Georgia Southern University
Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Honors College Theses

4-4-2023

Between Faith and Nation: The Complexities of Jewish Identity in Interwar Austria

Sarah E. Townsend
Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses

Part of the European History Commons, Jewish Studies Commons, and the Social History Commons

Recommended Citation

Townsend, Sarah E., "Between Faith and Nation: The Complexities of Jewish Identity in Interwar Austria" (2023). *Honors College Theses*. 823.
https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/823

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Between Faith and Nation: The Complexities of Jewish Identity in Interwar Austria

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in History.

By
Sarah Townsend

Under the mentorship of Dr. Brian K. Feltman

ABSTRACT

During the period between the First and Second World Wars, the people of the newly established Austrian Republic faced many changes: the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Habsburg Monarchy, economic hardships during and following the First World War, and the question of German ethnic nationalism and unification with Germany. The question of national identity was relevant to the entire Austrian population and Austrians had to make an important decision about their nationality: Austrian or German? For Austrian Jews, the dilemma was more complicated. Zionism promoted the idea of Jewish statehood and a solely Jewish identity. This thesis explores the diversity of the Jewish population and their answers to the national identity question in interwar Austria.

Using memoirs, questionnaires, and other personal writings from Austrian Jews, this thesis argues that the question of nationalism within the Austrian Jewish community was complicated, and a Jewish person's experiences and background influenced their national identity. Jews who did not have an Orthodox upbringing tended to not align themselves with the Zionist Movement, and often favored an Austrian, German, or dual national identity rather than a solely Jewish one. Jews who grew up in an Orthodox household often favored either a dual or a solely Jewish national identity. The Austrian Jewish community was far from monolithic, and any telling of its interwar history must address this complexity.

Thesis Mentor: Dr. Brian K. Feltman

Honors Dean: Dr. Steven Engel

April 2023
Department of History
Honors College
Georgia Southern University

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my grandmother, parents, and siblings for all of their support during this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Brian K. Feltman for all of the help and advice throughout this journey. This thesis would not be what it is without your assistance.

Chapter I: Introduction

Throughout the documented history of Austria, the Jewish population has had a visible and significant impact. While the Jewish community's everyday lives are not well-documented for most of their time in Austrian history, their importance to the country over the past millennium is evident. The recorded accounts of the lives of Austrian Jews tell the story of a group of people who – like in many other places – were on a quest for belonging. Some Jews even assimilated to the local culture, religion, and languages in order to fit in and prove themselves. At the beginning of the interwar period in Europe (1918-1939), Austrians – Jew and non-Jew alike – began to question whether they had their own national identity, or if their relationship to the German language and German culture made them Germans. The ideas of Zionism and Jewish nationalism complicated the question of nationality more for the Jewish community. Were the Jews of Austria actually German, Austrian, German and Jewish, Austrian and Jewish, or solely Jewish? This thesis explores the treatment of Jews inside of interwar Austria and how their personal experiences influenced how they viewed themselves in terms of national identity, as well as how others viewed them.

The conclusions drawn in this thesis will be based on an examination of the lives of Austrian Jews whose lives demonstrate the complexities within the Austrian Jewish experience and their views on national identity. It will explore the documented experiences of four Jews who lived in Austria during the interwar period: Otto Bauer, Lilly Geringer Drukker, David Lehr, and Adolph Mechner. Otto Bauer's answer to the national identity question will be analyzed through secondary sources that have analyzed his writings because a majority are in languages that I cannot confidently translate nor

analyze in their original form. Lilly Geringer Drukker, David Lehr, and Adolph Mechner all settled in the United States in the years after they left Austria and eventually wrote memoirs recounting their memories of interwar Austria. These four stories demonstrate the complexities of Jewish national identity in interwar Austria and how not every Austrian Jew identified the same.

Chapter II: Literature Review and Background

There is not a multitude of secondary sources – let alone primary – that detail the lives of Jewish people living in Austria, especially going back as far as the Middle Ages. Historian Bruce F. Pauley, whose published works in both German and English focus on Austrian and German history, has documented the existence of Jewish people living inside Austria since the 10th century. In *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism*, he dates the arrival of Jewish people into Vienna, Austria all the way back to 966 A.D.[1] Jews would later expand into other areas of Lower Austria and present-day Austria, being first seen in the Carinthia region of the country between the 10th and 11th century, the Styria region in 1103, and expanding further into the Lower Austria region in the early 13th century.[2]

Pauley's attempt to trace the roots of Austrian Jewish history is fairly unique. Many historical works that have a focus on areas of modern-day Austria begin around the mid 19th century, with the 1848-1849 revolutions, or around the reign of Joseph II in the 18th century. Pauley's historical narrative of the lives of Jews living in Austria before these frequently studied periods have gone widely uncontested since his book's publication in 1992.

While Jewish people began to expand to other areas inside Austria, there was still a prominent Jewish community in Vienna – the largest one within all of the German-

---

[1] Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 13.

[2] It's important to note that at this time, Vienna was not its own state as is now the case. Until the early 20th century, Vienna was considered part of Lower Austria, so Vienna will be included in references to Lower Austria.

speaking areas of Europe. According to Pauley, throughout Austrian history, the Viennese Jews were exiled twice, and returned to the city after both expulsions. The first Viennese Jewish community lasted from its first noted existence until 1431. Under the rule of Archduke Albert V of Austria, the first Jewish community of Vienna was exiled, though many Jews were no longer living in Vienna in the aftermath of the events of 1420. That year, the archduke charged the Jews with desecration and aiding Jan Hus – a Bohemian Church reformer that challenged the Catholic Church's teachings – in his wars. These charges gave the archduke the justification he needed to destroy the Viennese Jewish community, which was estimated to have consisted of 1,400 – 1,600 people at the time. Poorer Jews were thrown in the nearby Danube River, and many that were imprisoned in the local synagogue committed suicide. The remaining few who refused to be baptized were burned alive outside of the city walls on March 12, 1421. The surviving Jewish children were forcibly baptized, and the Jewish-owned property was seized. Vienna received the title "the City of Blood" as a result of these antisemitic events.[3]

The Jews of Vienna were not officially banned from the city until 1431, when they were supposedly banned "forever." Pauley also states that Vienna was not the only city to exile Jews in the 15th century. The Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, expelled them from other parts of Lower Austria in 1496. The Archbishop of Salzburg did the same two years later in 1498. Outside of Austria, the Spanish also expelled the Jews in

[3] Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 15.

1492 under Isabella I of Castille and Ferdinand II of Aragon.[4] Already, it was clear that Jews were often seen as outsiders by their neighbors as a result of their religious identity and cultural practices, and their identity and loyalties were always open to debate among those from outside their community.

In 1625, a new Jewish community emerged in Vienna. Individual Jews had been allowed to settle back inside the city if their services were needed. Unlike the last Viennese community, which included many who participated in moneylending, this group of Jews consisted mainly of merchants who established new centers of trade and were solely responsible for providing the Habsburgs and their armies with their war supplies. The second Jewish community of Vienna did not last as long as the first. Merely fifty-five years later, the Holy Roman Emperor at the time, Leopold I, expelled all Jews who refused to be baptized from Vienna. This resulted in between 3,000 to 4,000 Jews who were once again pushed out of Vienna and marked as outsiders.

After 20 years of dealing with the financial losses resulting from the Jews' absence, Leopold I decided to allow a small number of Jews to return to Vienna. Another historian, Robert A. Kann, writes in *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918*, that the reason that Leopold I extended the invitation to return was not just because of economic loss, but to help pay for the wars that Leopold I could not afford without their financial assistance.[5] The return gave way to the establishment of the third Jewish community of Vienna that was officially founded in the 18th century. More specifically,

---

[4] Pauley, 15.

[5] Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1974), 124-125.

Pauley states that this time, many of Vienna's Jews were Sephardic and although not as politically strong as their predecessors, were wealthier.[6] Because of their limited political power, their employment opportunities were dependent on the reigning monarch.

Robert A. Kann in *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* briefly touches on the topic of Jews inside the Empire and how they were treated by certain monarchs. Kahn's account of the relationship between the Jewish community and the monarchy in Leopold I's Austria is similar to Pauley's interpretation. Both note the strong antisemitic feelings of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. Although not much of Kann's information differed from that offered in Pauley's work, it is important to note that his book was published nearly a half-century ago in 1974.

According to Pauley, during the 40-year reign of Maria Theresa, she had few interactions with the Viennese Jews The separation between the monarch and the Jewish community was seemingly intentional. Both Pauley and Kann claim that she was largely antisemitic and was very stubborn in her beliefs.[7] She tried to expel the Jews in her realm but was never successful. Using the total Jewish population numbers of Lower Vienna given by Pauley, as of 1776, only 317 Jews were living in the total area of Lower Vienna, which was a very small number in comparison to other communities in history and in other parts of the Habsburg Empire at that time.[8]

---

[6] Pauley, 16. Sephardic Jews are a group of Jews who can trace their ancestry back to the Iberian Peninsula before the 1492 expulsion of Jews during the Reconquista.

[7] Pauley, 16; Kann, 189.

[8] Pauley, 17. According to Pauley, Bohemia and Moravia (combined) had about 55,000 Jews, and Galicia alone had almost 150,000.

Following the death of his mother and co-regent, Maria Theresa, in 1780, Joseph II began to write reforms that gave more freedom to the Jewish population. In May 1781, he issued a decree that improved the education of Jews in Bohemia. Later that year, he abolished the wearing of the yellow identification badge that Jews had been forced to wear to make themselves visible. According to Pauley, on 2 January 1782, Joseph II declared the Patent of Tolerance. This patent granted the Jews the ability to settle in communities outside of their previously assigned bounds, Jewish children were now required to attend German-language schools, all public educational institutions were now available for Jewish enrollment, and they could now practice any academic profession. Kann, on the other hand, argues that the Jewish rights granted in 1782 were not their own Patent of Toleration, but actually just a piece of special legislation that Joseph II wrote because he considered previous Jewish ways of life damaging to society. Whether the second Patent is actually considered a Patent is largely unimportant here. Either way, the 1782 legislation was a step towards equal rights for the Jews in Austria.

In 1788 Joseph II required Jews to relinquish their use of Yiddish and Hebrew in public along with adopting German-sounding family names. That year, he also required Jews to perform military service. This made Austria one of the first countries in Europe to have Jewish soldiers.[9] These steps made it easier for Jews to participate in everyday Austrian life, but they were not allowed to do everything other citizens could. They had to pay 10,000 gulden just to be able to live in Vienna, they could not own land, and they were still barred from entering civil service.[10] According to Pauley, these reforms

---

[9] Pauley, 18.

[10] German for the word “florin,” the gulden was the currency of Austria at the time.

instituted by Joseph II were greeted with a mixed reaction from the Jewish population. Jews in Vienna and Bohemia were supportive of these reforms, but other areas were less enthusiastic, arguing that the reforms would weaken the Jewish religion. Until Joseph II's reforms, many Jews saw themselves as their own nationality. They spoke Yiddish or Hebrew, had traditionally Jewish last names, and had their own communities. They did not identify as German or Austrian, which raises important questions. With the newest generation of Jewish children adopting a German last name and attending German-speaking schools, were Jews more likely to relate to German culture than the previous generation? In Pauley's words, "These changes eroded even more the Jews' sense of national identity."[11]

Following the death of Joseph II, his brother, Leopold II, became emperor. Leopold II did not change any of the reforms that were created under his brother. His son, Franz II,[12] however, issued more than 600 decrees that limited the Jewish rights that had been guaranteed by Joseph's reforms. Rather than toleration for life, it was limited to three years after 1795. After 1807, toleration was also not granted to families, but only to individuals. If a Jew entered Vienna and did not have toleration, they could spend no longer than a month at a time in the city. In order to be granted toleration, a Jew had to have a skilled trade. Even if a Jewish person had toleration, they were never considered a

---

[11] Pauley, 18.

[12] Franz II was known as Franz I after Napoleon removed his Holy Roman Emperor title in 1806, but to be consistent and avoid confusion, I will refer to him as "Franz II" throughout this paper.

citizen and could not gain citizenship. Their ability to spend time in Vienna was based on their usefulness.

Throughout the restrictive reign of Franz II, the Jewish community in Vienna continued to grow. In 1811, the Vienna community had grown large enough to build a prayer house. The first Jewish school in Vienna was founded a year later. In 1826 the community constructed a synagogue, and 1,600 Jews had established social and charitable institutions by 1830. Most of these institutions were for Jewish children, the sick, and widows. A majority of the working Jewish men engaged in small-scale trade, and other Jewish men also enrolled at universities so they could pursue the limited careers that were available to them. Although Jews were not considered citizens in Austria, some wanted to prove themselves as patriotic and willing to fight for Austria. A hope was that if they proved themselves as a true Austrian in war, then maybe they would be accepted as an Austrian outside of war. During the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century, 35,000 Jews fought in the Austrian army.[13] As was the case in many previous Austrian wars, Jewish financing was essential to helping fund mobilization.

The period between the end of Franz II reign in 1835 and 1848 saw little change in the Jewish population's status within society. However, in 1848-1849, revolutions against the government took place. Students from the University of Vienna's Medical College helped to organize demonstrations, and the three primary initiators of the revolution were also Jewish. Jews played a leading role in the student associations that pushed for increased social equality. Throughout the revolutions, Jewish people were

---

[13] Pauley, 19.

prominent with the hopes of gaining equal rights for themselves. The problem with their participation was that they were then heavily associated with rebellion. For example, one of the most radical revolutionaries in Vienna, Adolf Fischhof, was Jewish. Many who opposed the revolution would also oppose granting the Jewish people more freedom.[14] Nonetheless, according to Peter Stearns, "the revolutions of 1848 both reflected and furthered the modernization of European Jews."[15]

According to Pauley, the Jews only requested that they regained the rights that they received under the rule of Joseph II. The first constitution written during this period of revolution on April 25, 1848, did not grant them equality. Although, the newly elected Reichstag did remove the toleration tax that Jews had to pay in October. The following year, the constitution that was written on March 4 declared that a person could not be barred from receiving civil and political rights based on their religious beliefs. In addition, this new constitution granted Jews the ability to own property, enter any legal occupation, and marry someone outside of their own faith.[16]

Following the new rights granted to the Jews, they were allowed to establish a religious organization/community called the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde*, which had its own elected officials. This organization was in charge of religious and charitable

---

[14] Pauley, 20.

[15] Peter N. Stearns, *1848: The Revolutionary Tide in Europe* (New York: Norton 1974), 176.

[16] Pauley, 21.

activities within its community and functioned continuously from its founding in 1849 until the Nazis shut it down in 1942.[17]

The new rights granted to the Jews were short lived. In 1851, the new emperor, Franz Joseph, annulled the constitution. They were again barred from owning land, but they were allowed to retain the land they had already owned. The right to hold public office had also been removed, along with the reinstation of the prohibition of Jews employing Christian workers. Pauley claims that these losses of rights then led many Jews to baptism, which would then allow them to advance in their careers once again.[18]

Franz Joseph would be the last emperor to rule Austria. While the beginning of his reign started with the annulment of the 1849 constitution, Jews were able to progress significantly throughout his sixty-eight-year reign. Franz Joseph claimed that in the Austrian army people would be treated with equality, regardless of their religion. Jews played a big part in boosting the economy during the 1850s, building many factories throughout the empire – Bohemia, Moravia, Vienna, and Hungary – and also founded many of Vienna's important banks.[19]

On January 12, 1860, Franz Joseph issued an edict that once again allowed Jews to own land, enter any profession that they chose, employ Christian servants, move to previously banned localities, and also testify against Christians. On December 21, 1867, a new constitution was introduced. This constitution followed the Austrian defeat by

[17] The *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* in Vienna has since been reinstated and is the biggest one throughout Austria.

[18] Pauley, 21.

[19] Pauley, 22.

Prussia and the creation of the Dual Monarchy with Hungary, creating the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the creation of the Dual Monarchy and the new constitution, all other laws that were discriminatory against Jews were removed. In Pauley' words, "Jews came to regard the last half century of the Habsburg Monarchy as a golden era in their history."[20] Many Jews prospered during this time. When antisemitic movements began to reappear around the 1870s-1880s, Franz Joseph ordered that they be stopped immediately.

This "golden era" was not only a time for individual growth, but also for the Jewish community as a whole. During the late 19th century to the early 20th century, the Viennese Jewish community grew very quickly. Historian Marsha L. Rozenblit in *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*, examines the rapid growth of the Viennese Jewish population during this time using census reports. Rozenblit concludes that "Almost no Jews resided in the *Residenzstadt* in 1850, but the community grew at such a rapid rate that by World War I there were almost 200,000 Jews in the city."[21] After the joining of Austria and Hungary, Jews from all over the Dual Monarchy migrated to Vienna to capitalize on the new opportunities that were being offered inside of the Austrian capital.

Theodor Herzl was one of the Jews that resided in Vienna at the time. Regarded as a leading figure in the Zionist movement, he began with a career in law and then later pursued a career as a writer in the mid-1880s. At this time in his life, Herzl was

---

[20] Pauley, 22.

[21] Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), 16.

considered an assimilated Jew. Historian Jacques Kornberg writes, “Herzl pursued Austro-German assimilation with all the enthusiasm and devotion of a lover as yet unspurned.”[22] In late 1891, he began a new job for the Viennese newspaper, *Neue Freie Presse*, where he worked as the Paris correspondent. According to Kornberg, Paris is where Herzl was able to observe antisemitism in France and compare it to what he witnessed and experienced in Austria. In his comparisons, the antisemitic movements in France were a temporary occurrence that would soon pass, but Austria and the antisemitism seen within its borders was intense and seemed to only be increasing.[23]

Herzl left his job with *Neue Freie Presse* in 1895. This is the approximate time during which historians assume he advocated for the idea of a Jewish state. The question of the creation of a Jewish nation had arisen in Herzl’s writings before in early 1893 and later 1894. According to Kornberg, both times Herzl renounced the idea of Jewish statehood was because he believed that “Jews were acclimatized to a variety of homelands and national cultures and had little but their oppression in common.”[24] There is no confirmed reason for his conversion to Zionism, but scholars will relate it to either the Dreyfus trial that recently occurred in France or the political climate of Vienna at the time. In 1895, The Christian Social political party was on the brink of gaining the

---

[22] Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 59.

[23] Kornberg, 90.

[24] Kornberg, 160.

majority of the city council seats in the April elections and were actually able to gain the overwhelming majority on the Vienna city council in the September elections.[25]

Herzl's ideas in regard to Jewish nationalism were that a Jewish state was the one place that Jews would fully belong, and his doubts about Jewish belonging in the German-speaking world were grounded in an understanding of history. British translator Sylvie D'Avigdor translated Herzl's document, *Der Judenstaat*, into English and it since been republished with the help of Harvard law professor, Alan Dershowitz. In the English translation of this document, which was one of the first introductions of Zionism to the public, the subject of nationalism and the ability to assimilate are summarized as such: "We are one people – our enemies have made us one in our despite, as repeatedly happens in history."[26] No matter how much the Jews inside of Vienna tried to assimilate and consider themselves Austrian, no Jew would ever be fully accepted in society.

Nonetheless, many Jewish children attended *Gymnasium*, a secondary school that prepared children for university. It was considered the only way into a university and most professional careers. *Gymnasium* was also considered a place that helped Jews assimilate into European culture. When discussing *Gymnasium* in the years leading up to the First World War, Rozenblit asserts, "The high percentage of Jewish students in the Viennese *Gymnasien* in the decades before the First World War attests to the high level of acculturation in Viennese Jewish bourgeois circles and to the desire of those middle-

---

[25] Kornberg, 159.

[26] Theodor Herzl and Alan Dershowitz, *The Jewish State: The Historic Essay That Led to the Creation of the State of Israel* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company Incorporated, 2019), 25.

class Jews to encourage even further assimilation among the young."[27] Readings of many memoirs of Austrian exiles who grew up during this era reveal that *Gymnasium* was seen as a very impactful part of their childhood and national identity.

When war broke out following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in 1914, there was a sense of excitement within the Austrian Jewish community. Jews believed that this was a great opportunity to show their national pride and loyalty. Pauley writes that there were 25,000 Jewish officers and around 300,000 Jewish soldiers fighting in the First World War for Austria-Hungary.[28] In another work, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I*, Rozenblit argues that Jews, no matter their political or religious standing, supported Austria.[29] The reasoning was because they wanted to disprove the stereotype that Jews were cowards and prove their loyalty to Austria. Another reason for the overwhelming support of the war was because they were fighting against Russia, a country that was actively persecuting its Jewish population. They were simultaneously fighting against an antisemitic power and helping save the Jews of Eastern Europe.[30]

---

[27] Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*, 100.

[28] Pauley, 63.

[29] Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40.

[30] Tamara Scheer, "Habsburg Jews and the Imperial Army Before and During the First World War," in *Jewish Experiences of the First World War in Central Europe*, eds. Jason Crouthamel, Michael Geheran, Tim Grady, and Julia Barbara Köhne (New York: Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2019), 67.

When considering the concept of Jewish nationality at the time, whether they considered themselves to be Jewish, Austrian, or German, Rozenblit claims, "Indeed, the war served to strengthen the Austrian identity of Austrian Jews and their commitment to the continuity of the multinational Monarchy. At the same time, the war reinforced their Jewish loyalties and convinced them that Jewishness flourished best in Habsburg Austria."[31] It's important to remember that up until the breakout of the First World War, the Jewish community was flourishing inside Austria after 1867. They now had equal rights, and this war helped to reinforce the belief that they could be Austrian and Jewish simultaneously.

In actuality, the First World War was not the adventure it was glorified to be in the beginning. It was a war that raged on for four years and left tens of millions of people dead. When one examines Jewish participation in the World War, it becomes clear that not all Jews shared the same experiences. Jews fought alongside other Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers alike. It is important to note that not all Jewish participants were soldiers. Jews were seen in many different war-related jobs: "soldiers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), military civil servants, and officers serving in all branches of the army."[32]

While the empire's big urban cities tended to have a larger Jewish population than their rural counterparts, Jews were seen throughout the entire empire. Many nationalities would be seen congregated in specific areas of the country rather than spreading out. People who claimed Italian heritage tended to live in the Tyrol region that was on the

---

[31] Rozenblit, *The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I*, 40.

[32] Scheer, "Habsburg Jews and the Imperial Army Before and During the First World War," 62.

Italian border, Romanians were concentrated in the southeastern area of the empire closest to Romania, Slovaks were settled in the area that would later become Slovakia, and many other nationalities followed this pattern. Because of the widespread population of Jewish people within the empire, non-Jews in the army tended to know someone of the Jewish faith no matter where they were located. Military historian, Tamara Scheer, argues that this is why they were frequently – almost always – seen or mentioned in stories surrounding World War I.[33]

Training during the war was also separated by language. Because of the many different nationalities, there were eleven to twelve languages used in the Austro-Hungarian army.[34] Hebrew and Yiddish were not on the list of official languages, so speakers of these languages were grouped into whatever language that they could speak. While these groups were not officially sorted by their nationalities, people who spoke a common language, especially one that was not considered the *lingua franca*, tended to identify with the same ethnic group. According to Scheer, Jews often chose to adopt the German language and culture due to its high prestige. Using the story of a Galician Jew named Joseph Wittlin, Scheer described the process of sorting the soldiers: "An NCO assigned the conscripts according to their language knowledge to certain groups. First, he separated the small German speaking group, which for the most part consisted of Jews,

[33] Scheer, "Habsburg Jews and the Imperial Army Before and During the First World War," 62.

[34] Scheer, "Habsburg Jews and the Imperial Army Before and During the First World War," 65.

from the Polish and Ukrainian [Ruthenian] group."[35] The Jewish soldiers were not seen as a separate group of people within the war. Since the Jewish soldiers were blended in with other non-Jewish German-speaking soldiers, this could also be a reason as to why they would later on identify with Germans or Austrians linguistically and culturally.

Adolph Mechner was a Jewish man who grew up in Czernowitz, a town on the eastern border of Austria-Hungary. It is now part of Ukraine near the border of Romania. Born on March 14, 1897, he was 17 when war broke out. Once he saw a relative in uniform, he wanted to join the war effort, but his mother would not allow him to volunteer. He agreed to join when he turned 18.[36] He writes of his generation's patriotism and enthusiasm for the war, "The young people, all of them, were proud to wear the uniform and to contribute to the defense of the fatherland. The hardships of the military drill and the daily exercises were accepted as necessary, and we became used to it".[37] Most of the people living in Austria-Hungary received their news from the newspapers, which told the story of Austria-Hungary and Germany being attacked, and they acted in self-defense. This story created a sense of protectiveness within the population and helped to boost the people's enthusiasm for the war.

---

[35] Scheer, "Habsburg Jews and the Imperial Army Before and During the First World War," 66.

[36] Adolph Mechner, "The memoir of Adolph Mechner from the years 1897 to 1947", 1978, Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection, R154.M38 A3 1978, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., page 114, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib265465 (hereafter cited as Mechner, USHMM)

[37] Mechner, USHMM, 156.

Adolph and his family moved to Vienna in 1914 after the Russian invasion into Czernowitz. Following the outbreak of the war, Adolph's enthusiasm and sense of patriotism fluctuated throughout the First World War. Adolph writes in his memoir, "My enthusiasm for the war had abated since a long time, and especially since the invasion of Bukowina by the Russians."[38] He saw the horrors of the war in front of him and it made his enthusiasm for fighting deflate. When Adolph turned 18, he had to enlist and entered the army on October 15, 1915. He was stationed in the 21st district of Vienna and apart of the Infantry Regiment No. 83 as an *Einjährig-Freiwillige*.[39] The regiment was Hungarian, but Adolph was part of the company that was stationed in Vienna. Even though most of the soldiers spoke only Hungarian, the command language was German.

While Adolph was stationed in Vienna, he was allowed to return home on weekends to visit his family, and this is when he would read newspapers to be informed on what was happening with the war. He read about the Central Powers' successes against Russia and Croatia in late 1915, which he wrote led to an increase in his patriotism once again.[40] Adolph was sent to Nagykarácsony, Hungary in early 1916 because the Infantry Regiment No. 83 had too many *Einjährig-Freiwillige* and other regiments did not have enough. In Hungary, Adolph was with three other soldiers from his regiment in Vienna and were often called the words "nemet," "nemetek," and

---

[38] Mechner, USHMM, 122-124.

[39] *Einjährig-Freiwillige* is the title given to a conscript who would pay for his own supplies in order to have his time in active military duty reduced to one year and then attend officer school.

[40] Mechner, USHMM, 156.

"Zsido," meaning "German," "Germans," and "Jew" respectively. While Adolph and one other of the Viennese soldiers were Jewish, all four faced hostility and alienation for being "the enemy".[41] They were not treated well in Hungary, and were even sent to jail at one point, where they received better treatment than with their regiment. His negative experiences in Hungary led to another decrease in his patriotism.[42]

After Hungary, Adolph was transferred to the Russian front, where he spent time both in the trenches and in the reserves. After a few weeks, his regiment moved to Tarnopol where he lost one of his best friends, a Hungarian Jew.[43] On August 2, 1916, the Russian troops began to fire and the Austro-Hungarian army decided to retreat with only a few left behind to keep fighting and then surrender. Adolph was supposed to be one of those few but decided to retreat anyway. He was injured by bricks that fell on him from a fallen building and was sent back to Vienna after a short stay in a hospital.

Adolph remained in the army until the end of the war, but spent the last few months of the war in the hospital then on furlough. After Hungary, Adolph did not write about any antisemitism he experienced within the army. He was even decorated with many awards and titles during his service. He earned the rank of lieutenant and received the Silver Medal First Class (*Große Silberne*) and a wound medal with two stripes due to his two injuries he received in active duty. Adolph's story tells the experience of a Jew living inside of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and wanting to prove themselves to their

---

[41] Mechner, USHMM, 164-166.

[42] Mechner, USHMM, 170.

[43] Mechner, USHMM, 184.

country. Even though he experienced prejudice and cruelty, he thought it was imperative to fight for his land like everyone else and show that he was one of them.

Serving as a military physician was also a role that attracted a large number of Jewish people. Military physicians were not highly regarded within the army. While holding the rank of an officer, they were not regarded as such by other officers. Focusing specifically on the Jewish experience in Vienna, Rozenblit quotes, "It was not possible, especially not for a Jew in public life, to ignore the fact that he was a Jew… Among the army medical students, as in almost every unit of those serving for one year only – and where not? - there was clear cut division between Gentiles and Jews…"[44] Military experiences for Jews were diverse and sometimes led to increased acceptance, but the First World War failed to erase many of the tradition divisions between Jews and their non-Jewish countrymen in the empire.

During the war, the Austrian population was facing another crisis: the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Franz Joseph passed away in November of 1916, and with the heir presumptive, Franz Ferdinand, dead after his assassination two years earlier, the throne went to Franz Joseph's grandnephew, Karl I. Karl I saw discontent among the many nationalities inside of the empire rising again, but with the war still pushing on, it was hard to fight two battles at once. After almost two years of ruling, Karl I issued a public statement, withdrawing from state affairs, abdicating from his position on November 11, 1918.

---

[44] Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*, 9.

Austria-Hungary officially removed themselves from the war in early November 1918. On the Italian front, an Austrian officer crossed the Italian lines the morning of October 29 asking for an immediate ceasefire and to start negotiations for peace. He was sent back the following morning with the Italians' reply. People from both sides met at Villa Giusti near Padua to discuss negotiations. The Allies and their Supreme War Council wrote the terms for the armistice in Paris and sent them to Padua to present to General Weber, the man leading the Austrian delegation. The Allies had four demands: the immediate cessation of all hostilities, total demobilization of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in the field, removal of Austria-Hungary from the Italian areas of the empire, and free access to all roads, railways, and waterways in Austria-Hungary.[45] According to historian and journalist Gordon-Brook Shepard, the final demand was the hardest one for Karl I to accept because he felt that he was betraying Germany and contributing to their defeat.[46] Two days after receiving the terms, Karl I issued the order for General Weber to accept the armistice. Twenty-four hours later, at 3 p.m. on November 4, the armistice goes into effect and officially taking Austria-Hungary out of the war.[47] The First World War had offered an opportunity for Austrian Jews to demonstrate their loyalty, and they had shared in the Empire's suffering. Whether that would impact their acceptance in postwar Austrian society remained to be seen.

---

[45] Gordon Brook-Shepard, *November 1918: Triumph and Tragedy in the Final Days of WWI* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 184-185.

[46] Brook-Shepard, 185.

[47] Brook-Shepard, 186.

Chapter III: Interwar Austria

After Karl I's abdication, the many different national groups of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire were able to form their own governments and help to establish many of the countries we see today in Central and Eastern Europe: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Romania, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. Some of these national groups had declared their independence before Karl I's abdication, but the abdication removed the necessity to fight for their independence.

The question of a national identity within the population of Austria was more difficult to answer. Shortly following the fall of the empire and Germany's defeat, the idea of the *Anschluss* became a frequent topic of discussion. The hope of the *Anschluss* was to unite Germany and Austria into one large German-speaking nation. The movement came from the *Großdeutschland* (Greater Germany) idea, which was the belief that Germany should include Austria.[48] The German-speaking parliamentary representatives formed the Provisional National Assembly for German-Austria on October 21, 1918. The three major Austrian political parties – Christian Socialist, Social Democrat, and German Nationalist – and their members made up the Provisional National Assembly. The day after Karl I's abdication, a proclamation by the Provisional National Assembly declared the Republic of German-Austria. An article of the proclamation declared Austria to be a part of the German republic.[49] The idea of unification was a popular one within post-war Austria. In *Vienna and Its Jews: The*

---

[48] Erin R. Hochman, *Imagining a Greater Germany: Republican Nationalism and the Idea of Anschluss* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 3.

[49] Hochman, 8.

Tragedy of Success, 1880s-1980s, George E. Berkley points to the popularity of the Anschluss idea by noting that when Karl Renner proclaimed, "'We are a single race: one country in the face of destiny.' The stenographic record reports his remarks being followed by a 'standing ovation. Loud and prolonged applause and clapping from the floor and galleries.'"[50] The *Anschluss* was so popular that after the new Austrian government was established, the parliament put forward a motion to reaffirm the call for the *Anschluss* on March 12 and it received only one "nay" out of the 165 members.[51]

It is important to note that the supporters of the *Anschluss* at the end of the First World War were different than the group of supporters during the 1938 annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany. Erin R. Hochman's *Imagining a Greater Germany: Republican Nationalism and the Idea of Anschluss* points out that there were different types of German nationalist movement during the Interwar period seen in both Germany and Austria.[52] Republicans in Germany created the *Großdeutsch* nationalist idea as a contrast to the other, more right-wing, ideas of nationalism, like *Alldeutsch* and conservative nationalism.[53] *Großdeutsch* nationalism would include Jews and socialists – two groups who were often excluded from the other German nationalist ideas. In the context of interwar Austria, the Social Democrats were often supporters of the

---

[50] George E. Berkley, *Vienna and Its Jews: The Tragedy of Success, 1880s-1980s* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1988), 142.

[51] Berkley, 142.

[52] Hochman, 3.

[53] Hochman, 3.

Großdeutsch idea, while many of the Christian Social and German nationalists aligned more with *Alldeutschtum.*

When the *Anschluss* finally came to fruition in March 1938, it was the supporters of the *Alldeutschtum* version of German nationalism that would be the loudest advocators. As the Nazi Party began to gain power, republicans who supported the *Großdeutsch* idea and the *Anschluss* pushed back against the Nazi ideas of unification, instead wanting Austria and Germany to be united peacefully and in a way that would not cause political issues with other European countries.[54] Evan Burr Bukey writes in his book, *Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era, 1938-1945*, that not all Austrians were in support of the *Anschluss.* "As for Vienna, the center of Austria's large Jewish population, perhaps as many as half a million persons reacted to the Anschluss with disbelief, dismay, and dread."[55] The Jewish population were not the only ones who were not happy with the *Anschluss.* Catholics, monarchists, and Social Democrats all had people who were unhappy with this.[56]

The postwar Austrian government held its first elections in February 1919. Since no party won with an absolute majority – the Social Democrats did gain over 40% – three parties had to create a Grand Coalition and Karl Renner, a Social Democrat, became the Chancellor. Other important government positions went to Social Democrats. Otto Bauer, a Jewish Social Democrat, was given the position of foreign minister and Julius Deutsch,

---

[54] Hochman, 4.

[55] Evan Burr Bukey, *Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era, 1938-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 33.

[56] Bukey, 33.

another Jewish Social Democrat, became the minister of defense. This was a promising sign that Jews would be seen as “belonging” in postwar Austria.

With the question of the *Anschluss* in the air, a rise in German national identity began. Non-Jews identified as German-Austrian, others German, and some solely Austrian. For Jews, however, the question of identity in postwar Austria was far more complicated. The issue of national identity within the Jewish community had the influences of both the German national identity with the question of the *Anschluss* and also the idea of a solely Jewish nationality with the Zionist writings of Theodor Herzl. There were now three identities for the Jews to consider, leading some to align with more than one identity at a time.

The Jewish politician Otto Bauer rose to the high position of foreign minister within the new government. He was also the leader of his political party, the Social Democratic Worker’s Party, during the interwar years. His childhood was not filled with Jewish traditions. He was born in Vienna to an assimilated family. His family background was *Ostjuden* – Eastern European Jewish – but he grew up with the German national identity that his family adopted.[57] Historian Ian Reifowitz wrote in the *Journal of Jewish Identities* about Otto Bauer and his national identity along with Otto Bauer’s opinion on nationalism as a whole in Austria. Reifowitz writes, “Bauer contended the collective character of a people was not an unchanging spirit or set of characteristics its members inherited at birth, as racial nationalists contended, but rather a fluid, evolving

---

[57] Ian Reifowitz, “Otto Bauer and Karl Renner on Nationalism, Ethnicity, & Jews,” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 2, no. 2 (2009): 1-2.

entity built around language and culture, which themselves evolve over time."[58] Nationality was fluid in Bauer's opinion, and could change depending on yourself and your environment.

The desire for unification with Germany was not only based on national identity. After the First World War and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Austria was not doing well economically. Struggles such as food scarcity were felt heavily throughout the country. These problems started during the war, but with the cut off from the rest of the empire after the collapse, Austria's economic struggles grew. Vienna was the economic center for the empire. The city relied heavily upon materials and industries located outside of the new borders – coal from Silesia, wheat from Hungary, textiles from Bohemia – from all of which they were now completely cut off from.[59] Vienna no longer had access to the industries that previously helped their city boom. After the First World War, the economic situation worsened. Now Austria was hit with high inflations rates that wiped out the middle-class financially. For some, the Jews were the cause of rising inflation and seen as benefiting from it, but they were the ones who were impacted the most.[60] Citing Jewish – specifically the *Ostjuden* refugees – overpopulation and government reliance in Vienna, many non-Jews in Vienna often blamed the Jews for their own lack of food and economic prosperity and called for their removal.[61] The Jews were often blamed for these hardships, even if they played no role.

---

[58] Reifowitz, "Otto Bauer and Karl Renner on Nationalism, Ethnicity, & Jews," 10.

[59] Berkley, 146.

[60] Berkley, 150.

[61] Pauley, 80.

Berkley reasons that the strong antisemitism seen in this postwar period is a result of the lack of national groups for the Austrians to rule. The Habsburg Empire always contained many nationalities that could be blamed for any hardships in the Empire, but now Austria was only left with one minority – the Jews – onto which they could push the blame. The Austrians were not going to blame themselves for their political and economic struggles, so they focused on the most frequently persecuted group in history – the Jews. With increasing popular sentiment growing around Jewish expulsion, Hugo Bettauer wrote his novel, *Die Stadt ohne Juden*, in 1922. Written as a satire, this novel turned film was widely popular in Austria and gave a unique view onto Austrian sentiment towards their Jewish period was at this time. The film begins with the chancellor introducing anti-Jewish legislation in response to rising inflation. These laws created more financial problems and ultimately led to the Jews being blamed and expelled from Austria. After the Jews were removed, the country experiences even more hardships, leading to many of the non-Jewish Austrians advocating for their return.[62] This novel was written around the time of hyperinflation and increasing antisemitic attitude in the First Republic and can be seen as a reflection of the times and discussions surrounding Jews living in Austria.[63] The novel also plays into the idea of what would happen if the Austrians were to actually expel the Jews from Austria.

---

[62] William H. Carter, "Spielerische Gedanken: Economic Crisis and Financial Speculation in Hugo Bettauer's 'Die Stadt Ohne Juden' and Its Adaptation by Hans Karl Breslauer," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 49, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2016): 4. (hereafter cited as Carter, "Spielerische Gedanken")

[63] Carter, "Spielerische Gedanken," 14.

The political landscape of interwar Austria was dominated by the three major political parties: the Social Democrats, Christian Socials, and German Nationalists. The Social Democratic Worker's Party was the group who emerged as the political leaders of the First Austrian Republic at the beginning of its existence. The Social Democratic Worker's Party allowed for practicing Jews to participate in their party and was the only party that did so. That can contribute to the fact that around 75 percent of the Viennese Jews voted for the Social Democrats in the postwar elections and the party had a high percentage of Jewish members.[64] Christian Socials and German Nationalists both held conservative ideas and worked together to push back against the success of the Social Democrats and Jews in interwar Austria, and Vienna especially since that is where the Social Democrats held the most power and the majority of Jews resided.

---

[64] Pauley, 70.

Chapter IV: The Austrian Jews

At the time of the Social Democratic Worker's Party coming into power in Austria, the leader of the party was Otto Bauer. Born in September 1881 to a liberal, assimilated Jewish family, he did not practice Judaism, but was still an active member of the Jewish community. Otto Bauer was a left-wing intellectual who engaged heavily with Marxism and the ideas of Internationalism. With the lack of primary sources translated into English, it is hard to identify his national identity without the help of secondary sources. The concept of a solely Jewish nationality seemed hard for Bauer to embrace. According to Reifowitz, Bauer was oftentimes contradictory when the discussion of a distinct Jewish nationality arose. He did not believe in a distinct Jewish identity and saw his people only as a religious group rather than an ethnoreligious group. This led him to push for the idea of Jewish assimilation into Austrian society which was what his family had done.[65]

Austrian historian, Ernst Hanisch, argues that Otto Bauer identified first as an international Social Democrat, secondly as a German-Austrian, and third a Jew.[66] His Jewish identity began to grow stronger with the rise of National Socialism and the *Anschluss*. When the *Anschluss* happened, Otto Bauer was already in exile. He was living in Czechoslovakia at the time, but moved to Paris in May 1938 after Hitler invaded

[65] Reifowitz, "Otto Bauer and Karl Renner on Nationalism, Ethnicity, & Jews," 11.

[66] Ernst Hanisch, "Otto Bauer (1881-1938): Politician and Public Intellectual," in *Austrian Lives* 21, eds. Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser, and Eva Maltschnig (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2012), 59-60.

Czechoslovakia.[67] He continued to write in Paris until his death on July 4, 1938. The next day, his final article was published. Titled "I Appeal to the Conscience of the World" in English, his article was an appeal to the world to help the Austrian Jews who were facing antisemitism and deportation in the newly unified Nazi Austria.[68] What he documents in this article, especially the deportations to concentration camps, are supported and also documented in the memoirs of the other three Austrian Jews of focus.

Another assimilated Viennese Jew was Lilly Geringer Drukker. Born on January 13, 1927, she experienced interwar Austria differently than some of the other Jews mentioned. At the age of 67, Drukker wrote a memoir about her family's history and experiences along with her own personal stories of her childhood. She was not even 12 years old when she escaped Nazi Austria in 1939. Drukker's family was not overly religious. She and her parents did not observe Jewish holidays and her grandmother, who kept Kosher and observed some religious holidays, was the only semi-observant Jew in the household.[69] Drukker lived in a small apartment in the 20th district with her parents, two older brothers, Aunt Freida who she saw as a second mother, and her maternal grandmother. Her apartment floor had only Jewish neighbors, but there were some Christians living on the floor above, and she got along well with the people on her floor.

---

[67] Ewa Czerwińska-Schupp and Maciej Żurowski, "Otto Bauer and His Time," in *Otto Bauer (1881-1938): Thinker and Politician* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 43.

[68] Hanisch, "Otto Bauer (1881-1938): Politician and Public Intellectual," 60.

[69] Lilly Geringer Drukker, "Lilly Geringer Drukker memoir", 1994, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 2012.365.1, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., 8, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn47535 (hereafter cited as Drukker, USHMM)

Lilly Drukker does not recount many childhood stories in her memoir, but does talk about her family in the interwar period. Both sides of her family were originally from Poland, having left that area in the mid-19th century. Her maternal grandparents went to Vienna, while her paternal settled in Athens, Greece. Her father, Josef, was a talented musician who moved to Vienna to continue his musical education. Since Drukker's families knew each other in Poland, her maternal grandparents took in her father. This is where her parents meet again and get married. Josef found a job playing at the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and he stays there until he loses his job after the *Anschluss* in 1938.

Lilly Drukker was the only one in her family who still attended school by this time. When she returned to school after the annexation, the non-Jewish kids spilled ink all over the Jewish kids' desks, demanding that they clean up the mess. The following day, the classes were separated between the Jewish and non-Jewish students. The next year, Drukker had to attend a "Jews Only" school that was located further away from her home.[70]

Soon after the *Anschluss*, Lilly Drukker's mother registered the family at the United States Consulate in Vienna with the hopes of being able to leave Austria as soon as possible. Since refugees were being let in on a quota basis, it took time to be allowed into America. An emigrate also needed a US citizen to have an affidavit that showed they could financially support the incoming emigrate is that the émigré would not become a financial burden on the US. Luckily, there were some relatives already living in America

---

[70] Drukker, USHMM, 17.

who were able to secure an affidavit for Drukker's father first, since he was the one at the highest risk.[71] Sadly, by the time Kristallnacht occurred, her father's quota had not been called. Nothing occurred the night of November 9, 1938, but the next afternoon two Schutz Staffel (SS) men entered the family's apartment and took her father into custody. He was released from custody six weeks later with the help of Wilhelm Jaeger, one of the men in a position of power at the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Drukker's father had been held at the Dachau concentration camp and was released on the condition he would leave the country within a certain time frame. Drukker's father went to Berlin where he continued working until his quota was called. He emigrated to New York in 1939.[72]

Around the time that her father left for Berlin, Lilly Drukker left Austria for England. Through a string of connections, Drukker was able to be "adopted" by a family in London.[73] Lilly Drukker left Austria on January 11, 1939 with other Jewish children seeking refuge in England. She arrived in England two days later, which was also coincidentally her twelfth birthday. She would later emigrate to the United States in 1940 and reunite with her family there.

When discussing her identity, Drukker does not exclusively consider herself Jewish or Austrian. In her childhood, her parents instilled a sense of pride within her about her Jewish ethnicity. In her words, "As much as my parents sneered at our religious rituals, they nevertheless fostered in me an attitude of pride and privilege to be a member

---

[71] Drukker, USHMM, 18.

[72] Drukker, USHMM, 21.

[73] Drukker, USHMM, 19.

of an elite minority."[74] When writing on her experience of the *Anschluss* and the antisemitism that shortly followed, she writes, "I had been proud to be Viennese…"[75] Through her writing, it is clear that she saw herself as both Austrian and Jewish.

The problem of dual identity was that the Nazis did not believe that it was possible to be both German (Austrian) and Jewish. In the Nazi Party's 25-point program, the party lists their aims and objectives of the party. Point four states that Jews cannot be citizens of the German State. Ronnie Landau's English translation says, "Only Nationals can be Citizens of the State. Only person of German blood can be Nationals, regardless of religious affiliation. No Jew can therefore be a German National."[76] No matter how a Jew would identify, they were never considered a German in the eyes of the Nazi Party.

Another person who would come to see himself as both Austrian and Jewish nationally was David Lehr. In 1994, David Lehr wrote a book detailing the state of Austria during his life there along with his own personal stories. He was born in 1910 into an orthodox Jewish family living in Vienna.[77] Some of his earliest memories are from the postwar period where he experienced the food shortages and economic crisis

---

[74] Drukker, USHMM, 9.

[75] Drukker, USHMM, 16.

[76] Ronnie S. Landau, Studying the Holocaust: Issues, Readings, and Documents (London: Routledge, 1998), 63.

[77] David Lehr, *Austria before and after the Anschluss: Personal experiences, observations, and comments*, 1998, LBI Memoir Collection, ME 1202, Leo Baeck Institute Archives, New York, #, https://digipres.cjh.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE8650544 (hereafter cited as Lehr, LBI)

firsthand. He writes, “My memory of the early post-war period is replete with pictures of abject misery, starvation, and revolt.”[78]

In the Interwar period, Lehr graduated from *Gymnasium* and attended the University of Vienna. During *Gymnasium*, his class consisted of primarily the same 22 students: 5 Jews including Lehr, 2 non-Jews from Social Democrat households, 3 from Christian-Socialist, and the remaining 12 were all from strong Pan-German – *Alldeutschtum* – or Nazi households.[79] After graduation in 1929, he started to study medicine. The university campus had evident separation based on political affiliation, similar to the political atmosphere in Vienna at the time. There were two anatomy departments on campus, one led by a Pan-German professor and the other a Jewish professor. The Pan-German professor’s student demographic consisted mainly of German nationalists, and the Jewish professor taught the Social Democrats, Jews, and some Christian Socials.[80]

Lehr also witnessed many antisemitic attacks throughout his time at university. At the university, it was clear that Jews like Lehr were not accepted by all of their fellow students. He stated, “When I began the study of Medicine in the fall of 1929, there were several periods of major bloody, antisemitic riots by Pan-German and Nazi students at the main building of the University and at the Anatomical Institute, with pitched battles being fought by two bitterly antagonistic groups of medical students and student sympathizers

---

[78] Lehr, LBI, 174.

[79] Lehr, LBI, 39.

[80] Lehr, LBI, 40.

from other disciplines, brought in by them."[81] Not only did they separate the anatomy departments separated based on politics and beliefs, they also had violent conflicts between the two many times throughout Lehr's time studying, showing the open hostility between the two sides of the university students.

As the late 1930s and the *Anschluss* were approaching, David Lehr expressed a sense of dread within the Jewish community. They sensed it was coming due to the rapid rise in Nazism in Austria, but there was a sense of denial right before the March 1938 annexation came to fruition. Lehr says, "At the inception of these 'Days of Awe' for Austria's Jews, during which we tried strenuously to fend of the bone-chilling anticipation of disaster, many of us hid our anxieties and often unmitigated dread of inescapable cataclysmic events, in eager participation in patriotic activity, designed to stem the tide against Nazism."[82] As was the case at the start of the First World War, the Jews in Austria were trying to prove to their non-Jewish counterparts that they were loyal to their country.

David Lehr did not stay in Austria long after the *Anschluss*. He was not allowed to work at the university anymore, so he no longer had a job. That July, he emigrated to Sweden. Similar to Lilly Drukker's father, in order to be permitted to leave, Lehr had to swear to never return to his native country after he left. After receiving his passport, the Swedish consul made him swear that he did not make an oath of no-return to the Austrian government in order for him to get a Swedish visa. The situation becomes complicated when one has to make an oath of no-return to one country, while having to promise that

---

[81] Lehr, LBI, 40.

[82] Lehr, LBI, 231.

he did not make that same oath in order to gain entry to another one. Nevertheless, he was so eager to get out of Austria that he lied to the Swedish consul and was permitted to leave Austria.[83] The rest of his family stayed behind in Austria, where he assumed they all died until later reunification. After a year in Sweden, David Lehr was able to emigrate to the United States in the fall of 1939, where he would live for the rest of his life and be reunited with his family members upon their arrival.

David Lehr's answer to the question of national identity is a more complicated one than Drukker's. As a child, his mother had instilled in him a strong pride in his Jewishness.[84] So much so, that throughout his time in Vienna, his Jewish identity was much stronger than his Austrian one. While Lehr never declared himself a Zionist, he did hold the same idea that a Jew would never be treated with full equality in Austria and accordingly saw himself as separate from Austria. There were times – right before and during the *Anschluss* – that he pledged his loyalty to Austria, but he saw himself as a Jewish man first and foremost. He did not nationally recognize himself as an Austrian Jew until he emigrated and began to reflect on his own national identity. At the time of writing his memoir, he still held the Austrian-Jewish dual identity which can be seen through his writing when he consistently refers to himself and his contemporaries as Austrian Jews.

The previous individuals discussed were all born in Vienna. Though they all had different childhood and experiences, they were all considered – or at least considered

[83] Lehr, LBI, 232.

[84] Lehr, LBI, 218.

themselves – native Austrians. Adolph Mechner, as previously mentioned, was a Jewish man born in the Bukowina region of Austria-Hungary. The capital city of the province, Czernowitz, is where he grew up. Czernowitz was mainly German, while the rest of the region consisted of Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, and "quite a lot (about 35%) of Jews."[85] After Mechner was released from the Austro-Hungarian army, he returned to Czernowitz in September 1918 where he reunited with his mother and attended university for a year.

Bukowina was in chaos at the time. During the war, the region was occupied many times and Mechner's abandoned family apartment was even taken over by Russian troops.[86] After the war, there was fighting between the Ukrainian and Romanian national groups over the territory. The Romanians were able to take over control of the Bukowina area, and Mechner described the changes made by the Romanians when they took power, 'Names of streets were changed, and antisemitism could be noticed everywhere."[87]

Adolph Mechner returned to Vienna after spending a year at university in Czernowitz. After the collapse of the empire, *Heimkehrer* transports were sent to former parts of the empire. These were created as a way to collect Austrians from throughout the empire in order to bring them back. Mechner, even though he was not an Austrian citizen, was able to get on the transport and move to Vienna since they did not check papers for proof of citizenship due to so many documents being lost.[88] He was not the only non-

[85] Mechner, USHMM, 20.

[86] Mechner, USHMM, 266-268.

[87] Mechner, USHMM, 276.

[88] Mechner, USHMM, 294.

Austrian to be on this train, and he recalled, "Many old friends and some the professors from the University were also on the train."[89] Mechner and his friends were an example of the *Ostjuden* who would often face aversion from both non-Jews and Jews.

Once Mechner was in Vienna, he started medical school and filled out a form stating his intent to make the Republic of Austria his homeland. He did not become a citizen at that moment, rather, it took him 5 more years to gain his Austrian citizenship.[90] Coincidentally, Mechner attended the same institute as David Lehr but around 4 years earlier. Both studied under the Jewish Professor Tandler, who was the head of the Anatomy Department that was more tolerant and politically left leaning.[91] Mechner mentions that there was antisemitism throughout the university during his time as a student and Jews had to work harder than non-Jews in order to get the same recognition.[92] Mechner graduated on March 13, 1925 after waiting to receive Austrian citizenship so he could practice medicine in Vienna. If he had not waited, he would have been sent back to Romania to practice there.[93]

The Interwar years were good to Adolph Mechner. Another milestone Mechner reached during this time was marriage. He was married to an Austrian Jewish woman,

---

[89] Mechner, USHMM, 294.

[90] Mechner, USHMM, 296.

[91] Mechner, USHMM, 296. David Lehr also writes about his time studying under Tandler here: Lehr, LBI, 39-45.

[92] Mechner, USHMM, 318-324.

[93] Mechner, USHMM, 300. At this point, the Bukowina region was controlled by Romania.

Hedy, in 1928. His work as a doctor was so successful that he was able to open his own practice and renovate an apartment for himself and his wife. In 1931, Mechner had his first son, Franz.[94] Five years later, they had a second child. It was a daughter this time and they named her Johanna.[95]

The 1938 annexation happened two short years later. Adolph Mechner had started to worry about the rising Nazi party and its popularity in Austria for some time now. After the *Anschluss* occurred, the Nazis revoked Mechner's right to practice medicine. This also happened to German Jews in 1933. It would be harder for Mechner and his family to escape, especially due to the fact that Mechner was born in Czernowitz. Now that Czernowitz was part of Romania, he had to join that quota which was much lower than Austria's.

With what Mechner calls a "spark of good luck", he was nonetheless able to leave Austria. His wife, Hedy, had an uncle, Dr. Josef Feingold, who discovered two paintings in his basement. The credited painter was Adolf Hitler.[96] Dr. Feingold used these paintings as leverage to get him and his family to Paris. Dr. Feingold and his family had bought tickets to continue through France and travel to Cuba, but they decided to stay in Paris. Dr. Feingold offered these tickets to Adolph Mechner and his family, and they jumped at the chance. Both Adolph and his son, Franz Mechner, traveled to France to get on a ship to Cuba in October 1938. Franz was left in the custody of his Aunt Lisa in Paris

---

[94] Mechner, USHMM, 498.

[95] Mechner, USHMM, 544.

[96] Mechner, USHMM, 606.

since he thought that would be a better place for Franz.[97] Adolph Mechner would continue on to Cuba, where he reunited with his immediate family and emigrate to the United States in 1944.

In terms of his nationality, Adolph Mechner did not see himself as an Austrian. He was able to get Austrian citizenship and declared the desire for the country to be considered his homeland, but he never fully identified himself with Austria. Throughout his memoir, he writes about how Czernowitz was his homeland and where he was from. Austria was just the place that he lived. When it came to his identity, he saw himself as a Jew from Bukowina.

All four of these Austrian Jews are great examples of what the Austrian Jewish population experienced. Each of their stories reflect the struggle for acceptance that Austrian Jews faced throughout their history in Austria. At times, they would be accepted into society, but at other moments in history, they were persecuted on the basis of being Jewish.

[97] Mechner, USHMM, 608.

Conclusion

With the help of these four figures of Interwar Austrian history, it is easy to argue the complexities within the Jewish community. There was a spectrum of identities: strictly German/Austrian on one side, a dual Austro-Jewish identity in the middle, and a solely Jewish nationality on the other side. Otto Bauer, an assimilated Jew, did not often acknowledge his Jewish ancestry, calling himself a German-Austrian, and denying the existence of a distinct Jewish nationality. He would be on the strictly German/Austrian side of the spectrum. In the middle, there is Lilly Drukker, a non-practicing Jew who was a proud Austrian and also a proud Jew at the same time. David Lehr, who grew up in an Orthodox Jewish household, later came to see himself as an Austrian Jew, but recognized himself as only a Jew in his childhood during the Interwar years. Adolph Mechner, who the Viennese would call an *Ostjuden*, immigrated to Austria in the interwar years and did not identify as an Austrian nationally even though he was a recognized citizen. Rather, he continued to claim his Bukowina and Jewish identity. Through just these four stories, the complexities of Jewish identity in interwar Austria are easily visible.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Drukker, Lilly Geringer. "Lilly Geringer Drukker memoir". 1994. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 2012.365.1. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn47535

Landau, Ronnie S. *Studying the Holocaust: Issues, Readings, and Documents*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Lehr, David. *Austria before and after the Anschluss: Personal experiences, observations, and comments*. 1998. LBI Memoir Collection, ME 1202. Leo Baeck Institute Archives, New York. https://digipres.cjh.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE8650544

Mechner, Adolph. "The memoir of Adolph Mechner from the years 1897 to 1947". 1978. Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection, R154.M38 A3 1978. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib265465

Secondary Sources

Berkley, George E. *Vienna and Its Jews: The Tragedy of Success, 1880s-1980s.* Cambridge: Abt Books, 1988.

Brook-Shepard, Gordon. *November 1918: Triumph and Tragedy in the Final Days of WWI*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

Bukey, Evan Burr. *Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era, 1938-1945.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Carter, William H. "Spielerische Gedanken: Economic Crisis and Financial Speculation in Hugo Bettauer's 'Die Stadt Ohne Juden' and Its Adaptation by Hans Karl Breslauer." *Journal of Austrian Studies* 49, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2016): 1–16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44684647.

Crouthamel, Jason, Michael Geheran, Tim Grady, and Julia Barbara Köhne, eds. *Beyond Inclusion and Exclusion: Jewish Experiences of the First World War in Central Europe*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019.

Hanisch, Ernst. "Otto Bauer (1881-1938): Politician and Public Intellectual." In *Austrian Lives*, edited by Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser, and Eva Maltschnig, 21:56–70.

University of New Orleans Press, 2012. Accessed March 29, 2022. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1n2txnx.6.

Herzl, Theodor, and Alan Dershowitz. *The Jewish State: The Historic Essay That Led to the Creation of the State of Israel.* New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company Incorporated, 2019.

Hochman, Erin R. *Imagining a Greater Germany: Republican Nationalism and the Idea of Anschluss.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.

Kann, Robert A. *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1974.

Kornberg, Jacques. *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Pauley, Bruce F. *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=e000xna&AN=41205&scope=site.

Reifowitz, Ian. "Otto Bauer and Karl Renner on Nationalism, Ethnicity, & Jews." *Journal of Jewish Identities* 2, no. 2 (2009) :1-19.

Rozenblit, Marsha L. *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria During World War I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Rozenblit, Marsha L. *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983.