2020*, April 8, 2022, <https://www.burgenland-roma.at/index.php/politik-und-gesellschaft/zentrales-mahnmal-in-wien>.

In 2008, the European Parliament finally addressed both the past and present violence committed against Roma communities, issuing a resolution for a European strategy on the situation of European Roma. This resolution included the statement that “the Romani Holocaust (Porajmos) deserves full recognition commensurate with the gravity of Nazi crimes designed to physically eliminate the Roma/Romnja of Europe as well as the Jews and other targeted groups.”<sup>32</sup> Today, a European Union Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation exists, promoting Roma equal rights and inclusion and participation, and the European Council’s Recommendation on Roma inclusion, equality and participation has been adopted by all European member states on March 12, 2021. Still, anti-Roma discrimination persists, and Roma continue to face structural racist discrimination and marginalization.<sup>33</sup> It is well researched that Roma face socioeconomic exclusion in their daily lives, and despite the official intent of the European Union to “place Roma inclusion high on EU and national agendas and mobilizing EU policy, legal and funding instruments,”<sup>34</sup> the discrimination and structural poverty is severe.

Against the backdrop of (historical) structural discrimination, the Porajmos has been long ignored and rendered invisible not only by European politics of remembrance, but also by scientific research concerning the victims of the Nazis. Akim Jah notes in the introduction of a recent volume on deportations in the Nazi Era, that “for a long time little attention has been paid to the deportation of Roma/Romnja as a subject of research,” and that until today the topic remains “much less differentiated within research than the deportation of Jews.”<sup>35</sup> The neglect of their persecution continued for decades after the end of the war, and this neglect is belied by a racist anti-Romaism that preceded and endured

<sup>32</sup> European Parliament resolution of January 31, 2008, on a European strategy on the Roma.

<sup>33</sup> Jasmina Tumbas, “Countering Persecution, Misconceptions, and Nationalism: Roma Identity and Contemporary Activist Art,” in *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance: Danger, Im/mobility and Politics*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Aneta Stojnić (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 103.

<sup>34</sup> “A Union of Equality: EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation; Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council,” European Union, October 7, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0620>, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Henning Borggräfe and Akim Jah, eds., *Deportations in the Nazi Era: Sources and Research* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 6.

the Nazi era until today.<sup>36</sup> Outside of Roma communities, the Roma genocide started to be researched more systematically and was officially recognized by European nation-states and the European Union only in the late 20th century and early 2000s. This was very much enforced by Roma activists, families and communities of Roma victims themselves, claiming recognition for the genocide committed against them, along with transnational Roma entities that pursued the aim of recognition, documentation and commemoration, and started to organize Europe-wide.<sup>37</sup> One recent example of Roma genocide research and documentation is the *RomArchive: The Digital Archive of the Roma*. This archive was launched in January 2019 and is an international, digital archive for Romani arts and culture, predominately run by Roma.<sup>38</sup>

In Austria, parallel to the transnational efforts by Roma communities to move against anti-Romaism on a European level, local Roma organizations and communities formed initiatives for the recognition of Roma histories and for the creation of cultural spaces. This led to a growing public visibility and artistic interventions such as an art installation in front of the parliament, titled *Dikh he na bister!* (“Watch and don’t forget!”), a temporary “Memorial to Romn\*ja and Sinti\*ze who were killed during Nazi time,” designed by Natali Tomenko in 2019. The personal initiative of individuals like Ceija Stojka, who was the first Romni to publicly thematize the “Porajmos” (with her 1988 published book *Wir leben im Verborgenen*), also supported the claim for a public memorial site.

In 2022, a newly established collaboration platform between autochthon and migrant Roma communities in Austria, was able to jointly formalize a petition for a proper memorial to the federal government. The initiative for this broad coalition was supported by the work of an inter-regional and transnational project called “Dream Road: Danube REgion for improved Access and eMpower of ROmA Development” (2020–2022), funded by the European Union, and part of the recent efforts taken on a European level to combat anti-Roma discrimination. The chairman of the Austrian advisory board of the Roma handed the pe-

<sup>36</sup> *Deportations in the Nazi Era* provides a multidirectional perspective on Nazi crimes, researching specifically the deportations of Jews, Sinti and Roma.

<sup>37</sup> György Majtényi, “The Memory and Historiography of Porrajmos: Making a Transnational National Site of Memory,” *Shoah: Intervention, Methods, Documentation* 8, no. 1 (2021): 86–103. [https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0121/ART\\_GMAJ01](https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0121/ART_GMAJ01).

<sup>38</sup> RomArchive is available at <https://www.romarchive.eu/en>.

tition to representatives of the Austrian parliament in April 2022, where it was met by broad approval.<sup>39</sup> The drafting of this joint document is significant insofar as the formation of such an alliance transcended the legal distinction between autochthon and allochthon Roma groups in Austria. The protection of ethnic groups in Austria consists of a historically instituted and fragmented set of laws and regulations,<sup>40</sup> with some norms pre-dating the Austrian Republic, as far back as minority protection laws instituted during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The legal recognition of Roma as an ethnic group dates back to 1993, and distinguishes between those Roma that are seen as autochthon by the law—meaning that they migrated to Austria before the 20th century—as legally protected under the constitution (which includes the Burgenland-Roma, Sinti and Lovara), and those who migrated to Austria more recently (e.g. Kalderas, Gurbet and Arlije). The latter groups are not officially recognized and therefore not represented by the council of ethnic minorities (*Volksgruppenbeirat*).

While concrete plans and ideas for the creation of the Porajmos memorial exist, it is yet to be seen, whether and when they will be implemented. At the moment, the debate around its creation has quieted down again, and the struggle for a memorial site commemorating the Roma genocide continues.

As a tangent to struggle for a Porajmos memorial site, it is worth noting that one of Vienna's latest monuments incorporates what can be called a multidirectional gesture: At the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial, completed in 2021, dedicated to the 65,000 Austrian Jewish victims of the Shoah, the persecution of the Roma and other groups under the Nazi regime is made visible as well. At the entrance to the oval sphere, an additional memorial stone was added, with an inscription dedicated to the non-Jewish victims, amongst them the "Roma and Sinti communities of all ages, children and adults who were deemed to have mental or physical disabilities, people who were ostracized as 'asocial' or were persecuted for their sexual orientation, and Carinthian Slovenes."

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<sup>39</sup> Dream Road project description can be found at <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/dream-road>.

<sup>40</sup> See Mirjam Polzer-Srienz, "The Representation of Small Ethnic Groups by State Bodies: The Case of Austria and Slovenia," in *(Hidden) Minorities: Language and Ethnic Identity between Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christian Promitzer, Klaus-Jurgen Hermanik, and Eduard Staudinger (Vienna: Lit, 2009), 64.

## Transnationality in Contemporary Counter-Monument Practices in Vienna

As observed in an earlier study on transnational memory spaces in Vienna, conducted by Priker, Kramer, and Lichtenwagner, “transnationality has rarely been an explicit objective of mnemonic actors.”<sup>41</sup> This is also true for the three examples given in this article. Still, transnational events that were related to the respective causes did provide an important frame, that did influence the national debates in all cases.

The fight for a Porajmos memorial has been taking place against a transnational background from the beginning. As György Majtényi put it, the Porajmos calls for a “transnational national site of memory,”<sup>42</sup> as it is a “‘site of memory’ within Roma minority communities living in different nation states.”<sup>43</sup> Roma have never been attached to one nation state alone and have therefore always had to fight a transnational struggle,<sup>44</sup> often acting from positions of non-citizenship. The recent successes on EU level towards formal recognition of the crimes committed against them, have likely been helpful in making state institutions in Austria formerly acknowledge the Porajmos as well. This, albeit slow, progress towards more visible commemoration can furthermore be attributed to the formation of a national alliance of Roma communities beyond the legally constructed differentiation between recognized and non-recognized ethnic minorities. In part, this cooperation is the result of a transnational initiative at the European level.

The debates about the Lueger Monument have been impacted by transnationality in different ways. Initially, when the monument reentered public discourse in the early 2000s, it was not a singular, national occurrence of an old monument under examination. I understand the timeliness of the debate to be one of many

<sup>41</sup> Peter Pirker, Johannes Kramer, and Mathias Lichtenwagner, “Transnational Memory Spaces in the Making: World War II and Holocaust Remembrance in Vienna,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32, no. 4 (December 2019): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-019-09331-w>.

<sup>42</sup> Majtényi, “Memory and Historiography of Porajmos.”

<sup>43</sup> Majtényi, 86.

<sup>44</sup> On Roma transnational struggles see Thomas Acton, “Beginnings and Growth of Transnational Movements of Roma to Achieve Civil Rights after the Holocaust,” RomArchive, accessed August 12, 2023, <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/beginnings-and-growth-transnational-movements-roma/>.

manifestations of a general shift in public awareness of and interest in memorial culture in Austria and in other European countries similar to Austria. Austrian historian Heidemarie Uhl speaks in this regard of a “resurgence of interest in monuments in public discourse as well as in contemporary art.”<sup>45</sup> After monuments had been discarded as having lost all relevance to the present, “the amnesia of a future-oriented modernity was replaced by a new historicism, an ‘obsession with the past,’ which once again shifted the focus of social and scientific interest onto the dimension of history, though now under the sign of postmodernity.”<sup>46</sup> The past, and what we remember of it, is to be understood as a dynamic process, shaping the present.<sup>47</sup> From early on, critics of the monument pointed at precisely this connection between Lueger’s antisemitism of the past and the political conjuncture of Austria in the present, yet again confronted with a rise of racism and fascist currents.

After over a decade of critical debate about the future of the Lueger monument, the transnational paradigm shift in monument culture, set off by the Black Lives Matter protests, caused a significant shift in the discourse. When protests ignited, in the aftermath of the racist police murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, they quickly led to the toppling and removal of monuments related to colonialism and racist histories across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. The position of the Viennese municipal government, but also of known art historians, artists and intellectuals, had generally been opposed to the removal of the monument. Many argued about the dangers of erasing the past, claiming that retaining the monument would keep a critical awareness alive.<sup>48</sup> Yet, the Black Lives Matter protests demonstrated in a powerful manner the emancipatory potential of taking a racist monument down, of vandalizing or dismantling it, instead of contextualizing and preserving it. It seems likely that the vandalization of the Lueger monument in July 2020, shortly after the Black Lives Matter protests had erupted, were inspired and encouraged by the decisiveness of these anti-monument actions. In hindsight, the “shame” graffiti can be considered as the most noticed and talked about intervention, both for

<sup>45</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, “Out of True: Monuments and Reflective Memorial Culture,” in *Open Call*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Uhl, 46.

<sup>47</sup> See Uhl, 46n.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Aleida Assmann, “A Wake-up Call in the Heart of the City: Interventions Concerning the Karl Lueger Monument in Vienna,” in *Open Call*, 61–65.



its clear and intelligible messaging and for the multidirectional connections the activists drew with all forms of present-day discrimination and racism.

Black Lives Matter has also inscribed itself into the history and meaning of the Omofuma Stone, which did also not set out as a transnational site of memory, but was turned into one later on. Since its placement in 2003, the memorial has kept its function as a counter-monument. Despite its official recognition by state institutions, it continues to resist national discourses that tried to deny Omofuma's murder a place in Austrian hegemonic history at first.<sup>49</sup> The recurrent usage of the space has connected heterogeneous memories of traumatic pasts and presents in a multidirectional fashion, and ties the memorial to transnational movements: The "Square of Human Rights" serves today as a gathering place for various protests with anti-racist, anti-fascist and other anti-discriminatory agendas, for causes in and outside of Austria, such as protests in solidarity with women in Iran, or in Palestine. One of the largest of such gatherings at the Omofuma Stone was the Black Lives Matter rally on June 4, 2020.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

I set out to ask how multidirectional strategies have influenced and shaped recent counter-mnemonic struggles in Austria, and how these were impacted by transnationality. Strictly speaking, neither of the three examples constitutes an obvious case of multidirectional memory. There is no clear cross-referencing or negotiation between heterogeneous histories at stake in any of the counter-monument practices discussed. Still, each of these counter-hegemonic narratives did generate to an extent what Rothberg calls a platform to speak about more than just one memory. Thus, there is a multidirectional element in all three cases: (1) the activism against the Lueger Monument that combined his antisemitism of the past with the racist threats of the present; this became particularly clear when activists from different political backgrounds—Jewish, Muslim, Holocaust survivors and others—joined forces to resist the right-wing attacks of the "shame" graffiti intervention; (2) the collaboration between legally recognized Roma groups and those who are not considered an ethnic minority in Austria;

<sup>49</sup> Tello, *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> "50.000 bei 'Black Lives Matter'-Demo," Wien ORF, June 4, 2020, <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3051825/>.



(3) and the multiple ways in which the Omofuma Stone has become a place of remembrance of new and heterogeneous memories of racist violence. These new acts of remembrance are linked to the history of anti-racist protests after Omofuma's death but also tie in with new ones.

While transnationality was not the target of any of the provided examples, it did impact each of them in different ways. In the case of the Lueger Monument, the transnational movement of Black Lives Matter empowered activists to challenge the disputed monument in ways that radically questioned the dominant, national claims for preservation and contextualization; the transnational efforts of Roma communities all over Europe have vested the claim for a Porajmos memorial in Austria with additional leverage in the efforts of intervening in state policies. In the case of the Omofuma Stone, due to its clandestine, anti-hegemonic nature in its making, a site for the materialization of transnational solidarity in the context of anti-discriminatory fights for justice has been created.

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