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
EMERGING IDENTITIES AND ENDURING CHALLENGES

In the second week of February 1947, Franziska Tausig, the mother of Otto and mother-in-law of Hansi Tausig (who appears in chapter 4), sat on a train with 760 other Austrian Jews waiting to disembark in Vienna. They had survived the war in exile in Shanghai and were at the end of a two-month journey that had involved seven weeks of travel by sea from Shanghai to Naples and then another week by train to Vienna.1 Franziska’s husband had died in Shanghai from tuberculosis,2 and so she traveled alone, eagerly anticipating her reunion with her son and her first meeting with his young wife. Although the train had arrived in the station, it took another half a day before it finally pulled up to the platform. Franziska recalled,

The train had to wait an eternity to gain entry to the platform. It was cold and wet weather and we shivered miserably . . . sitting still in the same spot. They asked for our vaccination certificates. Then a doctor came to see if there were any sick people in the wagons. Finally we were given a piece of paper

2. Franziska Tausig, CM/1 file, 3.2.1.3/80854722/ITS Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington, DC.
with an address of a hotel or a camp. And then in the biting cold came a man, bare-headed, with a white beard. We had no idea who this man was, who patiently climbed into each cattle car. Finally someone said, “That is our General Körner, the mayor of Vienna.” He thanked us, that we in this time of distress and need, when every single person was needed to rebuild the city, that we were among the first to return. He said this so easily and naturally, that we enjoyed every word like a friendly welcome gift. As Mayor Körner reached the last car, the passengers in previous cars had already created a makeshift kitchen and made a goulash. I was already completely bereft of hope when a young man approached me and said, “Excuse me, Ma’am, but are you perhaps my mother?” This, my son’s question, is the endpoint of my emigration and the beginning of a new phase of life at home [in der Heimat].³

Indeed, as Franziska Tausig recalled, Mayor Theodor Körner, along with a number of other governmental representatives, members of the Jewish Community Council, and representatives of the Joint and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) greeted the train (see the photograph on the cover of this book).⁴ Despite what seemed a big and formal welcome, they were met with a chaotic scene. The few cars and trucks on the road navigated snowy, winter streets with difficulty, but in any case, no transportation had been arranged for them or for their luggage. The IKG had organized accommodations for the new arrivals, but many did not reach their beds until late in the evening.⁵ Still, three days later, the Joint reported that all had settled down comfortably and had received Austrian ration cards, which the Joint was supplementing from its stocks.⁶

---

⁴. “765 Jewish Refugees from Shanghai Return to Austria: Second Group to Arrive This Year,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 14, 1947.
These returning Jewish refugees were members of a larger group of German and Austrian Jews who had fled the Nazis to China when Shanghai emerged as an unlikely last resort. Neither visa nor medical exam had been required to travel there; one simply needed to pay the consul a fee of three dollars.\(^7\) The Chinese consul general in Vienna, He Fengshan, issued visas to Austrian Jews seeking escape, as did many of his fellow consular officers across Europe.\(^8\) After the November Pogrom (November 9–10, 1938), as many as two thousand German and Austrian Jews used such visas to obtain official release from Nazi concentration camps, exit visas from Greater Germany, and transit visas to third countries; indeed, most had gone to these third countries by the time war broke out in September 1939.\(^9\) Many others, though, had managed to make their way to Shanghai to join a Jewish community that was at the time composed of some one thousand Sephardic Jewish families that had migrated there from Iraq in the nineteenth century, as well as a few thousand Ashkenazi Jews who had fled the Russian Revolu­tion of 1917.\(^10\)

The first Austrian Jews arrived in Shanghai in August 1938.\(^11\) UNRRA documentation reveals that, of the 16,300 European Jews who finally found refuge there, 4,298 were Austrians.\(^12\) Of those remaining at the end of

---


\(^8\) Historian Gao Bei persuasively challenges the long-held belief that He Fengshan issued such visas in defiance of Chinese foreign policy. She has shown rather that he and his colleagues explicitly followed the Chinese Foreign Ministry's instruction, and that policy included issuing visas to European Jews. See Gao Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50–55. Still, Yad Vashem, Israel's museum and memorial to the Holocaust, honored Ho Feng Shan with the title of Righteous Among the Nations for his humanitarian work assisting Viennese Jews by providing Chinese visas to enable their escape from Austria. For more information about Ho Feng Shan, see Yad Vashem, "Chinese Visas in Vienna: Feng-Shan Ho," Righteous Among the Nations, accessed May 15, 2015, http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/ho.asp.

\(^9\) Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 411n44.


\(^12\) Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 318.
March 1946, the Joint office in Vienna, however, warned that the situation in the capital was untenable for Jews and cabled the New York main office (March 27) with the message, “Situation here totally negative,” and requested an official order be given to Joint colleagues in Shanghai to do everything possible to discourage repatriation. Further correspondence indicates disagreement between the Joint’s New York City office and its branches in Paris and Vienna, and finally Arthur Greenleigh (of the Paris office) wrote to Moses Leavitt in New York:

I cannot stress too much the terrible destitution, poverty, struggle and Anti-Semitism which now pervades Austria. In regard to the continued residence of Jews in Austria, I should like to refer for your consideration a statement made by the representative of the Church before the Anglo-American Committee, which is as follows: “Ich hasse nicht die Juden. Ich hasse das Judentum und das Judengeist.” [“I do not hate the Jews. I hate Judaism and the Jewish spirit.”] This statement of attitude from one of the chief representatives of the Church in Austria—Austria being a country in which the Church is one of the most dominant, if not the most dominant power—is of added significance in reflecting the atmosphere into which these people would be coming. I do not think it a function of the JDC to encourage people to return to Anti-Semitism.

13. Report of the Committee of the Council for the Far East, May 28, 1946, cited in Buxbaum, *Transit Shanghai*, 180. The cited report stated that some 16,000 refugees were in China at the time and that 4,298 of them were Austrian Jews.
Refugees in Shanghai realized that a Communist takeover was imminent and that Mao Zedong’s troops would soon follow, and many decided to go home or to emigrate further.¹⁸ The first group of a reported 34 Jewish repatriates from Shanghai arrived in Vienna on January 26, 1947, and found lodging with relatives or in housing provided by the Joint.¹⁹ A couple of weeks later, on February 13, 1947, Franziska Tausig’s train reached the city carrying some 760 more.²⁰

Not everyone welcomed the Shanghai refugees’ homecoming. A few days after Tausig and her fellow reémigrés arrived, the Jewish Community Council received an anonymous protest letter reiterating sentiments heard before with other waves of returnees. “Why must the Jews come back to Vienna to take our apartments?” the writer asked. “Far too few Jews were killed in the gas chambers, but we will complete the job.”²¹ Nonetheless, and despite the Joint’s own official discouragement of repatriation, as of mid-February 1947, the Joint expected and was making plans to provide assistance to more returnees from Shanghai, Russia, and Palestine.²²

In addition to the first two transports from Shanghai, another 1,300 men, women, and children still in China held Austrian visas.²³ Of the 796 Jewish repatriates from Shanghai in Vienna by May 25, 1947, 70 percent (560) were over the age of forty-five,²⁴ reflecting more mature survivors’ desire to live in a familiar place and refusal to start over again in yet another foreign country. Many did not see a future anywhere else, especially those who sought to regain careers or employment. By 1950, 20 percent

---

¹⁸. Buxbaum, Transit Shanghai, 179.
¹⁹. “765 Jewish Refugees from Shanghai Return to Austria.”
²⁴. List of repatriates from Shanghai in Vienna, May 25, 1947, 3.1.1.3/78805361/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
(about 850 of 4,298) of the Austrian Jews who had survived the war in Shanghai had returned.\(^{25}\)

Austrian Jewish survivors from Shanghai did not arrive back in Vienna as early as other reémigrés who were motivated by personal reasons, but they too came seeking to regain their familial homes. Their movement and motivations serve as an illustration that, although distinct groups of returnees can be identified by their similar wartime experiences and in a rough chronology, such “waves” prove not so precisely divided. Motivations did not always fall into one tidy category of familial, political, and professional home, but rather intentions overlapped and timelines stretched. One family might have held more than one concept of “home,” such as a couple of which the man sought to regain his professional home and his wife felt compelled to follow for reasons of familial home. And indeed, like the returnees from Shanghai, some exiles came back for reasons of family and did so a bit later in the postwar period.

Unlike so many others who took refuge in foreign countries, refugees who had survived the war in Shanghai had not found a sense of “home” there, nor a promise of one. Most elected not to stay, and many emigrated further to other countries. By the time Austrian Jews arrived in Vienna, they knew well that the Nazis had murdered many of their relatives and friends and had devastated their community. Nevertheless, they returned to the last place that they had been together with their families, their last home. And some, like Frau Tausig, did reunite with kin and found at least a part of the familial home that they sought. But even those who discovered that no one awaited them stayed and reclaimed at least the sentimental connection that contributed to their feeling of “home.” Many simply failed to conceive of another place in which they might professionally or socially begin again due to challenges of age, language, or immigration restrictions.

Some 800 Shanghai reémigrés joined about 1,200 other Austrian Jews back in Vienna after living in exile abroad (around 700 from England, mostly *Kindertransport* survivors; 200 from Palestine; and 350 from Karaganda in the Soviet Union), as well as the camp survivors who returned and those who had endured the war in the capital city. All had same ambition of rerooting in their hometown. After they had reconnected with surviving family members (if any), found a place to stay, and secured basic living necessities, and once they had cleared the immediate hurdles, the reestablishment of lives and livelihoods converged, and returnees’ differing motivations and rationales mattered less. Their decisions made, for whatever reasons or combination thereof, they had arrived and formed a new, larger group of Austrian Jewish survivors in Vienna. They faced the same issues, despite the differing motivations or rationales that brought them there.

A poll conducted by the US occupation forces in 1947–48 revealed that 44 percent of Vienna’s population agreed that “the Nazis exaggerated in their way of treating the Jews, but something had to happen in order to show them where they really belong.” This attitude shaped Austrian views on compensation and restitution, and throughout the unfolding post-Nazi years, heated debates surrounding these bitterly contested topics proved problematic and frustrating for Jews. Very few received prewar property and businesses that the Nazis and their supporters had stolen or otherwise obtained in dubious ways. And all of this took place in the context of a new and strengthening postwar Austrian national “first victim” identity and contributed to political action—and, often, inaction—that affected legislation and what semblance of denazification that took place. All bore down on returning Jews as they learned and relearned to navigate life in their hometown and as their Viennese Jewish identity both continued and was shaped anew in the postwar period.

Emerging Identities and Enduring Challenges

VICTIMS: MYTH AND REALITY

Immediately after the Red Army’s conquest of Vienna, Austrian politicians rushed to assume roles in forming a new government and shaping a new postwar national identity. They did so with a determination to distance their country from Germany and what they claimed had been specifically German war crimes. As we have seen, they cunningly grabbed hold of and clung to the official language of the Allied powers’ Moscow Declaration that served to solidify the myth of the country as the Nazis’ “first victim,” a guiding theme of both foreign and domestic Austrian policy that endured for decades. It was to this atmosphere that survivors returned. From the top levels of government to the people on the street, Austria and Austrians were victims.

“First Victim”

On April 27, 1945, Karl Renner, the leader of the provisional Austrian government under the Soviets, proclaimed the country’s independence and autonomy. This statement nullified the Anschluss and included a list of Nazi Germany’s violations of Austria, including a military occupation imposed on helpless and unwilling citizens, the degradation of Vienna to provincial city, and the plunder of the country’s cultural and natural resources. This description of national pain and suffering did not, however, include the loss of some two hundred thousand Austrian Jews forcibly expelled or deported to their deaths. On November 25, 1945, the conservative Austrian People’s Party won the first free national election, with the Socialist Party a close second. Under Chancellor Leopold Figl, the two parties established a coalition government that proved an enduring partnership for more than twenty years. The Nazis had persecuted Figl and most members of his cabinet—Figl himself suffered a total of more than five years in the Dachau and Mauthausen concentration camps—and with this the government presented itself with a strong “anti-fascist record,” which emphasized the

desired anti-German “first victim” identity for an international audience. Leaders sought to highlight Austrian innocence to underscore Germany’s sole responsibility for Nazi crimes and thus for reparations.

The “anti-fascist” characterization of government and leaders certainly did not mean freedom from antisemitism, nor did it permit perspective on or acknowledgment of the unique nature of the Nazi persecution of Jews. The Jewish community was disappointed that no Jews had gained official positions in the new government, despite the inclusion of three in Renner’s provisional administration. As previously mentioned, the electoral success of well-known antisemitic politicians like Leopold Kunschak and Julius Raab compounded Jews’ distress and aroused fear that Austrian Jews still living abroad would choose not to repatriate. In February 1947, Chancellor Figl assured Josef Silber of the Joint that there would be no “Jewish problem” under his government; Jews would be treated as Austrian nationals with all the rights and privileges of citizenship. Silber appeared to have been reassured by Figl’s statement but also seemed to have read between the lines, as he went on to emphasize to his superiors that the Joint must maintain its operations in Vienna, even after Jewish displaced persons (DPs) emigrated onward, to help the remaining Austrian Jews rehabilitate. Silber surely was aware that Figl was the same man who as chancellor in 1946 had publicly criticized exiles (so many of whom were Jews) for whom he thought “it certainly had been more comfortable … to sit safely in their club-chairs than to suffer for Austria.” Just one month before Figl’s statement, Karl Renner, who had assumed the role of federal president in the first government of the Second Republic, told a Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)

---

reporter that as the Nazis had also stripped non-Jews of their possessions and had confined them to concentration camps, any special legislation for the restitution of confiscated property to Jews would be “un-democratic and [would] create new anti-Semitism.” The style and content of the language employed by both Figl and Renner represented the governmental attitude and indeed its policy and functioned to conceal antisemitism behind a rhetoric of democracy. It also reflected the political savvy of leaders who strove to satisfy their electorate; an appropriate and fair response to calls for reparations and restitution would have been economically crippling on a national and provincial level, as well as for those businesses and the individuals who had benefited from Nazi policies of “Aryanization” and forced and slave labor.

In addition, the reintegration of former Nazi Party members became a priority concern, and political parties came together in uncommon accord, all seeking the electoral support of former Nazis. The leading parties adopted a policy of silence about the past that both mirrored and strengthened the same in the lives of individuals, families, communities, and larger society. This significant portion of the parties’ constituency propelled what would evolve into a central theme in Austrian domestic postwar politics. Government leaders worked diligently on an international level to distance the country and its citizens from Nazi crimes, all the while working internally to restore former Nazis’ professional and social statuses.

Allied policy and the practice of denazification during the occupation of Austria created the possibility to sidestep the actual and effective adjudication of former Nazis. The provisional government under the Allies was responsible for carrying out such processes but mainly exculpated former Nazis, who regained their professional positions and even collected compensation for material losses sustained after the war. That is, former Nazis

33. “Renner Says Special Restitution Laws for Jews Would Be ‘Undemocratic,’” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 31, 1947. In the same statement, Renner went on to claim that no one could accuse him of being antisemitic because his son-in-law was Jewish.

received compensation from the Austrian government for sanctions and penalties placed on them by the Allies. Newly restructured political parties assumed the position that few Austrians had been truly committed and resolute Nazi Party members, and Renner himself provided the explanation that most had only given in to financial and social pressures.\textsuperscript{35}

Other politicians gave confusing and conflicting messages about their impressions of Viennese society and the situation for returning Jews. Vienna’s Socialist mayor Theodor Körner, who greeted Franziska Tausig and 760 other Jews returning to Vienna in February 1947, wrote in a 1947 Wiener Zeitung article that press reports of antisemitism in Vienna consisted of deliberate lies: “The Viennese [person] is a cosmopolitan and thus from the start not anti-Semitic. Anti-Jewish tendencies are now still alien to them.”\textsuperscript{36} Not long after, however, Socialist interior minister Oskar Helmer warned of the danger of “Jewish dissemination.”\textsuperscript{37} Austrian leaders also opposed benefits and budget lines for the Jewish community. As previously mentioned, agriculture minister Josef Kraus argued against a proposed advance of funds to the IKG from a pool of heirless Jewish assets stolen by the Nazis, as he thought it gave one group preferential treatment. Helmer concurred; it could only add to “a perpetuation of distinctions,” he said, with which they wanted nothing to do.\textsuperscript{38}

The presence of Jewish DPs from other parts of Europe and a national responsibility for their welfare added to politicians’ irritation. They might reluctantly recognize Austrian Jews as citizens and promise to uphold their associated rights, but the some one hundred thousand eastern European


\textsuperscript{36.} Reinprecht, “Jewish Identity in Postwar Austria,” 206.

\textsuperscript{37.} Robert Knight, “Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen”: Wortprotokolle der österreichischen Bundesregierung von 1945–52 über die Entschädigung der Juden (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1988), 197.

Jews migrating through or temporarily residing in the country posed another problem to a government set on distancing itself from responsibility for Nazi crimes. More socially acceptable and enduring prejudices against Jews from the east allowed Socialist president Karl Renner to remark, “I do not think that Austria in its current state should allow the establishment of a new Jewish community from Eastern Europe while our own people need jobs.”39 It may have been possible to find a way to see Austrian Jews’ place in the newly forming Second Republic, even if only to appease the Allies, but eastern European Jews were another story. Plus, from their point of view as Austrian politicians, they were victims of the Germans.

Renner and his provisional government worked assiduously to frame the Germans as the sole responsible perpetrators of Nazi crimes during World War II and the Holocaust in order to shirk responsibility for compensation and reparations payments. Austrian leaders took advantage of Cold War tensions to pit the Western powers against the Soviets for financial benefit and to secure acceptance by all four Allied occupiers of the narrative of the country as the Nazis’ first victim. They characterized the end of the Nazi regime in Austria as “liberation” by the Soviet Army and Austrian resistance fighters.40 The logic of evolving postwar national identity involved the acceptance that the Anschluss had been a forced military invasion and occupation, after which there was no “Austria” but rather the Ostmark, a province of Nazi Germany. Residents had had no choice about joining Greater Germany, and thus they and their reconstructed postwar nation bore no burden and responsibility for Nazi crimes or for restitution claims.41 Further, they asserted, the German military occupiers had forced the country and its citizens into war that “no Austrian ever wanted.”42 Therefore, they were all victims, from returning soldier to bystander to “minor” Nazi Party members.

41. Knight, “Ich bin dafür,” 105.
Excluding Jews

Cloaked in a bombast of democracy and democratic values, the post-war government officially refused to differentiate between any subgroup of victims. In doing so, the cultural and political atmosphere steeped in antisemitism fostered the alienation of the most vulnerable and oppressed victims—Jews. The Renner government appointed Fürsorgekommissionen (welfare commissions) in May 1945 and tasked them with providing relief for Austrian war victims and concentration camp survivors who had returned.43 The passage of the Opferfürsorgegesetz (Victims’ Welfare Act) followed on July 17, 1945, and provided victims’ pensions, assistance finding housing and work (through issued Opferausweise, victim identification papers),44 food, and clothing to “victims of fascism.” It also clearly defined “victims” as concentration camp survivors who had been persecuted on political grounds and resistance fighters; excluded were those who had been oppressed on the basis of race, religion, and nationality. The KZ-Verband (concentration camp survivor association), established in 1945, also initially omitted Jews from its membership, as well as Roma and Sinti and homosexuals. It also did not admit those who had been punished for helping slave laborers,45 which reveals more about the Austrian understanding of “resistance” that developed in the context of the postwar victim mentality. These people had not defended their victim homeland with “gun in hand,” as those who were deemed active resisters had done. Rather, they had tried to help individual victims persecuted within Austrian borders (by Austrians!) and had been caught and were penalized with a similar persecution. Such resistance did not count. The group finally took on a representative from the Viennese Jewish community in 1946 and began

to provide *Opferausweise* to Jews, thus making victims’ benefits available to them.46

A new version of the Victims’ Welfare Law in 1947 defined two groups of victims. The first consisted of Austrian resistance fighters who, because they had taken “gun in hand,” held official certification of victim status as having been active resisters between March 6, 1933, and May 9, 1945.47 All were entitled to immediate financial support and later to a pension as victims of either the Nazis or the preceding Austrofascist regime. This pension was later reduced to the level of *Kriegsopferrenten* (war victim’s pension). Those who were entitled also received health-care coverage, and surviving family members had the right to claim benefits in the name of dead resistance fighters. The second group of victims defined by the law comprised those who were persecuted on grounds of race, religion, or nationality in the same time period.48 They became eligible for victim identification papers but had no claim to a pension. Both groups were to receive help in the form of money to rebuild their lives and a modest annual tax credit.49 Victims of either category also had to hold Austrian citizenship.

Victims’ welfare legislation was strategically worded and included loopholes and complicated language that excluded Jews and some other particularly defenseless victim groups. Roma and Sinti victims of the Nazis received no compensation until a 1988 amendment to the law included them,50 and only in 2005 did a further adjustment finally include homosexual and so-called asocial victims, as well as those who had been sterilized

47. Bundesgesetz vom 4. Juli 1947 über die Fürsorge für die Opfer des Kampfes um ein freies, demokratisches Österreich und die Opfer politischer Verfolgung (Opferfürsorgegesetz), *BGBl.* Nr. 183/1947, *Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich*, September 1, 1947, 821. The law specifies that this group “actively took weapons in hand” for the fight to free Austria.
48. Ibid., 821.
49. Bailer et al., *Erzählte Geschichte*, 672.
and the subjects of other medical experiments. The practical reality of these policies meant that, between veterans’ benefits paid to former Wehrmacht soldiers and the recognition of political “resistance fighters,” everyone in Austria was receiving governmental support except some of the most powerless yet most victimized groups under the Nazis.

Jews received no significant monetary support or tax relief until 1949. To obtain that, they had to be Austrian citizens at the time of application; but the Nazi regime had stripped Jews of their nationality, and the post-war government had not automatically restored it. In fact, the government required that one be a permanent resident of the country to apply to regain citizenship, and therefore one had to reside in Austria to claim assistance as a victim. This clearly excluded the majority of Austrian Jews—more than one hundred thousand—who had fled the Nazis to other countries, stayed abroad, and never planned to return. It also excluded camp survivors who chose not to go back after the war to make a home in Austria. The Austrian government finally granted Austrian Jews who retained their adopted citizenship the possibility to apply for compensation under the Opferfürsorgegesetz in 1953, but only after Allied intervention and that of the United States and Great Britain in particular. The minuscule number of Jews who did receive the status of “freedom fighters” got that designation only because they were validated as Austrians persecuted for political reasons, such as the later chancellor (1970–83) Bruno Kreisky.

Austrian Jews could be victims as Austrians but not as Jews. Government leaders were specific that any relief they received was not a form of compensation. To add insult to betrayal, the government assumed the responsibility to compensate former Nazi Party members for losses they incurred through the Allies’ anti-Nazi sanctions. By the government’s logic, Austrians

53. Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 673.
had been victimized by both a German prewar and wartime occupation and a postwar Allied one. Appealing to this much-larger group of “victims” proved politically advantageous as political parties reestablished themselves. Gaining votes from the tiny remaining Jewish community would have advanced political goals and agendas very little or not at all.

In addition to not providing aid to returning and remaining Austrian Jews, politicians also castigated them for having abandoned their country during crisis. This sentiment started from the top levels of government and society and seeped into the mentality of individual gentiles. Political leaders accused exiles of having enjoyed comfort and safety abroad while Austrian soldiers were forced to fight and die in the Wehrmacht, and others echoed a sentiment of additional blame placed on world Jewry for not coming to Austria’s rescue at the time of the Anschluss.54

Under Allied Occupation

The Austrian government’s pursuit of a postwar national identity continued in the context of the country’s physical reconstruction and its challenges. A “double speak,” as historian Heidemarie Uhl dubbed this discourse, endured as leaders portrayed their nation as a victim of the Nazis to an international audience, while at home they celebrated heroic Wehrmacht soldiers who sacrificed for their “fatherland.”55 All this played out under the quadripartite Allied occupation. As the 1940s came to an end, a new Austrian national identity solidified, including the crucial components of the country’s neutrality and its status as the first victim of the Nazis. As tensions escalated among the Allies (especially between the United States and the Soviet Union), no one cared about pursuing Austrian responsibility as a perpetrator country. Any façade of denazification dropped, and Western Allies’ leaders were satisfied so long as little Austria remained in the “West.”

The original occupation agreement for Austria called for “total control,” but on June 28, 1946, the Allies relaxed that condition with a second agreement that loosened the Allied Council’s direct oversight of the Austrian government. Only a unanimous negative veto from all four powers could stop legislation, and this rarely occurred. With Cold War tensions on the rise, the Soviets frequently opposed lawmaking and decrees that the Western powers had approved. By the spring of 1946, the Soviets had taken advantage of their zone of occupation and, through the auspices of the USIA (Administration for Soviet Property in Austria) holding company, seized “German assets,” broadly defined. As permitted by the Western Allies, the Soviet Union pursued reparations owed to them through profits gained in plundering property and exploiting the geographic areas of their control. It has been estimated that Austria paid more than $1 billion through such reparations claimed by the USIA.56 Both the Western Allies’ tolerance of this form of compensation and the Soviets’ assumption of it reveal a tacit lack of acceptance of the victim myth, or at least a less codified mode of forcing Austria to assume some responsibility for its role in World War II. A second, lesser-known passage of the Moscow Declaration had stated that Austria had responsibility for having allied itself with Nazi Germany and that this would be considered, as well as Austria’s contribution “to her liberation,” in a final postwar settlement. Leaders effectively buried this piece, and by the time of the 1955 Staatsvertrag (Austrian State Treaty), the preamble of which was largely based on the Moscow Declaration, Figl convinced the Allies to drop it from the text altogether.57

All Viennese, gentiles and Jews, found ways to conceal or not reveal intentions, plans, and even their pasts in order to live more easily and uneventfully under Allied occupation and among neighbors, colleagues, and even friends who had conflicting or oppositional wartime experiences. As Jewish returnees reestablished themselves, however, components of this concealment posed a particular set of obstacles in both the social and professional

realms. US military authorities in particular tried to help the struggling Jewish community, as we shall see, but as Cold War tensions mounted toward the end of the 1940s, they paid less attention to reparations and the restitution of property. Individuals turned for assistance to the IKG and to foreign Jewish organizations to help with the difficulties, hurdles, and outright obstacles in these processes.

RESTITUTION OF “ARYANIZED” PROPERTY

Issues surrounding the restitution—or not—of property stolen, both outright and that “Aryanized” under Nazi policy, endures to this day as an ongoing legacy of the persecution of Jews in Austria. Only a rare few claims on such property were recognized, and many returnees gave up without filing one. According to Christoph Reinprecht’s sociological survey of Austrian Jews who returned to Austria, 60 percent of his interviewees never even tried to go back to former apartments that theoretically they could have claimed as lost property. Of those who could prove their legal claim to capital or land, just two-thirds received restitution compensation, and even then, it amounted to a small proportion of the property’s original value.58

For survivors returning to Vienna in 1945, securing shelter was a priority, and thus the recovery of homes stood as an immediate concern. The first to try to reclaim their families’ residences were those who had endured the Nazis and the war in the city (see chapter 2) and concentration camp survivors who arrived back in the first months after their liberation (see chapter 3). Some found it startlingly easy to secure new apartments among those standing empty after Nazi residents had abandoned them as they fled the approaching Soviet Army. The Red Army and the Austrian provisional government also assigned to returnees the dwellings vacated by Nazis. Others found their original apartments empty or took over abandoned dwellings in the same or nearby apartment houses, circumstances that occurred more often in the chaos and confusion of immediate postwar Vienna and before

laws about reparations and restitution went into effect. On May 8, 1945, for example, Elisabeth Welt Trahan and her father found their family’s apartment occupied, but they were able simply to move into another one a floor below. As mentioned in chapter 2, there Elisabeth found evidence of the previous tenants’ political leanings, including a copy of Mein Kampf.60 Once the government established a Wohnungsamt (housing office) to serve all people without shelter, homeless Jews became dependent on municipal bureaucrats for housing and encountered the official and unofficial discrimination inherent in postwar Vienna. Many concentration camp survivors reported that they met an attitude of incredulity from civil servants who claimed not to believe their stories of the camps and the details of their persecution. If it all had really been so bad, they reasoned—and let the survivors know—they would not have been able to survive to return at all.61

The month of May 1945 saw the establishment of the Bundesministeriums für Vermögenssicherung und Wirtschaftsplanung (Federal Ministry of Property Protection and Economic Planning).62 And on May 10, 1945, just two days after the war’s official end, the fifth Kabinettssitzung: “Arisierter” Vermögen (Cabinet Council Meeting on “Aryanized” Assets) took place.63 From this meeting came the 1945 Anmeldegesetz (Registration Act), which mandated a June 1945 deadline for property holders to register assets acquired through “Aryanization” or otherwise taken by the Nazi regime after the Anschluss.64 This was to include both owners who had

59. In 1946, Elisabeth Welt and her father were registered as living at Strudlhofgasse 12/14 in Vienna’s ninth district. See Liste der in Wien lebenden Glaubensjuden, 1946, 3.1.1.3/78805460/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
63. Knight, “Ich bin dafür,” 82.
64. 10. Gesetz über die Erfassung arisierter und anderer im Zusammenhange mit der nationalsozialistische Machtübernahme entzogenen Vermögenschaften vom 10 Mai 1945, BGBl. Nr. 10/1945, Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich, May 28, 1945, 3. Stück, 16.
been the direct expropriators under “Aryanization” laws and subsequent owners of such property. Registration was incomplete, and the language of the decree had included nothing specific about the return of property. To top it off, as mentioned previously, this cabinet meeting concentrated on the return of SPÖ property and that of associated groups that had lost assets under the Austrofascist dictatorship in the mid-1930s. And it was during this gathering that Renner made his shameful and insensitive—to say the least—statement on the impossibility of compensating every “small Jewish merchant or peddler for his loss.” Renner knew that this statement represented the SPÖ’s broad base, estimated to have been 47 percent of the Austrian population at the time, and included many “owners” of Jews’ former property who had no interest in giving it back. Jews constituted less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the postwar population and made little impact on the views and actions of the leadership.

On VE Day, May 8, 1945, the provisional government had passed a Verbotsgesetz, a constitutional law banning the Nazi Party and its affiliate army and organizations and making recidivism illegal. With this legislation, all Nazi-held property officially changed to Austrian ownership. A little over one month later, on June 26, 1945, the Kriegsverbrechergesetz, a constitutional law on war crimes and other National Socialist misdeeds, outlined that the punishment for conviction for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and international law would be the confiscation of all assets. However, neither piece of legislation meant much until the Western occupation powers recognized the provisional government at the end of October 1945, and the Allied Council did not begin to approve the laws until early November of that year.

By August 1945, the Austrian provisional government took responsibility for the assignment of property, and with that shift, tensions and difficulties increased. The central office created to deal with housing concerns overturned initial decisions that had been made under Soviet supervision

65. Knight, “Ich bin dafür,” 83.
67. Ibid.
and declared them “not yet legal,” thereby benefiting “Aryanizers” holding Jews’ possessions. Some sixty thousand apartments in Vienna had been “Aryanized,” and those who were in custody of Jews’ former homes and businesses feared losing them to the rightful owners. In addition, the Soviets had named former Jewish owners as “temporary administrators” of their old businesses, but the Renner government reinstated “Aryanizers” into management positions. Jewish businesspeople lost or rightfully feared losing their enterprises once again. In fact, IKG president David Brill asserted that the government specifically prevented former Jewish owners from remaining or serving in such positions, claiming that “public administrators” had been installed to protect “Aryanizers.” In a September 7, 1947, interview with a JTA reporter, Brill related the story of a cardboard-factory owner who returned from exile in Shanghai. The “Austrian collaborationist” in possession of the facility refused him entry to his own plant and retained the enterprise worth some $100,000. And among the Jewish administrators appointed by the Soviets to head businesses formerly owned by Jews was Franz Fuerth, who in the postwar ran a carpet factory. The new Austrian government dismissed him and replaced him with a man who had been imprisoned for three months as a Nazi war criminal. These abuses were only a few among many, Brill maintained.

The chaos of postwar housing assignments coupled with anti-Jewish discrimination combined for bizarre outcomes. Frieda Fraenkel and her husband arrived in Vienna in 1950 after years of exile and internment in Italy and attempted to regain their old apartment. They were unsuccessful in that effort, but the former Nazi living in their home was forced to give them back their furniture. On the other hand, Gertrude Putschin’s family had

68. Embacher, “Unwelcome in Austria,” 198.
70. “President of Vienna Jewish Community Charges Gov’t Sabotaging Restitution Law,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 8, 1947.
71. Frieda Fraenkel interview, 412, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna, Austria. Frau Fraenkel had not wanted to return to Vienna after the war and would have preferred to remain in Italy. Her only complaint about the Italians was their lack of
to return furniture and home goods that they had received “on loan,” as the Nazi who had abandoned them came back and took advantage of his legal right to demand them.\(^2\) In cases where officials assigned dispossessed Jews to vacant apartments in which Nazis had lived—many of them “Aryanized” or otherwise stolen from Jewish families—they required that the Jews agree to relinquish the property to the “rightful” owners if they returned. And as we have seen with Kurt Fräser, the protection and advantage of having served in an Allied military only helped while one still wore the uniform. Fräser’s hopes of regaining his family home were dashed with his discharge (see chapter 5). Antisemitic discrimination encountered during the housing-application process prompted a 1946 agreement between the IKG and the city of Vienna to work together to provide IKG members with dwellings that had been abandoned by Nazis who had left or fled the city.\(^3\) Overall, however, the Austrian courts restored many homes to Nazis. In 1946, some 8,400 victims occupied Nazis’ former dwellings; in 1950, only 730 still lived in them.\(^4\)

Although the Allies’ policy proved permissive and lax with regard to denazification, they did try to assist Jews with regaining their property. Soon after occupying the city, the Allies began to enforce the return of IKG medical facilities, for example. At war’s end, the Ältestenrat controlled and ran one Jewish hospital in Vienna; by October 1945, it operated five homes for concentration camp survivors who required housing, medical services, and food.\(^5\) In November of the same year, leaders of punctuality. Her husband had insisted they go back to their hometown for his professional reasons and, in making his case, appealed to her intolerance of Italians’ lateness. He told her, “Wir können mit den Italienern nicht Schritt halten, die sind so unpünktlich, sind wunderbar, aber geschäftlich kann ich nicht mit ihnen arbeiten” (“We can’t work with the Italian pace. They are so unpunctual. They are wonderful [people], but I can’t work with them professionally.”).

\(^2\) Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 687–88.


\(^4\) Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 269 n26.

the IKG officially requested assistance from the US Army to secure the restitution of Jews’ former property, as well as some one hundred IKG-owned buildings. The formal request to General Mark Clark, the US representative of the Allied control commission for Austria, highlighted the inaction of the provisional government toward the compensation of Jews and described the antisemitic discrimination that public officials directed at returning camp survivors. Further, the Austrian government still held ownership of more than one hundred of the Jewish community’s former real estate assets.76

After the first postwar Austrian government took office, a series of laws began to go into effect dealing with restitution issues, but those instituted in 1946 proved to be of little or no significant help to Jews’ claims. The May 15, 1946, Bundesgesetz über die Nichtigerklärung von Rechtsgeschäften und sonstigen Rechtshandlungen, die während der deutschen Besetzung Österreichs erfolgt sind (federal law invalidating legal transactions and other legal actions that took place during the German occupation of Austria) had nullified legal acts and transactions, including contracts, that concerned the seizure of property under Nazi authorities but was never properly enforced.77 Had the government applied this law properly and by its terms, there would have been no need for subsequent decades of restitution and compensation negotiations and amendments and addenda.

Between July 1946 and July 1949, the Austrian government passed seven pieces of legislation regarding the restitution of property stolen by the Nazis or under Nazi law (see table 6.1). The laws required the state and individuals to restore properties, companies, patents, brands, design copyrights, and employment contracts to the original owners or holders.78 However, carefully and loosely worded terms offered loopholes and interpretations that permitted further injustices. In early January 1947, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that Jews in Vienna had enjoyed little success in regaining

77. Knight, “Ich bin dafür,” 264.
### TABLE 6.1. AUSTRIAN RESTITUTION LEGISLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Restitution Act, July 26, 1946&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Concerned with the restitution of property directly expropriated by the Nazis (not by private citizens or companies) and held and administered by the Republic of Austria or one of its federal states as successor and beneficiary of the Nazi regime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Restitution Act, February 6, 1947&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Supplemented the first law to deal with property in the hands of the Austrian government because of owners’ postwar forfeiture due to war crimes convictions or proven involvement with a National Socialist organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Restitution Act, February 6, 1947&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Deal with property wrongfully taken and transferred to private individuals or businesses. This act outlined dealings regarding Jews’ and other victims’ property claims for assets taken for racial, national, or political reasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Restitution Act, May 21, 1947&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Pertaining to businesses and entities transformed or dissolved under Nazi law. This applied to companies’ names, property, commercial patents, and private employment contracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Restitution Act, June 22, 1949&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Deal with the restitution of shareholders’ rights and interests, the status of partners in business, and members of trade organizations and other business entities that were confiscated and that subsequently ceased to exist under Nazi law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Restitution Act, June 30, 1949&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Concerned with the restitution of confiscated trademarks, patents, and pattern rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Restitution Act, July 14, 1949&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Addressed outstanding claims on employment contracts in the private sector, including wages, severance payments, and pensions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


their homes and that six hundred either lived in institutions or were homeless. In addition, the same article stated that the Viennese Jewish community and international Jewish organizations working in the city also worried about the imminent arrival of an expected fifteen hundred repatriates from Shanghai: “no one has any idea where they are to be lodged.” 79 Two months later, a Joint report described property restitution as dire and related that more than twenty-five hundred dwellings of Austrian Jews and several hundred IKG-owned buildings had yet to be returned. 80

Despite the prospects created by such legislation aimed at remedying the ownership of illegally attained property and assets, subsequent legal interpretations and rulings favored former Nazis and “Aryanizers.” In September 1947, IKG president David Brill characterized the first four laws as “a public scandal.” Brill accused the Ministry of Property and Custody of sabotaging the restitution of Jewish property. At that time, an estimated eight thousand Austrian Jews lived in Vienna, and IKG leaders portrayed the unfair and ineffective restitution laws as a main cause for many of them seeking to emigrate abroad. In addition, by that date, the Jewish community reportedly controlled only ten units of its 216 prewar properties. All were hospitals, nursing homes, or administration buildings, and six of the ten had been in Jewish hands throughout the war and were thus easily retained. Only four had been returned to the community after the Nazi defeat. 81

This all played out under the quadripartite Allied occupation and in the context of increasing Cold War tensions. As the 1940s closed, the development of an Austrian national identity as a neutral country and the first victim of the Nazis continued. And as friction between the Western Allies (and in particular the United States) and the Soviet Union escalated, attention to Austria as a perpetrator country faded. The Western Allies’ leaders

were satisfied as long as Austria remained neutral and not under Soviet domination, and any energy for denazification and restitution waned.

**POSTWAR IDENTITIES AND RESTITUTION PROBLEMS**

With the Austrian government’s official endorsement and promotion from the end of the war through the late 1940s, the victim myth took a foundational role in the postwar development of Austrian national identity. At the same time, however, political leaders successfully reintegrated former Nazis into society and, most importantly, into their supportive electorate. About 90 percent of former Nazi Party members in Austria were amnestied in 1946; they were reinstated to their jobs and paid compensation for material and financial losses they had suffered even after 1945.82 “Less incriminated” former party members regained voting rights in time for the 1949 elections, and the competition for their support occasioned a new political strategy of distancing resistance fighters and victims of fascism in domestic politics.83 West Germany stands in contrast to Austria on the issue of restitution. Although leaders of both countries avoided bringing justice to the majority of former Nazis and war criminals and while the reintegration of Nazis into postwar society served as a common goal in both former perpetrator nations, West Germany did negotiate for and pay substantial restitution to the (mostly Jewish) victims and to the State of Israel.84

A continued spotlight on the small percentage of Austrians who had been in opposition to the Nazis could have served to alienate the more significant part of the body of citizens who willingly took part at all levels

---


of the Nazi regime and who retained Nazi political leanings. In order for politicians to benefit from goodwill abroad and to earn support at home, continued “double speak” prevailed. While leaders courted former Nazis’ votes, they presented their nation internationally as the Nazis’ first victim and as distinctly non-German, and they continued to use the evidence of the Austrian resistance movement as proof of antifascism.

By the early 1950s, citizens pressed for war memorials to honor Austrians killed while “doing their duty” as Wehrmacht soldiers serving the “fatherland.” Veterans’ organizations gained strength and established such memorials with the full support of Austrian politicians who emphasized the rehabilitation of soldiers. They were no longer “double victims”—that is, citizens forced to live under an unwanted military occupation and soldiers pressed unwillingly into service. On the domestic level, talk of Austrian resistance minimized as Nazi crimes became marginalized, and politicians paid public tribute to former Wehrmacht soldiers, praising them as heroes who had sacrificed for their country.

Even before the end of the 1940s, however, former Nazis and “Aryanizers” had begun to loom large in the minds of their leaders seeking a wide base of voters. As they continued on in postwar society, they learned that their significance permitted them to enjoy not only the rights of protection from the government but also what amounted to a pardon for wartime activities and in many cases “Aryanization” benefits. An extreme but representative example of the victimhood mentality in postwar Austria can be seen in the creation of government-sanctioned advocacy and protective associations created by “Aryanizers” in reaction to the 1947 restitution laws. These groups organized and advocated on behalf of “Aryanizers” who portrayed themselves as victimized by Austrian Jews who came back and filed restitution claims on their former properties. These organizations provide a case study of the collision of postwar national identity with the reality of survivors’ return and rerooting experiences. These associations’ work and their political success as a lobbying organ sponsoring the defense of the

beneficiaries of “Aryanization” and “their” property also reveal the public nature of domestic Austrian postwar politics and the open and accepted interest of those who had participated and profited from the Nazi regime.

**OPPOSITION TO RESTITUTION: DER SCHUTZVERBAND DER RÜCKSTELLUNGSBETROFFENEN**

With the institution of restitution laws, dissatisfaction grew among the Austrian possessors of “Aryanized” property. The third of these restitution laws, which went into effect on February 6, 1947, dealt specifically with belongings taken for “racial, national, or political reasons” and aroused resistance among the beneficiaries of Nazi “Aryanization” policies. Those who were concerned with maintaining their neighbors’ possessions formed an advocacy group, the Schutzverband der Rückstellungsbetroffenen (Protective Association for Parties Affected by Restitution), which united them in a campaign for protection from Jews’ claims on their former properties. Discussions about the restitution of assets acquired under Nazi appropriation policies and in the hands of public entities postwar had begun immediately after the establishment of the provisional government. 87 However, this third law proved much more controversial than either of the first two, as in theory it regulated the return of private property that had mostly been owned by Jews and had been acquired through “Aryanization.”

At the time of the Anschluss, which ushered in the Nazis’ immediate and violent persecution of Austrian Jews, the dire circumstances of the Jews were clear to all. Purchasers took advantage of the situation to pay less than fair market value to acquire apartments, houses, businesses, and even small material goods such as furniture and carpeting. The Nazi system provided for buyers to deposit funds directly into sellers’ bank accounts, but then the

---

government froze Jews’ accounts in order to take much of their assets for taxes that they forced Jews to pay, including the Reichsfluchtsteuer, literally, Reich Flight Tax, which was levied on Jews who sought to emigrate. Once their accounts were frozen, Jewish holders had access neither to the already below-market-value payment nor to their preexisting funds. Although it was clear to the purchaser that prices for this property sat far below those for the assets of non-Jews, the system of transfer allowed “Aryanizers” to consider themselves participants in a fair transaction and later to feel relieved of responsibility for the subsequent action of the state. With their dealings legal under Nazi legislation, individuals could claim that they never saw these transactions as theft, although they most likely knew what the Nazi apparatus planned and carried out against their neighbors’ finances. “Aryanizers” willingly took part through their opportunistic agreement to underpay people in extraordinarily stressful, life-or-death situations.

After the war, as Austrians painted the picture of an aggressive Nazi invasion and occupation of their country, they reasoned that the Germans carried the responsibility for robbing the Jews. The state asserted its innocence in the face of all the crimes of the “German occupiers,” upholding that neither Austria nor the Austrian government had existed between 1938 and 1945, and therefore the postwar German government carried the responsibility for reparations and restitution. Austrian laws regulating restitution processes stirred irritation among owners who desired to retain assets. The strict enforcement of such legislation threatened to contradict the victim narrative of the postwar government, and over time the government showed its official and unofficial support of property owners’ complaints and thereby permitted avenues that allowed them to organize themselves to advocate for the retention of belongings. Despite the Allies’ interest in the restoration of property, persistent and shrewd Austrian politicians found ways to more or less stall or avoid reparations and compensation. With good reason, historian Robert Knight chose Minister of the Interior Oskar Helmer’s words for the title of his book, “Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen” (I am in favor of letting the matter drag on), to represent the postwar government’s sentiments toward Jewish Austrians and their return home. This quote certainly represented citizens from all levels of society who were interested in drawing out the processes of restitution.
When the third restitution law went into effect, Austrians in possession of property that formerly belonged to Jews watched with trepidation, realizing the precarious status of their assets. Some quickly organized themselves and applied to the Wahlen und verschiedene Rechtsangelegenheiten or Magistratsabteilung 62 (MA 62), the Vienna city government’s department for matters of electoral and related legal affairs. They sought official permission to form advocacy groups to protect and retain ownership of assets received through transactions that took place after the Anschluss. The Schutzverband der Rückstellungsverpflichteten (literally, Protective Organization of Parties Involved in Restitution) submitted its goals, mission statement, and statutes for review on April 30, 1947. The group outlined its intentions to hold meetings, distribute petitions, publish news about regulatory decisions related to restitution and other relevant literature, and arrange legal advice and help for its members. The state’s decision—signed by Interior Minister Helmer—denied the official formation of the association, stating that the organizers clearly sought to perpetuate National Socialist sentiment in Austria.88

The organizers appealed, explaining that some of the group’s members had endured political persecution during the war, and claimed that this experience proved their lack of interest in Nazi ideology. They also offered possible instances in which holders of property formerly owned by Jews might be harmed by the restitution laws. For example, they claimed that the owner of a carpet stolen from a Jewish household should not be responsible for returning it if he or she was the second or third owner. That is, the appellants acknowledged that its group’s members indeed held unfairly obtained items but took the view that either that person’s own suffering under the Nazis or the fact that he or she had not taken the property himself or herself meant that he or she had enjoyed no benefit from “Aryanization.”89 Organizers repeatedly stated that their members had been party to fair and voluntary transactions, but in this case, the state finally upheld its

89. Appeal by Dr. Hans Gutmann, G 203-15/43-48: A32/1 (prov.)-575, 1.3.2.119.A32.1947.6107/1947–6107/1947, WStLA. Attorney Dr. Hans Gutmann represented the applicants—Gisela
ruling and denied the appeal of the Schutzverband der Rückstellungsverpflichteten. Interior Minister Helmer also signed this decision. 90

Two additional hopeful organizations attempted similar applications but met the same fate as the earlier groups. The Vereinigung der Rückstellungsbetroffenen (Association for Parties Concerned with Restitution) applied in March 1948. The Sicherheitsdirektion (Security Directorate) of MA 62 initially rejected its request, but the group appealed, stating that the organization sought to represent only buyers who had taken part in voluntary transactions with Jews and argued that it was unfair that they suffer punishment because of others’ improper dealings. The group claimed to support the requirement compelling “Aryanizers” to restitute property but contended that its members were different and warned the government and the Allies against considering all post-Anschluss sales as belonging to the same category. At first, the group’s appeal was unsuccessful, but a memo dated August 3, 1948, directed reconsideration and reopening the investigation. 91 On April 6, 1948, the Union Rückstellungsverpflichteter (Union of Parties Involved in Restitution) also tried to gain approval to form an association, but again Helmer signed a negative response, charging the organization with promoting National Socialist sentiment. 92

The Schutzverband der Rückstellungsbetroffenen submitted its application in early May 1948. By presenting more harmless-seeming statutes, this organization showed clear signs of having learned from the failed attempts of the prior groups. The main signatory of the application, Hans Oberhammer, had also been a party in the earlier group’s unsuccessful proposals. This group’s application met with approval, and an added note from the Bundesministeriums für Vermögenssicherung und Wirtschaftsplanung (Federal Ministry for the Security of Property and Economic Planning) stated that it saw an advantage to having a partner with which

Gertrude Beck, Irma Gutmann, and Ludwig Bucsanyi. Presumably married, Dr. and Ms. Gutmann shared the same address.

90. 1.3.2.119.A32.1947.6107/1947–6107/1947, WStLA.
91. 1.3.2.119.A32.1948.5097/1948–5097/1948, WStLA.
92. 1.3.2.119.A32.1948.7194/1948–7194/1948, WStLA.
to work in case of negotiations during the implementation of the restitution laws.\textsuperscript{93}

The change in governmental response to the applications over this short period of time represented a strengthening facet of the postwar victim myth that involved the perceived further victimization of Austrian citizens inflicted by returning Jews. It also showed Austrian politicians’ realization of how much latitude they enjoyed under the Allied occupying powers in the context of rapidly developing Cold War politics, and their actions regarding the Schutzverband legitimized the organization and its work. The government had recognized its electorate and found the leeway to represent it. Understanding the Allies’ desire to maintain a neutral Austria and to limit Soviet expansion served to foster the desired national narrative of guiltlessness. The country and its citizens eagerly settled into this story line, feeling relieved of both economic and moral responsibility.

The first public meeting of the Schutzverband, held in September 1948 in the Hotel Wimberger, began with a presentation about the third restitution act, which, the speaker declared, represented a “setback in the reconstruction of our constitutional state.” The speaker went on to uphold the innocence of the group’s members, predicting that with this law, “ordinary honest and respectable citizens, mostly members of the working class [would be crucified] without the protection of law [and would] lose their property, sometimes their life-savings . . . , while restitution applicants enrich themselves unjustifiably.” Concentration camp survivors and antifascist demonstrators disrupted the meeting, and the police broke it up.\textsuperscript{94} News of the Schutzverband also reached the United States and sparked criticism that led the Austrian general consul in New York to request information and advice in anticipation of Austrian émigrés in the United States who, he thought, would protest and initiate violent attacks as word of the organization and its activities became better known. The consul also expected restitution claims. The Foreign Ministry inquired about the dissolution


\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 170–71.
of the Schutzverband; but Interior Minister Helmer upheld the decision to approve it, and the consul in New York was advised simply to take the position that the Schutzverband had been created legitimately under the Austrian legal framework.\footnote{Ibid., 171.}

\section*{THE VOICE OF THE SCHUTZVERBAND: \textit{UNSER RECHT}}

The first issue of the Schutzverband's newspaper, \textit{Unser Recht: Offizielles Organ des Schutzverbandes Rückstellungsbetroffener} (Our right: The official newspaper of the Protective Association for Parties Affected by Restitution), introduced central themes that would recur over the course of its publication from September 1948 to December 1960.\footnote{\textit{Unser Recht}, September 1948, 1. It is worth noting another trace of lingering victim myth sentiment in Vienna: as of the time of publication of this book, the Austrian National Library has cataloged \textit{Unser Recht}, the official newspaper of the Schutzverband, under the keywords “Österreich, Nationalsozialismus, Opfer, Zeitschrift” (Austria, National Socialism, victim, periodical).} For the first few years, it published one issue per month, distributed free of charge, but toward the end of the publication period, it printed only one or two per year. Most issues included copies of recent restitution-relevant news articles with editorial commentary and reports about parliamentary activity and decisions. Letters outlining members' experiences as “victims” of the Jewish former owners of their property were also included. The content and the language used throughout the nearly twelve-year print run illuminate the attitudes and feelings of victimhood among members.

From the start, the Schutzverband used \textit{Unser Recht} to stress the organization's guiding principles, even if only to its membership. First and foremost, it claimed to represent fair and honest buyers.\footnote{“Wiedergutmachung,” \textit{Unser Recht}, September 1948, 2–3.} The group complained that the third restitution law invalidated any and all sales contracts made with Jewish sellers after the Anschluss, regardless of how that contract
Emerging Identities and Enduring Challenges

It urged the government to review restitution claims as individual cases in order to exonerate those who participated in voluntary sales and to apply the laws only to unjust or improper transactions that had come about for “racial, national, or political reasons.” The editors of the newspaper left unsaid that official documentation of forcible sales simply did not exist and that no other objective facts pointed to the actual intentions of each party. Despite the inability to determine a seller’s reason, Unser Recht writers repeatedly upheld that their organization’s members had purchased property that Jews sold voluntarily.

Another recurrent and predictable theme consisted of characterizing Austria and all Austrian citizens as victims. According to the Schutzverband—as well as the narrative under construction at the time—all Austrians had suffered under Nazi oppression, and accordingly no hierarchy could be created in which Jews’ experiences and losses took priority over others. The author of one article printed in the December 1948 issue expressed this viewpoint with a threat: if a certain group were to gain a privileged status above others, “who knows how quickly this supposed advantage could turn into a serious disadvantage.” Another writer portrayed Schutzverband members as heroes who actually saved lives by buying drastically undervalued property to enable Jews’ flight from Nazi Vienna. And yet another likened the refusal to buy Jews’ assets during times of “Aryanization” to an act of the Gestapo, while a colleague asserted that to decline a “begging” Jew’s attempt to sell possessions would have set him or her on the road to Auschwitz.

In the pages of Unser Recht, Schutzverband members expressed frustration about restitution legislation that they believed harmed the Austrian nation. Challenged on a philosophical and moral level, they claimed that the Allies’ and Austrian politicians’ discussion of the need for restitution as fair and constitutional implied that Austrian citizens did not understand

---

98. Unser Recht, October 1948, 7.
right from wrong. Schutzverband members expressed shock at such talk; they asserted that the population held a deep-rooted, innate sense of justice that rendered them incapable of wrongdoing. Demonizing law-abiding citizens by portraying them as morally dubious profiteers of “Aryanization” led only to a hostile environment for democracy and freedom, a writer argued in *Unser Recht*.102 Similarly, other newsletter contributors explained that Austrians living in the countryside led deeply religious and righteous lives and that, therefore, committing impropriety was simply impossible.103 They reasoned that by nature Austrians simply did not take improper action. Such subjective, biased sentiment reinforced *Unser Recht* readers’ feelings of victimhood at the hands of the occupying powers, political enemies, and Jews with malevolent and even vengeful intentions.

Schutzverband articles also posited that restitution laws harmed the economy by removing money from the country and sending it to former owners or their families now living abroad, assuming that none intended to live again in Austria.104 Many survivors did initiate restitution claims with hopes of returning home, but protracted court cases and official harassment prompted them to abandon ideas of regaining a place to live or a business to run.105 During such long and drawn-out processes, the original owners often died, and their relatives continued the petition for restitution. Indeed, their heirs rarely planned to live in Austria, which particularly bothered the Schutzverband members. For them, the attempts of survivors’ relatives to regain property proved Jews’ greed and desire for revenge. Vengeance, however, implied an awareness of original wrongdoing; such inconsistencies recurred in the pages of *Unser Recht* throughout its period of publication.

A similar contradiction to the constant contention of Schutzverband members’ good natures and intentions, a September 1948 article urged both sides

---

Emerging Identities and Enduring Challenges

...to “carry the burden of the past together” and rejected a “biblical eye-for-an-eye” situation.106

_Unser Recht_ writers fought accusations that theirs was a club for disgruntled, defeated Nazis, often pointing out the persecution of Schutzverband members under the Third Reich, but with only vague details of their suffering. Some complained that the Nazis had driven them out of business, without indication of how or why. Many described the “heroic” assistance they and their colleagues had lent to Jews after the Anschluss, as well as “persecution” they suffered by the claims of returning property owners after the war.107 The repeated statement that the Schutzverband officially denied membership to staunch Nazis went unchallenged. In other issues, authors stressed the advanced age of many of the groups’ members to emphasize their innocence and helplessness, as well as the alleged impossibility of their former membership in the Nazi Party.108 Unsurprisingly, contradictions and denial pervaded Schutzverband logic.

In most cases, _Unser Recht_ did not print overt antisemitic statements, but at times Schutzverband members revealed their true sentiments. In December 1948, the Editorial Department replied threateningly to someone it called “Anonymous Foreigner.” The editor essentially directed him to mind his own business and stated that the unidentified writer’s “daitsch” (Deutsch, or German, but with a spelling that signified a Yiddish accent) reveals his obvious heritage.109 When referring to those who were seeking restitution, writers resorted to antisemitic stereotypes of untrustworthy Jewish sellers who simply waited for the first moment to regain assets from a “just buyer.”110 The Schutzverband also tried to use any relatively positive statement made by a Jewish Austrian to its advantage. When a camp survivor reflected on the injustice he observed in the restitution policy, for

---

106. “Was rechtfertigt das Begehren nach Novellierung des dritten Rückstellungsgesetzes und was ist anzustreben?,” _Unser Recht_, September 1948, 6–7.


example, he found himself profiled in *Unser Recht* as proof that even Jews saw unfairness in the laws.\(^{111}\) The organization also identified examples of so-called Mischlinge who somehow had fallen victim to restitution laws and exploited them for its purposes.\(^{112}\)

As the government worked to institute Austria’s and Austrians’ victim status as actual domestic and foreign policy, its support of the activities of such individuals and organizations made sense. As *Unser Recht* reminded politicians in its May 1949 issue, the government could ill afford experimenting with restitution laws at election time, especially with the organization’s estimated representation of two hundred thousand members.\(^{113}\) In fact, that same year, the support of the Schutzverband proved crucial to the electoral success of the newly formed party the Verband der Unabhängigen (VdU, Federation of Independents, renamed the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, or Freedom Party, in 1956). VdU membership included many former Nazi Party members.\(^{114}\) The government and populace were in agreement that all Austrians had suffered under Nazi persecution and that no subgroup of the populace should be prioritized or favored. The Schutzverband argued not only that its members were victims but also—and therefore—that they were not Nazis. For the Schutzverband, this straightforward yet unrelated fact justified retaining the stolen homes, businesses, and goods of their Jewish neighbors. And indeed, the Schutzverband found support and active membership through the late 1960s.\(^{115}\)

Decades later, the Austrian Historical Commission determined that a number of factors had hindered the restitution process, including not only the design of the third restitution law but also the resistance of individual “Aryanizers” and the activities of the Schutzverband der Rückstellungs-


\(^{112}\) “Der Kauf des Judenhauses immer das Verhängnis” and “Aus der Spruchpraxis,” *Unser Recht*, December 1948, 8.

\(^{113}\) *Unser Recht*, May 1949, 6.


betroffenen. In the immediate phase of restitution processes following the 1947 legislation, some applicants had met with the successful recovery of assets. But by the early 1950s, in the context of a political climate warmed to the reintegration of former Nazis, antirestitution sentiment had been roused, and attempts were made to amend the third restitution law. The tides turned, and increasing numbers of “Aryanizers” retained their ill-gotten property.

VIENNESE JEWISH IDENTITY: PREWAR AND POSTWAR

Jews returned to reclaim a place in a society in which they recalled their community’s firm roots and successful establishment before the war. Even with Vienna’s virulent antisemitism, particularly after World War I, Jews had deftly maneuvered discrimination to live and work among reluctant or even hostile neighbors. A quadripartite identity not only functioned but also served them well. Loyal to the monarchy, they considered themselves politically Austrian but also culturally German, ethnically Jewish, and, above all, Viennese. After World War I and Austria’s reduction to a rump state, Viennese Jews clung to this constellation and hoped to retain it. Austrian national identity, however, had not changed with the end of World War I, and many Austrians considered themselves German and yearned for union with Germany (Anschluss). The strong antisemitic component


of this German national identity, however, made it impossible for Jews to conceive of themselves as nationally “German.”

Defense stratagems cultivated through years of the particular brand of Viennese Jewish acculturation helped protect Viennese Jews and validate their continued existence. They had adopted the tastes and styles of the society around them, but Viennese Jews had acculturated as a group and thereby developed new ways and behaviors that continued to signify their Jewishness, both to themselves and to those around them. Viennese Jews lived together in the same neighborhoods, attended the same schools, and socialized and even married among one another, all of which ensured Jewish group survival in Vienna. That ended with the Anschluss and the ensuing systematic destruction of the community, including the forced emigration of some 135,000 Austrian Jews and the mass murder of another 65,000.

Jews returning to postwar Vienna continued the long trajectory of acculturation and accommodation, again seeking to find the best ways to reestablish themselves in a society changed by seven years of Nazi rule and more unfriendly and averse to Jewish citizens than it had been before the Anschluss. For returnees, this meant employing a certain level of discretion about their Jewish identity, perhaps even more cautiously than they had before the Nazi years. But it meant, too, a resumption of their identification as Austrians who also kept a connection to German culture and their Jewish ethnic identity. They consciously and willingly chose to live again among gentile Austrians, many of whom had at least sympathized with Nazi ideology, while others had benefited from the robbery and expulsion of the Jewish community or even taken an active part in the genocide perpetrated on Europe’s Jews. Returnees did not live in hiding, and they upheld their rights and commitment to the country as Austrians; but they also realized that a quieter approach to their Jewish identification and affiliation would serve them well.

Austrian Jews’ motivations for return had focused largely on questions of personal identity that centered on Vienna. Many sought instinctively to

go back to a familial home. Camp survivors went back to their hometown and joined those who had reemerged after hiding or surviving under protected circumstances, but neither group may have considered much beyond a hopeful reunion with family and situating oneself in a familiar—and a familial—place. Even after confronting the challenges of post-Nazi Vienna, many remained, having taken a measured decision to do so. Politically affiliated réémiigrés identified as specifically Austrian Social Democrats and Communists and arrived with idealistic expectations of doing their duty as dictated by these beliefs. Although they may have been quickly disabused of these notions, many stayed to take part in rebuilding and reshaping “their” Austria. Their identity as politically active (Jewish) Austrians meant that despite—or even because of—the remnants of Nazi ideology, they would remain to combat and change its legacies. And Austrian Jewish professionals—mostly men—maintained a specific identification with their country through training and language; for them, Vienna was the only possible option for renewed professional life. This group of survivors often took their decision later than those who returned more immediately for family and political reasons. The promise of denazification might have reinforced their decisions to attempt to resume professions, despite knowing that the government and professional organizations deterred their homecoming. Arriving later also permitted Jewish professionals the possibility of some awareness of the difficulties of return and a clearer picture of what to expect when they went back. Nonetheless, many of them did so and soon realized that taking part in the national silence on the issue of responsibility and guilt for Nazi crimes served as their best way to get along in postwar Vienna.

As we have seen with the example of Friedrich Torberg and his work (chapter 5), Jews who rejoined professional life in their hometown felt compelled to background their Jewish identity. Torberg wrote extensively about the “lost” Jewish element of Viennese society but never explicitly about what Austria and Austrians had taken and destroyed. Without placing blame, no discussion about responsibility could ensue, and without discussion, no confrontation. Carefully chosen and indirect language permitted gentiles to avoid considering their Jewish neighbors’ experiences. It also allowed Austrian Jews to live among former Nazis without thinking about their
neighbors’ wartime activities. Indeed, their successful reintegrati
on meant reestablishing a Jewish identity within the context of a nation reconstituting its national identity.

Jacqueline Vansant writes in *Reclaiming Heimat* that, despite all that had transpired, many survivors returned because they felt Austrian and wanted to reconnect to an Austrian “we.” 120 I would more specifically argue that, in fact, they sought to resume their position and part in the professional, cultural, and social life they recalled and had sorely missed in Vienna. They wanted to be Viennese again. They wanted to reengage with a Viennese “we.” Anthropologist Matti Bunzl writes that many Austrian Jews readily disavow their Austrian identity, reporting that they feel Viennese but not Austrian. Their everyday language reflects this—their use of the term “Austrian” is understood to be in reference to non-Jews. 121 Their city can still be associated with culture and beauty, while the whole of Austria connotes Holocaust, Hitler, and a modern-day right-wing government. “Viennese Jews” enjoy a higher status than “Austrian Jews”; therefore, within Austria, they are Viennese, and outside the country, they would emphasize the specifically Viennese and Viennese-Jewish elements of their identity. 122

Writer Ernst Lothar defended his decision to return to Vienna with reference to the whole of Austria and specified, “I’m not returning to people, but rather, you’ll forgive the pompous expression, to a landscape that I need in order to live.” 123 Like Lothar, some survivors also relate different feelings for the place versus the people and break it down to identification with city rather than country. Some share different versions of “I love Vienna; I just don’t like the Austrians.” 124 Others say, “I love Vienna; it’s the Viennese

122. Susanne Cohen-Weisz, “From Bare Survival to European Jewish Vision: Jewish Life and Identity in Vienna” (working paper, European Forum at the Hebrew University, Center for Austrian Studies, Jerusalem, 2008), 32–33.
124. For example, Trude Berger specified that her love of the country does not include the people. “Aber gross ist mein Liebe vielleicht zu dem Land; nicht zu dem Menschen.” See Trude
I can do without!” Nonetheless, those who remained chose to live in a place with which they identified but among a people about whom they felt, at best, ambivalent. Many returnees found that the welcoming and friendly circles within which they operated often led to their effective insulation from antisemitic hostilities, which enabled them to live with some safeguard against the legacies of the past. Erich Lessing found none of his pre-war Jewish friends alive in Vienna, and many of his non-Jewish friends had perished as well. He remembered, however, no particularly bad experiences with gentiles. “Rather,” he said, “nonexperience.” Lessing found a different city upon his return, and non-Jewish circles that had been closed to him in 1938 were oddly open. Before the war, his group of friends and those of his family had largely comprised Jews and Social Democrats; but after, “it was a completely different society and a different approach to life and to the society.” Lessing found postwar Austrian culture “mixed,” in a way he had not experienced before 1938. On the one hand, the more liberal and open-minded enjoyed a new openness to this mixing. On the other, as Lessing said, “People who had been Nazis had either changed color or said that they never really were in the party. This is an Austrian specialty.”

Lessing acknowledged a “subterranean” postwar antisemitism but recognized that he and his family had lived in a closed circle of left-wing acquaintances that he said he might even have categorized as “philosemitic.” Nonetheless, he also described a time that he heard an acquaintance catch himself just before making an antisemitic remark. Lessing spoke up and told the man that he would like to hear the rest of his statement. Everyone present went silent. They all knew what he had been about to say. As Lessing pointed out, his perception of an integrated Vienna may also have

---

125. Dr. Ruth Schauder, conversation with author, Vienna, Austria, October 23, 2012.
127. Ibid. In our interview, Lessing told the following story to illustrate his point: They used to say that, during denazification, when you asked people in Berlin if they had been party members, they said, “Yes.” When you asked someone in Munich, they said, “The party? What was the party? Me, oh, no, never heard of it.” And when you asked someone in Vienna, they said, “Me? No . . . but him!”
been a product of the circles in which he lived and socialized. He married a non-Jewish Austrian woman in 1949 and enjoyed warm and loving relationships with members of her family. In fact, the young couple lived with her parents for about three years, as they found housing hard to secure in the city. They overcame their different experiences of the preceding years. Erich’s wife had been a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM; League of German Girls, the female branch of the Hitler Youth) in Nazi Vienna and had enjoyed some prominence. A recording of her voice played during Allied air raids to warn residents to seek shelter from bombs. Membership in the BDM and associated activities did not necessarily signify a convinced Nazi; Lessing, his wife, and his in-law family acknowledged that reality, and they openly welcomed him. The young couple’s happy marriage, good family relationships, and the acceptance Erich felt among his wife’s relatives and in their enmeshed group of friends speak to the complicated nature of postwar Austrian gentile and Jewish identities, as well as Jews’ assimilation in a postgenocidal society.128

Maria Dorothea Simon also reestablished herself in her hometown after surviving the war in exile in the United Kingdom. After her return, she invited some former classmates to her apartment and noted that, although pleased to see her again, they acted subservient. “And none of them had been Nazis or had wanted me murdered with the rest,” she wrote with distinct sarcasm. Simon was well aware that many of her schoolmates had been enthusiastic Nazis and in an interview admitted ulterior motives behind her invitation. “Just look,” she thought, “I’m still alive and I have two lovely children. You weren’t able to kill me!” Despite her bitter feelings toward these acquaintances, Simon upheld later that she had not suffered from antisemitism in postwar Vienna.129 Her testimony reveals an awareness of

128. Ibid. Lessing exhibited one element of the complicated nature of postwar life and identities—from the start of our interview, he repeated that all was much simpler than one (I) might like to make it. He remained emphatic that the Vienna to which he had returned and in which he lived in the current day had been changed for the better, stressing the differences between prewar and postwar social circles and the interreligious mixing that involved actual interaction after the war.

such discrimination as a general problem but also suggests that she, like many other survivors who returned, employed self-defense mechanisms that included ignoring subtle or covert discrimination in order to adjust psychologically to life among former Nazis and bystanders to genocide. Simon did not report confronting her former schoolmates but rather made it clear that although they all chose to live together again, she knew the truth. Her survival and return served as a victory, even if she never openly reveled in it. She and so many others realized that they could resume much of the life they had previously enjoyed if only they participated in the national silence on the Nazi years. If Jews did not talk with Austrian gentiles about where they had been and what had happened to them and their families, then Austrian gentiles in turn would not confront returnees with the reality of their wartime activities and loyalties.

A distinct drawback to this approach was fantasy about the wartime doings of neighbors, coworkers, and friends. With no exchange or discussion, one could only imagine. Alternatively, if this “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy proved effective in hiding the truths of the past for a time, it could be blown apart quite suddenly. Frieda Fraenkel’s return and reconnection with prewar friends had gone quite well in her estimation. She reported that for decades they lived together quite nicely—until the Waldheim Affair. In 1986, the former general secretary to the United Nations Kurt Waldheim ran as a candidate for the office of the president of the Austrian Federal Republic. With the help of documentation provided by the World Jewish Congress, the New York Times reported on Waldheim’s wartime activities and criticized Austria for permitting such a candidate. He had been a member of the SA-Cavalry Corps and the Nazi Student League and had been in a position to be well aware of the genocide of the Jews of Saloniki. The ensuing campaign against him and against Austria enflamed antisemitism and sparked vocal and public blame of world Jewry for Waldheim’s and the nation’s troubles. The discussion of wartime activities became public and hostile, and in the end, antisemitism helped Waldheim get elected. With the sudden openness and aggression, Frau Fraenkel’s comfortable, quiet existence in Vienna changed. Indignant that the Waldheim Affair had become a “Jewish thing,” she first spoke out among friends. When they
reacted defensively, however, she reverted to holding herself back in silence to avoid any falling out with them. "I was afraid of my friends. I was afraid of people . . . a bad feeling because I always think that they are on the other side."¹³⁰ For years, Frau Fraenkel and her friends lived in silence about such topics, but with the debate forced into the public sphere, she could not avoid hearing her friends’ and neighbors’ antisemitic opinions and had to consider their positions and their pasts. The antisemitic sentiment fomented under years of Nazi ideology had not gone away; it had, as Erich Lessing said, only gone “subterranean.”

And so Austrian Jews returned to Vienna and chose to stay to reestablish their homes with their families, with political parties, and in their chosen professions. Once these survivors from different wartime locations and experiences had rerootted, they faced shared and similar challenges and obstacles moving forward. Their return constituted an attempt to reconnect to their sense of belonging as specifically “Viennese.” Their reentry, however, quickly brought them face-to-face with the reality that their Austrian neighbors’ attitudes and mind-set had not changed much after the Nazi defeat. Many Austrian Jews returned to Vienna with ideas that their return was expected and desired but were quickly disabused of such notions.

As a new postwar Austrian national identity took shape and solidified, returning Jews recognized the necessity of employing discretion about their Jewish identity. Survivors learned instead to take part in a national silence. An unspoken agreement kept both gentile Austrians and returning Jews from discussing their locations and activities during the Nazi years. Returnees recognized that they could avoid confrontation and uncomfortable conversation by carefully avoiding certain topics or at least speaking vaguely and with care not to place direct blame on Austria or individual Austrians. With these safety mechanisms in place, the political and social circles to which returning Austrian Jews belonged permitted most to report an insulation from day-to-day discrimination in a highly antisemitic city.

¹³⁰ Fraenkel interview.
Returning Jews did, however, encounter clear discrimination and a lack of political representation on a community and governmental level. With the victim myth cemented soon after the end of the war, government leaders and elected officials knew their constituencies and realized that strict adherence to restitution laws and participation in reparations payment would cause their careers to suffer and their parties to lose support. Politicians took care to appeal to the large portion of the electorate that had been members of the Nazi Party, as well as to those who had benefited from Nazi “Aryanization” policies. Satisfying the tiny Jewish fraction of the population made no political sense, and postwar politics and emerging Cold War tensions between the Allied powers provided a perfect setting in which to eagerly assume a victim identity and to avoid blame for Austrian participation in Nazi crimes.

This hostile atmosphere notwithstanding, survivors’ motivations for return and for remaining had everything to do with their individual and group identification as Austrian—and, in particular, as Viennese. Their familial, political, and professional affiliations tied them to the city, and even if much had changed drastically, they willingly reestablished their lives and learned new ways to maneuver in their home, Vienna.