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Sommario/riassunto

This paper considers narratives about traumatic pasts, using interviews

with visitors of the two exhibitions about the war crimes of the German

Wehrmacht, shown in Germany and Austria 1995 and 2002, as examples. Numerous justification and legitimization strategies are involved in public and private discourses. The study claims that official genres, such as school books or TV documentaries, still launch narratives which exculpate the German Wehrmacht as institution, although the evidence provided by historians and the exhibitions is overwhelming. The topoi used (such as 'doing one's duty'; 'all wars are the same'; and so forth) are to be found in similar debates in other countries as well. Hence, this case study illustrates patterns of argumentation which occur much more generally than only in the specific national contexts studied in detail here.