The Compromise of Return

Elizabeth Anthony

Published by Wayne State University Press

Anthony, Elizabeth.
The Compromise of Return: Viennese Jews after the Holocaust.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/83815

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2866204
Members of a Soviet infantry brigade liberated the Gross-Rosen concentration camp on February 13, 1945. There, among the smoldering ruins of barracks, they found a handful of exhausted, sick, and starving prisoners. Less than a week before, the Nazis had evacuated the majority of inmates by train or forced death march and burned many of the camp buildings. They left behind those who were too weak to attempt the journey, and among those remaining were Edith and Anni Holzer, twenty-five-year-old twins from Vienna. They had been deported with their parents and partners to Terezín, and all six had been transferred onward to other camps; only Edith and Anni survived. ¹ After two years of incarceration in multiple concentration camps, each weighed less than eighty-five pounds at the time of their liberation. With nothing and no one but each other, they shared a vision of their reunion with family and friends in Vienna.²

---

2. Edith (Holzer) Auerhahn and Anni (Holzer) Drill, interview, 495, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna, Austria.
Their trek back began when the Red Army locked them in a hospital train bound for Minsk, where ostensibly survivors would be provided with much-needed medical care. The atmosphere remained tense and dangerous, however, because of the constant threat of sexual violence. Soviet soldiers had made unwanted advances toward female prisoners from the first moments after liberation. At best, the soldiers propositioned them; more “reasonable” soldiers complained, “I gave you freedom. Aren’t you willing to give me anything?” Many others simply raped the women. Over the course of Edith and Anni’s train journey, they observed drunken Red Army soldiers’ regular visits to the wagons to prey on the female passengers.

When the train stopped at a station in Krakow, the twins escaped and continued toward home on foot, asking for food at farmhouses along the way. They walked as far as Bratislava, where two Austrian men driving a truck to Vienna picked them up. Their new travel companions showed signs of being no less aggressive than their liberators, though, and when they stopped for gas just outside the city, the sisters ran from them and walked the last few miles. Edith and Anni arrived in their hometown on April 20, 1945, more than two months after their liberation and among the first concentration camp survivors to return to Vienna.

The IKG counted fewer than 5,000 official members at the end of 1945. Among them were 1,727 concentration camp survivors. This starved, tortured, and psychologically traumatized group constituted the second wave of Jewish returnees to Vienna, following the reemergence of those who had

4. For more about Soviet liberators raping the Jewish women they had freed and their assertion that the Jewish women owed them something, see Nomi Levenkron, “Prostitution, Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II,” in Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust, ed. Sonja Maria Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 18.
5. Auerhahn and Drill interview.
survived in the capital. Although some already harbored hopes of emigrating onward from their country of origin, most camp survivors conceived only of returning to the last place they had been together with family and friends. Returning to a familial home formed the core of camp survivors’ motivation and drive to go back to Vienna. Reunions would occur at home, whether or not the survivors chose to remain there. And in any case, as Auschwitz survivor Marianne Windholm succinctly stated, “I had nothing . . . nowhere else to go.” Vienna was home—the only home she and so many others had ever known or could imagine.

RETURN JOURNEYS

Camp survivors found no time for extended celebration after their liberation. Suddenly free but far from home and with neither money nor possessions, they watched fellow prisoners continue to die from disease and malnutrition and began to comprehend the size and scale of the devastation to European Jewry. Basic needs were of their immediate interest, and those with sufficient strength thought of nourishment, a clean place to stay, and the welfare of relatives and friends.

Liberated in camps far from Austria, Viennese Jews had to find passage home. As the Austrian government made no move to help them, survivors relied on their liberators and on their own resourcefulness. Some traveled back on Allied-organized repatriation transports, while others made their own way through a continent still at war. They navigated destroyed roads and railways as they traveled through territories hostile to Jews, and women felt the constant threat of rape in chaotic wartime and postwar situations. Along the way, chance meetings with acquaintances, friends, and relatives almost always brought heartbreaking news. And as survivors approached Vienna, disillusionment and fear increased with their worries about what and who they would—and would not—find upon arrival.

7. Marianne Windholm, oral history, RG 50.030*0503, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).
Repatriation Transports

The majority of camp survivors who returned to Vienna traveled back from Terezín, where more than fifteen thousand Austrian Jews had been deported.8 Terezín, also referred to in German as Theresienstadt, was located outside Prague and served as both camp and ghetto. It opened on November 24, 1941, and first functioned as a transit camp for Czech Jews whom the Nazis later transported to killing centers, concentration camps, and forced-labor camps in the east. Starting with the arrival of fifty Berlin Jews on June 2, 1942, it took the function of ghetto and labor camp to house German, Austrian, and Czech Jews of select categories including those who enjoyed a particular cultural or artistic celebrity, those of certain age groups (both young and old), and German and Austrian military veterans. Toward the end of the war, Terezín received mostly Jewish prisoners (although some non-Jews) who arrived with death marches from many different concentration camps, most from Buchenwald and Gross-Rosen. In all, the Nazis deported 15,266 Austrian Jews to Terezín during the course of its operation.9

The high number of elderly prisoners in Terezín became a key part of Nazi propaganda aimed at eliding the true nature of the deportations. They speciously described it as a “spa town” for German Jews’ retirement and even staged the town as a seemingly desirable destination in preparation for a Red Cross visit in June 1944. In reality, the aforementioned categories of Jews were collected there for intended deportation to ghettos and killing centers in the east. Operations in Terezín also resembled those of a ghetto. Prisoners wore civilian clothes, took part in cultural and educational events, and labored in a number of workshops. Others maintained and cleaned the buildings, worked in a garden, and served as nurses and orderlies in an infirmary.

Another important ghetto-like aspect was the Jewish council, or Judenrat, which the Nazis forced to carry out their orders and policies as they administered the operations of Terezín. The Judenrat organized all municipal services, as well as labor detachments and deportations. Many of the members were former Jewish community leaders or Ältestenrat employees from Vienna, and they continued their work after the Red Army liberated the camp on May 8, 1945. In addition to the challenges associated with the management of the needs of a group of ill, malnourished, and traumatized people, they struggled to help organize departures for freed inmates. Two days after the liberation of former IKG employee Paul Stux at Terezín, he wrote to Dr. Josef Löwenherz, head of the Ältestenrat in Vienna. Many Jews had already left the camp for home, he stated, but the freed Austrian and German prisoners sat there waiting for some action on their behalf. He reported that about 10 percent of the Austrian Jews originally deported to Terezín remained, including some four hundred elderly and infirm.10 Another former IKG employee in Terezín, Salomon Süss, wrote to Löwenherz just one day later to ask him to intervene on their behalf.11 Former Terezín Judenrat functionaries like Stux and Süss composed lists of survivors, sorted them by nationality and hometown, and then sent them to the appropriate authorities with the request that the respective government arrange for the repatriation of its citizens. Buses from locations across Germany soon arrived, but the failure of Austria and the city of Vienna to reply to their appeal forced the Soviets to take over, and they organized buses to carry Viennese survivors home.12

The first such transport of approximately 650 Austrian Jewish survivors from Terezín arrived on July 7, 1945, and, about one month later, more than 300 followed them home to Vienna.13 A correspondent for the

11. Salomon Süss, Neugeasse 12, Theresienstadt, to Dr. Josef Löwenherz, May 11, 1945, A/W 4035, CAHJP.
Repatriation certificate issued by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense to Terezín survivor Jeanette Porges to return home to Vienna. (US Holocaust Memorial Museum; courtesy of Paul Peter and Lucie Porges)
Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) witnessed the early-August arrival and described the returnees’ excitement: “Despite the fact that half of them were ill . . . [they] laughed and chattered like children when they reached the Vienna railroad station. They called greetings to the few fellow-Viennese who were on hand to greet them.” The same correspondent also specified that everyone interviewed reportedly sought to emigrate elsewhere. More than 400 traced the same path home in the subsequent weeks, and by September 20, 1945, a total of 1,368 Austrian Jewish survivors of Terezín were once again living in Vienna.

Independent Return and Dangers to Women

Some concentration camp survivors, like Edith and Anni Holzer, organized their return without the assistance of Allied forces. Not wanting to wait for the repair of railways or for their turn on a waiting list, they pieced together their own journeys home. Their modes of transportation ranged from horse-drawn carts to crowded trains to any available vehicle moving in the general direction of Vienna. Alexander Rabinowicz was one of many who simply started out on foot. After surviving Auschwitz, a death march, and Buchenwald, he escaped from a moving train bound for Terezín in April 1945 and began his six-week trek home by walking toward Austria. He reached Brno, Czechoslovakia, where he found a ride in a truck the rest of the way to Vienna. Soviet troops liberated Marianne Windholm at Auschwitz, where they found her in the camp infirmary, very ill and

16. Transportliste des Sammellagers Malines, postwar compilation, 1.1.24.1/1269542/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. The cited document shows that Rabinowicz was transported to Auschwitz from Malines on Transport XI/1228 on September 26, 1942.
17. Häftlings-Personal-Karte Alexander Rabinowicz, January 22, 1945, 1.1.5.3/6971088/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
18. Alexander Rabinowicz, interview, 487, DÖW.
badly beaten. Despite the physical ailments and illnesses of Windholm and other prisoners from the camp, they walked together over the wintry Carpathian Mountains and slept in the streets and in bus stations along the way. Although they possessed neither tickets nor passports, they finally arranged seats on a packed train and arrived in Vienna after four months of travel.

Like Anni and Edith Holzer, many women journeying homeward encountered the particular horror of sexual assault. In Germany and Austria, all women were potential victims of rape by Soviet soldiers. The soldiers held Austrians and Germans collectively responsible for mass murder and rape committed against their families and communities during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, and their rage and vengeance motivated them. And, as the twins’ experience revealed, even physically and mentally traumatized Jewish women who clearly had taken no part in Nazi crimes were at risk. And, as we have seen, women did not face such danger only from Red Army troops. After bicycling part of the way from the Ravensbrück concentration camp, located about fifty miles north of Berlin, Irene Musik teamed up with two Viennese Jewish men also making their way home. They protected her from Red Army soldiers’ advances during their trip, but they too pressured her for sex. When she denied them, they abandoned her at the Czech border.

Elderly among the Survivors

There were no children among the more than three hundred Austrian Jews arriving in Vienna on a August 1, 1945, repatriation transport. Most were middle-aged and elderly. This sample represented a particular of Vienna’s

---

20. Windholm oral history.
21. Irene Musik, interview, 212, DÖW.
postwar Jewish population: its demographic distribution differed greatly from that of European Jewry as a whole. More than half of the Austrian Jewish survivors in immediate postwar Vienna were forty-five years old or older. The same age group constituted only 10 percent of all of Europe’s surviving Jews. A number of factors account for this difference. Historian C. Gwyn Moser has reported that of the 619 files of U-Boote survivors that she studied, nearly 60 percent had gone into hiding at the age of forty or older. This constitutes a significant percentage of U-Boote survivors but represents only 361 individuals. If, as Brigitte Ungar-Klein has estimated, there were a total of some 800 U-Boote, and 60 percent were forty or older, the number would increase to 500, yet it would still be less than 10 percent of the estimated number of surviving Jews in Vienna at war’s end. A number of Viennese “Mischlinge” and Jews over the age of forty-five who were married to gentiles surely survived the war in the city, but the extent to which they joined the IKG—or were permitted to join it—remains unclear.

The most important factor that shaped the postwar demographic appears to have been wartime emigration efforts. Thanks to the unflagging efforts of the Viennese Jewish community working under the intense pressure of the Nazis’ forced emigration policies, about two-thirds of Viennese Jews emigrated from Austria after the Anschluss. Most of them young and physically capable, they left to begin anew in other countries, and many left behind elderly relatives—temporarily, or so they thought. They planned to orchestrate their family members’ escape from abroad, but most of these efforts

proved unsuccessful. Thus, a disproportionate number of middle-aged and elderly constituted the city’s Jews subject to deportations. The Nazis sent many of Vienna’s older Jews to Terezín. The particular history of that camp afforded the aged a greater possibility of survival, and thus a relative prevalence of elderly Viennese were still alive at the end of the war and returned. Of the 15,351 Austrian Jews deported to Terezín, 1,270 were still there on May 5, 1945, awaiting repatriation, and many were of advanced age.27

ARRIVING HOME

Exhausted, malnourished, and often gravely ill, camp survivors came back to a partially destroyed Vienna with nearly eighty-seven thousand uninhabitable apartments.28 Marianne Windholm arrived in the city after dark with a group of other returning camp survivors, and they spent their first night home in a cellar. She only saw the destruction the next morning and did not recognize her hometown. “I went out and I did not . . . know where I [was]. The buildings were bombed. I had no idea in which district I [was]. It was terrible.”29 War damage in the capital included destroyed and impaired bridges, sewers, and gas and water pipes, as well as massive food shortages. The conquering Soviets placed first priority on bringing the city to working order and feeding the population, and they tasked the former chancellor of the First Austrian Republic and the last president of Parliament before the Austrofascist period, Dr. Karl Renner, to lead the establishment of a provisional Austrian government. Returnees from concentration camps arrived to find these problems but held tight to their more specific personal

27. Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 176–94. Another 154 Austrian Jews survived Terezín but had been sent to Switzerland on February 5, 1945; 149 Austrian Jews were liberated at other camps to which they had been sent from Terezín.
29. Windholm oral history.
intentions. Their first thoughts turned to locating family members and friends, finding places to live, and securing other basic life necessities.

Locating Family and Friends

Upon arrival in Vienna, camp returnees confronted the immediate question of where and how to locate other survivors. Some went directly to their prewar residences; others visited the IKG office for guidance and assistance. Ralph Segalman, a relief worker with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint), arrived in Vienna in November 1945 and described such efforts in his unpublished memoir: “At that time . . . about 1000 Jews had returned from the concentration camps and most of them were old. The few younger and middle age Jews were not around when we visited. We found that the younger people were trying to pull the threads of their families together, to find their loved ones and to figure out how and what to do with their lives. I met with many of them later when I began to see them at meetings and gatherings of Jews.”

A fortunate few did reunite with relatives in Vienna. Alexander Rabinowicz stumbled through the unrecognizable streets when he first arrived and wondered what to do first. He made his way to his sister- and (gentile) brother-in-law’s tenth-district apartment; his sister-in-law initially did not recognize him. Once the couple realized who stood before them, they immediately welcomed Alexander to their home. He slept on their kitchen floor for a few days, while his brother-in-law helped ease his reentry to life in the changed city. He took Alexander for delousing and used personal connections to help him secure an apartment.

Other camp survivors miraculously found family members waiting for them at their homes or in new ones. Susanne Kriss’s non-Jewish grandmother survived the war in Vienna, although the Nazis had evicted her

30. Ralph Segalman, “Letters to My Grandchildren,” unpublished memoir (Northridge, CA, 2001), 76. Special thanks to Professor Harold Marcuse for bringing this memoir to my attention and for providing me with a copy. Mr. Segalman’s memoirs can also be accessed at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Marcus Repository, SC-14902.

31. Rabinowicz interview.
from the home Susanne had known; they had grown suspicious of her frequent postal contact with Jewish relatives interned in Terezín. Susanne found her grandmother in the new home nonetheless, and the two set up house together.32 Most returnees, though, arrived to have their worst fears confirmed, as they searched and found no surviving relatives in Vienna. A deep connection to a familial home had motivated camp survivors’ return, and the loss felt upon finding that home empty left them heartbroken and haunted. JDC relief worker Ralph Segalman observed that many of the Jewish survivors he worked with had been “psychologically shaken” by their experiences and what they learned of the fates of their families. Segalman’s meetings with survivors about even practical matters like housing involved providing support to survivors in their grief and their sense of being lost and alone.33 “It was as if around every corner, my mother or sisters or husband would be coming,” wrote Trude Binder of her anguish in this situation. “I saw their ghosts everywhere.”34

Survivors registered with the IKG and sought the community’s assistance to find others. A bulletin board displayed notices to connect people, and many created new support networks by banding together with friends and distant relatives, as well as by marrying and starting families anew. There, on the IKG bulletin board, Marianne Windholm found her friend Anna Vietner’s message directing anyone who knew the Vietner family to an address in Vienna’s fifteenth district.35 Anna and her mother had survived the Nazis in the city in hiding, protected by their family’s non-Jewish maid. After the war, they were assigned an apartment that had been abandoned by Nazi residents who fled from the Red Army. Marianne made her way to the address and reunited with Anna, who opened her home to Marianne as she regained her footing in the city.36

32. Kriss interview.
35. Glaubensjuden in Wien, 1946, 3.1.3.7/8805492/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. According to the cited list, Windholm was living at Kranzgasse 7/4 in Vienna’s fifteenth district.
36. Windholm oral history.
Other returnees met family and friends by chance. In Edith and Anni Holzer’s first hours back in Vienna, they fortuitously ran into a physician they had known before the war. He told them that their friend and former nursing colleague Mignon Langnas had survived working as a nurse in a Jewish hospital. The three women reconnected, and Langnas took the sisters in at her tiny one-room apartment, where they lived together and took care of one another until Edith and Anni fell ill with typhus and required hospitalization.

Rebuilding kinship connections and establishing new ones became important in reclaiming one’s familial home, especially in light of the immense loss to the Jewish community. A wedding could provide joyous events for a grieving people working hard to reestablish lives. Despite enduring nearly three years in concentration camps, including Terezín, Auschwitz, and Flossenbürg, Lili Asch had been fortunate. After a short stint in the Deggendorf DP camp in Bavaria, she was back in Vienna and living with her sister and both of her parents, all also concentration camp survivors, by September 20, 1945. Lili married Alexander Asch, an Auschwitz survivor from Łódź, Poland, in December 1947 at the Seitenstettengasse Stadttempel, the city’s main synagogue and the only one left standing in Vienna after the massive destruction of the Reichspogromnacht. She wore a rented bridal gown and later fondly recalled the reception at her parents’ home. She marveled at her mother’s ingenuity at arranging eggs for the baker at

37. Auerhahn and Drill interview.
39. On August 8, 1942, the Gestapo deported Lili to Terezín on Gestapo transport number 35. See 35. Transport vom 13.8.1942 nach Theresienstadt, 1.2.1.1/11203728/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
40. On October 23, 1944, Lili was sent from Terezín to Auschwitz on Transport “Et.” See Alphabetisches Verzeichnis zum Transport Et, abgegangen am 23.10.1944, 1.1.42.1/11203728/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
41. On October 27, 1944, Lili was sent from Auschwitz to Flossenbürg with a group of more than two hundred other female prisoners. See Transportliste über 200 jüdische Häftlingsfrauen, 1.1.8.1/10799564/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
42. List of Austrians who returned to Vienna from Theresienstadt, September 20, 1945, 3.1.1.3/78805385/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
the famous Demel pastry shop; securing a special wedding cake in a city ravaged by food shortages was no small feat and indicated the importance of and reverence with which her family regarded the union.43 Weddings and other family celebrations, however, did not always ensure a sustained sense of home in the city. Later that same year and with the support of an affidavit from Alexander’s well-known uncle, the writer Sholem Asch, the couple immigrated to the United States.

Finding Housing and Work

Many Viennese Jews arrived to find their apartments confiscated and occupied by gentile Austrians, many of them yesterday’s Nazis. In the first few months of occupation, the Soviet authorities tried to help with the distribution of housing to Vienna residents. Once the government established a Wohnungsamt (housing office) to serve all residents of the partially destroyed city, the Soviets had no say, and survivors depended on municipal functionaries for housing assignments. Jews encountered antisemitic discrimination during the application process and while competing for housing with the general population, and in the summer of 1946, the IKG made an official agreement with the city of Vienna to work in partnership to provide its returning members with the abandoned apartments of Nazis who had left or fled the city.44 As previously mentioned, even before the 1946 agreement, the Soviets and the Austrian provisional government had assigned some survivors to such homes, which often had been stolen outright from Jewish families, or “Aryanized.” Overall, however, the Austrian courts restored many such properties. In 1946, 8,400 victims occupied Nazis’ abandoned or otherwise empty homes, but in 1950, only 730 still lived in them.45

Connections—both through private channels and through the city government—helped accelerate the process of obtaining apartments and furniture. A visit to the housing office with a friend or relative in Allied uniform ensured more prompt attention.\textsuperscript{46} Returnees also found that although revealing one’s status as a camp survivor could elicit antisemitic reactions, on other occasions it could be wielded to arouse sympathy or even shame.\textsuperscript{47} Camp survivor Frances Tritt worked in a pharmacy after the war and benefited from the good nature of a regular customer.\textsuperscript{48} When the customer asked Tritt about her wartime experiences, she told him that she had been in Terezín, and he immediately arranged to help her secure furnishings for her apartment through his governmental role as distributor to people in need in Vienna.\textsuperscript{49}

Homeless camp survivors turned to the IKG, which operated three KZ Rückkehrerheime (homes for returning camp survivors) in different locations across the city—two in the second district (Tempelhofgasse 3 and Untere Augartenstrasse 35) and one in the ninth (Seegasse 9). Hundreds of returnees, most of them elderly, lived in these facilities, run by the Jewish community with financial and logistical help from the Allies, the JDC, and eventually from the city of Vienna.

Finding work often depended on personal connections, as well as specialized skills and abilities, and survivors were resourceful in identifying ways to earn a living. Returnees with the appropriate language proficiencies secured translation and other work with the Allied occupation forces. Others found jobs with the Jewish community. Many found positions in medical facilities associated with the Kultusgemeinde. A chance meeting with a friend on the street led Marianne Windholm to obtain a job at the

\textsuperscript{46} For example, see Dr. Franz Hahn, interview, 510, DÖW.
\textsuperscript{47} For example, see Rabinowicz interview.
\textsuperscript{48} The Gestapo deported Fanny Tritt to Terezín on Transport 45 from Vienna. 45. Transport vom 9.10.1942 nach Theresienstadt, 1.2.1.1/11204145/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. Tritt was liberated there and had returned to Vienna by September 20, 1945. List of Austrians who returned to Vienna from Theresienstadt, September 20, 1945, 3.1.1.3/78805403/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
\textsuperscript{49} Frances Tritt, “Meine Lebensgeschichte. Das Wunder des Überlebens 1918–1971,” 90, MM 78, ME 650, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, NY.
Rothschild Hospital DP camp in the American Zone.⁵⁰ After the Holzer sisters recovered from typhus and convalescence, they worked for the IKG, assisting other returnees. Anni served as a nurse in a Jewish community clinic, and Edith worked first registering returnees and later as a social worker and cashier for the IKG.⁵¹ Dr. Franz Hahn had worked at the Rothschild Hospital from 1938 through 1943, and when he returned to Vienna in mid-August 1945, he almost immediately began work at the Jewish hospital on the Malzgasse.⁵²

Interacting with Gentiles
Returning camp survivors quickly realized that they were not welcome and learned to refrain from sharing their experiences with gentile Austrians. When they did, they frequently confronted listeners’ expressions of doubt and disbelief. Few gentile Austrians showed sympathy or appreciation for Jews’ ordeals under Nazi oppression, and some displayed outright hostility. The building superintendent at Marianne Windholm’s former family home greeted her with, “Oh, you’re still alive?”⁵³

Jewish returnees became targets for new and renewed antisemitism in Vienna, as their presence threatened the feeble construction of the myth of Austria as the Nazis’ first victim. Survivors knew that a large part of the gentile population had been—and still were—enthusiastic Nazis and antisemites. Austrian Jews knew that their gentile neighbors had exploited Jewish citizens’ dire situations to benefit from Nazi “Aryanization” policies and that some had participated in the mass murder of their families, friends, and community members. Gertrude Schneider wrote that it seemed that “everyone, except the survivors, suffered from a convenient kind of amnesia.”⁵⁴ In addition, postwar antisemitism facilitated non-Jews’ defensive reasoning that prisoners of concentration camps must have broken laws and that they

⁵⁰ Windholm oral history.  
⁵¹ Auerhahn and Drill interview.  
⁵² Hahn interview.  
⁵³ Windholm oral history.  
⁵⁴ Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 159.
had deserved incarceration as criminals. Schneider described her disappointment upon her June 1, 1945, return to Vienna: “We were not greeted with open arms, as some incorrigible optimists, myself included, had hoped for. The reception we had dreamed about in those long, cruel years that had robbed us of our youth, sapped our strength, and taken away our loved ones, was not forthcoming. There were no kind words; instead, there was the typical exclamation, something like ‘you people always come back,’ and with that we had to be satisfied.” Recounting camp experiences to gentile Austrians also prompted their attempts to match stories of suffering with descriptions of air raids and marauding Soviet liberators.

Gentiles in Vienna perceived returning survivors as contemptible competitors in a postwar housing crisis. Allied bombs had damaged 28 percent of the city’s buildings, rendering tens of thousands of apartments uninhabitable, and homeless returnees competed for shelter with bombed-out gentiles. In addition, some sixty thousand apartments in Vienna had been “Aryanized,” and those who were in possession of Jews’ former homes and businesses feared the possibility of losing them to the rightful owners. When laws about the return of property went into effect in 1947, so-called Aryanizers formed official advocacy associations to protect themselves and the property they held from Jews’ claims.

Although Jews encountered predominantly negative reactions from Austrian gentiles, intermittent kindness sparked. Some gentiles recognized and vividly recalled the experiences of their Jewish friends and neighbors. They refused to take part in the exploitation of Jews’ unfortunate situations and tried to help. Trude Binder emphasized while describing her first visit with non-Jewish friends after the war, “To show you how good people can be, they presented me with some money entrusted to them by my mother. It

56. Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 159.
57. Kleindel, Die Chronik Österreichs, 537.
59. For an analysis of such organizations’ activities, see chapter 6.
was still in the same package. They themselves had been plundered by the Russians but had managed to save my money."\(^{60}\)

 Occasionally gentiles provided returnees with much-needed support upon their return. When Auschwitz survivor Kurt Herzog arrived in Vienna,\(^{61}\) he already knew that the Nazis had murdered his parents, so instead of going to his prewar home, he went directly to the Pollack family’s apartment. This non-Jewish family had assisted him even after the Anschluss and until his deportation. He knew they would welcome him, and indeed they housed him and provided care during his first few weeks in Vienna. In an interview decades later, Herzog explained that he eventually grew frustrated with the difficulties of reestablishing himself in Vienna and immigrated to Australia. In light of this, he sought to be clear about the Pollacks: “Now, I have to mention this because those people were small people and they behaved in a way which is absolutely fantastic.”\(^{62}\)

 Not all seemingly sympathetic actions sprang from idealistic origins. Kind treatment was sometimes superficial and part of a deeper agenda. Trude Binder (née Weiner) ran into a carpenter and former neighbor soon after her return, and he greeted her with contrived warmth: “Oh, Fraulein Weiner, I’m so glad you’re back!” Trude knew that he was a former member of the Sturmbteilung (SA) and that he still held possession of an “Aryanized” carpentry workshop. She caught on to his fear of her denunciation when he offered to build her any furniture she wanted and used it to her advantage to furnish her apartment.\(^{63}\)

 Such opportunities for retaliation presented themselves to survivors, but many chose not to seek retribution against individuals. Their decisions not to denounce former Nazis may have sprung from a sense of forgiveness, but testimonies suggest that the returnees felt such compromises to have been in their best interest. Bringing difficulties to the non-Jewish neighbors among whom they consciously decided to resettle might serve only

\(^{60}\) Binder, “Survivor’s Memoirs of the Holocaust,” 32.

\(^{61}\) ITS Certificate of Incarceration Kurt Herzog, May 28, 1958, 6.3.3.2/104356374/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.

\(^{62}\) Kurt Herzog, interview, RG 50.583°0003, USHMM.

to create further problems for returnees, their families, and the Jewish community. Residency in postwar Vienna required an acceptance of living among perpetrators, and coping mechanisms that returnees developed and utilized involved discretion. A woman who had denounced Susanne Kriss’s mother to the Nazis for appearing in public without the required Star of David sought her out after the war and begged her not to inform the authorities of this act. Kriss’s mother brought no complaint against her. Kriss disagreed with the decision because, she said, she blamed exactly this kind of person for what had happened to them.64 Kriss’s mother, however, must have felt that she could better protect herself and her daughter by keeping silent.

Franz Hahn faced more than one opportunity for reprisal, but, despite a wartime path of persecution that included more than two years internment in Terezín65 and shorter stints in Auschwitz,66 Sachsenhausen, and Dachau,67 he exhibited restraint. He elected not to attempt the recovery of his former home when he found a gentile Austrian woman living there after she had been bombed out of her apartment. Hahn realized that she had not been the original “Aryanizer” and viewed her as less of a perpetrator and more of a victim. She had not stolen his apartment, he rationalized; why take it from her?68 At a later date, the father of an SS camp guard named Hartl approached Hahn and some of his survivor friends to ask them to write a letter on behalf of his son awaiting trial by the Allies. The young officer Hartl had shown great kindness to them in the camp, Hahn and his friends recalled, and they agreed. Their formal statement secured Hartl’s

64. Kriss interview.
65. Hahn was arrested in Vienna on September 30, 1942, and deported to Terezín the following day. No Transport vom 1.10.1942 nach Theresienstadt, 1.2.1.1/11204049/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
66. After two years in Terezín, Hahn was deported to Auschwitz. Alphabetisches Verzeichnis zum Transport Et, abgegangen an 23.10.1944, 1.1.42.1/4959507/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
67. Hahn arrived in Dachau on November 17, 1944, after a short time in Sachsenhausen. Häftlingspersonalbogen Franz Hahn, Dachau, 1.1.6.2/10084760/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. By September 1945, Hahn was back in Vienna and was residing at the Hotel Alserbach. Aus den Konzentrationslagern nach Wien Zurückgekehrte Juden, September 1945, 3.1.1.3/78805176/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
68. Rabinowicz interview.
acquittal, and although Hahn and his friends had no further contact with the officer, Hahn told his interviewer that he held no resentment. They had known Hartl to be the most decent and upstanding of all the guards they had encountered during the war and felt it the honorable thing to help him go free.69

Others felt that to gain some measure of justice outweighed potential future problems and, with no mitigating factors in the balance, chose to pursue legal channels. A Nazi neighbor wrongfully accused Alexander Rabinowicz of criminal activity, and an altercation ensued. Rabinowicz was arrested. Once released, he learned that the arresting officer had also been a Nazi, presumably conspiring with his neighbor. He filed a complaint that resulted in the officer’s suspension.70

Though Viennese returnees encountered widespread hostility, they were mostly spared the violence that met many returning Polish Jews in their hometowns, which has become the dominant narrative about return. The Jewish population in Poland grew from 42,662 on May 1, 1945, to a peak of 240,489 by July 1, 1946, but antisemtic assaults and massacres, which had started in the last half of 1944 and continued through the summer of 1946, caused that number to drop sharply by 1947 to a total of 89,000.71 After the Kielce pogrom on July 4, 1946, through the autumn of the same year, approximately one hundred thousand Jews left Poland, most for DP camps in Germany and Austria.72 Gentile Poles, unlike non-Jewish Austrians, had suffered as victims of the Nazis, who viewed them as a source of wartime and future slave labor. Most Poles, though, felt neither connection with nor empathy for the experiences of their Jewish compatriots. And unlike Austrian Jewish returnees, the majority of Polish Jews found that permanent resettlement in their former homes, towns, and cities proved impossible.

69. Hahn interview.
70. Rabinowicz interview.
THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE RECEPTION OF CAMP SURVIVORS

Just as interactions with gentile Austrians taught most returning camp survivors to turn to Jewish friends and acquaintances for support, so the formal reception by their government communicated that for institutional assistance they could depend only on the IKG. Politicians and bureaucrats transmitted messages explicitly and implicitly that proved that postwar Austrian consciousness was permeated by Austria’s assumed victim identity, a lack of responsibility for the persecution and genocide of European Jewry, and outright antisemitic hostility.

Postwar Austrian Government and the Victim Myth

At the end of July 1945, American, British, and French forces joined the Soviets in Vienna to assume control of agreed-on zones of occupation in Austria and in the capital city. All four powers also shared control of the Inter-Allied zone in the first district. By October, the wary Western Allies had officially recognized the Renner government, which was composed of politicians working diligently to shape a new national identity for Austria. This provisional government included a number of Communist Party representatives, as Renner and other leaders were wary of offending the Soviets.73 They seized important opportunities in the development of Cold War politics to define the country and its citizens as the particularly non-German first victims of the Nazis. This permitted Austrian individuals to emerge from World War II as innocent casualties rather than as perpetrators and aggressors, and Austria as a country could evade its share of responsibility for Nazi crimes by highlighting the nation’s technical nonexistence from March 1938 to May 1945.

The Austrian government’s attitude toward Jewish concentration camp returnees remained staunchly unsympathetic, and it denied culpability for

---
any part of their persecution under the Germans. Many government officials simply refused to believe their descriptions of camp conditions and their experiences, suggesting to survivors, “it couldn’t have been that bad, or you wouldn’t even be here now.”74 The few instances of efforts made by the Renner government to welcome or assist with Jews’ repatriation consisted of exceptions. Renner shifted narrative gears to suit the situation and his audience, but he did not veer from his position of utter disinterest in Austria’s Jews, current or former. In January 1946, the Association of Jewish Refugees in the United Kingdom reported that Renner had promised to eliminate Nazis from leading industrial and trade positions, which he said in response to revelations that “Aryanizers” still owned and ran many former Jewish grocery and textile businesses.75 No such action was taken.

Renner was in good company. All postwar political parties sought to embrace former Nazis and the beneficiaries of “Aryanization,” as they constituted an important segment of the electorate. Parties strove to include them by maintaining a second line of domestic discussion—or domestic silence—about the Nazi past,76 which involved avoiding enflaming animosity that would result from an official welcome of Jewish citizens’ return. Restoring former Nazis’ professional and social status became a main theme in domestic politics, and Austrian leaders simultaneously distanced themselves and their nation from responsibility for or association with Nazi crimes, while they also courted former Nazi Party members with political, professional, and social reconciliation.77

Such contradictions made sense as the Renner government sought to refashion a postwar Austrian national identity that differed for international and domestic audiences. Austrian leaders recognized that in 1946,

---

74. Embacher, “Unwelcome in Austria,” 197.
after the first strict phase of Allied control following war’s end, pressure to bring Nazis and war criminals to justice eased. The priority of rooting out and punishing Austrian Nazis waned as tensions between the Soviets and the Western powers increased. And the Austrian government exploited the situation to solidify the Moscow Declaration’s promise of victim identity. The nation sought to stress its innocence and to underscore Germany’s sole responsibility for Nazi crimes, and thus for reparations, on the world stage. At the same time, denazification as administered by the Renner government involved controlling the consequences for a large group of potential voters and took place as a series of amnesties.78 All postwar parties claimed that the Austrian populace included few committed Nazi Party members, and Renner posited that many had just caved to economic, social, and personal pressures. In 1946, some 90 percent of former Nazi Party members were amnestied, reinstated to their jobs, and paid compensation for material and financial losses after 1945.79 Such pardons led to the creation of the Federation of Independents (Verband der Unabhängigen, or VdU), the predecessor party to Austria’s current-day far-right Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich, or FPÖ).80

In the immediate postwar years, those who were active in the resistance movement received heroes’ honors, and memorials to those who were killed in the struggle for Austria’s “liberation” were erected in Vienna and the provinces. The government strove to define most all Austrian citizens as victims and promoted its view of Austria as victim nation with an antifascist exhibition at Vienna’s Künstlerhaus and the publication of the Rot-Weiss-Rot Buch: Gerechtigkeit für Österreich! Darstellungen, Dokumente und Nachweise zur Vorgeschichte und Geschichte der Okkupation Österreichs (nach amtlichen

80. Utgaard, Remembering and Forgetting Nazism, 31. The VdU changed its name to the Freedom Party in 1956 and continues to serve today as Austria’s far-right political party. An ÖVP and FPÖ coalition in 2000 brought the Freedom Party and its then-leader, Jörg Haider, to worldwide attention, as the European Union initiated and maintained a diplomatic boycott with Austria for seven months in reaction to the leadership of a xenophobic party with known Nazi ties.
An English version carried the same title in direct translation, including its reference to the national flag: *Red-White-Red Book: Justice for Austria; Descriptions, Documents and Proofs to the Antecedents and History of the Occupation of Austria.*

The 224-page *Rot-Weiss-Rot Buch* represented the foreign ministry’s determined attempt to highlight Austrian patriotism and to solidify the nation’s victimhood and innocence. Its intended audience was the Allied occupiers and indeed the world, and the lengthy subtitle emphasized that the collection of official documents and the accompanying narrative were evidence of the German Reich’s forced occupation of Austria. The book justified the lack of Austrian resistance by likening the Anschluss to the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia. As no other country offered military might in support of either nation (Austria or Czechoslovakia), the book reasoned, resistance to German “occupation” would have been senseless.

It also presents the case that Austria as a country did not exist politically and economically after the Anschluss and thus could not be responsible for Nazi crimes.

With this official position, the Austrian government endeavored to define or redefine nearly all other Austrian citizens as victims and, in doing so, elided the most oppressed group. Government benefits to concentration camp survivors persecuted on political grounds included the provision of housing, clothing, and food. Those mistreated “on racial grounds only” were specifically excluded. The nongovernmental KZ-Verband (concentration camp survivor association), established in 1945, also refused membership to Jews, as well as to Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and those who were


84. Ibid., 94.

85. Bailer et al., *Erzählte Geschichte*, 672.
punished for helping slave laborers.86 Jewish survivors could turn only to the devastated IKG and foreign Jewish organizations conducting relief work in the city.

The government’s explicit and implicit antisemitism regarding victim status and subsequent welfare benefits affected some non-Jews as well, as the government refused to recognize as resistance the aid and rescue of Jewish Austrians. The Gestapo arrested Dr. Ella Lingens, her husband, and a friend in September 1942, after an informant reported them for helping Jews flee Austria. The Nazis held Dr. Lingens in a Gestapo prison until February 1943 and then deported her to Auschwitz, where she served as a camp doctor and continued to help Jews at great personal risk.87 She survived and, after liberation, returned to her native Vienna, where she applied for an Amtsbescheinigung, the official certification of her victim status that would permit her benefits. A government official denied her request on the grounds that “having hidden Jews [was] a private matter and not a form of resistance.”88 Despite her arrest, deportation, and suffering at the infamous Nazi death camp, Lingens was not categorized as a victim because helping Jews did nothing in the supposed movement for a free Austria.

The case of Theresia H. illustrates a similarly appalling contradiction that took place in the context of the developing postwar national narrative. In 1962, the Austrian government denied her application for support as a victim, although the Nazis had arrested and imprisoned her in Eisenstadt in August 1942 for providing assistance to Polish prisoners of war. She was later interned from March 20, 1943, to February 20, 1945, in Ravensbrück, where she wore a red badge that identified her as a political prisoner. Yet the postwar Austrian authorities did not categorize her as a victim of the

88. Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 634.
Nazis, although they had considered Theresia H. a political opponent and imprisoned her for it. On the contrary, the authorities upheld the legislation used to imprison her in the first place as a traitor or saboteur. In response to her postwar claim, the Austrian government deemed the January 25, 1939, Nazi law that banned the provision of help to prisoners of war to be similar to laws of other countries at war and not a particularly National Socialist regulation. With this, they upheld Theresia H.’s guilt and at the same time dodged qualifying her as a politically persecuted victim. She had helped others oppressed by the Nazis and, in particular, members of an army of a nation opposed to the Third Reich and genuinely a “victim,” one in the group of countries to which Austria aspired to belong. This should have been seen as resistance, in favor of a supposedly oppressed Austria. Instead, the government handled her case in a way that clearly represented their true alliance.

In both of the preceding cases, the Austrian government denied victims’ benefits to women. Both Lingens and Theresia H. had provided aid to others whom the Nazis had oppressed, and they did so in traditionally female ways. The concept of resistance stood as a debated and controversial one in postwar Austria. An understanding of “resister” included “taking gun in hand” to protect the country, as more conventionally masculine and aggressive forms of opposition constituted “resistance.” Thus, in addition to the blatant contradictions involved in denying the women assistance as victims themselves, expectations and norms related to gender also guided an Austrian postwar understanding of resistance.

Restitution of Property

Despite Allied supervision, returning Jewish survivors encountered hostility in postwar Vienna, especially regarding the recovery of real estate and businesses stolen under Nazi “Aryanization” laws. Those who were in possession of Jews’ assets resisted relinquishing the property and often

---

succeeded in retaining it, as the provisional government had no interest in antagonizing this important group of voters. As we have seen, the postwar government made no secret of its lack of interest in or responsibility for Jewish citizens, and this held true with regard to restitution as well.

The provisional government formally addressed the issue of stolen property restitution on May 10, 1945, at the Fifth Cabinet Council meeting on “Aryanized” assets. Despite its title, the minutes of the meeting reveal that leaders focused on the return of the property of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and associated organizations, stolen under the Austrofascist dictatorship in the mid-1930s. It was inconceivable, Renner stated, to compensate every “small Jewish merchant or peddler for his loss” when the SPÖ had not regained its confiscated assets.90 His responsibility was to, and his reputation relied on, the 47 percent of the population he estimated that the SPÖ represented. For postwar Austrian politicians, satisfying the Jewish sliver of the electorate provided no advantage. On the contrary, not satisfying them but rather caring for the needs and wants of “Aryanizers” proved beneficial. Jews who had been racially defined by and persecuted under Nuremberg Laws had constituted less than 3 percent of the pre-Anschluss population of Austria.91 Jews alive in Austria after war’s end in 1945 constituted less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the population, and the many tens of thousands of Austrian Jews living abroad had lost their citizenship under Nazi law and were not entitled to regain it. Politicians identified their electoral base and looked no farther.

On November 3, 1945, representatives of the Viennese Jewish community submitted a memorandum to the offices of General Mark Clark, the US representative of the Allied control commission for Austria. They officially requested American assistance in the return of Jews’ property and in obtaining one hundred former IKG-owned buildings in the possession of

---


the Austrian government. Their statement outlined the Austrian provisional government’s turpitude with regard to provisions for the compensation of Jews and described the antisemitic discrimination that public officials directed at returning camp survivors. The memo stressed that immediately after conquering Vienna, the Soviets had named many former Jewish owners as “temporary administrators” of their prior businesses, a move that seemed in the direction of the return of rightful property. But just a few months later, the Renner government had gained official recognition and more power, and many “Aryanizers” of such establishments resumed control. The municipality controlled Jewish theaters stolen during the Nazi regime rather than restoring them to the rightful owners, and more than one hundred former Jewish community buildings were still the property of the Austrian government.92 A little over a month after sending General Clark the memo, Jewish community leaders followed up with a letter of thanks and appreciation for Clark’s “unparalleled kindness” and “judicious insight and respect for human rights and dignity.”93 Clark and US forces clearly expressed support and wanted to help the Jewish community, but as the provisional government gained and then increased in power, prospects for the recovery of former property looked bleak.

Although Chancellor Renner had promised to eliminate Nazis from leading positions in industry and trade, Aaron Ehrlich, president of the Jewish Chamber of Commerce in Vienna, reported in January 1946 that “seventy per cent of the food stores in Austria and at least 80 per cent of its clothing industry [were] still in the hands of former Nazis.”94 Ehrlich also emphasized that trade associations denied camp survivors the licenses they needed to establish businesses or to engage in trade. Then, too, Jews struggled, he pointed out, unable to secure accommodation, and all the while Nazis retained and enjoyed luxurious apartments.

The Austrian government’s first restitution act went into effect on July 26, 1946, and dealt with the restitution of property that had been seized by the Nazis and was still held and administered by the Austrian federal or a provincial government as successor and beneficiary of the Nazi regime. The second restitution act on February 6, 1947, standardized the restitution of property still in the hands of the Austrian government as a result of seizure under the Nazis. The same day, Parliament passed a third restitution act, which dealt with the return of Jews’ and other victims’ property and dealt with reclaiming property not taken and held by a public authority but held by individuals and organizations. Despite the possibility created by such legislation to support victims’ rights with regard to the return of their illegally appropriated property, with time, legal interpretations and judicial outcomes increasingly favored former Nazis and “Aryanizers.”

CAMP SURVIVORS AND THE IKG

Viennese Jews read the situation and quickly got the message. They learned to trust mainly one another and to surround themselves with mostly Jewish friends. They knew that they could not rely on their government for compensation, assistance, or sympathy. Jewish returnees depended on the IKG for food, housing, communication, and other resources, while international Jewish organizations provided goods to supplement the IKG’s assistance. Returning camp survivors who were left homeless turned to the IKG-run KZ Rückkehrerheime.

Provisions and Communication through the Kultusgemeinde

Many returning camp survivors obtained meals from Kultusgemeinde soup kitchens and depended on supplies from foreign Jewish organizations. In fact, most survivors credited the Joint with providing their basic necessities. With provisions limited for everyone in Vienna, some returnees relied on wartime black-market trading skills to organize supplies. Gertrude Schnei- der’s mother traveled back and forth to Hungary to secure basic foodstuffs, and Marianne Windholm recalled using chocolate as currency to purchase meat from a butcher.

Returnees depended on the IKG for communication with their compatriots and family members not yet in Vienna. Many made a daily ritual of visiting the Jewish community’s offices, looking for news of relatives and friends across the continent and, with any luck, among the small but steady trickle of returnees arriving in Vienna. Like Jewish communities and organizations throughout Europe, the IKG compiled and distributed lists of survivors living in the city to displaced persons’ assembly centers and camps, as well as to Jewish community leadership in cities and countries around the globe. The compilation and dissemination of such information, coupled with tracing services facilitated by international organizations in the immediate aftermath of the war, allowed relatives and friends to search for one another in the chaos of postwar Europe.

Many Jews believed at first that an increase in the Jewish population would improve their situation. As we have seen, governmental, professional, and social organizations disappointed them, but the Jewish community worked hard to meet its members’ needs and to represent them. As the IKG reconstituted, it found the US occupation forces particularly helpful. Individuals also recognized that the American zone had some of the best conditions in Vienna and sought to move there, and postwar relief worker Ralph Segalman and his Joint colleagues urged those surviving Jews living

98. Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 161.
99. Ibid., 160.
100. Windholm oral history.
101. Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 160.
in the former Jewish district of Vienna—which fell in the Soviet zone of occupation—to move to another zone. But, Segalman observed,

We were concerned that we might not be able to protect them in the Russian sector and who knew how long the Russians would remain friendly to the Jews? But these [many] elderly people wanted to remain in that quarter, near the old Jewish hospital, the old synagogue, and the Jewish old age home. Many of their friends lived there and the Jewish cafeteria with kosher food subsidized by the AJDC was located there. There was also a kosher bakery, subsidized with flour from the AJDC, and a pharmacy sponsored by the AJDC. This sector was not far from the Kultusgemeinde building where many cultural and Jewish political meetings were held. It was the place where Jews could meet on the street and exchange news about Palestine and emigration.\footnote{Segalman, “Letters to My Grandchildren,” 85.}

Jewish survivors in Vienna benefited from the active involvement of Jewish organizations like the Joint in reestablishing their lives there. They also appreciated the Jewish soldiers among the occupation forces. Gertrude Schneider went to an IKG-organized Chanukah Ball in Vienna in 1945, the attendees of which included mostly Jewish survivors but also a number of Jewish soldiers from the various occupation forces. After some entertainment, ball-goers lit traditional candles and sang the “Maos Zur,” a customary Chanukah song. “There was not a dry eye among us,” recalled Schneider, “even though we should have been very happy, for our survival was indeed a great miracle, too.”\footnote{Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 162.} It might be hard to expect a true “happiness” at such an occasion, as any such feeling would have been tempered with an ambivalent optimism after having lost so much and at best a sort of joy filled with relief and mixed with profound pain.

---
103. Schneider, Exile and Destruction, 162.
Profile of Cooperation: The KZ Rückkehrerheim at Seegasse 9

At the end of the war, the Ältestenrat controlled and ran one Jewish hospital in Vienna. The Nazis had systematically appropriated its other properties, but soon after taking the city, the Allies began to enforce the return of IKG medical facilities. By October 1945, the IKG operated five KZ Rückkehrerheime to meet the particular needs of camp survivors requiring housing, medical services, and food.104 As we have seen, many returnees found their former homes occupied, had no one with whom they could stay, and needed immediate shelter. A number turned to KZ Rückkehrerheime for accommodation and services.

The KZ Rückkehrerheim at Seegasse 9 in Vienna’s ninth district represented an example of IKG cooperation with and reliance on the US occupation forces to work toward the reconstruction of the Jewish community, starting with providing care for the IKG’s most vulnerable members. The home’s postwar history reveals ways the United States Forces-Austria (USFA) worked officially and unofficially to assist the Jewish community while the Austrian government—whose job it should have been—failed to do so.

At the time of the Anschluss, Vienna’s Servitenviertel (a small quarter named for the Catholic Serviten order and the church located there) in the ninth district was home to a thriving middle- and upper-class Jewish community. Many Jewish organizations and religious institutions had been situated in the magnificent turn-of-the-century buildings along the picturesque cobblestone streets, including the grand Müllnergasse temple, which the Nazis burned to the ground during the November Pogrom.

For nearly three hundred years, with the exception of 1942–45, a Jewish medical facility stood at Seegasse 9. In 1698, Samuel Oppenheimer built a private Jewish hospital on the grounds alongside Vienna’s oldest Jewish cemetery, and in 1793, the Jewish community took over its formal

ownership. The Kultusgemeinde constructed a then-modern nursing home on the grounds in 1890 and dedicated it to Emperor Franz Joseph I. Further modernized with an addition of a two-story annex in 1935, the home contained 454 beds for patients in 1936.  

The facility at Seegasse 9 served the city’s elderly Jews until mid-1943 and was the last Jewish nursing home closed and emptied of residents in Nazi Vienna. On August 25, 1942, the German Reich purchased the building from the IKG for 622,000 Reichsmark and transferred the monies to a fund intended to finance forced emigration from Bohemia and Moravia. On May 25, 1943, the last 122 residents of the nursing home were evacuated, most of them to Terezín, although some were resettled at the Swedish Mission across the street at Seegasse 16. The Swedish Lutheran Church had established the Swedish Mission in 1920 with the specific intent of converting and baptizing Jews. From the time of the Anschluss through 1941, however, the staff served “non-Aryan Christians” persecuted under the Nuremberg Laws and some Jews, helping with their social welfare and emigration needs. Once deportations to the east began, the home at Seegasse 16 served under the management of the IKG as a hospital and nursing home for Jews and Christians with Jewish family backgrounds, and from June 1943, the Nazis permitted it to continue in existence as a home for couples in “mixed marriages.” In all, the Swedish Mission helped some three thousand Jews and Christians with Jewish family backgrounds to emigrate from Nazi Vienna. After the war, Seegasse 16 also served as a

106. Ibid., 61.
108. Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Ältestenrates der Juden in Wien im Jahre 1943, p. 11, A/W 117, CAHJJP.
KZ Rückkehrerheim and often worked in coordination with the home at Seegasse 9 across the street.\footnote{111}

The building at Seegasse 9 was handed over to the German Reich on May 27, 1943.\footnote{112} The Waffen-SS moved in about a week later (June 4, 1943)\footnote{113} and used the home to billet troops until the end of the war.\footnote{114} An immediate postwar witness statement dated June 3, 1945, also mentioned that under Nazi possession it had housed a jail, either specifically for or at least also used to detain some Wehrmacht deserters.\footnote{115} The Nazis forcibly relocated those who remained at the Swedish Mission at Seegasse 16 to the Jewish hospital at Malzgasse 7 on June 21, 1943.\footnote{116} The IKG resumed operation of the nursing home at Seegasse 9 under the Soviets, and although the IKG had not yet regained ownership of the building, it reopened the building as a KZ Rückkehrerheim on July 7, 1945.\footnote{117} On that same day, the first large repatriation transport from Terezín arrived with five hundred survivors, four hundred of whom became Seegasse 9’s first residents.\footnote{118} The Rückkehrerheim manager Nicholas Lazarowitsch, who had survived the war in Vienna,\footnote{119} reported that upon the facility’s opening, its furnishings scarcely accommodated the new arrivals. Properly feeding them also proved difficult for the first eight weeks, but the home’s ration assignment from the US forces gradually improved. By the middle of September, residents received

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{111}{Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 173.}
  \item \footnote{112}{Duizend-Jensen, Jüdische Gemeinden, 63.}
  \item \footnote{113}{Ältestenrat der Juden in Wien, 22. Wochenbericht, June 1, 1943, DÖW.}
  \item \footnote{114}{Max Birnstein to the director of the Ältestenrat, May 28, 1943, A/W 275 and 1827, CAHJP.}
  \item \footnote{115}{“Postwar Witness Statements concerning the Formation of the Special Detachment Dirlewanger,” June 3, 1945, I.1.0.6/82326879/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.}
  \item \footnote{116}{Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Ältestenrates der Juden in Wien im Jahre 1943, p. 11.}
  \item \footnote{117}{Seegasse 9 KZ-Rückkehrerheim director Lazarowitsch to the IKG Amtsdirektion at Schottenring 25, 1010 Wien, August 21, 1948, XXVII, B, e, B31, Das Archiv der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien (IKG Archive), Vienna, Austria.}
  \item \footnote{118}{Report by Nicholas Lazarowitsch, manager of the Seegasse 9 KZ-Rückkehrerheim, December 22, 1945, Lazarowitsch briefcase (not catalogued), 1, IKG Archive.}
  \item \footnote{119}{It is unclear exactly how Lazarowitsch survived the war. As shown on a “List of home-inmates” of Seegasse 9 (January 2, 1947, 3.1.1.2/82048263/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM), he presumably self-reported that he survived the war in Vienna. His name, however, does not appear on a list of “Austrian Jews residing in Vienna during the occupation” (November 30, 1945, 3.1.1.3/78804734–78804758/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM).}
\end{itemize}
forty grams of bread daily with some meat, cheese, or jam, plus a breakfast of coffee with forty milliliters of milk, a half liter of Eintopf (a hearty Viennese meat and vegetable soup) for lunch, and dinner of forty milliliters of broth with various traditional Viennese Einlage (noodles, meat, strips of crepes, or dumplings added to soup). By October 1945, Seegasse 9 was the largest of the five shelters for returning concentration camp survivors in Vienna, one of two in the US sector.

The USFA assumed official oversight of Seegasse 9 on November 15, 1945, and officially classified it as a Displaced Persons Camp under the supervision of its DP Section. This was unusual, and a phenomenon particular to Vienna, as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) defined a “displaced person” as one displaced outside his or her country of origin. Brigadier General Ralph Tate, deputy commander to General Clark, had interceded to change the status of Viennese Jews from “refugees” to “displaced persons,” which entitled them to medical aid, food, shelter, and other support from US Army sources. Without this, 90 percent of Seegasse 9’s residents would have been excluded from the benefits afforded displaced persons. The fact that USFA formally qualified all Viennese Jews as “displaced persons” points to American efforts to provide assistance to the Jewish community by making a special allowance, actually bending rules to accommodate them with funds allocated for DPs. In addition, General Mark Clark, although baptized Episcopalian during his time at West Point, descended from a Jewish mother, and there has been speculation that this affected his interest in the surviving Jews living in areas under his command. Policies regarding Jews appeared more strictly enforced

120. Report by Lazarowitsch, 1.
121. Nadich to Commanding General, October 23, 1945.
122. Nicholas Lazarowitsch to the IKG Amtsdirektion, August 21, 1948, IKG Archive.
in Austria under Clark, and he was certainly quite vocal and supportive about the contributions of the Jewish soldiers who served under him.

In addition to funding and overseeing the medical care, US Army officials assisted residents in pursuing the return of former property. In a December 22, 1945, report, Lazarowitsch stated that none of his facility’s residents who had lived in Vienna before the Anschluss had regained his or her home. Many found their homes occupied by the Austrians who bought or received them under Nazi “Aryanization” policies. Army officials kept records of progress made toward regaining such property, but, according to the residents’ documentation, few if any had regained their homes even four years after the end of the war. Restitution legislation did not cover rented apartments. As residents of Seegasse 9 physically recovered and sought to reestablish independent lives in Vienna, they looked for housing outside the Rückkehrerheim, and many gave up on the possibility of regaining past residences. If they were not to recoup property with the support of the US Army, they reasoned, they would never recover anything.

In December 1945, about 60 percent of the population of mainly camp survivors at the KZ Rückkehrerheim at Seegasse 9 were over the age of sixty, reflecting the demographic pattern of the Jewish population of post-war Vienna. Two years later, a census record dated October 16, 1947, listed a total of 291 residents, 43 between the ages of sixty and sixty-nine, 85 over the age of seventy, and 26 over the age of eighty. One was eighty-seven. Like the general population at Seegasse 9, these 291 were almost without exception concentration camp survivors, most from Terezín. The institution’s history as an IKG nursing home might contribute to the high concentration of elderly at Seegasse 9, but the percentages nonetheless closely resemble the significantly high proportion of aged Jews in Vienna.

128. Applications filed by residents, folder “Wohnungen,” B13, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, IKG Archive.
129. Report by Lazarowitsch, 2.
130. List of all residents of Seegasse 9 KZ-Rückkehrerheim, folder “Diverse,” B13, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, October 16, 1947, IKG Archive.
The KZ-Rückkehrerheim at Seegasse 9 employed many of its residents in its daily operations. Many housed there were of advanced age and unable to assume outside jobs, while others encountered difficulties regaining trade and business licenses and therefore were delayed or prevented in their efforts to return to work.\footnote{Report by Lazarowitsch, 2.} The home paid wages to residents for peeling potatoes and for helping needy roommates.\footnote{List of payments in currency and points to camp residents, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, B13, folder II, Punkte 1948, IKG Archive.} In October 1945, seventy-seven-year-old Jella Caro, a survivor of Terezín,\footnote{The Gestapo deported Gabriele Caro from Vienna to Terezín on Transport 28 on June 20, 1942. Abgangsliste des. 28. Transportes, 1.2.1.1/11203480/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. Caro was liberated in Terezín and had returned to Vienna by September 20, 1945. List of Austrians who returned to Vienna from Theresienstadt, 3.1.1.3/78805387/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM. She was listed as residing at Seegasse 9 in September 1945 (Aus den Konzentrationslagern nach Wien Zurückgekehrte, September 1945, 3.1.1.3/78805180/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM), in 1946 (Liste der in Wien lebenden Glaubensjuden, 1946, 3.1.1.3/78805419/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM), and on January 2, 1947 (List of home-inmates, 3.1.1.2/82048260/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM).} lived in a large room at Seegasse 9 with fourteen roommates. She received compensation for her assistance with daily activities with the elderly and the partially blind or deaf among them.\footnote{Jella Caro to “Meine Lieben,” October 25, 1945, accession number 70867, document 1339/1, Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust & Genocide, London, UK.} In addition, the central kitchen that supported IKG-run facilities across Vienna operated from the neighboring house at Seegasse 11 and employed many of the homes’ residents. Workers at both Seegasse 9 and 11 received either cash or points to be used for purchase within the DP camp system, or a combination of the two.\footnote{File “Kultusgemeinde Korrespondenz,” AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse, 1949, B13, IKG Archive.} The aged, the physically impaired, mothers, and those who were caring for young relatives or other dependents also received work exemptions and were allotted a certain amount of money to live.

The US Army, as supervising and organizing power, oversaw and funded many of the home’s activities until 1950.\footnote{List of payments in currency and points to camp residents, Punkte 1948, IKG Archive.} Initially it provided food, including special items for Jewish holidays, and undertook renovations to
the building, including the installation of central heating and the repair of broken windows.\textsuperscript{137} The Joint also supported activities in the KZ-Rückkehrerheim at Seegasse 9, as it did in many DP camps. Private individuals around the world sent “care packages” of food and relief supplies for survivors through Joint-organized channels, as well as through other international Jewish organizations. Others supported the home with direct gifts. Max Hirschmann, formerly of Vienna, corresponded directly with Lazarowitsch to offer his and other former Viennese Jews’ assistance from their host country, Australia. Over a number of months, Hirschmann and his group provided many basic supplies for Seegasse 9.\textsuperscript{138}

The Joint funded a Kindergarten (day-care center and preschool) for children residing in the home and for community members desiring a Jewish program. Participants learned arts and crafts and music, played sports in the garden (the old Jewish cemetery next to which the home was situated), and took walks around the neighborhood. Seegasse 9 also hosted holiday parties and games for children.\textsuperscript{139}

Religious observances took place for young and old residents alike and included Purim and Chanukah parties, Passover Seders, and services for the High Holidays. A 1948 Chanukah party included song and dance performances and plays put on by the children of the kindergarten, each of whom also received a gift.\textsuperscript{140} The Swedish Mission across the street provided Easter eggs and Christmas trees for the few non-Jewish residents. US Army reports to the DP Section reveal that USFA personnel were involved in both oversight of and participation in such activities. They also placed a priority on ensuring that higher-ranking officers were aware of such events.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{137} Report by Lazarowitsch, 2.
\textsuperscript{138} AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, B13, folder “Max Hirschmann,” IKG Archive.
\textsuperscript{139} AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, B13, folder “Rapporte: Joint, IKG,” IKG Archive.
\textsuperscript{141} Mentioned on various reports from 1948 and 1949, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, B13, folder “Rapport Woche,” IKG Archive. Amusing to today’s reader, American soldiers’ accounts tell of residents celebrating Passover, “the Jewish Easter,” and Chanukah, “the Jewish Christmas.”
The USFA and the IKG tried to accommodate residents’ social and cultural needs in addition to religious observances. Visiting guests and celebrities performed concerts to entertain residents. An administrative report of activities in the home specified that Peter Herz and a cast of London actors and singers delivered a “great music hall performance” for a number of important guests (presumably representatives from the US Army) in attendance on June 28, 1949.\textsuperscript{142} On April 12, 1946, residents also showed their gratitude to their American benefactors with an observance of the first anniversary of the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt at an event that included a formal gathering with guest speakers.\textsuperscript{143}

The USFA oversaw operations of the facility until 1948. The IKG regained official ownership and control of the building at Seegasse 9 in 1947,\textsuperscript{144} and by March 1, 1948, the home was completely self-administered and covered its costs with revenues generated from the residents and from the surplus of the Seegasse 11 refugee kitchen.\textsuperscript{145} In addition to its initial and stated purpose as a home for those who were returning from concentration camps, Seegasse 9 opened its doors in later years to include other DPs and refugees, mostly Jews. The home received, for example, a number of Jewish refugees returning in 1949 after many years in exile in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{146} The IKG took complete control of the house in 1950 with funding from the city of Vienna, and it returned to its previous role as a Jewish nursing home. Seegasse 9 also retained its Rückkehrerheim function in part until the end of 1953, and former concentration camp prisoners resided there until the mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{147} The IKG finally sold the building to the city of Vienna in 1978, ending the

\textsuperscript{142}. Report on Seegasse 9 to Mr. Healy, July 1, 1949, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, B13, folder “Rapport,” IKG Archive.

\textsuperscript{143}. Various photos, captioned and dated April 12, 1946, Lazarowitsch briefcase (not cataloged), IKG Archive.

\textsuperscript{144}. 1.3.2.119.A.41—VEA—Vermögensentzug-Anmeldungsverordnung, 1947, 9. Bez., C 3, Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, MA 8, Vienna, Austria.

\textsuperscript{145}. Lazarowitsch to the IKG Amtsdirektion, August 21, 1948.

\textsuperscript{146}. Report on Seegasse 9 to Mr. Healy, April 7, 1949, AD, Rückkehrerheime, Seegasse 9, 1949, B13, folder “Rapport,” IKG Archive.

centuries-long Jewish ownership of the property (except for the few years between 1942 and 1945), and opened a new community-run nursing home in another part of the city.

After years of torture, deprivation, and starvation, many concentration camp survivors thought only of returning to their familial homes. Austrian Jews made their way back to Vienna independently or with assistance from their liberators. Few found the people they had so long yearned to see. As they sought to establish a toehold in what they fondly thought of as their hometown, they found that neither the Austrian public nor the government welcomed them. In their partially destroyed city, returnees confronted the loss of their family and community members, as well as their homes and businesses. As Austrian national consciousness formed around the ”victim myth,” returning camp survivors turned to the IKG and international Jewish organizations for assistance as they struggled to reestablish lives.

A desire to return to one’s familial home motivated camp survivors to go back to Vienna, but in the face of the many obstacles and disappointments, some felt that no sense of “home” remained. When Gertrude Chandler was liberated from a concentration camp in Poland, she thought only of going back to Vienna. Once returned, however, she learned that none of her family members had survived. She recovered from tuberculosis contracted in the camp but was unable to bear the emotional pain and the hostile atmosphere she felt surrounding her. Chandler emigrated to Palestine in 1947.148

Still, many did stay. Camp survivor Susanne Lamberg was among them. The Nazis had deported her and her parents to Terezín on October 1, 1942.149 She survived Terezín, Auschwitz, a death march, and Bergen Belsen.150 Of her decision to return, Lamberg said, “In 1945, I was 20 and at

149. 43. Transport vom 1.10.1942 nach Theresienstadt, 1.2.1.1/11204058/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
150. Nominal Roll of German Nationals, May 10, 1945, 1.1.3.1/3395393/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
the end. I was deathly ill, weighed 35 kilograms. I had lost my family. I had seen more dead bodies than anyone. But I wanted to live. And to go home. Austria and Vienna were my home. Despite it all. And because I had no other home. So I came back. And I stayed.”