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Outsider Bodies, Everyday Lives: Single Mothers and Their Children in Red Vienna

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Abstract

Healthy bodies were central to the welfare projects of Red Vienna, 1919–34. This article traces the discourse of care surrounding single mothers and their children within the interwar Viennese welfare system, paying particular attention to the ways their bodies were described, monitored, and maximized for social utility. It establishes a shift in the perception of “worth” for these citizens, and then contrasts this stated value with the remembered experiences of children growing up without legal fathers in Red Vienna.

Keywords: women; children; Red Vienna; welfare; history of everyday life

“He who builds palaces for children tears down the walls of prisons”

Julius Tandler, 1925¹

In the Fall of 1930, the Museum for Sociological and Economic Sciences in Vienna sponsored an exhibition at city hall. Timed to coincide with the meeting of the World League for Sexual Reform in Vienna, the exhibit featured innovative infographics related to population health and welfare reform, produced in the highly readable “Viennese Method” or visual style.² Some of the most striking features of this educational exhibit devoted to health and life were in fact about their tragic loss. Several infographics featured coffins. Perhaps the most alarming image was one of infant-sized coffins designed to stress child mortality rates in Vienna. The image reflected a deep concern for the statistical or social body of the city, but it also invited viewers to consider individual bodies, specifically those of suffering, dying children.³

In Vienna, officials of the Habsburg monarchy and later the First Austrian Republic struggled with high infant mortality rates that statistical experts blamed on high rates of illegitimacy.⁴ In the waning years of the empire, the Vienna foundling house, which was notoriously dangerous for women and newborns alike, was closed and replaced with the Central Home for Children.⁵ During the war

¹Gemeinde Wien, ed., *Die Kinderübernahmestelle der Gemeinde Wien*, Forward by Julius Tandler (Vienna, 1925/26), 7.

²The “Viennese Method” involved simplified, stylized visuals that could teach a wide audience with minimal text. The Vienna Museum of Sociological and Economic Sciences was an organization that created several international exhibits, although their “home gallery” was in Vienna’s city hall, through the Department of Social Hygiene and Social Security. See Otto Neurath, “Die Sozialhygienische Ausstellung des Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseums in Wien,” in *Sexualnot und Sexualreform: Verhandlung der Weltliga für Sexualreform, IV. Kongress*, ed. Herbert Steiner (Vienna, 1931), 655–70.

³Thomas Laqueur explores this relationship between the statistical body and the lived body in “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1989), 176–204, 194–95.

⁴For a review of Habsburg-era practices and outcomes, see Dr. Wilhelm Hecke, “Fragen der Unehelichenfürsorge,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 29, no. 280 (July–August 1930): 184–89. For a more sustained look at the discourse surrounding prewar structures of “illegitimacy,” see Britta McEwen, “Shame, Sympathy, and the Single Mother in Vienna, 1880–1930,” *Journal of Women’s History* (forthcoming).

⁵Across nineteenth-century Europe, millions of women abandoned their children in foundling houses. Vienna’s foundling house was one of the busiest on the continent, accepting more than 700,000 infants over two centuries. See Ingrid Matschinegg, Verena Pawlowsky, and Rosa Zechner, “Mütter in Dienst – Kinder in Kost: Das Wiener Findelhaus, eine

years, a city administrator developed a new system of guardianship to ensure young citizens without legal fathers could be monitored and supported by the new *Jugendamt* (Youth Authority). Subsequently, “Red Vienna,” whose city government the Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SDAP) controlled from 1919 to 1934, enacted policies to combat child mortality rates. The SDAP leadership, particularly Welfare Minister Dr. Julius Tandler, secured equal access to health and welfare initiatives for unmarried mothers and their children. These included free maternal and family advice centers, venereal disease testing clinics, milk stations, medical and dental care available in schools, new kindergartens and play areas, summer programs for children, and an expanded *Jugendamt* to monitor wards of the city well into their teenage years. Although national laws did not grant equal rights to children born to single mothers compared with those children born to married couples, interwar Viennese practice undid many of the inequities.⁶ Single mothers and their children, often separated by the city both as categories and as families, lived a very specific embodied experience in Red Vienna. Their bodies were supported and monitored more closely than those members of two-parent families, and they often suffered from bodily distress in the form of hunger, cold, and lack of housing. Rather than citizens capable of agency, they were understood as both subjects and objects of intervention and control. As we situate their bodies in relation to policy and memory, we approach a history of embodied experience.⁷

Bodies were important in Red Vienna. City leaders made widespread and innovative interventions into the individual and social body, from hygiene to housing reform. Most often this ideal body was imagined, and is now remembered, as vigorous, male, and working class. Feminist scholarship on the body reminds us that the clear lines between autonomous, male bodies and their social body or polity often become “tentative and derivative” when traversed by women.⁸ Women’s bodies, in particular, represent “an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organization.”⁹ This article considers the bodies of single mothers and their children as equally important to the strategies laid out by the city council during the years of Red Vienna. It explores the imagined world of their bodies in city planning and propaganda, as well as the lived bodily experiences of children growing up in Red Vienna without legal fathers. Attending to the “embodied history” of these historical actors illuminates the innovative institutions designed alternately to cultivate and control them.¹⁰ This practice allows us to situate bodies in new ways, while also considering the city’s institutional changes and the control it sought in population management.

Historian and gender theorist Kathleen Canning warns that, when we study the body, we are often actually exploring complicated and contradictory versions of what the body is: social, rhetorical, a site of regulation, and a site of experience.¹¹ All these versions of the body appear in this article. I first establish the imagined social body of Red Vienna by analyzing the *neue Menschen* imagined by city leaders. I then document the bodies of single mothers and their children as they appeared in the literature of city organizations designed to serve them, which in some ways were indeed sites of regulation. Here, doctors and administrators planned bodies for maximum health and utility. I focus on the Central Home for Children, the Institution of Mother and Infant Care, the Mothers’ Advice Centers, and the Vienna Youth Authority. Finally, I use narratives collected from the *Dokumentation*

Fürsorgeeinrichtung für ledige Frauen und deren Kinder,” *L’Homme. Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 5, no. 2 (1994): 60–80, 62. See also Verena Pawlowsky’s excellent monograph on the Vienna founding house: *Mutter ledig – Vater Staat: Das Gebär- und Findelhaus in Wien 1784–1910* (Vienna, 2001).

⁶Viktor Suchanek, *Jugendfürsorge in Österreich* (Vienna, 1924), 43.

⁷Although I am very interested in lived experiences, I recognize that this term is complicated by its lack of an opposite. When I refer to “embodied experience,” I mean the ways that individuals perceived their physical selves, as determined by material means, language, and, most of all, the city’s physical environment. Although inspired by feminist history, I do not engage current debates about “lived experience” as it is understood in identity politics or Critical Social Justice theory.

⁸Moir Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (London, 1996), x.

⁹Elizabeth Grosz, “Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal,” in *Feminine/Masculine and Representation*, eds. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (London, 2020), 62–74, 65.

¹⁰I take the concept of “embodied history” from Pierre Bourdieu, who theorized that it was an important part of *habitus*. See *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Palo Alto, 1990), 56–57.

¹¹Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, 2006), 168–69.

Lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen at the University of Vienna's Institute for Economic and Social History to explore the ways bodies were experienced and remembered by children without legal fathers in Red Vienna. In them, the everyday, messy vulnerability of children's bodies serves as a contrast to their imagined management by city institutions.

Neue Menschen

Bodies in Vienna are undergoing a reassessment in the historical record. We study them alive, in motion, in reproduction, and even in death. They are central to the culture of Vienna in the long fin de siècle, which Alys X. George has elegantly documented as reverberating with materialist, medical understandings of their "truth."¹² Recent scholarship has questioned how bodies were understood, on both a physical and social level.¹³ Bodily echoes ring throughout Viennese science, culture, and politics. The everyday lives of bodies, and the selves that inhabited them, are recorded in ego-documents of the era. Historians increasingly question the relationship between bodies and selves, bringing us closer to understanding what bodies meant in Red Vienna.

The war years and their immediate aftermath in Vienna were hard on bodies. Militarized male bodies were stretched to their limits physically and visibly shattered through mechanized warfare. Medical experts theorized that the very integration of the (male) human body was what led to its fragility: systems designed to keep it whole were penetrated, sometimes quite literally by shrapnel, causing mysterious, massive bodily failure.¹⁴ Responsible for protecting the Habsburg Empire and its interests, male bodies were sacrificed on the battlefields, scarred, and in some cases rendered useless to the state that inherited them: The Republic of Austria. Although Viennese women's bodies were not on the frontline, home front duty was onerous. Women were expected to protect the city from "internal enemies" such as disease, doubt, starvation, and desertion.¹⁵ Viennese women struggled to preserve their bodies and feed their families during and after the war.¹⁶ Children's bodies were disrupted by the war and concomitant malnutrition, as well. Their bodies were on display, in the streets, actively begging and silently suffering from malnutrition and rickets.¹⁷

The leaders of Red Vienna sought to restore this broken population. In both its planning and propaganda, the SDAP touted *neue Menschen* ("new people") thriving within the capital. Upright, clean-living, and politically committed, such *neue Menschen* worked to complete the Enlightenment project of creating a just society.¹⁸ The context of this fantasy was grim. Vienna after the Great War was a

¹²Alys X. George, *The Naked Truth: Viennese Modernism and the Body* (Chicago, 2020), 5–6.

¹³See especially George, *The Naked Truth*; Katya Motyl, *Embodied Histories: New Womanhood in Vienna, 1894–1934* (Chicago, forthcoming); Birgit Nemeč, *Norm und Reform: Anatomische Körperbilder in Wien um 1925* (Göttingen, 2020); Edgar Haider, *Wien 1918: Agonie der Kaiserstadt* (Vienna, 2019); Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers, *The Human Body in the Age of Catastrophe: Brittleness, Integration, Science, and the Great War* (Chicago, 2018); Verena Pawlowsky and Harald Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates: Kriegsoffer und Sozialstaat in Österreich 1914–1938* (Vienna, 2014). An older but valuable contribution can be found in Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley, 1990).

¹⁴In many ways, medical understandings of the soldier's body during World War I could be transferred to anxieties about the social body after the war. The soldier "became a stitched-together group of systems, fragile because material forces of war, such as bullets and shrapnel intruded into him, and because his own constitution was such as to facilitate his collapse." Geroulanos and Meyers, *The Human Body in the Age of Catastrophe*, 10.

¹⁵Elizabeth Domansky establishes these "internal enemies" as threats to the national body (in this case Germany's) during WWI. See "Militarization and Reproduction in World War I Germany," in *Society, Culture, and State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, 1997), 427–64, 455. On women as national protagonists during this period, see Belinda J. Davis, "Food, Politics, and Women's Everyday Life during the First World War," in *Home/Front: The Military, War, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Karen Hageman and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford, 2002), 115–38.

¹⁶Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004); Patricia Calvin, "The Austrian Hunger Crisis and the Genesis of International Organization after the First World War," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2014): 265–78.

¹⁷Haider, *Wien 1918*, 149–55.

¹⁸I take the idea of Red Vienna as an Enlightenment project from Wolfgang Maderthaler's "Das kommunale Experiment: die 'Veralltäglicung' der Utopie?" in *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934: Ideen, Debatten, Praxis*, eds. Werner Michael Schwartz, Georg

swollen, ill-funded city struggling to secure life-giving necessities for its citizens, who included new widows, orphans, and war invalids.¹⁹ It had recently won the status of an independent *Land* within the new country of Austria, but was surrounded by more conservative, Catholic-dominated territories. Although the majority of SDAP voters, which now included women, were also party members, the landscape of political street fighting and violence even within the capital was bleak.²⁰ Whatever *neue Menschen* might achieve there would clearly be contested. Furthermore, city planners were keenly aware of what they referred to as a “population emergency” brought on by war losses, malnutrition, infectious diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis, the 1918 pandemic, and a declining birth rate.²¹ Socialist leaders theorized that it was the “uncertainty of existence” that made having children more fraught for Viennese citizens, which planners sought to assuage through social welfare programs.²² The ways they imagined bodies, particularly the bodies of women and children, tell us a lot about what the powerful wanted from the powerless in interwar Vienna.

In this schema of *neue Menschen* with healthy bodies secured by the Welfare Ministry, women were often relegated to the role of “passive victims of a capitalist system,” saved and served by the city.²³ SDAP attempts to secure women’s votes reveal the party’s understanding of them as primarily mothers, rather than workers or planners.²⁴ Mothers were uniquely vulnerable in this besieged social landscape, as they were responsible for protecting both themselves and their offspring. And when women were considered as co-creators of Red Vienna’s new world, it was as mothers. The most famous figure of a woman in Red Vienna is the “Magna Mater” sculpture, created by sculptor Anton Hanak for the courtyard of the relocated *Kinderübernamestelle* (Children’s Diagnostic Center, KÜST) in 1925.²⁵ This image of a woman extending her arms over three children of varying ages, reproduced in photos throughout city promotional materials, was also featured on the boxes that held the free infant layette sets the city began distributing in 1927. This image of woman-as-mother dominated SDAP thinking about female citizens, who were often relegated to “affective centers” whose highest role was to provide a (working) husband an orderly, peaceful family life.²⁶ But because city planners desperately desired a body politic of Red Vienna that was productive and reproductive, these interwar social engineers reconsidered the hitherto excluded category of single mothers and their children.²⁷

Such citizens had long occupied a liminal space. As socially marginalized sites of reproduction, the bodies of single mothers were uncontrolled and potentially unhealthy. Yet their children, in the wake of

Spitaler, and Elke Wikidal (Basel, 2019), 24–29, 24. For a withering exploration of SDAP attempts to engender *neue Menschen*, see Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working Class Culture* (New York, 1991), especially 45–80.

¹⁹On the process of serving victims of the war, see Ke-chin Hsia, “A Partnership of the Week: War Victims and the State in the First Austrian Republic,” in *From Empire to Republic: Post-World War I Austria*, eds. Günter Bischof, Fritz Planner, and Peter Berger (New Orleans, 2010), 192–221.

²⁰Sixty percent of Viennese SDAP voters by 1930 were also party members. See Lothar Höbelt, *Die erste Republik Österreich (1918–1938): Das Provisorium* (Vienna, 2018), 72. On the atmosphere of latent civil war in interwar Austria, see Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Unter Beobachtung: Österreich seit 1918* (Vienna, 2017), 84–108. On women as new voters, see Anton Pelinka, *Die gescheiterte Republik: Kultur und Politik in Österreich 1918–1938* (Vienna, 2017), 194–202.

²¹Many areas of Europe perceived this “population emergency” after World War I and responded with the language of “race hygiene.” See Stefan Kühl, *Die Internationale der Rassisten. Aufstieg und Niedergang der internationalen Bewegung für Eugenik und Rassenhygiene im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1997), 41–53. Austrian statisticians were particularly struck by the dip in marriages celebrated during the war years, which would result in fewer (legitimate) children. See Bundesamt für Statistik, *Die Bewegung der Bevölkerung in den Jahren 1914 bis 1921* (Vienna, 1923), 10–16 on marriage; 30–35 on infant mortality rates.

²²Karl Kautsky, *Der Kampf gegen den Geburtenrückgang* (Vienna, 1924), 7.

²³Pat Thane, “Wohlfahrt und Geschlecht in der Geschichte: Ein partieller Überblick zu Forschung, Theorie, und Methoden,” *L’Homme. Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 5, no. 2 (1994): 5–18, 6.

²⁴*Die Neue Frau* (Vienna, 1924).

²⁵Katrin Pilz explores the creation and placement of this statue, as well as provides photographs of it at the new KÜST building that opened in 1925, in “Mutter (Rotes)Wien,” in *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934*, eds. Werner Michael Schwarz et al., (Basel, 2019), 74–81, 75. The original KÜST began serving children in 1910.

²⁶On SDAP leadership views of women and especially sexuality, see Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 178.

²⁷On the sense of emergency regarding declining birth rates, see Wilhelm Hecke, “Fürsorgeforderungen aus der Bevölkerungsverteilung,” in *Zeitschrift für Kinderschutz, Familien- und Berufsfürsorge* 16, no. 6 (Juni 1924): 102–7.

the Great War, were also precious “organic capital” to be cultivated.²⁸ Single mothers and their children were alternately understood by city fathers as both dangerous and endangered: transgressive, yet also worthy of protection. Out-of-marriage births were strikingly common in Austria, which had the highest “illegitimacy” rate (23.7 percent) of any country in Europe in 1930.²⁹ Vienna itself had a lower rate than some of the rural provinces, but its infant mortality rates of such children were disturbing: roughly double those of children born within a marriage.³⁰ For political leadership that desperately sought to cultivate a robust birth rate, this was a problem.

The rhetorical use and imagery of unwed mothers and their children in progressive literature shifted in the interwar period. Although such literature no longer referred to “sin,” it often was clearly concerned with social utility. Many reformers arguing for the right to legal abortion, for example, had previously used images of weak or lawless children being born to unmarried mothers. Feminist publications in the late Imperial period used language that warned of children born against mothers’ wills, who would certainly become “anti-social, unhappy, sick, and criminally-inclined.”³¹ An interwar Viennese association called the League Against Forced Motherhood, subsidized with municipal funds, regularly used the imagery of suffering women’s bodies and unwell children to argue for the availability of birth control.³² However, in Red Vienna, the social shame traditionally attached to reproduction out of wedlock eased: one city representative at a 1930 Vienna conference on the “Questions of Illegitimacy and Welfare” spoke approvingly of unmarried mothers, arguing that they were happy unlike modern “pleasure-seeking, criminally-inclined girls” who had no children at all.³³ At least single mothers were having children, suggested the speaker, which the city urgently needed. In the 1920s, the age of marriage was rising in Vienna; at the same time, birthrates in the capital were falling precipitously.³⁴ Children, even those born outside of marriage, were precious to city planners.³⁵

Children’s Services

Red Vienna had a wide range of programs in place to serve all needy children.³⁶ The Welfare Ministry, led by Dr. Julius Tandler, developed a robust pro-natalist set of provisions for citizens that was consonant with initiatives in other European countries devastated by the Great War, particularly those of France.³⁷ Children’s bodies, perhaps made more precious by the loss of life that resulted from

²⁸Viennese sociologist Rudolf Goldscheid developed the idea of citizens as “organic capital” in Vienna; Tandler used the term widely. See Julius Tandler, *Ehe und Bevölkerungspolitik* (Vienna, 1924), 1. See also Julius Tandler, *Wohltätigkeit oder Fürsorge?* (Vienna, 1925), 5.

²⁹Gerlinde Hinterleitner, “Das Süßeste, was dem Weibe werden kann, ist die Mutterschaft: Uneheliche Mutterschaft in Wien, 1918–1938” (Ph.D. diss., Universität Wien, 1989), 5.

³⁰On Vienna’s illegitimacy rates being lower than those of rural areas in the interwar period, see J. Robert Wegs, *Growing Up Working Class – Continuity and Change Among Viennese Youth, 1890–1938* (University Park, 1989), 127. On infant mortality rates, see Hinterleitner, “Das Süßeste,” 65.

³¹The phrase is taken from a 1905 issue of *Mutterschutz*, as quoted in Andrea Czelk, “Frauenrecht und Mutterschutz,” in *Frauenrecht und Rechtsgeschichte: Die Rechtskämpfe der deutschen Frauenbewegung*, eds. Stephan Meder, Arne Duncker, and Andrea Czelk (Cologne, 2006): 351–66, 361.

³²The images of a women and children agonizing due to sexual ignorance or oppression were surprisingly common in interwar Vienna’s sexual reform movement. See Britta McEwen, *Sexual Knowledge: Feeling, Fact, and Social Reform in Vienna, 1900–1934* (New York, 2012) especially Chapter 4.

³³Hecke, “Fragen der Unehelichenfürsorge,” 187.

³⁴Wilhelm Hecke, “Statistik der Unehelichkeit in Oesterreich,” *Mitteilungen des Volksgesundheitsamtes im Bundesministerium für soziale Verwaltung* 9 (September 1935): 77–79.

³⁵This is especially true for Tandler, who during the war formulated a series of policy changes that would increase the quality and quantity of the population, starting with removing the stigma of “illegitimacy.” See Julius Tandler, “Krieg und Bevölkerung,” as reprinted in Karl Sablik, *Julius Tandler, Mediziner und Sozialreformer: Eine Biographie* (Vienna, 1983): 113–21, 120.

³⁶An excellent guide to services can be found in *Jugend in Not: Ein Jahrbuch der Fürsorge des Allgemeinen Verbandes f. freiwillige Jugendfürsorge in Wien* (Vienna, 1924).

³⁷Several scholars have explored French interwar pronatalism. See especially Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago, 1994); Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham, 2002); Kristin Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914–1945* (Cornell, 2003).

the World War, became earnest investments across Europe. In Vienna, both private and public institutions served single mothers and their children. Private mother-and-child homes for unmarried women included one run by the left-leaning *Bund für Mutterschutz* (Alliance for the Protection of Mothers) and one by the Catholic charity *Soziale Hilfe* (Social Help), an arm of the order Caritas Socialis.³⁸ In these homes, unwed pregnant women received counseling before giving birth, and a safe place to nurse their infants and plan their next steps for several months.

In addition, an independent *Bund für Mütter- und Kindesrecht in Wien* (Association for the Rights of Mother and Child) was founded in 1928 that supported uniform legal rights for children, taking as its motto “*All children are equal.*”³⁹ This “non-political” organization, founded by a social worker and a lawyer, worked to normalize freely chosen unions and their issue, recognize war brides, and re-write inheritance laws. It also offered free legal advice to unmarried parents and contested Vienna’s legal guardianship over “fatherless” children.

Public institutions in Red Vienna designed to address *Unehelichkeit* (illegitimacy, literally “not-of-marriage”) did so under discrete names: The Central Home for Children, the Institution for Mother and Infant Care, the Mother’s Advice Centers, and the Vienna Youth Authority. Each of these organizations, despite the generality of their titles, served single mothers and their children. The goals of these municipal interventions were varied and conflicting. They certainly mitigated suffering; they also expanded a healthy, productive population of *neue Menschen*, who were in turn monitored and assessed as never before. In important ways, these institutions worked to legislate equality among children and families. By securing equal care and access for unmarried mothers, Red Vienna undid centuries of lesser status in the name of *Bevölkerungsqualität* (“quality of population”), hoping for a “coming generation” that could withstand and overcome physical hardship.⁴⁰ The institutions designed to serve needy children, including those without legal fathers, were both humane interventions in a time of hardship and sites in which bodies were instrumentalized within a particular political project of rationalization and “enlightenment.”⁴¹

Orphanages are some of the oldest institutions for needy children. The city of Vienna ran eight orphanages before the Great War, supplemented by at least twenty-five private institutions, many of which were quite small.⁴² The city government converted old orphanages into care facilities for children after the war.⁴³ The innovation of that period, however, was the expansion and centralization of the *Zentralkinderheim* (Central Home for Children), founded in 1910 and overhauled by Social Democratic city leadership in 1922.

The official statutes of the *Zentralkinderheim* described it as an “official foundling institution” charged with caring for children born outside of marriage.⁴⁴ Like the Viennese foundling house it replaced in 1910, it accepted infants and children whose (most often single) mothers had abandoned them.⁴⁵ It was open to all Viennese women without means. Indeed, the grounds and buildings, redeveloped in the years 1908–10, had previously served as a foundling house for Lower Austria. Childcare

³⁸On the Vienna *Bund für Mutterschutz*, see Britta McEwen, “A Home for Mothers in Vienna: Community and Crisis,” in *Kinship and Community: Society and Culture in European History*, eds. Jason Coy et al. (New York, 2015), 89–106.

³⁹Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, MAbt 119. A32 5218/28, Bund für Mütter- und Kindesrecht, “Statuten.” Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰These terms are central in Julius Tandler, *Ehe und Bevölkerungspolitik*. The text is little concerned with marriage, and instead focuses on repopulating Austria, which should seek to “not inhibit the instinct to breed, but rather to enlarge upon it, to make it responsible, and even to rationalize it.” Tandler, *Ehe und Bevölkerungspolitik*, 4.

⁴¹I am grateful to Katya Motyl for highlighting this insight, found in Jessica Hayes-Conroy and Allison Hayes-Conroy, “Visceral Geographies: Mattering, Relating, and Defying,” *Geography Compass* 4 (2010): 1273–83, 1277. Motyl uses this concept to problematize the relationships between the environment and the body. See Katya Motyl, “Re-Embodying History’s ‘Lady’: History, Materiality, and Public Space in Early-Twentieth-Century Vienna,” *Gender & History* 33, no. 1 (March 2021): 169–91, 174.

⁴²*Die Gemeinde-Verwaltung der k.k. Reichshaupt- und Residenzstadt Wien im Jahre 1910* (Vienna, 1911), 339–42.

⁴³*Das Wohlfahrtsamt der Stadt Wien und seine Einrichtungen 1921–1931* (Vienna, 1931), 24.

⁴⁴*Statut für das niederösterreichische Landes-Zentralkinderheim in Wien* (Vienna, 1910), 4.

⁴⁵Hinterleitner, “Das Süßeste,” 65. This similarity extends to the possibility of anonymously delivering a child there, just as one was allowed to do in the foundling house system. See *Ein Führer durch die neue Anstalt* (Vienna, 1910), 13–14.

specialists in Red Vienna re-organized it, framing it as a training center for nursing students. Bodies here were something to be studied, conserved, and organized. Social workers at any of the three university maternity wards or the city ward at *Brigittaspital* were instructed to refer single women and their infants to the *Zentralkinderheim* if homelessness was suspected.⁴⁶ The *Zentralkinderheim* featured separate rooms for nursing mothers, infants under three months being bottle-fed, and infants and toddlers without mothers present at all.⁴⁷ Expanded services in the interwar years accommodated more clients and extended the maximum age of housed children up to their sixth year. The organization created or repurposed off-site “reception homes” throughout the interwar period. The largest associated reception home, Schloss Wilhelminenberg, purchased by the city in 1927, could shelter thousands of children a year.⁴⁸

City reports on the *Zentralkinderheim* stressed that it was the primary care facility for “illegitimate” children under the age of two.⁴⁹ Over half of its clients were without legal fathers.⁵⁰ Yet the director of the *Zentralkinderheim* clearly described the organization as radically different from the foundling house that it replaced. The grounds and facilities brought “air, light, and sun” to clients housed in “high, light, and spacious” rooms.⁵¹ The *Zentralkinderheim* welcomed mothers, and even unaccompanied children were nourished, bathed, cared for, and treasured. Those mothers who did not trust the institution were free to leave, with their children, against the advice of the social worker, “who would certainly ask them to accept the help of the city’s systems.”⁵² Other mothers, wanting to return to their service work, or families, or romantic partners, left their children behind. The *Zentralkinderheim*, as a dedicated “asylum for children,” was obliged to keep such children according to its statutes, regardless of their mother’s marital status.⁵³ The main facility carved out space in the city for reproductive female bodies, even when they were single. It encouraged such women to nurse and engage with infant bodies in a hygienic, sanitary, monitored environment. As such, the *Zentralkinderheim* was a refuge for citizens whose bodies were endangered by hunger, cold, or abandonment. On a basic level, this was a place where the city financed and nurtured these bodies. The *Zentralkinderheim* also attempted to maximize infant life by encouraging mothers to stay with their children, nurse them, and commit to a life with them. Failing the successful creation of this relationship, the *Zentralkinderheim* planned for the supporting of even very young children’s physical needs.

Although the city took control of the *Zentralkinderheim* in 1922, it was a creation of an earlier era. The remarkable innovations of Red Vienna’s welfare system in many cases built upon institutions from the late Habsburg monarchy. In 1908, for example, the citizens of Vienna created a fund to benefit children’s protection and care in celebration of Emperor Franz Joseph’s sixtieth Jubilee. Out of this donation came the *Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge* (Institution of Mother and Infant Care), which opened a grand facility in 1915 in Pötzleinsdorf, the eighteenth district of Vienna. The design of the center was dominated by clean, modern lines, glassed-in rooms, and pavilions in which residents could enjoy the fresh air. Here, a staff of specially trained doctors and uniformed nurses cared for mothers and their children. When the SDAP’s Health and Social Welfare Ministry took control of the facility after the war, it stressed the institution’s role in repairing the bodies of women and children, who suffered from illness and lack of food. Many of the infants at the institution were there alone, suggesting that their (single) mothers had relinquished them. Its literature stressed that the goal was to encourage mothers who might be “compelled by social suffering” to

⁴⁶*Bundeshauptstadt Wien: Die Gemeindeverwaltung 1919–1922* (Vienna, 1927), 292.

⁴⁷*Die Verwaltung der Bundeshauptstadt Wien in der Zeit vom 1. Jänner 1923 bis 31. Dezember 1928*, 2. Band (Vienna, 1933), 730.

⁴⁸Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 520.

⁴⁹Gustav Reither, “Das Zentralkinderheim der Stadt Wien,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 23, no. 242 (March–April 1924): 21–25, 22.

⁵⁰Reither, “Das Zentralkinderheim,” 22.

⁵¹Gustav Reither, “Das Wiener Findelhaus im Wandel der Zeiten,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 28, no. 271 (January–February 1929): 65–71, 70.

⁵²Gustav Reither, “Erfahrungen in der geschlossenen Säuglingsfürsorge,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 29, no. 282 (November–December 1930): 314–15, 314.

⁵³*Ein Führer durch die neue Anstalt*, 7.

perhaps abandon their babies to instead stay, nurse them, and grow to love them.⁵⁴ In this sense, the institution extended the *Zentralkinderheim*'s approach to reconciling single mothers to their infants; however, the *Mutter- und Säuglinganstalt* accommodated reproductive bodies (and infant bodies) that were more clearly, medically endangered.

The first line of defense in staving off infant mortality at the *Mutter- und Säuglinganstalt* was securing nourishment. The fact that some women staying in the institution were required to nurse more than their own child suggests that not every mother stayed with their infants. This pattern and practice had been established in the old Viennese foundling house, suggesting that the *Mutter- und Säuglinganstalt* was in fact a medicalized, updated version of an institution designed for unmarried women. What had changed was the focus on healing the infants. A 1919 publication from the director, Dr. Leopold Moll, emphasized at length the various illnesses, diseases, and lack of nutrition child-patients suffered from, and how each child was treated.⁵⁵ Medical staff referred mothers and children cleared of medical issues and preparing to leave the institution to an on-site *Mutterberatungsstelle* (Mother's Advice Center) for further monitoring.⁵⁶ The paperwork demanded of the *Mutterberatungsstelle* pointedly asked for either the father's name or that of the guardian, and included questions for the foster mother, further suggesting that the institution served single mothers.⁵⁷

Like the *Zentralkinderheim*, the *Mutter- und Säuglinganstalt* was also a training center. During the war, nurses trained there, and after the war it educated special "infant social workers" to aid mothers in breast feeding and childcare. These social workers were expected to make house visits to both healthy and sick clients, "exactly as a doctor would."⁵⁸ Visits lasted two hours and consisted primarily of checks on the weight of the child and whether the environment was hygienic. Here, the body of the child was something to be both measured and managed vis-à-vis its surroundings, which might threaten its success. Social workers were to serve as the "middle point for education (*Aufklärung*, or enlightenment) and care for all mothers."⁵⁹ In this sense, we can speculate that the archipelago of *Mutterberatungsstellen*, discussed next, that the Welfare Ministry developed across the city in the 1920s and early 1930s, began at the *Mutter- und Säuglinganstalt*.

The stated goal of *Mutterberatung* ("Advice for Mothers") was intimately linked to single motherhood. The Welfare Ministry, which created centers for maternal advice immediately after the war, wrote as late as 1930 that the *Mutterberatungsstellen* provided "medical care for illegitimate and foster children cared for by the *Jugendamt* (Youth Authority) and supervision of health status of all children in the welfare system until they are required to be in school."⁶⁰ The municipal *Mutterberatungsstellen* were used by thousands of people a year, primarily workers and city employees.⁶¹ Roughly one-third of the women who used the *Mutterberatungsstellen* in the early 1930s were unmarried.⁶² City administrators originally designed the no-cost centers for women as a response to a perceived postwar spike in venereal disease. At the centers, women in the first four months of pregnancy were tested for syphilis. Those who visited the centers, should they be uncovered by health insurance, were initially incentivized to use the program by a cash bonus paid in the first month of their newborn's life.⁶³ Once in the system, these mothers could receive free pediatric advice on nutrition and care of infants. As we have seen with other city interventions into family health, doctors and city administrators were especially concerned to support breast feeding, noting that it was a greater determinant of infant health than the mothers' economic standing.⁶⁴ At the *Mutterberatungsstellen*, medical staff members

⁵⁴Leopold Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien* (Vienna, 1919), 40–41.

⁵⁵Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien*, especially 42–44.

⁵⁶Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien*, 46.

⁵⁷Sample forms are reprinted in Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien*, 70–71.

⁵⁸Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien*, 59.

⁵⁹Moll, *Die Reichsanstalt für Mutter- und Säuglingsfürsorge in Wien*, 86.

⁶⁰*Das Wohlfahrtsamt der Stadt Wien und seine Einrichtungen, 1921–1931* (Vienna, 1931), 52.

⁶¹"Wer kommt in der Mutterberatungsstelle?" *Neues Wiener Abendblatt* 295 (25 October 1925), 5.

⁶²Hinterleitner, "Das Süßeste," 89.

⁶³Charles A. Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler* (Berkeley, 1948), 510.

⁶⁴Moll, "Welches Kind ist anstaltbedürftig," *Zeitschrift für Kinderschutz Familien- und Berufsfürsorge* 16, no. 6 (June 1924): 118–24, 119.

measured, weighed, and examined infants with a social worker present, who was then obliged to follow up with home-visits. Some families considered this monitoring of maternal work as invasive, yet the *Mutterberatungsstellen* were some of the most successful clinics run by the city: at their height in 1932, more than 260,000 cases were seen.⁶⁵ Children born to single mothers had to report to these offices every month.

The *Mutterberatungsstellen*, advertised as the “people’s” equivalent to a bourgeois house-visit by a doctor, were designed to deliver medical care for poor women in addition to advice.⁶⁶ Although the cash bonus system elapsed quickly, Viennese mothers continued to use the centers in increasing numbers.⁶⁷ The *Mutterberatungsstelle* system expanded significantly throughout the First Republic, swelling to thirty-five clinics, each staffed by male and female doctors who provided “office hours,” including evening appointments, at locations throughout the city.⁶⁸ Women who used the centers for their infants demanded, and received, extended care for and advice about their children as they grew. Services were designed for older children, often in concert with *Jugendamt* initiatives for education and job placement. These centers explained back to women their bodies, along with the bodies of their children. The end goal of interactions at the *Mutterberatungsstellen* was to educate women about securing their own physical health along with that of their offspring. These services were among the most successful of Red Vienna’s social health interventions.

Two conceptual shifts in the care of children born outside of marriage occurred during the Great War. In 1916, state support was extended to “orphans” of single mothers; that is, children who had lost their fathers at the front, but whose parents were unmarried.⁶⁹ That same year, certain districts within the city of Vienna began using *Berufsvormundschaft* (professional guardianship) models of care for children without legal fathers, a process that extended to the entire city immediately after the war. This was overseen by the *Wiener Jugendamt* (Vienna Youth Authority), created in 1917.

In 1921, the *Wiener Jugendamt* took legal guardianship of all Viennese children born to single mothers after January 1st of that year.⁷⁰ By the late 1920s, it oversaw over 25,000 children.⁷¹ This guardianship began even before the child was born: the *Jugendamt* gave legal advice to pregnant, single women, helping to secure court recognition of the father and funds for a protected last six months of pregnancy and first three months of the child’s life.⁷² After its birth, that child had a public guardian who supervised him or her until they turned 14. This system replaced the private guardianship model that had been in place until the war and that had been roundly critiqued by children’s advocates.⁷³ Public guardians, who each oversaw the cases of roughly 450 wards, were trained by the city to closely monitor the children entrusted to their care.⁷⁴ They were responsible for making sure the children’s bodies were nourished, clothed, and monitored by regular visits to a municipal doctor.

By the later years of the First Republic, 83 percent of all Viennese children were born in maternity wards. This meant that most families, whether composed of a married couple or a single mother-and-child, were under the surveillance of city social workers, who were stationed in the

⁶⁵Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 513.

⁶⁶Karl Gottlieb, “Die Mütterberatungsstelle als Zentrum der ärztlichen Jugendfürsorge,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 25, no. 258 (November–December 1926): 113–14. See also “In der Mutterberatungsstelle,” *Das Kleine Blatt* 57 (4 April 1927): 1–2.

⁶⁷Julius Tandler, “Sozialdemokratische Wohlfahrtspflege” (1924) reprinted in *Hugo Breitner/Julius Tandler: Architekten des Roten Wien* (Vienna, 1997), 20.

⁶⁸“Die Mutterhilfe der Stadt Wien,” *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 26, no. 264 (November–December 1927): 186–89.

⁶⁹“Staatliche Erziehungsbeiträge für die unehelichen Kriegerwaisen,” *Blätter für das Armenwesen der Stadt Wien* 15, no. 180 (December 1916): 212–13.

⁷⁰*Das Jugendamt der Stadt Wien* (Vienna, 1933), 11–13.

⁷¹*Das Jugendamt der Stadt Wien*, 19. See also Hinterleitner, “Das süsseste,” 87.

⁷²Felix Faschank, “Die öffentliche Berufsvormundschaft,” Vortrag im Radio Wien am 24. Mai 1930, reprinted in *Blätter für das Wohlfahrtswesen* 29, no. 280 (July–August 1930): 153–56, 154. See also Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 512.

⁷³See, for example, Christian Klumker, “Die rechtliche Stellung der Berufsvormundschaft,” *Zeitschrift für Kinderschutz und Jugendfürsorge* 1, no. 2 (1900): 41–44; or Siegfried Wiess, “Die Aufgaben der öffentlichen Säuglingsfürsorge in Österreich,” *Zeitschrift für Kinderschutz und Jugendfürsorge* 1, no. 3 (1901): 73–79.

⁷⁴Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 513.

hospitals where infants were born.⁷⁵ These city social workers, often educated women of a bourgeois background, were in turn charged with visiting children within poorer or working-class milieus. The numbers were staggering: by the middle of the 1920s, 250,000 children were visited by a city representative.⁷⁶ A report on social workers in Vienna from 1930 marveled at the range of their activities: “they combine advice on child welfare to the mothers with a knowledge of standardized procedure in social problems . . . they arrange for state care of illegitimate and orphan children where necessary, and for reception into institutions of tuberculosis or mentally defective cases.”⁷⁷ Obviously, these social workers excelled at navigating the new city systems, which must have been a boon to single, working mothers. It is striking that the observer considered “illegitimate” children, children without any parents at all, and sick or disabled children all in one breath. These were indeed the categories that demanded surveillance and intervention. Sick and disabled children had specific physical needs that might only be met with the help of city funds, and the children of single mothers, along with orphans, often required “state care” to meet their material needs.

The institutions discussed here were designed to ensure and expand a healthy population. They also clearly mitigated the physical suffering of their young charges and patients. All the services outlined in this essay can be understood as forerunners to what we would now consider public health initiatives. In some ways, these four social services legislated equality for single mothers and their children; this did not mean legal equality, but rather equality of outcome (in this case physical survival). This equality came with a heightened level of surveillance and intervention into daily life. These services were intended to achieve a healthy citizenry, and to serve an impoverished population within the city. In planning for a working class of strong *neue Menschen*, the SDAP designed programs that pointedly included unmarried mothers and their children.

Lived-in Bodies

Whatever the intentions of the institutions designed to serve single mothers and their children, their records tell us little of the lived realities of their clients. Their bodies, however they might have been envisioned by health experts and population planners, were also lived-in, sensitive, organic structures for moving through the world. Embodied experiences provide a counterweight to the planned bodies that city leadership imagined itself cultivating. Turning to the life stories of these outsiders to polite society fleshes out the chronicle. Several personal narratives from the children of single mothers were gathered in the 1980s as part of a social history initiative and are now stored in the *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* in the University of Vienna’s Institute for Economic and Social History. Some have been collected, edited, and published; others remain in their written or transcribed form in the archive itself. In every case, the stories told were understandings of entire lives, and not merely the challenging childhood I highlight here. I have selected seven of them for what they tell us about both the patterns of being a fatherless child and the suggestions we can gather as to how the children themselves experienced their bodies and perceived their worth. All these stories were told by elderly women, reminiscing about their childhoods. Their bodies are bridges between the selves they constructed (and remembered) and the city that housed them. I am particularly interested in whether these women, as children, understood themselves as outsiders, and how their bodies bore this. I also highlight the ways they experienced physical privation and/or health.

As a historian, I am picking and choosing from stories within larger frameworks or narrative arcs, whose richness is not explored in this essay. Indeed, the narratives in full reflect lives lived in extraordinary times which include the Austrian Civil War, the Anschluss, the years of integration into Nazi Germany, and postwar occupation. I cannot address these fascinating topics within the testimonies. Rather, I seek to highlight only how these citizens remembered and narrated their childhood selves.

⁷⁵Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 510.

⁷⁶Andreas Weigl, “Fürsorgliche Belagerer”: Bürgerliche Fürsorgerinnen im ‘Roten Wien,’ *Studien zur Wiener Geschichte* 66 (2010): 319–35, 331.

⁷⁷“Child Welfare in Austria,” *The Lancet* 215, no. 5549 (January 1930): 35–36, 36.

Their experiences reflect the options available to children from outside marriage. The stories also suggest how the women, as children, perceived their everyday world and what actions were open to them and their mothers. Although it is striking that all the narrators are women, it was not a consideration in my choices.

Johanna Kalisch was born in 1903, when Vienna still used the foundling house system. As such, her childhood predates the period under review; however, because she herself became an unmarried mother, I have included her testimony. Like many unmarried mothers, Johanna's mother was a maid. Johanna did not know who her father was, but Johanna explains that he had left 1,000 *Kronen* to pay for her care. Johanna was born before the *Jugendamt* was created, so there was no city office that would have secured more support. Johanna left Vienna to stay with a family in Bohemia, seeing her mother only infrequently before her mother's early death. Johanna returned to Vienna as a teenager, but remembers being embarrassingly poor: "I was nineteen years old and had no money . . . my clothes were used, and my shoes came from [Julius] Tandler," referring to city welfare leadership.⁷⁸ In Vienna she became pregnant, and her lover taunted her that "illegitimate children beget more illegitimate children."⁷⁹ Despite promises of marriage, she found herself at the city hospital alone, undergoing a difficult birth. The attending doctor, after delivering the child, also taunted her, saying fatalistically: "and next year we'll see each other again."⁸⁰ In her autobiography, Johanna narrated the period as one of extreme tension, asking rhetorically, "[w]ould need and suffering have no end?"⁸¹ In this narrative, the body betrays Johanna as poor (through her appearance in used clothes and donated shoes). It also betrays her physically, with what was most likely an unplanned pregnancy. The doctor helping her judged her and her body as predicable, yet this, too, was mortifying.

Maria-Luis D. was born in Vienna in 1916. Her birth father was unknown to her, and her mother married a different man soon after Maria-Luis's birth. When she was very young, Maria-Luis spent days in bed with half-siblings owing to the extreme cold and lack of fuel in the home. Here young bodies were huddled together. Her mother worked in various households while her stepfather was at war. All of them became ill with typhus when Maria-Luis was two, and one sister died. At the age of three she was taken to the KÜST and remembers clearly "many long benches filled with children who had been given over for a place in a foster-home."⁸² Maria-Luis frames herself and her body here as one among many. Selected by a woman and taken by carriage to St. Pölten, outside the city, Maria-Luis lived in a comfortable house with a new family "like a princess" for two years. One afternoon, another woman she did not recognize came to fetch her—it was her birth mother, and Maria-Luis was separated from her foster mother in tears. However, she was allowed to take "all my beautiful things . . . clothes, shoes, coats, hats, and even my big doll."⁸³ These things comforted her and clad her body, keeping her warm. Maria-Luis returned to Vienna and to poverty. When she was six, her foster-brothers surprised her on the street, embracing her and telling her they had come to take her back to St. Pölten. They explained to Maria-Luis's mother that her foster mother cried terribly in her absence, and begged Maria-Luis's mother to allow her daughter to be adopted. They brought along with them so much food that Maria-Luis's household had enough to eat for days. Yet in the end, her birth mother refused, and Maria-Luis never saw this foster family again. She lived in poverty in Vienna with her mother and several half-siblings, who were often sick. These bodies were unstable. Maria-Luis and an older brother went without lunch at home because their mother knew that they would be fed a snack at school. Although there was a free municipal children's swimming pool nearby to which Maria-Luis was often invited by schoolfriends, she did

⁷⁸Johanna Kalisch, in Verein "Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen," hg. "Als lediges Kind geboren..." *Autobiographische Erzählungen 1865–1945* (Vienna, 2008): 159–88, 176.

⁷⁹Kalisch, "Als lediges Kind geboren..." 181.

⁸⁰Kalisch, "Als lediges Kind geboren..." 184.

⁸¹Kalisch, "Als lediges Kind geboren..." 185.

⁸²Maria-Luis D., in *Geboren 1916: Neun Lebensbilder einer Generation*, eds. Gert Dressel und Günter Müller (Vienna, 1996): 174–213, 176.

⁸³Maria-Luis D., *Geboren 1916*, 176.

not have a swimsuit.⁸⁴ A social worker brought her “something” (presumably food or clothes) whenever she visited, and Maria-Luis would go barefoot until late fall, when her mother would finally buy her used shoes. In her memoir, she noted that “we weren’t the only ones going barefoot at that time, lots of children then were barefoot.”⁸⁵ Here there is a kind of solidarity, but not the kind the SDAP imagined; it was a fellowship of poverty. After a visit with a *Jugendamt* doctor, Maria-Luis’s physical condition was determined to be unsatisfactory, and she was brought again to the KÜST. She spent some time in an orphanage where she was well-fed but remembers: “unfortunately this time went all too quickly, and soon I found myself at home again, where to my great surprise another child had been born.”⁸⁶ This part of Maria-Luis’s narrative is one in which her body suffers alongside many others.

Herta Koller was born in Vienna in 1922 to a mother with a rural background whose “nine or eleven” siblings had varying fathers, suggesting that Herta’s mother may have been born to a single mother. Herta’s experience was softened by an older sister, Paula. But her earliest memories are of terrible penury: “We stood on the street, had no money, no place to live, nothing. Paula had to go begging so that we got a little bread or some pennies. Nights we spent in a shelter. But many wouldn’t take us, because I was so small and they were afraid I would wet the bed.”⁸⁷ Again, the body betrays the narrator, causing embarrassment through the totally natural incontinence of a child. Both Paula and her mother considered suicide at this point: “Mother had thoughts of harming herself, but then there was us [to consider]. One day when we were by the Danube, Paula said to Mother, ‘Bind us to you, Mommy, and we’ll jump in, then we’ll have peace.’”⁸⁸ Like Maria-Luis, Herta’s sister Paula was able to imagine bodies bundled together, probably because that was how the family slept and maybe how they kept warm. Eventually, Paula was put into the care of a “good family” in Vienna and Herta went into a children’s home run by the city of Vienna (probably the KÜST). Both girls were later reunited with their mother, who had somehow collected money from their father, and settled in a new neighborhood after a few years. Their mother eventually remarried.

Maria Galhuber was born in Vienna in 1924 in what she calls the “Alsergrund foundling house.”⁸⁹ Foundling houses were gone by then, but we can surmise that she means a university-run clinic open to poor women. Her mother and her aunt had come from the countryside, and although her aunt got married in Vienna, her mother did not. Maria never learned a word about her father. She remembers asking her mother, as soon she “understood”: “How is it that other children have a father, and only I do not?”⁹⁰ According to her aunt, Maria’s mother had not wanted to bring her into the world “like a disgrace.”⁹¹ Maria’s body and very existence were thus marks of dishonor. Like many children of single mothers, she was eventually sent to live in the country with her grandparents, who were terribly poor. Although her mother, as well as an aunt and uncle, became “Viennese,” Maria’s remaining childhood was rural.

Luise Zipperle was also born at the Alsergrund clinic. Her mother came to Vienna during the war to work as a maid, met a man whom she mistakenly thought wanted to marry her, worked as long as she could while pregnant, and gave birth to Luise in 1922. She found employment as a washerwoman while Luise was an infant, and through Luise’s *Jugendamt*-mandated *Vormund* (city guardian, probably a social worker) secured a small dwelling. Luise’s early years were marked by hunger: “I remember very precisely: when I asked mother what there was to eat, she always said: ‘Whatever is left over from

⁸⁴Maria-Luis D., *Geboren 1916*, 181. Maria-Luis entered the pool in street clothes and remembered that by the time she had walked home, she was dry enough that her mother did not notice.

⁸⁵Maria-Luis D., *Geboren 1916*, 181.

⁸⁶Maria-Luis D., *Geboren 1916*, 182.

⁸⁷Herta Koller, “Kindheit,” From the collection “Dokumentation Lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen,” Institute für Wirtschafts- u. Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien, 2.

⁸⁸Koller, “Kindheit,” 3.

⁸⁹Maria Galhuber, “Meine Lebenserinnerungen,” From the collection “Dokumentation Lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen,” Institute für Wirtschafts- u. Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien, 1.

⁹⁰Galhuber, “Meine Lebenserinnerungen,” 1.

⁹¹Galhuber, “Meine Lebenserinnerungen,” 1.

yesterday,' and I would answer: 'but there was nothing left,' as we hadn't had anything that day. 'Well, there you go,' would my mother say, 'then there is sadly nothing.'⁹² Luise's body here is part of an absurd ritual in which it hungers, and when it does so, is reminded of a recurring pattern of that hunger. As a result, simple foodstuffs were a pleasure for Luise. She remembers the "splendid taste" of a glass of cold milk in the summer with a buttered roll, which "was for me a kingdom." Likewise, she has memories of a round roll with hot headcheese made from horsemeat, which she described as a "sadly all too seldomly-had delicacy."⁹³ She also remembers eating "dog meat," which she described as tasting delicious, as it stilled her hunger.⁹⁴ Her mother took a job at a sugar factory, which Luise remembers distinctly as it meant that twice a year, they received a free carton of sugar. Her mother, influenced by religious neighbors and voices that she heard in the building, made two pilgrimages to Mariazell. In 1935, hoping to find relief from her poverty, she took Luise on a third pilgrimage. Luise remembers being very hungry on the journey, but also a free breakfast at the rectory when they arrived. Even in movement away from Vienna, on a spiritual journey, her body interrupts her.

Ernestine Wollner was born in 1925 to an eighteen-year-old secretary who became pregnant while having an affair with her (married) employer. Ernestine lived with foster parents, arranged by the *Jugendamt*, for a year and a half, and then in a Viennese household composed of her mother (pointedly unnamed in the autobiography), her Aunt Jenny, and her grandmother. The women struggled with unemployment and did piecework at home. When she started school, Ernestine's mother advised her to tell the teacher that her father was dead. Like Maria, her physical body moved through a world in which embarrassment surrounded her simply because her mother was unmarried. Ernestine remembers visits from her *Jugendamt* guardian (most likely a social worker), who would find the house "spic and span" for the occasion: "the house was in order . . . and I was drilled to answer the questions of the official . . . who came by quite often."⁹⁵ Ernestine noted that, as she grew, the "official" came by less often, and while narrating this she immediately remarked on the regular coolness of her mother, suggesting that she felt a loss without the social worker in her life. "I tried to do everything right for Mama," she explained, but she was never praised or held. Her autobiography contains a poem of sorts:

Why does Mama love me not?
 Why doesn't she hug me?
 Why does she not kiss me?
 What have I done to you, Mama?
 So many questions—but no answer.⁹⁶

Ernestine never found the "motherlove" she sought from her own mother but did find it in her aunt. As an adult, Ernestine was able to hold her aunt's hand as she died, remarking about the moment in her autobiography, "beloved Jenny—your love helped me get over so much." In this narrative, the precariousness of Ernestine's home life could be papered over for the benefit of the visiting city officials, but her sense of worth vis-à-vis her mother could only be "gotten over" through the love of her aunt. The lack of her mother's love, remembered as a physical lack, stayed with her throughout her life.

Charlotte Keltner was born in Vienna on Valentine's Day in 1925. Her mother, Anna Daniel, was advised at the hospital to give her daughter up for adoption, for, in Charlotte's words, "what would a single woman in the year 1925 do with a child? She would never get a husband."⁹⁷ Charlotte lived with an aunt and uncle, and only learned of their true relationship to her from an older cousin when she

⁹²Luise Zipperle, in Verein "Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen," hg., *Als lediges Kind geboren...* *Autobiographische Erzählungen 1865–1945* (Vienna, 2008): 204–26, 207.

⁹³Luise Zipperle, "Als lediges Kind," 206.

⁹⁴Luise Zipperle, "Als lediges Kind," 208.

⁹⁵Ernestine Wollner, in Verein "Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen," hg., *Als lediges Kind geboren...* *Autobiographische Erzählungen 1865–1945* (Vienna, 2008): 247–84, 252.

⁹⁶Ernestine Wollner, "Als lediges Kind," 254.

⁹⁷Charlotte Keltner, in Eva Hiss, hg., *Ziehkinder* (Vienna, 1994): 194–97, 194.

was six. This did not trouble her: “it meant nothing to me and did not upend my spiritual equilibrium. They remained to me my Mama and Papa.”⁹⁸ Her birth mother, to whom Charlotte referred in her memoir as her “poor mother,” worked from four in the morning to ten at night in a bakery. Charlotte explained that Anna loved her but was so overworked that often when she visited, Charlotte was asleep. Nonetheless, on Sundays Anna would take Charlotte for walks and would give her “what her heart desired,” from strawberry soda to hot chocolate. “This was in 1930 a luxury.”⁹⁹ In her early years, the whole family lived in the sixteenth district in an apartment with one room and a kitchen. Charlotte slept in a bed with a “sister” (her cousin); her mother slept in another bed with her own sister and brother-in-law. In 1932, Charlotte’s aunt and uncle received a spot in a municipal apartment building, which she described as a “paradise” with multiple rooms and a balcony. She played soccer in a nearby field, sledded and skated in the winter, and described her new life as “splendid.”¹⁰⁰ She enjoyed freedom and space to move in, and playing with the forty other children in the courtyard of the new building. In 1934, her apartment was on the frontline of the February Austrian Civil War, and Charlotte remembered her “Mama” (and thus presumably her aunt) going out in the cold to find coal and catching a bullet in the back of her full rucksack, which protected her. Charlotte was nine years old, “terribly excited,” and unable to sleep in the confusion of knowing that people were shooting at each other.¹⁰¹ In this final narrative, bodies are endangered by both the lack of suitable housing (note that they also slept bundled together), and even once suitable housing is secured (through the threat of political violence).

These seven women, who recounted their births to single mothers (and in the case of Johanna her own unwed pregnancy) from the distance of a lifetime, describe their young bodies largely as places of suffering and anxiety. In their memories, finding food and shelter is just as memorable as school or work, suggesting that a functioning body was not taken for granted. Illness in the family is remembered clearly. So too with the cold—sometimes actual cold feet are remembered. In several stories, the body is reduced to its needs or functions. It is never remembered as strong, even though the bodies of these women were strong enough to withstand extreme conditions. When they were children, these women’s mothers surely struggled with the “uncertainty of existence” that socialist city leaders blamed for the declining birthrate in the city. Their fatherlessness was confusing and potentially embarrassing to the families that raised them. They were often poor enough to fixate on food, or the lack thereof, in their memories. Their mothers might have come to Vienna from the countryside to work, and there was considerable movement between rural and urban areas in their stories. Viennese municipal support in their lives, in the form of the hospitals they were born in, guardians and social workers, foster homes and the KÜST, shoes, and even the city housing project that eventually housed Charlotte’s family, were structures that kept them alive. Although city services monitored and ameliorated suffering, the children in these life histories cannot be understood as thriving. Their pleasure in food, warm clothing, and secure housing is palpable, suggesting that all were perceived as luxuries. That they survived at all was an achievement.

The survival of these women is a testament to the efficacy of Red Vienna’s institutions, but also a reminder that the Enlightenment project in which these institutions were situated could not fully prevent these children’s bodies, or selves, from suffering. It is also clear that these individuals did not perceive themselves as part of a “coming generation” that would renew the city, as much as leaders like Tandler might refer to them as such. There is very little class consciousness in their memories: no socialist sport festivals nor membership in the *Rote Falken*, the socialist youth group. Instead, these women remember being outsiders to the communal experience of living in and building up Red Vienna.

⁹⁸Charlotte Keltner, *Ziehkinder*, 194.

⁹⁹Charlotte Keltner, *Ziehkinder*, 195.

¹⁰⁰Charlotte Keltner, *Ziehkinder*, 195.

¹⁰¹Charlotte Keltner, *Ziehkinder*, 195.

Wolfgang Kaschuba has described *Alltag* (everyday life) as “an experiential space, rooted in the life world, where individual need and social ‘commonsense’ must repeatedly come into new agreements and arrangements within a horizon of values.”¹⁰² Commonsense is an apt word for the social interventions that Red Vienna attempted in women’s and children’s lives. They needed food, clothes, and shelter. What these women remember about their everyday lives is a window into the achievements, limited as they are, of the city in keeping an interwar generation alive and relatively healthy. However, as these stories make clear, the productive, male *neue Menschen* of Red Vienna celebrated in city publications, were in fact sometimes cold, hungry girls. Children of single mothers were outsiders to the fantasy of *neue Menschen*—literally out in the cold. The narratives they created show signs of corporeal practices like bundling together for warmth or going without food or shoes out of necessity. Their bodies, although functioning, were marked in many of these stories by privation and ill health.

Infant mortality rates, so strikingly depicted in the infographics at the beginning of this article, did in fact decline in Red Vienna. Whereas the mortality rate per 1,000 live births had been 158 in 1918, by 1933 it was down to 60.¹⁰³ Yet mortality rates among infants of single mothers remained much higher than those of married mothers throughout the period.¹⁰⁴ Social Democratic city leadership, which understood infant mortality as “a direct measure of the cultural level of a people,” worked to combat these numbers and increase the “organic capital” of Vienna.¹⁰⁵ The bodies, both social and individual, that had suffered so greatly during the war, were understood as sites of regeneration under the stewardship of the SDAP. Certainly, the interventions of the city played a role in mitigating suffering and conserving its population. Red Vienna sought to control and harness bodily power, in part, by securing the health of unmarried women and their children.

“He who builds palaces for children [also] tears down the walls of prisons.” This phrase, attributed to Julius Tandler, was etched on the entrance to Red Vienna’s *Kinderübernahmestelle* (KÜST). The liberating sentiment, deeply influenced by Tandler’s pronatalism, must be balanced with the knowledge that many of these “palaces for children” were also, at the same time, places for monitoring, controlling, and re-classifying marginalized children as useful to the city.¹⁰⁶ Although the KÜST served a varied clientele, the same tensions hold true for the single mothers and children documented throughout this essay. The children of unmarried mothers were carefully cultivated through the *Zentralkinderheim*, *Mutterberatungsstellen*, and *Jugendamt*. Their bodies were the base units in which they as individuals could be useful to Red Vienna; therefore, they were sites of management and control. They also, as we have seen, were the gateways to these citizens’ experience of the world, with its pleasures and disappointments. These bodies had the hopes, duties, and potential of Red Vienna projected upon them. They were critical to the self-understanding of single mothers and their children, in that their bodies physically suffered and survived. By attending to their stories, this essay contextualizes the innovative institutions designed to protect and produce the social body, and reclaims bodies objectified and maximized by city institutions for individual meaning.

¹⁰²Wolfgang Kaschuba, “Popular Culture and Workers’ Culture as Symbolic Orders,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdke, trans. William Templer (Princeton, 1995), 169–97, 170.

¹⁰³*Statistisches Taschenbuch Wien*, 1933, as cited in Gulick, *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, 514. The rates in 1918 were certainly inflated by the starvation blockade of Vienna, so the celebrated improvement may be less impressive.

¹⁰⁴Wilhelm Hecke, “Die Unehelichen in Oesterreich,” in *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, ed. Ludwig Elster (Jena, 1930), 573–92, 591.

¹⁰⁵Kautsky, *Der Kampf gegen den Geburtenrückgang*, 8.

¹⁰⁶For a sensitive, complex reading of the KÜST and city initiatives for children’s well-being, see Gudrun Wolfgruber, “Messbares Glück? Sozialdemokratische Konzeptionen zu Fürsorge und Familie im Wien der 1920er Jahre,” *L’homme: Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 10, no. 2 (1999): 277–94. The old KÜST is today a center for children named the “Julius-Tandler-Heim.”