At the 2013 Cannes Festival, Claude Lanzmann showed his most recent work, a documentary about the controversial role played by the Viennese rabbi Benjamin Murmelstein in relation to the deportations of Austrian Jews during the Holocaust. The documentary is based on interviews Lanzmann conducted with Murmelstein in Rome in 1975, nearly 40 years prior to their eventual release. Austrian reception of Lanzmann’s documentary was framed by an interview, published in the weekly news magazine *Profil*, with Doron Rabinovici, an influential Austrian-Israeli historian, writer and author of a seminal study of Jewish functionaries under the reign of Nazism (Rabinovici, 2000a). Asked to comment on the extraordinary time-lag between Lanzmann’s original interviews with Murmelstein and the first public screening of the resulting documentary, Rabinovici argued that although Murmelstein had tried to ‘buy time’ for Vienna’s Jews during the Holocaust, his controversial role as a Jewish representative who had been forced to negotiate with the Nazis had for a long time been a taboo subject for Jews in Israel, Austria and elsewhere. Before now, Rabinovici postulated, ‘the time had not yet been right’ for the kind of cinematic representation and resulting discussion Lanzmann’s new documentary would generate. (Zöchling, 2013)

This usefully sets the scene for this essay, as Rabinovici’s comments raise two sets of more general issues. First, they pose questions about the resonance of documentary, cinematic and other representations of the Holocaust with a particular audience, and how the latter’s expectations and ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 90) change over time. This further asks how (cultural) representations of the Holocaust are embedded in
– and hence need to be read in relation to – their wider and changing social contexts. Second, Lanzmann and Rabinovici inadvertently remind us of the transnational dimensions to any discussion of the historiography and memory of the Holocaust.

This essay focuses on Austria’s small contemporary Jewish community and explores the discursive features of select representations of the Holocaust in various media, academic and literary genres and its rhetorical invocations in recent public debates. I thus discuss a national context where the Holocaust resulted in the murder of more than 65,000 Austrian Jews, with some 130,000 forced into exile, and where the post-war period saw until the mid-1980s widespread amnesia of, or at least disinterest in, the Holocaust amongst the non-Jewish majority. At the same time, this discussion confirms the pitfalls of a ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002), showing that voices from within Austria’s Jewish community, part of the paradigmatic diaspora, can only be understood against the backdrop of their transnational contexts, solidarities and self-understandings.

As a geographically delineated discussion with wider transnational dimensions this essay thus engages with various materials related to and emanating from within Austria’s contemporary Jewish community. These materials, I shall argue, provide insights into current debates about the relevance of Holocaust memory to contemporary European societies. My analysis addresses the important question as to what kinds of art and literature are today capable of giving voice to the victims of the Holocaust and of thus aiding the effective transmission of memory to future generations in spite of the growing historical distance. This involves some reflections on the inter-relationship between art and popular culture and on whether, and how, the latter can aid this transmission of Holocaust memory. Moreover, I also examine references to the Holocaust in everyday political debate, which I here define as including forms of discursive engagement with power (i.e. its structural distribution, possible
future transformation and memories of its past workings and abuses), to which a wide variety of social actors and not only political elites contribute.

My analysis shall be informed by three main conceptual threads: Katherine Biber’s critical reflections in ‘Bad Holocaust Art’ (2009); Nancy Fraser’s notion (1992) of ‘subaltern counterpublics’; and Avishai Margalit’s distinction (2002) between the group-specific ‘ethics’ of memory and a universal ‘morality-of-memory’ respectively. Building on the latter, in particular, public discussions about the universal relevance of Holocaust memory are shown to frequently involve the detection of a lack of such memory, to which contemporary anti-Semitism is attributed. Further, and for obvious historical reasons, a morality of Holocaust memory is particularly in the Austrian context expected and rightly seen to be imperative. Discussions within Austria’s Jewish community, meanwhile, show that the group-internal ethics of memory are in turn contested and have the potential to divide as well as unite a ‘community of memory’.

By way of a methodological note, this essay develops a qualitative reading and thematic analysis of a specific ‘universe of meaning’ (Grady, 2001): prominent statements, accounts and representations concerning and by members of Austria’s contemporary Jewish community as they have been articulated across a range of media outlets and other publications over recent years. Focusing on the interface of memory, politics and the everyday, I pay particular attention to representations and invocations of the Holocaust in these materials. Given constraints of space, and a concomitant focus on a select number of specific examples and representational contexts, the result is of course not an all-including summary of everything that has been said about the Holocaust and its commemoration within Austria’s Jewish community since the turn of the millennium. Instead, I offer an analysis of a small number of discursive snapshots indicative of different frameworks of interpretation and memory and the political positions they underpin.
Austrian Jewish Studies

The present analysis needs to be positioned in relation to the (*longue durée*) histories of Austrian Jewish communities and relevant academic research, much of which is conducted under the disciplinary heading of Jewish Studies in the Austrian context. In their simplest possible re-telling covering the period since the Middle Ages, Jewish histories in Austria have been histories of exclusion, ‘marginalization, destruction and rapprochement’ (Lamprecht, 2004: page; also see Tietze, 2007).

Centuries of deep religious anti-Semitic prejudice (e.g. Bukey, 2000: 22, 105) and pre-modern periods of persecution and territorial expulsion subsequently crystallized in the 19th century version of anti-Semitism that would decisively shape the descent into the horrors of the Holocaust (e.g. Pauley, 1998). The significance of the late 1800s to this development is also captured in important literary sources, such as Arthur Schnitzler’s autobiographical reflections on his Viennese youth. In the late heyday of liberalism between 1875 and 1885, Schnitzler argues (2011: 77; 142), anti-Semitism was transformed from a widespread though often latent emotional predisposition into a major social and political force. This development was significantly driven by the most radical versions of a pan-Germanic identity discourse – such as that articulated in Georg Ritter von Schönerer’s synthesis of a Germanic self-definition with opposition to the Habsburg monarchy (and the Catholic clergy) and rabid anti-Semitism (e.g. Schiedel and Neugebauer, 2002) – that gathered pace and force in the German speaking parts of the Habsburg empire during the latter’s final decades. Recent literature in Austrian Jewish Studies has captured diverse experiences and biographies in the period stretching from the late 19th century, to World War One, to the economically and politically tumultuous years of the First Republic, Austria’s authoritarian *Ständestaat* and subsequent
annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938. Particularly noteworthy here is Raggam-Blesch’s (2008) study of Jewish women’s autobiographical reflections on their heterogeneous positions – inflected by the histories, self-understandings and external perceptions of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ Judaism respectively – and their experiences of anti-Semitism and misogyny in this period.

In the Austrian context, and as mentioned above, the Holocaust resulted in the murder of more than 65,000 Austrian Jews, with some 130,000 forced into exile. The post-war period saw, until the ‘Waldheim controversy’ of 1986, widespread societal amnesia of the Holocaust and Austrian contributions to it (e.g. Mitten, 1992; Uhl, 2006; Wodak and de Cillia, 2007). Today 8,000–15,000 Jews are estimated to live in Austria (e.g. IKG 2012a), the vast majority of whom in Vienna, comprising a community that is politically and religiously heterogeneous and shaped by diverse migratory histories, significantly including those of relatively recent arrivals from the former Soviet Union (Menasse, 2012: 13; 49).

The now large and continually growing literature within Austrian Jewish Studies includes work on local/regional Jewish histories (e.g. Lamprecht, 2004; Habres, 2011; Riedl, 2012; Galler and Habres, 2013); autobiographical (e.g. Klüger, 1994) and family history (e.g. Clare, 1980) writings by Austrian Holocaust survivors and their descendants (e.g. Soyinka, 2012), much of which reflects their authors’ transnational biographical routes and lives; as well as seminal work on anti-Semitism in Austria since 1945 (e.g. Wassermann, 2002; Gottschlich, 2012). Interest in Austria’s contemporary Jewish community is not confined to the academic realm. This was reflected, for instance, in a Profil cover story in 2006, which examined the simultaneously local and diasporic identifications of young Jews in Austria and the significance of Judaism in their lives as part of a multicultural society more than six decades after the Holocaust (Steinitz, 2006).
While the following discussion is embedded in these wider representational fields and the histories they illuminate, my focus is more specific. I begin by examining debates about the (in)appropriateness of Holocaust representations in various forms of art, literature or popular culture as vehicles of memory transmission. This will also help pave the way towards a subsequent discussion of how some such representations and historical reflections can at times give rise to notable disagreements within Austria’s Jewish community.

The popular – between commodification and the subaltern

The materials examined here intersect with wider debates about the potential role for popular culture in the transmission of Holocaust memory. Two contrasting argumentative strands can be discerned, which focus on the purported dangers of commodification and the writing of otherwise overlooked histories respectively.

During his involvement in the civil society opposition to Austria’s then and highly controversial coalition government involving the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 2000, the earlier-mentioned Austrian-Israeli author and historian Doron Rabinovici described himself as a ‘cultural hybrid’ living in a national context where an honest engagement with the Nazi past was still alien to many and in a ‘schizoid situation’ created by a populism that is insistent on singular identities (2000b: 49–51; 54). In a more recent essay on literature, memory politics, historiography and the Holocaust, Rabinovici (2010) returns to and elaborates on these issues. In doing so, he argues for the need for a particular kind of art capable of giving a voice to history’s otherwise silenced victims. Rabinovici contrasts such a historically responsible art dedicated to ‘enabling the individual to resist their annihilation’ (2010: 9) with a purely market-driven mass culture. His cross-referencing of Adorno seems hardly coincidental to the argument, as ever since the latter’s criticisms of ‘mass’ or popular culture
for its allegedly intrinsic commodification (Adorno, 2001 [1972]), prominent forms of Kulturpessimismus have defined ‘the popular’ as synonymous with a market-driven ‘culture industry’.

As an illustration of the latter, Rabinovici mentions Thilo Thielke’s book Eine Liebe in Auschwitz (Love in Auschwitz) (2000). Sold as an ‘extraordinary love-story’, this tells the story of two survivors who, having fallen in love in Auschwitz and survived the Holocaust, presumed one another to have perished, only to be briefly reunited decades later. Such representations, according to Rabinovici, ‘trivialise’ the Holocaust, as they are driven by a market logic that seeks to cynically profit from the suffering of the murdered, and reduces the Holocaust to the status of mere ‘location’ for a love-story. Persecution, torture and mass-murder are not being meaningfully examined here, instead, the focus shifts to an account of romanticism and the allegedly ‘heavenly force that is love in the midst of hell’, with such publishers arguably hoping to increase profit-margins through the merging of a story of passion with Holocaust suffering (Rabinovici, 2010: 8). A similar contrast between responsible art and what he describes as ‘compassionate’ memory on one hand, and commodified (popular) culture on the other informs an argument Maximilian Gottschlich proposes in his recent book – Die große Abneigung (The Great Antipathy) – on contemporary anti-Semitism:

The more time passes since Auschwitz and the more prominent the mediatized staging of the Holocaust as part of a global entertainment industry becomes, the more urgently we need a culture of compassion; only this can counter-act the unbearable trivialization of the past that deprives memory of its purpose – to remain conscious of innocent suffering’ (Gottschlich, 2012: 250, my translation).
Katherine Biber’s discussion of ‘Bad Holocaust Art’ is highly pertinent for both Rabinovici’s and Gottschlich’s reflections. Biber traces competing positions concerning the relationship between historiographical and artistic representations of the Holocaust. While the former are governed by a consensus that historiography has clear epistemological limits set by the available evidence, with regard to the latter there is a view that art – in its purported ‘autonomy from moral discourse’ – is given a license to ‘transcend all limits’ and that it speaks to its own, context-specific audiences (Biber, 2009: 240-241, 245). Projecting this back onto Rabinovici, it is certainly not the historically changing make-up of audiences and their interpretative schemata that he objects to. On the contrary, as shown by his above-quoted commentary on Lanzmann’s recent documentary, Rabinovici knows that representational forms and contents change over time. Similarly, in his just-quoted essay, Rabinovici concurs that artistic/literary representations offer perspectives on the past that most historiography – in its single-minded focus on ‘the facts of how things were’ as revealed by the available evidence – is largely oblivious to. The objection, then, concerns the angle and focus of some very particular types of representations of which Rabinovici considers Thielke’s *Eine Liebe in Auschwitz* an exemplar (Rabinovici 2010: 6; 12).

All this echoes long-standing arguments that, in relation to the Holocaust, art and historiography share not only thematic but also ethical space. Susan Sontag (1980: 139) and Dan Stone (2001: 141), for example, argue that certain representations of fascism can descend into irresponsible, decontextualized forms of ‘pornography’. Similarly, in an objection resembling Rabinovici’s and Gottschlich’s concerns about a culture industry beyond all limits, Perry Anderson warns us that credible ‘narrative strategies’ preclude a historical ‘plotting of the Final Solution...in romance or comedy genres’ (1992: 64; also Biber, 2009: 240; 250). Helpfully, Biber points towards a possible measurement of ‘good
Holocaust art’ inferred from the ‘expectation that we will shudder, and from this shudder will flow an act of responsibility’ (2009: 246).

What is at stake in these arguments, then, is the question as to how the Holocaust is represented. Part of the debate is an issue considerably more specific than the broader discussions about the relationship between art, popular culture, and historiography. Instead, we here encounter the question as to what makes any given *register of representation* appropriate, meaningful and responsible *vis-à-vis* the victims of the Holocaust.

In this context, it is worth returning to Andreas Huyssen’s more optimistic take on the potential for *certain forms* of popular culture to transmit memories of the Holocaust and to meaningfully articulate contemporary experiences of survivors and their descendants. Huyssen famously makes this argument with reference to Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and *Maus II*, defining it as an appropriation of the ‘mass cultural genre’ of the comic book and its combination with ‘modernist techniques of self-reflexivity, self-irony [and] ruptures in narrative time’ that invoke Kafka rather than Disney (Huyssen, 2003: 124). Demonstrating that popular cultural forms, in themselves, need not preclude meaningful, resonant and relevant Holocaust memories, Huyssen sees Spiegelman as part of ‘newer, “secondary” attempts to commemorate the Holocaust’ that productively respond to a possible crisis of representation:

How to get past the official memory culture? How to avoid the trappings of the culture industry while operating within it? How to represent that which one knows only through representations and from an ever-growing historical distance? All this requires new narrative and figurative strategies, including irony, shock, black humor, even cynicism, much of it present in Spiegelman’s work (Huyssen, 2003: 136).
The ‘popular’ in popular culture, then, should certainly not be seen as intrinsically problematic for responsible or meaningful forms of representing and remembering the Holocaust. However, there is conceptual scope here for extending our understanding of power, resistance and their interface with the past. Seminal literature within memory- and subaltern studies offers fruitful points of departure. For instance, the ‘popular memory approach’ with its emphasis on resistance through counter-memories cutting across dominant representations of history (Jing, 1996: 16) can be developed further:

[H]istoriography records that members of subordinated social groups – women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians – have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups…circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser, 1992: 123).

Nancy Fraser’s highly suggestive notion of such ‘subaltern counterpublics’ further resonates in the concept of ‘subaltern memories’ (e.g. Bell, 2003: 75-76) – the bottom-up, often continually side-lined memories, narratives and (everyday) invocations of the past by members of historically subordinated, oppressed and persecuted groups.

Returning to the Austrian context, the autobiographical writings of Holocaust survivors can be viewed as examples of subaltern memories articulated by the historically silenced, oppressed or, in this case, by those who survived the genocidal machinery of Nazism that intended for nobody to remember its crimes. Such subaltern memories emerge powerfully, for example, from the late Leon Zelman’s life history. A survivor of the ghetto in Lodz, of Auschwitz and Mauthausen, Zelman was a prominent figure in Austria’s small,
post-war Jewish community and hence of a quintessential subaltern counterpublic. Zelman was co-founder and long-term editor of the periodical *Das Jüdische Echo* (The Jewish Echo), and founded the Jewish Welcome Service, an organization enabling Viennese Holocaust survivors to visit the city of their birth decades after their forced exodus and dispossession (Rath, 2012: 292–293). He begins his autobiography *Ein Leben nach dem Überleben* (A Life after Survival) as follows:

I don’t want to write a Holocaust book. So much has already been described, analysed and counted. I only want to tell my life story that was shaped by the horrors of the Holocaust...not a story about famous people, but about the Jewish Mamme, about girls and boys in a shtetl at a time when I and others began to dream. Before we could grow up and lose our dreams, as people generally do, our community was destroyed and the dreamers themselves were murdered...I am one of the last remaining survivors of a generation that did not survive...I want to tell the story of this generation...Hitler set out to destroy us...to dehumanise us...We were meant to become ‘sub-human’ at the hands of the SS... I was a child in the camps, and I am one of those who escaped our intended annihilation (Zelman, 2005: 7–8).

Conceptually, this resonates with the attention to ‘ordinary’, rather than politically prominent, historical actors and their experiences of subordination and disempowerment, or much worse, typically at the heart of studies of popular culture and subaltern memory. Albeit in different ways, Rabinovici, with his call for a responsible art that preserves the individual from their annihilation, and Zelman both confirm that traditional historiography and an exclusive focus on facts and ‘famous people’ do not suffice as channels for capturing and transmitting the voices and memories of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.
I next turn to recent discursive materials revolving around and involving Austria’s contemporary Jewish community, which show how a range of present circumstances have been interpreted through historical comparisons and, in some cases, as indicative of a perceived lack of Holocaust memory.

When the ‘morality of memory’ fails … or is needed …

In *The Ethics of Memory* philosopher Avishai Margalit argues that memory and ethics are largely defining features of the ‘thick relations’ that bind ‘families, clans, tribes, religious communities and nations’ internally (2002: 8; 69f.). He contrasts this with the ‘thin relations’ connecting humanity as a whole that have generally not been underpinned by universal narratives of, and investments in, a shared past. There are exceptions, however: ‘[G]ross crimes against humanity’, such as genocide and, paradigmatically, the Holocaust present a moral case for a universal memory. Margalit’s ethics-versus-morality-of-memory distinction can help illuminate how and in which contexts the Holocaust has recently been invoked, sometimes rather contrastingly, by different members of Austria’s contemporary Jewish community, and how such invocations define and occur in debates both with powerful outsiders and within the community.

Parts of Doron Rabinovici’s recent novel *Andernorts* (Elsewhere) critically explore what Deborah Lynn Steinberg describes as a contemporary ‘revivification of racial science as a…site of human classification’ (2009: 2), the prominent tendency to explain and attempt to ‘anchor’ identities genetically. *Andernorts* offers such an exploration through its two central characters, Israeli Ethan Rosen and Austrian Rudi Klausinger, and their quest to establish if they are half-brothers. Kinship and ancestry are further tied to questions of cultural memory and its transcendence. In a relevant passage, Rudi Klausinger speaks of the ‘necessity to
remember across all boundaries and cultures’ (Rabinovici, 2012: 204). This resembles Margalit’s definition of the ‘morality of memory’ as pertaining to genocides calling for their universal remembrance.

Turning from literature to everyday political discussions next, we encounter another realm crucial to contemporary Holocaust memory. In discussions variously centred on Austria’s Jewish community, we also find a ‘morality of memory’ at stake. The Holocaust is thus invoked in two different kinds of discursive realms: as an interpretative prism in the context of contemporary debates of core aspects of Jewish identity or current anti-Semitism; and in wider political struggles – often on behalf of non-Jewish groups – against ethnic exclusion and the resurgent nationalisms currently evident across Europe.

In the summer of 2012, the thus-named ‘German circumcision debate’ which was triggered by a court verdict in Cologne, and followed injuries sustained by a four-year old Muslim boy (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2012), that circumcision could be interpreted as contravening the child’s rights crossed the Austrian-German border. There it led to representatives of Austria’s Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant communities jointly calling on the Austrian government to re-confirm the ‘judicial legitimacy’ of circumcision and to thereby underline its commitment to religious freedom (Der Standard, 2012a). Alongside official confirmation of the Austrian status quo protecting circumcision as an expression of religious identity, there were notable discursive counter-tendencies, including a survey suggesting that up to 46% of Austrians might favour a ban on circumcision, for a variety of cited reasons (Profil 29, 16 July 2012: 13), or the chairman of an agnostic association arguing for ‘the child’s right to decide’ in a discussion on Austria’s public broadcasting network (ORF ZIB 2, 2012). Notwithstanding such often problematic counter-discourses, the government reiterated that the ritual was and would continue to be legal in Austria. Other contributions to what became a public debate involving Jewish and non-
Jewish voices emphasised that some arguments against circumcision undoubtedly tapped into age-old anti-Semitic sentiments and would further alienate Jews and Muslims alike (e.g. Schmidinger, 2012; Eisenreich, 2012; Appel, 2012).

The Austrian Jewish community’s official responses to the controversy included the formation of a transnational action group involving representatives of German, Swiss and Austrian Jewry and led by Vienna’s *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde* (IKG) aiming to draft a shared strategy (IKG, 2012b). In an interview with *Profil*, Schlomo Hofmeister – Viennese rabbi and mohel, against whom zealous ‘circumcision opponents’ would subsequently try to bring a court case (ORF, 2012) – argued that a ban on circumcision would make Jewish life in Austria impossible. He further stressed, in a noteworthy historical comparison, that external encroachments on this core aspect of Judaism were ‘historically not new’; but ‘neither ancient Rome’s imposition of the death penalty on the religious practice nor Nazism had succeeded in preventing us from circumcising our infant boys; a court in Cologne will not manage this either’ (Profil 29, 16 July 2012: 76). More widely quoted was the IKG’s former president Ariel Muzicant’s position who argued that a potential ban on circumcision was, ‘as another attempted destruction – this time by ideational means – of the Jewish people, comparable to the Holocaust’ (quoted in Rohrhofer, 2012: 2). Current IKG president Oskar Deutsch partly concurred in describing a potential ban as an ‘ideational exiling’ (*Der Standard*, 2012a).

In such historical comparisons we detect local, context-specific versions of what Jaspal and Yampolsky (2011) have revealed in relation to Israel – the continuing centrality of World War Two and the Holocaust as ‘anchors’ for interpretations of present circumstances. In appropriation of Margalit’s terminology, some Austrian Jewish responses to the ‘circumcision debate’ can thus be said to have detected a perceived lack of a ‘morality of memory’ arguably evident amongst critics of the religious practice. In its coverage of the
circumcision debate, Austrian daily Der Standard thus quoted a member of Vienna’s Jewish community who described ‘this sudden debate over Jewish integration as scandalous, given the century-old Jewish history in Austria’ (in Herrnböck, 2012: 3).

Despite broad trends since the late 1980s towards a belated engagement with the Holocaust and with the longer history of anti-Semitism in Austria, recent years have seen several worrying anti-Semitic incidents and scandals (see Karner, 2011: 64–65). Most recently, in the summer of 2012, this included acts of vandalism committed against Jewish graves at Vienna’s central cemetery (IKG, 2012c); and in September 2012, in the run-up to a ‘Europa league’ game of football, a Viennese rabbi was verbally attacked by a football fan, suspected of being Greek, shouting neo-Nazi abuse with police officers standing idly by. Whilst Vienna’s police subsequently investigated the incident and these officers’ inactivity, Oskar Deutsch, the aforementioned IKG president, warned against any tolerance of anti-Semitism as a wrongly accepted part of an assumed ‘football-fan culture’ (ORF Wien, 2012).

In the intersection of party politics and social media, another controversy in August 2012 revolved around a temporary facebook posting of a cartoon with anti-Semitic echoes by FPÖ-head Heinz-Christian Strache, who subsequently replaced the cartoon and denied all anti-Semitic intentions (Die Presse, 2012; IKG, 2012d). This happened only months after Strache – head of a political party whose ideological and organisational roots can be traced to Austria’s history of direct involvement with Nazism (e.g. Adunka, 2002: 15-18) – was allegedly heard describing far-right fraternities as ‘the new Jews’ (Der Standard, 2012b); Strache thereby seemingly likened civil society protests against the fraternities’ controversial annual prom, which in 2012 was even more controversially held on the international day commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz, to the November 1938 pogroms.

It is against this backdrop of a range of political debates and (more or less) everyday discourse, in which various, ideologically heterogeneous, Jewish and non-Jewish actors
invoke the Holocaust for a variety of rhetorical purposes, that concerns with a seeming absence of a ‘morality of memory’ in certain quarters need to be located. This emerges, for example, from Ari Rath’s recent autobiography. The former editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post was born in Vienna and managed, shortly after Austria’s annexation by Hitler Germany, to escape to the Middle East as a teenager. In his memoirs, Rath (2012) reflects on his work as a leading Israeli journalist as well as on his decade-long and profound disappointment with post-war Austria’s reluctance to confront its role in the Holocaust. This can plausibly be read, in Margalit’s terminology and in contrast to the post-war West German example, as a past manifestation of an institutionalized lack of a morality of memory in one of the very national contexts in which such remembering across boundaries was most called for. Importantly, Rath also emphasizes Austria’s more recent history of a more open, honest and self-critical engagement with its darkest historical chapter, a process that has taken place over the last two-and-a-half decades and which led to Rath feeling ready to resume his Austrian citizenship. He reports living in the city of his birth for parts of the year now and on the new friendships formed there, the vibrancy of Jewish culture in Vienna today, and on a genuine societal commitment to confronting the Nazi past. However, Rath also points at ‘the continuing presence of the shadows of the past’ in parts of Austrian society, citing the far-right FPÖ and the country’s most widely read tabloid newspaper as examples (Rath, 2012: 297; 320; 325–326).

Continuing with Margalit’s conceptual frame, whilst recent Austrian history can certainly be described as a gradual growing into a morality of memory premised on a critical engagement with Austria’s place in the Holocaust, such a morality is still not embraced universally across the country’s political spectrum. Lest it be assumed that only the far-right can display such a lack of morality of Holocaust memory, it is worth citing Stephan Grigat’s report, published in Wina (a Jewish Viennese magazine), of a local gathering by the ‘anti-
imperialist left’ declaring their solidarity with Hamas in the context of the recent re-escalation of the tensions in the Middle East. Worryingly, a Trotskyist speaker thereby called for a ‘Palestine stretching from the West Bank to the Mediterranean’ and for Israel to be ‘annihilated and chopped up’ (ausgelöscht [und] zerschlagen) (quoted in Grigat, 2012: 3). It is perhaps particularly in discursive and rhetorical details and choice of words that a worrying and continuing lack of morality of Holocaust memory thus manifests at different ends of the ideological spectrum, whether articulated in such far-left sentiments or by Strache describing, in the above-mentioned incident, today’s far-right as ‘the new Jews’.

There are other, very different discursive-political contexts that can, in part, also be read through Margalit’s concept of a morality of memory. More accurately, there are particular argumentative positions, encountered in parts of Austria’s contemporary Jewish community, that regard particular current circumstances (e.g. forms of social exclusion and injustice) as calling for a morality of memory. More specifically, some such positions argue for a politics of multicultural inclusion in the here and now that is informed by an engagement with the Holocaust and a mourning for its victims.

A prominent example of this position can be gleaned from the annual periodical Das Jüdische Echo, formerly edited by the earlier-mentioned, late Leon Zelman. Taking its 2009 issue, entitled Zuhaus in Europa (At home in Europe), two mutually inter-related political projects emerge. First, a shared project involving Jews and non-Jews in commemorating the Holocaust; second, a contemporary politics of human rights and multicultural inclusion, which is acutely conscious of the historical, structural and ideological conditions that led to the Holocaust, from which, in part, it derives a clear stance in opposition to contemporary racism, whoever its perpetrators and targets. Zuhaus in Europa contains a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish contributions, with national and pan-European foci, offering historical
and contemporary accounts by politicians, civil society actors, intellectuals and journalists, eminent literary figures (e.g. Elias Canetti), and young Austrians doing their national service in different museums and sites commemorating the Holocaust (Gedenkstätten). Whilst some contributions focus on Jewish themes, there is a recurring focus on contemporary xenophobia. Several chapters examine contemporary anti-Roma violence in different parts of Europe or reflect on the need for a successful multiculturalism. All along, the Holocaust provides the inescapable backdrop through different narratives, memories, and the bare, country-specific figures. Insightful reflections on different European countries are thus accompanied by ‘hard’, quantitative indicators of how the Jewish communities of the countries in question were decimated during the Holocaust. We are reminded of the scale of the horror and loss across national contexts through the juxtaposition of the respective size of their Jewish communities before and after the Second World War (e.g. Austria – a Jewish population of 200,000 before, 10,000 after; Lithuania – 250,000 and 5000 respectively; Poland – 3.3 million and 10,000; Romania – 800,000 and 12,000; the Czech Republic – 120,000 and 4000; Germany – 550,000 and 120,000; Greece – 70,000 and 4000) (Das Jüdische Echo, 2009).

The Jewish Echo’s ethos premised on a morality of memory with other-directed implications for the here and now emerges most succinctly from one of the editor’s introductory remarks:

Especially as an Austrian one is delighted to see great thinkers confirm what others…stubbornly deny: It is perfectly possible to be at home both in a particular country and in all of Europe both at the same time; to show solidarity and compassion across national boundaries; to respond with emotion and activism when injustices are committed outside of one’s own backyard, when minorities only a few kilometres
beyond our borders are threatened and persecuted. Many people now show such activism routinely – and it’s no coincidence that they include many who are grounded in the Jewish faith and tradition (Widecki, 2009: 9).

Another discursive snapshot – provided by Gerard Sonnenschein, head of the small Jewish community in Graz, Austria’s second city, in 2008 in the context of the commemorations of the November 1938 pogroms – is similarly noteworthy. It demonstrated that invocations of the Holocaust or the immediate post-Holocaust era do not always paint a bleak picture of the present by claiming to detect similarities between then and now. In this case, Sonnenschein contrasted his painful memories of a then continuing local anti-Semitism in the post-war decades with present circumstances, which he depicted as an example of successful inter-faith dialogue, describing multicultural engagement in contemporary Graz as exemplary (Bast, 2008). This also serves as a useful bridge to the next and final section, in which we turn to disagreements within the Jewish community over the (ir)relevance of the Holocaust for understanding present contexts.

**The contested ‘ethics of memory’ and internal divisions**

The earlier mentioned comparison by Ariel Muzicant of the recent ‘circumcision debate’ with the Holocaust provided an example of the latter being invoked as an interpretative lens, through which particular contemporary circumstances are made sense of. As such, this was an example of what Jan-Werner Müller has described as ‘analogical thinking’ (2002: 27). In this final section, I examine how such forms of analogical thinking involving and invoking the Holocaust have at times been strongly contested within (and beyond) Austria’s contemporary Jewish community. In doing so, this section poses a challenge to Margalit’s
second key-concept, the ‘ethics of memory’ that are alleged to cement the ‘thick relations’ binding an ethnic/religious community internally.

In a recent interview with the Viennese Jewish magazine *nu*, when asked to comment on the terrorist attacks in Toulouse and anti-Semitic tendencies elsewhere, Parisian historian Diana Pinto rejects facile comparisons of the 1930s with the situation faced by Europe’s Jewry in the early 21st century. What is more, she locates such historical analogies primarily in the ultraorthodox community:

I don’t want to underestimate the danger. But today there is no European state that is ideologically underpinned by anti-Semitism … not even Hungary … Compared to the 1930s, we now live in paradise … [some] ultraorthodox Jews are stuck in a defensive posture … they view the world through the lens of the Warsaw ghetto. I find this lacks respect for the victims of the horror…it gives [these groups] a strong sense of identity. They don’t want to be loved…and they like living with a sense of being threatened…Never before have European Jews known conditions as open as today … I can’t accept the banalisation of anti-Semitism and the Shoah. This would mock the victims…We’re not witnessing a replay of the 1930s, that’s my conviction as a historian (Pinto quoted in Spera, 2012: 31–32).

Writing in the earlier-mentioned 2009 issue of *Das Jüdische Echo*, Steven Beller concurs, detecting a fear amongst some high-ranking functionaries in Jewish organisations that the ‘terrible times of the first half of the 20th century…could return in 21st century Europe’; agreeing, of course, that all anti-Semitic and racist violence and exclusion need to be condemned in the strongest possible terms, Beller argues that seen from a broader historical
perspective such catastrophising of today’s circumstances is not justified and that today’s Europe is ‘very good for Jews’ (Beller, 2009: 11–12).

These and similar arguments have recently been developed further by Peter Menasse, editor-in-chief of the already mentioned Viennese Jewish magazine *nu*. In late 2012, Menasse published a book entitled *Rede an uns* (Speech to Us), in which he directs a number of bold theses at his own Austrian Jewish community. First, and most centrally, Menasse insists that ‘today’s Jews are not victims’ (2012: 8) and should therefore not present themselves as such and in opposition to today’s assumed perpetrators – in a process that stifles communication (also see Dusini, 2012). Second, Menasse distinguishes between three successive post-Holocaust eras: an initial post-war phase, in which most European countries, including Austria, were guilty of a ‘complicity of silence’ and amnesia concerning the Holocaust; this was followed by a second phase, starting in the late 1980s, of widespread commemoration; this in turn, Menasse concludes, is currently giving way to a third phase in which ‘us Jews should be more and perhaps solely focused on the present and future’ (2012: 6). Lest he be misunderstood, Menasse is certainly not overlooking contemporary forms of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, but he argues for a ‘presentist politics’ that avoids overly simplistic analogies with the past. In this vein, he strongly criticizes some of the statements by prominent members of Vienna’s IKG in the context of the ‘circumcision debate’ mentioned earlier for being ‘hair-raising’ (*abenteuerlich*) and an ‘offensive’ step towards trivializing the Holocaust (Menasse, 2012: 29; 105). Here again we detect the relevance of some of the arguments reviewed by Katherine Biber, albeit in this case they can be seen to also pertain to examples of everyday discourse and some of the historical comparisons drawn therein. In detecting and opposing levelling analogies drawn between very different contexts, Menasse seemingly invokes the ‘sense of responsibility to [the] victims’ and the insistence that representations of fascism ‘must, of necessity, commentate [sic!] on the operation of power and terror in fascist
practices’ (Biber, 2009: 236; 248). The earlier-mentioned ‘shuddering ability’, we are warned in Menasse’s speech, is in danger of being undercut and diluted. What has been demanded of artistic representations is here also expected – as a minimum standard – of how people remember and invoke the Holocaust in the realm of political discourse:

It seems necessary to locate Holocaust representations within a discourse of disgust ...

Passive reflection on atrocity has no function...The difference is in the pit of the stomach (Biber, 2009: 252).

Parts of Menasse’s and Pinto’s arguments can plausibly be read as warnings that all-too-easy comparisons between then and now come close to a ‘trivialisation’ and ‘banalisation’ of the Holocaust, for they privilege making sense of present circumstances at the expense of the ‘disgust’ and ‘shuddering’ that representations of the Holocaust, through whichever artistic or discursive registers they are articulated, ought to invoke.

Wider xenophobia, Menasse goes on to elaborate, has once again become endemic. But, he argues, it should no longer be primarily a Jewish responsibility to provide the necessary warnings and democratic education; these are, he insists, wider societal responsibilities (Menasse, 2012: 60). Finally, Menasse postulates that current ways of transmitting the history of the Holocaust have lost their relevance for understanding contemporary contexts. This is due, he argues, to ‘existing ways’ of transmitting this memory often paying insufficient attention to ‘how injustice comes about’; and without such a focus on the conditions of possibility underpinning racism more generally, Menasse concludes, the young generation cannot learn from what is being transmitted (Menasse, 2012: 72; 73; 74-75).
Parts of Menasse’s speech, particularly his strong criticism (2012: 18) of leading figures in Austria’s Jewish community, undoubtedly also need to be seen against the backdrop of considerable internal schisms and power struggles the community has experienced of late (e.g. Bauer, 2012). This includes tensions between orthodox and conservative voices on one hand, and liberal factions, such as the progressive organisation Or Chadash, on the other (Profil 16, 16 April 2012: 19; Beig, 2012). At the same time, the arguments summarised in this final section illustrate very clearly that different sections and individuals in Austria’s and other Jewish communities relate to the Holocaust, from their perspectives and vantage points in the 21st century, rather differently. As we have seen, it thus turns out, for instance, that within the nowadays small Austrian Jewish community the invocation of the Holocaust as an interpretative lens for contemporary circumstances has the potential to trigger considerable disagreement and internal controversy. This should make us more generally weary of reifications of memory as an assumed unifying force within ethnic/religious groups. In our conceptual terms, it shows an ‘ethics of memory’ to be considerably less binding than assumed by Margalit.

Concluding remarks

In the tradition of popular culture studies (see Turner, 1990), more work is needed on how any of the discourses examined above, formulated as they largely are by public figures within Austria’s contemporary Jewish community, are ‘decoded’ (see Hall, 1980) and appropriated by those less prominent. The argumentative positions discussed here are undoubtedly negotiated in different ways by different sections and individuals within the numerically small but internally diverse and lively Jewish community in Austria today. Much work therefore remains to be done on the on-going and unfolding reception of any of the positions...
examined above. Their examination in the present essay has been entirely thematically qualitative, thus also leaving questions about the relative salience of these different positions and interpretative frameworks within the Austrian Jewish community for future quantitative research to address. What is distinctive about the approach outlined here is its deliberate and critical linking of theoretical work on popular culture with conceptualisations of popular memory and the relationship between memory, morality, ethics, and the subaltern. Jointly, these theoretical strands open a perspective on how 70 years after the Holocaust members of Austria’s contemporary Jewish community commemorate and make reference to it – in a variety of contexts, to different effects and audiences, and how some such references can trigger considerable internal disagreement. Particularly the latter, the potential for disagreement between mutually contesting positions, highlights that popular memory – here referred to as the articulation of memories of a deeply traumatic past by the historically marginalized, oppressed and persecuted – need not be consensual. Such memories, subaltern in relation to a dominant national mythscape (Bell, 2003), need not inevitably and permanently bond an ethnic/religious group internally. This counter-acts the reifying undertones of parts of Margalit’s position. As we have seen in Peter Menasse’s recent *Speech to Us*, even in the case of a numerically small ethnic/religious community with a shared and painful past, that past and its relevance to the present can give rise to considerable internal debate and disagreement. It is through an analytical strategy partly focused on the minutiae of everyday language and on representations of this past that such internal fissures can be captured and a more nuanced, arguably more sceptical understanding of the ‘ethics of memory’ and its ability to bond a social group can be generated.

While within the nowadays small Austrian Jewish community the relevance of the Holocaust for comprehending contemporary circumstances is therefore not unanimously accepted, the second dimension to Margalit’s distinction – the moral case for universally
commemorating the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity – retains all its timeliness and urgency. There is indeed an obvious and continuing need for a morality of memory that speaks to all of us, across all boundaries of culture, religion and nationality, of the crimes committed and suffered 70 years ago.

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**Endnotes**

1 All translations from German are the author’s.