

## The Remembrance of World War One and the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses discourses and activities of memory of the Austrian “Federation of Jewish War Veterans” (Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten/BJF), based primarily on the analysis of the journal “Jewish Front” (Jüdische Front) as well as on archival sources. A remarkable increase in anti-Semitic activities as well as acts of violence committed by the National Socialists led former Jewish soldiers of the Austrian army to found the BJF in 1932. The aim of the BJF was to defend the Austrian Jewry against anti-Semitic accusations as well as to strengthen their Jewish self-consciousness by focusing on the remembrance of the Jewish military service during the Great War and an idealized and exaggerated war experience. To reach their objectives, the BJF was organized hierarchically and militarily. The members wore uniforms, and the BJF organized military inspections, spread propaganda via the journal “Jewish Front” and initiated the erection of Jewish war memorials in several Austrian cities. Due to the fact that the BJF wanted to unify the Austrian Jewry under its leadership, it claimed to be above all party lines and propagandized a common Austrian Jewish identity.*

### Introduction

#### Austrian War Memory and Collective Identity

#### Jewish Soldiers – Jewish War Victims – Jewish Veterans

#### Memory and Identity Discourses in the Context of World War One

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### Introduction

At the end of December 1932, the first issue of the journal “Jewish Front” (*Jüdische Front*) was released. It was the “Official Organ of the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans” (*Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten\*\** [BJF]),<sup>1</sup> which had been founded in Vienna a few months earlier. The aim of the BJF and

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<sup>1</sup> *Jüdische Front*, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

the journal was to fight the increasing anti-Semitism by means of remembrance of Jewish military service during the Great War. The general guidelines for this struggle can be read in the foreword of the first issue, written by the first leader of the BJJ, Major General Emil Sommer:

Shoulder to shoulder with our comrades, without any distinctions by nation or denomination, we stood as a wall against a world of enemies. A feeling of exacerbation must come over us now when this comradeship that we all kept faith with in the face of the enemy is sold down the river. My Jewish brothers, who are pressed hard by the hate and malice of their enemies, are calling on me now in the autumn of my life to be their leader in their defense. The honor of an upright soldier commands me to follow this call and to fight with all my fortitude together with you against all injustice. We will uphold our honor as loyal citizens of our fatherland beyond any political differences, and we will defend ourselves against all attacks. Standing alone, we have to lead in the fight for our honor and without doing harm to anyone. It is a fight against injustice and defamation. The path is hard, the prejudices we are confronted with enormous.<sup>2</sup>

In his foreword, Sommer addressed many of the central *topoi* of Jewish discourses of memory prevailing during and after the Great War: the fight against anti-Semitism party truce (*Burgfrieden*); comradeship; soldiers' solidarity regardless of denominational, national, and social differences; brotherhood, and Jewish solidarity. One of these agents of memory was the BJJ, which, beyond considering strategies against anti-Semitism, also negotiated the positioning of the Jewish people within the Austrian state and society as well as Jewish self-understanding and Jewish identity in general. These negotiations did not occur in isolation but were related to Gentile and general discourses during a time that was recognized by Austrian and Central European Jews as a time of fundamental crises arising from political and social transformations.<sup>3</sup> For the Austrian Jews these crises arose from the breakdown of the Habsburg Monarchy, which led to the questioning of well-practiced narratives of Jewish identity and Jewish positioning within state and society.<sup>4</sup> If Jews were a distinctive religious group of citizens among others within the supranational and multiethnic monarchy, they

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<sup>2</sup> GMJ Emil Sommer, "Kameraden!" *Jewish Front*, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, "Sustaining Austrian 'National' Identity in Crisis: The Dilemma of the Jews in Habsburg Austria, 1914–1919," *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, eds. Pieter M. Judson, Marsha L. Rozenblit (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 178–92; Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna 1918 – 1938* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 2.

<sup>4</sup> See for example David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 161–89.

now became a minority whose rights, at the beginning of the new republic, were vague. Furthermore, the revolutionary process of the foundation of the Austrian republic in 1918 was accompanied by anti-Semitic riots, public violence and permanent uncertainty for Jews, especially in Vienna.<sup>5</sup>

Within various discourses about Jewish identity and a Jewish positioning within state and society the discourse on memory is only one among others, but it was central for the BJV. In this article, I will discuss the discourses and practices of memory of the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans. My research is primarily based on the analysis of the journal *Jewish Front* and of archival sources. In this context, I will show how Jewish military service, the commemoration of Jewish soldiers, Jewish identity and the positioning of the Jewish people within state and society, as well as their fight against anti-Semitism are interlinked. Furthermore, I will explain that the discourses of the BJV are embedded in older lines of argumentation, which, in turn, are rooted in the Enlightenment.

### **Austrian War Memory and Collective Identity**

According to Reinhart Koselleck, the political cult of the dead (*Totenkult*), the public remembrance of the fallen soldiers, and thus war memory, in general, has always been more than just private grieving and public mourning. Thus has Jay Winter argued in his outstanding analysis of memory and mourning in response to the First World War.<sup>6</sup> Negotiating inclusion or exclusion of a community of memory, of a political entity, always constitutes a political act. Therefore, commemorating the fallen soldiers has always been part of political culture and part of a discourse creating (usually national) collective identity.<sup>7</sup> It has always served the political entity, the nation or the state, in its efforts to stabilize and to legitimize itself. And by commemorating all the men who were willing to risk

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce F. Paules, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus. Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslöschung* (Wien: Kremayr & Scheriau 1993), 116-31; Peter G. J. Pulzer, *Die Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Deutschland und Österreich 1867-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2004), 299-332.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 223-29; Jay Winter, *Remembering War. The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 8-13.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Einleitung to Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmale der Moderne*, eds. Reinhart Koselleck, Michael Jeismann (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 9.

their lives, the nation strengthens its unity and gives meaning to the senseless death of each individual soldier.

Thus, with the establishment of modern liberal society and the modern nation since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called “hero’s death” of each individual soldier moved more and more to the center of the cult of the dead and war memory.<sup>8</sup> Since then, the death of the citizen soldier on the battlefield has been recognized as proof of his loyalty to the state and to the nation. In turn, the state granted each soldier political participation and civil rights.<sup>9</sup> This nexus between military service and citizenship/civil rights was of great importance to the history of Jewish emancipation.

At the very beginning of the discourse dealing with Jewish military service in modern history stood the enlightened politics of tolerance of Emperor Joseph II<sup>10</sup> and the book by Prussian councilor Christian Wilhelm Dohm *Ueber die buergerliche Verbesserung der Juden* [On the Civil Improvement of the Jews],<sup>11</sup> first published in 1781. In his text, which was written in the spirit of the Enlightenment, Dohm dedicates a whole chapter to the question of Jewish military service, in which he first cites all the arguments of the opponents of Jewish emancipation.<sup>12</sup> According to these opponents, Dohm writes, Jews are unfit for military service in general. In particular, they argue that the religious rules of the Sabbath rest, the laws of *Kashruth*, and the religious command that only a defensive war could be a just war were barriers for Jewish military service. Additionally, the social segregation of the Jews from other religious groups, their “inability to tolerate physical discomfort and labor,” and their physical constitution are listed as arguments against Jewish military service. Furthermore,

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<sup>8</sup> See for the “Cult of the fallen soldiers,” George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70–106.

<sup>9</sup> For example Ute Frevert, “Bürgersoldaten – Die allgemeine Wehrpflicht im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert” *Die Wehrpflicht und ihre Hintergründe. Sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur aktuellen Debatte*, ed. Ines-Jacqueline Werkner (Erlangen: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 45–64, 48–9; Nikolaus Buschmann, “Vom ‘Untertanensoldaten’ zum ‘Bürgersoldaten’? Zur Transformation militärischer Loyalitätsvorstellungen um 1800,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* XII (2013), 105–26; 105.

<sup>10</sup> See: Erwin A. Schmidl, *Habsburgs jüdische Soldaten 1788–1918* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2015), 21–50; Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military. A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013), 38–47.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Wilhelm Dohm, *Ueber die buergerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, Berlin 1781.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Wilhelm Dohm was in contact with Moses Mendelssohn, the founder of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah, who influenced his work. See Uwe J. Eissling, “Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden und die Vision einer ‘judenfreien’ Welt” in *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 88 (1991): 27–58; 32–33.

they claim that Jews are disloyal and in case of doubt would not fight against other Jews. As a consequence, they come to the conclusion that “citizens who do not defend the society to which they belong cannot be citizens like others; they cannot demand equal rights and have to put up with oppressive differences.”<sup>13</sup> However, Dohm dismisses these arguments: “It is right to demand unlimited military service from the Jews. But currently they are not able to perform it, because the oppression under which they have had to live for such a long time has suffocated their military spirit and physical courage and caused religious speculations and unsociable behavior. They have not had a fatherland for more than one and a half millennia. How could they go to battle and die for it? But I am convinced that they will do this with the same competence and loyalty as everyone else if a fatherland will be given to them.”<sup>14</sup>

Dohm’s book, written at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, already presents the *topoi* and arguments concerning the issue of Jewish military service and war memory that would then prevail during the entire 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. First of all, these debates revolved around the question whether Jews could be equal citizens of the states in which they live; secondly, they focused on the question of how Jews negotiated their identity and position in modern societies. Those party to these debates were Jews and Gentiles, and analyzing the memory of the First World War, we can see within these discourses all the political and social fractions and dislocations within the Jewish population (the Zionist, religious, and so-called “assimilated” groups) as well as the society at large.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it must be stated that for the Habsburg/Austrian Jews, the end of the war and the breakdown of the Habsburg Empire brought about new problems.<sup>16</sup> While the Habsburg Empire had been a supranational state that accepted the coexistence of different ethnic/national groups under its reign, the new republic (German-)Austria understood itself as a Christian German nation state. This

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 236–37.

<sup>15</sup> For the political differentiation of the Jews in interwar Austria see Feidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna 1918 – 1938*.

<sup>16</sup> Marsha Rozenblit argues that the Jews of the Habsburg Empire had a tripartite identity, which came to an end with the breakdown of the monarchy. This identity was composed of a patriotic loyalty to the state/dynasty, the cultural sharing with one or another of the monarchist nationalities and the sense of belonging to the Jewish people, in terms of an ethnic identity. Referring to the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans and the followers of the liberal Jewish party (Union), I would argue that this tripartite identity did not come an end. The loyalty to the dynasty was substituted by the loyalty to the state, a constitutional patriotism. Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing A National Identity. The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23 – 25.

state had to (re-)define its relation to national as well as religious minorities. Additionally, it tried to distance itself from the former supranational monarchy.

These two issues – Austria’s self-understanding as a nation state and its distancing itself from the monarchy – had a great impact on the political life and practice in Austria after 1918 and on the political and public activities commemorating the fallen soldiers of the First World War. In contrast to other European countries, the new Austrian state was for many years unable to create a national or canonized narrative with a national cult of the dead to commemorate the Great War. Consequently, an Austrian War Memorial (Hero’s Memorial) could not be erected until the 1930s. Instead of a national memory discourse, various commemoration activities on a local or group level were established.<sup>17</sup> Thus, after the end of the war in almost every Austrian village and city a war memorial for the victims of the local community was erected, initiated by veterans’ organizations, or political or religious groups. They normally placed their memorials next to the church, on the cemetery, or on the village square. Commemoration practices and the language of memory were mostly embedded into a religious (Christian) discourse and aimed at supporting primarily the private and regional grieving for dead relatives.

Whenever any attempts to initiate a collective memory narrative occurred, struggles and political conflicts followed immediately. The erection of the war memorial on the outer wall of the Cathedral in Graz, for instance, was accompanied by severe political controversies.<sup>18</sup> This memorial had already been planned during the war but could not be realized before 1923. The bourgeois, Christian Social initiators of the memorial put the memory of the fallen soldiers into a patriotic, partly monarchic and religious context.<sup>19</sup> This was again criticized by German nationalists and, especially, by Socialists. In the socialist newspaper *Arbeiterwille* [Workers’ Will], for instance, we can read about the inauguration of the war memorial, which was attended by high-ranking

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<sup>17</sup> The first attempt of the state to remember the fallen soldiers in the regions was initiated by a decree of the minister of internal affairs in June 1915. In this decree, the minister proposed the erecting of memorials or commemorative plaques similar to those he had in Serbia. Erlaß des Präsidiums des Ministeriums des Inneren vom 21. Juni 1915 (Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv (StLA)), Statth. Präs. A5b-3440/1915.

<sup>18</sup> Stefan Riesenfellner, “TODESZEICHEN. Zeitgeschichtliche Denkmalkultur am Beispiel von Kriegerdenkmälern in Graz und in der Steiermark von 1867–1934,” *TODESZEICHEN. Zeitgeschichtliche Denkmalkultur vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Stefan Riesenfellner, Heidemarie Uhl (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), 1–77; 32–3.

<sup>19</sup> “Ein Fest der Liebe. Die Enthüllung des Grazer Kriegerdenkmals,” *Grazer Tagespost*, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

politicians from the city of Graz and the district of Styria as well as leading members of the Catholic Church:

It was a commemorative ceremony of the old black-and-yellow power, whose pitiable victims would turn over in their mass graves in the rocky karst, in the marshes and steppes of Russia, the Carpathian Mountains, and the horrible fields and mountains of Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania, if they had seen what happened when they were used by those for whom they were only cannon fodder, lawless and submissive slaves, to show off in the old and false glamour, to demonstrate boldly and cheekily the black-and-yellow era, which was a bloody curse for millions of people and which will live on as a curse in the hearts of the starving orphans, in the souls of the careworn widows, in the dismal feelings of the old mothers whose happiness and lives were destroyed forever.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the Christian Social initiators of the memorial, the *Arbeiterwille* and the Socialists wanted to place the memory of the war within a spirit of pacifism and positioned themselves against the old monarchic, bourgeois, and nationalistic order as well as against the Christian Social party. They had their own notion of how to memorialize the war appropriately, which could be seen when in 1925 the “Red Vienna”<sup>21</sup> initiated a new war memorial in place of the older and provisional one at the Viennese Central Cemetery. The wooden cross that had been erected in 1915 was then replaced by a monumental memorial, designed by the famous sculptor Anton Hanak. Contrary to the hegemonic Austrian practice of a nationalistic and bellicose memory discourse,<sup>22</sup> the center of Hanak’s memorial showed the stone sculpture of the “great mother” and the inscription “Lord, give us peace! To the fallen of the World War, the city of Vienna.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Heldenehrung,” *Beilage zum “Arbeiterwille,”* June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

<sup>21</sup> “Red Vienna” (Rotes Wien) was the specific name for the Austrian capital Vienna under the reign of the Social-Democratic party in the years from 1918 to 1934. In this period many progressive ideas, especially concerning the social housing construction (sozialer Wohnbau) and social service were implemented. See for example *Kampf um die Stadt*, ed. Wolfgang Kos (Wien: Czernin Verlag, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> For example Oswald Überegger, *Erinnerungskriege. Der Erste Weltkrieg, Österreich und die Tiroler Kriegserinnerung in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Inscription in German: “Herr, gib uns den Frieden! Den Gefallenen des Weltkrieges die Stadt Wien” See: Heidemarie Uhl, “Kriegsallerseelen 1914–1918” in *Im Epizentrum des Zusammenbruchs. Wien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, eds. Alfred Pfoser, Andreas Weigl (Vienna: Metropolverlag, 2013), 114–121; 120–21.

The examples from Graz and Vienna point to all the ideological and political conflicts within the Austrian memory discourses in the interwar period, and it becomes evident that different political and social groups made sense of the meaningless death of thousands of soldiers in different ways. Some interpreted the death of each soldier as a heroic sacrifice for the fatherland while others understood the mass deaths as a warning for the future and dedicated their practice to the pacifist motto “No more war.” Consequently, during the first years of crisis, the young republic was unable to create an “Austrian national consciousness” – something for which the impossibility of establishing a collective memory of war is a telling expression.

It was only the Austrian fascist regime, the so-called “Ständestaat,” that tried to create an Austrian national consciousness in opposition to Nazi Germany and the Austrian National Socialists. By doing so, the “Ständestaat” also tried to establish a hegemonic national war memory. A visible symbol thereof is the Austrian Heroes’ Monument, which was built in the Exterior Castle Gate in Vienna and which was inaugurated in 1934.<sup>24</sup> Although the initial planning had already begun at the end of the Austrian Republic, this memorial was an important and prestigious project for the Austrian fascist regime, one that aimed to represent the new Austrian consciousness by referring to the history and glory of the Habsburg Empire. The underlying rationale of this endeavor was to create a Catholic and conservative Austrian identity.<sup>25</sup> In the center of the Heroes’ Monument there is a crypt, designed like an early Christian chapel, with the tomb of the “Dead Warrior.”<sup>26</sup> Next to the tomb, memory books (“Heroes’ Books”) listing the names of all the fallen Austrian soldiers were displayed, because this should be “a memorial for all the living and dead heroes of the World War. It should be a memorial for the centuries old and glorious army, a memorial of the thousands of battles, in which the sons of Austria fought, a memorial of victories that made our former fatherland great and powerful, a memorial of the innumerable heroic deeds upon which Old Austria’s (“Altösterreichs”) military glory was founded and preserved.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Das österreichische Heldendenkmal in Wien. Ein Führer durch Raum und Zeit* (Vienna: n.y).

<sup>25</sup> For the Heroes’ Memorial see: Peter Stachel, *Mythos Heldenplatz* (Vienna: Pichler Verlag, 2002), 99–102.

<sup>26</sup> *Das österreichische Heldendenkmal in Wien. Ein Führer durch Raum und Zeit* (Vienna: n.y).

<sup>27</sup> *Gedenkschrift anlässlich der Weihe des österreichischen Heldendenkmals am 9. September 1934*, ed. Vereinigung zur Errichtung eines österreichischen Heldendenkmals (Vienna: 1934), 44–45.



The “Dead Warrior” was modeled on the “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” in Paris or London, but it was not non-denominational. The Austrian “Dead Warrior” was clearly a Christian soldier as much as Austria was a Christian country, and, complying with the intentions of the initiators of the memorial, a Holy Mass was to be held every day in honor of the fallen soldiers. This commemoration practice did not, however, correspond exactly to Austrian history or to social or political realities, since Catholic soldiers were also joined by non-Catholic Christian and Jewish soldiers who fought at their side in the Austrian Army and for their fatherland. They, too, had the right to be equal members of the memory community, and, consequently, equal citizens. Yet, for these minorities the Austrian fascist regime reserved a place only at the margins, in the form of a separate memorial place next to the crypt in the south wing of the Heroes’ Monument.<sup>28</sup>

### **Jewish Soldiers – Jewish War Victims – Jewish Veterans**

The positioning of the fallen Jewish soldiers and Jews in general on the margins of the community of memory and the entire society had a long, anti-Semitic tradition in Austria. However, various Jewish representatives tried to fight against this tradition for centuries. The protagonists were Jewish communities, Jewish veterans and their organizations, as well as relatives of the war victims. In their struggle, they referred to the promise of emancipation that the state would grant them full legal equality and social recognition, if, like other citizens, they were willing to serve in the army. They wanted the state and Gentile society to appreciate their loyalty to the fatherland and their willingness, be they soldiers or civilians, to give their lives for their country.<sup>29</sup> They demanded protection by state and society on the symbolic as well as on the political level from anti-Semitic accusations and attacks.

For Jews in Austria, anti-Semitism existed during as well as after the war, but it increased massively throughout this time. Anti-Semitic attacks in the context of the war first emerged in late 1914 and 1915, when thousands of Jewish refugees

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<sup>28</sup> *Das österreichische Heldendenkmal in Wien. Ein Führer durch Raum und Zeit* (Vienna: n.y).

<sup>29</sup> For example “Das jüdische Opfer des Krieges,” in *Dr. Bloch’s oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

began to search for shelter in the western territories of the monarchy.<sup>30</sup> At this time, however, the state tried to implement and maintain the party truce and hindered the anti-Semites by means of rigorous censorship restricting their public attacks on Jews. This changed when Emperor Franz Joseph II passed away in November 1916 and his successor, Emperor Karl I, reconvened the Austrian parliament. As part of the discourse around nationalistic conflicts and triggered by military, political, social, and economic crises, anti-Semitism obtained increased publicity and became an increasingly integral part of the overall political discourse.<sup>31</sup> For anti-Semites, Jews were the scapegoats for all problems of state and society. They accused the Jews of having no fatherland, of being cowards, and of war-profiteering, and they demanded their exclusion from society.<sup>32</sup> Anti-Semites were present in all political parties, but were particularly strong in number among Christian Socialists<sup>33</sup> and German nationalists<sup>34</sup>; they were well represented in editorial departments<sup>35</sup> of various newspapers and in various anti-Semitic organizations. Among veterans' organizations, for instance, one might note the Front-Line Soldiers' Organization of German-Austria ("Frontkämpfervereinigung Deutsch-Österreichs"), founded in 1920. Its constitution included an "Aryan-Paragraph," and the Front-Line Soldiers became a gathering place for anti-Semites generally and, later, National Socialists, in particular, in Austria's interwar years.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Beatrix Hoffmann-Holter, "Abreisendmachung" *Jüdische Kriegsflüchtlinge in Wien 1914 bis 1923* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1995); Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War*, 67–100.

<sup>31</sup> For example Marsha L. Rozenblit, "Sustaining Austrian 'National' Identity in Crisis," 185.

<sup>32</sup> Gerald Lamprecht, "Juden in Zentraleuropa und die Transformationen des Antisemitismus im und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 24, ed. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin: Metropolverlag, 2015), 63–88.

<sup>33</sup> Leopold Kunschak, the chairman of the Christian Social Workers Association and the later minister Heinrich Mataja as well as the founder of the anti-Semites League Anton Jerzabek have been named. Thomas Stoppacher, *Die Zeit des Umbruchs in einem antisemitischen Umfeld – Die jüdische Bevölkerung in Österreich 1917-1919 in den Debatten des Parlaments*, unpublished manuscript. For the Christian Social movement and anti-Semitism see also John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in late imperial Austria. Origins of the Christian Social Movement, 1848–1897* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Robert S. Wistrich, *Die Juden im Zeitalter Kaiser Franz Josephs* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), 171–97.

<sup>34</sup> For Karl Hermann Wolf, member of the German National Association (Deutschen Nationalverband) see Stoppacher, *Die Zeit des Umbruchs*.

<sup>35</sup> The voice of the Christian Social party was the *Reichspost*, an anti-Semitic newspaper published in Vienna.

<sup>36</sup> Frontkämpfervereinigung Deutsch-Österreichs (Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLA)), A32-5442/1922.

Jews responded relentlessly to these anti-Semitic attacks, and Jewish communities, and their notables, rabbis, journalists, as well as Jewish political parties developed defense strategies against anti-Semitism and social exclusion.<sup>37</sup> Hence, for instance, in December 1917, Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937), who was already a member of the committee for the “Jewish War Archive” in 1915,<sup>38</sup> published a call in different German-Jewish journals in Vienna to found an organization for the Jewish War Combatants and War Invalids (“Verbandes jüdischer Kriegsteilnehmer und Kriegsbeschädigter”<sup>39</sup>). Referring to similar considerations in Germany, he sought to found an organization in Austria that would represent Jewish interests and preserve items and memorabilia related to Jewish war experiences. According to Birnbaum, the aims of this organization were:

1. Legal protection of all members in all claims against the state and others related to the war;
2. Representation of interests of the members before social service organizations of every kind;
3. Arrangements to enable the reentry of members into the civil economy (certificate of employment, certificate for the possibility of self-employment, perhaps commercial, industrial, and agricultural companies of the organization);
4. Representation of the interests of all Jewish war combatants and war invalids – particularly in order to preserve their reputation and honor – before the representatives of public life and before society.<sup>40</sup>

As with similar organizations that would follow, Birnbaum assumed that especially the fourth aim of his organization would protect not only the interests of Jewish soldiers (“Jewish community of faith”) but would also lead to the “protection of the Jewish people’s community” in general. “The activity, which has to be developed to preserve the interest, the reputation and the honor of the

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<sup>37</sup> *Der Erste Weltkrieg aus jüdischer Perspektive. Erwartungen – Erfahrungen – Erinnerungen. Themenheft der Zeitschrift zeitgeschichte*, eds. Gerald Lamprecht, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, Heidrun Zettelbauer 41/4 (2014).

<sup>38</sup> “Aufruf des ‘Jüdischen Kriegsarchivs,’ *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>39</sup> “Verband jüdischer Kriegsteilnehmer und Kriegsbeschädigter” in *Jüdische Zeitung. Nationaljüdisches Organ*, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

<sup>40</sup> “Verband jüdischer Kriegsteilnehmer und Kriegsbeschädigter” in *Jüdische Zeitung. Nationaljüdisches Organ*, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1917.

Jewish war combatants and war invalids, has to result in instructive and statistical material of common Jewish value and has to prompt further activities for the benefit of the Jewish community and the Jewish reputation.”<sup>41</sup>

Birnbaum, who wanted to enlarge the membership of his organization beyond the group of Jewish war veterans, was fully aware of the fact that the conditions of war and other obstacles prevented the official establishment of the organization in 1917. However, he wanted to be prepared for peacetime,<sup>42</sup> because he, like other alert Jewish contemporaries, assumed that with the end of war anti-Semitism would increase dramatically and would threaten Jewish life and existence in Austria fundamentally. Thus, he argued, the Jewish community had to be well prepared to react appropriately.

In 1919, the Organization for the Jewish War-Disabled, Invalids, Widows and Orphans was founded. Although it is not clear if Nathan Birnbaum was involved in its founding, this organization implemented his ideas. It focused mainly on the difficult economic and social situation of its members and tried to provide substantive assistance.<sup>43</sup> The organization’s journal, titled *Bulwark of the Jewish War-Victims* and first published in 1926, shows how difficult the economic and social circumstances were for the Jewish war invalids.<sup>44</sup> In the lead article of the first issue, titled “What we Want,” the author writes with a degree of resignation, but also combatively:

Among war victims all over the world, the Jewish ones are worst off. Not only that they had to fight against each other as members of the different states they were living in, but also is the poor or even completely missing social service of these ‘fatherlands by choice’ (*Wahlvaterländer*) for their co-fighters a nagging pain, which is related to the war and its horror for the Jewish war victims. Let us

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Eleonore Lappin, “Zwischen den Fronten: Das Wiener Jüdische Archiv. Mitteilungen des Komitees Jüdisches Kriegsarchiv 1915–1917,” *Deutsch-jüdische Presse und jüdische Geschichte I: Dokumente, Darstellungen, Wechselbeziehungen*, eds. Eleonore Lappin, Michael Nagel (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2008), 229–46.

<sup>43</sup> As there is no specific research on the question of public social welfare for Jewish veterans and war disabled, we have to refer to the book written by Verena Pawlowsky and Harald Wendelin about Austrian welfare politics for the victims of war. In their book they do not mention any anti-Semitic tendencies within the Austrian welfare politics, although some of the organizations for war-disabled – especially the Christian Social ones – were anti-Semitic. Verena Pawlowsky, Harald Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates. Kriegsoffer und Sozialstaat in Österreich 1914–1938* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2015), 265–73.

<sup>44</sup> For the difficult situation of the Austrian war-disabled see Verena Pawlowsky, Harald Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates. Kriegsoffer und Sozialstaat in Österreich 1914–1938* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2015).

make no mistake: the revolution and the marching in of the ‘republican freedom’ in the defeated states resulted neither in the end of anti-Semitism nor did it the proud feelings of the states of the entente. [...] How could they [the Jewish war victims] act otherwise than to demand insistently, to fight for their rights instead of always competing for love and attention in vain? For those who fought for their ungrateful fatherland, and for their miserable widows and orphans, there is no other possibility left to fight than: to take the fight to the public!<sup>45</sup>

Due to unknown internal quarrels the Organization for the Jewish War-Disabled, Invalids, Widows and Orphans split into two successor organizations with similar aims in 1929.<sup>46</sup> These organizations also turned their attention mainly to providing substantive assistance for their members, to compensating for neglected aspects of symbolic recognition for the Jewish war victims, and to further engagement in remembrance activities.<sup>47</sup> These were then the main issues pursued by the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans, founded in Vienna in 1932.<sup>48</sup> Former Jewish soldiers of the Habsburg army founded this

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<sup>45</sup> “Was wir wollen,” “Schutzwehr” der jüdischen Kriegsofper, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

<sup>46</sup> The Organization for the Jewish War-Disabled, Invalids, Widows and Orphans was dissolved in 1929 and in its place two others were founded: the Organization of the Jewish War-Invalids, Widows and Orphans (“Verband der jüdischen Kriegsinvaliden, Witwen und Waisen”) and the Aid-Association for the Jewish War-Victims, Invalids, Widows and Orphans in Vienna (“Hilfsverband der jüdischen Kriegsofper, Invaliden, Witwen und Waisen in Wien”). Both organizations also accepted members who weren’t front-line soldiers. E.g. (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (ÖStA)), AdR, Pol Dion Wien 1953/1937; (ÖStA), AdR, Pol Dion Wien 1411/1931; (ÖStA), AdR, BKA 117212/1929; Pawlowsky, Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 275.

<sup>47</sup> The Austrian compensation legislation (“Entschädigungsgesetzgebung”) demanded the separation of war-disabled, invalids, war victims, widows and bereaved form veteran’s organizations. This could be the reason why organizations of war-disabled, widows and orphans were not primarily engaged in commemoration activities for the fallen soldiers. See Pawlowsky, Wendelin, *Die Wunden des Staates*, 502–503.

<sup>48</sup> Although the BJF had many members, there has been only limited research into its history; see for example Martin Senekowitsch, *Gleichberechtigte in einer großen Armee. Zur Geschichte des Bundes Jüdischer Frontsoldaten 1932–1938* (Roma: Viella, 1994), Michael Berger, *Eisernes Kreuz – Doppeladler – Davidstern. Juden in deutschen Armeen. Der Militärdienst jüdischer Soldaten durch zwei Jahrhunderte* (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2010), 151–168. Recently Gerald Lamprecht, “Erinnerung an den Krieg: der Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten Österreichs 1932 bis 1938” in *Weltuntergang. Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Marcus G. Patka (Vienna: Styria premium, 2014), 200–10, Gerald Lamprecht, “Geteilte Erinnerung? Der Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten,” *Zonen der Begrenzung. Aspekte kultureller und räumlicher Grenzen in der Moderne*, eds. Gerald Lamprecht et. al (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 87–104, Schmidl, *Habsburgs jüdische Soldaten 1788–1918*, 146–56.

organization in response to increasing anti-Semitism in the 1920s and early 1930s, mainly driven by the National Socialists. In founding the Austrian Federation, the Jewish veterans were following the example of the Germany-based Reich Federation of Jewish Front-Line Soldiers (“Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten/RJF”) founded in Berlin in 1919.<sup>49</sup>

The main aim of the BJF was to protest against the “permanent defamation and daily defilement of the Jewish name and Jewish honor”<sup>50</sup> and to put up an active fight of resistance. Its members legitimized their activities by citing their patriotic military service for the Habsburg army, as the head of the BJF, off-duty captain Sigmund Edler von Friedmann, argued in his speech at the general muster on May 5, 1935: “Was the Jewish blood that was shed worth less than the blood of the Gentiles? No! It was the same lifeblood that was shed, the same lifeblood that was wept over by Jewish and gentile mothers. Thus, we do not beg for equality, we do not beg for equal rights, we demand them!”<sup>51</sup>

The founders of the BJF did more than raise the idealistic claim for social recognition; they also strove for the unification of the fragmented Jewish population in Austria under the leadership of the BJF. They deduced their claim to leadership from their military service and argued that only former soldiers with their war experiences and the experiences of comradeship would be able to successfully wage the struggle against anti-Semitism. This basic orientation as well as the fundamental ideology were articulated prior to the election of the council of the Viennese Jewish Community in 1936: “We front-line soldiers know, perhaps better than others, to assess how invaluable are rigid discipline and subordination under authoritarian command in an endangered position and in a dangerous situation.”<sup>52</sup>

The BJF valued rigid organization and a clear hierarchical structure (both common to the military) as the basis of effective and powerful action and for the overcoming of social and political differences. Such organization and action, they assumed, were something the front-line soldiers’ community had already realized in the trenches. Consequently, the BJF understood itself as impartial and

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<sup>49</sup> *Mitteilungen der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Graz*, January 1933, 4; E.G. Martin Berger, *Eisernes Kreuz – Doppeladler – Davidstern*, 123–50, Ulrich Dunkler, *Der Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten 1919–1938. Geschichte eines jüdischen Abwehrvereins* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1977).

<sup>50</sup> “Aufruf zur Gründungsversammlung des Bundes Jüdischer Frontsoldaten im Juli 1932” in *Drei Jahre Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten Österreichs* (Vienna n.y.), 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Drei Jahre Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten Österreichs*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> “Mehr Würde, mehr Einsicht!,” *Jüdische Front*, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1936.

requested that the other Jewish political and religious parties and groups also subordinate their particular interests to the interest of the whole:

We aspire not to primacy, we do not want to intervene in the rights and agendas of individual Jewish parties. They all should carry on and foster their ideological particularities and singularities. They should, though, be unified in their defense against external enemies, like all peoples who possess a sense for and understanding of practical vital necessities, and who have been and still are in hours of danger. In such times, there was no opposition among the parties, there were only national comrades.<sup>53</sup>

Based on its conviction that military service and war experience were fundamental to the particular values and attitudes of the BJF, the organization only accepted former Jewish soldiers as its members.<sup>54</sup> The aims of the BJF were written down in the statutes and covered the “fostering of traditional comradeship among the Jewish front-line soldiers and other Jewish war veterans, as well as in conjunction with gentile front-line soldiers and gentile war veterans.” Furthermore, “protection and preservation of the honor and reputation of the Jewish citizens of Austria [...], moral and substantive assistance of all Jewish institutions,” “moral and substantive assistance for suffering Jewish front-line soldiers and their families, their widows and orphans,” “permanent care for graves of Jewish front-line soldiers,” “promotion and support of all efforts to strengthen the defense capability of the Jewish citizens of Austria, physical training of the Jewish youth, and active support of all sporting activities in Austrian Judaism.”<sup>55</sup>

While the first statutes, dating from 1932, underscored the maintenance of military traditions, social service, and the strengthening of Jewish self-consciousness, the general alignment of the BJF changed somewhat in 1933 in light of the foundation of the Austrian fascist regime with its attempt to create an Austrian self-consciousness.<sup>56</sup> The new program accentuated the “unbreakable commitment to the fatherland Austria, and the unbreakable commitment to an upright Judaism.” Furthermore, it promised that they would put themselves “on the line for Jewish honor, Jewish reputation, and in all situations in which Jewish life is in danger.” The BJF also wanted to uphold “the

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<sup>53</sup> “Einheitsfront,” *Jüdische Front*, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1936.

<sup>54</sup> See the statutes of the BJF and their §5 membership (WStLA), 6959/1932.

<sup>55</sup> Statutes of the BJF from 1932 (WStLA), A32 6959/1932.

<sup>56</sup> In the statutes from 1936 the foundation of a Jewish Heroes Museum is mentioned (WStLA), A32 6959/1932.

traditions of the Austrian army” along with unification of Austrian Jewry. It is interesting that the statutes not only supported an Austrian Jewish identity but also mentioned the promotion of the development of the *Yishuv* in Palestine.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the range of issues they addressed, the struggle for equal rights, guaranteed by the Austrian constitution, and self-defense against anti-Semitism stood at the center of the activities of the BJF. All this found its expression in the BJF’s pledge, formulated in 1934: “I pledge loyalty to Austria! Pledge to Judaism! Pledge to the BJF Austria!”<sup>58</sup>. In addition, the BJF participated in Austrian memory discourses, memory activities, and intra-Jewish as well as Jewish-Gentile debates on Austrian Jewish identity and the position of the Jewish population within society. The instruments used by the BJF to reach all the objectives were the organization of a number of sub-groups (women’s groups, youth groups) and a wide range of activities (propaganda, protection of events, memory activities, cultural events, public musters, demonstrations and interventions with public and political authorities).

### Memory and Identity Discourses in the context of World War One

One main task of the BJF was publicizing their aims. To that end they founded the journal *Jewish Front: Official Organ of the Austrian Federation of Jewish War Veterans* in December 1932. The owner and publisher was the BJF, and the first chief editor was the Viennese businessman Robert Politzer.<sup>59</sup> He was followed by the civil servant and engineer Karl Reiß and, in January 1935, by the engineer Otto Braun, who was supported by the author Alfred Winzer, the responsible editor of the section devoted to *Bundesnachrichten* [“federal news”].<sup>60</sup> In January 1935, the federal news report became a separate section of the *Jewish Front*, covering various activities of the BJF’s sub-groups in the Austrian federal states. In January 1936, Karl Reiß returned as editor of the journal and stayed in this position until the forced suspension of the *Jewish Front* in March 1938.<sup>61</sup> By that time, 108 issues of the journal had been published, available for purchase either individually and/or by subscription.<sup>62</sup> The members

<sup>57</sup> *Drei Jahre Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten Österreichs*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Russian States Military Archiv/Special Archiv (RGWA), 672-1-274.

<sup>59</sup> *Jüdische Front*, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>60</sup> *Jüdische Front*, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935.

<sup>61</sup> *Jüdische Front*, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1936.

<sup>62</sup> (Year/Issues) 1932: 1; 1933: 14; 1934: 18; 1935:24; 1936:24; 1937:23; 1938:4; The last issue was released on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1938.



of the BJF and the Jewish population in Austria constituted the journal's target audience, but it is, for lack of historical sources, nearly impossible to describe the reception of the *Jewish Front* in any real detail.

According to the stated editorial policy, the journal reported on the BJF's various activities in Austria and informed its readers about the general political ideas of the organization. It published articles devoted to intra-Jewish debates, contemporary political and social developments, the establishment of the Austrian fascist regime, the rise to power of the National Socialists in Germany, the possibilities and strategies of self-defense against anti-Semitism, the Jewish self-consciousness of the front-line soldiers, as well as the Jewish population in Austria and Europe. Regardless of the particular topic, the question of how and in what form Jewish life could continue in Austria played an especially important role, and the BJF tried to formulate a narrative for an Austrian-Jewish identity in the face of the current challenges. This narrative was based on considerations of a liberal concept of nation, state, and citizenship. For the BJF this concept had already been realized in the multiethnic and supranational Habsburg monarchy and also during World War I. In several articles and speeches, the authors referred to the Habsburg army, military service, and the comradeship they had experienced, and they deduced guidelines for the present situation:

Even if the Austrian Jews – whether Zionists or not – see the emergence of a common Jewish land in the settlement in Palestine, and if they confess love and affinity toward this Jewish Palestine, even then, the Jews have the same right as Germans who are also living dispersed all over the world to acknowledge and to love the land in which they live and work, the plot of land that they have defended with their blood, as their fatherland. [...] We acknowledge our fatherland, we Jewish front-line soldiers, as Jews and Austrians, as we are now and as we want to be in future. And we demand for ourselves the right to declare our confession freely and clearly.<sup>63</sup>

In all the debates, military service and war experience are the main points of reference. Both are supposed to prove Jewish loyalty toward the state/fatherland and buttress the legitimate demand for equal rights as equal citizens. Both are also the main arguments against a *völkish* view of the nation, which maintains that a person's Jewishness constitutes a reason to exclude him or her from the nation and, consequently, from society. For the BJF, the liberal concept of the nation was represented by the constitution, which guaranteed citizens equal

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<sup>63</sup> "Das Recht der Juden auf ein Vaterland," *Jüdische Front*, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1934.

rights regardless of their religious denomination. Thus, the authors writing in the *Jewish Front* repeatedly invoked the constitution, as we can read, for instance, in January 1933: “We nowadays have the duty to give the state its share of the earnings from our work, and this is really not a small amount. Herewith we fulfill our civic duty. But we demand that the state be equally aware of its duties and not allow that one part of the population be treated in an inhuman way for no reason and be declared outlawed pariahs.”<sup>64</sup>

This Jewish constitutional patriotism, on the one hand, which placed the equality of all citizens at its center, always opposed the *völkish* nationalism that began its course to triumph no later than 1918.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, for many other Jews in Austria, it served as a positive reference to Austrian and Habsburg history, as shown by an article from 1933 bearing the title “Loyalty for Loyalty.” Concerning questions of Pan-Europe and the present developments in the Austrian society, it reads: “We Jews, who are neither proponents of a German nor a Slavic kind of nationalism, especially we Austrian Jews, particularly as we are untouched by such inhibitions can, [...] only wish for the revitalization of this economic zone; a region in which each nation could live out its peculiarities, a region in which people respected their fellows and showed them understanding. A region in which the cultural competition of the nationalities only led to good things for all”<sup>66</sup>. In view of the current situation in Germany as well as Austria, the author continued:

We Jewish front-line soldiers of Austria are for many reasons loyal to our fatherland, which we defended together with our Christian fellows. Regardless of the fact that in Germany a government is in power, which for us Jews no words can describe and whose results are like a river of mud, which will not last forever, so, regardless of all this, we see the well-being and the mission of Austria only therein: that it will be the leader and mediator of the East. But if we turn to or are annexed to the West, our people and our country will sink into total insignificance. The longstanding coexistence of many nations in Austria has established a culture that is a tribute to our country.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Die verfassungsmäßige Gleichberechtigung der Juden im Spiegel der österreichischen Tagespolitik,” *Jüdische Front*, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

<sup>65</sup> Jan M. Piskorski, *Die Verjagten. Flucht und Vertreibung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2013), 60.

<sup>66</sup> “Treue um Treue,” *Jüdische Front*, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

In this article, National Socialism and Austrian German nationalism are both contrasted with an idealized Habsburg monarchy. The author presents especially the German nationalism of Austria as a historical aberration that should be revised for the benefit of both Austria and its Jewish population. The author of the article invokes in this context the “noble Austrian soul with its characteristic culture,” which would be stunted in the case of an annexation with the “cold, calculating nature of the North-German.” In making this point, the author refers to rabbi Joseph Samuel Bloch and his text “The National Dispute and the Jews in Austria” (1883).<sup>68</sup> Bloch, too, criticized nationalism and anti-Semitism and declared the Jews as the only true Austrian people, because they had not affiliated themselves with any national movement.<sup>69</sup>

From the positive references to the Habsburg monarchy it can be inferred that the BJF had legitimist tendencies. After 1934, however, when the first leader of the BJF, Emil Sommer,<sup>70</sup> left the organization, the new leadership took a stand against legitimism, albeit with some reservations. They argued that although the Habsburg monarchy conjures up memories among the members of the BJF, as front-line soldiers and as Jews, “of times, that were more beneficial, happier, more harmonious than present,”<sup>71</sup> the BJF as an organization could not support a legitimist position. On the one hand, they had supported it by arguing that “after the foundation of the new Austria [...] the majority reserved the right to decide for the form of government that was most likely to represent its historical and political sensibility. It is consistent with this attitude that we demonstrate our sympathies for the legitimist idea, whenever the tradition of the old Austrian army and in particular the reputation of the last and highest supreme commander is fostered and upheld.”<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, they argued with reference to the history of the BJF's founding and its policy that the BJF was to be politically and religiously impartial. This impartiality should concern the members of the BJF, which belonged to Zionist, liberal and the religious/orthodox Jewish parties, as a community as well as its relationship to

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<sup>68</sup> Joseph Samuel Bloch, *Der nationale Zwist und die Juden in Oesterreich* (Vienna, 1886), 41.

<sup>69</sup> “II. Generalappell des B.J.F.” *Jüdische Front*, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

<sup>70</sup> Immediately after leaving the BJF Emil Sommer founded his own organization with the name Legitimist Jewish Front-line Soldiers. But this organization had only few members. (ÖStA), AdR, BKA Zl. 150.385/1934.

<sup>71</sup> “Monarchie und Legitimus. Die Stellungnahme des BJF,” *Jüdische Front*, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

other Gentile political parties.<sup>73</sup> To get to the heart of the relation between the BJF and legitimism, we can also read the following statement by the BJF in the article titled “Monarchy and Legitimism:”

We sympathize with it [legitimism] from the bottom of our hearts, but we have to refuse, for the above-mentioned reasons, to participate actively. Undoubtedly, we would welcome a change in the internal situation that would give us again the possibility to participate in building the state not only passively, as taxpayers, but also actively, joyfully. But as long as the participation of a Jewish group in a movement is seen as a ‘burden’ for this movement, as long as the rules of the form of government are exclusively constituted as a prerogative for the Christian majority, our pride alone forbids us to impose ourselves onto a movement, although we welcome its aims and are even willing to support them. This is not false pride, but the result of the bitter insight that we are only granted equality and civil rights in so far as we are defined as objects but never as subjects of the political decision-making process. For these reasons we have to decline to participate in the internal movement, whether in the Fatherland Front (“*Vaterländische Front*”)<sup>74</sup> or in the “Frontmiliz”<sup>75</sup>. We are and we will remain an impartial and apolitical organization, joined by the idea of loyalty to the state and to Judaism.<sup>76</sup>

As can be seen in this and many other articles, the BJF was confronted with the difficult challenge that, on the one hand, its members came from various political backgrounds, and, on the other hand, the BJF had to be impartial by all means in its stance toward both the various Jewish groups and parties and against the Austrian political parties and the state. Furthermore, the BJF also had to find an arrangement with the Austrian fascist regime, which was anti-Semitic but at the same time the only available partner for the fight against the National Socialists

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<sup>73</sup> See: Gerald Lamprecht, “Erinnerung an den Krieg: der *Bund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten* Österreichs 1932 bis 1938,” *Weltuntergang. Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Marcus G. Patka (Wien: Styria books, 2014), 200–210.

<sup>74</sup> The *Vaterländische Front* [Fatherland Front] was founded on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1933 by the Austrian fascist regime based on the model of other fascist mass and unity parties; see Emmerich Tálos, *Das austrofaschistische Herrschaftssystem Österreich 1933–1938*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2013), 147–90.

<sup>75</sup> The *Frontmiliz* [front militia] was a centralization of all defense organizations that supported the Austrian army and police. The *Frontmiliz* was organized within the *Vaterländische Front*; Tálos, *Das austrofaschistische Herrschaftssystem*, 225–28.

<sup>76</sup> “Monarchie und Legitimismus. Die Stellungnahme des BJF,” *Jüdische Front*, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937.

and for the independence of Austria.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, political activities were only possible within the Fatherland Front.<sup>78</sup> Thus the BJJ supported the Austrian fascist regime from April 1933 onwards and became the only Austrian Jewish organization to enter the Fatherland Front on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1933.<sup>79</sup> They justified this step by arguing that “the government turns to all the people who are willing to support its opus and rescue it from confusion and a civil war. This is exactly the same goal that we also aspire to, and as we are convinced that the government is honestly and frankly aiming at inner peace, we will follow its call and line up behind the government as upright Jewish front-line soldiers. We are offering our collaboration solely to help the Jewish community and our Jewry.”<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

In the 1930s the BJJ had (besides the Jewish sports club *Hakoah*) the highest membership of any Jewish organization in Austria.<sup>81</sup> The BJJ tried to unify the Austrian Jewish population and also to be an effective defense organization. While *Hakoah*, however, tried to create a positive Jewish identity on the basis of athletic success, youthfulness, and the ideals of Zionism, the Jewish front-line soldiers legitimized their doings and their consciousness by reference to modern Jewish history, Jewish military service, and the war experiences gained in the First World War. For them, their service to the country should have been proof enough of Jewish loyalty to state and society, and should also have served as a guarantee of their recognition as equal citizens. Their experiences of comradeship during the war as well as military structures were seen as ideals and guiding principles in times of crisis. But all this only could only be realized once the

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<sup>77</sup> We can read in reference to the anti-Semitism of the Fatherland Front: “The BJJ knows that these tendencies only arise from the will to take the wind out of the sails of the National Socialists. The Jewish front-line soldiers, unified in the BJJ, demand, on the grounds of their proven and widely acknowledged efforts in the Word War, justice and the end of the anti-Semitic attacks, which are not only a breach of the constitution but also a blemish on the reputation of Austria as a cultivated state [or: civilized state –sometimes ‘Kultur’ is translated as ‘Civilization’ – and it would read better here].” “Die Bundesführung teilt mit” *Jüdische Front*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1936.

<sup>78</sup> On the relationship between the Austrian fascist regime and Judaism [Austrian Jewry? the Jews?]: *Österreich! Und Front Heil! Aus den Akten des Generalsekretariats der Vaterländischen Front: Innenansichten eines Regimes*, ed. Robert Kriechbaumer (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 103–07; Táló, *Das austrofaschistische Herrschaftssystem*, 470–90.

<sup>79</sup> RGWA, 672-1-275.

<sup>80</sup> “Pflicht der Stunde,” *Jüdische Front*, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

<sup>81</sup> In 1935 the BJJ had approximately 20.000 and in 1938 24.000; *Drei Jahre Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten Österreichs*, 58; Erwin A. Schmidl, *Habsburgs jüdische Soldaten*, 155.

political and ideological differences within the Austrian Jewish population could be overcome, as the deputy leader of the BJV, Ernst Stiasny, pointed out in a meeting in Graz in November 1934. Following Stiasny, in times of crisis there was no place for a sophisticated analysis of the question whether “Judaism is a race or denomination” because, he argued, it would in any event always be clear that Judaism always has been a “community of fate.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bericht über die Generalversammlung der Ortsgruppe Graz des BJV am 10.11.1934 (RGWA), 672-1-293.