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THE DILEMMA OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Jews of Habsburg Austria in World War I

The situation of the Jews in Austria-Hungary during World War I places in stark relief the dilemma of a minority group struggling to define its identity and its place in a complicated political order in a period of crisis. The Jews were intensely loyal to the multinational, supranational Habsburg Monarchy which offered them a great deal of latitude to be patriotic citizens while proudly affirming a staunch Jewish ethnic identity. World War I – the great patriotic war – offered them unprecedented opportunity to prove their utter loyalty to the fatherland and devotion to the Jewish people. Yet the collapse of the multinational state at the end of World War I confronted the Jews with a grave crisis. They now had to reconstruct new identities in theoretically homogeneous nation-states, many of which displayed profound antipathy to them. The experience of the Jews thus offers us a wonderful prism through which to understand not only the dilemmas of ethnic minorities, but also the complicated relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, indeed the very nature of nationalism and the nation-state themselves. I modestly hope that this study¹ (and the book on which it is based²) will contribute not only to the ways that historians of East Central Europe understand the conflicts of this most interesting region, but also to the ways that we all comprehend these contentious issues.

Since historians always feel compelled to provide a little historical background, let me set the stage. Numbering over two million in 1910, the Jews of Austria-Hungary on the eve of World War I were an extraordinarily diverse lot. The Hungarian half of the Monarchy (today's Hungary, Slovakia, part of the former Yugoslavia, part of Romania) contained large numbers of ultra-Orthodox, Yiddish-speaking Jews, who still practiced the traditional Jewish role as middlemen in the village economy, in some regions and equally large numbers of fully Magyarized, assimilated modern Jews in other regions, in particular in Budapest and other cities. The Austrian half of the Monarchy (which included what is now Austria, the Czech Republic, part of Poland, part of Ukraine, and part of the former Yugoslavia) was equally diverse. In Galicia and Bukovina (home to about a million Jews), most of the Jews were Yiddish speaking, extraordinarily pious, usually members of one or another Hasidic sect, and very poor, but some Jews had

¹ This study is based on a lecture given in the framework of the *Jewish Studies Public Lecture Series* of the Central European University in January 2002.

² Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

adopted Polish or German culture and effected a modern lifestyle. The rest of the Jews of “Austria” – essentially the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia (today’s Czech Republic), and the capital Vienna – had all modernized. In the course of the nineteenth century the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia (altogether approximately 130,000 in 1910) had adopted German language and culture and modern economic roles. The Jews who migrated to Vienna from Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, and Galicia in the second half of the nineteenth century also adopted German language and culture and experienced economic transformation in the city, abandoning petty trade for positions as entrepreneurs in commerce or industry, as business employees, or as professionals, and adopting the life-style of the urban bourgeoisie. Like modern Jews everywhere, they tended to comply far less strictly with the rules and regulations of traditional Judaism.³

These Jews lived in an unusual country. The Habsburg Monarchy was a multinational, supranational dynastic state in which patriotism was defined as loyalty to the Habsburg emperor and his house. The Habsburgs never crafted an overarching national identity to unite their diverse realm, but, in the course of the nineteenth century, many of the peoples of the Monarchy came under the influence of nationalism. They sought to construct national identities for themselves and demand national rights. In 1867 the authorities assuaged Hungarian nationalism by granting Hungary quasi-sovereignty. Except for foreign policy, foreign trade, and foreign military ventures, Hungary was effectively an independent country, united to Austria only in the person of the emperor, whom the Hungarians called “king.” Hungary fancied itself a nation-state, and its Jews adopted a Hungarian national identity. In the rest of the Monarchy, which had the profoundly non-national name, “the lands and provinces represented in the imperial parliament in Vienna,” but which everyone called “Austria,” (and which is our subject today) rising national groups had to content themselves with demands for greater autonomy. The Habsburg authorities acknowledged that eleven different national groups resided in their domains: Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, and Italians. In the decades before the First World War the conflicts between these national groups dominated and stymied normal political life in Austria.⁴

The nationalism that became such a potent force in Austria-Hungary was the type that social scientists have labeled “ethnic nationalism.” Those people who constructed a national identity as Czechs or Poles or Hungarians

3 For an overview see William O. McCagg, Jr., *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989; Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, pp. 14-38.

4 For a comprehensive history of the Habsburg Monarchy see C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1790-1918* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918* (New York: Longman, 1989), and the multivolume *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918*, edited by Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch, and published by the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

did so based on the conviction, widespread in Central and Eastern Europe, that “the nation” was, in the words of Rogers Brubaker, “an ethno-cultural community of descent.” They believed that the nation, whose members not only shared a language and culture, but were biologically related to each other, should ultimately have political control over its own destiny.⁵ The logical extension of their goals was sovereignty, to make the ethnic nation and the political nation congruent, but in practice they remained loyal to the Habsburg regime until the end of World War I. For its part, that regime never created, or even understood the need to create, what we call a “civic nation,” a nation based on the participation of citizens in the political process. Habsburg Austria had a liberal, constitutional government, but it never crafted any overarching Austrian national identity to unite its citizens. The emperor, his bureaucracy, and his army considered themselves Austrian, but such Austrianism was simply old-fashioned dynastic loyalty not modern civic nationalism.⁶ To the extent that they thought about the issue at all, most inhabitants of the state defined themselves as members of their newly constructed nations, not as Austrians. Except the Jews...

The Jews of Austria liked the fact that they lived in a supranational state that did not impose on them any particular ethnic national identity. They could imagine Austria as a political nation, and to that political nation they offered their firm and unshakable loyalty. They adored the Emperor, Franz Joseph, who seemed to rule forever (1848–1916) and pretended that it was he, not the German liberals, who had granted them emancipation in 1867, but they were not conservative dynastic loyalists. They were loyal to the old emperor as representative of the state which not only protected them from the antisemitism rampant in most of the national movements but accorded them far more latitude than nation states like France or Germany or assert a Jewish ethnic identity. The Jews therefore did regard themselves as Austrians.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Jews of Habsburg Austria developed what I call a “tripartite identity.” They espoused a fervent Austrian state patriotism, and adopted the languages and cultures of one or another of the peoples of Austria if they modernized. But, they continued to regard themselves as members of the Jewish people. Hence, modernized Austrian Jews (my subject) were Austrian politically; German, Czech, or Polish culturally; and Jewish in an ethnic sense. They were far freer than Jews in France or Germany to affirm Jewish ethnic identity. Jews in those nation states had to join the national community and behave as if

5 Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); idem, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge 1998); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

6 For a wonderful study of supranational Austrianism, see István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Jewishness was merely a matter of religious faith. But in Habsburg Austria, Jews could adopt the culture of one of the peoples in whose midst they lived without joining the “nation” those peoples were in the process of constructing. When Jews adopted German culture in Austria, for example, they did not consider themselves Germans in the same way as most Germans understood that term. That is, Jews who spoke German, loved German literature, and assumed the superiority of German culture regarded themselves as culturally German, as members of the German *Kulturnation*, but not as members of the German *Volk*, the German people. Such a cultural definition of Germanness, therefore, left room for them to identify ethnically as Jews. Despite the fact that the authorities only recognized the Jews as members of a religious confession, Jews in Austria could affirm their ethnic identity more easily than the Jews of France or Germany, both true nation-states which eschewed ethnic diversity. Naturally different kinds of Jews had different views of the meaning of their ethnic identity, and some Jews did try to assimilate utterly into the German or Czech nation, but most Jews felt comfortable with a state that allowed them so much freedom to construct their identities as they chose.

World War I provided the Jews of Austria with the perfect opportunity to express both their profound Austrian loyalty and their very real sense of Jewish solidarity. Jews all over Europe shared in the outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm in August 1914, eager to prove their loyalty to the nation and mute antisemitic charges about Jewish cowardice. The Jews of Austria embraced the war with great passion and conviction because for them the war was simultaneously a war to defend the fatherland and a Jewish holy war to liberate the oppressed Jews of Eastern Europe. After all, for the first two years of the war, Austria's main enemy was Russia, the evil empire which oppressed Jews, and which, at the beginning of the war had invaded the Austrian provinces of Galicia and Bukovina, causing hundreds of thousands of Jews to flee in mortal terror of the advancing Russian armies. Fighting for Austria thus meant defeating the Russians and rescuing the Jews of Austrian Galicia, and of Russia itself, from czarist tyranny. For the Jews the war was a *Rachekrieg für Kishinev*, a war of revenge for the pogroms which had terrorized East European Jewry. Since defeating Russia was simultaneously an Austrian and a Jewish war aim, Jews experienced no dissonance between their Austrian and Jewish loyalties. Indeed, the war enhanced their conviction that Jews prospered most in multinational Habsburg Austria.

Jewish spokesmen endlessly articulated this war ideology, often in quite overheated language. In August 1914, Moritz Frühling set the tone. In an article in the Viennese liberal Jewish newspaper, the *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, he declared that Austrian Jews needed to throw the “hereditary enemy” of the Monarchy and of “human morality” back to the steppes of Central Asia where it belonged so that European freedom could be guaranteed by Austria-Hungary and Germany. Jewish soldiers had a special reason for fighting the “northern barbarian.” Invoking the biblical injunction

to remember Amalek, the traditional enemy of the Jews, Frühling asserted that Jewish soldiers “must take revenge for all the atrocities committed against our brothers, must make expiation for our raped and murdered sisters.”⁷ The same mood was invoked in a letter from a Jewish soldier, printed in the Jewish press: “Oh may we be able to take revenge for the mutilated bodies of Kishinev, for the most shameful atrocities of Zhitomir, the eyes put out in Bialystok, for the defiled Torah scrolls, for the pogroms, and for the innumerable murdered innocent children.”⁸ The Jewish press contrasted an evil, barbaric Russia, a Russia with the blood of Jews on its hands, with civilized Austria, and saw the war as a Manichean struggle of the forces of light against the forces of darkness. Surely Austria would win this struggle because culture and decency had to triumph over barbarism, and God would help Austria and Germany save humanity from the despotic, hypocritical Cossacks, those “heroes of the pogroms.” The Jews, for their part, had to remember the “screams of pain” of Russian Jewry, which “compel us to participate in the annihilation of this enemy.”⁹

But it was not only Russian Jews whom they had to avenge. The Russian invasion and occupation of Galicia meant that Jews not only had to defend the fatherland from attack, but also rescue fellow Austrian Jews from the clutches of an enemy bent on persecuting them as Austrians and as Jews. The Jewish press was filled with gruesome reports of Russian atrocities against the Jews of Galicia, many of them exaggerated, depicting Russian policy as “a war of annihilation against all that is Jewish.” The war, then, was not only revenge for Kishinev, but also for the liberation of Galician and Bukovinian Jewry, simultaneously on behalf of the Monarchy and Austrian Jewry.¹⁰ Moreover, the fact that Jewish soldiers from Galicia and Bukovina were fighting to rescue their parents, siblings, wives, and children from the Russians, surely galvanized them to fight. Indeed, the Jewish press singled out for praise Galician Jewish soldiers, who fought to avenge loved ones persecuted by the Russians. In May 1915 one writer lauded Galician Jewish soldiers who “with insane fury ... attack, and their hatred of the Russian murderers, who have treated their families so brutally, is the best stimulus [for their valor].”¹¹

On a more realistic note, we have wonderful evidence of how ordinary Jewish soldiers regarded the war with Russia in the pages of an unpub-

7 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 7 August 1914, pp. 547–8.

8 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 28 August 1914, p. 596.

9 See, for example, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 14 August 1914, pp. 562–3; 21 August 1914, pp. 577–9; 28 August 1914, pp. 593–5; 4 September 1914, pp. 610–11; 18 September 1914, pp. 640–3; 8 October 1914, pp. 681–3; 16 October 1914, pp. 697–9.

10 See, for example, *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 4 September 1914, pp. 609–10; 18 December 1914, p. 891; 1 January 1915, pp. 2–3; 12 March 1915, pp. 200–201; *Jüdische Zeitung*, 11 December 1914, p. 1; *Selbstwehr*, 29 January 1915, pp. 1–2; 12 February 1915, p. 1; 19 March 1915, p. 1; *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 29 March 1915, pp. 3–4.

11 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 7 May 1915, p. 353. See also *Jüdische Zeitung*, 20 August 1915, p. 3.

lished diary by a young Jewish medic, artillery sergeant Teofil Reiss from Vienna. Not particularly well-educated, but wonderfully full of himself, Reiss ironically commented that people at home who think all soldiers are enthusiastic fighters have never been at the front, yet he was obviously proud of his military service, his work with the wounded, and especially the medals for bravery that he received. He delighted in the fact that Austrian soldiers were “hunting [the Russians] like dogs” in Russian Poland in 1915. Whenever he spent time behind the lines because of illness or wounds, he was very eager to get back to the front. Reiss’ pride, his desire to serve at the front, and his pleasure in Russian defeat all reveal that he viewed the war with Russia as something meaningful to him personally. He does not wax eloquent, like the propagandists, about a just war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, because he knew the filth and suffering of war.¹² Similarly, Bernhard Bardach, a career army doctor born in Lemberg, noted in his war diary on April 5, 1915 that “our joyful mood was indescribable” when the Austrians started winning in Galicia. Throughout May and June he recorded his own glee and the “colossal, general jubilation” over the Russian retreat.¹³

Such jubilation was widespread. Austrian Jews exulted over German and Austrian military successes in Galicia in the spring and summer of 1915, which led to the reconquest of the province and the occupation of Russian Poland and the Baltic region. Moritz Güdemann, the elderly chief rabbi of Vienna, noted in his diary: “Oh great, obstinate, impenitent Russia of terror and pogroms, how dearly you and your czars must still pay for the persecution of the Jews.”¹⁴ When the Central Powers checked the Brusilov Offensive in the summer of 1916, it was clear that they had won the war in the East, and Jews rejoiced accordingly, confident that such a victory was a victory for European culture, the multinational Habsburg Monarchy, and Jewish freedom all at the same time.¹⁵

Jewish participation in the war effort, both in the field and on the home front, bolstered and fortified the Austrian and Jewish loyalties of Jews. Good Austrian citizens, Jews contributed a great deal to the war effort, buying war bonds and donating lots of time and money to various charities established to help soldiers, their widows and orphans. Despite their genuine concern for the war effort in general, however, the bulk of Jewish war time charitable work focused on fellow Jews, on the religious needs of Jewish soldiers in the army, and especially on the overwhelming needs of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Galicia and Bukovina who

12 “Kriegstagebuch” of Sargent Teofil Reiss, Kriegsarchiv (Austria), B/1576.

13 Bernhard Bardach, “Aus meinem Tagebuch,” Bernhard Bardach Collection, Leo Baeck Institute (New York), AR 6632, entry for April 5, 1915, II, p. 77; May 2, 1915, II, p. 83; May 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 28, 30, 1915; June 3, 4, 1915, II, pp. 83–4, 88, 93–4.

14 Moritz Güdemann, “Aus meinem Leben,” unpublished memoir/diary, Leo Baeck Institute (New York), diary entries for 27 June and 4 August 1915, pp. 230–32.

15 See for example, *Jüdische Korrespondent*, 6 July 1916, p. 1; 21 July 1916, p. 1; September (n.d.) 1916, p. 1; 21 December 1916, p. 1.

flooded into Bohemia, Moravia, and Vienna. Indeed, helping the refugees became the most important war work done by Austrian Jews, in particular by Austrian Jewish women. When they helped the refugees – which they sometimes did with some degree of condescension and cultural superiority – Austrian Jews understood that they were simultaneously contributing to the Austrian war effort and helping fellow Jews in distress. After all, the refugees were citizens of Austria, victims of Austria's war with Russia who suffered, at least in part, because of their Austrian loyalties. At the same time, the refugees were Jews, and helping them both reflected and encouraged Jewish solidarity. Jews in Bohemia, Moravia, and Vienna recognized that the antisemitic, anti-refugee sentiment, which grew enormously during the difficult last two years of the war, endangered the situation of all Jews, and they strove valiantly, albeit without much success, to combat it. They also understood that only the multinational state could protect them from the ravages of this antisemitism.¹⁶

The Jews who fought for the Monarchy – and they numbered over 300,000 during the course of the war – obviously thought they did so as loyal Habsburg subjects, devoted to Kaiser and Reich. That so many Jews earned medals for their war time heroism, that so many Jews fell in battle, gave all Jews a sense of pride in Jewish participation in the war effort, even if it did not dispel antisemitic myths about Jewish cowardice. Moreover, the reality of ultra-orthodox Galician and Hungarian Jewish soldiers valiantly marching off to battle provided a visual image of the utter loyalty of Habsburg Jews, including the least assimilated among them, to the Monarchy. At the same time, the refusal of Habsburg army authorities to abide official antisemitism in the service made all Jews appreciate the multinational state. In Germany, where Jews had hoped that their war time service would lead to their full acceptance in the German nation, the army succumbed to antisemitic pressure to take a military census which deeply humiliated the Jews and made them feel betrayed by the nation in whose name they fought. In Austria-Hungary, by contrast, not only did many Jews serve as officers in the army, but that army, which considered itself above national and confessional strife and valued loyalty to the fatherland and dynasty above all else, assumed that the Jews were a profoundly loyal element and saw no reason to bow to antisemitic demands for a similar census.¹⁷ Jews obviously felt that the army, and the multinational state, deserved their unreserved support and affection, and they fervently hoped for its continuity.

During the last two years of the war, Austrian Jews devoutly wished for the continuity of the multinational empire because they believed that only

16 For a fuller discussion, see Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, ch. 3.

17 See letters of Minister of War Krobotin and Army Chief of Staff Conrad in *Kriegsarchiv*, KM Präs. 1916, 34–17/3. On the German army census see Werner Angress, "The German Army's 'Juden-zählung' of 1916. Genesis-Consequences-Significance," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23 (1978), pp. 117–37.

it protected them from the antisemitism rampant in the national movements, only it guaranteed their status as citizens, and only it would allow them the luxury of the tripartite identity they held so dear. Only in multinational Austria could they assert a staunch Austrian political identity, a loving affiliation with German or Czech or Polish culture, and a clearly articulated Jewish ethnic identity. The nation states which might replace Habsburg Austria if the nationalist movements proved successful would not prove so generous. They would demand that Jews belong to the dominant nations of those new states even as they denied the ability of the Jews ever to become full-fledged members of those national communities. Jews worried about the success of the national movements especially after the Entente (the United States, France, and England) began to encourage “the national self-determination of all peoples” in 1918 under the influence of the American president Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Although the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy was not one of Wilson’s points, and the Entente did not actively encourage nationalist politicians to work for political independence until victory was clear in the summer of 1918, many people understood that a thorough political reconfiguration would take place. The Jews loudly and regularly declared their devotion to the united Monarchy down to – and beyond – the bitter end. Not only were the Jews now the only Austrians in Austria, they were also the last Austrians in Austria.

The issue of the status of Galicia can serve as an excellent example of Jewish fears. Although Jews in theory supported the national aspirations of the Poles, in fact, Austrian Jews wanted Galicia to remain in Austria no matter what plans might be afoot to recreate an independent Poland. Frankly Austrian Jews of all political and religious persuasions worried that the Poles would persecute the Jews in Galicia if the Austrian authorities were not there to prevent such persecution.¹⁸ The Zionists for example admitted that they were “not joyful” over the degree of autonomy granted the Poles in administering Galicia. They remembered the “unfriendly relations” between Poles and Jews and insisted that only the Austrian authorities could protect all three national groups in Galicia: Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews.¹⁹ Antisemitic incidents in Galicia – including pogroms in the spring of 1918 – convinced the Jews that only the Austrians could protect the Jews from the Poles.²⁰ Indeed, when an independent Poland, which included Galicia, came into existence in November 1918, Jews worried about the physical safety of the Jews there. They had every reason to fear, as, in the words of Joachim Schoenfeld, Poland was born “accompanied by rivers of

18 *Jüdische Zeitung*, 23 July 1915, p. 1; 6 August 1915, p. 2; *Selbstwehr* 30 July 1915, p. 7; 6 August 1915, p. 2; 20 August 1915, p. 3; *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 25 June 1915, p. 469; 30 July 1915, p. 575; 27 August 1915, p. 650.

19 *Jüdische Zeitung*, 16 November 1916, pp. 1–2; 1 December 1916, p. 1.

20 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 26 April 1918, p. 249; 24 May 1918, pp. 309–10; *Jüdische Zeitung*, 26 April 1918, p. 1; 24 May 1918, p. 2; *Selbstwehr*, 3 May 1918, p. 1.

Jewish blood.”²¹ As part of the conflict between the Poles and Ukrainians for control of eastern Galicia, large scale pogroms erupted in Lemberg and elsewhere in late 1918/1919 which led to thousands of dead. The bloodshed only served to remind the Jews of the calamity of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and the dangers for the Jews of nation states, or at least the kind of nation-states that came into existence in East Central Europe.

In the waning days of World War I, Jews recognized that their strong support for the continuity of the multinational state had isolated them significantly. As the Poles, Czechs, South Slavs and others became excited about the possibilities of national independence, the Jews persisted in their unconditional loyalty to Habsburg Austria. By the summer of 1918 one writer in the *Österreichische Wochenschrift* noted that the Jews were “the only Austrians loyal to the state left in the Monarchy.”²² Zionists insisted even more forcefully on the need for Austrian continuity and on undying Jewish loyalty to the multinational state. Zionist parliamentary deputy from Bukovina Benno Straucher asserted in mid-1917 that the Jews were “a state-upholding element ...whose patriotism is not broken by any provincialism... We Austrian Jews declare ourselves unconditionally and without any reservations for Austria.”²³ Similarly, Viennese Zionist Robert Stricker argued, with some hyperbole, in a speech in Prague in November 1917 that “We nationally-conscious Jews want a strong Austria. Only it can provide a home to its nations. We believe that an Austria must exist. If there were no Austria, it would be a misfortune for the entire world.”²⁴ Throughout 1918 Austrian Zionists insisted that “the idea of the Austrian state is an indubitable necessity.”²⁵ In Bohemia and Moravia, where the Czechs increasingly sought national independence, the Jews expressed their loyalty to Austria state, even as they kept their options open by not criticizing the Czech national movement.²⁶

When World War I ended and the Habsburg Monarchy collapsed, Erna Segal, a young Viennese Jewish woman born in Galicia, was “deeply shocked.” As she remembered, “We were raised with deep reverence for the imperial family, we loved Austria and its rulers and now with one blow everything had come to an end. What now? I asked myself.” Although her father hoped that the end of the bloodletting might be a blessing for humanity, he feared that disaster would result from the “dismemberment” of Austria.²⁷ Similarly, Minna Lachs, a schoolgirl in Vienna, whose family

21 Joachim Schoenfeld, *Jewish Life in Galicia under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in the Reborn Poland, 1898-1939* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985), p. 201.

22 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 19 July 1918, pp. 441-42.

23 *Jüdische Zeitung*, 22 June 1917, pp. 1-2; *Selbstwehr*, 6 July 1917, pp. 3-4.

24 *Selbstwehr*, 23 November 1917, p. 4.

25 *Jüdische Zeitung*, 14 June 1918, p. 1.

26 *Selbstwehr*, 13 July 1917, p. 1; 31 August 1917, pp. 1-2; 20 September 1918, p. 1.

27 Erna Segal, “You Shall Never Forget” (text in German), unpublished memoir, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, p. 26.

had fled there from Galicia in 1914, remembered that she felt a sense of impending catastrophe in October 1918. When her father returned from the army in November, her mother, relieved to have her husband home, assumed that everything would get better, but her husband feared that everything “would first get worse.”²⁸

Both Segal and Lachs expressed the anxieties that many Austrian Jews felt with the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy in October/November 1918. While other Austrians – Czechs, Poles, South Slavs – rejoiced in their newly declared national sovereignty and freedom from Habsburg domination, many Jews felt uncertain about the future. Fearful about the anti-Jewish violence that erupted in many of the successor states and worried about their status in those states, most Jews sincerely mourned the passing of Austria-Hungary. Jews in Vienna, both those long resident and the Galician refugees stranded there, felt the loss of Habsburg Austria most acutely. When the German deputies in the Austrian parliament declared a German-Austrian state on October 21, Heinrich Schreiber expressed the anguish of liberal Viennese Jews, wondering “if this day would become for us Jews another, new ninth of Av,” the traditional day for mourning catastrophes in Jewish history. He reiterated Jewish loyalty to Habsburg Austria, declaring:

We acknowledge openly and honestly the deep pain in our hearts about the gloomy and painful transformation and upheaval. It is with ...deep sadness...that we bid farewell to the united fatherland, and we stand shocked before the grave of old, familiar, honorable memories and feelings that a day of calamity has dashed into ruins. Our only comfort is the thought that we Jews are not guilty for it.²⁹

With hindsight, many memorists from Vienna also expressed their deep regrets over the demise of the supranational state. David Neumann, who had served as a sergeant in the army, recalled that during his trip back to Vienna “I cried for my fatherland.” After all, the fact “that Austria-Hungary was destroyed was, in my opinion, one of the worst catastrophes of the twentieth century.”³⁰

In the new Czechoslovakia, where Czechs reveled in their new independence, such mourning would have branded the Jews as traitors. It would have been politically stupid to mourn Austria amidst the nationalist euphoria of the Czechs in late 1918. Thus, Jews in the Czech lands did not publicly express their sadness at the collapse of the Monarchy. The Jews who had already embraced Czech culture and the Czech national movement naturally supported the new order enthusiastically. But German-

28 Minna Lachs, *Warum schaust du zurück. Erinnerungen 1907-1941* (Vienna: Europa-verlag, 1986), pp. 89-90.

29 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 25 October 1918, pp. 673-5.

30 “Erinnerungen David I. Neumanns an seine Soldatenzeit im Ersten Weltkrieg,” appendix to Erwin A. Schmidl, *Juden in der k. (u.) k. Armee 1788-1918 = Studia Judaica Austriaca* 11 (1989), pp. 227, 228.

speaking Jews (the overwhelming majority) reacted cautiously, expressing their loyalty to the new state, but anxious about their place within it. They became more confident when they realized that the new Czechoslovakia, like Austria before it, was a multinational state, filled with Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Magyars, Ukrainians, and Jews, whose leaders, especially President Thomas Masaryk, would pursue a policy of tolerance for national diversity. In an odd way, Jews came to regard Czechoslovakia as a smaller-scale, improved version of the old Monarchy and Masaryk as a stand-in for the beloved Franz Joseph. Zionists especially glorified the new Czechoslovakia as a tolerant, multinational state, and they fervently hoped that it would recognize the Jews as a nation and accord them some measure of national autonomy. They viewed a Jewish national identity as the only way to avoid the vituperative conflict between Czechs and Germans. They urged all Jews in Czechoslovakia to continue the old Austrian tripartite identity in a new form: Jews should be Czechoslovakian by political loyalty, German or Czech by culture, and Jewish by national identity.³¹ Even many non-Zionists in Czechoslovakia agreed. Theodor Sonnenschein, the president of the Jewish community of Troppau, Silesia, insisted that in mixed areas Jews had to declare themselves a separate nation "if they did not want to suffer the same fate as the Jews in Lemberg or Slovakia."³²

In all of the Austrian successor states Jews struggled to construct a new identity but found that task overwhelming. The new states were nation-states, even though they contained sizeable minorities of other national groups, and the dominant nations – the Czechs, the Poles, the Germans – wanted to create more or less homogeneous national cultures. The situation was, in an interesting way, most problematic in the rump state of German Austria, the present Austrian republic. Here the Jews in theory should not have had no problem at all. After all, Jews in Austria, essentially the Jews of Vienna, had already adopted German culture. The problem was that Viennese Jews did not feel German in the same way as other Germans. They were Viennese, Austrian, Jewish, but not necessarily members of the German *Volk*. Thus, at a time when nearly everyone in the Austrian Republic sought *Anschluss* with Germany, the Jews did not support such a move. The Jews in German-Austria certainly professed their loyalty to the new state as well as their affiliation with German language and culture, but they could not bring themselves to adopt a German national identity that had the same meaning for them as it did for the Germans. The virulence of antisemitism in the new state did not make their task of adopting a German-Austrian national identity any easier. Although they did not view the new state as a reincarnation of old Austria, they nevertheless hoped that they could continue the old Austrian tripartite identity: loyal to the state and its

31 Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*, pp. 138–50; Hillel Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 183–92.

32 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 13 December 1918, pp. 785–6.

culture yet also functioning as a separate ethnic group. The new political logic dictated a German national identity, but in fact more Jews turned to Jewish ethnicity and even Jewish nationalism than ever before. Heinrich Schreiber, for example, who eloquently mourned the passing of the Monarchy in the pages of the *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, could not bring himself to say that he was a German in the national sense. For him, Germanness remained cultural and Jewish identity primary. He concluded: "We are Jews, we are Austrians, and when that is too little we are German-Austrians, by birth and customs, education and culture, attitude and feeling."³³ Similarly, A. Schwadron insisted in the same newspaper in January 1919 that Jews were German, not in a *völkisch* sense but in a cultural one. Jews did not form a separate nation, but they did belong to the Jewish people.³⁴ A spokesman for the Austrian-Israelite Union likewise noted in the spring of 1919 that the Jews were not primarily a *Volk* but a religious community whose members shared the same ethnicity (*Stamm*) and blood.³⁵

The dissolution of the relatively tolerant multinational Habsburg Monarchy therefore presented the Jews with a grave crisis of identity. They responded to the collapse of the Monarchy with the hope that somehow the new states would allow them to adhere to their old tripartite identities. They hoped that they could affirm their loyalty to the state, participate in its culture, but still retain a large measure of Jewish ethnicity. Unfortunately, these new states generally proved unable to accept such an identity. They insisted that Jews join the dominant nation even as most of them refused to admit Jews to membership in the national community and anti-semitism flourished. They did not create an overarching political identity that would have united all groups into a larger, political nation. Jews may have pretended that they belonged to the political nation, but no one else joined them. The experience of Jews in interwar East Central Europe therefore reveals the dilemma of minority groups in ethnic nation states. Ethnic and religious minorities function best, after all, in countries whose national identity does not depend on mythical ethnic descent but rather on political loyalty. It is a lesson which most countries of the region, and the world, would do well to learn.

33 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 25 October 1918, pp. 673–5; quotation, p. 675.

34 *Österreichische Wochenschrift*, 24 January 1919, pp. 55–6.

35 *Monatschrift der Oesterreichisch-israelitische Union*, vol. 31, no. 2–4 (February–April, 1919), p. 4.