Heidi Hakkarainen

Final pre-print draft of the book chapter, published in C*atastrophe, Gender and Urban Experience, 1648–1920.* (Eds.) Deborah Simonton and Hannu Salmi. Routledge Research in Gender and History. Routledge, New York 2017, 157–176.

Chapter 9: City Upside Down: Laughing at the Flooding of the Danube in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna

Introduction

'The Blue Danube', composed by Johann Strauss the Younger, was performed for the first time in 1867 in a popular entertainment venue called the Dianasaal. This was a place where the Viennese burgers bathed in the water of the Danube during summertime and organised concerts and balls in winter.[1] The waltz, which had been said to follow an organic rhythm of peaceful waves, became an emblematic melody of the era when the capital of the Habsburg Empire grew into a modern metropolis. Lyrics attached to it later celebrated the river as a calm stream, uniting hearts in its shores across the empire.[2]

Yet, only five years earlier in 1862, the flooding of the river caused a disaster which threatened urban existence in Vienna. In February 1862, the surface of the Danube rose over 15 feet due to an ice jam and cold water covered several parts of the city, mainly the suburban areas of Brigittenau and Leopoldstadt. Flooding lasted from 1 February to 9 February, making the city unfamiliar and unsafe for over a week. It made 4000 people lose their homes and caused the loss of several lives.[3]

As an urban catastrophe, flooding was not a singular event in Vienna but it had a history of its own. The flood in 1862 was part of a long continuum of urban disasters caused by the great Danube which runs through the city on its way from the Alps to the Black Sea. The city and the river had co-existed for centuries and severe floods had troubled Vienna ever since it evolved from a Roman camp into a medieval town.[4] For example, in the 1340s, floods occurred almost every year and, together with an earthquake and plague, wiped out approximately one third of the population of the

city. Accordingly, the Viennese had lived with the threat of floods for centuries; some of them had personal memories of the most recent major flooding of the Danube, which took 74 lives and happened only thirty-two years earlier in 1830.[5]

However, the 1862 flood discussed in this chapter was significant because it took place at a time when rapid urban development radically changed not only the role of the river in urban life but also attitudes and ideas related to nature. The dependence on the Danube as a source of materials and means of waste disposal was diminished in the nineteenth-century. At the same time, it became more important to control the great river as the city expanded from under 500,000 inhabitants in 1857 into over two million in 1910. There was a need to protect the growing population and infrastructure and create more space for them.[6] The flood in 1862 was the final impetus for the regulation of the Danube, which was carried out between 1869–1875.[7] The natural disaster thus had an effect on the modernisation of Vienna as it showed a demand for technological development and a new kind of organisation of space.[8]

Furthermore, the flooding in 1862 meant not just destruction of the material environment but it challenged mental hierarchies and categories that shaped the processes of comprehending and organising subjective experiences in the rapidly changing city.[9] The disaster turned Vienna temporarily upside down. Different kinds of rules and borders were crossed in the state of emergency and urban settings were transformed into unfamiliar scenes full of chaos and disruptions. Because the organisation of the nineteenth-century city was so inseparably interwoven with masculine ideas of order, reason, self-control and progress,[10] the disaster created a threat to modern middle-class masculinity. This chapter pursues this crisis from a cultural historical perspective by looking at how the urban catastrophe was discussed in humorous magazines during and after the flood.

Flood humour

In early 1860s, there were four major humorous magazines in Vienna: *Figaro, Kikeriki, Humorist* and *Hans Jörgel*, which were all aimed at a middle-class audience. All these humorous prints followed events during and after the flood. Whereas *Humorist* and *Hans Jörgel* represented an

older tradition of humorous magazines, dating from the *Vormärz*, *Figaro* was founded in 1857 and *Kikeriki* in 1861.Their political views were liberal, even though *Kikeriki* started as a democratic paper but veered towards anti-Semitism in the 1880s.

Making fun of such a serious and horrifying topic as a catastrophe is not surprising considering that humour often relates to disturbing topics, cultural taboos and things that cause uncertainty in society. According to folklorist Alan Dundes, humour often relates to cultural fears and anxieties.[11] As the interest in humour research has grown in the twentieth century, a wide selection of scholarly literature has investigated humour's role as a cultural pattern helping to cope with threatening or frightening experiences such as oppression, war or catastrophe.[12]

The historical study of humour calls for sensitivity for the temporal nature of humour; considering something as funny is always tied to a certain time and place.[13] Like any other aspect of culture, the realms of the comical are constantly changing.[14] Accordingly, as historian Robert Darnton has argued, one has to recognise a different way of thinking of the people of the past in order to 'get the joke'.[15] Reading humorous representations, therefore, requires a process of pulling apart different contexts or meanings that these humorous accounts combine and setting them in a larger historical and cultural framework.

Consequently, the following analysis proceeds by cross-reading humorous sources with other non-humorous popular narratives on the disastrous flood, especially newspaper reports from *Wiener Zeitung* and *Die Presse* and non-humorous popular literature published after the catastrophe such as F. Hofmann's *Die Ueberschwemmung von Wien und Umgebung im Februar 1862* (*The Flooding of the City of Vienna and its Surroundings in February 1862*). The focus will be on three aspects that emerged in humour as sources of uncertainty: mistrust towards city authorities, losing control over the body and possessions, and reversal of class hierarchies.

Uncertainty and Doubt

The catastrophe had a vast impact on the city. In Brigittenau alone 1500 people had to be evacuated by 5 February.[16] The next day 2860–3000 homeless people were in need of accommodation and they were lodged in local inns and other facilities. Later it was estimated that

4000 people altogether had to leave their homes because of the flood.[17] Lack of drinking water and food was also a major problem. Flooded areas were isolated and they could only be reached through waterways. This increased a sense of uncertainty.

In the early phase of the disaster, in particular, this uncertainty was a major theme for jokes and cartoons. In fact, there is remarkable little information surviving on the flood. For example, the authorities never published numbers of casualties or information on wounded or missing persons. The citizens followed events mainly through daily papers, which published reports on damages in Vienna and in other cities together with exact measurements of the water level in different parts of the Danube.[18] Reports were scattered and fragmented; growing in number only after the danger was starting to pass. The first facts about the number of evacuated people and reports on casualties emerged only after 5 February.[19] Humorous magazines, as well, delayed their response to the disaster, so that most of the jokes and cartoons were published at a time when the water was already starting to subside.

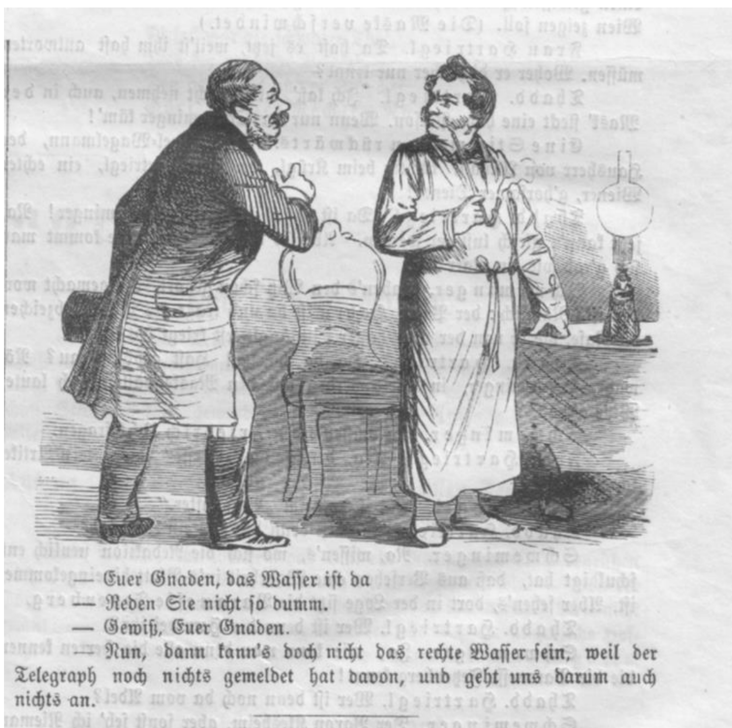

Figure 9.1‘Your Grace, the water is here’. *Figaro* 7 February 1862. Souce:ÖNB.

As the danger was still relatively high, *Figaro* published a cartoon picturing an upper-class male with his servant, informing him that ‘Your Grace, the water is here.’ His master does not, however, believe this because the telegraphed news had not yet reported the problem. He states that it must be wrong water and therefore, ‘none of their concern’.[20] The idea of rising danger that was faster than printed literature was discussed also in other humorous representations.[21] There clearly was a view that in a state of emergency it was more important to rely on the authority of lived experience than on the authority of texts.

This notion refers to the fact that newspapers and other urban texts were crucial for the middle classes in fathoming the city and orienting in urban life.[22] However, since information on the disaster was regulated in the public sphere, the authority of the texts was overruled and the body was transformed into a source of knowledge and action. Blind belief in texts was ridiculous and laughable like the upper-class gentleman who relied more on telegraphs than on the lived experience of the servant who came to warn him.

The recent studies of urban catastrophes have suggested that we should pay more attention to the connections between ‘natural’ disasters and social processes, as human actions that both lead to natural hazards and are altered and shaped by them. When looking at urban catastrophes from a historical perspective, it is important to acknowledge that the meanings and effects of urban catastrophes depend on the historical contexts in which they take place. Clashes between human civilisation and the physical environment have been observed and interpreted in different ways in causes of history and there is a body of work dealing with the cultural responses and social implications of natural catastrophes in different periods of time. One of the recent studies, *Historical Disasters in Context* (2012) looked at the role of catastrophes in making historical processes and shaping experiences and knowledge.[23]

The question of knowledge was central for Viennese humour on the flood in 1862 and it was intimately interlinked with questions of power and authority. The violence of the flood seemed to be silenced by the authorities, which means that there is no surviving information on the number of

casualties. *Die Presse* pointed this out on 5 February by writing that apparently no human lives had been lost but because there were no official bulletins given to the public, accurate facts about the matter were missing. [24]

Even though the official sources fell silent about lost lives, some scattered information on the horrors that took place in February 1862 can be found in the newspapers. In comparison to the *Wiener Zeitung*, which gave only sparse facts on the on-going disaster, *Die Presse* published more detailed accounts on the catastrophe. On February 6, it reported on what was described as the first known death case: the carpenter Joseph Stauber and his foster child were rescued together with day labourer Maria Schellibor on a lighter near the left bank on the Danube Canal. However, the lighter fell over and even though Stauber and Schellibor were rescued from the water, the foster child died.[25] In another account, the foster child was identified as a twelve-year old girl.[26] The next day more horrible cases were reported: in Brigittenau house Nr. 100, a drowned man was found floating in the water in his bed. In Leopoldstadt, a worker was killed while passing a yard covered in water. In nearby Taborelinie, a small wooden cabin was dragged to the shore and two children were found dead inside.[27]

However, despite these sensational details, no lists of victims were ever published. The remaining information on the casualties is thus confusing and contradictory. Hofmann's account *Die Ueberschwemmung von Wien und Umgebung im Februar 1862* neglects the incidents described in *Die Presse* and names only one accident in addition to the case of the foster child. On 6 February, at 4am, a rescue boat capsized on a boulevard covered with water up to five feet high and four people were killed.[28] So, clearly the flood of 1862 took human lives even though the number of deceased was never given to the public,

Silence might have been a conscious strategy to avoid panic. As previous research has shown, press publicity in the late 1850s and early 1860s in Vienna was not only heavily censored but also consciously manipulated in order to secure established political order.[29] The flood in 1862 took place at a time when the old censorship regulations, dating from a period after the 1848 revolution

and created to secure the restoration of Neo-Absolutism, was on its last gasp. The next year, in 1863, a new press law came into force, giving more liberties for the press and ensuring a rapid growth of humorous periodicals in Vienna.[30]

Notably, all newspapers reported promptly on measures that the state and city authorities were taking against the catastrophe. For example, the *Wiener Zeitung,* the official mouthpiece of the government, published on February 7 on the front page that the Emperor Franz Joseph and Mayer Zelinka had been exploring the flood plain on a boat.[31] As discussed later in this chapter, the heroism of Emperor Franz Joseph and the charity of upper-class citizens were heavily highlighted in the press, whereas elements of death, danger and violence were absent with the exception of few horrifying details.

However, more critical tones and fears were ventilated through popular humour. On February 8, the humorous magazine *Hans Jörgel* published an imaginary letter of the title figure to his brother-in-law in the province stating that he had witnessed with his 'own eyes' that the destruction was far worse than that announced in the papers. Because the Hans Jörgel figure was a prototype of fool, writing in casual dialect, he was able to say aloud things that were otherwise prohibited.[32] The letter ended up entailing an open critique on the public authorities for both failing to respond to the danger properly and covering up their own mistakes. [33]

Figaro and *Kikeriki* magazines, too, ridiculed the city council and the provincial Surveyor's Office for inadequate measures against the disaster.[34] On 13 February *Kikeriki* published a cartoon titled 'Viennese Flood Descriptions' which was a pictorial narrative that combined the sense of urgency with satirical ridicule towards the city authorities. The first two pictures depict how the danger increased in Brigittenau every hour. The third picture shows how a guard posted near the Kettenbrücke Bridge is not the least bit interested that the bridge is in danger of collapsing because of the weight of fleeing people. He states that the problem is the responsibility of the city authorities in Leopoldstadt. In the fourth picture, a commission is investigating the canal while one of the

houses suffers a dangerous crack and the entire crowd inside has to be evacuated in case of collapse.

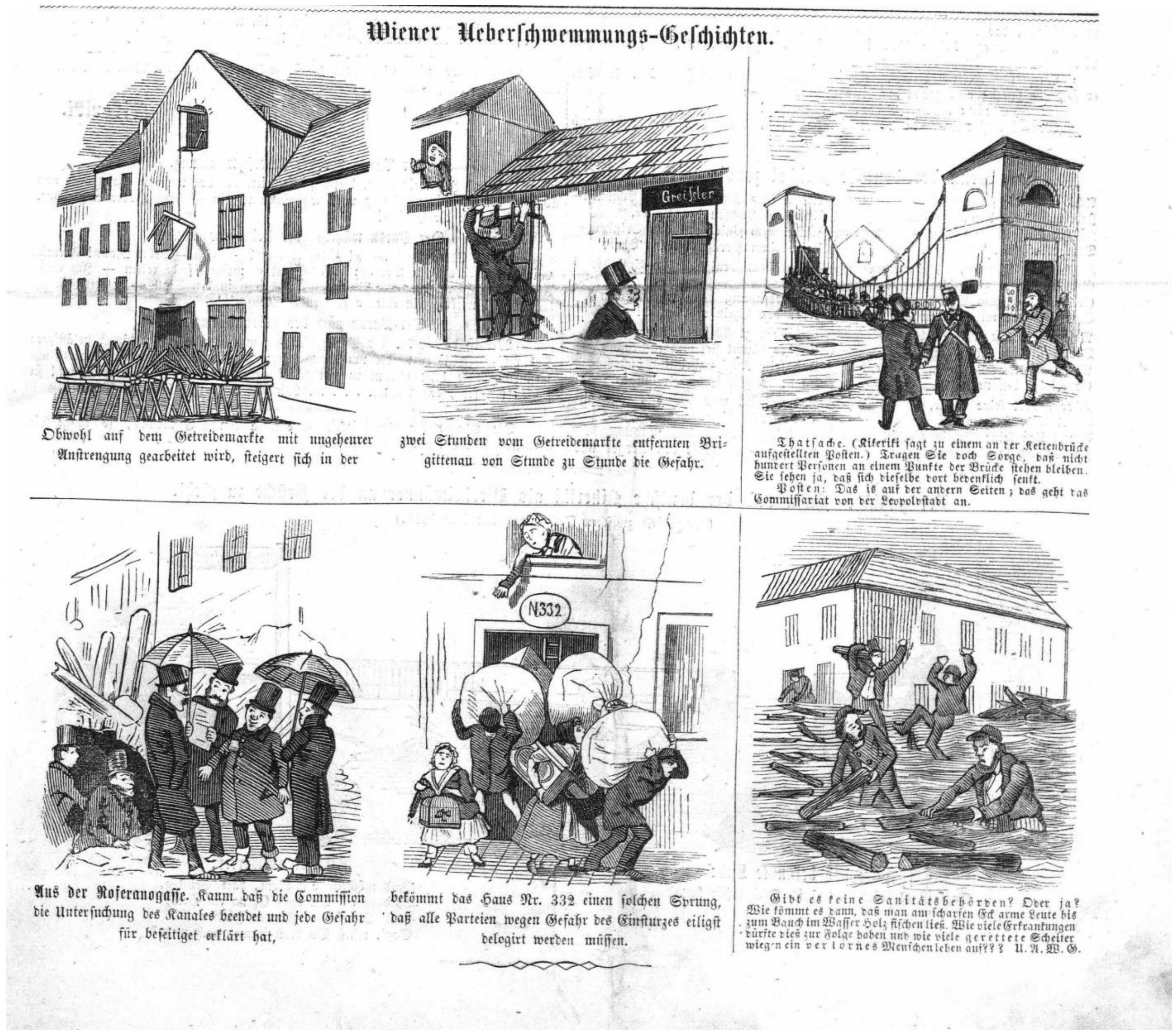

Figure 9.2 ‘Viennese Flood Descriptions’. *Kikeriki* 13 February 1862. Source: ÖNB.

The fifth picture asks how is it possible that poor people are allowed to collect wood waist-deep in the water and how many diseases and lost human lives this may cause.[35] In the same issue the chief editor, Ottokar Franz Ebersberg, alias O.F. Berg, heavily criticised the city council for inadequate measures in dealing with the catastrophe, especially for not using soldiers in the rescue operations.[36]

The transformation of the material environment in 1862, and earlier, was a source of curiosity and fright. On 5 February, *Die Presse* reported on the disorder and misery in the damaged areas: people were crying for help on the roofs where they had escaped. Dead animals, such as drowned cows and objects, even small cottages, were drifting in the water. Street lanterns had gone out and numerous cries for help echoed everywhere in the dark night lit with nothing but torches.[37] Later an account written retrospectively described the unrecognisable and strange landscape in great detail, depicting how city squares turned into seas and how two elks were seen swimming all the way to the Nordbahnhof in search of rescue.[38]

There is a long tradition of Viennese visualisations of floods, which all portray how water suddenly takes over places and transforms them into unfamiliar landscapes.[39] Both visual and textual accounts on floods often contained words like 'terrible' referring to the horror of the disaster. It has been suggested that horror and humour have in common the unfamiliarisation of the familiar.[40] Furthermore, especially after Freud, humour has been related more to feelings of anxiety and uncanniness than pleasure.[41] The sudden invasion of nature over the city, which made people lose control over their everyday environment, was something that caused deep structural uncertainty.

Losing control over bodies and possessions

Not just the body, but space, experience and even humour, are gendered concepts. Recent studies have emphasised that gender should be understood widely as a category that organises human relations and social order by creating differences and hierarchies.[42] Furthermore, especially after Judith Butler, the performative nature of gender has been under inspection in a wide range of scholarly studies that ask how not only femininity but also masculinity are constantly reconstructed through action.[43] Gender, as a social category, is also historically determined. As historian Ute Frevert has noted, the nineteenth century established new definitions for gender, which intermingled with the bourgeois self-understanding and class identity. In bourgeois society, gender

difference became a constitutive principle in understanding human existence and organising social relations.[44]

Also, George L. Mosse has located the nineteenth century as a constitutive era for the creation of modern masculinity. Ideas of manhood did not just shape nineteenth century political ideas such as nationalism, but masculine ideals of rationality and self-constraint transpired modern society on a deeper level as they became incorporated in the ideals of organising space and society. Middle class ideals of masculinity were formative for the modern individual, as ideals of manhood were used to determine normative patterns of behaviour and social interaction. Masculinity was constructed trough the male body, which became a key symbol for immaterial meanings such as honour, courage and control.[45] The flood formed a threat to all of these ideals. The transformation of the material world changed people's actions in space into unconventional behaviour as they were forced to climb on roofs, sail on rescue boats and struggle with natural elements that had taken over the city.[46] Precisely because gender was so much embedded in the city space and practices attached to it, the catastrophe raised uncertainty concerning gender.

Figure 9.3 'Regulation of filth in Glacis'. *Kikeriki* 20 February 1862. Source: ÖNB.

Over a week after the flood, *Kikeriki* published a cartoon titled 'Regulation of filth in Glacis' portraying a scene in which a group of people, all men, are sailing on a raft in the middle of the city, in a former fortification area, which soon hosted both Parliament and the City Hall. The accompanying text says that since the heavy rains have transformed the Glacis area into a 'sea of filth', the city council has organised a ferry to conduct the commission's inquiries and rescue respectable passers-by from the mud. [47]

The cartoon points directly into the most frightening aspect of unruly nature: the flood threatened traditional qualities and values of masculinity because it made men lose control over their everyday environment and over their own bodies. Following the famous notions of Henri Bergson, laughter is produced as human beings are momentarily transformed into things, unable of controlling their own movements.[48] The image of men turning into mere things was a theme that was also revoked in serious narrative patterns of horror and danger: Accounts on the terror and fright caused by the flood described how even the sturdiest rescue boats were turned into toys by the waves as the tides were tossing heavy pontoons around as if they were merely playing balls. Men and women were said to be hanging to chimneys on the roof in order not to be tossed into the surfs.[49]

The mixture of horror and comicality of losing control also emerged later in 1863 in a reminiscence of the catastrophe: A man is standing in the water in panic, unable to help women and children who seek safety in him. In the foreground, a baby is floating away in a cradle.[50] This might seem an unexceptionally cruel joke, but it was nothing unusual for the late nineteenth-century Viennese public who enjoyed black humour in general. A vast number of humorous texts and images were concerned with morbid topics such as violence and accidents, inclining towards black gallows humour.[51] Some distance was, however, clearly needed for this 'floating baby' cartoon as it was published many months after the catastrophe.

The ability to defy danger and protect women and children was a key characteristic of manhood, which was, especially in the nineteenth-century German dictionaries, associated with strength and courage.[52] Therefore, the fear of failing to fill the masculine ideal was ventilated in the realms of humour and socially punished by ridicule.[53]

The ideas of mud and filth were also crucial for the humorous representations of losing control. Flood water was not just water, but it was considered filthy, an impure mixture of water and human belongings. The idea of filth or dirt (Koth) was associated with the flood on several occasions. For example, *Der Humorist* magazine published on 8 February an 'Ode to the Flood' celebrating ironically the wet filth that was covering the streets:

> Ha!! – is it humanly possible?? – so much water!!
>
> O speak muses, is this God's commandment?
>
> The flood is swelling and ever more damp and wet
>
> Rolls down the streets the dreadful filth! […][54]

Descriptions of the disaster often depicted how the floodwater was carrying with it everyday artefacts such as house furniture, carriages, beams and street pavements.[55] The flood created a mixture of water and different items and objects swirling together in the city, and this compound of a natural element and human belongings made water both filthy and unsettling for the middle classes. [56] Accordingly, the filth refers to human material that is no longer owned but turned into waste.

Natural disasters are not only interpreted as catastrophes in terms of what kind of effects they have in human society, but they also make visible intersections between nature and society that normally go unnoticed.[57] Nature and the city are not opposite entities but nature is interwoven in the life of the cities in multifaceted ways.[58] Usually the natural and the social intersect in ways that are so settled and accepted that they seem given or 'natural'. For example in the late nineteenth-century, the Viennese bathing in the water of the Danube in Dianasaal had been absorbed in the bourgeois way of life.

However, disruptions and breaks in the cultural system make the encounters between natural and social visible. Disasters are an important object of study because they make visible the connections between nature and the city, unravelling various underlying assumptions and cultural codes that are embedded in material spaces and spatial practices attached to them.[59] The flood

had thus multifaceted cultural implications because of its transformative power over the material world that had sustained social relations and embodied cultural meanings and practices.

Reversal of social hierarchies

One of the humorous magazines, *Kikeriki,* used the disaster to make political jokes on the reversal of class hierarchies. These jokes are based on a situation in which the state of an emergency turns the world upside down; upper-class gentlemen lose their power and servants suddenly become leaders. For example, this joke presents a scene in which a shoemaker is searching refuge with his children in a strange house:

> Shoemaker: So children, just bring everything here to the first floor, where are the bunnies?
>
> Landlord: But please bear in mind –
>
> Shoemaker: You should better go and make sure that the coffee will be finished. Children, are the coal scuttles already upstairs? Put them there on the four-poster bed.
>
> Landlord: What? For God's sake – my poor bed –
>
> Shoemaker: The scuttles must be saved. You better start heating the room and take care of the coffee or I will throw you into the water.
>
> Landlord: I will do everything, just don't ruin my furniture. […][60]

The scene continues in the same manner as the lower-class shoemaker takes over the house with his kids. The wife of this imaginary family is absent, which implicitly evokes an association that the upper-class landlord is turned into the role of the wife, making coffee and fussing over people ruining his nice furniture. The shoemaker is taking advantage of the abnormal situation and enjoying it to the full, stating that 'a flood like this doesn't happen every day'.[61] He makes the landlord sleep on the floor and clean his boots. Each time the landlord tries to protest, the shoemaker threatens to throw him into the water.

In this example, the reversal of hierarchies of class and power involved ideas about positive active masculinity and negative passive femininity. The upper-class house owner seems comical because

he acts in a feminine way and at the same time the masculine shoemaker dominates the situation with physical threat. This scene seems to create an underlying fear towards the underclasses who could riot during the catastrophe and take over the city with physical violence.

Understanding this joke required an acknowledgement of a hierarchy of gender which contradicted the hierarchy of class. Femininity in man was ridiculous despite of their social standing and heritage. Making a man seem feminine was an old strategy for ridicule that the Viennese audience was familiar with; cross-dressing to reverse gender roles had been part of the European humorous tradition since the Middle Ages.[62] In the joke about the landlord and the shoemaker, the ridiculous idea of a feminine man was resurrected in a political context of post-1848 Vienna. Ideas about gender were thus crucial for making the reversal of class relations funny.

In another example from the same issue that came out 13 February, when the danger had already passed, the political message was more explicitly articulated. This joke is based on a three-fold structure presenting a baron before, during and after the flood. During this period, his attitude toward the working-class men changes from fear and hostility to fake solidarity, which, however, vanishes as soon as the danger is over. [63]

Even though catastrophes have been viewed in terms of the nature-culture hierarchy, they should not be reduced to a clash of nature and culture. In fact, the situation is very often more complex. Catastrophes bring together both natural and cultural factors and these entail multifaceted social contexts that shape both the catastrophic events and their interpretations. For example, because of social practices and spatial arrangements, different social groups have unequal protection against catastrophes and not all are affected by the catastrophe in the same way. Disasters are thus approached increasingly as ‘processes’ instead of singular ‘events’, resulting from the fact that catastrophes are often neither sudden nor simply destructive.[64]

The political context of Neo-Absolutism that started after the repression of the 1848 revolution shaped both the development of the catastrophe and how it was interpreted. Importantly, suburban areas such as Leopoldstadt, Brigittenau and Neubau suffered the most severe damage, whereas bourgeois neighbourhoods and the aristocratic city centre managed to avoid major damage. This

reveals a clear hierarchy in social space, as poor working-class areas are usually more vulnerable to natural hazards than wealthy privileged parts of society. In Vienna there had been measures for centuries to regulate that part of the Danube Canal which ran near the city centre between Stephansplatz and Leopoldstadt. However, the larger tributaries and channels running near the growing underclass suburbs were less controlled until the 1869–1875 Danube regulation concentrated them in one riverbed.[65]

In humorous accounts, catastrophe affected not just people's relationship to their environment but to other people as well. As the space was suddenly transformed, social relations, embedded in space, were suddenly shaken. For example, the following joke "On the days of the Flood" portrayed a situation in which the disaster leads to unexpected behaviour. An office chief wants to know why one of the clerks did not show up at work the day before:

> (Office chief to a reticent clerk): Mr. Schaffelhuber, why were you not in the office yesterday?
>
> Schaffelhuber. (Abashedly): Please forgive me Mr. Councillor, I am…I have…"
>
> Councillor: Now speak up! What excuse do you have for yourself? Were you ill – or did you suffer from some other misfortune? I want to know the truth!"
>
> Schaffelhuber: I beg for your forgiveness Mr. Councillor; – I was with my wife fishing wood from the Danube. [66]

According to classical theories of laughter, humour most often involves a sense of superiority, incongruity or an element of relief.[67] This example seems to contain all of these aspects. The sophisticated and respectful masculinity is turned banal and ridiculous through action that does not fit into the realms of accepted behaviour. However, there is also an element of relief. The cause for the clerk's absence from work during the catastrophe turns out to be less sinister than feared: he had been fishing wood from the river – together with his wife.

The comicality of the punchline refers to the fact that even reactions to catastrophes have their own gendered modes of proper action and behaviour. For example, in eighteenth-century

Switzerland floods were so common that certain practices were created to deal with them. These had very distinctive gender roles as men worked on reinforcing river embankments and women collected valuable material from the water and brought cattle to a higher ground for safety.[68] Collecting material from the water was thus an activity associated with women and the lower classes, such as workers fishing wood from the water in *Kikeriki's* cartoon discussed earlier.

It seems that most of the jokes revolved around the idea of losing masculinity and only a few humorous accounts involved women. Even if women did appear in the realms of humour, they were there to build up tension for comical effect. Only once did a woman appear as the butt of humour in a joke, in which a middle-class Hausfrau mistakes a commission member collecting clothes for charity for flood victims for a Jewish beggar.[69] In serious narratives as well, women had supporting roles. Donations and charity work were the most important arenas in which women appeared in public. For instance, the paper *Wiener Zeitung* published each day names of those who had donated for flood victims and many of the names were women's.[70] Charity was thus an accepted way for women to take part in efforts against a catastrophe.

As noted in earlier research on the history of catastrophes, natural disasters often have multifaceted cultural consequences. Catastrophes have implications not just on the material world, but on ideas, attitudes and emotions as well. Catastrophes and disasters have worked at different periods of time as triggers of cultural change.[71] Even though the transformative power of the Viennese catastrophe should not be exaggerated, the flood in 1862 was clearly not just a destructive force, but it had also a creative side, evoking new ideas about transgressing cultural borders and hierarchies. The flood had a vast subversive potential. This seems to be the main reason why the serious narratives of the flood, published in newspapers and popular printed books, strived at creating a story of masculine heroism of the Emperor Franz Joseph.

After the catastrophe: Reconstructing a story of the emperor's masculine heroism

After the flood, popular literature was used to create a narrative of conquering the danger and restoring control over the city. These narratives highlighted the role of the emperor Franz Joseph as a masculine and brave rescuer of his subjects. Consequently, the non-humorous popular

literature re-shaped the narratives about the catastrophe into a story of masculine heroism and survival of the empire.

In F. Hofmann's *Die Ueberschwemmung von Wien und Umgebung im Februar 1862* the emperor was presented as a brave and strong father figure who defied danger in order to protect his people and his capital from destruction.[72] Another non-humorous booklet called *Kaiser und sein Volk bei der Ueberschwemmung in Wien 1862* told the same story in a more poetic form: As the city was turning into 'an endless sea', the only person who could rescue the poor Viennese from 'an ascending watery grave' was the emperor.[73]

In the popular literature of the time, the emperor embodied the ideals of strength and courage that were so constitutive for modern masculinity. As the others are struck with fear when confronting the elements, the emperor holds his courage and leads others into a fight against the violent forces of nature. The same story was also visualised in a contemporary printed flyer, presenting lyrics for a song 'The Flood in Vienna', seen below.[74]

Figure 9.4 An Image from the flyer 'The Flood in Vienna'. Source: ÖNB.

As Franz Mauelshagen has noted, disasters are neither unique nor exceptional and different kinds of cultural practices have evolved for interpreting catastrophes and commemorating them.[75] In different historical times there have been various religious, political and scientific interpretative patterns for floods and other catastrophes.[76] For example, in the German-speaking coastal area of the North Sea, the ways of explaining floods changed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, from divine punishment and God's wrath to a work of nature.[77]

As discussed earlier at the beginning of this chapter, floods have a long history in Vienna, and the overflowing of the Danube in 1862 was perceived and comprehended as a part of a larger historical continuum. Because of this, there were established narrative practices and coping strategies of dealing with the disaster. For centuries the royal rulers of the Habsburg dynasty had used the Danube to present and strengthen their political power; festivities were organised on the riverbank, imperial signs appeared in the regulation plans and it was conventional to thank the sovereign for conquering the disaster after a flood had taken place.[78] The celebration of the emperor and the 'restoration of natural order'[79] after the 1862 catastrophe was thus part of a larger historical continuum as the flood became absorbed in the nineteenth-century Habsburg mythos that sustained the political power of Franz Joseph.

However, there were interesting differences between commemorating the flood in 1830 and 1862. For example, Franz Sartori's account *Wien's Tage der Gefahr und die Retter aus der Noth* (1830) thanked the emperor Franz I at first, but then provided multiple stories on the bravery of individual citizens, both men and women, who joined the fight against disaster according to their gender roles.[80] However, in 1862 only the emperor Franz Joseph is playing the part of the masculine hero. He is a single hero defying alone the forces of nature.[81] The press played a pivotal role in creating this story. Already in the early stage of the catastrophe when water was rising in the suburban areas of Brigittenau and Leopoldstadt on February 3 and 4, the press reported on how the emperor was visiting the damaged areas and leading actions against the growing danger.[82] Humorous magazines, as well, joined in celebrating the leadership of the emperor; however, at the same time they ridiculed the bureaucratic city authorities: for example, *Hans Jörgel* wrote bitterly that the

provincial Surveyor's Office should have followed the example of the emperor who led the rescuers into the water like soldiers into fire, with no fear of death. [83]

The 1848 revolution, which had occurred since the last severe flood, clearly had an enormous effect on how the meaning of the catastrophe was understood and discussed in public. As chaos and disorder had more political associations than in 1830, press propaganda was used to create an image of the emperor Franz Joseph as a strong ruler who was personally involved in the dangerous rescue operations and protected his subjects against the violent forces of nature. The failed attempt to assassin the emperor in 1853 and various internal conflicts within the empire probably affected this need to underpin the heroism of the emperor. The flood was thus interrelated with a construction of both a new kind of political power and modern masculinity.

It has been suggested that patterns for perceiving and interpreting disasters is based on cultural memory, a pre-existing framework of shared knowledge that help to comprehend the experience of catastrophe.[84] The pre-existing framework also shapes what is included and what is excluded in the memory of a catastrophe. For example, in Vienna the press accounts and popular narratives had a vital role in shaping the memory of the floods. An illustrative example is that Sartori's book failed to mention a fate that did not fit into the existing gendered category of heroism: one of the most famous actresses of Vormärz Vienna, Therese Krones, died at the age of 29 of lung disease after helping to rescue other people during the flood in 1830.[85]

In 1862, as well, the stories of ordinary men and women were left out and the multifaceted social reality was reduced into the story of the masculine heroism of the emperor. Hofmann's book ended with an apologetic afterword regretting that much had to be left out in order to describe the main events of the 1862 flood. This meant that not all who had taken part in efforts to save the city could be named.[86]

The commemoration of the 1862 flood in serious narratives can be understood as an 'interpretative intervention', which, according to Janku, Schenk and Mauelshagen, aims at preserving social stability and maintaining political power. Because disaster experiences are so affective and powerful, there have been throughout history attempts to manipulate them by shaping the ways in

which they are communicated, documented and interpreted. This is how narratives on catastrophes turn into instruments of power. [87]

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to show that the catastrophic flood in Vienna in 1862 had a radical transformative power on material city space as well as meanings and ideas related to the urban environment. Humorous magazines published jokes and cartoons that unveiled the subversive potential of the catastrophe that turned the city upside down shaking different social and cultural hierarchies such as class and gender, embedded in space. However, the disruptive nature of the catastrophe created a need to restore the social order after the flood by emphasising the emperor's masculine power over city space. After the flood, popular literature was used to create a narrative of conquering the danger and restoring control over the city. These narratives highlighted the role of the emperor Franz Joseph as a masculine and brave rescuer of his royal subjects.

Accordingly, there was a contradiction between the humorous and non-humorous discourses on the catastrophe. Whereas jokes and cartoons challenged and undermined the ideal of modern masculinity, and dealt, in great variety, with the idea of *losing control,* the serious accounts actively reinforced the idea of heroic male reason and courage revolving around the idea of *gaining control*. In the serious narratives, modern masculinity was embodied in the Emperor Franz Joseph. His conquest over the catastrophe became a story of restoring power and control over city space. Because of the striking gap between humorous and non-humorous narrative patterns, the humorous sources give insight into the underlying uncertainties, which created a need for the official story of heroic masculinity.

Where the newspaper reports and serious literature on the flood aimed at preserving social stability and maintaining political order, humour reflected and expressed uncertainties lying underneath the official way of dealing with the catastrophe. Popular jokes and cartoons thus give access to the fears, imaginings and interpretations of the catastrophe that were otherwise silenced in the late nineteenth-century bourgeois culture.

[1] Christine Klusacek & Kurt Stimmer, *Die Stadt und der Strom. Wien und Donau* (Vienna: Dachs Verlag 1995), 199–206. Later headquarters of IBM moved to the site of the former Dianasaal. Claudio Magris, *Tonava* (Helsinki: WSOY 1986), 224–225.

[2] Donau so blau, / Durch Tal und Au / Wogst ruhig du dahin, / Dich grüßt unser Wien, / Dein silbernes Band / Knüpft Land an Land, / Und fröhliche Herzen schlagen / An deinem schönen Strand. An der schönen blauen Donau, Op. 314.

[3] F. Hofmann, *Die Ueberschwemmung von Wien und Umgebung im Februar 1862* (Vienna: Alexander Eurich 1862), 24.

[4] See, Christopher Sonnlechner, Severin Hohensinner & Getrud Haidvogl, 'Floods, fights and a fluid river: The Viennese Danube in the sixteenth century', *Water History* 5 (2013): 173–194; Gedrud Haidvogl, Marianne Guthyne-Horvath, Sylvia Gierlinger, Severin Hohensinner & Christoph Sonnlechner, 'Urban land for growing city at the banks of moving river: Vienna's spread into the Danube island Unterer Werd from the late 17th to the beginning of the 20th century', *Water History* 5 (2013): 195–217.

[5] Klusacek & Stimmer, *Stadt und der Strom*, 46, 54.

[6] Haidvogl et al, 'Urban land', 209–213.

[7] Peter Mohilla & Franz Michlmayr, *Donauatlas Wien* (Vienna: Österreichischer Kunst- und Kulturverlag 1996), 6.13, 7.1–7.19.

[8] See further Christof Mauch, 'Introduction', in: *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies Toward a Global Environmental History*, ed. Cristof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Plymouth: Lexington books, 2009), 1–16; Lisa Benton-Short & John Rennie Short, *Cities and Nature*. Second Edition. Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City (New York: Routledge 2008), 194–213.

[9] Compare Hannu Salmi, *Nineteenth-Century Europe. A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2008), 2.

[10] Compare Elisabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City. Urban life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press1992).

[11] Alan Dundes, *Cracking Jokes: Studies of Sick Humour Cycles and Stereotypes* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press 1987), 4 and passim.

[12] Elliott Oring, *Jokes and Their Relations* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentacky 1992), 29–40; Dundes, *Sick Jokes*,1988, 19–20, 159–168.

[13] Jan Bremmer & Herman Roodenburg, 'Introduction: Humour and History', *A Cultural History of Humour*, ed.Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press 1997), 1–10.

[14] Peter Burke, 'Frontiers of the Comic in Early Modern Italy, c. 1350–1750', In: *A Cultural History of Humour,* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1997), 61–75.

[15] Darnton Robert, *The Great Cat Massacre. And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books 1999), 77–78.

[16] *Wiener Zeitung* (5 February 1862). All newspapers and magazines are from the online service of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek: ANNO-Austrian Newspapers online. http://anno.onb.ac.at/.

[17] Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 17–19, 24.

[18] Telegraphische (Privat) Depeschen. *Wiener Zeitung. Abendblatt.* (7 February1862).

[19] The documents of the ministry of police (K.K. Polizei-Ministerium) at the Österreischisches Staatsarchiv entail only information on measures taken after February 6. At-OeStA/AVA Inneres Polizei OPB-Prä II 158/1862.

[20] Euer Gnaden, das Wasser ist da. *Figaro* (7 February1862).

[21] Gesang der Geister über den Wässern. *Figaro* (7 February1862).

[22] Compare Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1998), 1–11.

[23] Andrea Janku, Gerrit J. Schenk & Franz Mauelshagen, 'Introduction', in: *Historical Disasters in Context. Science, Religion,and Politics,* ed. Andrea Janku, Gerrit J. Schenk & Franz Mauelshagen, Routledge Studies in Cultural History (New York: Routledge 2012), 1–14.

[24] Ueberschwemmungs-Chronik. *Die Presse* (5 February 1862).

[25] Ueberschwemmungs-Chronik. *Die Presse* (6 February1862).

[26] Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 15.

[27] Ueberschwemmungs-Chronik. *Die Presse* (7 February1862)..

[28] Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 22.

[29] Elisabeth Springer, *Geschichte und Kulturleben der Wiener Ringstraße* (Wiesbaden:Franz Steiner Verlag 1979), 86–87.

[30] Ernst Scheidl, *Die humoristisch- satirische Presse im Wien von den Anfängen bis 1918 und die öffentliche Meinung* (Vienna: Universität Wien 1950), 135.

[31] *Wiener Zeitung*. (7 February 1862).

[32] Compare Anu Korhonen, *Fellows of Infinite Jest. The Fool in Renaissance England*, Cultural History, University of Turku, (Turku: Painosalama 1999).

[33] *Jörgel Briefe* (8 February 1862).

[34] Tagesordnung für die künftige Woche. *Figaro* (7 February1862); Vorkehrungen für die nächste Ueberschwemmung. *Figaro* (7 February1862).

[35] Wiener Ueberschwemmungs-Geschichten. *Kikeriki* (13 February1862).

[36] Was Kikeriki während der Ueberschwemmung gethan hätte, wenn er im Gemeinderathe gesessen wäre. *Kikeriki* (13 February1862).

[37] Ueberschwemmungschronik. *Die Presse* (5 February 1862).

[38] Hofmann *Ueberschwemmung*, 17.

[39] See, e.g. *Die Schreckens-Tage oder die Ueberschwemmung in Wien im Jänner 1849. Genau dargestellt und zusammengetragen von einem Augenzeugen*, (Vienna: Stockholzer v. Hirschfeld 1849); Die schreckliche Überschwemmung des Wien-Fluβ den 29. Julius 1785. http://www.bildarchivaustria.at/Preview/14207540.jpg, accessed 26 February 2015.

[40] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge 2002),16,18; Julian Brigstocke, *The Life of the City. Space, Humour, and the Experience of Truth in Fin-de-siècle Montmartre* (Surrey: Ashgate 2014), 147–165.

[41] Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer (1905) 2006).

[42] Ute Frevert, *Mann und Weib und Weib und Mann: Geschlechter-Differenzen in der Moderne* (München: C.H.Beck 1995), 9; Anu Korhonen, *Kiusan henki: sukupuoli ja huumori uuden ajan alussa*, (Jyväskylä: Atena 2013).

[43] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge 1999), 9–11.

[44] Frevert, *Mann und Weib*, 55.

[45] George L. Mosse, *The image of man: The creation of modern masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 3–5. See also Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993) 7–14.

[46] The press used the word 'Elementarunglück' in order to describe the flood. See, e.g. *Wiener Zeitung* (6 February1862). Compare Gerrit Jasper Schenk, 'Katastrophen in Geschichte und Gegenwart', in: *Katastrophen,* ed. Gerrit Jasper Schenk (Ostfildern 2009), 9–19.

[47] Die Koth-Regulierung am Glacis. *Kikeriki* (20 February 1862).

[48] Henri Bergson, *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic.* Trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: The Macmillan Company 1914).

[49] Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung,* 13–14.

[50] Revue des Jahres 1862. *Kikeriki* (1 January 1863).

[51] Compare Dundes, *Sick Jokes*,1988.

[52] Frevert, *Mann und Weib* 1995, 28, 30–35, 55.

[53] On ridicule see further Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule.Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage 2012).

[54] Ha!! – ist es menschenmöglich?? – so viel Wasser!!

O sprech, ihr Musen, ist ds Gott's Gebot?

Es schwillt die Fluth, und immer feuchter, nasser.

Wälzt durch die Gasser die grause Koth! […]

Ode an der Ueberschwemmung. *Der Humorist* (8 February 1862). Translations of German quotations into English are conducted by the author.

[55] Ibid. See also Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 17, 21.

[56] Compare William A. Cohen, 'Introduction: Locating filth', in: *Filth, Dirt, Disgust and Modern life,* ed. William A. Cohen, & Ryan Johnson (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press 2004), vii–xxxvii.

[57] See further Schenk, 'Katastrophen', 13; Mauch, 'Introduction', 9.

[58] Benton-Short & Short, *Cities and Nature*, 2.

[59] Ibid., 3.

[60] Schuster: So, Kinder, bringts nur Alles herauf in ersten Stock, wo sind die Kiniglhafen?

Hausherr: Aber bedenken Sie doch –

Schuster: Schau´s Sie lieber, das der Kaffee fertig wird; Kinder, ist die Kohlenbutten schon heroben? Dort hinlegen aufs Himmelbett.

Hausherr: Was? Um Gotteswillen – mein theures Bett –

Schuster: Die butten muβ gerettet werden; lassens einheizen und schauens, daβ der Kaffee fertig wird, sonst, wirf ich Ihnen ins Wasser.

Hausherr: Alles thu ich, nur ruinirens mir meine Möbel nicht. […] Der Schuster beim Hausherrn. (Szene aus einer überschwemmten Vorstadt.) *Kikeriki* (13 February 1862).

[61] Ibid.

[62] See e.g. Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization. The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (London: Melthuen 1986) 5–6.

[63] Der Baron vor der Ueberschwemmung. *Kikeriki* (13 February 1862).

[64] Schenk 'Katastrophen', 11–12; Mauch 'Introduction', 4; Janku, Schenk & Mauelshagen 'Introduction',1–12; Franz Mauelshagen, 'Disaster and Political Culture in Germany since 1500', in: *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies Toward a Global Environmental History,* ed. Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister (Plymouth: Lexington books 2009), 41–76, 42.

[65] Mohilla & Michlmayr, *Donauatlas*, 2.6–3.6.

[66] (Bureau-Chef: zu einen zuhalternen Beamten): „Herr Schaffelhuber! Warum haben sie gestern das Amt nicht frequitiert?"

Schaffelhuber. (verlegen): „Entschuldigen Herr Rath, ich bin…ich habe…"

Rath: „Nur heraus mit der Sprache! Was für eine Entschuldigung haben Sie – Waren Sie krank – oder ist Ihnen vielleicht sonst ein Unglück passirt? Ich will die Wahrheit wissen!"

Schaffelhuber: „Ich bitte um Entschuldigung Herr Rath; - ich und meine Frau haben an der Donau Holz aufg´fangen." Aus den Ueberschwemmungstagen. *Kikeriki* (20 February1862).

[67] See further e.g. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*.

[68] Christian Pfister, 'Learning from Nature-Induced Disasters. Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies from Western Europe'.In: *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses*, 17–40, 24.

[69] Ueberschwemmungs-Miβverständnis. *Kikeriki* (27 February1862).

[70] Aufruf. *Wiener Zeitung.* (7 February 1862).

[71] Compare Janku, Schenk & Mauelshagen, 'Introduction', 3.

[72] Hoffmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 11.

[73] *Der Kaiser und sein Volk bei der Ueberschwemmung in Wien* (o.j.), 5–7.

[74] John Ernst, Die Überschwemmung in Wien, ÖNB Archiv des Österreichischen Volksliedwerkes, http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/dtl_2615829 24.4.2015.

[75] Mauelshagen 'Disaster and Political Culture', 43.

[76] Janku, Schenk & Mauelshagen 'Introduction', 2–12; Schenk, *Katastrophen*, 12.

[77] Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen, 'Gotteszorn und Meereswüten. Deutungen von Sturmfluten vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert', in: *Naturkatastrophen: Beiträge zu ihrer Deutung, Wahrnehmung und Darstellung in Text und Bild von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert,* ed. Dieter Groh, Michael Kempe & Franz Mauelshagen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag 2003), 101–118. See also Chapter 10 in this volume.

[78] Mohilla & Michlmayr, *Donauatlas*, 2.6,3.6.

[79] Hofmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 32, 29.

[80] Franz Sartori, *Wien's Tage der Gefahr und die Retter aus der Noth ; Authentische Beschreibung der unerhörten Ueberschwemmung der Donau im Erzherzogthume Oesterreich unter der Enns im Jahre 1830*, (Wien:Gerold 1830), IX, 237-246 and passim.

[81] Hofmann *Ueberschwemmung*, 14.

[82] Gleich auf die erste Meldung. *Wiener Zeitung* (3 February 1862); Wiener Nachrichten. *Die Presse* (4 February 1862).

[83] *Jörgel Briefe* (8 February 1862).

[84] Mauelshagen, 'Disaster and Political Culture', 62.

[85] Klusacek & Stimmer, *Stadt und Strom*, 48.

[86] Hoffmann, *Ueberschwemmung*, 32.

[87] Compare Janku, Schenk & Mauelshagen 'Introduction', 5.