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MARIA FRITSCHÉ



**FIERY HUNGARIANS, SUBVERSIVE CZECHS, SNAPPY
GERMANS.
THE RECYCLING OF HISTORY IN POSTWAR
AUSTRIAN CINEMA (1945-1955)**

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Maria Fritsche is Research Fellow at the University of Southampton. Dr. Fritsche studied History, Political Science, Film Studies and Gender Studies at the Universities in Vienna, Bern and Portsmouth and has worked as a researcher and lecturer. Her main research interests lie in the field of film history as well as 20th century social, military and gender history, particularly in Europe during World War II and the postwar era. Her current research project deals with the Marshall Plan Information Campaign and the planning, production and reception of Marshall Plan propaganda films in the 1950s.

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Illustration on cover: Kaiser Wilhelm (Wolfgang Lukschy) and Kaiser Franz Joseph (Paul Hörbiger) in *Die Deutschmeister* (1955).

Maria Fritsche

Fiery Hungarians. Subversive Czechs. Snappy Germans.

The Recycling of History in Post-war Austrian Cinema (1945–1955)¹

Historical Costume Film as Historiographical Source

Sissi (1955), the tragic story of the Bavarian princess Elisabeth/Sissi, who falls in love with the young Austrian emperor Franz Joseph I. and marries him, still tops the league of the most successful productions in post-war Austria.² It is a classic that has acquired a cult following across continental Europe. While *Sissi* is one of the few Austrian films known outside German-speaking countries today, it was certainly not the only profitable historical costume film within Austria at the time. In fact, the historical costume film was undeniably one of the most popular domestic genres at the time. But why was the genre so successful? Was it because it offered an escape to a fairytale world through its glamorised Imperial setting and splendid costumes? Was it because it romanticised the past and thereby conveyed a sense of permanence and stability?

Historical costume films, defined as films set in the historical past but not necessarily dealing with actual historical events or personae, did not merely feed escapist desires.³ No other genre in post-war Austrian cinema celebrated Austria and the Austrian people more strongly than the historical costume film. My argument is that the domestic historical costume film, apart from providing escapism and reassurance, played a major role in the construction of Austrian national identity. It helped to instil a sense of national pride and it popularised the idea that Austria was a nation distinct from Germany – a conviction that was

¹ I would like to thank Christian Cargnelli for his helpful and critical comments to this article and György Péteri for his encouragement to publish the article in this series. All translations from German are my own. The pictures are screenshots from the films, unless otherwise stated.

² See e.g. S. Hake. (2002). *German National Cinema*. London, New York: Routledge, 114. E. Marischka. (Director). (1955). *Sissi* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Erma-Film.

³ Critics use the terms 'historical' and 'costume' or 'heritage' often interchangeably to categorise films that are set in what the audience perceives as historical past. The term costume film, as for example Sue Harper has used it, is more open than 'historical film' which is usually used to define films that are set in the past and deal with real historical personae or events. See S. Harper. (1994). *Picturing the Past. The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*. London: BFI, 2. For a discussion of the terms costume, historical and heritage film see for example A. Higson. (2003). *English Heritage, English Cinema. Costume Drama since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 9–11.

by no means shared by all Austrians after the Second World War.⁴ The films fed into the discourse on Austrian identity, equipping it with adequate imagery and providing ‘historical evidence’ for the claim that the Austrians were a distinct species.

Historical costume films shape notions of national identity.⁵ They do not represent the past truthfully, but interpret it, making it both ‘usable’ and accessible for the present. Pierre Sorlin suggested that historical costume films constitute the ‘historical capital’ of a society by producing ‘myths’ about the past.⁶ The ruling elites may instrumentalise these ‘myths’ to sustain their power. This, however, does not necessarily mean that historical films are always in line with the dominant discourse or serve as vehicle for the dissemination of national ideologies.⁷ They can also act subversively, as they provide an ideal forum in which displeasure can be aired.⁸ Sometimes critique can be expressed more easily when cloaked in historical costume and placed in a bygone era.

Anybody studying film history is faced with the challenge of explaining the complex relationship between historical change and cultural texts. While we are not able to verify exactly how and to what extent cultural texts such as films respond to historical change, we can assume that films tell us something about the time in which they were made. As films are produced and consumed by people who are rooted in society, they draw their images and themes from that social environment.⁹ Hence, even though films do not *reflect* social reality, they engage with it and can thus, according to Justin Smith, be considered ‘the repository of currents of feeling’ of a society.¹⁰ The analysis of films can therefore give valuable insights into the collective hopes and anxieties of a society, making film an indispensable source for historical investigation.¹¹

⁴ See E. Hanisch. (1994). *Der lange Schatten des Staates. Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*. Wien: Ueberreuter, 159–163.

⁵ See B. De Wever. (2007). Prologue: Historical Film as Palimpsest. In L. Engelen & R. V. Winkel (Eds.), *Perspectives on European Film and History* (5–11). Gent: Academia Press, 8.

⁶ P. Sorlin, (1980). *Film in History. Restaging the Past*. Oxford: Blackwell, 21.

⁷ This would explain why, for example, all state-commissioned films in the Third Reich were historical films. See Hake, 2002, 77–78.

⁸ See F. Stern. (2005). Durch Clios Brille: Kino als zeit/und kulturgeschichtliche Herausforderung. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 16 (1), 59–87, 74.

⁹ See R. C. Allen & D. Gomery. (1985). *Film History. Theory and Practice* New York, London: McGraw-Hill, 158.

¹⁰ J. Smith. (2008). Film History [Electronic version]. In *Making History: The Discipline in Perspective*. London: Institute of Historical Research. URL: http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/film_history.html, retrieved 6 February 2010.

¹¹ See A. Kaes. (1995). German Cultural History and the Study of Film: Ten Theses and a Postscript. *New German Critique* (65), 47–58, 51.

While film always engages with the environment it is produced in, it is more responsive to social changes in some periods than in others. Tim Bergfelder's argument that popular cultural often gives more emphasis to the national when countries 'feel beleaguered in their political or cultural identity' is certainly true for Austria after the Second World War.¹² Post-war Austrian cinema provides a particularly interesting case study to analyse cinematic discourses and the role of cinema in society, because the decade after the Second World War was a most momentous period in Austrian history: In 1945 Austria was a defeated country whose economy and social structures had suffered severe damages. Large parts of the cities and the industry had been destroyed, a considerable percentage of men was absent due to casualties and imprisonment, and the country was occupied by the former enemies. Faced with military defeat, the difficult legacy of Nazi dictatorship, the loss of loved ones, and the destruction of their homes or private lives, many Austrians felt disoriented and hopeless.¹³ Some issues, such as those of gender and national identity, were particularly pressing at the time. Gender relations had come under severe pressure, because the return of veterans triggered conflicts between men and women over the distribution of power and the question of gender roles.¹⁴ Moreover, the downfall of the German Reich had made national identity once more an issue of vital importance. As a union with Germany was no longer desired or opportune, Austria's elites put much effort into promoting the idea of an independent Austrian nation; this was as much directed at the Austrian people to strengthen their sense of national identity as at the occupying Allied Forces, who should be coaxed into granting Austria national independence.¹⁵

Austrian cinema did not just comment on these issues but actively engaged in the discourses on national identity and gender roles. By analysing how cinema debated these issues I hope to identify the emotional currents that ran through post-war Austrian society; I

¹² T. Bergfelder. (2005). National, Transnational or Supranational cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 27 (3), 315–331, 319.

¹³ See E. Bruckmüller. (1985). *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*. Wien: Herold, 520.

¹⁴ See e.g. I. Bandhauer-Schöffmann, & E. Hornung. (1996). War and Gender Identity. The Experience of Austrian Women, 1945–1950. In D. F. Good, M. Grandner & M. J. Maynes (Eds.), *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (213–233). Providence, Oxford: Berghahn; E. Langthaler. (1996). Ländliche Lebenswelten von 1945 bis 1950. In R. Sieder, H. Steinert & E. Tálos (Eds.), *Österreich 1945–1995: Gesellschaft, Politik, Kultur* (35–53). Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik; I. Bauer, & R. Huber. (2007). Sexual Encounters across (Former) Enemy Borderlines. In G. Bischof, A. Pelinka & D. Herzog (Eds.), *Sexuality in Austria* (65–101). New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.

¹⁵ See E. Brix. (1988). Zur Frage der österreichischen Identität am Beginn der Zweiten Republik. In G. Bischof & J. Leidenfrost (Eds.), *Die bevormundete Nation. Österreich und die Alliierten 1945–1949* (93–104). Innsbruck: Haymon; E. Bruckmüller. (1997). *Symbole österreichischer Identität zwischen 'Kakanien' und 'Europa'*. Wien: Picus Verlag, 42–45.

want to show how popular cinema responded to and participated in dominant discourses and thus assess its role in the reconstruction of Austrian society.

The historical costume film offers an interpretation of the historic past that influences our assumptions of history and historic identity. Hereby, the themes and subjects that are not represented are equally important than the actual depiction of the past. George F. Custen's argument that 'absences [...] constitute a state of symbolic annihilation [...], in which a sanitised view of history is constructed eliminating problematic areas from public perusal' is insightful. It reminds us to look beyond the imagery, to probe deeper, and to identify the reasons why particular elements are omitted or marginalised, whereas others are accentuated. To investigate the meanings of presences and absences in historical costume film it is necessary to acknowledge that the issue of historical accuracy – the truthful depiction of the past – is of little relevance. Historical films generally tell us more about the time period in which they were produced than about the past they are concerned with, and it is this relationship between the represented and the social context in which the films were produced which is of primary interest here.¹⁶

In this article I will investigate the absences and presences in Austrian historical costume film in order to establish the meanings these films carried for contemporary audiences and to identify the specific role(s) of historical costume film in Austrian society. Focusing specifically at the choice of historical periods and the depiction of different nationalities, I want to show how the genre participated and fed into the discourse on national identity. This article argues that it was no coincidence that the film producers in post-war Austria singled out the 19th century for preferential treatment, but that this choice was closely linked to the much debated issue of national identity after the war.

The Popular Appeal of Historical Costume Films in Post-War Austria

Domestic historical costume productions regularly topped the tables of the most frequently screened (and assumedly also best-selling) films in post-war Austria. Towards the mid-1950s, the genre experienced a virtual boom: In 1953, the domestic costume comedy *Der Feldherrnhügel* (Grandstand for General Staff) was the most successful film released; the following year, *Kaisermanöver* (The Kaiser Manoeuvres) topped the exhibitors' charts; and in 1955, *Die Deutschmeister* (The Deutschmeister) came second only behind the Hollywood

¹⁶ Derek Elley suggests that films reveal 'the rules and call signs' of the era. See D. Elley. (1984). *The Epic Film. Myth and History*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 6. Pierre Sorlin argues that 'nearly all films refer, if indirectly, to current events'. Sorlin, 1980, 18.

romantic drama *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954).¹⁷ The fact that these films outstripped even major Hollywood productions is evidence of their broad appeal. They offered everything what the Austrian spectator expected from a visit to the cinema, which was, according to the film producer Erich von Neusser, ‘Predominantly pleasure, relaxation, entertainment, preferably in a local setting, preferably set in the beautiful past’.¹⁸

Contemporary critics were divided in their views on Austrian costume films. Critics lavished praise on some films, such as the historical dramas *Der Engel mit der Posaune* (The Angel with the Trumpet, 1948) and *Der Prozess* (The Trial, 1948) or the costume comedy *Die Fiakermilli* (Fiakermilli, 1953).¹⁹ Others, in particular costume films made by prolific directors Ernst Marischka and Franz Antel, were often dismissed as shallow entertainment. Critics accused these filmmakers of glorifying the past, of promoting tedious clichés, and most of all, of repeating the same formula over and over again.²⁰ A critic, reviewing the opening of Hans Schott-Schöbinger’s costume comedy *Hofjagd in Ischl* (Royal Hunt in Ischl, 1955), remarked sarcastically: ‘We have – thanks to the cinema – known it for a long time: It was a splendiferous time. The Kaiser Franz Josephs were sitting on benches at scenic spots, nodding benevolently. (...) They did not think of war or armament, but only about how they could marry off their nephews and nieces to each other.’²¹

This ridicule, however, did not affect the films’ success with audience, as both their rankings and the large number of historical costume film productions demonstrate. More than one fifth of the total output of Austrian feature films (45 out of 213) between 1946 and 1955 falls into the category of historical costume films. The significance of this impressive number becomes only clear when compared with other countries; in Britain, for example, where costume films boomed in the 1930s, the highest share of costume films amounted only to a

¹⁷ See Österreichisches Statistisches Zentralamt. (1959). Beiträge zur österreichischen Statistik (Vol. 39), 145f. E. Marischka. (Director). (1953). *Der Feldherrnhügel* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Vindobona-Film; F. Antel. (Director). (1954). *Kaisermanöver* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Hope-Film, Neusser-Film; E. Marischka. (Director). (1955). *Die Deutschmeister* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Erma-Film.

¹⁸ E. v. Neusser. (1950). Die österreichischen Filmerfolge. *Film-Kunst. Zeitschrift für Filmkultur und Filmwissenschaft*, 5, 253–254, 253.

¹⁹ K. Hartl. (Director). (1948). *Der Engel mit der Posaune* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Vindobona-Film; G. W. Pabst. (Director). (1947/48). *Der Prozess* [Motion Picture]; A.M. Rabenalt. (Director). (1953). *Die Fiakermilli* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Schönbrunn-Film.

²⁰ For the criticism on costume film see for example the reviews on Marischka’s *Verklungenes Wien*: ‘Verklungenes Wien’, *Wiener Kurier*, 2 November 1951; ‘Die Filmpremiere von gestern abend: ‘Verklungenes Wien’’, *Weltpresse*, 31 October 1951; ‘“Verklungenes Wien” im Apollo’, *Wiener Tageszeitung*, 1 November 1951; ‘Verklungenes Wien’, *Arbeiterzeitung*, 4 November 1951; also Joachim, A., ‘Offene Worte zu aktuellen Fragen: Kitschflut ohne Ende?’, *Wiener Kurier*, 5 November 1951.

²¹ A. Bronnen. ‘Hofjagd in Ischl’, *Der Abend*, 9 December 1955; H. Schott-Schöbinger. (Director). (1955). *Hofjagd in Ischl* [Motion Picture]. Austria/West Germany: Patria-Filmkunst, Tonfilm GmbH.

maximum of 13.5 percent of the total production in 1935.²² In comparison, almost a third of all Austrian films produced in 1947 fall into the category of historical costume film; considering the financial difficulties the production companies faced after the war, this rate is quite astonishing.²³

In the late 1940s, the Austrian film industry fell into a severe financial crisis which also affected the production of costume films. The crisis was mainly caused by the strict export restrictions to Germany which the Allied Forces had imposed; as Austria's film industry depended on the German market for its survival, the barring from accessing the profits in the West German zone resulted in a production slump. When trade restrictions with the now independent West Germany were lifted in 1950, domestic film production picked up again and also brought a dramatic increase in historical costume film productions: 40 percent of all Austrian films that premiered in 1953 were costume films. This upturn can at least partly be attributed to the growing influx of financial investments from West German distributors, who recognised the appeal of Austrian films for German audiences and wanted to have a share of the profits.

Yet, not just the numbers of films produced increased towards the mid-1950s, but also the investment in production values grew: the Soviet-controlled *Rosenhügel* studio took the lead in producing the first coloured costume films since the war with *Die Regimentstochter* (Daughter of the Regiment, 1953), *Eine Nacht in Venedig* (A Night in Venice, 1953) and *Franz Schubert* (1953).²⁴ However, the most lavish Austrian costume productions since the Ufa days in the Third Reich were produced with West German capital: *Sissi* (1955), *Die Deutschmeister* (1955) and *Der Kongress tanzt* (The Congress Dances, 1955) were rich in sumptuous décor and costumes, and the high production values certainly heightened their appeal for the audiences.²⁵

The Meaning of Absences and Presences in Popular Film

As mentioned earlier, costume films offer an interpretation of the historic past that shape our assumptions of history and historical identity. The fact that national cinemas often focus on

²² See Harper, 1994, 10.

²³ See U. Halbritter. (1993). Der Einfluss der Alliierten Besatzungsmächte auf die österreichische Filmwirtschaft und Spielfilmproduktion in den Jahren 1945 bis 1955. Unpublished Master thesis (Diplomarbeit), University of Vienna, Wien, 49–101.

²⁴ G. Klaren & G. Haenel. (Directors). (1953). *Die Regimentstochter* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Nova-Film; G. Wildhagen. (Director). (1953). *Eine Nacht in Venedig* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Nova-Film; W. Kolm-Veltée. (Director). (1953). *Franz Schubert* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Beta-Film.

²⁵ F. Antel. (Director). (1955). *Der Kongress tanzt* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Cosmos-Neusser-Film.

specific historical periods while ignoring others suggests that these historical eras play a particular role in society.²⁶ By investigating why film producers selected some historical periods rather than others, and by analysing how these are visually represented, I want to show how cinema participated in the construction of national myths.

In post-war Austria, film producers singled out the 19th century as the era of their choice, even though a small number of costume films were set in other eras, such as in the 18th century (*Maria Theresia*, 1951; *Mozart*, 1955) or in Ancient Greece (*Triumph der Liebe, Lysistrata – Triumph of Love*, 1947).²⁷ The favoured historical periods were thus the reign of Kaiser Franz Joseph I. (1848–1916) and, to a lesser degree, the era of Metternich (1809–1848).²⁸ These historical periods obviously occupied the minds of contemporaries. But what was it exactly that made them particularly interesting? Why did film producers, whose main interest was – after all – the commercial success of their films, believe that films set in the 19th century would appeal to the audience? And why did these films indeed prove to be so successful? Considering that cinema-goers are by no means passive consumers who simply watch everything that is presented to them, but who make active choices in what they wish (and do not wish) to see on screen, these films must have held a specific attraction.

The fact that post-war Austrian film mainly dealt with these two historical periods is particularly meaningful because they occupy two opposite positions in the collective memory: while the Austrians remember the governance of the German Prince Metternich, who controlled Austrian politics as foreign minister and chancellor until 1848, mainly in terms of oppression, the reign of Kaiser Franz Joseph still evokes memories of grandeur.²⁹ Post-war historical costume film played an influential role in shaping these widely held perceptions of the past, not least because the films have had many repeats on national and private television since.

²⁶ See G. F. Custen. (2001). Making History. In M. Landy (Ed.), *The Historical Film. History and Memory in Media* (66–97). New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 92.

²⁷ K. Hartl.(Director). (1955). *Mozart* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Cosmopol-Film; E. E. Reinert. (Director). (1951). *Maria Theresia* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Paula-Wessely-Film; A. Stöger. (Director). (1947). *Triumph der Liebe* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Wiener Mundus-Film.

²⁸ The German diplomat Metternich became Austrian foreign minister after Napoleon Bonaparte defeated Austria in 1809. He played a dominant role at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 that reshaped Europe after the Napoleonic wars. His reactionary politics had a major impact on Austria until the revolution of 1848, when he was forced to resign.

²⁹ See Hanisch, 1994, 163, 428; E. Büttner & C. Dewald. (1997). *Anschluß an Morgen. Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Films von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. Salzburg: Residenz, 182–189.

Austrian Historical Costume Film and the Era of Metternich

Metternich's control of Austrian politics in the first half of the 19th century forms the template for films such as *Erzherzog Johann's grosse Liebe* (Archduke Johann's Great Love, 1950), *Franz Schubert* (1953), *Einmal keine Sorgen haben* (To Be without Worries, 1953), *Der Kongress tanzt* (1955), or *Wien tanzt* (Vienna Dances, 1951).³⁰ The Metternich era was a period of political oppression and censorship, a climate that gave birth to the introspective *Biedermeier* style in literature and architecture. A scene in *Erzherzog Johann's grosse Liebe* tangibly conveys this air of suppression by depicting country folk sitting in an inn looking fearfully at the entry of a group of men in top hats and dark coats. Even though the newly arrived guests present themselves as Viennese tourists, the locals suspect them to be members of the secret police who came to observe them. The secret police also functions as cultural signifier in the Johann Strauss biopic *Wien tanzt*. Here members of the secret police inform Chancellor Metternich (Erik Frey) about a new dance that has quickly attracted a large following in the Viennese music halls: the waltz. They suspect the waltz to be dangerous, as it arouses passionate feelings and thus might spark revolutionary spirits. Metternich immediately calls for a covert observation, and, in disguise, visits the music hall where Johann Strauss, played by Adolf Wohlbrück (internationally better known under his name Anton Walbrook), performs. Yet Strauss, having been warned off, switches to a traditional polka as soon as the secret police enters the music hall. The secret police fails to blend into the crowd: sitting in groups, dressed in black, with their top hats on, the people quickly spot the presence of the unwelcome authority. Metternich feels thoroughly embarrassed by the incompetence of his subordinates and sarcastically commends the police chief on the successful completion of the mission.

³⁰ H. Schott-Schöbinger. (Director). (1950). *Erzherzog Johanns grosse Liebe* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Patria-Filmkunst; G. Marischka. (Director). (1953). *Einmal keine Sorgen haben* [Motion Picture]. Austria/West Germany: Carlton-Film (Vienna, Munich); E. E. Reinert. (Director). (1951); *Wien tanzt* [Motion Picture]. Austria/Liechtenstein: Vindobona-Film, Cordial-Film.



Figure 1 Members of the Secret Police fail to blend into the crowd in *Wien tanzt* (1951)

Costumes, body language and the gaze function as visual cues that identify the historical period, but also offer an interpretation of history: the representatives of power are clearly distinguishable through their demeanour and clothes and thus isolated from the rest; the people express their disapproval of the oppressor through their body language. By these visual means, the filmic texts suggest that Austrian society was divided into a few suppressors and the mass of ordinary Austrian people, who were quietly resistant against the authoritarian regime.

The fact that Metternich was not Austrian, but German, is important here and might explain why the first half of the 19th century was one of the most favoured periods in post-war Austrian cinema: Metternich is often represented as the man in power who manipulates a weak Austrian Kaiser. The films alluded to the Nazi past by drawing parallels between Metternich's reign and the Nazi dictatorship. It seems likely that the audience was able to decode these references, which rewarded the culturally savvy spectators.

Films such as *Wien tanzt* or *Erzherzog Johann's grosse Liebe* also demonstrate how historical costume film could function both as a tool of criticism and as a medium to come to terms with an uncomfortable truth: in a time when a critical engagement with the immediate past was largely avoided because it brought up uncomfortable truths about Austria's involvement

in Nazi crimes, the projection onto a different period allowed the film producers to debate the legacy of the Nazi past. Yet, these films did not just provide a space in which Austrians could counter the allegations about their support for the Nazi regime by emphasising that they themselves had been victims of oppression; the films also played down the extent of repression and thus lessened the burden of guilt and consequently provided a source to create a positive self-image: *Wien tanzt* ‘humanises’ Metternich by presenting him as a man who laughs about the stupidity of his follower and finally joins in the fun of dancing the immoral waltz. And *Der Kongress tanzt* ridicules the overzealous secret police and thus divests it of its influence.



Figure 2 Chancellor Metternich (Erik Frey) during an undercover inspection in a Viennese music hall in *Wien tanzt* (1951)

A particularly interesting example of the instrumentalisation of the past to support Austria’s ‘victim’s myth’ and claim of innocence is *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt* (The World Turns Backward, 1947).³¹ This costume comedy tells the story of disgruntled retired civil servant

³¹ See for example C. Karner. (2005). The 'Habsburg Dilemma' Today: Competing Discourses of National Identity in Contemporary Austria. *National Identities*, 7(4), 409–432; also Utgaard, P. (2003). Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. J. Hübler-Kahla. (Director). (1946/47). *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Österreichische Wochenschau- und Produktions KG J. A. Hübler-Kahla & Co.

Pomeisl, played by the famous Viennese comedian Hans Moser, who is frustrated by the miserable living-conditions in post-war Austria. Yearning for the ‘good old times’, Pomeisl falls asleep and – in his dream – is given a ring that allows him to travel back in time. He promptly ends up in the Metternich era, at the Congress of Vienna. Just like in real life, Pomeisl finds himself in the position of a clerk, who suffers under an authoritarian leadership and from a grumbling stomach. His immediate superior, aristocratic Polizeirat von Creutzinger (Theodor Danegger), shows little regard for the basic needs of his civil servant until he recognises his usefulness. Metternich has given Creutzinger the order to find somebody who can infiltrate the congress in order to gain vital information that would allow to manipulate the outcome. The short, corpulent Pomeisl displays a striking resemblance with Prince Palatzky. While the real Palatzky has been kidnapped by Metternich’s men and is kept drunk in one of the famous Viennese wine cellars (a pointer at Austria’s preference of harmless ‘weapons’), Creutzinger pressures Pomeisl to go undercover as Prince Palatzky to eavesdrop on other participants of the congress. Pomeisl finally succumbs to the promise of roast chicken and cucumber salad and is dressed up and sent to the congress where, to his dismay, he finds himself amidst arrogant royal warmongers. Pomeisl, representative of the ordinary people but disguised as pompous prince, is the only one who calls for peace and regard for the peoples’ needs. But his pleas fall on deaf ears.

The narrative, which sees Pomeisl through three different historical periods, presents the Austrians as eternal victims of external powers, a critical nod to Austria’s annexation by the Nazis and its occupation by the Allied Forces after the war. The film hence provides ‘historical evidence’ for the inert pacifism of the Austrian people and thus corroborates the official doctrine that Austria was a victim of Nazi aggression. *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt*, however, also shows that filmic texts function on different levels and that filmic messages can be quite contradictory.



Figure 3 Pomeisl (Hans Moser) tries to hide behind his files in *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt* (1947)

The scene where the officials, looking for a double for Prince Palatzky, finally spot Pomeisl illustrates this argument: having looked in vain for an adequate representative for the Prince, the secretary Windholz (Max Brod) at last draws Polizeirat von Creutzinger's attention to the clerk Pomeisl, who sits amidst large stacks of files. Pomeisl, who quickly realises that he caught the interest of his superiors who tower high above him on a staircase, clumsily tries to hide behind the files, pretending to be busy. Upon Creutzinger's triumphant outcry: 'That's him! We finally got him!', Pomeisl's head shoots up, and he responds stutteringly, with a weak voice: 'Me? Why me? Your lordship, have mercy, I have done nothing except my duty!' This remark must have produced some chuckles among the audiences in 1947, as it was an unconcealed reference to the excuse presented by many Nazi collaborators after the war. Pomeisl's utterance can be read as sarcastic commentary on the successful attempts of the Austrian people to present themselves as innocent victims of the Nazi regime. *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt* functioned ambiguously, participating in the construction of a national myth while at the same time questioning it. The fact that later costume film productions displayed none of this ambiguity suggests that in early 1947, when the film was produced, the

official line that Austria had been an innocent victim of Nazi aggression was not yet widely accepted.

In post-war historical costume film, the Metternich era served as a means to debate the Nazi past, but also provided a forum for criticism. Whereas *Die Welt dreht sich verkehrt* took several swipes at the Germans, a recurring theme in Austrian cinema, the costume comedy *Der Kongress tanzt* played on the Austrians' dislike of the Soviet occupation troops. The film about the Congress of Vienna portrays the Russian Czar Alexander (Rudolf Prack) as an alcoholic and kleptomaniac who likes to steal watches – a blatant allusion to the Soviet soldiers' habit of confiscating watches from the Austrians. Moreover, *Der Kongress tanzt* shows Viennese citizens expressing their disapproval about the impending arrival of the Russian Czar: Metternich, played by Karl Schönböck, gives the order that the Austrians should display 'great enthusiasm on the scale of small, medium or great enthusiasm', but also voices concern that it might 'take ages until the Russians leave Vienna'. Contemporary audiences undoubtedly understood these jokes as criticism directed at the Soviets and their reluctance to leave Austria. The fact that *Der Kongress tanzt* was produced after the Allied Forces had signed the state treaty that gave Austria independence in May 1945, explains the bluntness of the jokes; the producers did no longer have to fear Soviet intervention and took this opportunity to make fun of them, albeit in a very harmless manner, as anxieties about Soviets remained strong.

The analysis of Austrian films produced in the decade after 1945 reveals that the Metternich period was used to express opinions on sensitive political issues. By drawing parallels between the Nazi dictatorship and the Metternich regime and by playing down the severity of repression, the historical costume films trivialised the recent past and made the horrors of the Nazi past look less threatening. These films hence served as a kind of Freudian 'screen memory'. According to Sigmund Freud, some individuals develop a 'screen memory' to cope with a traumatic experience; by displacing the memory of a disturbing event onto a seemingly insignificant earlier or subsequent memory, it is disguised. The screen memory is therefore a compromise between the psyche's need for repression and the need to remember: it protects the subject from the disturbing memory but it also recognises its importance and thus tries to keep the memory alive, albeit in a concealed form.³² Contrary to the commonly

³² According to Freud, a 'screen memory' may be 'retrogressive' and made up of 'completely indifferent' early childhood memories, or it may be 'formed from residues of memories relating to later life.' S. Freud. (1968). Screen Memories. In S. Freud & J. Strachey (Eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Early Psycho-Analytic Publications* (3rd ed., Vol. 3, 1893–1899, 303–322). London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 320, 307.

held assumptions that the Austrians repressed the unsettling memory of the Nazi past, the analysis of the historical costume film suggests that the past may not have been simply repressed, but rather displaced onto an earlier past. Screening the traumatic memory of the Nazi past with a chapter of the past that seemed less charged but still bore resemblance allowed both audience and filmmakers to cope with it while keeping the memory alive. Hence, the historical costume films produced in post-war Austria smoothed national traumas instead of working through them and thusly created harmony between the past and the present.

Austrian Historical Costume Film and the Era of Kaiser Franz Joseph

Harmony was also a key theme in the historical period that featured most frequently in post-war historical costume film: the era of Kaiser Franz Joseph.³³ The ‘Habsburg Myth’, a romanticised view of the Austrian monarchy that ignored the actual ethnic or social conflicts which had brought about its downfall, was by no means a creation of the Austrian film industry.³⁴ Nostalgia for the Habsburg monarchy started to develop soon after the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, and the conservative Catholic elites were its chief proponents. After the Second World War, Austria experienced a new wave of Habsburg nostalgia. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was still close enough to be remembered by most members of society, either through direct experience or through stories told by their parents and grandparents. Having just come out of a terrible war and living in a society that was changing at a fast pace, this nostalgia seems understandable: compared to the present, the era of Kaiser Franz Joseph seemed idyllic and hence provided a ‘usable’ past. Once denounced as hotbed of social conflict and *Völkerkerker* (prison of nations), the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was cleansed by the atrocities of the Nazi regime, allowing it to shine in new splendour, as Ernst Hanisch aptly put it.³⁵

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Austria’s political and cultural elites ransacked the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for symbols and clichés to provide the disoriented

³³ The following films are set in the Habsburg monarchy under the reign of Franz Joseph: *Das unsterbliche Antlitz* (1947); *Umwege zu dir* (1948) and *Wiener Mädeln* (1948) – both *Überläufer*, i.e. films produced during the Nazi era, but released after the war; *Anni. Eine Wiener Ballade* (1948); *Der Engel mit der Posaune* (1948); *Der Prozess* (1948); *Maresi* (1948); *Liebling der Welt* (1949); *Das vierte Gebot* (1950); *Der alte Sünder* (1950/51); *Das Tor zum Frieden* (1951); *Verklungenes Wien* (1951); *Der Feldherrnhügel* (1953); *Die Fiakermilli* (1953); *Du bist die Welt für mich* (1953); *Hab ich nur deine Liebe* (1953); *Kaisermanöver* (1953); *Der Komödiant von Wien* (1954); *Der rote Prinz* (1954); *Kaiserwalzer* (1954); *Die Deutschmeister* (1955); *Hoffjagd in Ischl* (1955); *Sarajevo* (1955); *Sissi* (1955); *Spionage* (1955).

³⁴ See Hanisch, 1994, 157–58.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, 163.

Austrian people with a positive historical identity. The image of the ‘good, old Kaiser’, the Empire’s multi-ethnic character, as well as the stereotype of the Austrian musical ‘genius’ were presented as quintessentially Austrian.³⁶ The film industry quickly jumped on the bandwagon to cash in on the revived Habsburg nostalgia. Film directors Ernst Marischka and Franz Antel were at the forefront in creating an idyllic image of ‘Austria’s last happy time’, as one advertisement called it.³⁷ Their films portrayed the last decades of the Habsburg Empire as a glorious era, with a fatherly emperor presiding over a multi-ethnic society living in harmony.

Kaiser Franz Joseph played a central role in these historical costume films. Often (falsely) remembered as Austria’s last emperor, Franz Joseph I. had already acquired mythical status during his lifetime because of his long reign from 1848 to 1916. Post-war Austrian historical costume film turned the Kaiser into a cult figure and cemented the image of Franz Joseph as ‘the good emperor’. With the exception of the trilogy *Sissi*, which shows the emperor in his youth, post-war historical costume films depict the Kaiser usually as an old man, with mighty white whiskers and in his characteristic slate blue uniform. The figure of Franz Joseph is omnipresent in these films, even if he was physically absent from the filmic text: portraits, busts, statues as well as the tunes of the ‘Kaiserwalzer’ or the ‘Kaiserhymne’ are constant reminders of his presence. Images of the imperial palaces of Schönbrunn and Hofburg, or of Bad Ischl, Franz Joseph’s favoured summer retreat, underline the ubiquitous influence of the Kaiser.

Almost all of the films set in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire portray the era in a positive light, as time of tranquillity and stability. A very interesting exception to the rule is the historical costume film *Sarajevo*, produced in 1955.³⁸ Focusing on the last hours in the life of Archduke Franz Ferdinand before his assassination in Sarajevo in 1914, the film presents an image of the past that runs contrary to the nostalgic image of Franz Joseph’s era so prevalent in post-war Austria. In *Sarajevo*, the static world of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire does not radiate tranquillity, but heaviness. It presents the Viennese aristocracy as an elite embroiled in intrigues, clinging greedily to its endangered status and privileges; it draws an image of a bureaucracy that is slow and inflexible, incapable of adapting to the changes and thus steering the Empire straight towards its inevitable destruction. The omnipresence of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph does not emanate reassurance, but feels oppressive. The

³⁶ See Bruckmüller, 1997, 46–48.

³⁷ Advertisement for the film *Verklungenes Wien* (1951), *Illustrierter Filmkurier* (1951), Nr. 1019.

³⁸ F. Kortner. (Director). (1955). *Sarajevo* [Motion picture]. Austria: Wiener Mundus-Film.

rooms where Franz Ferdinand (Ewald Balser), successor to the throne, and his wife Sophie (Luise Ullrich) reside on their visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina is crammed with images and busts of the old Kaiser. The mise-en-scène highlights the strained relationship between the Kaiser and his nephew Franz Ferdinand: the Kaiser looms in every corner, looking down on Franz Ferdinand who is slowly being suffocated by this dominance. Having just been advised to cut short his visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina because of the tense political situation, Franz Ferdinand enters his chambers pondering and gazes uneasily at the slightly elevated bust of the Kaiser that sits on a pedestal and emphasises the powerlessness of Franz Ferdinand; the solemn musical score that accompanies this scene underlines the looming danger.



Figure 4 Archduke Franz Ferdinand (Ewald Balser) feels uneasy in the presence of the Emperor Franz Joseph I. in *Sarajevo* (1955)

The reason why this film conveys a different picture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire might be that the film was directed by an outsider, the famous Austrian-Jewish actor Fritz Kortner, who had fled to London in 1934 and moved on to the US in 1937, returning to Germany after the war. His experience of exile seemed to have provided him with a different view of Austria's history, a view unaffected of the need to romanticise the past.

But *Sarajevo* was an exception to the rule. The overwhelming majority of the Austrian historical costume films offer a reassuring image of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, with the Kaiser presented as the *Übervater*, the second in the holy triad of god, emperor and father.³⁹ Depicted as the centre point of a world that has come to a standstill, the old, white-bearded Kaiser symbolises stability. The problems in this bygone world seem small and easily resolved, very often by the fatherly emperor himself. The genre presents Franz Joseph as an approachable father figure, who is always willing to lend an ear to his subjects, whatever their problems might be. The atmosphere of the imperial palace and its stiff court officials might appear intimidating, but this only helps to highlight Franz Joseph's kind-heartedness and understanding. In *Die Deutschmeister* the Kaiser, played by Paul Hörbiger, listens attentively to the nervous chattering of young sales assistant Stanzi (Romy Schneider), who has been granted an audience. Smilingly, with a slight nod of his head, he rules that her aunt should be given the status of a purveyor to the court and that the tune her fiancée composed should become the signature march of his royal regiment.

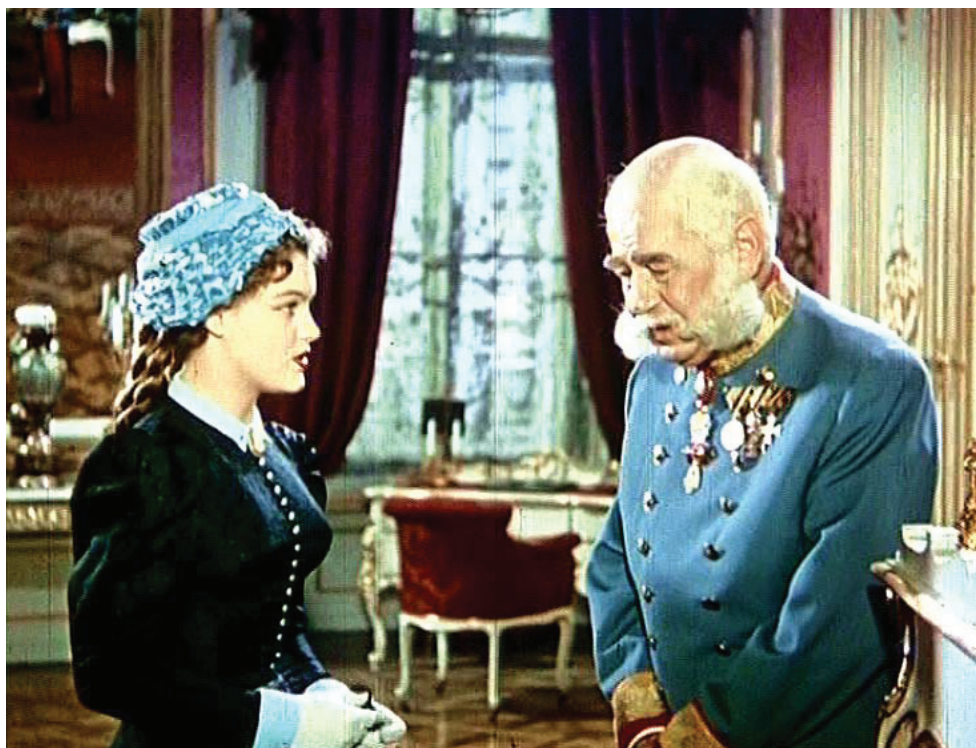


Figure 5 Stanzi (Romy Schneider) chats with Kaiser Franz Joseph (Paul Hörbiger) in *Die Deutschmeister* (1955)

³⁹ See Hanisch, 1994, 155.

Very similar is the depiction of the Kaiser in *Kaisermanöver* (The Kaiser Manoeuvres, 1954) where he even-handedly distributes advice and favours: when pub owner Radler (Hans Moser) hears that Captain Eichfeld (Rudolf Prack), the son of his former officer, is in trouble for writing a critical book about the Austro-Hungarian military, he turns straight to the Kaiser for help. Disguised as gardener, Radler enters the grounds of the Imperial palace Schönbrunn and strikes up a conversation with the Kaiser, who is on his morning stroll through the gardens. After hearing Radler's account, the Kaiser looks into the matter, generously grants Eichfeld's pardon and admonishes him in paternal manner.



Figure 6 Kaiser Franz Joseph I. (Benno Smytt) lends his ear to pub owner Radler (Hans Moser) in *Die Deutschmeister* (1955).

In the historical costume films produced in post-war Austria Franz Joseph almost invariably personifies harmony and conciliation, themes that were of paramount importance in post-war Austria.⁴⁰ The experience of war and disrupted social order had fuelled a longing for stability and 'being taken care of'; the image of fatherly emperor Franz Joseph, almost a softer and more human form of the *Führer*, seemed to have answered this need. Post-war historical

⁴⁰ Büttner and Dewald describe Franz Joseph as 'a promise of equilibrium', 'an axis where different threads converge'. Büttner & Dewald, 1997, 187.

costume film thus juxtaposed two contrasting father images: the hard, authoritarian *German* father, represented through the figure of Metternich, is contrasted with the warm, kind-hearted *Austrian* father, embodied by Kaiser Franz Joseph I. By promoting a national model of masculinity that was not only distinct from German masculinity, but also presented Austrian men in a more positive light, the costume genre corroborated the official line of Austria being a victim rather than a perpetrator. Through its setting in the historical past, the films insinuated that the differences between Austrian and Germans were not merely superficial, but deeply rooted in history.

Cinematic Recycling of Austria's Multi-ethnic Past

The fact that the spotlight of the film industry was on the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire becomes only meaningful when viewed within the historical context: one of the main concerns of Austria's political elite after the war was to demarcate Austria from Germany and to downplay Austria's collaboration with the Nazi regime. Mainstream cultural and political discourse wove the 'golden myth' of a harmonious multi-ethnic dual monarchy, (barely) held together by Kaiser Franz Joseph, who – in defiance of growing nationalism – embraced the diversity of 'My peoples'.⁴¹ After the Second World War, Austria's political and intellectual elites celebrated the ethnic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as constitutive feature of Austrian identity. The underlying argument was that Austrianness was born out of the country's rich, multi-ethnic heritage – a heritage the Germans apparently did not possess. The ethnic heterogeneity of the Austrian Empire was hence used to explain the ostensible *joie de vivre* of the Austrian people and to argue their cultural superiority over the Germans.⁴²

The declaration of Austria's first elected government in 1945 clearly reflects this way of thinking: with reference to Austria's multi-ethnic past, the declaration argued that the Austrians' mixed ancestry had brought them in 'natural opposition' to the Nazis who believed in the superiority of the Aryan race. It strongly rejected any equation of Germans

⁴¹ W. Müller-Funk. (2004). Lächeln, Langeweile, Zorn. Überlegungen zur österreichischen Identität [Electronic version]. *Medienimpulse* (50), 14.

http://www.mediamanual.at/mediamanual/themen/pdf/identitaet/50_Mueller.pdf, retrieved 20 February 2008. Kaiser Franz Joseph I. addressed his subjects as 'My peoples', most famously in his Declaration of War on Serbia on 28 July 1914 'An meine Völker!'. The document can be found online at the Zeitgeschichte Informations System of the University of Innsbruck, Primary Sources of 20th Century Austrian History: <http://zis.uibk.ac.at/quellen/rauch11b.htm#dok2>, retrieved 10 August 2008.

⁴² The conservative intellectual August Maria Knoll insisted that Austria had always broken national barriers. 'In Austria, political discussions were held in all European languages; but even more frequently people here thought, made poems, sang and built in all languages.' Cited by Bruckmüller, 1997, 46.

with Austrians and implied that the Austrians had always been resistant towards the Nazi regime, as Nazi ideology was ‘completely contrary to the Austrian nature’.⁴³ The multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire hence served as means to distance the Austrians from National Socialist ideology which considered Jews and Slavs as ‘*Untermenschen*’.

The fact that the elites called upon the late Habsburg Empire to provide a historical basis for the newly formulated identity may at least partly explain why the film industry took up the issue; it does, however, not explain why the films about this historical period were so popular with the audience. But the sales figures speak for themselves, and they clearly indicate that the historical costume films must have hit a nerve. Therefore, in order to understand the films’ popularity and the role they played in contemporary national discourse, we need to analyse the films’ narrative and visual strategies.

The filmmakers used different visual and narrative means to draw attention to the ethnic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy: national stereotypes, settings in different parts of the Empire, diegetic and extra-diegetic music as well as objects or costumes that are associated with a specific ethnicity served to describe the era as ethnically heterogeneous. The important question is whether the films are inclusive or exclusive. Do the narratives highlight or tone down the differences between the nations? Who is given privileged space, and who is sidelined or excluded? As discussed earlier, absences and presences can give an indication of what was deemed acceptable or even desirable at the time, and what was not. Films set in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire clearly favoured one nation (apart from the German-Austrian, which was the focus of all films): the Hungarian. Apart from the Hungarian, the Czech was the only other nationality that regularly featured in historical costume film in post-war Austria. Multi-ethnicity was therefore represented through a small number of nationalities, usually Hungarians and Czechs, as well as (Prussian) Germans. The full range of ethnicities actually present in the Habsburg Empire was never explored.⁴⁴ Poles, Romanians or Ukrainians were disregarded altogether, while Croats, Serbs and Bosnians can only be found in the historical drama *Sarajevo*, a film that actually debated the ethnic conflicts in the Habsburg Empire; Italians feature merely in the costume melodrama *Das unsterbliche Antlitz* (The Immortal Face, 1947).⁴⁵

⁴³ Declaration of the Austrian Government, 21 December 1945, cited by M. Gottschlich, O. Panagl & M. Welan. (1989). *Was die Kanzler sagten. Regierungserklärungen der Zweiten Republik 1945–1987*. Wien: Böhlau, 93.

⁴⁴ This exclusion of other nationalities obviously does not apply to those costume films where the narrative revolves around a person of different nationality, such as the French bon vivant Georges Duroy in *Bel Ami*, or Queen Victoria in *Mädchenjahre einer Königin*.

⁴⁵ G. v. Cziffra. (Director). (1947). *Das unsterbliche Antlitz* [Motion Picture].

Noteworthy is the general avoidance of Jewish characters. Only two earlier productions, both produced in 1948, featured Jews and even addressed the issues of Jewishness and anti-Semitism. Karl Hartl's melodrama *Der Engel mit der Posaune* tells the fictional story of the Jewish woman Henriette Alt, played by one of Austria's most popular actresses Paula Wessely, who has an affair with crown prince Rudolf (Fred Liewehr) and commits suicide when the Nazis annex Austria. *Der Engel mit der Posaune* was a great success with both critics and audiences, and even attracted the attention of Alexander Korda, who brought the film to Britain, where Anthony Bushell directed the remake *The Angel with the Trumpet* in 1949.⁴⁶ G.W. Pabst's film *Der Prozess*, on the other hand, triggered considerable protest, especially in Hungary, which provided the local setting for the drama. *Der Prozess*, which depicts the murder of a young girl that leads to an anti-Semitic show trial in 19th century Hungary, is the only film that openly addressed the issue of anti-Semitism.⁴⁷ Later films avoided the depiction of Jews, perhaps because Allied pressure to face up to the Nazi past had eased off with the growing intensity of the Cold War. Only the costume comedy *Der Feldherrnhügel*, produced in 1955, features a Jewish character, an officer named Rosenstock, in a minor role. In the original script, the figure of the Jewish officer served as critique of the virulent anti-Semitism in the Austro-Hungarian military; the playwright's intention, however, has been wholly lost in this adaptation.⁴⁸

These absences in post-war Austrian historical costume film point to the filmmakers' unease with the representation of a specific group, as was the case with Jews, or a mere lack of interest, as was the case with the majority of Slav ethnicities; the producers of historical

⁴⁶ See K. Hartl. (1973). 'Reden Sie mit dem Karas...' In W. Kudrnofsky (Ed.), *Vom Dritten Reich zum Dritten Mann. Helmut Qualtingers Welt der vierziger Jahre (257–272)*. Wien, München, Zürich: Molden, 266–270.

⁴⁷ For *Der Engel mit der Posaune* see for example E. Büttner. (2007). *Vertraute Gesichter. Filmhimmel Österreich. Über Ruinen zu Neuem Leben / Kontinuitäten* (56), 8–13. The Hungarian Embassy in Austria lodged a protest against G.W. Pabst's plans to make a film about that historical case. Austria's Jewish religious community also protested. The reason for their complaints was an article in a Hungarian newspaper which compared *Der Prozess* with the anti-Semitic Nazi film *Jew Süß*. As a consequence, the Austrian government issued a decree in which the provincial governments and cinema operators were warned about the film that was being produced. When the Socialist Minister of Interior asked for clarification in parliament, the matter was resolved, with the government stressing that it had no objection against the 'artistically highly valuable' film. The Ministry of Trade also emphasised that it supported the making of the film, also for 'economic reasons'. The director G.W. Pabst took legal proceedings against the alleged writer of the article, with the trial receiving large press coverage. The film itself was much acclaimed by the critics. See for example 'Keine Filmzensur', *Wiener Zeitung*, 27 February 1948; 'Zivilprozess um den 'Prozess'', *Neues Österreich*, 1 September 1948; Horn, O., 'Wenn es einer wagt...', *Österreichisches Tagebuch*, 5 July 1947; 'Ehrenbeleidigungsklage um den Film 'Der Prozess'', *Wiener Kurier*, 12 May 1948. For the attempts of the provincial governments to prohibit the screening of the film see for example: 'Der Prozess' in Vorarlberg verboten', *Neues Österreich*, 10 January 1948.

⁴⁸ The film was based on the original play written by Alexander von Roda-Roda and Carl Rössler in 1910 which was banned by the censors in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The play was adapted for film three times, in 1926, 1931/32, and 1953. See 'Der Feldherrnhügel', *Die Presse*, 16 October 1952.

costume film obviously felt that it was sufficient to include some Hungarian or Czech characters to paint a 'realistic' picture of the Austro-Hungarian past.

While Hungarians and Czechs are positioned at the margins to add colour to the narrative, (German-speaking) Austrians are always at the centre in Austrian historical costume films. True Austrianness is evoked by the use of the German language – or rather the Viennese idiom. Even though the name of lieutenant Géza von Hajós in *Der Feldherrnhügel* or the background of Archduchess Sophie, a Bohemian aristocrat in *Sarajevo*, suggest a non-Austrian origin, their Viennese accent leaves little doubt about their 'true' nationality. The star images of the actors certainly helped to emphasise this message: Géza von Hajós was played by Hans Holt, who was usually typecast as the quintessential Viennese charmer, and Luise Ullrich, in the role of the Bohemian Archduchess Sophie, for many spectators always remained the 'sweet Viennese girl' she had played in Max Ophüls *Liebelei* in 1933, which had made her famous.

The filmic narratives clearly distinguished between those who could be considered Austrians and those who could not; yet they were more ambiguous with regard to the identity of Hungarians and Czechs. While their accent clearly demarcated them as different, they were not assigned the status of the 'Other'. Interestingly, it was the Prussian German, the third prominent non-Austrian nationality in Austrian historical costume film, that was ascribed the function of the 'Other'. Before attending to the complex function of the German in the genre, let us look at the representations of the Hungarians and Czechs and their function in more detail.

Fiery Hungarians

The figure of the Hungarian fulfilled many tasks in post-war Austrian historical costume film: it symbolised the multi-ethnic character of the Empire, but also gave the films an exotic touch; it served to underline the cosmopolitan spirit of the Austrians and suggested equality between the two nations. Whether in the form of music, drink or actual people, the Hungarian was, just as the Viennese waltz or the charming officer, a key feature of any post-war costume film. The Hungarian stood for passion, gaiety, and beauty, and was used to draw attention to the richness of Austria's cultural heritage and to 'round off' the Austrian character. While the historical costume genre presented the Austrians as musical to the core, it also associated the Hungarian with music. 'Austrian' waltzes, polkas and traditional songs were complemented with Hungarian *Csárdás* or gypsy tunes. The veteran *bon vivant* Bauer (Paul Hörbiger) in *Der alte Sünder* (The Old Sinner, 1951) usually encounters a black-

moustached Hungarian in traditional costume on his nightly tours through Viennese cafes and night clubs, who plays sentimental tunes on his fiddle.⁴⁹



Figure 7 Viennese *bon-vivant* Ferdinand Bauer (Paul Hörbiger) enjoys Hungarian hospitality in *Der alte Sünder* (1951). Film still from film programme.

Post-war Austrian historical costume films show a fairly consistent depiction of Hungarian characters. In general, Hungarians are recognisable by their distinct accent and their names, whereas their appearance and mannerisms are usually very similar to those of the Austrians. Hungarianness is primarily defined by passion: *Mulatság*, a bacchanal party with gypsy music, passionate women, *Tokaji* wine and lots of glass-smashing, and the *Csárdás* are presented as the epitome of Hungarianness. The film *Kaisermanöver* characterises the Hungarian officer Török (played by comedian Gunther Philipp) as an avid lover of young women and *Mulatság*; erotic Frau von Lamasy (Gretl Schörg) in *Der Feldherrnhügel* bewitches all men with her sensual appearance and *Csárdás* dancing.

⁴⁹ F. Antel. (Director). (1950/51). *Der alte Sünder* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Schönbrunn-Film.



Figure 8 Officer Török (Gunther Philipp) at Major Jurinic's Mulatság Party in *Kaisermanöver* (1954)

The brotherhood of Hungarians and Austrians is celebrated in the ball scene in *Der Feldherrnhügel*, with Austrian, Hungarians and even Germans being swept away by the rousing *Csárdás* tunes the gypsy band plays. Young Austrian countess Julia Kopsch-Grantignan (Annemarie Düringer), freshly married to lieutenant Géza von Hajós (Hans Holt), flees with her mother to a Hungarian garrison town after having found her husband in close embrace with his former lover, the frivolous Hungarian artist Frau von Lamasy, only minutes after the wedding. Géza, however, is also posted to this town, which is in full preparation for a ball organised to honour the visit of Archduke Karl Viktor. At the ball, Géza tries to explain to his estranged newly-wed wife Julia that the encounter with Frau von Lamasy was harmless, but she again rejects him and demonstratively flirts with the Archduke. As the ball proceeds, Géza withdraws to another hall and sits alone and full of self-pity at a table drinking wine; in the back Frau von Lamasy, dressed in a sparkling black dress, makes a big entrance with a gypsy band. Immediately surrounded by admiring officers, who were drinking at the tables, Lamasy spots Géza in the foreground, who slouches in his chair and tries to appear disinterested, and walks towards him. Putting a hand on his shoulder to console him, she beckons to the gypsy band and starts to sing a song about the healing effects

of Hungarian wine and music. The other Hungarian and Austrian officers join in, when the rhythm of the tune suddenly grips Géza: he jumps up, thrusts the table aside, and starts singing, circling the officers who raise their glasses and tap their feet. Lamasy and Géza dance the *Csárdás* together and the music sparks a *Csárdás* fever that travels fast, emphasised by the quickening pace of the music. The camera, panning slowly through the large rooms, reveals that everybody has joined in the dance; quick cuts between the different couples draw attention not only to the jealous battle between Géza and his young wife, but simultaneously highlight the harmonious co-existence within the Empire, with Hungarians, Austrians and Germans dancing merrily together.



Figure 9 Géza von Hajós (Hans Holt) dances the *Csárdás* with Frau von Lamasy (Gretl Schörg) in *Der Feldherrnhügel* (1953)

The costume narrative highlights similarities between Hungarians and Austrians rather than differences: both share a profound love for music, wine and women. The admiration for everything that is Hungarian is particularly strong in the military, which plays a dominant role in post-war Austrian historical costume films. In *Kaisermanöver*, Hungarian officer Török's love for *Mulatság* is shared by his Austrian comrades and in particular by the Austrian officer Jurinic (Erik Frey), who is well known for his *Mulatság* parties. In

Kaiserwalzer, Austrian officers drink with a Prussian comrade and cheer on the table-dancing Anni (Angelika Hauff) who sings ‘Let’s do a Mulatság, Mulatság, Mulatság! Let’s smash our glasses at the wall!’⁵⁰



Figure 10 Austrian and German officers enjoy an impromptu *Mulatság* with Anni (Angelika Hauff) in *Kaiserwalzer* (1953). Film still from film programme.

The Hungarians thus function as agents of cultural transfer in the filmic narratives: they export Hungarian customs, which are eagerly appropriated by the Austrians as their own. Austrian historical costume film portray Hungarians not only as spirited and warm, but also as generous. In *Der Feldherrnhügel*, Colonel Esterhazy (Svet Petrovich) brings along a gypsy band and cases full of Tokay wine to the army’s ball, and rich pig farmer Sándor Gyöngyösházy (Fritz Imhoff) in *Der alte Sünder* lavishes expensive presents on a beautiful woman. The dark moustached Gyöngyösházy competes with the elegant, white-haired Viennese couturier Ferdinand Bauer (Paul Hörbiger), a well-known womanizer, for the favours of the admired Parisian singer Yvonne Farini (Susi Nicoletti). Visually, the two characters are presented as equals: they are of similar height and positioned on the same level, usually facing each other, with Farini in the middle. At their first dinner together Gyöngyösházy serves chicken paprika, a spicy Hungarian dish that leaves Bauer breathless. Gyöngyösházy belittles Bauer’s ‘weakness’ and underlines his love for hot food by adding more paprika. This earns him Farini’s applause: ‘Bravo! I love men who eat spicy food!’, she exclaims, which encourages Bauer to follow suit. Farini then turns to tease Gyöngyösházy by

⁵⁰ F. Antel. (Director). (1953). *Kaiserwalzer* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Neusser-Film.

showing him her new diamond bracelet, indicating that it was Bauer who gave it to her. The competition between the two men continues, each scoring an equal number of goals, until Gyöngyösházy's wealth finally decides the battle in his favour. The relationship between Gyöngyösházy and Bauer is competitive, but restricted to verbal exchanges which remain essentially on the level of harmless mockery.



Figure 11 Mr. Gyöngyösházy (Fritz Imhoff) takes delight in his chicken paprika in *Der alte Sünder* (1951)

Even though the narratives often characterise Hungarians as amusing people, they never make them the object of ridicule. Respect for the Hungarians is further emphasised by the fact that Austrians are depicted as keen followers of Hungarian customs. Essentially, the narratives and the imagery underline the equal status between Hungarians and Austrians. It may well be that this was meant to reflect the political equality of the two nations in the late Habsburg Empire. However, by depicting the Hungarians and Austrians as brothers in spirit, the films (deliberately or not) also suggested that the Austrians were equally passionate and thus more Hungarian than German in their mentality.

The positive picture the historical costume film paint of the Hungarian was by no means restricted to cinematic discourse. Social empirical research on national consciousness has shown that Austrians tend to look favourably upon Hungarians; in public opinion polls, Austrians have regularly named the Hungarians as the neighbours they feel most closely related to, second only to the Germans. As the first of these surveys dates back to 1980, we can only speculate about the origins of the high regard for Hungarians. Some sources suggest that the Austrian affection for the Hungarians is historically rooted; but it may also be that the positive portrayal of the Hungarian in post-war Austrian cinema and in the media contributed to this positive image.⁵¹

Subversive Czechs

The second ethnic group that features prominently in the costume genre are the Czechs. Yet the representation of the Czechs is more ambiguous than that of the Hungarians, which may be explained with the fact that the Austrians have traditionally looked upon the Czechs far less favourably than upon the Hungarians. The relationship between Austrians and Czechs can be described as complex: on the one hand, the Austrian Empire's disregard for the national rights of the Czechs in the 19th century paired with strong Czech nationalism produced a deep rift between the two nations. On the other hand, the large-scale immigration of Czechs and Slovaks during the 19th century forged strong personal links between Czechs and Austrians through intermarriages and business relationships; it is a well-known cliché that the Viennese telephone book displays far more Czech than (German) Austrian names. In the past, Austrians looked down on the Czech and Slovaks because of their lower status, while, at the same time, relying on their work force and professional expertise.⁵² The close emotional relationship mixed with the perceived need to elevate one's own standing by distancing oneself from the socially inferior Czechs obviously produced contradictory feelings; this antagonism is evident in the visual representation of the Czechs in the historical costume films.

At times, Czech characters merely feature to illustrate the ethnic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian army and are thus portrayed in a neutral way, as in the case of officer Krallitschek (Erich Dörner) in *Kaiserwalzer*. Krallitschek, clearly distinguishable as Czech by his accent, is a veterinary, but holds an officer's rank like his Austrian comrades, adjutant

⁵¹ See E. Bruckmüller. (2003). *The Austrian Nation. Cultural Consciousness and Socio-political Processes*. Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne Press, 134f.

⁵² See *ibid.*, 147–149.

Zauner (Gunther Philipp) and Count Ferry (Erik Frey). Stationed in Bad Ischl they enjoy themselves sampling pastries in the local confectionary or having a private *Mulatság* with the Viennese dancer Anni in their accommodation. The figure of Krallitschek has seemingly no other purpose than to add colour to the narrative.

In other films, Czech characters usually fulfil a comical function. Making use of the distinct Czech accent and vocabulary and drawing on the well-established stereotype of the Czech as sedate, headstrong and subversive, the three soldiers Lamatsch (Heinz Conrads), Nepalek (Franz Böheim) and Kunitschek (Ernst Waldbrunn) in *Der Feldherrnhügel* are typical for the portrayal of the Czechs in Austrian film. Here, the Czech soldiers subvert military hierarchy with their simple-mindedness and thus invite the audience to laugh at them. At the morning of the planned manoeuvre Czech Sergeant Koruga (Fritz Imhoff) tries to brief his three soldiers on how to behave during the inspection by Archduke Karl Viktor. The soldiers, suffering from a heavy hangover, stand slouching with half-closed eyes in front of Koruga who tries to fine-tune their performance. However, their straightforward answers do not please Koruga; his efforts to elicit the desired response that everything in the military is 'excellent' are in vain. Admitting defeat he finally decides that 'it is best that the Archduke doesn't see you at all. Hide in the bushes and sleep off your hangover!', upon which the visibly perked-up soldiers reply in unison: 'Excellent!'.



Figure 12 Private Lamatsch (Heinz Conrads), Nepalek (Franz Böheim) and Kunitschek (Ernst Waldbrunn) at a roll call with Sergeant Koruga (Fritz Imhoff) in *Der Feldherrnhügel* (1953)

Many Czech characters in post-war Austrian film, such as the kind-hearted and loyal dressmaker Pschistranek in *Der alte Sünder* or the simple-minded soldier Kunitschek in *Der Feldherrnhügel*, were impersonated by the popular comedian Ernst Waldbrunn. Bohemian by origin, Waldbrunn used his Czech accent effectively on stage and in his film roles, thus adding ‘authenticity’ to his performance as well as producing comic effect. In *Der alte Sünder* Waldbrunn plays the dressmaker Pschistranek, whose slight sloppiness and relaxed attitude to work enrage his immediate superior Zirrhübel (Rudolf Carl), who demands efficiency and speed. Pschistranek accepts Zirrhübel’s rebuke with a smile and with irony; hiding behind a deliberately faulty German, he uses his linguistic abilities to play with the meaning of words and thus continuously undermines Zirrhübel’s power, without him even noticing.

Producers of historical costume film utilised Czech characters as a source of comic relief as well as a source of empowerment. The Czech represented the lower classes that made fun of the upper classes; but this subversive criticism was delimited by turning the

Czech into an object of ridicule. It is noteworthy that the filmmakers refrained from fully exploiting the negative stereotype of the Czech that was prevalent at the time; such a depiction would certainly have thwarted the film producers' efforts to sell the audience a harmonious image of the multi-ethnic empire.

Snappy Germans

The creation of Austrian identity after the Second World War relied, as Hanisch argues, heavily on the demonisation of Germany.⁵³ This anti-German sentiment resonates strongly in post-war Austrian cinema. The historical costume genre was by no means anti-German as a whole, even though the Germans were often caricatured. Yet, the function of the German stereotype in historical costume film is more complex: on the one hand, it served to distinguish the Austrians from the Germans and to present the Austrians as superior by shifting negative characteristics on to the Germans. On the other hand, it also – on a different level and often less explicitly – integrated 'the German side' of the Austrians into the newly constructed Austrian identity.

The German protagonists we find in post-war costume films, such as *Die Deutschmeister*, *Kaiserwalzer*, *Der Feldherrnhügel*, *Der Obersteiger* or *Die Fiakermilli*, are usually male and from Prussia. They are distinguishable from the Austrians by their behaviour and manners, but most importantly – and quite significantly – by their language. Different pronunciations and use of words serve as major source of amusement, as they create frequent misunderstandings, and are persistently played on in the films: in *Kaiserwalzer* Austrian confectioner Bachmaier (Oskar Sima) and Prussian Hauptmann Krause (Paul Westermeier) constantly assure each other that they find it very hard to communicate because of the variations in their dialects. The depiction of the Austrian Bachmaier, who is considerably 'weightier' in his stature than his shorter Prussian counterpart, leaves no doubt as to who is more powerful: towering over Krause, confectioner Bachmaier, though ostensibly friendly, sneers at the Prussian officer who tries to place an order. As Krause finds it hard to make sense of the Austrian terms for the different pastries, his companion, a charming Viennese beauty, comes to his aid and acts as translator. Bachmaier accepts the order with a smile, commenting smugly: 'How good that I speak all languages!' The narrative presents the Austrians as extraordinary cultured: whereas the Germans have only one term for coffee, as Krause's command for 'a coffee!' illustrates, Austrians have a variety of coffee specialities and, significantly, use this fact to elevate

⁵³ See Hanisch, 1994, 163.

themselves over the others. The historical costume narratives thus claim that the Austrians are in possession of a cultural capital their German counterparts ostensibly lack.

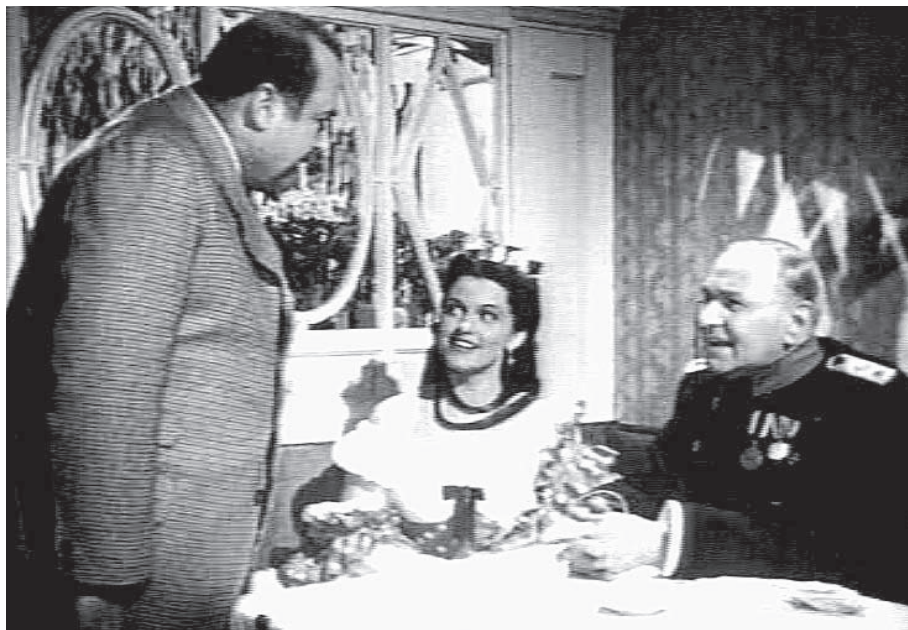


Figure 13 Austrian confectioner Bachmaier (Oskar Sima) teaches Prussian Hauptmann Krause (Paul Westermeier) the differences of Austrian coffee culture in *Kaiserwalzer* (1953)

As a rule, it is the Germans that are shown as incapable of understanding the Austrians: Prussian Flügeladjutant von Lützelburg in *Der Feldherrnhügel*, who visits a manoeuvre of the Austro-Hungarian infantry, admits to his Berlin-born host Mrs von Leuckfeld (Loni Heuser) that she is the only human being that he is able to understand in the Hungarian garrison town populated with Austrian officers. Just like young apprentice Fritz (Wolfgang Jansen) from Berlin in *Die Deutschmeister*, von Lützelburg scoffs at the Austrian language as ‘Chinese’. Both display a self-assured manner, but their attempts to assert themselves are fruitless and collapse at linguistic barriers.

While the Germans seem to find it difficult to decode the meaning of the Austrian language, the films portray the Austrians as more knowledgeable. The narratives insinuate that their inability to communicate with the Germans effectively is due to choice, not incompetence, which puts the Austrians in a position of linguistic and cultural superiority. Viennese baker Therese Hübner in *Die Deutschmeister* gently bullies her young German apprentice Fritz into learning ‘correct’ German by teaching him to call a croissant a ‘Kipferl’ and not a ‘Hörnchen’, as the Germans would put it. Self-conscious Mr. Stanginer (Rudolf

Platte) in *Die Fiakermilli* acknowledges this Austrian superiority freely. His small stature and his demeanour suggest humility, and he habitually introduces himself in a weak voice: ‘Sorry, I am from Berlin’.

The differences between Germans and Austrians become particularly evident in the realm of the military. Austrian historical costume films portray members of the Austrian military usually as smooth, sedate, and even a bit sloppy. The German officer, on the other hand, represents the opposite: Flügeladjutant von Lützelburg in *Der Feldherrnhügel*, Hauptmann Krause in *Kaiserwalzer* or Kaiser Wilhelm II in *Sissi* display a harsh and overbearing masculinity; the Prussian officers’ staccato mode of speaking and snappy movements together with upturned moustache-ends, particularly emphasised in the hammed performance of the German actor Wolfgang Lukschy, who played both von Lützelburg and Kaiser Wilhelm II, conveys the image of ‘hard’ masculinity, but actually caricatures it.



Figure 14 Snappy Prussian officer Flügeladjutant von Lützelburg (Wolfgang Lukschy) introduces himself to the Austrian officers in *Der Feldherrnhügel* (1953)

Austrian men, even in the military, are presented as being civilians at heart. Not only the encounter between Prussian officer Krause and the Austrian confectioner Bachmaier in

Kaiserwalzer emphasises this difference, when Bachmaier proudly proclaims that he has always been a civilian and knows nothing about the military; the Austrian officers, too, display a much less military demeanour than their Prussian comrades, but rather indulge themselves in pastries, wallowing in delight.

The German protagonist is usually represented a comical figure in Austrian costume film, an outsider, who wants to belong to and who admires the Austrians. In the context of Austria's longstanding inferiority complex towards the Germans as well as Austria's efforts for a (re)union with Germany after the First World War, this is an interesting reversal. In order to be admitted to the Austrian community the Germans become eager learners of local (and Hungarian!) customs; Flügeladjutant von Lützelburg outdoes his Austrian comrades at drinking Tokay wine and dancing the Csardas, and Hauptmann Krause is so intrigued by the tradition of *Mulatság* that he wants to export the table-dancing Anni to Berlin. While the films caricature German mannerisms and peculiarities, often in a condescending and at times even pungent manner, they promptly downplay mockery as harmless banter. At the end of each costume film, differences between Germans and Austrians are bridged and friendship is celebrated. In one of the final scenes of *Kaiserwalzer*, the former opponents – the Austrian confectioner Bachmaier and the Prussian Hauptmann Krause – sit together drinking wine and strike up a conciliatory song, admitting: 'Oh well, Berlinian is difficult, but Viennese even more! Yes, Viennese is difficult, but Berlinian even more!'⁵⁴ And in *Die Deutschmeister* Austrian Kaiser Franz Joseph I and German Kaiser Wilhelm II demonstrate their transnational friendship by attending a military parade, side by side on their horses. While their positioning on the same level suggests equality, their facial hair still indicates vital differences between the two nations: the old Franz Joseph with his fluffy white whiskers contrasts sharply with the much younger Wilhelm with his dark upturned moustache-ends that signify severity.

⁵⁴ 'Na ja, Berlinerisch ist schwer, aber Wienerisch noch mehr! Ja, Wienerisch ist schwer, doch Berlinerisch noch mehr!'



Figure 15 Kaiser Wilhelm (Wolfgang Lukschy) and Kaiser Franz Joseph (Paul Hörbiger) in *Die Deutschmeister* (1955)

The fact that Austrian historical costume films stroke a conciliatory tone with the Germans in the end was not accidental. While making fun of the Germans was permissible and even increased the films' appeal for German audiences because it offered a source of identification, film producers could not afford to offend them; after all, the German market was essential for the survival of the Austrian film industry.⁵⁵ Still, the fact that the narratives always invite the German characters into the Austrian community at the end of the film can, I argue, only partly be explained by the dependency on the West German market and German financial investment in Austrian film production. It seems that the negative stereotype of the German also offered an opportunity to debate internal contradictions. Despite their attempts

⁵⁵ The US-High Commissioner reported that the 'average Austrian film' made considerably more money in Germany than German films in Austria. 'The reason for this was that the Austrian films, though artistically inferior, were in a lighter vein, whereas most of the German films, though artistically better, were serious and gloomy.' Report of the US-High Commissioner from May 1949, cited by Halbritter, 1993, 62.

to demarcate themselves from the Germans, the Austrians could not help but recognise strong similarities. By ridiculing the harsh, overbearing, ‘masculine’ manners which the films identified as typical German, the filmic texts made these characteristics appear less threatening and thus more acceptable.

It should not be forgotten that historical costume film also offered another image of the German that differed strongly from the depiction of Prussian characters: the Bavarian. Even though less frequent, Bavarians appeared from time to time in historical costume film, such as in *Sissi* or *Der Obersteiger* (The Mine Foreman, 1952).⁵⁶ The narratives emphasise the similarities between Austrians and Bavarians: they share a love for food and beer, are equally jovial and ‘gemütlich’, and – above all – speak the same language. The film *Sissi* implied – through its characterisations of the protagonists as well as the Alpine setting in Bavaria and the Austrian Bad Ischl – that Austrians and Bavarians are essentially the same people. The young Austrian Kaiser Franz Joseph (Karlheinz Böhm) and princess Elisabeth of Bavaria/Sissi (Romy Schneider) harbour a deep love for nature and dislike the strict court ceremonial in Vienna; what is more, Franz Joseph names Sissi’s down-to-earth father Duke Max of Bavaria (Gustav Knuth) as the only likeable person among his relations. *Der Obersteiger* appropriated the Bavarian in a different way: here the star persona of popular Viennese actor Hans Holt as well as his Viennese accent and mannerisms remodelled the figure of Duke Max of Bavaria into an Austrian, leaving only the title as indication of the duke’s origin. Historical costume film therefore effectively rejected the Germanness of the Bavarians and thereby affirmed the popular cliché that Bavarians have more in common with Austrians than with their fellow German countrymen.

So, while historical costume genre claimed the Bavarians as ‘honorary Austrians’ and used them to aggrandise the nation, the Prussian Germans were described as the ‘Other’, against which the ‘unique’ Austrian character was drafted. Hungarian and Czech stereotypes, on the other hand, served primarily to provide ‘historical proof’ for Austria’s cosmopolitanism and multi-ethnic roots. Hungarians and Czechs thus functioned as fictional ancestors: the Hungarians represented the passionate and musical side of the Austrian character, whereas the Czechs stood for the Austrians’ alleged resistance to authority. The films transplanted Hungarian passion and Czech subversiveness onto the Austrian character to emphasise the differences between Austrians and Germans, thus providing the audience with ‘historical evidence’ that Austrians were a distinct species from the Germans.

⁵⁶ F. Antel. (Director). (1952). *Der Obersteiger* [Motion Picture]. Austria: Patria-Filmkunst.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that the Metternich era and the reign of Kaiser Franz Joseph were the most frequently depicted historical periods in post-war Austrian cinema. They provided a site where conflicting desires regarding the father figure could be negotiated: Metternich, who was usually depicted as slight and cunning, represented the authoritarian, repressive *German* father. The old, white-bearded Kaiser Franz Joseph, on the other hand, embodied the good, paternal *Austrian* father. By contrasting the ‘good’ (Austrian) father with the ‘bad’ (German) father, who is ultimately rejected, the narratives helped to purify Austrian masculinity. The *Führer* was replaced with a fatherly emperor who granted stability and harmony in a time of rapid social transformations.

Yet the choice of the two historical periods also served other purposes: by drawing analogies between the Metternich era and the Nazi regime, the genre played down the brutality of the Nazi dictatorship and emphasised Austria’s spirit of resistance. The period of Franz Joseph, by contrast, was used to draw attention to Austria’s multi-ethnic past, allowing producers of historical costume film to argue for fundamental differences between Austrians and Germans. Emphasising strong Hungarian and Slavic roots, the films set the ‘cultured’ and ‘emotional’ Austrians apart from the Germans, who were depicted as ‘hard’ and ‘militaristic’; these images also fed into – and supported – the official discourse of Austria’s claim of innocence. Austrian historical costume film did not only instrumentalise the ethnic-diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to assert a unique Austrian identity and thus to provide reassurance for its audiences; with the exception of the historical drama *Sarajevo*, it also omitted any references to nationalism or ethical conflicts. Instead, it painted the picture of a harmonious Austrian society which implied that the time between the two World Wars had only been an untypical aberration in an otherwise pacifist society.

The romanticised depiction of the Habsburg Empire provided Austrians with a positive historical identity. By replacing the memory of the *Wehrmacht* and the Nazis with images of a dashing and seemingly harmless Austro-Hungarian military, the genre helped to exonerate the nation of the guilt of having actively participated in Nazi atrocities and war crimes. The films’ insistence on Austria’s greatness and historically rooted differences between Austrians and Germans served to rub out memories of many Austrians’ fatal wish for unification with Germany. Of course, it was not only the historical costume genre that fulfilled a cleansing function in post-war Austrian cinema. But because the genre was able to replace a negative history with a positive history, it might have been particularly successful in

easing the nation's guilt. The negative past was not merely suppressed and factored out as in other genres, but painted over by a 'new', more 'relevant' past. The more the Imperial past shone and glistened in Austrian historical costume film, the less visible the dark periods of Nazi dictatorship and Austrian fascism became.

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