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Jumbled Mosaics: Exploring Intracategorical Complexity in the Memoirs of Jewish Austrian (Youth) Emigrants to the United States

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Abstract | *This article offers a comparative analysis of a selection of memoirs of Jewish Austrians who fled to the United States under National Socialism, drawing primarily on unpublished memoirs from the Austrian Heritage Collection held at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. The article applies an intersectional approach to demonstrate how these memoirs can contribute to a more nuanced historiographical reconstruction of the complex processes of memory and identity formation that accompanied persecution, flight, exile, and survival abroad than have often been undertaken hitherto. Intergenerational discourse is of particular interest here, as is the intersection of age and generation with other analytical categories such as religious and/or cultural identity within the family, gender, schooling, friendships and social networks, class and political orientation, as well as practical issues surrounding integration in the United States during and after the 1940s such as language and the consequent transculturality of the Jewish Austrian exile community. The article demonstrates that each life story constitutes its own idiosyncratically “jumbled mosaic” – a compelling epithet used by one of the memoirists that captures perfectly both the unique subjectivity but also intracategorical complexity of the individual life stories.*

Keywords | *Austrian Heritage Collection, emigrant memoirs, intersectionality, generationality, memory, transnationalism,*

Note: Some of the statistical information cited in this article was relayed to me directly by Michael Simonson, archivist and Head of Public Outreach at the Leo



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The Austrian Heritage Collection (AHC) is a memorial project based at the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) in New York. Begun in the mid-1990s and ongoing today, it has resulted in the single-largest source collection pertaining to Jewish Austrian emigrants and one of the largest collections of exile history in the world. Documenting life stories from across the former territory of the Habsburg Empire and its successor states, the LBI's "Austrian" collections (in the broader historical sense of the term) today make up a good 30 percent of the institute's total archive and library holdings, reflecting a dramatic shift since the 1990s in the perception and reception of German-speaking Jewries in Central and Eastern Europe outside the narrower remit of a "national German" context.

By 2010 the AHC had compiled a broad variety of memory-texts (concentrating on interviews, but also including memoirs, official documents, photographs, and many other ego-documents) from over 3,500 individuals born between 1880 and 1939. Almost 2,300 of these people were born after 1920, meaning that the bulk of the material pertains to emigrants who were youths or children when they experienced Austria's "Anschluss" and were subsequently expelled or fled. Of the total collective, 97 percent lived in the United States and 87 percent were born in Vienna, though many in turn had family roots stretching across Central and Eastern Europe. This reflects the predominance in these life stories of both Vienna in the past and the United States, particularly the New York metropolitan area, in the present. The gender balance of the collection is fairly even, and the materials reflect a great diversity of religious, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, educational, professional, and other backgrounds.¹

Only a few systematic analyses of these materials and the wealth of insights they hold for modern Jewish Austrian history (including the tens of thousands

Baeck Institute (hereafter LBI), as well as by Philipp Rohrbach, one of the principal coordinators of the AHC, both of whom I thank warmly for their assistance in researching the AHC over the years. I would also like to thank Jacqueline Vansant and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on the earlier drafts of this article. Research for this article was made possible by a generous grant from the Edith Saurer Fonds.

1. See Albert Lichtblau, "Community-orientiertes Arbeiten konkret: Die Austrian Heritage Collection in New York," in *"Nach Amerika nämlich!" Jüdische Migrationen in die Amerikas des 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulla Kribernegg, Gerald Lamprecht, Roberta Maierhofer, and Andrea Strutz (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 139–40, 143; and Christian Klösch, "The Austrian Heritage Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute: Ein wissenschaftliches Projekt zur Dokumentation von Lebensgeschichten vertriebener ÖsterreicherInnen in den USA," in *Jenseits des Schlussstrichs: Gedenkdienst im Diskurs über Österreichs nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, ed. Martin Horváth, Anton Legerer, Judith Pfeifer, and Stephan Roth (Vienna: Löcker, 2002), 237–38.

who fled to and settled in the United States) have been undertaken to date. One particularly noteworthy publication is the 1999 work *Als hätten wir dazugehört* (As though we belonged) by Albert Lichtblau, one of the initiators and long-term coordinators of the AHC, which traces in broad strokes the confluence of history and memory of Jews across the Habsburg lands, thus setting a milestone for the study of Jewish Austrian memory through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.² Another milestone publication based on the AHC, which is of particular interest with regard to the analytical approach taken in this article, is the 2008 work *Zwischen Ost und West* (Between East and West) by Michaela Raggam-Blesch, which constitutes a first intersectional analysis of Jewish identity formation in Vienna through the lens of gender and women's history on the basis of Jewish women's memoirs.³

The AHC remains a largely unmined treasure trove of materials with enormous untapped potential for a thorough retelling of modern Jewish Austrian history and its complex transnational nexus between formerly Habsburg Central Europe and the United States—including, for the purposes of this special volume, specific attention to the experiences of youth emigrants as well as age and generation more generally as categories of analysis in historical research.

This article juxtaposes and analyzes (in varying shades of detail) a selection of ten unpublished memoirs from the AHC drawn from dozens that I have researched over the years. Six of these were authored by individuals born from 1917 onward (two in 1917, three in the 1920s, and one in 1930), meaning that these memoirists were either children, adolescents, or young adults when they experienced Austria's slide into National Socialism, the Anschluss, persecution and expulsion, and flight to America. The remaining four memoirists were born in the 1890s and provide a generational counterbalance to the younger pool of memoirists.

The main criterion for the compilation of my sample was thus not exclusively the age of the memoirists, less than half of whom were underage when they fled Austria, and all of whom only penned their memoirs later, when they were well into adulthood or even old age. My primary interest lay rather in their discursive engagements with childhood, age, and generationality and how these intersected with further categories such as gender, class, political orientation, and religiosity, as well as (conspicuously) education, in the subjects' construction of personal and cultural identifications and their relationship to

2. Albert Lichtblau, ed., *Als hätten wir dazugehört: Österreichisch-jüdische Lebensgeschichten aus der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1999).

3. Michaela Raggam-Blesch, *Zwischen Ost und West: Identitätskonstruktionen jüdischer Frauen in Wien* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2008).

Austria as a past and America as a present homeland. I thus also purposefully selected memoirs that proved most fruitful for the kind of comparative, intersectional analysis that I intended to showcase here, with a particular view toward the issue of childhood and age that forms the focal point of this special volume.

To this end, the analysis opens with an examination of intergenerational and intersectional discourses in *Weiter leben: Eine Jugend*, the influential 1992 autobiography of the recently deceased scholar and Shoah survivor Ruth Klüger (1931–2020). Although this constitutes a published work that did not originate in the AHC, Klüger’s explicit reflections on intersectionality offer a critical and accessible foundation for the comparative analysis of the AHC memoirs that follows.

Intersectional analyses of Jewish Austrian memoirs, both as individual texts and taken together as a corpus, can contribute to a more nuanced historiographical reconstruction of the complex processes of memory and identity formation, individual and collective, that accompanied persecution, flight, exile, and survival abroad than have often been undertaken hitherto. Intergenerational discourse is of particular interest here, as is the intersection of age and generation with other analytical categories such as religious and/or cultural identity within the family, gender, schooling, friendships and social networks, class and political orientation, as well as practical issues surrounding integration in the United States during and after the 1940s, such as language and the consequent transculturality of the Jewish Austrian exile community. The “intracategorical complexity” of the life stories recorded in this corpus of memoirs defies simplistic and monocausal explanatory models of modern Jewish Austrian history, showing instead that, for all their commonalities and differences, each life story constitutes its own idiosyncratically “jumbled mosaic”—a compelling epithet used by one of the memoirists cited below that captures perfectly the unique subjectivity but also intracategorical complexity of individual life stories.

Intersectionality and Intracategorical Complexity

Intersectionality is an often-invoked and thus polysemous analytical concept. Most commonly applied to the intersection of race and gender in the context of discriminatory language and practices, its potential application in historical scholarship is vast.⁴ As one handbook summarizes: “intersectionality plays

4. See the summary in Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp, “Intersectionality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, ed. Georgina Waylen, Karen Celis, Johanna Kantola, and S. Laurel Weldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. 57–59.

the useful role of challenging nationalised, racialised and sexualised versions of belonging” and instead “puts complexity centre-stage.”⁵ In other words, this critical approach serves to deconstruct those analytical categories that dominate both in historical sources and historiographical writing, while at the same time revealing the ways in which categories that are often examined in isolation actually interact with, inform, and transform each other in multiple configurations.⁶ An intersectional approach to historical sources and historiographical writing, with a view to the multiplicity and interaction of different categories, can thus foster a more complex understanding of both individual and collective human experiences. This obviates the oversimplifications and distortions that can arise from reducing these experiences to one or the other category of analysis, as still occurs all too often in historiography.

The problem of reductive categorization is especially apparent in the field of Jewish studies as well as in related fields such as Holocaust studies, which are predicated on a broad religious, cultural, and/or ethnic signifier (“Jewishness”) that often, however, remains poorly defined. Writing a history of Jews (or of the Holocaust) on the basis of “Jewishness” as the primary or even sole category of analysis not only runs the risk of (re-)producing false binaries, as is most evident in the tenacious “assimilation” paradigm in Jewish historiography.⁷ This “judaeocentric” perspective also obscures the diversity of experiences among the broad collective of people identified (by themselves or others) as Jewish, as well as their embeddedness in a range of contexts—and categories—beyond “Jewishness.”⁸ This is especially true in the context of Jewish emigration from Austria and Germany under National Socialism, as the common denominator of “Jewishness” in this context was sweeping, negative (fatal, in fact), and most crucially not a matter of self-identification, but of “racial” (and thus racist) categorization. Locating the diverse experiences of the vast collective of people persecuted as Jews under National Socialism in a complex entanglement of categories such as gender, class, religiosity, education, and so forth—in other words, to adopt an intersectional approach—can help foster not only a

5. Emily Grabham, Didi Herman, Davina Cooper and Jane Krishnadas, “Introduction,” in *Intersectionality and Beyond: Law, Power and the Politics of Location*, ed. Grabham, Cooper, Krishnadas, and Herman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 10, 1.

6. See Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” in *Intersectionality and Beyond*, ed. Grabham et al., esp. 50–51.

7. See Tim Corbett, Klaus Hödl, Caroline Kita, Susanne Korbel, and Dirk Rupnow, “Migration, Integration, and Assimilation: Reassessing Key Concepts in (Jewish) Austrian History,” *Journal of Austrian Studies* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1–28.

8. See Steven Beller, “Knowing Your Elephant: Why Jewish Studies Is Not the Same as Judaistik, and Why That Is a Good Thing,” in *Jüdische Studien: Reflexionen zu Theorie und Praxis eines wissenschaftlichen Feldes*, ed. Klaus Hödl (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2003), 18.

more nuanced understanding of their experiences, but also of categories such as “Jewishness” themselves.

To be sure, caution needs to be taken that an intersectional approach does not simply reproduce “further universal categories of identity which inevitably produce their own exclusion,” as sociologist Momin Rahman poignantly put it, for “identity politics is a curse—an inevitable playing out or self-fulfilling circuit of essentialisation, with consequently limiting results.”⁹ Sociologist Ann-Dorte Christensen rightly emphasized that “social categories are contextual and mutable” and that “we cannot understand these categories in isolation.” As she concluded, it is “a huge challenge to develop multifaceted analyses that can accommodate diversity and uncover complex interactions in power hierarchies”—but this huge challenge also promises huge rewards.¹⁰ An intersectional approach can reveal the different, competing epistemological claims put forth by various members of a given collective, in which some were traditionally more empowered and thus represented to a greater degree than others. After all, as the diverse experiences of persecution under National Socialism demonstrate, “individuals and groups can simultaneously experience privilege and disadvantage,” for example due to their gender, networks, or economic means. The “inracategorical complexity” that results from an intersectional approach thus goes to show that “cultural fields,” however defined, “are heterogeneous and incoherent” and therefore cannot be so readily explained according to monolithic cultural paradigms.¹¹

The AHC is an unparalleled source base for an intersectional—and as such fundamentally new—approach to modern Jewish history in Austria and Central Europe, as well as the transplantation of Jewish Austrian people and cultures to the United States as a result of mass emigration during and after National Socialism. Conceived with the benefit of hindsight and consciously developed with an eye to reflecting diversity and difference, this vast collection of heterogeneous sources and life stories can be dissected and reassembled in innumerable constellations according to categories including, but certainly not limited to, religiosity, politics, culture, class, education, profession, social networks, neighborhoods, and language, as well as of course gender, age, and generation.

9. Momin Rahman, “Theorising Intersectionality: Identities, Equality and Ontology,” in *Intersectionality and Beyond*, ed. Grabham et al., 354, 369–70.

10. Ann-Dorte Christensen, “Belonging and Unbelonging from an Intersectional Perspective,” *Gender, Technology and Development* 13, no. 1 (2009): 38, 22.

11. Collins and Chepp, “Intersectionality,” 60, 62. The term “inracategorical complexity” is outlined in McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” 51.

Even a brief survey of a limited number of memoirs from this vast collection, juxtaposing just a few of these various categories of analysis, allows for an extremely complex understanding of parallels but more crucially of divergences of experience among the broad collective of “Austrian Jewry” in the first half of the twentieth century and their lives in the United States in the second half. The novelty of this approach lies not just in the illumination of intracategorical complexity in modern Jewish Austrian historiography, but also in the exploration of the transcultural dimension of Jewish Austrian history linking Central Europe and the United States through the twentieth century and into the present day. This will be demonstrated through the following analysis with particular regard to the discussion of childhood, age, and generationality in the sample.

“It was different for a child”: Discourse among Younger Memoirists

While Ruth Klüger’s is the only published memoir examined here, which therefore did not originate in the AHC, and although Klüger’s experience differed significantly from the other memoirists in that she was a survivor of various Nazi concentration camps, her autobiography provides an illuminating point of entry into the intersectional analysis of Jewish Austrian memoirs. This is due not least of all to Klüger’s manifest awareness and hence explicit discussions of the intersectionality of her experience, particularly with regard to her age and gender. As a feminist, scholar, and child Holocaust survivor, Klüger possessed the analytical and discursive tools to critically dissect her intersectional experience in a manner that illuminates the often more subtle or less explicit forms of intersectionality that are to be found in the AHC memoirs.

In the very first pages she cited her birth in Vienna in 1931 as the reason why she could understand “immediately and without having read Sartre that the consequences of antisemitism may have been a Jewish problem, and a significant problem at that, but that antisemitism itself was the problem of the antisemites.”¹² Klüger was painfully aware of the difference of experience that separated her from children who were just a few years older than she was and, thus, separated her from the city of her birth:

12. “Und da ich Jahrgang 1931 war, verstand ich ohne weiteres und ohne Sartre gelesen zu haben, daß zwar die Folgen des Antisemitismus ein jüdisches Problem waren, und dazu ein beträchtliches, der Antisemitismus selbst jedoch das Problem der Antisemiten.” Ruth Klüger, *Weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992), 12. Klüger was here referring to Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1944 essay “Anti-Semite and Jew.” Note that I do not refer here to the English-language autobiography, Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2001), as Klüger understood this not as a direct translation but as a new work written with an American audience in mind. All translations in this article are my own.

What all the older children among my relatives and acquaintances had learned and done when they were my age, I could not learn or do, like swim in the Dianabad [a public swimming pool], go to the Urania cinema, or ice-skate. I learned swimming after the war in the Danube, before it became polluted, but not in Vienna.

She was “the youngest” and thus the only one among her older peers

who only knew the Austrian landscape through names: Semmering [the mountain], Vorarlberg [the region], Wolfgangsee [the lake]. Names that were all the more idyllic in their unknownness.

As she concluded:

All those who were just a couple of years older experienced a different Vienna from I, who at the age of seven was not allowed to sit on park benches but could therefore count herself among the chosen people. Vienna is the city from which I never managed to escape.¹³

Klüger’s specific experience of the Shoah—as a survivor of numerous camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau—was also uniquely conditioned by her age, beginning with the fact that she only evaded being sent straight to the gas chamber upon arrival in Birkenau because she claimed during “selection” to be older than she actually was. More broadly, however, she explicitly contrasted her own experience against Primo Levi’s influential treatise on the inmate condition on account of their generational difference:

He came there with the self-awareness of a grown, finished European, rooted and grounded philosophically as a rationalist and geographically as an Italian. *It was different for a child* [my emphasis], as in the few years that I had existed as a conscious person, my right to existence had been

13. “Was alle älteren Kinder in der Verwandtschaft und Bekanntschaft gelernt und getan hatten, als sie in meinem Alter waren, konnte ich nicht lernen und tun, so im Dianabad schwimmen, mit Freundinnen ins Urania-Kino gehen oder Schlittschuh laufen. Schwimmen habe ich nach dem Krieg in der Donau gelernt, bevor sie verseucht war; aber nicht bei Wien. . . . [I]ch war die Jüngste und daher die einzige. . . , die die österreichische Landschaft nur den Namen nach kannte: Semmering, Vorarlberg, Wolfgangsee. Namen, die vom Nichtkennen her noch idyllischer wurden. . . . Alle, die nur ein paar Jahre älter waren, haben ein anderes Wien erlebt als ich, die schon mit sieben auf keiner Parkbank sitzen und sich dafür zum auserwählten Volk zählen durfte. Wien ist die Stadt, aus der mir die Flucht nie gelang.” Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 16–17.

denied bit by bit, so that Birkenau was to me not devoid of a certain logic.¹⁴

Nevertheless, despite the unequivocal rejection and the lethal persecution that had characterized her entire childhood in Vienna and culminated in her deportation to a camp from which she was not supposed to escape alive, she concluded:

Vienna is a part of my brain structure and speaks from within me, while Auschwitz is the most wayward place I have ever entered, the memory of which remains a foreign body in my soul, something like an inoperable lead bullet in my body. Auschwitz was only a terrible coincidence.¹⁵

As these passages indicate, Klüger was also acutely aware of how place and time intersect with categories such as age, generation, and culture in the unfolding of a human biography. Vienna retained a deep and inescapable duality for Klüger, investing her recollections of her native city with a palpable ambivalence, which constitutes one of many parallels between her story and many of those recorded in the AHC:

Vienna is a global city, everyone has their vision of Vienna. To me, the city is neither strange nor familiar, which in turn means it is both, homely and sinister. It was just joyless and hostile to children. Hostile to Jewish children right down to the core.¹⁶

Klüger's visceral memories of her childhood in pre-Nazi and Nazi Vienna, conditioned by her age and generation as well as the intersection of place,

14. "Der aber kam mit dem Selbstgefühl eines erwachsenen, fertigen Europäers dahin, geistig als Rationalist und geographisch als Italiener beheimatet und befestigt. Für ein Kind war das anders, denn mir war in den wenigen Jahren, die ich als bewußter Mensch existierte, die Lebensberechtigung Stück für Stück aberkannt worden, so daß Birkenau für mich einer gewissen Logik nicht entbehrte." Ibid., 112. Klüger was here referring to Primo Levi's 1947 memoir *If This Is a Man*.

15. "Wien ist ein Teil meiner Hirnstruktur und spricht aus mir, während Auschwitz der abwegigste Ort war, den ich je betrat, und die Erinnerung daran bleibt ein Fremdkörper in der Seele, etwa wie eine nicht operierbare Bleikugel im Leib. Auschwitz war nur ein gräßlicher Zufall." Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 138.

16. "Wien ist Weltstadt, von Wien hat jeder sein Bild. Mir ist die Stadt weder fremd noch vertraut, was wiederum umgekehrt bedeutet, daß sie mir beides ist, also heimatlich unheimlich. Freudlos war sie halt und kinderfeindlich. Bis ins Mark hinein judenkinderfeindlich." Ibid., 67.

language, socialization, and discrimination in her formative years, not to mention her eloquent, incisive, and insightful prose, explain the enduring impact of her autobiography across international borders and different generations. Indeed, intergenerationality lies at the core of the message—or in some respects lack thereof—that she wished with this autobiography to communicate to posterity: “There is always a wall between the generations, but here there is only barbed wire; old, rusty barbed wire.”¹⁷

Klüger’s internationally renowned autobiography offers a profound point of departure for a comparative focus on the AHC memoirs and the formative role played by age and generation in the negotiation of individual attachments to Austria on behalf of the memoirists in exile. Intergenerational discourses permeate the AHC memoirs, as emigrants recalled their roots and ancestry while wishing to communicate their memories to their children, thereby linking their past, present, and future in a transcultural dimension between Austria/Europe and America. In many of the AHC memoirs, the very act of committing experience to paper was an exhortation for coming generations to remember not only their roots, but also their forebears’ persecution and their reasons for leaving Austria and Europe behind.

Many of the AHC memoirs consequently reflect a deep ambivalence toward, tending in some cases even to an outright rejection of, Austria as a personal and cultural point of reference, with age and generation once more playing a clear intersectional role in personal strategies of identification. Indeed, for those memoirists who were mere children when Nazi rule in Austria began, their link to Austria often consisted of little more than the dark memory of persecution and mass murder. This total severance with the Austrian past and its simultaneously inescapable presence throughout the memoirists’ adult lives was expressed poignantly in an unpublished memoir penned in 2004 by Harvey Fireside, who was born Heinz Wallner in Vienna in 1929. His “identity,” he explained as an older man, “like that of many refugees, resembles a *jumbled mosaic* [emphasis added]. It was wrenched in my youth by violent events, the meaning of which is still the subject of bitter debates in my former homeland.”¹⁸ Fireside’s is one of the darkest, most repudiatory of the AHC memoirs I have come across, yet his reference to “refugee identity” as a “jumbled mosaic” perfectly captures the vagaries of individual life trajectories and the intracategorical complexity that shaped individual experiences beyond the common denominator of persecution and flight.

17. “Eine Wand ist immer zwischen den Generationen, hier aber Stacheldraht, alter, rostiger Stacheldraht.” *Ibid.*, 72.

18. Harvey Fireside, “Delusions and Denials: Viennese Life under the Nazis,” unpublished memoir, 2004, LBI, ME 1486, 1.

Fireside was rejected for the Kindertransport but managed to flee to New York in 1940, later receiving a PhD from Harvard and becoming a professor of politics at Ithaca College. His life thus followed a clear teleology from antisemitic oppression and persecution in Austria to success and self-realization in a new life in America. Many of his friends and relatives were not so fortunate, those “scores of gentle souls who disappeared during the mechanized killing of Jews by their Nazi neighbors. The victims were not given time to compose a farewell distilling the significance of their lives, so it becomes my lot to set inadequate words to honor their abbreviated lives.” Fireside’s Anglicization of his name (although itself an allusion to the family’s original name “Feuerzeug,” which his father had “Germanized” to Wallner) and the fact that he wrote his memoir in English signal from the outset his deep-felt detachment from his Austrian past. His decision to detach from Austria was clearly not circumstantial, but an issue of proactive choice: “After we emigrated, our family deliberately repressed their painful experiences, seeking to melt once more into a safe cultural background.”¹⁹

Yet, as Fireside continued, his ability to detach was also the result of an individual and familial lack of roots in Austria—as well as his own youthfulness at the time of his emigration:

Unlike my new neighbors [in America], some of whom can trace their ancestry for six or seven generations, I barely knew one set of grandparents, and most of my other relatives ended up in mass graves scattered in East European camps with unpronounceable names. . . . When that whirlwind of history swept through my birthplace, Vienna, in March 1938, I was only eight years old. At this early age, I was no longer sure of my own identity as a native Austrian.

On a more implicit level, this detachment could moreover be linked to the family’s ideological makeup. Fireside recounted how his uncle Leo’s “name was never mentioned because he had married a ‘shikse,’ a Christian woman, in Hannibal, Missouri, after he had also emigrated. Leo’s parents responded by sitting ‘shiva,’ the ritual for mourning the dead.” Thus, in Fireside’s family, their sense of “Jewish difference” and the segregation this entailed was not exclusively conferred from without, but also cultivated from within.²⁰ Fireside’s young age,

19. *Ibid.*, 1.

20. I use the term “Jewish difference” as it was developed by Klaus Hödl, *Wiener Juden—Jüdische Wiener: Identität, Gedächtnis und Performanz im 19. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), and Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

his experiences of antisemitism growing up, and the family's evidently strong self-identification as Jews facilitated an abrupt break with Austria and a certain acceptance of the fate thrust upon Austria's Jews, as Fireside finally noted with reference to the forced ghettoization of Vienna's Jewish population following the "Anschluss": "For me as a child, the forced move to the ghetto was more like a homecoming than a traumatic life of poverty and persecution."²¹

The intersection of personal, familial, generational, and cultural rootedness was highlighted explicitly in a memoir by another relatively young emigrant, John Emanuel Ullmann (incidentally a cousin of Bruno Kreisky), who was born in Vienna in 1923 and fled to the United Kingdom in 1938, from where he moved to New York in 1948, eventually becoming a professor at Hofstra University. His memoir, which is based on a lecture delivered at Hofstra in 1992, tells a story of Jews in Vienna more broadly, but through the prism of Ullmann's own family history, rather than vice versa. Ullmann here proffered a sophisticated model of various forms of nostalgia exhibited by the eclectic group of Austrian emigrants in the United States, concluding that it was especially "our elders"—the older generation—who "never got over the loss and never got used to [their] new life." This he contrasted with the younger generation as well as, significantly, "the many Viennese Jews who lived in poverty or were late immigrants. . . . For them, Vienna was a misery to be forgotten." These were the emigrants who more readily severed all links with Vienna and refused to speak German in their new homelands.²² Here, too, generation intersected with issues such as culture, language, class, and crucially also migration background to condition the emigrants' experience of forced expulsion and their ability to adapt to a new situation in life following their arrival in America.

The conclusion that age and generation impacted the relative ease or difficulty with which individual emigrants processed their forced departure from Austria and their subsequent relationship to both their Austrian past and their American present is amplified in a short, unpublished memoir penned by Alexander Chajes in 1991 and meaningfully entitled "Coming to America." Chajes was born in Vienna in 1930, making him the youngest memoirist of my AHC sample. He emigrated to New York with his family in 1940, eventually becoming a professor at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. The family's departure from Austria as depicted in this memoir, only twelve pages in length, appears a natural consequence of the course of history, their destination America the inexorable conclusion to a historical telos.

21. Fireside, "Delusions and Denials," 1–2, 5, 64.

22. John Emanuel Ullmann, "The Jews of Vienna: A Somewhat Personal Memoir," unpublished memoir, 1993, LBI, AR 10682, 3, 5.

The memoir closes with the simple lines: “We arrived in New York on Labor Day, approximately two months after we had left Vienna. . . . I went to school and learned English and my father went to work for his old boss who had also come to America.”²³ This summation by an exceptionally young memoirist makes the experience of emigration and integration into a new society and culture sound not only easy, but natural. To be sure, a boy of ten can adapt fairly easily to a new home country, learn a new language, and integrate into a new society and culture. Since he experienced only a few short years of ostracism in Austria culminating in persecution and exile, this neat break with his Austrian past appears natural indeed. As the following cases show, however, persecution and forced emigration were experienced very differently by older memoirists with a lifetime of memory rooted in Austria, demonstrating what a critical role age and generation played in personal memories of Austria, expulsion, and flight to America.

“I hardly knew I was a Jew”: Discourse among Older Memoirists

A turn to the memoirs of older emigrants reveals a strikingly different picture with regard not necessarily to the experience of being persecuted and forced to emigrate, but certainly to the manner in which this experience was processed and in which the individual memoirists positioned themselves toward their Austrian past. Joseph Bohm was born in Vienna in 1892, making him one of the two oldest memoirists of my sample. He served in the Habsburg military in World War I and emigrated to the United States in 1940, where he penned his unpublished memoir in 1969. In the first pages he embedded the “communicative memory” of his family history (meaning as far back as living familial memory reached) in the historical topography of the Habsburg Empire, outlining his great-grandmother’s move from Nikolsburg (Mikulov in Moravia) to Vienna in 1840, his great-grandfather’s service as a surgeon in the Habsburg military, and the family’s bourgeois character.²⁴ Theirs was a fairly typical story of a late-nineteenth-century middle-class Jewish Viennese family, as popularized in published family histories like Edmund de Waal’s *The Hare with Amber Eyes* or more recently in Julie Metz’s *Eva and Eve*.²⁵ Locality was an important

23. Alexander Chajes, “Coming to America: Reminiscences of my Journey from Vienna to America,” unpublished memoir, 1991, LBI, ME 906, 12.

24. I here use the term “communicative memory” as developed by Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999), esp. 13.

25. Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with the Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Vintage, 2011); Julie Metz, *Eva and Eve: A Search for My Mother’s Lost Childhood and What*

factor: Bohm's family lived on the Mariahilfer Straße in the sixth district, where they enjoyed a lifestyle "perhaps somehow in the style of a 'Salon' of 19th century Paris," and also had a holiday home in the Biedermeier town of Baden, south of Vienna.²⁶ In this account, not only age but also familial rootedness, class, and affluence play a distinct role in the subject's relationship to Austria and European culture.

World War I plays an especially prominent role in many of the AHC memoirs, especially among the older memoirists, and especially among the male memoirists, many of whom served in the Habsburg military. By contrast, Ruth Klüger mentioned in another instance of astute intergenerational self-reflection how, to her generation (presumably all the more so for girls), the Great War, which back then "was not yet called the First World War," had already become a "distant" or "benighted" past and consequently did not hold much relevance for coping with the present oppression under National Socialism.²⁷ Personal memories of the war were much more meaningful for members of Joseph Bohm's generation, even if he, in retrospect, took a critical view of the ubiquitous patriotism and enthusiastic belligerence that accompanied the outbreak of war in 1914, putting these down to Austria's character as "a constitutional monarchy with censorship of press and speech and with a government-controlled, strictly 'patriotic' oriented school system." Nevertheless, his own enthusiasm at the time remains palpable in his memoir, although it was written fifty-five years later and after another world war as well as his own forced expulsion from his former homeland, as he remembered feeling that "they had killed MY archduke" in Sarajevo in 1914. As he explained this feeling with a view toward the intersection of age, education, socialization, and culture: "I was then 21 years old (and the product of my upbringing)."²⁸

a War Left Behind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021). The latter is based in part on the contributions of the author's mother to the AHC: Eve Metz Collection 2004, LBI, AR 11892; and AHC interview with Eve Metz, 2004, LBI, AHC 3156.

26. Joseph Bohm, "About My Family (1892–1940)," unpublished memoir, 1969, LBI, ME 1350, 1, 3, 7, 9.

27. "Manchmal erzählte jemand vom Weltkrieg, der noch nicht der Erste Weltkrieg hieß." Klüger then described this time as a "höhlendunkle Vergangenheit." Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 38. The fact that women did not serve on the frontline during World War I does not mean that the war did not represent a significant rupture in their lives, however, as many were active on the home front and, as in other European countries, this experience spurred the movement for women's emancipation in Austria. See Michaela Raggam-Blesch, "Jüdische Frauen im Krieg," in *Weltuntergang: Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Marcus Patka (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum Wien, 2014).

28. Bohm, "About My Family," 13.

Widespread though such memories of service in the Habsburg military, of political loyalty to Austria, and the attendant sense of belonging may be in this corpus of memoirs, there were of course other perspectives among the “front-line generation,” too. Isidor Klaber, for example, who was born in Vienna in 1892, the same year as Joseph Bohm, claimed in his unpublished memoir that his sense of loyalty and belonging had already during World War I been invested somewhere entirely different, remembering that he proclaimed at the time, in the context of his service in the multicultural Habsburg forces: “I am not a German, and not a Magyar, only a Jew!” Notably, though, he wrote this account in German. The reason for this identification can also be readily found from an intersectional perspective: A medical doctor by training, Klaber was not just a board member of the Vienna Jewish community organization during the interwar period but also an early and ardent Zionist activist. He notably did not emigrate to the United States like all the other individuals in my sample, but settled in Tel Aviv in 1938, where he remained until his death in 1972.²⁹ Klaber is an example of how emigration patterns often dovetailed with cultural, political, and of course religious affiliations, and it is no coincidence that the United States–based memoirists often fostered much greater attachments to Austrian culture after the Shoah than did their peers who emigrated to Palestine/Israel—even if the latter, like Klaber, continued to speak and/or write in German.

What comes across powerfully in many memoirs like Bohm’s, in any case, by pointed contrast to the younger memoirists, is the extent to which Bohm’s generation was conditioned by their Austrian past, as they had spent decades in Austria before the Anschluss and had often lived their lives deeply embedded in Viennese society. Toward the end of his memoir, Bohm described how his elderly mother, Clara, who had emigrated to London, continued a Viennese salon life there:

An elderly Viennese refugee woman was hired as sleep-in housekeeper and companion. Within a few days mother managed to create a good semblance to her former life in spite [*sic*] of the vast difference in her present station and surroundings. Quite a few of her Vienna friends and acquaintances were then among the Austrian refugees in London and there were not many afternoons where mother didn’t have some guests in her little living room to whom she served tea and sandwiches as graciously as in Vienna.³⁰

29. Isidor Klaber, “Selbstbiographie (1892–1940),” unpublished memoir, undated, LBI, ME 1451, 9.

30. Bohm, “About My Family,” 27.

A comparison of memoirs on the basis of age and generation reveals time and again the significant impact these categories exerted on individual feelings of attachment to Austria and experiences of persecution and forced expulsion. In a relatively early, unpublished memoir penned for an essay competition at Harvard in 1942, Philipp Flesch, who was born in “Vienna, Austria-Hungary” in 1896, where he worked as a teacher before fleeing to the United States in 1939, structured his chapters according to the great “collapses” (*Zusammenbrüche*) of Austrian history that had occurred during his lifetime, thus explicitly framing his own life story in the context of Austria’s modern history: up to 1918 (the collapse of the empire), up to 1934 (the collapse of Austrian democracy), up to 1939 (meaning the collapse of Austrian independence in 1938, but presumably encompassing Flesch’s emigration the following year), with the last chapter being entitled “heading toward the fourth collapse”—presumably invoking the impending collapse of the Nazi state.³¹

Flesch opened his account with an overview of his family history, which he called “typical of the general fate of the Jews,” a highly dubious characterization, for evidently—as the vast and diverse AHC proves only too clearly—there is no such thing as a “typical” or “general” Jewish fate, not even in the specific context of Austrian history. Flesch could in fact trace his genealogy “in Germany” (as he put it) back to 1640, which was in actuality spread across the Habsburg lands of Moravia, Hungary, and Austria, but speculated that his ancestors “may already have come to Gaul with the Romans.” This is a crucial point, whether factual or not: Many Jewish emigrants of the older generation had a sense of rootedness in Europe reaching back centuries or even millennia, long before the dawn of the nation states that were warring against each other—and in this case against the collective of “the Jews”—in their own times. For many older memoirists, this deep-seated sense of belonging could not simply be erased, not even by forced expulsion and genocide. Flesch underlined this point explicitly: “We always treasured the values of our fatherland, defended them in war, and disseminated them in cultural life.” Reflecting back to his experience of the empire, for which he fought in World War I, Flesch stated in pointed contradistinction

31. The chapters are entitled “Bis zum ersten Zusammenbruch (1896–1918)”; “Bis zum zweiten Zusammenbruch (1918–1934)”; “Bis zum dritten Zusammenbruch (1934–1939)”; and “Dem vierten Zusammenbruch entgegen.” Philipp Flesch, “Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem 30. Januar 1933,” unpublished memoir, 1942, LBI, ME 132. Note the name of the memoir: This was also the name of the essay competition, which was directed at all refugees from Nazi Germany, including Austria. The significant proportion of Austrian refugees among the “German” refugees is reflected in the figures, with alone 39 submissions out of a total of 263 having been submitted by Viennese refugees. See Dieter Hecht, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, and Michaela Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah: Gedächtnisorte des zerstörten jüdischen Wien* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2015), 144 n. 15.

to the experience of the generation that followed his: “*I hardly knew I was a Jew* [emphasis added], had never heard a bad word spoken on the subject, and only tried to emulate my beloved spiritual heroes Beethoven and Rembrandt and perhaps to suffer a tragic death for the good and the luminous.”³²

The lengthy and literary, but also unpublished memoir by geographer Eric Fischer, a highly educated man who later became a visiting professor at Harvard, noted that he was born in Vienna in 1898 “of a line of educators.” Fischer’s memoir is punctuated by anecdotes and vicarious memories, the “communicative memory” of his peers, to again use the scholarly jargon, that highlighted the diversity and consequent complexity of cultures and life stories in Europe in the half-century preceding National Socialism. The communicative memory documented here also underlines once again how age and generation played a crucial role in the depth of an individual memoirist’s sense of historical attachment to Austria, indeed in their conception of Austria itself. To pick out one representative example, Fischer recounted the story of Tancred Klein, a former student of his, who was born to Jewish Russian immigrant parents who later converted to Greek Orthodoxy. Klein was conscripted as a “non-Jew” into the Wehrmacht during World War II, was caught conspiring with the communist underground and sentenced to a labor camp, from where he managed to escape and join the Soviet forces, which he deserted at the end of the war to return to Vienna, before eventually emigrating to Mexico. “We met him . . . in 1974. He seemed very loyal to me, his old teacher, but also quite confused: a fervent Mexican patriot, but still deeply involved with everything connected with Habsburg Austria.”³³

Fischer himself was very much the product of his time and his social network in Central Europe, and a case in point of how even the cataclysmic violence of Nazi persecution was not always or necessarily able to sever the link

32. “Zum Verstaendnis meiner Geschichte und um zu zeigen, dass mein Schicksal sowohl fuer das meiner Vorfahren als fuer das allgemeine Judenschicksal typisch ist, muss ich kurz ueber meine Familie berichten, ueber die mir in einem interessanten genealogischen Werk seit 1640 genaue Einzelheiten vorliegen. Wahrscheinlich waren wir aber schon lange vor disen [sic] Jahre in Deutschland [sic!]. Vielleicht kamen meine Vorfahren schon mit den Roemern nach Gallien. Wir haben die Werte unseres Vaterlandes auch immer geschaezt, in Kriegen verteidigt, in Kulturleben vermehrt. . . . Ich wusste kaum dass ich Jude war, hatte noch kein boeses Wort darueber gehoert und bestrebte mich nur, meinen geliebten Geisteshelden Beethoven und Rembrandt nachzueifern und womoeglich einen tragischen Tod fuer das Gute und Lichte zu erleiden.” Flesch, “Mein Leben in Deutschland,” 1–2.

33. Eric Fischer, “Memoirs and Reminiscences (1898–1985),” unpublished memoir, 1984, LBI, ME 348, chap. 6, 10–11. Note that the pagination of this memoir begins anew with each chapter.

between Jewish Austrians and the culture which they had once called home—if they wished to maintain this link. Conversely, it is telling that Fischer, during his convoluted three-year emigration via Palestine to New York, drafted a scholarly work called *The Passing of the European Age*.³⁴ As historian H. Stuart Hughes put it, Fischer here traced

the shift of cultural leadership to the New World [and] of the networks and ways New World influence had already and would continue to be reintroduced into Europe to restimulate and redirect cultural developments there. . . . [This] was not a simple obituary on the past, but a probing of trends that would be defining of the future.³⁵

The depth of Fischer's historical roots in Europe and the breadth of his scholarly learning enabled him to look far beyond the tragedy of his own personal experience of expulsion and flight and to integrate this into a sophisticated understanding of the dramatic shifts in European society and its position in world affairs that were taking place through the ruptures of the mid-twentieth century.

“I was a child of the new republic”: Intersections of Class, Education, and Social Networks

Expanding the analytical circle beyond the categories of generation and age, it becomes equally clear that class, education, and social networks also exerted a great impact on individual experiences of belonging in Austrian culture and society and, thus, on individual reactions to persecution and forced expulsion. Returning to Harvey Fireside's unpublished memoir, he stated categorically, in an assessment of Austrian antisemitism that resounds across many memoirs as well as in academic historiography: “Jew-hating was part of the atmosphere that Vienna's Jews had endured all their lives, so they naturally assumed they would be able to weather the next storm if it should sweep across the border.” He described the frightening ease with which non-Jewish Austrians not only accepted but proactively embraced National Socialism, and how relations with neighbors, even friends, changed abruptly overnight after the Anschluss, as “our supposedly civilized neighbors” transformed into “instant fascist

34. Eric Fischer, *The Passing of the European Age: A Study of the Transfer of Western Civilization and Its Renewal in Other Continents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943).

35. Excerpt from H. Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought 1930–1965* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), cited in the preface to Fischer, “Memoirs and Reminiscences,” 3.

fanatics.”³⁶ This is another iteration of the ostensible telos of modern Jewish history already encountered above, which viewed antisemitism in Europe as endemic, the Shoah as inexorable, and emigration to America as a logical consequence of the evolution of history.

Yet this telos was not felt so crassly or uniformly by everyone. An intriguing, unpublished memoir in this respect was penned in 1990 by Helen Blank, who was born Helene Bilber in Vienna in 1917. Significantly, both her parents were immigrants from the eastern fringes of the empire, thus she did not hail from an established Viennese family. Moreover, while her father was described on the cover of the memoir as a “successful businessman,” the family was not bourgeois and, after the father abandoned his family, they lived in poverty in the working-class sixteenth district. The family also clearly identified with the Jewish community, as Helen herself eventually became a teacher in the religious Talmud-Thora-Schule in the second district, home to the bulk of Vienna’s orthodox Jewish population.

Nevertheless, Blank, who fled to New York in 1939 at the age of twenty-two, said of herself:

In the truest sense of the word *I was a child of the new* [Austrian] *republic* [emphasis added], enjoying the many advantages created by it. My young life was heavily influenced by the events of the time—the beginning of the young republic, its short, promising rise—its decline and its final demise in 1938.³⁷

Moreover, Blank “identified with the working people of Vienna” and wrote at length about social democracy in interwar Vienna, especially its brilliant education system, including the many daycare centers:

This is where I felt at home, where I belonged, where I was happy. In these centers young, enthusiastic, well-trained personnel took care of us and besides giving us the necessary attention and activities, they instilled in us the love for democracy and for our republic. Call it brainwashing, call it education, it made a lasting impression on me. We became very proud of our Red Vienna.³⁸

Class, neighborhood, socialization, political orientation, and education combined here to instill, even in a consciously Jewish girl who was born of

36. Fireside, “Delusions and Denials,” 11, 14–15.

37. Helen Blank, “Growing Up in Vienna, 1917–1939,” unpublished memoir, 1990, LBI, ME 1299, 2.

38. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

immigrant parents, a profound sense of belonging in the Austrian republic that not even forced expulsion to America could negate. Blank's identification of Austria with republicanism and social democracy contrasts pointedly with Bohm's childhood memories of imperial Austria on the one hand and Klüger's childhood memories of Nazi Austria on the other, underlining once more the manifest impact of generationality in the formation of individual experiences and attachments, especially during childhood.

Reflecting back on antisemitism, in pointed contrast to Fireside's experience, Blank wrote:

It would be foolish to say that there was no anti-Semitism. We all know better than that. But as a child I was not aware of it. It is not that the Jewish children were not known. Religious education was obligatory in Vienna, and once a week we had to go to special classes to learn Jewish religion and tradition. But I did not suffer from anti-Semitism—not in school and not in the street—until 1938.³⁹

Thus, Blank's embeddedness in a working-class milieu and a social democratic political culture fostered a sense of integration and intersectional perspective, with religious education strikingly appearing as one key facet in a Viennese child's life in the interwar period in which "Jewish difference" was made palpable. In fact, compulsory religious education was only reintroduced under "Austrofascist" rule in 1934 (a throwback to the religious culture of the Habsburg era) and was welcomed by the increasingly particularist Jewish religious establishment of the time—a circumstance that needs to be borne in mind when examining the memoirs of younger emigrants, for whom this inculcated sense of religious difference was received as a given.⁴⁰

In any case, Blank evidently had a very different experience concerning her own sense of belonging in Austria despite, like Fireside, having a pronounced Jewish identity and no familial roots in Vienna. Her recollection of her enforced departure from Vienna is telling of how her personal networks, by notable contrast to Fireside, affected her enduring ambivalence about her Austrian past:

On January twelfth, 1939 my sister and I were at the train station to leave the country. A lot of friends were there to see us off. Jewish and non-Jewish. . . . In spite of all that happened, I love that city—call it a hate-love

39. *Ibid.*, 4.

40. See Sara Yanovsky, "Jewish Education in Interwar Vienna: Cooperation, Compromise and Conflict between the Austrian State and the Viennese Jewish Community," in *From Empire to Republic: Post-World War I Austria*, ed. Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser, and Peter Berger (New Orleans: UNO Press, 2010).

relationship. I attribute to my youth in Vienna my love and knowledge of music, but more important, a respect for democracy. Having seen it crumble, I am alert to its threatening dangers and its vulnerability.⁴¹

Examining the intersection of networks and generational experiences also reveals striking differences in perception and experience. Returning to Eric Fischer's memoir, he also noted that mild antisemitism was evident in his earliest childhood, which increased with the influx of Jewish refugees from the eastern crownlands after 1914.⁴² He moreover commented that his parents did not have many non-Jewish friends, which raises the question of the extent to which socialization, experiences of separateness, and notions of difference coalesce with the sense of what Fischer called "an all-pervasive atmosphere of antisemitism"—regardless of a given memoirist's generation. Nevertheless, Fischer, in a characteristically sophisticated instance of historical contextualization, also remarked that "the Viennese population was generally xenophobe, hated and derided Czechs, Magyars, and Italians," thus emphasizing that in the virulent ethno-nationalist atmosphere of post-Versailles Europe, antisemitism was just one of many forms of prejudice and persecution, albeit the one that ultimately proved the most lethal. Reflecting forward to his new situation in America, Fischer nevertheless expanded this line of thinking beyond the boundaries of Austrian culture: "Such primitive gullibility was not a specific Viennese benightedness, however. An American friend of ours tells that when she studied at Hunter College in New York, a friendly colleague of hers would not believe that she was Jewish: 'That's impossible, I don't see any horns in your hair.'" Fischer, who was of course a teacher and, it will be recalled, hailed from "a line of educators," finally and significantly remarked that the "reform-minded" board of education in "Red Vienna" had made a real effort, if ultimately unsuccessful, to end discrimination in Viennese schools.⁴³ Thus, he did not regard prejudice as something endemic, but as the product of cultural and political trends combined with failures in education and socialization.

One issue touched on repeatedly here is the role of schooling and education in the formation of an individual's outlook and sense of belonging, and thus conversely on their reaction to the experience of forced expulsion from Austria. The noteworthy number of scholars among the sample of memoirists, including a number who became professors at prestigious American universities,

41. Blank, "Growing Up in Vienna," 8.

42. This has been noted repeatedly in historical research, too. See Albert Lichtblau, "Zufluchtsort Wien: Jüdische Flüchtlinge aus Galizien und der Bukowina," in *Weltuntergang*, ed. Patka, 134–42.

43. Fischer, "Memoirs and Reminiscences," chapter 5, p. 2.

suggests a link between erudition and the will and/or ability of an individual to reflect upon and record their experiences of their traumatic past. Looking back to the older memoirists who grew up in the final days of the empire, it quickly becomes evident that their experiences at school fostered a deep-seated sense of belonging in Viennese society and Austrian culture. Philipp Flesch, for example, recalled: “My boyhood and school days flowed gently in the twilight of the foundering monarchy.” By contrast to the rising tide of pan-German nationalism that became so prevalent in the interwar period, he recalled that his teachers on a political level “mostly exhibited individualism.” After World War I, Flesch obtained a PhD at Vienna University and claimed (though his recollections in this regard do not coalesce with historical research) that the atmosphere at the university was “academic” rather than antisemitic and that lectures by Jewish professors were well-attended.⁴⁴

Even Ruth Klüger, the youngest memoirist examined here, who suffered a horrendous childhood in antisemitic Vienna, recalled a briefly harmonious period, significantly under the aegis of the “Austrofascist” regime: “At first, we were all Austrians in the first grade and sang the Dollfußlied,” the “Austrofascist” anthem in memory of the assassinated dictator Engelbert Dollfuß. As she concluded, however: “At home, people were social democratic and therefore not so edified when I came home with my Dollfußlied”—another profound instance of the intersection of generationality, schooling, and political orientation within the family.⁴⁵

When we compare Harvey Fireside’s experience of school, one major difference immediately becomes apparent, for he did not attend an Austrian state school, but rather the Jewish Chajesgymnasium in the Castellezgassee in the second district, which has long been connoted as Vienna’s “Jewish” district. As he described his schooling experience: “We began classes each day by saluting a homemade blue-and-white flag and singing the Zionist anthem, the Hatikvah, which means Hope. The Nazis tolerated such ethnic pretensions, because they might constitute one way of getting rid of their Jews.”⁴⁶ The school long predates Nazi rule, having been founded in 1919 as the only “Jewish” high school in Vienna, named after the city’s first ever Zionist chief rabbi, Zwi Perez Chajes.

44. Flesch, “Mein Leben in Deutschland,” 1, 4. On antisemitism at Central European universities in the interwar period, see Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Jana Starek, eds., *Alma mater antisemitica: Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016).

45. “Zunächst jedoch sind wir in der ersten Schulklasse alle zusammen Österreicher gewesen und haben das Dollfußlied gesungen. . . . Zu Hause war man sozialdemokratisch und daher wenig erbaut, als ich mit meinem Dollfußlied einzog.” Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 37.

46. Fireside, “Delusions and Denials,” 77.

Crucially, the school aimed to engender a strictly Zionist worldview and a strong sense of Jewish identity among its pupils.⁴⁷ In contrast to many other memoirists, Fireside's total lack of socialization in broader Viennese/Austrian society and his consequent lack of non-Jewish friends and acquaintances surely played a similarly significant role in his later rejection of his Austrian background as did the experience of antisemitism, persecution, and forced expulsion.

Returning to Ruth Klüger, who was of a similar age and was thus forced to switch to a Jewish school after the Anschluss, she noted a similar reaction on her part: "as my unconsolidated belief in Austria began to falter, I became Jewish in defense." In contrast to Fireside, however, Klüger in retrospect became just as critical of this new sense of "Jewishness" as she was of her "Austrianness":

Before I was seven, meaning in the first months following the Anschluss, I shed my previous forename. Before Hitler the world knew me as Susi, then I insisted on the other name [Ruth]. . . . I wanted a Jewish name, befitting the circumstances. No one told me that Susanne is just as much a biblical name as Ruth. After all, who in our household was well-versed in the Bible?⁴⁸

For all that the experience of National Socialism and the Holocaust shattered the self-conceptions of "Austrianness" of the memoirists who were forced to flee their country of birth, these memoirs evince equally profoundly the often-constructed nature of "Jewishness" among this and subsequent generations, which was itself in many cases little more than an invented tradition. Indeed, the AHC allows for a novel examination of the mutability of both "Jewishness" and "Austrianness" as categories of self-conception through the twentieth century and their profound intersection within these life stories.

"I did not know where I belonged": Transculturality between Austria and the United States

Fireside's unequivocal (and understandable) response to National Socialist persecution—dropping his German name, eschewing the German language,

47. See Hecht, Lappin-Eppel, and Raggam-Blesch, *Topographie der Shoah*, 101–13.

48. ". . . als mein ungefestigter Glaube an Österreich ins Schwanken geriet, wurde ich jüdisch in Abwehr. Bevor ich sieben war, also schon in den ersten Monaten nach dem Anschluß, legte ich meinen bisherigen Rufnamen ab. Vor Hitler war ich für alle Welt die Susi, dann hab ich auf dem anderen Namen bestanden. . . . Einen jüdischen Namen wollte ich, den Umständen angemessen. Niemand hat mir gesagt, daß Susanne genau so gut in der Bibel steht wie Ruth. Wer war schon bibelfest bei uns zu Haus?" Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 40.

and becoming explicitly “Jewish” (as well as American) “in defense”—fits a certain trope, almost a cliché, in Jewish emigrant biographies. Yet many of the AHC memoirs tell a different story, one of continued, if transformative relationships to Austria and Austrian culture after National Socialism. Indeed, the very different conceptions of culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth that Jewish European emigrants (who, after all, were white Europeans) encountered in the United States are telling of the utterly malleable nature of these categories generally.

Ruth Klüger captured this pertinently in her recollection of a conversation with her female roommate at a summer course in Vermont organized by Hunter College: “To her question of what my nationality was, I gave the only possible answer, namely that I was a Jew born in Austria. Then I was simply an Austrian, she stated; my religion had nothing to do with my nationality.”⁴⁹ For Klüger, emigration did not mean she could simply shrug off her Austrian/European past.

Others cultivated their attachment to Austria more proactively. Helen Blank, once she was settled into her new life in New York, became a member of numerous Austrian organizations such as the Austrian Forum, the Austrian American Federation, and the Free Austrian Youth. Indeed, the summary on the cover of her memoir states that this was only written in English because it was based on a lecture “held for an English-speaking audience” at the New School in New York in 1990.⁵⁰ The migration and transmutation of Austrian culture in the United States, which led to the establishment of a kind of Austria in exile among the large emigrant community, is documented in great detail and complexity in the AHC.⁵¹

Harvey Fireside had little patience for what he perceived as this “nostalgia.” In September 2000 he undertook a trip to the city of his birth organized by the Jewish Welcome Service in Vienna, which he really only partook in for a chance to visit his family gravesites at the Central Cemetery. In a separate memoir detailing this experience, he recounted how he and his wife, Bryna, met another old emigrant, Alex, who had returned from Seattle to live in his erstwhile home: “With shallow roots in the United States, he lived out his remaining days wrapped in the dreams of his youth, a precious fossil of a prehistoric time.”

49. “Auf ihre Frage, welcher Nationalität ich den sei, gab ich die einzig mögliche Antwort, ich sei Jüdin, in Österreich geboren. Dann sei ich einfach Österreicherin, konstatierte sie, mein Glaube hätte nichts mit meiner Staatsangehörigkeit zu tun.” Ibid., 246.

50. Blank, “Growing Up in Vienna,” cover.

51. This issue was also explored in a dissertation based on original interviews by Brigitta Boveland, *Exil und Identität: Österreichisch-jüdische Emigranten in New York und ihre Suche nach der verlorenen Heimat* (Gießen: Haland and Wirth, 2006).

Strikingly, however, Fireside here recognized that it was the very shallowness of his own childhood roots in Vienna that enabled him to break so radically with his Austrian past, at least an implicit concession to the variability of experience and the crucial intersectionality of age, generation, socialization, and so forth: “When I heard the nostalgia in Alex and Lili’s stories of their pre-Nazi days, I felt grateful for having had a miserable childhood here, shorn of emotional ties to pull me back.”⁵²

However, for most emigrants, regardless of age, the problems of belonging and inclusion, marked not least of all by issues such as language, did not simply cease when these tens of thousands of Jewish Austrians arrived in the United States. On the contrary: It was this experience of geographical and cultural migration that made many realize just how Viennese, Austrian, and/or European they were. This was recognized even by a younger, skeptical memoirist like Fireside, who noted how in America, “German and Austrian Jews formed their enclaves, where they indulged old memories.” Fireside recounted his family’s own experience of cultural migration as follows:

As the fates would have it, we had arrived on the first night of Passover. . . . We chimed into prayers that acknowledged we had been slaves in Egypt until we had been freed by Adonai [God]. Certainly, I felt, some higher power had released the three of us from bondage and pointed our feet to America, our Promised Land.⁵³

This sounds like a romanticization of America in turn, but it points crucially to a pivotal pair of themes—or categories—in Fireside’s biography: Jewishness and religiosity. America appeared to offer what Austria did not, namely the ability to be both Jewish and American, and thus crucially allowed Fireside and his family to simply jettison their Austrian past as unnecessary and unwelcome baggage, a fact that for Fireside personally was certainly compounded by his young age at the time of his emigration.

Conversely, it was the absence of a strong Jewish identity or the lack of religious observance among other emigrants that allowed them to maintain a sense of Austrian culture in their new homeland. For many, their very rootedness in Austrian culture and the German language actually impeded their ability to shed their past, if they wanted to. Klüger, ever the master at complicating every stratum of identification or belonging, noted how many emigrants struggled in vain to truly “integrate” in their new homeland: “Everyone wanted to show us

52. Harvey Fireside, “Visit to a Viennese Cemetery,” unpublished memoir, 2004, LBI, ME 1486, 8–9.

53. Fireside, “Delusions and Denials,” 32, 89.

how Americanized they were. They corrected and ridiculed each other when speaking English. And they disdained themselves because they did not number among the autochthonous.”⁵⁴

Eric Fischer also noted that for Jewish refugees from countries like France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy, for obvious reasons, it was easier to return home after the war than it was for German and Austrian refugees. Yet he also noted that many, especially the older generation, did return because they proactively wished to contribute to the reconstruction of the Austrian republic. Some were so “broken” by their experience of emigration that they committed suicide, while others returned to Austria and “miraculously recovered.”⁵⁵

Philipp Flesch, writing in 1942, recounted darkly how the refugee condition was itself characterized by

the feeling of foreignness, of being an outsider. The dry despair of dumb patience. There arises a clear awareness of what one has lost and the question of whether it would not have been better to lose one’s life along with losing one’s homeland. The immigrant now understands that “wretched” actually means “homeless.”

This, he concluded, led one or the other (male) emigrant, especially he who could not find work and generally could not “integrate,” to join the US Army in the hope that “his life could thus be usefully ended.”⁵⁶ Beyond prominent and often essentialized categories such as religion, culture, ethnicity, and nationality, the very experience of being an emigrant—their “refugeeness”—thus played a crucial part in the way Jewish Austrians positioned and understood themselves once they had arrived and settled in America.

54. “Alle wollten uns zeigen, wie amerikanisiert sie waren. Sie korrigierten und verspotteten einander beim Englischsprechen. Und verachteten sich selbst, weil sie nicht zu den Einheimischen zählten.” Klüger, *Weiter leben*, 224.

55. Fischer, “Memoirs and Reminiscences,” chap. 8, 54–55. On “remigration” generally, see the groundbreaking works by Jacqueline Vansant, *Reclaiming Heimat: Trauma and Mourning in Memoirs by Jewish Austrian Reémigrés* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001); and Elizabeth Anthony, *The Compromise of Return: Viennese Jews after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021).

56. “. . . das Gefuehl der Fremdheit, des Aussenstehens. Die trockene Verzweiflung der stupiden Geduld. Es entsteht das deutliche Bewusstsein dessen, was man verloren hat und die Frage, ob es nicht besser gewesen waere, mit der Verlust der Heimat auch das Leben zu verlieren. Der Immigrant versteht nun, dass ‘elend’ eigentlich ‘heimatlos’ bedeutet. . . . So koennte sein Leben nutzbringend beendigt werden.” Flesch, “Mein Leben in Deutschland,” 43–44.

The feeling of “refugeeness” was evident among emigrants of all ages. Trudy Jeremias, who was born Trudy Epstein in Vienna in 1925 and who emigrated to New York as a teenager in 1939, where she still lives today, recalled in her unpublished memoir how traumatic the cultural and linguistic dislocation from Austria initially was: “I actually had very few notions of America, apart from having read Karl May. I had learned a little English, but when I arrived here, I realized that I understood nothing.” Between classes on the first days in her new high school, she would stand “in a stairwell and cry because *I did not know where I belonged*” (emphasis added). The first friend she made in America was a Puerto Rican girl who had also emigrated with her parents to New York, with whom Trudy struck up a bond not because of the sameness of their pasts, but because of their shared difference in the present. As divergent as they may have been, it was the intersection of their experiences as young emigrants from foreign cultural backgrounds that forged a bond of friendship between the two girls. Throughout her entire life, Trudy has lived consciously in a liminal cultural space, between Austria and America, Jewishness and non-Jewishness, English and German. As she explained her socialization to this day with other emigrants of Jewish and/or German-speaking backgrounds (Trudy today hosts the famous *Stammtisch* in the Upper East Side with which all alumni of the LBI are familiar): “It has nothing to do with religion per se. I always felt Jewish, like I belonged to Jewry. . . . [However,] I feel equally at ease with non-Jews as with Jews. Nevertheless, without realizing it, one always feels more attracted by a certain familiarity, for example when speaking German.”⁵⁷

To cite one final memoir by way of comparison, and to underline one final time the intersectionality of experience: Thomas Kessler, who was born Thomas Koessler in Vienna in 1917, recounted in his unpublished memoir, only six pages long and simply entitled “Personal Statement,” that he emigrated in 1938 at the age of twenty-one, became a US citizen in 1943, and then legally changed his name to fit in. His short account ends: “After that I did not consider myself to be a refugee anymore.” Kessler’s Jewish-born, social democratic parents had abandoned their faith before their son was born, and he was baptized Lutheran and considered himself a Christian; in short, the intersectionality of his age and

57. “Vorstellungen von Amerika hatte ich eigentlich sehr wenig, außer Karl Mey [*sic*] gelesen zu haben. Ich hatte etwas Englisch gelernt, aber wie ich dann hergekommen bin, habe ich festgestellt, ich verstehe überhaupt nichts. . . . ich war immer in einem Stiegenhaus und habe geweint, weil ich nicht gewußt habe, wo ich hingehöre. . . . Es hat mit Religion per se aber nichts zu tun. Ich habe mich immer jüdisch, zum Judentum dazugehörig gefühlt. . . . Ich fühle mich genauso zu Hause mit Nicht-Juden wie mit Juden. Allerdings, ohne daß man es weiß, fühlt man sich mehr angezogen von einer gewisse [*sic*] familiarity, genauso wie das Deutschsprechen.” Trudi [*sic*] Jeremias, “New York (1925–1998),” unpublished memoir, 1998, LBI, ME 1122, 1, 6.

the family's political and religious affiliations may well explain why his transition to becoming an American was apparently so easy, when for so many others it was hard, or even impossible.⁵⁸

Indeed, most emigrants did not have experiences as one-dimensional or straightforward as this. For many, their new lives in America meant an existence between two (or more) cultures, the old world living on in the new. Even among those who "integrated" in America and "intermarried," thinking that this would eventually lead to "an end to this whole Jewish business," as John Emanuel Ullmann remarked, this telos was to be disappointed once again by their children and grandchildren, the later generations of Americans with Jewish Austrian roots, who "could not hear enough about us and the old days and what had long been covered up turned into a proud briefing session. What goes around, comes around."⁵⁹

Conclusion: Approaching Memoirs as Jumbled Mosaics

It takes comparative studies with an intersectional focus, such as the one undertaken here, to reveal the rich complexity of memoirs like those compiled in the AHC as a collective corpus of life stories of Jewish Austrians who emigrated to the United States. Beyond the collective experience of persecution and forced emigration, a comparative and intersectional focus reveals each memoir as a "jumbled mosaic" of idiosyncratic experiences, reflections, and identifications. Only through an intersectional approach can the intracategorical complexity contained within this corpus be uncovered. This can serve in turn to advance the study of Jewish Austrian history in fruitful and exciting new directions, including not least of all the transcultural dimension between Austria and Central Europe in the past and the United States in the present.

Age and generation were evidently key factors determining not only how the memoirists experienced growing up and living in Austria as well as later persecution and forced expulsion, but crucially also how they made sense of these experiences retrospectively when it came to framing their stories in a textual narrative. These categories moreover intersected in profound and variable ways with a whole range of other factors, including but not limited to gender, class, religiosity, culture, political orientation, education, and socialization. However, a key takeaway from the juxtaposition of memoirs here—which has itself only scratched the surface of the vast and jumbled mosaic of the AHC—is that none of these categories are deterministic, and thus none of the individual experiences is typical and none of the retrospective interpretations more

58. Thomas Kessler, "Personal Statement," unpublished memoir, 2001, LBI, AR 11320, 6.

59. Ullmann, *The Jews of Vienna*, 38.

“true” than another. It thus stands to reason that scholarship on modern Jewish Austrian history should finally liberate itself from the essentialist categories and deterministic explanatory models that have dominated so often hitherto. The AHC provides the content while an intersectional approach provides the analytical means to achieve greater complexity in our evolving historiography of Jewish Austrian culture. The potential insights that this source base, combined with this analytical approach, promise have only just begun to be tapped.

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