

## Jewish Identity in Postwar Austria: Experiences and Dilemmas

### Introduction

This article relates to a number of sociological findings concerning the experiences, identity conflicts and ways of coping with anti-Semitism among Viennese Jews of different generations. The relevant studies were designed and carried out in the context of the so-called “Waldheim affair”. Kurt Waldheim, Austrian president from 1986 to 1992, is known to have had to face, during his election campaign, massive accusations concerning his role under the Nazi regime: Waldheim had concealed, or at least incompletely disclosed, his membership with the SA and NS student federation, as well as his role as liaison officer with the German *Wehrmacht*. He justified himself with reference to the “performance of one’s duties”, producing the argument that “after more than 40 years, some things simply slip your mind.”<sup>1</sup> Two aspects should be emphasized in relation to the Waldheim affair which was to leave its crucial mark on the history of the Second Republic: on the one hand, the officially supported system of excluding and tabooing the NS past went out of control. The affair began to preoccupy the Austrian public, triggering off a virtual “memory project”. For the very first time since the war, the historical myths and delusions of the Second Republic of Austria were allowed to come to surface with vehemence, finally being exposed and criticized as constituents of a problematic national ideology. In particular, this referred to the notion that Austria had been the first victim of Nazi Germany. On the other hand, the 1986 election campaign was accompanied by an increasing right-wing populism represented by Jörg Haider’s so-called “Austrian Freedom Party”. These new developments indicated that, even after the Holocaust, it was indeed possible to successfully mobilize anti-Semitic prejudice in the political arena. The skillful political tactics that came to be applied proved to be able to transform latent anti-Semitic attitudes into manifest forms of anti-Semitism. Private opinion on this issue was again allowed to be publicly expressed, and a pattern of what until then was looked upon as explicitly hostile, anti-Jewish behavior emerged.<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental crisis in Austrian political culture as described above was the background for a quantitative and qualitative analysis of experiences, opinions and attitudes among Austrian Jews. The quantitative investigation offered us the opportunity to ask members of Vienna’s Jewish community about the significance of the developments within Austrian society in the late 1980s as seen from the perspective of Austrian Jews.<sup>3</sup> How did they personally evaluate the changes within Austrian society? To what extent did these changes have an impact on Viennese Jews’ self-identity and their attitude towards the country itself? In particular, how did they judge the growing extent of anti-Semitism? According to Alphonse Silbermann, the only way to identify the scale and degree of openly manifested

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Präsenz*, April 24, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example H. Weiss, *Antisemitische Vorurteile in Österreich* (Vienna, 1987); E. Gehmacher, F. Birk and G. Ogris, ‘Die Waldheim-Wahl. Eine erste Analyse’, *Journal für Sozialforschung* 26 (3/1986), pp. 319–31; ‘SWS-Meinungsprofile: Antisemitismus in Österreich und Westdeutschland 1987’, *Journal für Sozialforschung* 28 (1/1988), pp. 79–118; Ch. Haerpfer, ‘Antisemitische Einstellungen in der österreichischen Gesellschaft 1973–1989’, in *NS-Ideologie und Antisemitismus in Österreich*, ed. H. Kienzl and K. Prokop (Vienna, 1989); J. Golub, *Recent Trends in Austrian Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1991); American Jewish Committee/Gallup-Institute in Austria, *Current Austrian Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust* (Vienna, 1995); H. Weiss and Ch. Reinprecht, *Nationalismus-Studie*, unpubl. volume of tables (Vienna, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. Weiss, *Jüdische Identität-ein Generationenvergleich. Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse einer quantifizierenden Untersuchung in Wien*, unpubl. research report (Vienna, 1992).

discrimination is to ask the discriminated minorities themselves.<sup>4</sup> In Austria, no data had yet been accumulated in this regard.

However, quantitative data cannot exclusively provide a satisfying answer to the question as to what it means to be Jewish in present-day Austria, which means the question of identity. Therefore, we addressed this key issue in a series of biographical interviews with Viennese Jews, who had been forced to emigrate in the late 1930s and then returned from exile, with their children, after the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to the quantitative inquiry, our qualitative research endeavor focused in particular on experiences and identity conflicts among Jewish re-emigrants. It should be emphasized that the identity issue dealt with in this paper does not concern the entire Jewish postwar community in Austria. Those who returned from emigration are only a very small part of the Jewish community in this country. Most of the Jews who live in Austria today are postwar emigrants from Eastern Europe and their descendants.

Yet even if the interviews regarding the question of Jewish identity concerned merely a small group within the Austrian Jewish community, it would appear significant for the way in which Jews in Austria generally see themselves today. The interviewees had lived in this country until 1938 and therefore had developed a specific identity as Jews and as Austrians. After their return, they faced the problem of living in a country that had rejected and persecuted its citizens of Jewish origin. The state officially refused to acknowledge its share of responsibility for the crimes committed under national socialism, and even those Austrians who had collaborated with the Nazi regime regard themselves as victims. How did re-emigrants come to terms with this situation? What did the experience of expulsion, emigration and return mean in the process of constructing and, of course, redefining their identity? Did such experiences have an impact on the younger generations and on the way they perceive themselves? What criteria do individuals apply to measure the degree of their own “Jewishness”? Are there differences between the generations? And what distinction can be made between Jews who returned after 1945 and postwar immigrants from Eastern Europe?

This article argues that the identity of Austrian Jews who returned from emigration was marked by strong feelings of alienation and ambivalence both in regard to their self-image as Austrians and as Jews: one can also say that re-emigrants had to come to terms with a doubly broken identity. An attempt to overcome this conflict was not made by ethnification, that is, a stronger feeling of affiliation with the Jewish community, but rather by means of strategies of individualizing and encapsulation, thus internalizing their own identity problems. This was the reason, why parent–child relationships were frequently marked by silence. With the eruption of the Waldheim affair the confrontation with their own “past unmastered” seemed unavoidable. However, the increased ethnic identification with Jewry resulting from this affair was limited to the succeeding generations who could in this way demonstrate their rejection of the predominant political culture. In contrast, the experiences of Jews who immigrated to postwar Austria from Eastern Europe are marked by what can be described as “classical” problems of migration. The tendency of ethnic isolation which can be observed within this group can be attributed to status problems.

Before discussing the above line of thought in the light of our empirical research findings, we will outline the historical–political context and several relevant aspects of postwar Austrian political culture.

### **The historical–political context: aspects of political culture in postwar Austria**

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<sup>4</sup> A. Silbermann, *Sind wir Antisemiten? Ausmaß und Wirkung eines Vorurteils in der BRD* (Cologne, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ch. Reinprecht, *Zurückgekehrt. Identität und Bruch in der Biographie österreichischer Juden* (Vienna, 1992).

The Nazi regime had almost completely extinguished the once flourishing Jewish community of Vienna. Approximately 200,000 Jews had been living in Austria before 1938, 180,000 of whom in Vienna (they made up 9.4 per cent of the city's population). About 65,000 Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, almost 130,000 were forced to emigrate, and only a few survived in hiding. In December 1945, after the country was liberated, the Jewish community consisted of a mere 4,000 members, less than half of them were survivors of concentration camps, and only some hundreds had returned from emigration. In the following years, about 5,000 Jews previously forced to emigrate by the Nazis came back to their home country. Today's Jewish community in Vienna is no larger than 10,000, among whom only a few are survivors of the Nazi regime.<sup>6</sup>

The atmosphere with which Jews were confronted in postwar Vienna was lucidly described by George Clare, a British writer of Austrian origin. After visiting Vienna he wrote: "I found that same kind of self-pity in Vienna which was so familiar to me from Germany but with the added dimension of lamb-like Austrian innocence."<sup>7</sup>

Such "innocence" was also cultivated by the Austrian political elite and the official attitude towards the victims was rather ambivalent. Under the pressure of the allied occupation forces, anti-Semitism was condemned and rigorous measures of denazification were passed immediately in 1945 in order to demonstrate the will to create Austria anew. On the other hand, responsibility for crimes committed under the Nazi regime was fully rejected and compensation to its victims was denied (although the Republic, on the occasion of the 1955 state treaty negotiations, officially agreed to make reparation payments). The procedures of denazification soon came to an end; most of the convictions took place between 1945 and 1949, and the sentences passed on war criminals turned out to be rather lenient.

More often than not, the situation was bitterly grotesque for the Jews who had survived the Holocaust. They had to register at the central office for victims of Nazi terror where they were welcomed with the question "*Sind Sie Jude oder Arier?*" ["Are you Jewish or Aryan?"]. The first law passed in July 1945 provided for exclusive financial support for victims who could prove to have been involved in an active resistance movement. Historian Ruth Beckermann concluded: "All of a sudden, Jews who had been persecuted for being Jewish had to show that they were worthy victims. To be a Jew was not enough. One had to have opposed the Nazis."<sup>8</sup> Jewish emigrants who tried to return in larger groups, such as emigrants in Shanghai where about 10,000 Austrian Jews had survived the Nazi regime, suffered from a particularly extreme degree of bureaucratic harassment. Even famous artists and intellectuals were not exempted from humiliating bureaucratic hurdles.<sup>9</sup>

It is crucial to realize that the kind of anti-Semitism prevailing in Austria after 1945 was not merely "atmospheric". The authorities of the Viennese Jewish community estimate today that no more than two-thirds of former Jewish landed property, and one-fourth of former Jewish businesses, had been restituted eight years after the end of the war. Clearly, anti-Semitism also had economic reasons.<sup>10</sup> Having taken part in plundering Jewish property, thousands of Viennese often succeeded in preventing the restitution of what they had come to see as their own, legally acquired property.

Leading politicians in postwar Austria obviously supported this view. In 1948, the Social Democratic Interior Minister, Oskar Helmer, referred to the danger of "Jewish

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen. Juden in Österreich nach 1945* (Vienna, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in O. Rathkolb, 'NS-Problem und politische Restauration', in *Verdrängte Schuld, Verfehlte Sühne. Entnazifizierung in Österreich 1945–1955*, ed. S. Meissl, K. D. Mulley and O. Rathkolb (Vienna, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> R. Beckermann, *Unzugehörig. Österreicher und Juden* (Vienna, 1989), p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. for example F. Stadler, *Vertriebene Vernunft I und II. Emigration und Exil der österreichischen Wissenschaft* (Vienna and Munich, 1987 and 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Safrian and H. Witek, *Und keiner war dabei. Dokumente des alltäglichen Antisemitismus* (Vienna, 1988), p. 194.

dissemination”.<sup>11</sup> And with regard to “displaced persons” (about 100,000 Jews from Eastern Europe migrated through Austria after 1945), Karl Renner, the Republic’s Social Democratic President, remarked: “I do not think that Austria in its current state should allow the establishment of a new Jewish community from Eastern Europe while our own people need jobs.”<sup>12</sup> Jewish emigrants who returned from their countries of exile were confronted with the slogan “*Rückkehr unerwünscht*—no place for emigrants.” Newspapers related to emigrants as an “evil”, having no right to speak about Austria. The conservative Foreign Minister, Leopold Figl, expressed in public that it had been more comfortable for the emigrants to sit in their “cosy” leather seats than to fight for the country.

At the same time, Austrian official declarations were eager to deny any anti-Semitism, an attitude which had to be adopted under the pressure of the allied occupation forces. “The Viennese are cosmopolitans and thus no anti-Semites”, said Vienna’s Social Democratic mayor, Theodor Körner, in 1947. “Anti-Jewish tendencies are alien to them. Stories about anti-Semitism are deliberate lies or thoughtless rubbish.” A poll carried out by the US occupation forces in 1947/48 illustrated the people’s real opinion: 44 per cent of the city’s population agreed with the statement “The Nazis exaggerated in their way of treating Jews, but something had to happen in order to show them where they really belong.”<sup>13</sup>

While anti-Semitism and lack of historical consciousness are characteristic aspects of political culture in the Second Republic, empirical studies carried out today indicate that anti-Jewish prejudice has survived. A representative opinion poll in 1996 showed that 32 per cent shared the opinion that: “Jews have too much influence in Austria”; and 18 per cent thought that much of what was said about concentration camps and Jewish persecution was exaggerated. Finally, 16 per cent remarked that one should admit today that “the extermination of Jews in our country also had positive aspects”.<sup>14</sup>

The denial of guilt and the myth of being a victim proved to be useful tools in dealing with the past, both for the elite and the majority of the population. The elements of such strategies included denying any connection with the crimes of national socialism, personalizing historical responsibility in the figure of Hitler, and generally delegating accountability to the Germans. The results of recent empirical research indicate that this attitude is popular even today. In the above survey, for instance, 44 per cent believed that Austria was not responsible for the Nazi regime, but rather it was its victim. This withdrawal from historic responsibility is clearly expressed in the conviction that “Austria was extinguished in 1938 and came into being in a new form in 1945.” It was thus made possible to re-establish both personal and structural continuities and to refuse paying any restitution to Jewish “homecomers”. Even today, 57 per cent in this country believe that Austria is not obliged to pay restitution.

For decades, Austria has not made a genuine attempt to come to terms with the “chaos of its own past” (Anton Pelinka). In the late 1980s, the legitimization of a nation-wide “lie of life” was questioned for the very first time on account of the Waldheim affair. Since then, the official picture of history has been corrected and school-books reformulated. National socialism has been declared an official part of Austrian history and collective memory.<sup>15</sup> However, these positive changes could not have come into being without foreign observers’ critical assessments: why was the Austrian elite itself not able to scrutinize its own history? The process of questioning the Austrian identity could nevertheless be seen as an opportunity

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<sup>11</sup> R. Knight, *Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen* (Vienna, 1988), p. 197.

<sup>12</sup> R. Knight, *Ich bin dafür*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> M. Schönberg, *Amerikanische Informations- und Medienpolitik in Österreich 1945–50*, unpubl. dissertation (Vienna, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> H. Weiss and Ch. Reinprecht, *Nationalismus-Studie*.

<sup>15</sup> See the statement made by former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in July 1991 concerning the joint responsibility of Austria in the Third Reich, in *Die Presse*, July 9, 1991.

to change the relationship between Austria and its history—and the country’s relationship to its Jewish citizens.

### **Coming back to Austria after the Second World War**

What reasons did Jews actually have to return to Austria after 1945? Most of the approximately 5,000 emigrants who returned to Austria (mostly to Vienna) after the liberation of 1945 came back immediately after the war. Indeed, most of them had a number of reasons to return.<sup>16</sup> Personal and family circumstances were often of great importance. The chances for older emigrants to integrate in their countries of emigration were limited; and opportunities to develop a stable existence there were more easily accessible to young people with a higher standard of education, stable family structures and higher-level mobility. Younger emigrants sometimes followed their parents, or they looked for survivors in their families and finally landed in Vienna. Others accorded their partners’ or spouses’ wish to come back. Some did it for political reasons as they desired to help reestablish a new democratic Austria. Many came back from emigration countries like Palestine/Israel or China (Shanghai) where it was difficult to establish a normal life. By 1950, only 0.2 per cent of the then resident former emigrants in the USA had returned to Austria, 4.7 per cent of those living in Palestine/Israel and 20 per cent of those in Shanghai. However, for nearly all interviewees, attachment to the German language and Austrian culture was a major factor.

Our research argues that the motives for coming back to Austria were strongly influenced by the way in which the events of March 1938 and the subsequent process of displacement were handled. Three relevant aspects can be observed: the political orientation toward anti-fascism and socialism, cultural identification with prewar Austria, and the age factor. Political identity as a communist or social democrat made it possible to interpret persecution not as a personal abuse, but as a manifestation of political conflict, implying the patriotic struggle for a free Austria.

This influenced both the exile situation as such (participation in the struggle against Hitler) and the decision to return (participation in Austrian reconstruction). Another way to neutralize the negative experiences of 1938 and displacement was to idealize prewar Austrian culture, thereby rationalizing the country’s extinction and the setup of Hitler’s murder regime in terms of a historical accident or contingency. In addition, the decision to return was influenced by one’s age at the time of expulsion: younger emigrants in particular more frequently experienced displacement, exile and return as a challenge or even adventure than as an unbearable destiny.

Apart from these different and specific preconditions, the return movement was intermeshed with the hope that a normal life would again be possible after all the years of humiliation. Many emigrants hoped that anti-Semitism would become a thing of the past and that the Austrian people would change their attitude after all that had happened. Therefore, many of them expected to be welcomed by the Austrians. Such hope was linked to the notion of a new beginning in which the re-emigrants preserved their prewar exile identity for times to come—an orientation toward social integration and cultural assimilation as members of Austrian society as well as citizens of the Austrian Republic.

### **“Returning to Austria broke me down—not the exile”**

The reality which the emigrants found after their return was at once familiar and alienating. They still had strong feelings of attachment to the places they had belonged to

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. F. Wilder-Okladek, *The Return Movement of Jews to Austria after the Second World War (with special consideration of the return from Israel)* (Den Haag, 1969).

before. However, they were forced to realize that the Nazi regime and the war had done a lot of mental damage to the people. They were genuinely welcomed by a few only; politics and daily life were full of covert anti-Semitism; and claims for restitution of Aryanized property were rarely recognized. In addition, the emigrants faced the problems of arranging their lives in practical terms, such as finding a job or dealing with the local authorities, especially when it came to lodging.

However, the emigrants did not find a renewed Austria—their idea cherished during their exile failed to materialize. Instead, they were confronted with the self-righteousness of people who defended Aryanized property as if it were their own, with a bureaucracy and new political elite which failed to understand or share their anxieties and needs. In such a situation, even those emigrants who came back with expectations of Austrian political and democratic renewal were forced to admit that their hopes had been based on an illusion.

Some concrete data from our quantitative analysis should amplify the atmospheric description of these people's situation. Among those interviewees who returned from emigration after 1945, 60 per cent never returned to their former apartments which they could have claimed as their property. Two-thirds of those who could prove their legal property (capital or land) were restituted, yet only a very small proportion of the original value was paid out. 40 per cent claimed that it would have been *very* difficult to access their former property; and another 40 per cent claimed it had been *rather* difficult.

All the humiliations the emigrants were exposed to after their return sharpened their awareness of the scale and depth of expulsion experienced in 1938. The situation they found in Austria upon returning destroyed the expectations and hopes they had cherished in the years of exile, when they still thought of that country as their home. But returning did not prove to be like coming back home. In her autobiography, one Austrian emigrant wrote: "However difficult to bear at times, exile was altogether an enriching experience; it was not the exile, but returning to Austria which broke me down."<sup>17</sup>

Similar emotional experiences were described by Jean Amery in *Out of Guilt and Expiation*: "We did not lose the country, but we had to recognize that we had never possessed it. Whatever had to do with this country and its people proved to be a fatal misunderstanding of our lives."<sup>18</sup> These sentences again refer to the experience of expulsion—a harassing encounter and existential disappointment that most of the interviewees did not consider thinkable until they returned home.

Then, was the decision correct to return to Austria after years of exile, and was that the question to be asked? In our series of qualitative interviews, the evaluations show a lot of ambivalence. Almost every second interviewee answered that they do not regret having decided to come back; but almost exactly as many confirmed that they occasionally had doubts regarding this decision. Only few clearly state it was wrong to have returned.

The younger generation judged their parents' decision to return quite differently. Children and grandchildren could not understand that, even after the Holocaust, their parents still clung to expectations of a renewed Austria. In their perspective, the humiliations their parents had to suffer after their return must have been foreseeable. As opposed to their parents, they traced back all the traumatic experiences, including the time in postwar Austria, to the structural characteristics of Austrian society. In turn, such criticism of their parents' decision to return represents a crucial element in creating their own identity, especially with regard to their Jewish identity.

## Dilemmas of Jewish identity in postwar Austria

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<sup>17</sup> H. Zaloscer, *Eine Heimkehr gibt es nicht. Ein österreichisches curriculum vitae* (Vienna, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> J. Amery, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (Munich, 1988), p. 67.

Austrian Jews who had come back from their countries of emigration after 1945 bore a double stigma: First, in the memory of expulsion, the stigma of being Jewish had become an immanent part of their own personal identity. Second, the fact of having been in exile made them suspicious in the eyes of the non-Jewish Austrians. After 1945, no space nor possibility seemed available to establish a normal relationship between Jews and non-Jews; the conditions for a new beginning were extremely difficult. Let me quote from a book by Dolly Steindling: “Barely a question as to my parents, brothers and sisters, barely a question where had I been all those years, why I survived, or how and why I came back to Vienna. The fact that I was there and alive was close to provocative to them, something that made them feel very uneasy.”<sup>19</sup>

Jewish emigrants who came back to Austria after the country was liberated were once again forced to perceive themselves as merely Jewish in the mirror of society. The Jewish re-emigrants were thus left without the chance to independently define their identity either as Jewish or Austrian.

The emigrants came back to Austria as individuals, carrying in them their own reminiscences of discrimination, persecution and expulsion, and they wanted to live in their country as free individuals. Instead, the majority of Austrians perceived them as a collective entity. Thus, it proved impossible to develop either a distinctive Jewish or an Austrian identity. Although at the moment of returning many of the emigrants saw themselves as Austrian patriots, the situation did not offer them an opportunity to fully identify themselves with this country. There were two major reasons. Firstly, the emigrants were excluded from collective discourse; secondly, the conditions for a modern integration of Jewish and Austrian identity, as had been present in prewar times, had been destroyed by national socialism. The emigrants thus felt a deep emotional ambiguity towards their own Jewish, as well as their Austrian identity.

In one of our biographical interviews, this experience was expressed in a moving way by a man who had survived the Holocaust in Palestine/Israel and returned to Austria with his parents shortly after the war:

In my mind, normal integration in Austria today is possible only to a very limited extent. It's different for traditionalist or Orthodox Jews who do not strive to integrate. I am absolutely non-religious, but I have a Jewish conception of myself as belonging to a community that shares a common destiny. Wherever I go, whatever I do, I always come up against a barrier. This is a very painful experience. You always meet people who aren't particularly nice, or who wouldn't see you as being very nice. We all have our own circles of people whom we meet, that's normal. But still, there is a dividing line. It is not possible for me to establish genuine relationships with other people. Eighty per cent is all I can get out of a relationship. That's what I call a feeling of isolation, and it's very unpleasant. There are times I manage to get over it, and there are times when I really suffer.

The dilemma of our interviewee's identity could be described as follows: as a Jew, he is denied total integration; and as an Austrian born in prewar times, he is rather far from accepting Jewish identity. For him, Jewish identity becomes a kind of supportive construction that is necessary to avoid total alienation. The dilemma is apparent: he is neither religious, nor does he identify himself with the Jewish community. He is married to a non-Jewish woman and never bothered to transmit the Jewish tradition to his son. Yet the man's being Jewish is a covert, self-asserting value, a substitute for the social acceptance he misses.

In our series of biographical interviews, this pattern was to be found in most reports given by the interviewees, even by those who were politically active and who looked upon their own experience in the light of their political consciousness.

The process of reconstructing and redefining Jewish identity in post-Holocaust Austria

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<sup>19</sup> D. Steindling, *Meine Jugend. Ein Bericht* (Vienna, 1990).

was characterized not only by the difficulty, or even impossibility, of a new beginning based on a clear and rational relationship between the minority and the majority. The situation was also marked by the overcoming of prewar assimilation strategies. Assimilation was no longer a collective process (a “ghetto of assimilation”) but represented individualized practice, and the strategies which Jews were forced to develop had to be strategies exceeding the traditional concepts of assimilation and dissimilation.

In fact, the emigrants could not resume the dominant prewar conceptions of Jewish identity: cultural assimilation (civic emancipation) and social revolution. In our research, all the interviewees came from families who had gone through the process of assimilation prior to the war. Most identified themselves very strongly with the tradition of Austrian culture, while their links to the Jewish tradition were comparatively loose. Zionism, the third dominant prewar concept of Jewish identity, played for our interviewees a secondary role only. Most interviewees lived in mixed couples. At the subjective and objective levels likewise, the process touched upon social and structural assimilation; it concerned those who believed in civic emancipation—in terms of personal and social autonomy—as much as those who believed in the utopia of political, socialist revolution.

Despite all the difficulties and humiliations described above, most of the interviewees successfully managed to integrate into Austrian society. The lack of acceptance on the part of most in that society did not result in stronger identification with the Jewish community; each individual had to find his or her own ways to cope with rejection. The distressing experiences and humiliations could not be communicated but were locked up within one’s personal memory. We would also argue that the emigrants were forced to internalize and individualize the societal conflict going on between the majority and the minority. This is the reason why emigrants, especially when asked about their experiences by their own children, often tried to gloss over the gloomy side of their situation, suppressing both their Jewish identity and their negative experiences. During the Waldheim affair, their children criticized this attitude as eluding historical truth. For the very first time, and as a consequence of that affair, many of the former emigrants declared themselves publicly as belonging to the Jewish community.

A majority of our interviewees continue to see Austria as their homeland, even after the Waldheim affair, although they do not hesitate to show ambivalent feelings. Individual bonds with Jewishness could be described as identification with a “community of fate”. The factors of identification include the existence of the State of Israel, the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish culture. The bonds to Jewishness as such (ethnic identity) and to Jewish religion and tradition are rather loose. Other research findings also confirm the importance of identification with a community that shared the same destiny, as well as the relatively little significance of religion and traditional Jewish cultural values for the emigrants.<sup>20</sup>

### **Differences and lines of conflict between the generations**

The German sociologist Micha Brumlik once remarked: “The children of German Jews have developed a post-Shoah identity that no longer has much in common with German Jews’ traditional identity.”<sup>21</sup> And with respect to Austria, our own investigations indicate a number of intergenerational differences and lines of conflict. As to Jewish identity, the memory of the Holocaust and the fact of being part of the “community of fate” are of secondary importance

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Goldstein, I. F. Lukoff and H. A. Strauss, *Individuelles und kollektives Verhalten in Nazi-Konzentrationslagern* (Frankfurt and New York, 1990); M. Pollak, *Die Grenzen des Sagbaren. Lebensgeschichten von KZ-Überlebenden als Augenzeugenberichte und als Identitätsarbeit* (Frankfurt and New York, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> M. Brumlik, ‘Zur Identität der zweiten Generation deutscher Juden nach der Shoa in der Bundesrepublik’, in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland nach 1945*, ed. M. Brumlik et al. (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 172.

in the children's and grandchildren's generation. Identification with culture and family life is much stronger than it was in their parents' case. This tendency of establishing identity upon ethnic criteria is even stronger in the second postwar generation.

These findings are confirmed by our quantitative research. "I feel very strongly attached to the Jewish tradition", claimed 47 per cent of the younger but only 36 per cent of the old generation. Despite the inner commitment to Jewish tradition, 26 per cent of the old and only 18 per cent of the younger Jews dissociated themselves from the Jewish world. The imposition of Jewish identity seemed to bother our older interviewees much more than the younger ones. Thus, the hypothesis "the only reason why I'm a Jew is because the others see me as a Jew" was confirmed by 18 per cent in the older and 10 per cent in the younger generation.

It seems that the younger our interviewees were, the more they became sensitive to the heritage of the Holocaust and the more they felt insecure and alienated: "Where do I belong, who am I?" The problem the children are facing is an ethnic dilemma concerning their attitude towards their own parents. Even though they criticized the strategies their parents applied to come to terms with the past and to survive, they felt a moral obligation toward their parents' fate. This dilemma is a source of conflict between the generations. Younger people cannot build their Jewish identity without getting into conflicts with their parents.

Among our interviewees of the second postwar generation, we observed an ambivalent, often extremely critical attitude and even rejection of Austria's political culture. The interviewees showed a pronounced interest in the development of reactionary political tendencies and in increasing anti-Semitism, whereas their parents tended to play down these issues. There was a very strong feeling of being a stranger, of being homeless. At the same time, Vienna remains their center of life, the only possible reference of Jewish life in Austria, and as such has a very positive connotation. Jewishness was an important issue for almost all of them; but the aspect of collective self-assertion played a more important role for the younger ones.

By means of confrontation with their parents' biographies and decisions, the younger generations tried to define their own position in society. Commitment to the Jewish community does not necessarily arise from manifest discrimination and concomitant feelings of stigmatization but rather from searching for one's own independent identity—as against both the parental biographies and the identity concepts prevailing in Austrian society.

As survivors of the Holocaust, the emigrants had been anxious to protect their children from discrimination and thus taught them to distance themselves from Jewish tradition. This concern did not, however, bring the expected result and was held in no high esteem. Most of the survivors' children reported on the process of becoming conscious of their Jewish origin in their adolescence. Both their social environment and their own roots are thus undergoing critical assessment. At the threshold of adulthood, the experience of being discriminated—for instance at school—is recalled or reinterpreted on the grounds of being stigmatized as a Jew. This process has sharpened the general sensibility to anti-Jewish attitudes and discriminating conditions in past and present times.

Activated by the 1986 election campaign, anti-Semitism was to be an experience deeply impressed on the memories of the homecomers' children. It was the first manifest wave of postwar anti-Semitism that directly confronted them. For this reason, the members of the second generation showed more distrust, sensitivity and personal concern with regard to their environment and the development of political culture in Austria. In our quantitative questionnaire survey, 38 per cent of the younger and 28 per cent of the older generation considered the Austrian population strongly anti-Semitic, while a mere 1 per cent did not believe Austrians to be anti-Semites. 60 per cent of the old, but only 46 per cent of the young interviewees claimed that anti-Semitism was no stronger in Austria than elsewhere. The

aggressive, murderous form of anti-Semitism was judged a serious threat by a total of 40 per cent. 91 per cent of the young and 89 per cent of the old shared the view that xenophobia was readily accepted in Austria—6 per cent and 9 per cent respectively, stating that the country has well overcome its Nazi past.

Reflection of one's personal origins is no longer an issue to be discussed within the family only. It has become a public issue in the aftermath of the Waldheim affair, the increase of right-wing populism, and as a result of the Holocaust commemoration debates. Such reflection has become increasingly possible and, in the eyes of young Jews, necessary in order to give public expression to their Jewish identity. To be Jewish has become a metaphor for resistance against a society that today denies diversity and that never wished to be reminded of its responsibility for the atrocities committed by Austrian Nazis. The Viennese writer Robert Schindel formulated this in his very own words: "For me being Jewish means memory and resistance."<sup>22</sup>

### **Immigrants and emigrants**

The above considerations apply to a limited extent only to the group of immigrants, that is, those Jews, or their parents, who came to Austria from Eastern Europe after 1945. The analysis of results from our quantitative study indicates that immigrants attribute more significance to ethnic affiliation than emigrants. Moreover, the former also show a higher level of ethnic identification with their people, culture, family life and religion. Such identification proved even stronger among the younger immigrant generations. Ethnic identification, especially in terms of traditional family life, culture and religion, is even more dominant in the second generation of immigrants than among the homecomers' children.

The ethnification tendency can thus be observed both among the children of emigrants and the second generation of immigrants. At the same time, however, the differences between these groups are substantial. With regard to the extent of interethnic marriage, mixed friendships or discrimination experienced in everyday and professional life, for example, factual assimilation has largely been preserved among children of Jews born in Austria before 1938. Conversely, the higher degree of ethnic identification in immigrants, particularly in those of the second generation, can apparently be attributed to status problems. Immigrants' children have a comparatively lower professional status than the children of long-established families, they indicate difficulties more often with regard to everyday and professional appreciation, and they more frequently experience factual discrimination in the working world. They share immigrants' "classical" destiny, forced to manage professional ascent that smoothes the path to appreciation and thus to assimilation. In relative terms, closure proves most powerful in this group, both with respect to contacts and ethnic self-definition.

### **Concluding remarks**

Our findings suggest that the differences are larger between homecomers and immigrants than between generations. This would indicate that the assimilative effect is more powerful than the generational effect, although the younger generation in both groups generally experiences an intensification of ethnic self-definition. Divergent experiences manifest themselves in the ethnification tendency. Ethnicity represents a defensive strategy of closure for the second generation of immigrants. For the virtually assimilated second generation of Austrian born re-emigrants, however, ethnicity is a resource and an option. This indicates that the emergence of an oppositional attitude toward one's environment and a feeling of collective attachment is based on voluntary choice and subjective decision-making.

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<sup>22</sup> R. Schindel, 'Judentum als Erinnerung und Widerstand', *Falter* 26/1984.

Ethnification fails to represent such a resource in the perspective of immigrants or the parent generation of re-emigrants.

With the Waldheim affair, the homecomers' children and grandchildren were most painfully made aware of the basic dilemma of Jewish identity in postwar Austria. "For the first time in my life", reported a young woman in our series of biographical interviews, "I had the feeling of being unable to define my Jewishness on my own."