

Linking the Present and the Past - A Personal Story

Gerda Lederer

OUTLINE

1. Introduction.....p 1
 2. Background and childhood in Vienna 1926-1938.....p 2
 3. Discrimination, persecution, and exodus 1938-39.....p 5
 4. The American years 1939-1973.....p 7
 5. Pivotal experiences 1973-74.....p 9
 6. Looking for answers 1975-1980.....p 14
 7. Research in a changing World and Coming Full Circle.....p 16

1. Introduction

In the course of one of the many films containing interviews with Holocaust survivors ("We were so beloved...") a man looks back at his childhood in the German countryside and recalls that he admired and envied the German SS men he saw, handsome and trim in their shiny black boots and their tailored uniforms. He was then a boy of eight and his envy had been his guilty secret.

This episode made me look back at my own feelings, in Vienna in March of 1938. That Spring I turned 12, Hitler's army marched into Austria, and the democratic state of Austria became part of Germany's Third Reich. Had I perhaps also been a little envious of the people whom this event made so happy, perhaps unwilling to admit these feelings even to myself? I wrote in my diary that I was glad that I was among the persecuted; had I not been among them, I feared that I would have been among the others. Those others were exalted, they seemed to be in a joyous trance. There must have been some who were apprehensive but I was not aware of them at the time. I pondered a poem by Goethe that an older friend had written into my leather-bound autograph album:

Du musst steigen oder sinken,
 Du musst herrschen und gewinnen,
 Oder dienen und verlieren,
 Leiden oder triumphieren,
 Amboss oder Hammer sein.

You must rise or fall,
 Reign and win
 Or serve and lose,
 Suffer or triumph,
 Be anvil or hammer.

(English translation by GL)

Were those really the only alternatives?

2. Background and childhood in Vienna 1926-1938

The Austrian state of my childhood was a parliamentary system but not a democratic one. Payne (1980) describes it as presenting "perhaps the clearest case in Europe of the three main faces of authoritarian nationalism: a moderate right authoritarian group, the Christian Social Party; a more radical, overtly authoritarian and violent rightist group, the Heimwehr units; and revolutionary nationalists in the form of the Austrian Nazis" (p.107). I have childhood memories of political strife, of unrest and shooting in Vienna in February 1934 when I was not yet eight years old. I was too young to be told - or for that matter to understand - that the Heimwehr had provoked the confrontations which had led to a ban of the Christian Social Party and the establishment of a corporative state under Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss: conservative, Catholic, and virtually theocratic. But even if I had been older, I don't think my parents would have discussed this with me. It was my impression that my sister, two years older, was equally ignorant and unconcerned in those years. I don't think we talked about politics as children. My father was a Jewish Austrian (not an Austrian Jew). He loved Austria, especially Vienna. He felt close to Emperor Franz Joseph (1830-1916), who passed my father's retail store and residence on Mariahilferstrasse when he made his way in the royal coach each morning from Schloss Schoenbrunn on the outskirts of Vienna to the Hofburg in Vienna's center and my father, along with many others, would stand in the street and watch his carriage go by. As my father would have it, they greeted each other. In fact, Emperor Franz Joseph was a friend of the Jews of Vienna.

I think my father was probably conservative and not politically involved. He had been a soldier in the First World War and was proud of it. He loved Austria and often told me that "politics was dirty business". And my mother thought whatever my father thought, or at least never mentioned it to me if she had a different opinion. She was a business woman, an unusual circumstance for a woman of her circumstances. She loved life and she loved music. She played the piano, she sang well and often and I thought her very pretty.

In July 1934 an event of such proportions shook Austria that it imprinted itself on my memory. Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated. I had to think of that event when John F. Kennedy was shot in 1963. My youngest daughter was then about the same age as I had been in 1934. It was a shock to her - as it had been to me, 29 years earlier - the violent death of the country's leader, the sadness and the pomp and circumstance, the loss of a symbolic father figure. I think I decided that I had loved the little man (Dollfuss was not quite 5 feet tall), especially after he was dead. Kurt von Schuschnigg acceded to power after him and continued the semi-fascist order in Austria.

If I was largely unaware of politics before 1938 it was probably because the political system did not intrude on my life. Like most of my friends, I belonged to an upper middle class assimilated Jewish family. We attended a public elementary school. That is probably the reason that we did not have orthodox Jewish classmates.

Besides my parents and our governess, the most important adult in my life during the first three years of the four years of elementary school was Lehrer Feigl. This teacher taught us all subjects except religion. He always taught with vigor and enthusiasm and I can remember that he devised a very effective method for teaching set theory when he taught us arithmetic. But he loved teaching German best. He inspired us with his diction and his enunciation. He often slipped into the role of the Burgtheater actor he wished he had become, we were his audience. He was passionate and extremely authoritarian. I loved him and I feared him. And I acquired at that time a deep feeling for the German language.

Religion was taught to Austrian public school pupils during the school day. Unless the parents had requested exemption from all religious instruction, that is, had declared the child "konfessionslos" (having no religion), instruction in the three major religions was provided. For one hour twice a week the children in our class went either to a Protestant minister or to a teacher of Jewish religion (in higher grades to a rabbi), or stayed in the room with the majority to await the Catholic priest who would come to instruct them.

I remember the two teachers of religion I had in the lower grades as beautiful, gentle and understanding young women who taught the (Old) Testament as wondrous stories and who encouraged religious observance at home. Attendance at the Saturday afternoon children's service at the local synagogue was also required. As proof of attendance one had to bring the program card that was distributed there. Under the influence of the religious instruction my sister and I besieged my mother to light shabbat candles on Friday night, a custom we observed from then on throughout the years we spent in Vienna.

Like many of the other Jewish families in Vienna, we observed the major Jewish holy days with family and friends and these repeated rituals left me with warm memories. For example, we always celebrated Passover with Aunt Cilly, actually an aunt of my father. As I try to reconstruct the event, the atmosphere of closeness and warmth suggests to me for the first time that perhaps Aunt Cilly's apartment was small. That thought never crossed my mind then. I remember some humorous repartees about possible abbreviations of the pre-dinner prayer service spoken by my father and an uncle, I remember being allowed to taste wine (not particularly to my taste but so grown up), and I remember waiting for Prophet Elias to come

through the door that had been left ajar for him in order to drink from the wine goblet that had been filled for him. I also remember asking the four questions, an integral part of the Passover ritual. It is the responsibility of the youngest son to rise and, in Hebrew, ask such questions as, why is this night different from all other nights. This honor fell to me and I felt very important. I was allowed this participation in spite of the fact that I was a girl, but then there were no younger boys in the family.

We lived near a Catholic church and I remember being taken there from time to time by the family cook. I loved the smell of incense, the statues and the cool quiet. I also remember a picture of Christ on the cross in a small show window which I passed every Saturday on my return from the visit to my synagogue. It said under the picture that if you looked at it intently for two minutes, Christ's eyes would open. I stopped there every week and waited for Christ's eyes to open. Once I leaned against the glass so hard that the window broke and I ran home, my heart pounding.

I loved the Christkindlmarkt, the stalls erected around St. Stephens Cathedral at Christmas time with their toys and sweets and wonderful smells. I don't recall that I ever wished that we had a Christmas tree. I think I felt integrated in the Vienna of my childhood, secure in my identity.

Was I aware of antisemitism? I recall two incidents quite clearly. In the first case I conclude that I was only four years old since my sister was six, in 1930. She had entered first grade in the village near Vienna where we had a summer home and my parents withdrew her and moved with us back to Vienna. Antisemitic comments and perhaps acts had prompted this decision. It is too late to ask what had actually happened, there are no longer witnesses to this time in my life.

The second incident I recall happened in 1934, when I was eight. I had been attending the same public elementary school in Vienna since first grade and had several good friends. In third grade, I made a new friend. Her name was Irmgard. I loved and admired her and she reciprocated my friendship. We planned one day that I should visit her after school and when I asked my parent's permission, they did not grant it. My mother had telephoned Irmgard's parents and had been told that they did not approve of such a close friendship with Jews. I remember being as surprised as I was hurt. Only then did I become conscious of the fact that my other friends were Jewish and Irmgard was not.

3. Discrimination, persecution, and exodus 1938-39

At 6PM on March 11, 1938 my family listened as Chancellor Schuschnigg held a radio address in which he said good-bye to his Austrian countrymen. His speech was followed by the Austrian National Anthem, played like a funeral dirge. Though I was not

quite twelve years old, that event and many of those in the six months that followed, before we left Austria, have remained surprisingly vivid in my memory.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I witnessed Austria's reaction to the Anschluss. There was an ecstasy of acclamation and joy. Later, the mendacious post-war self-portrayal of Austria as Hitler's first victim was to make me cynical regarding historical accounts and, incidentally, lay the groundwork for my interest in political psychology.

But back to 1938: The manifest racist antisemitism that had taken five years to develop in Germany was accomplished in as many months in Austria. Upon my return to school two days after the Anschluss, the 12 Jewish children of my seventh grade class of 36 were segregated to the rear of the classroom. Aryan children could not be expected to sit next to Jews, was the explanation. Some of our teachers were in silent empathy with us, many were not, some were openly hostile and aggressive. In art, the projects we were working on were discontinued. A picture of Hitler was displayed and the assignment was to draw a likeness. Jewish children were not permitted to draw Hitler's portrait, however. In music, Nazi songs were learned. We had to stand but were not allowed to sing as our classmates intoned, "wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt" ("when Jewish blood splashes from the knife").

The streets were full of flags adorned with swastikas and with uniforms. One morning, as I started on my way to school, I saw that the shop windows of our store had been smeared with swastikas and the words "Jude" and "Juda verrecke" ("Jew, croak"). One of the employees was busily scrubbing away at the paint so that my father would not see it or have to clean it upon his arrival.

Movie theaters, swimming pools, and even park benches were off limits for Jews. I remember one Sunday going to play at the Jewish cemetery, the one place from which we were not barred.

My uncle was driving in Vienna when his car was stopped and confiscated. He was sent to the concentration camp Dachau. He was a man in his sixties, hard of hearing and a diabetic. His failure to hear and promptly obey orders caused him to be singled out for torment beyond his endurance. He was very ill by the time his family was able to achieve his release.

My sixteen-year-old cousin Ernst was strongarmed into joining a group of Jews who had to scrub political symbols of other parties from the street. When pushed to the ground by one of the young Nazis, he got up and slugged his tormentor. Thereupon a few of the men beat my cousin without mercy and left him for dead in the gutter. When he recovered consciousness he hid in a doorway until dark and then made his way to our house. His arrival contributed to my father's realization that we had to leave Austria.

Up to that time, my father had maintained that he had no enemies. He had fought for Austria in World War I. Vienna was his home. He had never harmed anyone, had on the contrary helped many people. He could not conceive of leaving Austria. Though he had found the thought of leaving Austria preposterous in March, he knew by the summer of 1938 that we had to go if we were to have a chance. He joined the lines seeking visas to distant countries. England, the US, and Australia were his first, second, and third choices. In the end he filed applications for each of these countries but felt we could not wait for the visas to be granted, a lengthy process. He bought visas for us to enter Santo Domingo and purchased passage on an ocean liner. With these documents in hand, my father obtained three-week transit visas for France. He sold the family stores to aryan buyers for a pittance, paid that pittance as Reichsfluchtsteuer (tax for fleeing the Reich), and left Vienna with his family in late September 1938, just before Kristallnacht.

How does a child of twelve experience this upheaval? I was aware of the pall that hung over our lives, the lurking danger as we prepared to leave Vienna, the fear when crossing the border on the way from Vienna to Paris. But the experience was also a lark, an exciting adventure. I am convinced that I did not experience real terror solely because I was never separated from my parents. The childhood illusion that they were there to protect me from harm allowed me to remain a child, secure in the knowledge that my parents would stand between me and the evil that threatened the world.

Of the ten months we lived in Paris I was only able to attend school for three. My sister and I had to withdraw from public school when the school asked that documents be brought to show legal residence status. Later, each of my parents and my sister attended courses that were supposed to make it possible for them to earn money to support us in the country of our immigration. I stayed home, minded a two-year old cousin and shopped and cooked. Since my vocabulary was as limited as my culinary skills, my boarders had to make do with two simple alternating menus.

There was an additional important event of a personal nature that took place during that year. When I turned 13 in an apartment hotel in Paris I lost my faith. It was the year I learned French, read "Der Zauberberg" by Thomas Mann, and memorized ballads of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine. My belief in a deity had been getting weaker but I thought that only God could explain the wonderful formations in even the smallest snowflake of the universe. When I found scientific explanations that could account for the patterns of nature I became an agnostic.

We continued to wait in vain for visas. When it seemed that the French would refuse to extend our permits yet another time and threatened to send us back to Germany, where concentration camps awaited us, we decided to leave for Santo Domingo. At that

inopportune moment this country declared our visas invalid. By great good fortune we were notified shortly thereafter that the American visas had been approved and we left for the United States as quickly as possible.

I remember that we traveled to New York in great style, on the French Line's huge steamer, the "Ile de France," having been able to use the tickets previously purchased for travel to Santo Domingo. For myself at thirteen, it was a wondrous experience. The steamer trunk that carried our possessions was recently accepted for exhibit at New York's new Museum of Jewish Heritage. This made me feel a little like a relic of the past myself.

4. The American years 1939-1973

We arrived in New York shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe. I was now thirteen, facing the twin problems of adolescence and cultural integration while my parents faced those of economic survival. I don't remember experiencing serious difficulties learning a second foreign language within a year (though I remember French remaining my favorite for quite a while). The scholastic demands, first in seventh grade, then skipping right into the second year at Evander Childs High School, did not seem overwhelming. When I had problems, my sister helped me solve them. I enjoyed learning and got along well with my teachers. I earned good grades and was even awarded some academic honors. My parents, strangers to that world and preoccupied with their struggle to earn a living, had to be explained that these were in fact achievements to be savored.

During those years I also remember loneliness. Though I know that this is a frequent experience in adolescence, I attributed mine to the cultural dislocation. But who knows, I might have been equally alone as an awkward thirteen in Austria. Looking back, I think that my life would have taken a different course if I had been more popular with American teenagers. Like other young refugees from Nazi Europe, I would have turned my back on the culture and language of the country of my birth that had treated us so badly and I would have embraced all things American with passion.

However, since I found only a few casual friends in my high school, I tried clubs and groups outside of school and finally found a safe haven in an Austrian youth group whose members had come through life experiences similar to mine. It gave me a chance to commune with nature, to practice sports, and to contribute to the war effort. Some friendships that were formed there have lasted a lifetime. This group was my world until it disbanded sometime after the end of the Second World War.

Subjectively, the years in the Austro-American Youth (AAY) seem to me longer than some other, similar stretches of life time. I was at an impressionable age. We have since learned that mature men and

women, asked to pinpoint the most important non-personal experience during their lifetime, overwhelmingly tend to pick events that occurred when they were between 17 and 25 (Shuman and Scott, 1989). Some of the great decisions that shaped my life were made relatively casually during that time. For example, I remember selecting my future course of study and thus a professional direction by a perverse process of elimination, for I was a self-denigrating snob. I liked writing and visual arts but felt that I did not have the outstanding talent to pursue either. I liked tutoring mathematics but I had a haughty disdain for the teaching profession. Similarly, I felt that the social sciences were not sufficiently intellectually demanding. Besides, they needed a good memory which I did not have. That left mathematics and physics which I enjoyed and could do as well as the other good students in those courses.

My parents had forfeited my access to a free public college education in New York's city colleges by moving to the suburbs. My father could not or would not pay for a private college education for both of his daughters and neither my sister nor I wanted to be the one to go to college if the other could not.

In fact, my sister Liselotte and I both achieved the coveted college education. She took secretarial courses to learn the skill that would support her during her college years, moved to New York and attended Hunter College. When she passed away some years ago, she was the head of Adelphi University's Science Library.

I finally entered New York University with a partial tuition scholarship, studying at night, and, like my sister, I earned my way. I remember spending my days working for Bell Laboratories in a sprawling city block between Bank and Bethune Streets in downtown New York. I was proud to be one of 14 technical assistants, working 40 hours a week for \$18 and frequently putting in overtime. I enjoyed the work. When we were dismissed in 1945 at the end of the war to make room for the traditional males to fill our places I became a disenchanted feminist.

During the next four years I had a succession of jobs: A mathematician was sought by a box company and I was hired. I had to calculate endless series of measurements for knocked-down cardboard boxes. I was disillusioned but I calculated until I was laid off. I was hired by a radio factory as a junior physicist. I had to spot check radio sets selected at random from the assembly line. If they failed to meet standards, the tolerances were increased. Full of moral indignation, I kept checking.

I lectured for Brookhaven National Laboratories at an exhibit at the New York Museum of Natural History on atomic energy. While holding forth to about 20 visitors, between the Van der Graaff globe and a model of atomic fission, the love of my life, also a member of the Austro-American Youth group, proposed to me. We were

married in April 1948.

Around that time, I started work as a technical editor for the McGraw-Hill Book Company. At the time my first daughter was born, I was copy editing the manuscript of a textbook on optics. My husband finished it with my help, sitting in my hospital room. (At that time, it was customary to allow five hospital days to have a baby.) After her birth, I started editing at home - not only for McGraw-Hill but also for D. Van Nostrand, Prentice Hall, Academic Press, and others. My second daughter came between "Differential Equations Made Easy" and "Mathematics: A Topical Approach".

In 1954, we moved to the Catskills. The reason we bought that house on that meadow was that it reminded us of Austria. My husband had left Austria at 18, I had been 12. We had acquired US citizenship, we spoke English with each other, we were Americans. Yet each of us had internalized a longing for the mountains and the meadows of our childhood and when we found the blue gentian and the chanterelles, we stayed. That is where our youngest daughter was born.

Taking only a very brief look at the next fifteen years, I can report that as our three daughters grew up, we felt it best for the family to leave our rural Shangrila. We returned to civilization in a New York suburb, I became a mathematics teacher, and the marriage I had considered ideal for many years fell apart. In 1973, my husband and I decided to try a year's separation. All three girls were away at college and after 25 years of marriage, it seemed possible and wise not to sever the marriage immediately but to try life apart.

For the consumption of friends and relatives - and because there was more than a kernel of truth to this version - I set out to discover why mathematics instruction abroad produced considerably better mathematics knowledge and comprehension than our efforts in the US. This conclusion had been reached by the International Project for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA) in their multinational study of mathematics achievement (Husen, 1967) which concluded that American 13- and 17-year-olds placed 11th and 12th, respectively, with respect to the 12 industrialized nations examined.

I arranged for an exchange with a Swiss math teacher at a Gymnasium - we were to trade places for a year. When this arrangement fell through, a colleague gave me a newspaper clipping announcing a search for German-speaking American teachers of mathematics to come for two years to teach in Hamburg, Germany, where there was a sudden shortage of teachers of mathematics. I was interviewed for the position and was hired, even though I only had a one-year's leave of absence from my teaching job. My fluent knowledge of German sold the hiring committee.

5. Pivotal experiences 1973-74

10

How did I feel about going to Germany? Some of my Jewish friends were shocked and looked at me askance. Among the 23 teachers accepting the German offer of positions, there was only one Jewish couple and they were not refugees from Nazi Germany. I was excited to be off on this adventure, to break out of a marriage that had become unendurable and to be on my own, free of the responsibilities for a family. The fact that I was particularly fascinated to be going to Germany was my own guilty secret. I suspect that the decision had something to do with a fascination, even an obsession, with the former aggressor.

I would not have wanted to go to Austria. I had been back there a number of times since 1938. I knew the Austrians to be antisemitic, to cling to a political mind set not so different from the pre-war years in Vienna and even more so in the country side. My feelings for Austria were a mixture of yearning and loathing, and I had no desire to teach Viennese children.

I was also glad not to be going to Switzerland. I had no emotional bond, no consuming interest in that country. I admired its mountains and lakes, I had pleasant memories of vacations spent there skiing, but it did not cast a spell over me.

And Germany? Where national socialism had its climax, where even little children spoke that "high German" I had learned to love as a child? What was the source of my fascination? What did I expect to find by entering the lion's lair? By 1973, the Second World War was part of the past for Americans, especially for those whose families had not been devastated by the Holocaust. I expected this to be the case in Germany, too, though I anticipated the massive devastation of the German cities to have left physical and psychological scars. I thought the Nazi period to be a tabu subject. In their hearts, I expected the Germans to be more or less unchanged, to be what they had been in the thirties. When had losing a fight ever changed a combatants opinion? What would have made the Germans change in those 28 years since their defeat at the hands of the allies?

These largely unconscious expectations were based on a number of visits to Austria, where the Nazi era was never talked about except when oblique references alluded to the suffering they, the Austrians, had had to endure ("You were lucky...") or to sotto voce comments about things that had been better "under Hitler."

I had to admit that I was not well-informed about post-war Germany. While I was keenly aware of the Vietnam protests at home in the late 60s, I was ignorant of the phenomenon of the so-called "sixty-eighters" in Germany. Only after arriving there did I learn that the early 70s were a time in the Federal Republic of Germany when the media, the publishers, public figures and the educators were

determined to "overcome the past" (die Vergangenheit zu bewaeltigen). They were earnestly engaged in attempting to apply anti-authoritarianism to child rearing and education. Now that I was embarking on this great adventure, I became aware of all these attitudes and endeavors. I wanted to observe and to chronicle. Overnight, I became a participant observer.

I was to teach German children, I had contact with their German parents and with my German fellow faculty members. My students were born about thirteen years after the end of World War II. Most of their parents, especially the mothers, enjoyed "die Gnade der spaeten Geburt" (the grace of the late birth), to borrow a phrase later coined by Chancellor Kohl to point out the automatic innocence of all that happened under Hitler of those born too late to have experienced the Third Reich as adults. It soon became clear to me, however, that this generation was also deeply affected, in many ways, by the period of national socialism and the Second World War which they had experienced as children and through their parents. On a class trip (Klassenreise) traditionally held at the beginning of the school year, for students to get to know one another better, the chaperoning parents proved unable to produce even a single German song to go with the evening's campfire. A self-conscious censorship found the songs that came to mind politically tainted. With relief we finally sang the ever popular "Hoch auf dem gelben Wagen", a song recently sung by Foreign Minister Scheel, and some of the most popular songs of Peter, Paul and Mary.

My adventure and that of my American colleagues began about a month before the opening of school. This was to give the newcomers time to move into their temporary homes and to become familiar with the West German system of education. We had to enroll in special preparatory classes on curriculum, course content, and on classroom practices and procedures. One of the first lessons was that frontal teaching, as customarily practiced in the US, was out. As the teacher, one was not to admonish the students to be quiet and listen, one was not to lecture. One of the psychoanalytic proponents of anti-authoritarianism of the time (Thomas Ziehe, 1975) cautioned that obtaining obedience by soliciting the affection of the students was also wrong; in fact, he explained that it was the teacher's responsibility to teach the students to disobey authority.

There were many paradoxes. Considering Germany's traditional tripartite system of education undemocratic, the Federal Republic of Germany tried to move away from the division according to student aptitude (into Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium) to a system of comprehensive schools (Gesamtschulen). The model was the American high school or a similar plan implemented in Sweden. However, feelings in the population were split. Especially parents of bright and capable students did not want to give up their dream of a strictly academic education for their children. And to

implement the structural change in the face of opposition struck the Germans as authoritarian, even if the aim was a more democratic system. Gesamtschulen were established, not instead of but in addition to the conventional schools. The new system did not work out as well as it might have because the top students continued to attend the academic secondary schools as before. One of the few remaining democratizations left from this era is the decision making process concerning the selection of students for the Gymnasium. No longer does a single examination at the age of 10 decide a child's educational future. Performance over a period of one or two years, teacher recommendation, and parental wishes play a significant part in the school choice.

In the course of my year of teaching at an academic secondary school (Gymnasium) in Hamburg I experienced many examples of this political consciousness. By this time, many educators had decided that a non-authoritarian approach to teaching, in preference to anti-authoritarianism, was desirable. In my every-day experiences it meant that when I stopped a child from running in the hall, a reflex reaction on my part developed in decades of teaching, I was told that children naturally run and one should not impose authority (glass doors, albeit reinforced, in the halls notwithstanding). When I wanted to separate two fighting eight-year old boys in the school yard during recess, I received a similar admonition. On a school outing with eleven-year olds, I wanted to line the children up to count them - and was told that this smacked of authoritarianism and was therefore not customary.

While economic conditions were quite similar, the behavior of the students I was teaching in this Hamburg suburb was markedly different in a number of respects from the behavior of those I had left behind in the New York suburb. I was busy recording anecdotes and observations. I was interested in the experiences of my fellow teachers from the US and compiled, distributed, and analyzed my first questionnaires.

The American teachers had been distributed over a relatively large area and I was the only one at my school. I now depended for social contacts on my new colleagues. I had said nothing about my background and discovered that my German fellow teachers had decided that I might have been an Austrian war bride. Since I wanted to assess the prevalence of anti-semitism in my environment, I decided to leave this image in place. I thought I would learn more if people were not aware of my Jewish background. A test of residual antisemitic attitudes came in form of two new students who were admitted during the school year. The boy and girl came from Israel. Their father had emigrated before the war and now returned, uninhibited in his display of great wealth. The children frequently arrived at school by chauffeur driven limousine, they were exempt from writing on Saturdays, they were often unprepared and they tended to be fresh and self-righteous. And these were the only Jews at this school, among the very few Jews in Hamburg. I listened

carefully, to the teachers and also to the custodian (Hauswart), a man with little education and much power, a typical situation in German schools. I heard criticism of the children but never in reference to their background or to Israel. This seemed to me almost unnatural, as if everyone was under the spell of a tabu. I imagined that a similar situation in the United States, especially in the American mid-West, would have elicited other comments.

My own reception had been warm and friendly, not only if measured against the warnings and expectations of friends. I had been told that North Germans were cold and distant, hard to get to know, and that Germans in contrast to Americans had few intimate friends and were not very interested in expanding this limited circle.

Within two or three weeks I had been invited to the home of one of the teachers. I remember that when she originally called to invite me, I could not produce a mental image of her, all the women seemed to melt into each other. I enjoyed the evening spent with her and soon had many friends among the faculty.

I remember that the teachers were divided into two groups, ostensibly the smokers in the teachers' smoking room and the non-smokers in the other. Actually it was a political division, running also along age lines. It took me a while to discover that this resulted in the presence of some non-smokers in the teachers' smoking room. There was little social contact between the two groups. As an older non-smoker, I landed at a table with conservative, older women.

As the year progressed, I decided to change my image. Not having heard antisemitic comments when I was thought to have been a (non-Jewish) war bride, I decided to set the record straight. I casually remarked to some teachers that I was Jewish. I had been treated with warmth before this revelation. Now my colleagues started to vie for my friendship. I felt that I was encountering philosemitism, and I didn't know how to react. I tried to imagine myself in the place of the Germans I was encountering and I decided that it would be very difficult to react "normally" under the circumstances, assuming that anyone could suggest what "normal" might be after the Holocaust.

Some time during that year I met a German approximately my age and we became friends. Like myself, he was recently separated from his wife after a long marriage and had three children. We were surprised how much we had in common. We met for long walks, together explored Hamburg, and we talked. It was difficult for me to hear him talk about his life experiences in the Hitler Youth. At the age of 16 he had been drafted into the army with his tenth grade class and his teachers. He was a soldier for six weeks and a prisoner of war of the Americans for a year. I don't know whether I was the first Jew he had ever met; I certainly was the first one he got to know well.

We visited the memorial at the site of the former concentration camp Bergen-Belsen together. I placed a stone on one of the memorial grave stones, a Jewish gesture of respect dating back to biblical times. He did not know whether it would be sacrilegious to for him do the same. He stood as if paralyzed and cried. Later that year we visited Neuengamme, the former concentration camp near Hamburg. We also saw exhibits such as the one about "Entartete Kunst" (modern art declared degenerate by the Nazis).

The people among whom I had decided to live for a year had stopped being "the Germans", they had become individuals. And my expectations of what I would find and experience had proved false.

At the end of the academic year I returned to New York. I had made many friends and had a great variety of impressions. I felt a need to discuss my experiences and their implications with my American friends and colleagues. When I did that, however, I found that many had their own picture of Germany and the Germans. They seemed disinterested and unwilling to consider revising it. They wanted to classify others as prejudiced without the insight that they might be responding out of prejudice themselves. On the occasion of a lecture I held at my American high school about the mathematics curriculum and my experiences in the German classroom, one of the parents in the audience told me that my observations were incorrect, that I had been deluded.

I found myself in a strange situation. Having previously spoken about the Holocaust and the Nazis to inform Americans about the greatest genocide of all times, I suddenly found myself perversely trying to set the picture straight regarding the Federal Republic of Germany, 30 years after the end of the Second World War.

6. Looking for answers - 1975-1980

My first marriage had ended. I resumed my position teaching mathematics in the US. But the German experience pursued me. The motion pictures shown late at night in which all Germans conformed to a Nazi stereotype; the unquestioning behavior of American students and teachers when they pledged allegiance to the flag displayed in each classroom; the words of parents telling their children to do as they were told: I saw them all with a different awareness. I felt as if I were living in two worlds and had two distinct and irreconcilable forms of perception.

But what was this quality that had undergone sizable changes in Germany? And had it really? Or had my limited experience produced a delusion, as had been suggested?

In the ensuing year, my two worlds met. Teachers from the German Gymnasium where I had taught followed the invitation of my Westchester high school, my American colleagues, and of the parents of our students and visited with us for two weeks. The visitors

were touched by the warmth, the friendliness, and the generosity of their hosts and by the Americans they met in general. They were also more than a little bewildered by social customs unfamiliar to them. For example, our American high school principal, who welcomed them personally in his office upon their arrival, shook hands with each one, addressed each by first name, and introduced himself similarly. The German teachers were taken aback. Some had worked at their school with colleagues for a dozen years or more and still addressed them in the formal manner (with Sie and Frau or Herr Schmidt). They were suddenly called upon to call this foreign principal the equivalent of "Du". It was almost unthinkable for them, at the very least awkward.

I began to realize that such conventions of a culture were not coincidental. They reflected cultural values which, in turn, were an integral part of what makes Germans German and Americans American. In his book on "Society and Democracy in Germany" Ralf Dahrendorf (1967) writes about pivotal differences in value attitudes and role expectations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States. He calls them the private and the public virtues (p.285) and says about them that the private virtues, dear to the Germans, provide the individual with standards for his own perfection, whereas the public virtues prized in the US are of greatest importance in societies whose aim is the frictionless mastery of relationships between men (p.286). Perhaps the single maxim that best characterizes public virtues is "keep smiling" - make things easy for the others, even if this is hard for you (p.287).

How true, I thought. Many Germans I had met basically misunderstood the friendliness of Americans and especially criticized what seemed to them the hypocrisy of "keep smiling". As a little social experiment, try smiling at a toddler in a supermarket in Atlanta and in Frankfurt. In Atlanta, the parent will return your smile and make you feel that you have made a friend. In Frankfurt, the parent is likely to stare you down with an angry frown, silently criticizing your intrusive behavior.

My sensitivity to cultural nuances became finely tuned. The more I thought and read, the more there seemed to be to know. I decided to embark on a new course of study evenings, after my teaching job.

When I entered Columbia University in 1976 to study sociology and social psychology, I was almost fifty years old. I had a master's degree and 20 years of experience teaching mathematics. Teaching in Germany for a year had awakened the memories of the first years of my life in Austria and raised questions I wanted to learn to answer. My training in mathematics helped determine the choice of approach.

As my studies progressed, I became familiar with Kurt Lewin and Erik Erikson, with Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich. I realized that much of the material I was studying was already familiar to me, some from earlier studies, some felt as I had always known these things, since childhood.

Goethe - and "the Germans" - had thought that one had to rule or serve ("Du musst herrschen und gewinnen, Oder dienen und verlieren,"). The bicyclist's syndrome had prevailed, in Germany even more pronounced than elsewhere: stepping down on those below as you bent your back to those above you - a pervasive pecking order. I marveled how well Heinrich Mann had described this in a historical setting in "Der Untertan" (1918). I read about the authoritarian German father and typical German family constellations in Schaffner's "Father Land" (1948). I read "The Authoritarian Personality" (Adorno et al 1950) as if it were a thriller. Rockeach's "Open and Closed Mind" (1950) was a revelation. I was fascinated by David Mantell's analysis of Green Berets and conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War (1972/1974).

For my dissertation I posed the question, are young Germans fundamentally less authoritarian now, 32 years after the end of World War II, than the German 16-year olds of 1945, and how do they differ from their American contemporaries?

I found research carried out by psychologists who had asked questions about German and American 16-year-olds at the end of World War II (McGranahan, 1946) and of a number of investigators in the following decades. I set out to replicate earlier surveys of German and American adolescents with broader samples and a many-faceted questionnaire.

When it became necessary to produce a German version of a previously used English questionnaire, I tested the quality of the translation with a special small-scale study. The questionnaire was administered to 80 bilingual students twice, the second time after a two-week interval. While a control group completed the questionnaire twice in the same language, half the students received the questionnaires first in one language, the second time in the other. Inquiring into occasional discrepancies led us to discover that some children think very differently about some things when they are thinking in a different language.

The results of the analysis within cultures over time and across cultures showed a diminution of intercultural differences and a sharper reduction of authoritarianism among German adolescents than among American adolescents since 1945. The data also revealed significant correlations between authoritarianism, pseudo-patriotism, ethnocentrism, and dogmatism in both cultures. I completed my dissertation in 1980 and received the Ph.D. from Columbia University. Soon thereafter, I translated the research

into German and it was published as "Jugend und Autoritaet" (1983).

In a way I felt that I had come full circle when I was asked by the Institute for Conflict Research in Vienna to carry out an empirical survey similar to the German one in Austria, to throw light on the adolescents in Austria and for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison.

In the years between 1978 and 1987 my three daughters grew up to be successful and fulfilled professional women. During that time, I took leaves of absence from my high school twice - first for a year to collect data and experience in order to write my dissertation and then for two years - to work in my new field in Germany. I continued with my research of comparative authoritarianism and investigated the causes and expressions of youthful protest and aggression.

In June 1987, I retired from teaching mathematics in New York in order to pursue my new profession. I moved to Germany and worked for some time at the recently founded Institute for Antisemitism Research in Berlin. At that time, I also taught some courses at universities in Berlin and Hamburg. In my private life, I had taken the big step and had married my partner of many years. Living in Germany now, I had a front row seat at that great upheaval, the political and symbolic fall of the Wall between the East and the West in 1989.

7. Research in a Changing World and Coming Full Circle

With the desire to document the events that were happening in terms of attitudes and opinions of the young people experiencing them, I decided to replicate and expand the surveys I had conducted 1979-80 in classrooms in West Germany, the United States and Austria. In 1990, before the German Democratic Republic (DDR) gave up its independent existence, a survey was carried out with the same instrument used in 1979-80 in East Germany. Also, the earlier studies were replicated at the sites previously surveyed in West Germany, in the US, and in Austria. In the Austrian survey, a new antisemitism scale was added to the questionnaire.

With the help of a Russian colleague the study was also extended to Moscow. In the resulting analyses we compared East and West German youths after 40 years of strictly separate political socialization and also, experimentally, the East German adolescents with the West German sample on one hand and with the Russian sample on the other. Would responses be similar because of a century-old common culture or because of a young life time of shared political values (Chapter 7, Autoritarismus und Gesellschaft, 1995).

Since 1992, I live in New York again. My research in this field of political psychology, where sociology, psychology, and political science come together, has led me to teach about political

psychology on the internet for the new School for Social Research, a university forged by refugee scholars in the 1930s and 40s. With the help of this institution, I recently succeeded in bringing German and American students together in the same virtual classroom.

My composite identity - Austrian, Jewish, American - augmented by the perspective of my German partner, have helped me see the world from a wider angle. The recognition that I have received has been very gratifying. After a hiatus of nearly half a lifetime, I turned to work on the questions raised by the experiences of the early years of my life and I am still working...

References

- Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., and Sanford, R. N. "The Authoritarian Personality." New York: Harper and Row, 1950.
- Dahrendorf, R. "Society and Democracy in Germany," Garden City, New York: 1967.
- Husen, T. "International study of achievement in mathematics: A comparison of twelve countries." New York: Wiley, 1967.
- Lederer, G. "Jugend und Autoritaet: Ueber den Einstellungswandel zum Autoritarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und den USA." Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983.
- Mantell, D. M. "Familie und Aggression." Frankfurt am Main, Germany: 1978.
- Payne, Stanley G. "Fascism." Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.
- Ziehe, T. "Pubertaet und Narzissmus," Frankfurt am Main: Europaeische Verlagsanstalt, 1975.

"Strength and Weakness: The Authoritarian Personality Today," (W. Stone, G.Lederer and R.Christie, Eds.) New York: Springer 1992.

" Autoritarismus und Gesellschaft" (G. Lederer and P. Schmidt, Eds.), Leske und Budrich, Opladen: 1995.