

[from AUGUSTIN - *tun & lassen*]

Did you know that 10,000 Austrians were murdered in Maly Trostinec?

Obliterated name of annihilation

In memory of the Austrian victims of the Shoah at Minsk and Maly Trostinec, Waltraud Barton of Vienna has founded the association IM-MER (Initiative Malvine – Remembering Maly Trostinec) and organized the first official memorial trip to Minsk.

Minsk, the capital of Belarus, is only two hours north-east of Vienna by air. The journey on the night-train takes a good 24 hours, of which at least three are spent changing tracks at the White Russian border. When you experience the border for the first time, you could imagine cattle being loaded. Together with the dreadful amount of paperwork needed to get into the country, one of the last dictatorships in Europe to fall, the White Russian capital of Minsk retreats from an Austrian perspective into the mental distance. Furthermore this region is not really a “white” spot in the conscience of most people in this country, but rather a “blind” spot. Has anyone tried to draw out Belarussian rubles from a branch of the average Viennese bank? Expect nothing more than a sympathetic smile, based on ignorance that such a currency even exists! Not even at the bank, proudly displaying the Austrian emblem, into whose coffers you have to transfer the rather fat visa fee of 60 Euros before you can even request your currency. And who knows that, during the Holocaust, ten transports each carrying 1,000 Austrian Jews travelled from Vienna to Minsk between the years 1941 and 1942, and that those deported were murdered in the Minsk ghetto and in the extermination camp at Maly Trostinec?

Indeed, how would you know? As far as we can tell, there were not even twenty survivors. In no other place were so many Austrian victims of the Shoah murdered during the Nazi era. All the same, this place with its crimes, so close to Minsk, is as good as unknown in Austria. With the association IM-MER, Waltraud Barton has made it her task to preserve the memory of over 10,000 Austrians deported in the second world war to Minsk and Maly Trostinec and murdered in the vicinity of Minsk; to anchor Maly Trostinec as a place of annihilation in Austria’s collective memory; and thereby to try and ensure – through work in the field of education, especially in the spheres of human rights and standing up for what is right – that nothing of the kind can ever happen again in the name of justice.

Waltraud Barton in conversation

Who was Malvine?

She was my grandfather’s first wife and she was Jewish, but she became a Protestant upon her marriage. How I would have liked to have met Malvine, or at least to have seen a photo of her! But there’s nothing to remember her by. When I asked my father about her, he went silent on me, and said no information about her existed; so, within my family, she was more or less a secret.

After that, you naturally searched more than ever ...

At first, I wanted clarity for my two sons. Otherwise, what was I supposed to tell them about their grandparents and great-grandparents? Right up to my 50th birthday, I had an ever-growing desire to find out more about the death of my quasi step-grandmother. Malvine’s marriage to my

father ended in 1938, when she was already 60, but she moved out of the marital home four years earlier. My grandmother, who gave birth to my father in 1935, was already living there.

Was that time doubly difficult for Malvine, because your grandfather was still married to her and at the same time living together with his future wife?

Yes, and no doubt that was one reason why her existence was never mentioned in the family. In the years that followed, Malvine had to move frequently, her living conditions deteriorated, and by and by she ended up in a collective apartment for Jews in Vienna's second district. You have to imagine: Malvine was old, poor and alone, her parents and siblings having already died. At the age of 64, she was deported to White Russia. It was a bit like deliberate neglect of the elderly because many of those who met this fate – not all, but the majority – were old women, alone in the world. On the MA8 announcement are the words, short and terse: "Departed for Minsk." Five days after she left Vienna, she was shot in the extermination camp at Maly Trostinec.

What effect did your journey to Minsk and your visits to various memorials have on your original endeavours to overcome something purely personal for yourself?

I wanted there to be a place where I could mourn and pray for them, because nobody had done that for them, neither at the time nor later. Now, just because I've been there, I can no longer speak only of Malvine. The people who were murdered there have a right to their names and dates of death being known: even if no photos, then at least their names. When I saw the lists of murdered German Jews in the history workshop, it became even clearer to me: there are 10,000 Austrian Jews whose names appear nowhere.

Your "Initiative Malvine" finally persuaded Austrian officialdom to erect a memorial in three languages. Why is that so important?

Because, until now, practically nobody knows that the Minsk ghetto was the third largest ghetto after Warsaw and Lvov [Lemberg]. And, after Auschwitz, Maidanek and Treblinka, Maly Trostinec was the largest extermination camp, and nine of the ten transports out of Vienna were brought to it directly. An estimated 40,000-60,000 people were killed in Maly Trostinec alone. By the way, until now there's no Austrian memorial, and it still makes me rather angry to think that arrangements are being discussed for memorials a long way away but very media-friendly – such symbols are of course necessary and must be erected, but the consciousness that what happened then concerns all of us, here and now, in some way or another, is still missing, and unfortunately even now, or rather once again, many people are looking the other way, just as my own father did. But the memorial in Minsk and our yellow name cards in Maly Trostinec are a beginning.

Dagmar Haier was talking with Waltraud Barton

[Photo caption: After Warsaw and Lvov (Lemberg), Minsk in White Russia was the third largest Jewish ghetto. In contrast to Maly Trostinec, Minsk shows signs of a memory culture.]

About Waltraud Barton

Born in 1959, she is the eldest daughter of a Protestant Professor of Theology and has six other siblings. She is the single mother of two sons (born in 1984 and 1996), and studied Theatre at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz. Alongside her artistic activities as an

actress, she also worked for many years as a Cultural Manager and as an amateur Mediator (including at the Allegro Vivo Music Festival and the Austrian Cultural Service).

As a founder member of the association art2play – a network for ability-centred theatre forms (acting, dance, singing), she developed theatre projects for and with schools, institutions for the sick, shelters for refugees, clubs for pensioners, and many others, and was General Secretary to the Austrian Society for Autism.

In February 2006, Waltraud Barton completed her training as a mediator with ARGE Education Management in Vienna, and since then has been working freelance as a registered mediator (specializing in the fields of art and culture).

In April 2007, she obtained her Master's degree (MA – Mediation) with Distinction. (Title of her Master's thesis: "The Stage in the Workplace – Synergetic Dependency in the Theatre. Fields of Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Theatre."), and at the moment she is in the second stage of Law studies.

The association IM-MER, founded by Waltraud Barton in 2010, began its activities by establishing the first Austrian memorial trip to Maly Trostinec and an interfaith mourning ceremony in Minsk at Whitsun 2010. Further memorial trips are planned, and also a meeting place in Vienna "Maly Trostinec in Vienna," a conference to take place on the 70th anniversary of the first deportation to Minsk, and a register – a kind of "book of the dead" for all those Austrians murdered in Minsk and Maly Trostinec.