

Press information

The City Without. Jews Foreigners Muslims Refugees 30|05|–10|11|2019

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The new temporary exhibition at the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism 'The City Without. Jews Foreigners Muslims Refugees' shows, using historical and contemporary examples, how increasing political polarisation can be socially divisive and ultimately lead to the exclusion of certain groups from society. The exhibition is based on the 1924 film of Hugo Bettauer's novel 'The City without Jews'. Certain scenes in the film reference the gradual exclusion of the Jewish population during the rise and establishment of the Nazi movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Alongside these scenes, the exhibition also looks at current developments, relating them to historical events. The exhibits range from anti-Semitic stickers and handbills from the 1920s to lists of the names of Munich Jews who were deported in 1942. They also include the vicious anti-Semitic board game 'Pogromly' invented and produced by the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU) in the late 1990s as well as contemporary racist postings.

The German/English exhibition will run from 30 May to 10 November 2019. It was realised in cooperation with the Jüdisches Museum Augsburg Schwaben. The curators are Andreas Brunner, Barbara Staudinger and Hannes Sulzenbacher.

The exhibition

In his novel 'The City without Jews' published in 1922, the Viennese writer Hugo Bettauer imagined a scenario where the Jews were expelled from Vienna. His 'Novel of the Day after Tomorrow', as it was subtitled, was a piece of contemporary history, a satire on the anti-Semitism rife in Vienna at the time. In 1924, the film director Hans Karl Breslauer made a film of the novel. The screenings of the film in Austria and Germany were disrupted by the extreme right, and in 1925, Bettauer was murdered by right-wing extremists in Vienna. Only a few years later his satirical vision was to become brutal reality with the deportation and murder of Europe's Jews.

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Bettauer's novel has often been described as a prophecy, which it never actually was. Rather, both the novel and the film portray contemporary mechanisms of exclusion of a minority by the majority society. In the film the Jews return to their home city – historical reality was quite different. Taking Bettauer's and Breslauer's fiction as a starting point, the exhibition traces the real historical consequences of the exclusion of the Jews, which ultimately led to the Shoah. The exhibition 'The City Without' was commissioned by Filmarchiv Austria and was first shown at the Metro Kinokulturhaus in Vienna in 2018. The version of the exhibition shown at the Munich Documentation Centre has been extensively adapted to include current examples of racism and exclusion and the focus changed from Vienna to Munich and Bavaria.

The exhibition begins with a prologue, which looks at Bettauer's novel and the film through the lens of present-day Germany. Whereas Bettauer intended the novel to be funny, today we are unable to laugh, because knowing what happened subsequently makes it impossible not to think of the Shoah when we read the novel or watch the film. Photos of deserted Jewish flats in Vienna taken by the photographer Robert Haas visualise this, impressively conveying the feeling of loss and emptiness that the Shoah left behind. The main part of the exhibition examines the mechanisms that a majority society uses to exclude a minority. It traces the stages in the process of exclusion, introducing each of them with a scene from the film: from the polarisation of society to stereotyping, a loss of empathy and brutalisation to the complete exclusion of a group of people cast as the enemy. The exclusion process is illustrated with examples from history – starting in the 1920s – but the exhibition also uses more recent examples to trace developments from the immediate post-war era to the present. Whereas in the 1920s, anti-Semites called ever more loudly for the exclusion of the Jews, today such calls are directed at foreigners, Muslims, refugees and, as in the past, Sinti and Roma. 'The City Without' uses this juxtaposition to pose the central questions of our age: Are we reliving 'Weimar conditions'? Is the current situation similar to that at the end of the Weimar Republic, shortly before the Nazis came to power? Is there still time to warn people to 'nip racism in the bud'? The exhibition shows the continuity in anti-Semitic stereotypes and images of the 'other'. Even before the Nazis came to power, election posters, publications and stickers made 'the Jews' scapegoats for lesser and greater evils. The first anti-Jewish pogroms took place in Berlin in 1923, but these were to be only the prelude to the 'Jews out' policy of the Nazis. Eugenics, the theory of promoting 'healthy genes' by 'eliminating' 'foreign genetic material', led to an increasing loss of empathy in the 1920s and 1930s. Today, people still look for 'simple solutions' for

complex problems and allegedly find them in slogans like 'foreigners out'. Whether it is criminality, sexual violence, disease or drugs offences, it is always 'others' – Muslims, refugees, foreigners or Jews – who are blamed. Even the enemy stereotypes have remained much the same: images like a 'blood-sucking spider' or a 'greedy capitalist' are still used to portray 'the Jew'. Today's targets of discrimination include not only Jews, but also Muslims and particularly the refugees who arrived in Germany in 2015, with right-wing parties urging their exclusion from 'German society'. The calls for 'Islam-free schools' in the election campaigns of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party bring to mind analogies with the Nazi desire to make Germany 'free of Jews'.

The exhibition concludes with a return to satire – the device used by Bettauer in the novel/film 'The City without Jews' – in a section featuring the 'container action' 'Please love Austria' staged by Christoph Schlingensiefel in 2000. In what was to become a political and public provocation, Schlingensiefel built a container village next to the Vienna State Opera with the words 'foreigners out' prominently displayed. Twelve asylum-seekers lived in the containers for a week, monitored by camera. In a play on the 'Big Brother' TV reality show, each day members of the public could vote on which asylum seeker should be expelled from Austria. The action sparked heated debates and caused considerable confusion. Today, container villages for refugees and asylum-seekers are an everyday sight.

Publication

The exhibition 'The City Without' was not conceived purely as a historical presentation but constantly refers to present social dynamics and examines what is behind them. The catalogue likewise follows this concept and supplements the exhibition with historical and current analyses and perspectives. It includes several essays addressing issues raised by the exhibition in more depth. These are not so much commentaries as new perspectives on the general subject of exclusion.

The catalogue contains contributions by: Leora Auslander, Bettina Bannasch, Sabine Brantl, Michael Brenner, Burcu Dogramaci, Carl Hegemann, Andreas Heusler, Nermin Ismail, Uffa Jensen, Armin Loacker, Gerhard Milchram, Bernhard Purin, Doron Rabinovici, Julya Rabinowich, Frank Reuter, Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Tanjev Schultz, Maximilian Strnad, Dietmar Süß, Natan Sznajder, Sonja Zekri and Moshe Zimmermann.

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Event programme

The exhibition 'The City Without' will be accompanied by a series of events dedicated to historical and current themes. It begins on 5 June with a screening of the film 'The City without Jews' (Austria 1924). Nikolaus Wostry from Filmarchiv Austria will introduce the film and explain how it came about and how it was received. On 16 July, Sarah Hegenbart and Paul Poet, the director of the film 'Ausländer raus! Schlingensief's Container' (Austria 2002), will talk about Christoph Schlingensief's satire. On 17 July, the historians Doron Rabinovici and Natan Sznaider will discuss 'new' and 'old' anti-Semitism. In the podium discussion 'But what does "German" actually mean?' on 11 September the authors Fatma Aydemir, Max Czollek, Lena Gorelik and Saša Stanišić (confirmation pending) will examine questions of identity, home and integration. The 'shift to the right' will form the subject of a performance by the musical cabaret group 'Wellküren' on 27 September.

At 5.30 pm every Tuesday (excluding public holidays) the Munich Documentation Centre will offer open guided tours of the exhibition. The programme's educational events also include a seminar entitled 'Surely there's no law against saying that' on 13 July and a training session for teachers on 26 September. On 5 October, the Munich Documentation Centre will for first time hold a writing workshop with the Munich writer Lena Gorelik.

The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism, Max-Mannheimer-Platz 1, is open from Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am to 7 pm (opening times for schools and groups can be extended by arrangement). Entrance is free for all visitors until 9 September 2019. For more information please visit www.nsdoku.de.