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Barbara Stelzl-Marx. "Death to Spies! Austrian Informants for Western Intelligence Services and Soviet Capital Punishment during the Occupation of Austria." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:4 (Fall 2012): 167-196. DOI: 10.1162/JCWS_a_00279. http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00279

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Scholars associated with the University of Graz have made that institution the hub of intelligence studies in Austria. Siegfried Beer and Martin Moll publish the Austrian *Journal of Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies (JIPSS)*.¹ Also paying attention to the intelligence side, Barbara Stelzl-Marx and the "Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for the Study of the Consequences of War" she co-directs in Graz, Austria, have almost single-handedly torn the study of the Soviet zone of the Austrian occupation (1945-1955) from scholarly obscurity and oblivion.² Since the opening of Russian archives after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the Institute's director, Stefan Karner, and his team have regularly travelled to Moscow and its environs to discover new archival riches on the Soviet treatment of Austrian and German POWs during and after World War II³, as well as all aspects of the Soviet occupation policies in Austria⁴ and Germany.⁵ Stelzl-Marx

¹ See my review of Kerstin von Lingen. "Abhörung und Anwerbung: Die 'Sunrise-Gruppe' im Fokus von CIC und CSDIC." *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies* 4:2 (2010): 7-19. <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR301.pdf>

² Wolfgang Mueller has made valuable contributions to this research field as well. See *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Österreich 1945-1955 und ihre politische Mission* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005); idem, Arnold Suppan, Norman M. Naimark, Gennadij Bordjugov, eds., *Sowjetische Politik in Österreich 1945-1955. Dokumente aus russischen Archiven* (Vienna 2005).

³ Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI: Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995).

⁴ A volume of essays Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, Aleksandr Tschubarjan, eds., *Die Rote Armee in Österreich. Sowjetische Besatzung 1945-1955: Beiträge* (Vienna-Munich: Böhlau/Oldenbourg, 2005),

Habilitationsschrift, Stalin's Soldaten in Österreich, has been published and constitutes a quasi "summa" of her research on the Soviet post-World War II occupation of Austria⁶ – she is the "Austrian (Norman) Naimark," if you will.⁷

Soldaten in Österreich is an example of the new Cold War scholarship at its best. Based on deep research in more than a dozen Russian and Austrian archives, dozens of oral histories, and sure-footedness in both Russian and Western literature, Stelzl-Marx reconstructs the ten-year Soviet occupation of Austria on what she calls the 'macro' and 'micro' levels of the Soviet presence. On the state level, she traces the transition from war to peace and the setting up of the Soviet occupation establishment. She covers every level of the occupation element from the headquarters down to the provincial level, including the work of the secret services (a topic which is also covered by the article under review here) and the economic struggle over Austrian reparations from 'German assets' seized by the Red Army at the end of the war. She follows in Norman Naimark's footsteps into the difficult terrain of *social* and *sexual* occupation history, namely Soviet raping and looting during the liberation phase and immediately after the war, including under-cover abortions, prostitution and venereal disease, and espionage (the 'so-called the honey trap' – see below). Unlike previous historical writing, her article can document true 'love matches' between Austrian women and Soviet occupation soldiers that resulted in offspring. This is new terrain in the social history of postwar occupations, as is Stelzl-Marx's long chapter on leisure time (including festivities) of the Soviet occupation element in Austria. If that were not enough, this magisterial and prize-winning study features a long and innovative section on the *cultural* history of the Soviet occupation of Austria ('perception and memory'). She delves into perceptions of postwar Austria in Soviet documentary films and photography as well as the occupation media, concluding with a long chapter on Russian memories of the post-World War II occupation of Austria in oral history, novels, and official commemorations.⁸ After Kurt Tweraser's superb and detailed two-volume study of

is accompanied by a massive volume of documents see Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, Aleksandr Tschubarjan, eds., *Die Rote Armee in Österreich. Sowjetische Besatzung 1945-1955: Dokumente* (Vienna-Munich: Böhlau/Oldenbourg, 2005); see also the regional study of the short-lived Soviet occupation of parts of Styria, Stefan Karner, Othmar Pickl, eds., *Die Rote Armee in der Steiermark: Sowjetische Besatzung 1945* (Graz: Leykam, 2008).

⁵ Peter Ruggenthaler, ed., *Stalins großer Bluff: Die Geschichte der Stalin-Note in Dokumenten der sowjetischen Führung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), and now summarized in English, idem, The 1952 Stalin Note on German Unification. The Ongoing Debate, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2011): 172-212.

⁶ Barbara Stelzl-Marx, *Stalins Soldaten in Österreich: Die Innensicht der sowjetischen Besatzung 1945-1995* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012).

⁷ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁸ Stelzl-Marx, *Stalin's Soldaten in Österreich*.

the American occupation of Upper Austria⁹, the Soviet zone in the postwar occupation of Austria has, at last, found a masterful historian too.

“Death to Spies”, the article under review here, provides a pared-down summary for the English-speaking public of a longer introductory essay by Stelzl-Marx in a much larger edited work entitled *Stalin’s Final Victims (Stalin’s letzte Opfer)*¹⁰ On the basis of judicial records located in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow and appeals by Austrian ‘victims’ accused of spying for the West, Stelzl-Marx meticulously reconstructs an obscure chapter of political justice in early Cold War history that was recurrent in all territories occupied by the Soviets. She accounts for 89 people sentenced to death by Soviet military tribunals in Austria and executed in Moscow between 1950 and 1953. After Stalin’s death, this grim practice of capital punishment in Stalin’s legal system was converted to long prison sentences. Another 72 Austrians were sentenced to death by Soviet tribunals and executed between 1945 and 1947. Between 1947 and 1950 the Soviets meted out twenty-five-year sentences rather than death penalties for Cold War propaganda purposes. Altogether 1,015 Germans and Austrians were sentenced to death and executed during the Soviet occupation period. The Russian human rights organization “Memorial” (*Pamyat*) thinks that as many as 10,000 victims of Stalin’s frequent miscarriage of justice might have been buried in Moscow’s Donskoe Cemetery, which they are trying to document individually (171f). Stelzl-Marx wryly concludes that the summary trials, with their inadequate procedural practice that resulted in death sentences and executions “bore no resemblance to Western notions of due process” (169). How and why could such a gross miscarriage of justice happen?

During the ten-year occupation, Austria – akin to the better known Cold War battleground Berlin¹¹ – was one of the “principal spying grounds in Central Europe” (169). In places like Vienna, the two superpowers increasingly clashed as the Cold War broke out for good in 1948. In the process, normal Austrian citizens were pulled into the murky business of passing on tidbits of information to the Western occupation powers. This kind of habitual low-key ‘spying’ in the Cold War – and Stelzl-Marx fails to make this distinction – was not the stuff of top-level espionage such as ‘nuclear spying’ or tapping into top-level Soviet strategic planning. The American Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) regularly hired Austrians who might have worked in the sprawling Soviet industrial empire in the Russian zones (USIA), or lived close to a Soviet military bases or occupation establishments, and

⁹ Kurt Tweraser, *US Militärregierung Oberösterreich 1945-1950*, 2 vols. (Linz: Verlag Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, 1995 and 2009).

¹⁰ Barbara Stelzl-Marx, “Verschleppt und erschossen: Ein Einführung,” in: Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *Stalin’s letzte Opfer: Verschleppte und erschossene Österreicher in Moskau 1950-1953* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), 21-78.

¹¹ David E. Murphy, Sergei A Kondrashchev, George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

could provide industrial intelligence or information about Red Army troop formations and movements. Moscow also considered it a capital crime when Austrians engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda on behalf of the White Russian émigré organization “National Alliance of Russian Solidarists” (NTS) in the intense propaganda war financed by the CIC. Such ‘espionage’ -- what might be called ‘information gathering by the small-fry’ – usually happened for economic motives. Passing on information to the Americans paid handsomely yet many of the ‘victims’ who were apprehended by Soviet counter intelligence claimed not to have been aware that they were doing anything wrong. This comes through most clearly in the desperate clemency pleas that the convicted wrote to Soviet courts asking for suspension of the death sentences.

What Stelzl-Marx calls “the honey trap” (181-184) – the high stakes love affairs between Austrian women and Soviet occupation soldiers – was the other most likely cause of getting in trouble with Soviet occupation authorities. Western intelligence services apparently felt that Austrian women who had liaisons with Soviet occupation soldiers were easy prey to recruit for information activities, as well as for utilizing these women to urge their Russian boyfriends to desert from the Red Army. One gets the impression from Stelzl-Marx’s individual case studies that these women were usually uneducated and very naïve. Once they entered such relationships it was almost impossible to extract themselves from them. Once death sentences were meted out by the ruthless military tribunals, appeals for clemency were not granted. These women ended up in the hands of Vasili M. Blokhin, the feared ‘butcher’ of Butyrka Prison, who shot them “dressed in a brown-tipped cap a long leather apron, and gloves that reached past the elbows” (167) – shades of the terror regime in the French Revolution. The bodies were cremated and the ashes of the burnt were interred in mass graves. Relatives were not informed of the circumstances of these deaths and were instead provided only years later with fabricated explanations of ‘natural’ death causes. The Boltzman Institute in Graz in some cases provided evidence about the circumstances of the deaths to close relatives of the executed half a century later.

Another group of Austrians who were targeted by Stalin’s judicial system after the war were Austrian civilians who had served in the German armed forces during the war, or in POW camps within the Third Reich, and thereby were judged to have committed alleged war crimes. 110 Austrians were put on trial (among them 50 policemen who had been involved in murdering Jews in Galicia) – and many of them were sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor, with some receiving the death penalty. Some of these prisoners more likely deserved the harsh punishment meted out by Stalin’s system of justice.

The twisted Stalinist legal practice in Austria was characterized by its high level of secrecy. Most of the people who came into the crosshairs of the Soviet occupation authorities were kidnapped and often never heard of again. Stelzl-Marx argues that each individual case produced huge files that were left in the Moscow archives, from which the fate of hundreds of people kidnapped can be reconstructed. She suggests that “the uniformity of the proceedings indicates that the verdicts were preordained” (189). The executions took place

in the Soviet Union, not in Austria, and relatives were not informed about the grim fate of their loved ones.

In this plodding yet informative essay Stelzl-Marx strangely does not report on the fate of the best known person kidnapped by Soviet authorities, Margarethe Ottillinger. Riding with her boss, the Minister of Economic Planning, the twenty-nine-year-old chief economist in the Ministry of Economic Planning was snatched from a car by the Soviet authorities on the border of the American-Soviet zones of occupation on November 5, 1948. Accused of spying on the Soviet industrial establishment in Austria for the benefit of the Americans and the Marshall Plan, she was interrogated for weeks on end in the Soviet zone and threatened repeatedly with execution, and then transferred to prisons in the Soviet Union. Sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, the Soviets sent her home, close to death after years of hard labor, in 1955 after the signing of the State Treaty.¹² Ottillinger's case is the classic case study of the complexity of the East-West struggle during the Austrian occupation, the high stakes involved in reorganizing the Austrian economy after Hitler, the dangers of 'collaborating' with the American occupation element, and the high price paid by individuals who were caught in the crosshairs of the occupation powers. This is the grey area that many of the lesser-known cases Stelzl-Marx writes about in her essay fell into, with victims often paying the steeper price of their lives than the high-profile Ottillinger, who had the support of top levels of government officials in her eventual release. In all these cases the Stalinist system of justice was excessive, grim, and merciless and that is the story Stelzl-Marx has unveiled in this well-documented article.

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¹² Based on new Russian archival findings, this strange Cold War tale is summarized by Stefan Karner, "Die Entführung der Margarethe Ottillinger," *Die Presse*, April 20, 2013. <http://diepresse.com/home/meinung/debatte/1391824/Die-Entfuhrung-der-Margarethe-Ottillinger> (accessed April 21, 2013).