



German
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London

German Historical Institute London Bulletin

ARTICLE

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German Historical Institute London Bulletin
Vol. XLVI, No. 1 (May 2024), 3–25

ISSN 0269-8552

ARTICLES

GERMAN ZEITGESCHICHTE FROM THE MARGINS: THE POST-WAR EXPERIENCE OF NAZI VICTIMS

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About ten years ago, a remarkable film had a short moment of glory in German cinemas: *Lore*, by Australian director Cate Shortland. It is set at the end of the Second World War and describes the journey of Lore, the eldest daughter of a *Schutzstaffel* (SS) family, through Germany – from the Black Forest to the island of Föhr in the North Sea. When her parents flee, the young girl, a fervent member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls), is instructed to take her younger brothers and sisters to her grandmother in North Frisia. The film tells the story of this march across a destroyed country and through a destroyed people in deeply impactful images: displaced persons and forced labourers on their way home, bombed-out civilians, Jews, former prisoners of war, Nazis, and concentration camp survivors all crowd the streets, stations, villages, and forests. The film is about violence and rape, trauma and death. By the end, when the siblings arrive on the island, the taciturn Lore has profoundly changed: in the final scene of the movie, at her grandmother's, she throws up the rich, hearty food across the festive dinner table. And she does so at the very moment when her grandmother asserts that the Germans in general, and Lore's parents in particular, are of course not to blame for everything that is happening *to* Germany now – and although she leaves it open as to who really *is* to blame, it is not hard to guess.

In the meantime – in the past decades, that is – this tenacious post-war assertion has been refuted, deconstructed, and also morally condemned time and again; the literature on it could fill a library.

This article is the edited version of my Inaugural Lecture as Gerda Henkel Foundation LSE/GHIL Visiting Professor, given at the LSE on 28 Nov. 2023.

Until recently, contemporary history research in the Federal Republic of Germany focused on the years between 1933 and 1945: initially its pre-war history, then the persecution of Jews and others, until gradually – with increasing distance – its post-war history came into view. This research, however, was primarily directed at Lore and her family, including her parents and siblings, and not with the same intensity at the people she met along the way. The famous ‘coming to terms with the past’ and the historiographic assessment of this process were – and for good reasons – primarily a German–German debate in which other perspectives were only included very slowly and very late. Moreover, I would argue that this process is still far from complete.

We have so far heard just as few of the voices of the men and women vagabonding on German streets in 1945 as we have of those men and women who migrated to the country in the following decades, and who came for very different reasons; they helped to build up Germany’s destroyed economy and with it a welfare state that is still considered the foundation of its ‘functioning democracy’ today. To bring the experiences of former victims of Nazism into the foreground is thus a venture in its own right. But apart from mere ethical considerations and blunt historical curiosity, I would eventually like to ask what all this could mean for the historical narrative of the Federal Republic as a democratic success story.

I will concentrate on four victim groups: Jews, Sinti and Roma, Eastern European forced labourers, and German homosexuals. I will leave out other groups, either because there is little to no research so far on their post-war experiences, or because, as is the case with political opponents of the Nazi regime, this would lead us far into the post-war politics of the two German states during the Cold War. For the sake of focus, I will concentrate on West Germany, more or less until the 1960s – and for the sake of legibility, I will apply a different structure than is normally used when analysing victim groups, since to list their experiences one by one would run the risk of repetition, as well as a certain *déjà vu*. Because surely anyone reading the title of this article will share the same understanding that the post-war experiences of former Nazi victims were quite awful. So what exactly is new here? I am convinced that by reading these experiences together, we will see a panorama that has so far

been amazingly absent from the leading interpretations of post-war German history. In order to facilitate this, the article is divided into three main sections: homecoming/homemaking, compensation, and persecution.

But first, let us take one last look at the overall context and at Lore's family. From *their* perspective, the central message of April 1945 was: 'We have lost'. The war was over and so was the dream of the 'thousand-year Reich', of world—or at least European—domination, including a colonial and settlement empire in the eastern part of the continent. Furthermore, the country was occupied and now partly ruled by people who, until a few weeks ago, had been deemed 'sub-humans'. Worse still, millions of freed slave labourers and prisoners of war could now move freely through the country. All in all, the German delusion of superiority had suffered a severe blow, and Hannah Arendt on her visit to Germany in 1950 was not the only one who was repelled by the general self-pity with which the people bemoaned their own fate and rejected any responsibility for other victims.¹

At the same time, it was precisely at *this* historical moment, one of a crushing catastrophe, that antisemitism and racism acquired a new, additional function in the post-war period, which explains their continued virulence. Never before has Germany—to quote Hannah Arendt again—been as antisemitic as it was *after* National Socialism, after the war, in defeat.² The same can probably be said for racism: Germany after 1945 was no less antisemitic and racist than before, and one could venture the thesis that both antisemitism and racism functioned at that moment as a kind of glue between one phase and the next. To put it simply: both resentments served to maintain a sense of superiority in at least one area—that of national identity. Being German was not bad in itself, neither individually nor collectively; quite the opposite, as the racist disdain towards 'marauding' liberated Eastern Europeans or 'haggling' Jewish displaced persons on the Munich black market seemed to prove—not to mention the plundering and raping Red Army soldiers from the 'depths of the Russian

¹ Hannah Arendt, 'The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany', *Commentary* (Oct. 1950), 342–53.

² Hannah Arendt and Dolf Sternberger, *Ich bin Dir halt ein bisschen zu revolutionär: Briefwechsel 1946 bis 1975*, ed. Udo Bermbach (Berlin, 2019), 100–1.

steppes'. In the end, these resentful gazes provided confirmation that not everything had been wrong. The alleged threat of Bolshevism had now become a reality, at least in the East. And one should not underestimate the additional dynamic that the Cold War would create, which kept this older ideological conglomerate of political, racist, and antisemitic resentments alive and well.

These resentments can be quantified in the nowadays all-too-familiar language of surveys. The US military government's 1947 report on the continuity of antisemitism used refined categories, though unfortunately without defining them. According to the report, 18 per cent of the Germans surveyed were considered 'radical anti-Semites', 21 per cent 'anti-Semites', another 22 per cent 'racists', 19 per cent 'nationalists' (without specifying what was meant by this term), and only 20 per cent largely free of these resentments, which together are probably best described by the term *völkisch*. The authors of the report identified several 'interrelated causes' for this, but pointed out first and foremost:

an overall decline in German morals, accompanied by an increase in nationalism and anti-'foreigner' sentiment in general. The deterioration of material conditions of life and, perhaps even worse, the continued bleak prospects have served to increase resentment of all types as well as the aggressive expression of it. Anti-Semitism is merely one aspect of this complex.³

So this was the ideological, mental, and very real landscape of the Allied occupation zones in which the recently liberated victims of German persecution were trying to find their way through devastated lands, looking for surviving relatives and a way home or abroad. In the early summer of 1945 around 8 million former prisoners in concentration camps, POW camps, and slave labour camps of all sorts, together with millions of expellees from the former German territories in the East, demobilized soldiers, and fleeing Nazis, were living in the more or less lawless space of a largely destroyed country. We should take two additional facts into account that are hardly ever

³ Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS) Research Branch, 'Anti-Semitism in Germany, Berlin 1947', reprinted in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 6 (1997), 353–9.

mentioned in contemporary reports and their later interpretations. First of all, most of the survivors were young or very young, and second, the great majority of them had been abducted (or recruited) from rural areas, from small towns and villages; they mostly belonged to the lesser-educated groups or had not received any education at all. This was especially the case for Jewish or Sinti and Roma youngsters whose persecution had begun before the outbreak of the war. Many of them were the only survivors of their families. Probably all of them had witnessed at least one of the many end-of-war massacres in which German troops and civilians had killed those still in their power at the last minute. To name but one of the best known of these infamous events: the so-called 'Hare Hunt of Celle' of April 1945 saw SS men and part of the population of the town of Celle in Lower Saxony chase down a group of concentration camp survivors who had managed to escape from a train during a bombing raid, killing at least 170 of them.⁴ All over Germany there had been an extreme outpouring of visible violence during the last months and weeks of the war. For sure, this potential for violence did not simply disappear in a few months – and nor did the fear of it.

What did change was the fact that by May 1945, Germany was completely occupied. Given the circumstances, the Allied forces did their best to somehow control the chaos on the streets. Since there was no lack of camp facilities in the country, they decided to concentrate the non-German population, which was now summarized under the new term 'displaced persons' (DPs). For the small Jewish minority among them, a quarter of a million, the DP camps meant first and foremost security under the direct protection of the Allies, especially in the American Zone. Due to persistent antisemitism among members of some of the other DP groups, such as Ukrainians or Lithuanians, it quickly proved necessary to establish Jewish DP camps, and this made it easier for them to cope with the liminal situation they found themselves in – geographically, physically, and psychologically. In addition, this collective coping mechanism was probably an important factor which ultimately softened the long-nurtured wish

⁴ See the section on 'The Massacre at Celle' in Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, trans. Chaya Galai (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 265–71.

for revenge. As early as June 1945, the president of the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews stated that if Jews avenged themselves, they would ‘descend into the lowest depth of ethics and morality to which the German nation has fallen during the past ten years. We are not able to slaughter women and children . . . we are not able to burn millions of people.’⁵ Their vengeance, some survivors very outspokenly conceded, was to have Germans working for them in the camps, cleaning, cooking, repairing—and it is to the historian Atina Grossmann that we owe an impressively multilayered account of what she calls ‘close encounters’ between Jews, Germans, and the Allies in occupied Germany.⁶

Since the history of the Jewish DP camps is probably the best researched area in the field of German-Jewish post-war history, I will confine myself to these few remarks, insisting once again on the specific transitional situation that only existed thanks to American protection. For example, only weeks after the founding of the Federal Republic, the German police started their brutal raids on the black market in Munich’s Möhlstraße, a practice that continued well into the 1950s.⁷ The market had long been a favourite object of antisemitic projection, which was then extended to the few Jews and other ‘Easterners’ who had stayed behind after most DPs had left the country by 1948, and who needed to find a new place to live. To quote one of many similar-sounding documents of the time, in this case from the Bavarian city of Bamberg, where local officials wanted to get rid of the few Jewish DPs who intended to make a home there: their rejection, they wrote, had nothing to do with antisemitism, but merely with the fact that the population had to be protected against people ‘who feel comfortable in dirt and vermin and therefore constitute a dangerous site of infection’.⁸ In view of this reality, it is hardly surprising that the

⁵ Quoted in Frank Trentmann, *Out of the Darkness: The Germans, 1942–2022* (London, 2023), 90.

⁶ Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, 2007).

⁷ Lilly Maier, ‘Der Schwarzmarkt in der Möhlstraße und die Münchner Polizei: Eine Untersuchung im Spiegel der Akten der Polizeidirektion München’, *Münchner Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur*, 12/1 (2018), 35–51.

⁸ Quoted in Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 258.

few hundred remaining Jewish families in the last DP camp, Föhrenwald in Bavaria, refused to move out until 1957.⁹ At that time, around 15,000 Jews were still living in Germany – a very small and often poor group who had not been able to emigrate and were either dependent on state welfare or – especially the younger former DPs among them – tried to earn a living as unskilled labourers in bars, laundries, and other small businesses.¹⁰

For the minority among the minority – that is, those Jews who had been living as Germans among Germans until or during the deportations – the situation had been fundamentally different from the outset. Most German Jews had survived in so-called mixed marriages, and therefore had at least partial connections to their neighbours which they could sometimes build on, or professions they could take up again.¹¹ Especially in large cities such as Hamburg, Berlin, or Frankfurt, it was also possible to turn to the Jewish communities that were being rebuilt or to the city administrators, who during the immediate post-war years were anti-Nazis, at least at the top.¹² Nevertheless, they were all too aware of the virulent antisemitism of their own neighbours, having experienced it since 1933. They understood its subtle language and had no illusions about the state of the country. Time and again, for example, there are cases of Jews refusing to accept the special assistance they were entitled to, be it food or housing, for fear of provoking antisemitism. And in fact, it took what today is often called resilience and courage to assert one's rights as a Jew in West Germany. In his impressive moral history of the Federal Republic, Frank Trentmann highlights this in an example from Offenburg in southern Germany: when a secondary school teacher showered a returned concentration camp survivor with a bucket of classic antisemitism in a bar and loudly regretted that this person had not gone up in smoke, various state institutions refused to

⁹ Alois Berger, *Föhrenwald, das vergessene Schtetl: Ein verdrängtes Kapitel deutsch-jüdischer Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Munich, 2023).

¹⁰ For a general overview see Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*, trans. Barbara Harsha (Princeton, 1997).

¹¹ Maximilian Strnad, *Privileg Mischehe? Handlungsräume 'jüdisch versippter' Familien 1933–1949* (Göttingen, 2021).

¹² See Anthony D. Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews: Munich, 1945–1965* (Lincoln, NE, 2004); Tobias Freimüller, *Frankfurt und die Juden: Neuanfänge und Fremdheitserfahrungen 1945–1990* (Göttingen, 2020).

hold him accountable. It took a story in the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* to bring about legal proceedings. Antisemitism, one can only state time and again, lived on in post-war pubs and living rooms – and only became a problem when the media took a critical look at it.¹³

But what about those survivors who returned to their homes in small towns or villages where everyone knew everyone else? In the years immediately after the war, if you wanted to recover your apartment or furniture from your neighbours in the larger cities, you could rely on the Allies and the city administration. In the villages, however, this could trigger a tangible conflict, as you had to literally snatch the goods from your former neighbours. Even if local authorities did provide supplies, this was usually based on a compromise: you did not get back all of your furniture (let alone the piano!), and not your whole house, but only the upper floor – while the Nazis who had occupied it after your family's deportation continued to live downstairs.¹⁴ And since many returnees were often the only Jews in the village, most of them agreed to a compromise or completely gave up what was due to them. Anna Junge is currently working on a study of German Jews in the post-war period in northern Hesse, for which she has compiled impressive material from the archives. She emphasizes differences between generations and genders: while younger survivors often managed, by force and stubbornness, to retrieve what was due to them and then left Germany, very few of the older ones (most of whom had survived in mixed marriages) dared to testify against their former tormentors. In order to remain in the village, they needed to adapt: Jewish men, for example, rejoined the traditional associations, while women generally had no choice but to remain silent and avoid attracting attention.¹⁵

Much of what has been said so far connects the surviving Jews' fate to that of the surviving Sinti and Roma and the former forced labourers.

¹³ Trentmann, *Out of the Darkness*, 192–3.

¹⁴ See the remarkable graphic novel Stefanie Fischer, Kim Wünschmann, and Liz Clarke, *Oberbrechen: A German Village Confronts its Nazi Past. A Graphic History* (forthcoming with Oxford University Press). For a general overview see Stefanie Fischer, Nathaniel Riemer, and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *Juden und Nicht-Juden nach der Shoah: Begegnungen in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2019).

¹⁵ Anna Junge, 'Unerwartete Nachbarschaft: Jüdisch-nichtjüdisches Wiedersehen im ländlichen Nachkrieg', (PhD thesis, Technische Universität Berlin, 2024).

Due to their age and persecution, it was extremely difficult for them to build a life for themselves without formal education in a country where official qualifications were – and still are – more important than elsewhere. In the case of the Sinti and Roma, the fundamental hostility they faced was furthermore based on centuries of stigmatization and persecution, which had intensified in Germany since the late German Empire in the context of ‘modern’ crime prevention.¹⁶ During the Weimar Republic, German Sinti and Roma were registered throughout the country; from 1926 onwards, the records of 14,000 individuals, including children over the age of 6, were brought together in a central card index along with photos, fingerprints, and ancestry charts.¹⁷ After 1933, this mixture of police practice and criminal biology was combined with the racist thinking of Nazi biopolitics, which meant that the Sinti suffered from several measures at once: forced sterilization and psychiatrization; persecution as so-called ‘asocials’, ‘work-shy’, or as ‘hereditary criminals’, which could in some cases lead to them being killed in the euthanasia programme; and finally, exclusion under the Nuremberg Laws and ultimately murder in Auschwitz.¹⁸

The card index, which grew to 30,000 names during the Nazi period, was preserved and continued to be used in the Federal Republic.¹⁹ This has to be kept in mind in order to understand why the few surviving Sinti’s reaction to the liberation was completely different to that of their

¹⁶ See Marion Bonillo, ‘Sinti und Roma im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1871 bis 1918: Eine Minderheit im Fokus der verschärften “Zigeunerpolitik”’, in Oliver von Mengersen (ed.), *Sinti und Roma: Eine deutsche Minderheit zwischen Diskriminierung und Emanzipation* (Bonn, 2015), 49–70.

¹⁷ Eveline Diener, *Das Bayerische Landeskriminalamt und seine ‘Zigeunerpolizei’ (1946 bis 1965): Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten der bayerischen ‘Zigeunerermittlung’ im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 2021), 41–65.

¹⁸ Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische ‘Lösung der Zigeunerfrage’* (Hamburg, 1996); Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, ‘Apotheose des Rassismus? Über das Verhältnis von Rassendenken, Rassenpolitik und Nationalsozialismus’, in Manuela Bojadžijev et al. (eds.), *Rassismusforschung: Handbuch für Wissenschaft, Studium und Praxis* (forthcoming; Baden-Baden, 2024).

¹⁹ For the blatant continuities in state policies see Gilad Margalit, *Germany and its Gypsies: A Post-Auschwitz Ordeal* (Madison, WI, 2002), 65–82; Sebastian Lotto-Kusche, *Der Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma und die Bundesrepublik: Der lange Weg zur Anerkennung* (Berlin, 2022), 47–59.

Jewish peers. Given their long experience with state representatives of all kinds, they were afraid of medical personnel, uniforms in general, and trucks and trains, so that they often fled on foot from hospitals and reception camps in order to avoid registration. As a result, they had absolutely nowhere to go, no communities – which is why there are hardly any facts, figures, or reports from that period. The Allies did not understand at all why they behaved the way they did.

In the few interviews about this period, which have been analysed by Anja Reuss, survivors unanimously describe themselves as completely disoriented, driven by and filled with fear: ‘And then we were outside, we didn’t even dare go out on the street, we were still afraid that they would catch us . . . we were no longer able to think properly’.²⁰ In search of family members, they too eventually returned to the places from which they had been deported. Many German Sinti had already been settled in impoverished ghettos on the outskirts of the cities in the 1920s, and they now tried to reclaim their homes – in vain. Such was the lot of a young girl who returned to her family’s pitch in the town of Neubrandenburg only to discover that local farmers had converted her family’s wagons into pens for chicken and pigs. The local mayor, who was of course aware that she and her family had been deported to Auschwitz, did not assist her in any way.²¹ The utter desolation of the Sinti survivors led them to form even closer-knit and more segregated groups. They went where they could meet other Sinti and only gradually, by word of mouth, became aware of the full extent of their catastrophe.

Only a little support was provided to them by other Nazi victims’ associations or by the first municipal contact points – partly due to lack of papers (in Berlin, for example, support was linked to proof of residence), and partly due to old prejudice. In the end, it depended on the officials in charge. In particular, those among them who had been persecuted themselves, as Jews or political opponents, often called for better treatment and granted small sums of money or benefits out of compassion or care – while the rest reacted in more or less the same way as before 1945.²² And since there were no superordinate facilities

²⁰ Anja Reuss, *Kontinuitäten der Stigmatisierung: Sinti und Roma in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin, 2015), 63–80; quotation on p. 76.

²¹ *Ibid.* 77.

²² Margalit, *Germany and its Gypsies*, 83–122.

similar to the DP camps for Jewish survivors, surviving Sinti were forced to somehow reintegrate directly into everyday life in Germany. Their attempts often failed. Even those who had already led sedentary lower middle-class lives for generations had to start from scratch. The restlessness expressed in the files and interviews in Anja Reuss' book, the frequent changes of work and residence, the alcoholism and – again and again and above all – the utter poverty, are striking.²³

Utter poverty seems to have linked the Sinti to the group about whom we know least: the approximately 250,000 to 300,000 former forced labourers who, for whatever reason, remained 'stuck' in Germany and mostly lived in the poorer districts as 'homeless foreigners'. But they were by no means invisible. Their story has met with so little historiographical interest because the continuities between the Nazi era and the Federal Republic have so far been considered more from the perspective of the perpetrator society.²⁴ Moreover, in this case the continuities – or what Rita Chin, Maria Alexopoulou, and others have called 'racist knowledge' – are still part of our present.²⁵ In the spring of 1945, around 6 million forced labourers were living on German soil; by autumn, almost 5 million had already left the country for their homelands. The problem was that not all of them wanted to return home – perhaps they had become emotionally attached to Germany, or perhaps the persons they had been emotionally attached to in their places of origin were no longer alive; perhaps they had collaborated with the Germans and could no longer return, or perhaps they did not want to live under Communist rule. Or perhaps they were too ravaged in body and soul to want anything at all. According to a letter from the Polish former forced labourers' organization, many had 'lost their health due to the hard work and malnutrition', and some had also lost their courage to face life.²⁶ Natascha Wodin, to give only one example,

²³ Reuss, *Kontinuitäten der Stigmatisierung*, 139–51.

²⁴ For a discussion of continuities and differences in the policing of foreign workers see Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880–1980: Seasonal Workers, Forced Laborers, Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 186–92.

²⁵ Rita Chin et al. (eds.), *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Bloomington, 2009); Maria Alexopoulou, *Rassistisches Wissen in der Transformation der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in eine Einwanderungsgesellschaft (1940–1990)* (forthcoming with Wallstein Verlag).

²⁶ Alexopoulou, *Rassistisches Wissen*, 147.

tells in her book *She Came from Mariupol* the story of her mother, who committed suicide in the 1950s at the age of 36 after years of forced labour, illegality, isolation, and endless hostility.²⁷

In 1951, up to a quarter of a million former forced labourers were still living in West Germany, although an unknown number might have arrived after the end of the war. This vagueness is based on the fact that local authorities no longer wanted to recognize DPs as victims of the Nazis and simply claimed that they were foreigners ‘who came here later’—which in many cases was an outright lie, as Maria Alexopoulou has proved in her analysis of the foreigners’ files for the city of Mannheim.²⁸ Thus the memory of forced labour was also consciously erased, even though (or perhaps because?) it had been present everywhere—in towns and in the countryside, in factories and families.

After the war, the continued presence of former labourers on German soil was resisted at all levels of government and with common racist arguments. An allegedly high crime rate, a negative attitude towards ‘honest work’, and a tendency towards ‘asociality’ were repeatedly cited.²⁹ But in reality, many were simply too old or too ill, both mentally and physically, and had thus not been able to move on to the United States or Canada. Only after a massive international campaign was this group of non-returnees given the status of ‘homeless foreigners’ in April 1951.³⁰ This status did not grant them any political rights, but it put them on an equal footing with German citizens in many areas. They now had free choice of place of residence and almost equal access to the labour market—only itinerant trade was expressly excluded. At the same time, however, they were still subject to the *Ausländerpolizeiverordnung* (APVO) of 1938, so that despite their privileged status, they were de facto at the mercy of the ‘alien police’, who made life difficult for them with every trick in the book. For example, even though officially they could freely choose where to live, the local police refused to issue them residence permits. If they were allowed to stay,

²⁷ Natascha Wodin, *Sie kam aus Mariupol* (Reinbek, 2017); published in English as *She Came from Mariupol*, trans. Alfred Kueppers (East Lansing, MI, 2022).

²⁸ Alexopoulou, *Rassistisches Wissen*, 130–4.

²⁹ Ibid. 110–15.

³⁰ Anna Holian, ‘A Missing Narrative: Displaced Persons in the History of Postwar West Germany’, in Cornelia Wilhelm (ed.), *Migration, Memory, and Diversity: Germany from 1945 to the Present* (New York, 2017), 32–55, at 36.

they did so in the most appalling circumstances. In Mannheim, for instance, former DPs were often housed until the 1960s in old forced labour barracks, while single men lived in a former bunker. Many seem to have lived out their lives in welfare institutions such as homeless shelters or men's homes, and the term 'asocial' abounds in the files. In other words, National Socialist biopolitics continued not only in the language of state institutions, but in everyday life.³¹ The integration of the 'homeless foreigners' into the West German labour market has hardly been researched to date. Sometimes it is described as almost non-existent, sometimes as somewhat positive, mainly thanks to the job opportunities offered by the Allied armed forces.³² In the 1960s, their stories in German archives increasingly start to merge with those of the new foreigners arriving in the country. This again points to another important topic: the privileged status of the 'homeless foreigner' theoretically also entitled them to preferential treatment when applying for German citizenship. By now, it will presumably come as no surprise that this request by the Allies was deliberately forgotten by German institutions. Nor did the authorities consider it necessary to notify former forced workers of the possibility of acquiring a new, better status, which meant that most did not apply for it in the first place or later had to fight for it in vain.³³

However, this had serious consequences with regard to the question of compensation. Although German citizenship was not a prerequisite for this, it was extremely helpful when applying as a racially or politically persecuted person under the 1953 Federal Compensation Act. Compensation for foreign forced labourers was postponed until after peace treaties had been concluded with their countries of origin, and finally came at a time when most of them had already died. Individual claims, even if only for lost wages, were almost always unsuccessful; a female former slave worker in Mannheim, for example, was told that she would first have to provide proof of her exact working hours during the war years.³⁴ In general, German courts denied that forced labour had been 'racist' persecution, but rather maintained that workers had been recruited for their professional aptitude. Incidentally,

³¹ Alexopoulou, *Rassistisches Wissen*, 137–67, 170–5.

³² *Ibid.* 107–9, 168–9.

³³ *Ibid.* 139–40.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 180.

similar arguments are found up until the 1960s in court rulings on compensation for Sinti and Roma: their persecution had not been racially motivated either, but had merely served to 'prevent crime' or had been carried out for 'military reasons' (in order to prevent espionage), as the Federal Court of Justice ruled in 1956 with regard to the first mass deportation of German Sinti in 1940 to the area of the later Belzec death camp in south-east Poland.³⁵

Expatriated as a group in 1935, Sinti and Roma benefited from the support of the Allies until 1949, who, on request, issued them with 'concentration camp ID cards' and thereby documented both their persecution and their German citizenship. However, after 1949 (and sometimes even before), these cards were withdrawn by the German authorities unless 'real proof' could be provided. For example, Otto Rosenberg, who had survived Auschwitz and other camps as a teenager, was now expected to prove that the rest of his family had been gassed there, or that his mother, who had died of exhaustion after liberation, was really buried there.³⁶ A similarly brutal approach was taken to pension applications. Anja Reuss tells us of a Sinti woman whose baby had been murdered in Auschwitz and who herself had been severely harmed by her imprisonment in a concentration camp. She had to submit to a medical examination every two years in order to maintain her claims, and when her menstruation resumed, her pension was reduced.³⁷ Frank Trentmann's apt remarks about compensation proceedings before German courts in general also apply to all these cases: 'Individual experiences of persecution were reduced to percentage points of disability and resulting benefits'³⁸ – if acknowledged at all. These were humiliating and often retraumatizing experiences for all victims. In the case of Sinti and Roma, the dividing lines between persecution, compensation, and prejudice were to a certain extent fluid: for example, the central police files developed during the Nazi

³⁵ The full text of the verdict is reproduced in Tilman Zülch (ed.), *In Auschwitz vergast, bis heute verfolgt: Zur Situation der Roma (Zigeuner) in Deutschland und Europa* (Reinbek, 1979), 168–71. See also Hans-Joachim Döring, 'Die Motive der Zigeuner-Deportation vom Mai 1940', *Vierteljahrhefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 7 (1959), 418–28.

³⁶ Reuss, *Kontinuitäten der Stigmatisierung*, 93.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 107.

³⁸ Trentmann, *Out of the Darkness*, 183.

era and other persecutory Nazi records served as credible evidence in compensation proceedings. There was also a tendency to pay out compensation not in money, but in material goods.³⁹

Such examples once again show how fundamentally important Allied protection had been for Jewish survivors. For example, under US pressure, Jews were allowed to (re)acquire German citizenship, and by 1952, 70 per cent of the Jewish DPs still living on German soil had made use of this option.⁴⁰ From the summer of 1945 onwards, they were provided for fairly well, especially as private Jewish organizations also supported the survivors to the best of their abilities. And, as is well known, the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952 determined that payments amounting to billions were to be made to the State of Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference for the benefit of victims. In addition, the Federal Republic of Germany committed itself to the individual restitution of assets – a process that was notoriously slow to begin and has not yet been completed. Individual compensation claims, however, followed a similar pattern and were a bureaucratic and psychological nightmare for the victims.⁴¹ These procedures may appear somewhat less brutal or cynical in comparison to the groups of victims I have already discussed, but it is hard to imagine how they would have turned out without the watchful eye of the USA or the dreaded ‘world opinion’ monitoring the German treatment of Jews after 1949.

Domestically, on the other hand, it was clear and unmistakable that the care for Jewish DPs, the Luxembourg Agreement, and the compensation payments and restitutions were lending new impetus to anti-Jewish resentment – a new theme that was nonetheless easily linked to old antisemitic notions.⁴² It is therefore hardly surprising that after the founding of the Federal Republic, this completely

³⁹ Margalit, *Germany and its Gypsies*, 83–122.

⁴⁰ Atina Grossmann, ‘From Victims to “Homeless Foreigners”: Jewish Survivors in Postwar Germany’, in Chin et al. (eds.), *After the Nazi Racial State*, 55–79, at 76.

⁴¹ Svenja Goltermann, ‘Kausalitätsfragen: Psychisches Leid und psychiatrisches Wissen in der Entschädigung’, in Norbert Frei, José Brunner, and Constantin Goschler (eds.), *Die Praxis der Wiedergutmachung: Geschichte, Erfahrung und Wirkung in Deutschland und Israel* (Göttingen, 2009), 427–51.

⁴² Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch Since 1945*, trans. Belinda Cooper and Allison Brown (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997), 225–71.

unconcealed aggression was unleashed against a Jewish representative of the compensation proceedings. Philipp Auerbach had survived Auschwitz and served as the Bavarian State Commissioner for Racially, Religiously, and Politically Persecuted Persons between 1946 and 1951. He sometimes used his position to grant payments according to need rather than according to administrative procedure. After being driven out of office by an antisemitically motivated court case, he committed suicide in prison in 1952.⁴³ Hans Habe, a journalist who had returned to Germany from exile, commented bitterly: ‘Thus a . . . controversial but innocent man became the first victim of Nazi justice seven years after our victory over Hitler’s Germany.’⁴⁴

Here, as in other cases, anti-Jewish media agitation shaped the public treatment of Nazi victims. A particularly popular topic in the first post-war decade were the Jewish *Greifer* (‘catchers’)—men and women, forced by the Gestapo to cooperate, who tracked down Jews in hiding in Berlin and handed them over to their murderers. The best known of them, Stella Goldschlag, was sentenced in a Soviet trial in 1946 to ten years in a camp and, after her release, to another ten years in prison in West Berlin. Of the hundreds of Berlin Gestapo members, only sixteen were held responsible for the deaths of more than 55,000 Jewish Berliners. Even though some were tried in court, all of them were released before 1950.⁴⁵

This was not an exception, but a pattern. As the work of Philipp Dinkelaker has shown, more Jews accused of betraying other Jews under Gestapo pressure were tried in the former capital of the German Reich than were German perpetrators. Shortly after the war, the last head of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (Reich Association of Jews in Germany; formerly Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden, or Reich Representation of German Jews) was imprisoned and then executed by the Soviets, and at least fourteen former Jewish auxiliaries were held in Gulag camps or received lengthy prison sentences of twenty-five years. In the trials of subaltern Jewish auxiliaries of the

⁴³ Hans-Hermann Klare, *Auerbach: Eine jüdisch-deutsche Tragödie oder wie der Antisemitismus den Krieg überlebte* (Berlin, 2022).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Grossmann, ‘Victims’, 72.

⁴⁵ Doris Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat: Jüdische ‘Greifer’ im Dienst der Gestapo 1943–1945* (Berlin, 2006).

Berlin Judenrat (Jewish Council) in the 1950s, the city's courts based their sentences on antisemitic preconceptions, as Philipp Dinkelaker sharply observes: 'Cementing the *Völkisch* image of Jews as a collective with shared interests, individual survival to the detriment of others was understood as a base motive, a particularly reprehensible betrayal that aggravated punishment.'⁴⁶ As we know, this directly contradicts German judicial arguments when the fate of the perpetrators was at stake.

I am fully aware that it is probably neither historically nor ethically convincing to place the cases of Auerbach or the Reichsvertretung auxiliaries under the rubric of 'persecution'. Of course, there is a fundamental difference between a constitution that deems the 'dignity of man' to be 'inviolable' and a state that enacts racist laws, pursues deadly antisemitic policies, and denies disabled and mentally ill people the right to live. These trials took place in a democracy and in a state of law. However, as we have already seen, below the officially applicable norms there was a wide margin of interpretation—the famous German administrative *Ermessensspielraum*—in which members of victim groups were treated quite differently from other Germans.

As already shown, there was a fundamental continuity between the persecution of Sinti and Roma in the Nazi state and their treatment in the first years of the Federal Republic—the only major, but decisive, distinction being of course that they were no longer subjected to genocide. Immediately after 1945, the same German authorities who had dealt with them during the war endeavoured to circumvent the Allies' protective measures. Without identity papers, they could be—and often were—deported across the border to the East. After the founding of the Federal Republic, this policy became more radical and they were monitored and regulated in accordance with the APVO, which meant that they could be banned from staying in one place, but also from 'wandering around'. In short, the Sinti and Roma had once again become objects of so-called crime prevention, and the police only needed to get used to the new terminology: *Landfahrer* (vagrants)

⁴⁶ Philipp Dinkelaker, "'Worse than the Gestapo'? Jews Accused of Collaboration during and after the Shoah' (PhD thesis, Technische Universität Berlin, 2022), 236. Dinkelaker's thesis will soon be published by Cornell University Press.

instead of *Zigeuner* (Gypsies), who continued to be recorded separately in police statistics.⁴⁷ Only during the 1970s can we witness the beginning of a slow change, thanks to incipient activism.⁴⁸ Internal police guidelines from 1970 still record a biological understanding of crime, despite relabelling: 'Travellers are persons who move around the country with vehicles due to an ingrained tendency to wander. The temporary or permanent establishment or maintenance of a dwelling does not necessarily invalidate the person's status as a traveller.'⁴⁹ In 1979, the genocide of the Sinti and Roma was publicly acknowledged for the first time by a representative of the German government at a commemorative event, and only in 1982 was their special registration finally abolished. But the history of trauma and the denial of life chances that affected Sinti and Roma even after the period of persecution has not yet been written.

This can also be said about the last group of victims I wish to discuss: homosexual men. They were persecuted not on racial grounds, but in the context of Nazi biopolitics, which aimed to eradicate everything that stood in the way of creating a 'healthy *Volkskörper*'. In addition to this, a homosexual panic among masculinist organizations such as the SS caused its leader, Heinrich Himmler, to intensify persecution. In contrast to the groups discussed so far, homosexuals could theoretically avoid persecution by trying to disappear into the 'national community' and live as inconspicuously as possible. However, the desire to denounce them in those years set narrow limits. During the Nazi era, tens of thousands were convicted under Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, which was tightened in 1935. Approximately 15,000 homosexual men were sent to concentration camps, where they were often on the lowest rung of the prisoner hierarchy, tortured cruelly by the guards, and despised by most of their fellow inmates. Thousands died in the concentration camps, and some were only released from prison long after May 1945.⁵⁰ But, in contrast

⁴⁷ Margalit, *Germany and its Gypsies*, 56–82.

⁴⁸ Silvio Peritore, 'Politische Emanzipation, Erinnerungsarbeit und Gedenkstätten', in von Mengersen (ed.), *Sinti und Roma*, 185–200.

⁴⁹ Lotto-Kusche, *Der Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma*, 54.

⁵⁰ Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz: Die Verfolgung der Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn, 1990); Burkhard Jellonnek,

to the other victim groups discussed here, they at least had homes to go back to, sometimes also families and friends. After short-lived attempts to gain recognition as Nazi victims, which mostly failed due to their exclusion by victims' organizations, it became clear after the founding of the state that the law would not be changed.⁵¹ On the contrary, the Federal Republic explicitly retained Paragraph 175 in its 1935 Nazi wording until 1969, and, as is well known, it was not completely abolished until 1994.

This led to a phenomenon that I would like to call a persecution frenzy, without which the picture of the post-war period would not be complete. In only twenty years, between 1949 and 1969, around 50,000 sentences for homosexual behaviour were handed down in the Federal Republic—more than during the German Empire and the Weimar Republic combined. In addition, no compensation was granted to these victims of Nazi persecution, neither for the time spent in prison nor for such dramatic procedures as castration, which some homosexual men had undergone during the war years to avoid being sent to a concentration camp.⁵² Like so many other persecuted people, most of the surviving homosexual and queer victims of National Socialism never lived to receive state recognition of their suffering and often died impoverished, isolated, and in poor health—not only because of the physical harm they had suffered during the Nazi era, but also because of repression in the post-war period, which was only marginally milder. Even castration continued to be seen as an acceptable alternative to preventive detention once convicts had served their sentences. It seems easy to prove that social homophobia was also radicalized *after* the Nazi era, presumably not least due to

‘Nationalsozialistische Homosexuellenverfolgung in Stadt und Land: Die ländlich strukturierte Pfalz, das städtische Würzburg und das Ballungszentrum Düsseldorf im Vergleich’, in Alexander Zinn (ed.), *Homosexuelle in Deutschland 1933–1969: Beiträge zu Alltag, Stigmatisierung und Verfolgung* (Göttingen, 2020), 49–59.

⁵¹ See e.g. Susanne zur Nieden, ‘Die Aberkannten: Der Berliner Hauptauschuß “Opfer des Faschismus” und die verfolgten Homosexuellen’, in Frei, Brunner, and Goschler (eds.), *Die Praxis der Wiedergutmachung*, 264–89.

⁵² Alexander Zinn, ‘“Gegen das Sittengesetz”: Staatliche Homosexuellenverfolgung in Deutschland 1933–1969’, in Zinn (ed.), *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 15–48.

propaganda and socialization *during* the Nazi period: expert opinions, psychiatrists, criminologists, and, finally, the media provide ample illustrative material.⁵³ On the other hand, it is much more difficult to reconstruct the consequences for those affected. These included the destruction of social and family ties that often followed from a conviction, or the loss of a job or of educational opportunities (convicted students were expelled from universities, for example). In short, homosexual men faced the fear of social disgrace as well as the psychological pressure of permanent disguise – the fury of denunciation had by no means subsided in the 1950s and 1960s and remained a very effective tool of threat and blackmail until 1969.

To conclude: during a discussion of contemporary history from the margins on a panel at the 2023 German Historians' Convention, Julia Noah Munier emphasized that the persecution of homosexuals took place not so much on the margins, but right at the heart of the 'success story' of the Federal Republic – and not only in social terms, but also ideologically. It was precisely the heterosexual 'model of marriage and family', she argued, which, as the nucleus of the now democratic society, promised salvation through purification.⁵⁴ At the same time, of course, it required a negative counter-pole – namely, the 'homosexual youth seducer', the different variants of which Frank Biess has recently presented to us in his fascinating book *German Angst*.⁵⁵ But fear was by no means the only German emotion of the post-war period, and at least from the perspective presented here, it was not even the dominant one. If we consider the persecution furore against homosexuals, and add to it – which I have *not* done here – the written outpourings of hatred against communists, and later against the so-called '68ers and the German terrorists of the 1970s, in which people fantasized about every conceivable way of killing their enemies; if we consider these

⁵³ Julia Noah Munier, *Lebenswelten und Verfolgungsschicksale homosexueller Männer in Baden und Württemberg im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2021).

⁵⁴ See the conference report by Lukas Sebastian Sievert and Andreas Charis, 'HT 2023: An den Rändern des Erfolgs – Segregierte Geschichten der (frühen) Bundesrepublik', *H-Soz-Kult* (25 Nov. 2023), at [<https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-140099>], accessed 3 Feb. 2024.

⁵⁵ Frank Biess, *German Angst: Fear and Democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford, 2020).

two quite violent resentments – homophobia and anti-communism – together, then we find an eerie contrast to the radiant satisfaction of the economic miracle up until the 1970s: a subcutaneous but passionate need for punishment that at times came to the surface, coupled with a contempt for Sinti and Roma as well as Eastern Europeans that was fed by an astonishingly unbroken sense of superiority. By contrast, it is more difficult to get to the heart of feelings towards Jews in the post-war period, not least because such feelings were made taboo by the Allies. They were as varied as antisemitism is, and in the post-war period they were nourished by resentment of the living proof of German guilt, as well as envy – which could easily turn into philo-semitic admiration. However, all these groups were united by the majority society's feeling that they should *not be there*. Even though this was the most taboo topic in post-war Germany, 37 per cent of respondents to a 1952 survey agreed with the statement that it would be better not to have Jews in the country, while 44 per cent were 'undecided'. At least up to the 1960s, there was a (silent) majority of Germans who preferred not to share their country with their Jewish fellow citizens.⁵⁶ In this respect, Munier's thesis should prompt a discussion of what functions antisemitism and racism had for the *centre* of society in the early Federal Republic, and not just how they played out on its fringes, where a few hundred thousand people were treated badly for a while.

This question is important for various reasons. The narrative of the unsightly continuity of the elite is incomplete if it is written only as a history of ideology and mentalities, or as an institutional history, without taking into account the perspective of those who paid a very real price for it. As Frank Biess and Astrid Eckert have recently postulated, the narrative of continuity as a whole changes when the various forms of exclusion are systematically considered.⁵⁷

In contrast, this perspective brings into view factors that have so far played no role at all in the different narratives of the Federal

⁵⁶ Werner Bergmann, 'Sind die Deutschen antisemitisch? Meinungsumfragen von 1946–1987 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', in Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb (ed.), *Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945* (Opladen, 1990), 108–30, at 115.

⁵⁷ Frank Biess and Astrid M. Eckert, 'Why Do We Need New Narratives for the History of the Federal Republic?', *Central European History*, 52/1 (2019), 1–18.

Republic, be it as a success story or recently in more self-critical variants.⁵⁸ In a remarkable essay, Lauren Stokes points out that there were not only a quarter of a million former forced labourers in the post-war years of the Federal Republic, but that new immigrants came into the country *before* this situation was regulated by the ‘guest worker’ treaties.⁵⁹ Given the great need for labourers, foreigners were tolerated even without papers, while the official rhetoric was very different, as we have seen. At the local level, the authorities turned a blind eye when entrepreneurs employed foreign workers illegally, without residence or work permits. The famous discretionary power of the administration could thus work both ways. Economic requirements and the ability to work were decisive here – making it possible to undermine the racist practices that were so vehemently upheld against others, mostly weaker persons, at the same time. But ‘racist knowledge’ also served to keep the costs of labour low: accommodation in barracks, twelve men to a room, hardly any washing facilities, and so on. Even if one knows this in theory, accounts of the living conditions of foreign workers until well into the 1970s should be compulsory reading in every German history lesson. After all, it was not only their labour that made the economic boom possible, but also the living conditions that were thought to be acceptable for them on racist grounds.

Foreign workers were at the same time well aware of these historical roots, as there existed another kind of knowledge in Germany: that of those ‘stranded’ after the war, of course, but also that of many of the new arrivals. After all, Italians, Greeks, and Yugoslavs came from formerly occupied countries where the SS and Wehrmacht had committed many outrages against civilians. They quickly learned to relate their own experiences to the (war) knowledge about ‘the Germans’ that was available in most European countries. They then transferred that knowledge to their colleagues from further afield, as a first-generation Turkish labour migrant recalled: ‘Only then did I understand why the police and the Germans were so unfriendly to

⁵⁸ Annette Weinke et al. (eds.), *Demokratisierung der Deutschen: Errungenschaften und Anfechtungen eines Projekts* (Göttingen, 2020).

⁵⁹ Lauren Stokes, ‘The Permanent Refugee Crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–’, *Central European History*, 52/1 (2019), 19–44, at 30–2.

us! With such a past! . . . When we came here, it had only been twenty years since the war.⁶⁰

Migrants used the murderous German past to account for the otherwise inexplicable hostility that surrounded them, and which they perceived as deeply inhumane. Lore's children, however, coming of age in the 1960s and working through the Nazi past of their family and their nation in the late 1970s and 1980s, had no idea how present this past still was in their country. It is about time we took note of this.

⁶⁰ Dilek Güven, 'Das jüdisch-muslimische Morgenland: Antisemitismus und Bilder von Juden unter Deutschtürken verschiedener Generationen', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 33 (forthcoming, 2024).

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