



Eichmann's Jews

The Jewish Administration of Holocaust Vienna,
1938-1945

Doron Rabinovici

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In memory of Franz Löw-Danneberg and Willy Stern

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THE JEWISH ADMINISTRATION OF
HOLOCAUST VIENNA, 1938–1945

DORON RABINOVICI

Translated by Nick Somers

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PREFACE

The subject of this book has haunted me for years. Discussion of the Jewish councils touches the post-1945 Jewish identity and more than anything else shows how the Nazi extermination policy even managed to rob the victims of their dignity. I have never been able to make light of this and have therefore attempted to make an academic study of the material, although realizing at the same time that words alone are inadequate to do justice to the subject.

In the Jewish youth organization I belonged to in Vienna, called Hashomer Hatzair, we sometimes carried out mock trials. The issue in dispute was fixed and there were guidelines for each of the protagonists but we usually improvised as we went along. One of us was the judge, another the defendant; there was a defence lawyer and a plaintiff, speeches and pleas and witnesses to be cross-examined. I recall one case – I must have been eleven years old – that particularly marked me. One of us, barely older than seventeen, was on trial as head of the Jewish community. ‘Partisans’ testified against him and other ‘survivors’ spoke in his favour: in other words, a reconstruction by a group of young people in Austria in the mid-1970s of the unofficial Jewish courts that were set up after 1945 in various countries, particularly in the displaced person camps. Some of our parents might well have taken part in proceedings of this type. We spectators were the jury and had to reach a decision. Without knowing much about it, we quickly found the defendant guilty. After the Holocaust, young Jews sought a new identity, and could only see themselves as members of the resistance. It was impossible to imagine what it had been like as a member of the Jewish councils.

This book, by contrast, attempts to understand the situation of Jewish functionaries under the Nazis. By looking at the point of view of the victims, we can see how unfathomable and absurd everything

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that was done to them must have appeared. Their despair and their powerlessness reflect the extent and nature of the crime. A critical study can possibly shed light on aspects that the victims were unable to see or to comprehend at the time and might also draw attention to some of our own weaknesses and blind spots.

Considerable research has been carried out on Jewish councils in other parts of Europe, but the Jewish administrative bodies in the German Reich have long been extensively ignored. In Germany and Austria, a study of the Jewish community leaders and the involvement of Jews with the Nazi regime that organized their expulsion and extermination has been just too sensitive an issue.

Consideration of the situation in Vienna is, however, of vital importance. To understand how the Jewish councils came about, it is essential to consider the developments in Austria. It was here that department II-112 of the Security Service under Adolf Eichmann developed the model for the Nazi Jewish policy. The Vienna model was then copied in other cities like Berlin, Prague or Paris. Eichmann set up the first Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Vienna as the Nazi authority responsible for organizing the mass expulsion and later the deportation to extermination camps. The Jewish organizations were completely at the mercy of the regime. The Jewish administration was restructured in its entirety. The Vienna Jewish Community authorities (Kultusgemeinde) under Nazi rule can be regarded as a prototype for the future Jewish councils.

I am grateful to a large number of people and institutions for their indispensable aid in researching this subject. This book could not have been written without the support of the staff of the following archives, listed here alphabetically: Archive of the Republic of Austria, Vienna; Archive of the Landgericht, Vienna; Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem; Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; Documentation Archive of Austrian Resistance, Vienna; Documentation Centre of the Association of Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime, Vienna; Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. I should like to thank them for helping me with my research. Hadassah Assouline, director of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, not only gave me access to the Kultusgemeinde archive in her institute but also referred me to the private archive there of Benjamin Marmelstein. Elisabeth Klamper from the Documentation Archive of Austrian Resistance helped me to locate documents.

Dolfi Brunner, Walter Fantl, Marcel Faust, Gerda Feldsberg, Paul Gross, Franz Hahn, Mares Prochnik, Herbert Schrott and Martin Vogel, along with Willy Stern and Franz Löw-Danneberg, who have

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both died in the meantime, allowed me to interview them for hours and gave me the benefit of their recollections.

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I owe a particular debt of thanks to Karl Stuhlpfarrer, my academic mentor at the University of Vienna. He encouraged me for years and spurred me on with advice, criticism and praise.

I am extremely grateful to my parents, Shoshana and David Rabinovici, for their sincere support.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A/W	Archive of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde in the CAHJP
CAHJP	Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DÖW	Documentation Archive of Austrian Resistance
IKG	Kultusgemeinde (Jewish Community authorities)
P	Private archive of Benjamin Murrelstein in the CAHJP
YIVO	Yidisher Visenschaftlicher Institut
YvS	Yad Vashem

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When I was teaching in Cleveland, a young Jewish political scientist, engaged to a German woman, said to my face, without flinching: ‘I know what you survivors had to do to stay alive.’ I didn’t know what we had had to do, but I knew what he wanted to say. He wanted to say: ‘You walked over dead bodies.’ Should I have answered: ‘But I was only twelve’? Or said, ‘But I am a good girl, always have been’? Both answers implicate the others, my fellow prisoners. Or I could have said, ‘Where do you get off talking like that?’ and gotten angry. I said nothing, went home to my children, and was depressed. For in reality the cause of survival was almost pure chance.

Ruth Klüger,
*Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*¹

Survivor guilt

The mass murder of millions of Jews was a collective crime. Although it was organized centrally, the work was split up and carried out by different authorities. Not just the police and the judiciary, but also the railways and banks, universities and industry offered their services to help isolate and rob the Jews, expel and exterminate them. What happened in the concentration camps and behind the front was officially kept secret, but here, too, quite a few people were involved in the misdeeds, and many were aware of some of the things that were going on. Only a few might have had an idea of the full magnitude of the crimes, but practically everybody knew that it was something not to be talked about.

A study of the files reveals the zeal, speed and thoroughness with which the anti-Jewish measures, decrees and laws were passed in

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Vienna in 1938 – a far cry from the proverbial sluggishness of Viennese bureaucracy. The crime was a social phenomenon: its progress was acclaimed in the newspapers and the plundering, beatings and pogrom that took place in November 1938, the deaths, arson and rape, were hailed triumphantly.

The mass murder would not have been possible without the indulgence and tacit consent of the population. One aspect of the misdeed was that the victims were deprived of any support. They were betrayed and at the mercy of everybody, completely defenceless in the face of the crimes committed. Before the physical annihilation, the victims were destroyed socially and psychologically.

On 15 October 1945, the head of the Vienna State Police filed charges with the public prosecutor's office against Wilhelm Reisz. During the Nazi era, Reisz had been subordinate to SS-Scharführer [squad leader] Herbert Gerbing. He was involved in the *Aushebung*, as it was called, of the Jews (literally 'lifting out') – finding out where Jews listed for deportation lived, noting their names and helping them to pack the few things they were allowed to take with them. Reisz's actions, remarked the Austrian head of the State Police, were 'particularly reprehensible' because he 'brought misfortune on his compatriots in order to gain advantage for himself'.²

Why was Reisz exceptional? Was he 'particularly reprehensible' because otherwise Austrians did not bring misfortune on their compatriots in order to gain advantage for themselves? Not at all: the National Socialist Jewish policy in Austria was not imposed from without, by the Old German Reich against the will of the people. Austrian anti-Semites went to work with great fervour in 1938, proceeding with a fanatical sense of duty that was as yet unimaginable in Berlin. Was Wilhelm Reisz then unexceptional in a country that after 1945 styled itself merely as Hitler's 'first victim'? No, he was an exception: Reisz was a Jew – and he survived. He 'brought misfortune', as the Vienna State Police put it, 'on his compatriots', Jews persecuted by the Nazis.

Wilhelm Reisz had been appointed by the Kultusgemeinde [Jewish Community authorities – IKG] in 1939 after he had demonstrated his ability to obtain passports even in difficult cases. When, after 1941, Jews were no longer being expelled but deported and killed, the SS demanded Jewish marshals [Ordner] from the IKG to assist the SS men in their round-ups. Josef Löwenherz, the head of the IKG, attempted initially to obstruct this request, but the SS threatened to use members of the Hitler Youth to collect Jews from their homes and take them to the assembly points. Then the Nazi authorities

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appointed a Jewish Gestapo informer to recruit a squad of thugs. At this point, Löwenherz agreed to designate trusted Jewish employees, who would answer directly to the SS men.³ Each member of the SS was to be accompanied by a Jewish Gruppenführer [group leader] and a troop of assistants [*Ausheber* – literally ‘lifters’]. Those who refused were likely to be immediately deported.

Wilhelm Reisz was Gruppenführer of the Jewish marshals under SS-Scharführer Gerbing. He had not volunteered for this task but was not in any position to refuse it. As a victim of the Nazi persecution of the Jews he was forced to cooperate, drawing attention to himself through his excessive zeal as a means of making himself indispensable and of surviving in this way. Testimony relating to Reisz was mixed. Some said under oath that they had him to thank for their lives. He had worked initially in the emigration department of the Kultusgemeinde and helped Jews to flee from the Nazis. As a Gruppenführer, he also intervened in individual cases to prevent expulsion. For most of the victims, however, he was known as the ‘meshuggene Reisz’, roughly treating the people he rounded up and singling out to the SS-Scharführer the ones who were to be deported. For the round-up operations, Gerbing sent his subordinate Reisz in advance. Gerbing himself remained in a car in front of the building, or sat comfortably in an armchair and dozed off while Jews were being ferreted out and their homes cleared. Once he had a dentist explain his medical equipment to him while Reisz was getting on with the ‘official business’. Jewish witnesses described Gerbing as a ‘would-be medical student’ with refined manners, ‘not as rough and vigorous as the other Scharführer, most of whom were butchers’, said one witness at Reisz’s trial before the Austrian People’s Court.⁴ The judgement reflected this estimation.

Witnesses in other trials, by contrast, present a Herbert Gerbing who was not particularly notable for his good manners. One witness of a round-up recalled at the trial of Anton Brunner: ‘When we left the house, I saw Gerbing battering a certain Dr Gross with brass knuckles until the man’s eye dangled from its socket and his nose was broken.’⁵

And yet Gerbing gave many victims to understand that he had nothing to do with the round-ups. While some of his colleagues enjoyed tormenting the Jews themselves, Gerbing appears to have taken particular pleasure in letting Reisz do the work for him. Sometimes, if they were not working satisfactorily, the *Ausheber*, including Reisz, were beaten. The Jewish Gruppenführer had to hope for his own sake that he would find enough victims. His own life

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depended on it. Sometimes, if the quota was not filled, if people listed for deportation could not be found, the Jewish helpers were transported in their place. The court said on this matter: 'The accused took on work in this way that was not in fact part of his duties.'⁶

Wilhelm Reisz also volunteered for a journey to Berlin. Three Austrian Jews had been ordered to show how the round-ups in Vienna were being carried out. On his return, he expressed his surprise to other Jews that the non-Jewish population of Berlin resisted the round-ups. One witness stated that even in Theresienstadt, Berlin Jews had complained about the Viennese methods, mentioning Reisz explicitly.⁷

The Austrian People's Court found Reisz guilty and sentenced him to fifteen years' imprisonment, including three months' hard labour. Fifteen years for a Jew who had previously been under a death sentence and had escaped the mass extermination only because as a Gruppenführer he had made himself indispensable to Gerbing.

Johann Rixinger, the Gestapo clerk responsible for Jewish affairs in Vienna, who had had enormous decision-making powers during the deportations and was implicated in the organization of the mass murder, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He served only six and a half years.⁸ The Gestapo treasurer Bernhard Wittke was sentenced to three years.⁹ The notoriously brutal SS man Ernst Girzik, holder of the Blood Order, was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment like Reisz – albeit without having lived constantly in fear of death in the same way Reisz, as a Jew, had done. He was granted amnesty by the Austrian Federal President in December 1953.¹⁰

The Jewish Gruppenführer Wilhelm Reisz thus received five years more than Johann Rixinger. Unlike Reisz, Gestapo officials could claim that they had been obliged to obey orders. It might be pointed out in this regard, however, that police officers or soldiers in the Third Reich were able to refuse to participate in crimes against civilians and in shootings and mass killings. No one was prosecuted because he did not feel capable of taking part in genocide. All that it meant was that he would be transferred and not get promotion. Reisz's 'zeal', by contrast, was held against him: 'The accused did more than was required of him. The People's Court does not condemn him for having been a marshal. He was under coercion. The testimony indicates, however, that he worked with a certain amount of "zeal", which he must now be held accountable for.'¹¹

The court was not interested in the fact that, as a Jew in Vienna, Reisz was in constant danger. It took no account of the fact that he had to work with particular 'zeal' for the SS-Scharführer so as to

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avoid being deported to a death camp. Gerbing exploited the Jew Reisz first for the round-ups from 1941 to 1943 and then again in court after 1945. Like many of his SS colleagues from the Vienna headquarters, he disappeared and was never found and called to account for his deeds.¹²

On the day after sentence was passed, Reisz hanged himself in his cell.¹³ For seven years, he had suffered under Nazi persecution and survived extermination. And now he committed suicide. Unlike many Nazi criminals, who committed suicide to escape capture, trial or conviction, Reisz did not kill himself until after the judgement had been passed. He had not expected to be convicted and saw himself not as a perpetrator but as a victim of the Nazi regime. The very things that had helped him to survive were held against him in the trial. Was he overcome by guilt? Or was it simply despair that those who had committed the crimes and their accessories, who had involved him in their acts, had now got off more lightly than he had?

The severity of the sentence is surprising, particularly in comparison with the judgements otherwise passed down by the Austrian judiciary after 1945. Of the 136,000 people who appeared until 1956 in Austria before the People's Courts, as they were called, for Nazi crimes, 108,000 proceedings were discontinued or suspended. Of the remaining 28,000, just under half ended in conviction. In many instances, however, it was not a case of crimes committed against others, but rather of technical offences [*Formaldelikte*], such as illegal membership of the Nazi Party between 1934 and 1938.¹⁴

Although Reisz was the only Jew to be convicted by the Austrian People's Court, proceedings were instigated against other Viennese Jews in Austria and other countries after 1945. In February 1949, Oscar Reich was tried before a military tribunal in Paris.¹⁵ Born in Vienna in 1914, Reich had been a well-known football player there and had been able to escape to France in 1938 after being signed by the Association sportive de Cannes. When war broke out, he was interned for a lengthy period in various camps in Vichy France before being imprisoned by the Gestapo in early October 1943 in the camp at Drancy. There he was recruited by the SS to the internal camp police and was engaged in round-ups outside the camp, avoiding deportation to Auschwitz in this way. On trial with Reich was the SS man Josef Weiszl, who had helped to organize deportations to Auschwitz from Drancy and was far senior in rank to Reich. In Vienna, Weiszl had been a colleague of SS-Scharführer Herbert Gerbing and had been particularly enthusiastic in his persecution of

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Jews: ‘He was the most horrible *Ausheber* and always performed “merit tasks demonstrating his industriousness”. Not only did he drag designated Jews from their dwellings; he also grabbed anyone he encountered on the way or who lived in the same house where he was to perform a seizure.’¹⁶

Weiszl also rounded up people who according to the Nazi laws were exempt from extermination, such as the Jewish partners in mixed marriages. He was notorious in Drancy for his brutality, and witnesses described physical punishment, beatings with his rifle butt, whipping and torture. On hearing of her impending deportation, one woman slit her arteries. Weiszl refused her medical attention and forced her into the wagon, where she died on the journey to Auschwitz.¹⁷

The military tribunal in Paris allowed the SS man Josef Weiszl mitigating circumstances. It sentenced him to life imprisonment, commuted in 1952 to twenty years’ penal servitude. He was released in 1955. By contrast, Oscar Reich, who could not claim merely to have been following orders, was sentenced to death by the same tribunal and executed by a French police firing squad at Fort de Montrouge on 5 July 1949.¹⁸

Josef Weiszl returned to Vienna in December 1955 where, as he said himself, he was received by the State of Austria as a late returnee [*Spätheimkehrer*] and was allocated welfare benefits as such. Although the tribunal in Paris had convicted him only for crimes committed in France, Vienna’s ‘most terrible *Ausheber*’ was not called to task by the Austrian public prosecutor’s office. In May 1956, the judiciary decided not to pursue Weiszl any further because he had already been convicted abroad.¹⁹

This book is not meant to be an apology for the Jewish *Ausheber*. The examples of post-Fascist jurisprudence described here are not intended to demonstrate that Jewish defendants were all innocent, but rather to show the imbalance in the judgements. That the perpetrators committed criminal acts is a self-evident truism. Jewish victims who did not fit in with the prototype ‘victim’ of Nazi extermination, however, were seen as particularly reprehensible and disgraceful. They were accused of collaborating with the totalitarian criminals. The responsibility for this relationship was sought not with the perpetrator but with the victims, as if they had had a particular interest in this deadly constellation.

Wilhelm Reisz and Oscar Reich were under constant threat of death during the Nazi regime. Primo Levi, a survivor, writes of this situation:

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The condition of the offended does not exclude culpability, which is often objectively serious, but I know of no human tribunal to which one could delegate the judgement. If it were up to me, if I were forced to judge, I would light-heartedly absolve all those whose concurrence in the guilt was minimal and for whom coercion was of the highest degree.²⁰

Why did the judges fail to reach the same conclusion as Primo Levi? Why did so many of the critics take no account of the defendants' predicament? The constant fear of death and the will to survive were frequently ignored in the judgements of Jewish SS accomplices.

There is also the claim that Jewish community officials wanted 'merely' to save themselves and their families. The myth that Jewish community officials acted, whether consciously or unconsciously, only out of their own selfish interests is nothing other than a form of defamation, while in reality the idea of social responsibility could well have been at the root of their decision to collaborate. In other words, the leaders of the community were prompted not by a desire to survive themselves but rather, at least initially, by the hope of being able to negotiate with the SS and to rescue Jews by enabling them to emigrate. Later on, they endeavoured to stay the complete annihilation of the community; and ultimately they sought to alleviate the suffering.

Jewish *Ausheber* like Wilhelm Reisz or Oscar Reich were accused of having done more than was necessary merely to survive; they are said to have identified with the perpetrators and to have taken part with relish in the crimes. In other words, their status as victims was denied. They were stylized as 'would-be Nazis'²¹ who had acted voluntarily rather than under the threat of death.

There has been much discussion about the identification of a victim with the perpetrator. The phenomenon is known in psychoanalytical literature,²² but this identification of a victim with his or her tormenter is based on the indisputable and immutable difference between the persecutor and the persecuted, between the tormenter and the victim. A Jew could be an accomplice within the Nazi regime, but he remained a Jew and as such was fair game. Whereas the perpetrator found enjoyment in killing others, the victim sought first and foremost to escape his or her fate. The identity of the Jewish victim was that of a person with a wretched and doomed existence. No Jewish Gruppenführer could escape this identity and become a member of the master race. Even those who attempted to emulate the Nazi brutality remained Jews who did not act voluntarily but were involved in the crime under coercion and in extreme adversity.

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Wilhelm Reisz, whose deepest emotional impulses are completely unknown to us, was not a 'would-be Nazi'. He was not a Gruppenführer because he wanted to be a Nazi or perpetrator; he was obliged against his will to serve the Nazis because he was a victim.

Identification with the tormenter is a typical victim reaction. It confirms the victim's identity and status. This psychological explanation also carries the risk of posthumous denunciation, however. No peculiar ulterior motives are needed for a person, in fear for his life, to help clear Jewish homes and round up victims for deportation. The threat of death is sufficient.

The psychological questions raised in this chapter refer not to the behaviour of Jewish people during the Nazi regime but to the sentencing after 1945 of survivors accused of collaboration. It does not discuss whether victims could also be perpetrators, but rather the disgraceful circumstance whereby victims were sentenced more severely after 1945 than their tormenters and thus remained victims. The tactic employed by the Nazis worked only too well. The Jewish community itself was called upon to announce the discriminating laws, to ensure the exclusion and branding, to handle the people being deported until the last moment and to manage the 'collection points'. The Kultusgemeinde was required to register the Jews and to keep records so as to permit emigration initially and then, as was discovered too late, to facilitate extermination. The Jewish community became an instrument of the Nazis, an 'agent of its own destruction'.²³

The Jewish victims, persecuted or abandoned by the non-Jewish population, were deceived twice over. They obeyed the Nazi regulations announced by the Kultusgemeinde, directing their indignation at their own representatives. It was not the SS or the Gestapo but the Jewish officials who promulgated the Nazi decrees. It was not the members of the Gestapo Jewish department but the head of the Jewish community who was to remain imprinted in the survivors' memory, not the SS-Scharführer but the Jewish marshals. In this way, the victims' trust in their own leaders was abused and broken as a means of preventing any protest against the crimes.

This Nazi tactic of deception worked and continued to work after the German Reich had been defeated. Even after 1945, victims were mistaken for perpetrators or deliberately replaced them.

Criticism was heaped upon the Jewish administrative leaders after 1945, and even those who had not cooperated at all during the deportations but had on the contrary illicitly attempted to assist those in hiding were accused of having collaborated with the Gestapo.

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In the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany, former Communists and Social Democrats who had survived the Nazi regime – in some cases in concentration camps – were interned again after 1945 because their very survival was seen as suspicious. Communist comrades who could demonstrate that they had belonged to Nazi Party organizations were left alone. They had obviously come to an arrangement; they could not therefore have been informers, traitors or *kapos* and would soon – before many who had been interned in camps because of their beliefs – be welcomed into the Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic.²⁴

The Soviets were not the only ones who were harsh on their own people. Collaborators in France were often punished more severely than German perpetrators in the French-occupied zone. Treason from within appeared to incite greater inner fear than misdeeds committed by the enemy. And again, anyone who had survived the extermination was suspicious for that reason alone.

Survivor guilt is a psychoanalytical term. It refers not to authentic guilt but rather to an irrational feeling of guilt by survivors.²⁵ The mourning for the dead forces the survivors to ask why they managed to survive, and this evokes a feeling of guilt. No survivor can be as innocent as a dead victim, murdered defencelessly in a gas chamber. Individual shortcomings pale into insignificance in the face of the monstrous immensity of the crime, and the dead are automatically seen as ‘good’. Primo Levi, himself a survivor, was convinced: ‘The worst survived, that is, the fittest; the best all died.’²⁶

The survivors’ guilt was also influenced by the generally negative tone of public discourse after 1945. Survivors reacted in different ways to the public mood. Unlike Primo Levi, Ruth Klüger, for example, wrote:

So we survivors are either the best or the worst. And yet . . . the truth is concrete, meaning specific. The role that prison life plays in the life of an ex-prisoner cannot be deduced from a shaky psychological rule, for it is different for each one of us, depending on what went before, on what came afterwards, and on what happened to each during his or her time in the camps. . . . It was a unique experience for each of them.²⁷

In those countries that had until recently proclaimed that the Jews were responsible for everything, it became particularly important that no aspersions be cast on the victims. In the anti-Fascist mood that

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now prevailed, those who had been connected in any way to the killing could not be seen as victims, but were simply counted among the perpetrators so as not to spoil the idealized image of the victim. As a witness at the trial of Wilhelm Reisz stated: 'I feel obliged to testify because I cannot accept that because of the asocial behaviour of a few Jewish elements, all other respectable Jewish Austrians are disqualified.'²⁸

The behaviour of those Jewish officials and assistants whose relations with the perpetrators were held against them was often not studied on an individual basis but simply condemned universally. There has been lively discussion as to how their actions should be judged, but what any individual did and his reasons for doing so are all too frequently ignored. Thus the truth is studied without any account being taken of the underlying reality. If we are not to fall into the trap of making general and exaggerated accusations, we must look more closely at the psychological mechanisms in action after 1945 with regard to the survivors.

Under the Nazis, the victims were forbidden to live. After the liberation, they had to justify their survival. Paradoxically, the anti-Semitic logic that the only good Jew is a dead one has itself survived the Third Reich.

Breaching taboos

'That's too much to take; you'll have to leave that out,' said jurist and political scientist Franz Leopold Neumann about a chapter in the MA dissertation by his student, Vienna émigré Raul Hilberg,²⁹ author of the standard work on the extermination of European Jewry.³⁰ He was referring to the chapter in Hilberg's paper about the attitude of the Jewish communities to the Nazi extermination policy. Neumann, author of the first major structural analysis of the Nazi regime,³¹ refused to permit this chapter to be included, finding it too terrible to discuss the powerlessness and hopeless situation of Jewish victims forced against their will to become agents of their own destruction.

The attitude of Jewish functionaries is still a taboo subject today, although not an unbroken one. It has already been addressed in various ways, not infrequently with a reference to the general reluctance to broach the subject. Those who study the matter tend to encounter general interest, occasionally reserve and suspicion, but usually welcome curiosity. When mention is made of the subject,

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practically everyone will point out its sensitivity. Some question the ideological necessity to study or write about this uncomfortable issue and warn of the possibility of approval from the wrong people. There are also those who carefully avoid the subject for personal reasons.

For many people, however, breaking taboos has a certain attraction. The sensitivity of the subject evokes the possibility of discovering exotic secrets or something obscene. The imagination of some was fired by the thought of victims becoming perpetrators, the vague idea that the victims might have participated and taken secret pleasure in the crimes committed against them. Peter Wyden, for example, explained why he wrote the book *Stella*. It tells the story of Stella Kübler, who was tortured, threatened and cajoled by the Gestapo into finding hidden Jews, or 'U-boats', as they were called. She became a 'catcher' (*Greifer*), the most feared and notorious in Berlin. Wyden described his interest in his former fellow pupil as follows: 'And why, why was she willing to agree to this Faustian pact with Hitler? I had always wanted to find an explanation for the secret of this beauty, whom I had once worshipped. [. . .] I had to find out. I had to know about about Stella and these incestuous murders, my war's last taboo.'³²

The Jewish functionaries are part of this 'last taboo'. In the Jewish identity after the Shoah, they were often symbols of unresisting Jews who were unable to assert themselves or put up a defence, the antithesis of the heroic partisan struggle and a sovereign Israel.

The study of the attitudes of Jewish victims under the destructive regime is always in danger of turning into a complacently moralizing reproach, shifting the blame for the crimes to the victims. This book is not about taboos or criticism but rather about the motives behind the accusations, reproaches and denunciations. In ideological disputes, Jewish organizations are sometimes accused of having collaborated in the crime. Zionism was said to have cooperated with the Nazis because it helped to organize the emigration to Palestine, because – confronted by the alternative of life or death – it negotiated with the Nazis on the transfer of capital to Palestine. The whole world, although not placed under the same pressure for survival as the Jews, was unable to maintain a boycott, but the Zionist leadership was expected to have done so.

It would be so convenient in the minds of anti-Semites if the Jews could be held responsible for their own extermination. I would like to give an example of this kind of distortion. For different reasons,

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the Nazis and Zionists attempted between 1933 and 1939 to get as many Jews as possible out of Germany – the Nazis with the aim of expelling them, the Zionists in an attempt to save them. The two sides were not equal partners. The Zionist organizations were obliged to cooperate with the Nazi rulers in the interests of Jewish survival. Francis Nicosia discusses the problems connected with this policy in his book *The Third Reich and the Palestinian Question*. He refuses to make hasty judgements, contenting himself with a description of what went on.³³

One thing that Nicosia had not envisaged was that a German publishing company specializing in extreme right-wing literature would bring out an unauthorized translation of the book. It appeared in German under the title *Hitler und der Zionismus*.³⁴ Druffel-Verlag ignored the letter of protest by the author and wrote in the jacket text: ‘This book clearly shows that the German Reich government, in particular the SS, consistently supported the Jewish element in Palestine, encouraged emigration and provided practical development aid in various areas.’

‘The Führer gave the Jews a state’ is the subtext. The historian Julius H. Schoeps asked in connection with this jacket text: ‘Do the publishers mean to say that the Jews should be grateful to the Reich government and in particular the SS for what they did? Or are they saying that it wasn’t like that at all and that historians who have studied the Jewish policy in the past give a completely false picture of what actually happened?’³⁵

Revisionism is the order of the day in the German translation.³⁶ It basically suggests that the victims were not better than the perpetrators and for this reason the perpetrators cannot have been that bad.

The accusation that the Jews collaborated was, of course, used by the former perpetrators in court. In his defence, for example, Franz Murer in 1963 made reference to the participation of Jewish functionaries in the extermination process. The ‘butcher from Vilnius’, as he was called by the victims, was deputy regional commissar (*Gebietskommissar*) of the ghetto. Charged with seventeen murders, he denied everything, saying that it was too much to expect him to remember all the details twenty years later. He also recalled that the Jewish administration in the ghetto also had the authority to dole out punishment: ‘The actions of the Jewish police, who were equipped with rubber truncheons issued by the civil authority – the regional commissar – has nothing to do with me.’³⁷ The perpetrators attempted to accuse the victims of their own murder.

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Alain Finkielkraut wrote in his book *The Imaginary Jew*:

It's unbearable, this arrogant summoning of ghetto dwellers and camp prisoners to answer before an abstract tribunal, a scandal. Yet for all our disgust, the indictment still requires a response. Jews who forty years ago suffered through Hitler now need lawyers for defence. Today and for the foreseeable future, we are reduced to justifying the victims for a massacre carried out against them.³⁸

All too often, the criticism among Jews of the survival strategies of the Jewish communities has been in danger of degenerating into a surrogate ideological war at the expense of the dead. Not infrequently, they have been reduced to objects of academic study. The victims have been glorified as martyrs and their suffering as a passion leading to redemption and the creation of the State of Israel.

The death of millions was all the more terrible because, as Bruno Bettelheim notes, it was completely senseless, even if it might have had some purpose for the murderers.³⁹ The people killed by the Nazis did not die as martyrs. Martyrs die for a conviction they believe in. The victims of the Nazis were killed, however, simply because they were Jews or were defined as such by the Nazi regime. Whether babies or converts, they were all killed professionally and bureaucratically. To give the mass murder a belated higher meaning is simply to whitewash it.

Criticism of the failed survival strategy of the Jews comes from a historically secure position. The discussion should not be disallowed, but it must take account of the historical circumstances. Before 1938, no one could imagine what would happen. Even the future murderers did not know in 1933 or 1939 that millions of Jews would be murdered within the next few years.

The historical taboo preventing any discussion of ignominious behaviour by the victims was based on an idealized and dehumanizing idea of the victims. They could be portrayed only as completely innocent. They were denied a real existence that would admit a paradoxical biography and ambivalent character. But it is just as fatal to break the taboo dictated by this same dehumanizing conception and to criticize the victims for not complying with our idealized projections. Breaking a taboo is not the same as getting rid of it.

A taboo and the breaking of a taboo, both of which present the victims as icons, as saints or demigods, are the reverse side of all of those accusations that the Nazis levelled against the Jews. All of the irrational, unconscious aggression hidden by the taboo is released when the taboo is broken.

No mass murder without victims

The mass murder of millions of Jews under the Nazis was not the work of a dehumanized machine obeying the orders of an all-powerful demon. On the contrary, the crime has a name and an address, as Bertolt Brecht said. Many of the criminals retained their rank, name and social status even after 1945. The perpetrators have no right to anonymity and they cannot be exonerated from personal responsibility.

Whereas no discretion should be allowed to the murderers in the historical narrative, the suffering of the victims should not be sensationalized. At the same time, however, the victims should not be denied their place in history and their right to exist as individuals.

The history of the murder is not just the history of the murderers. The victims also had various ways of acting and reacting. Without considering the victims, it is not possible to understand the crimes committed against them.

The Nazi strategy was clear: all sympathy for the wretched and defenceless Jews by their non-Jewish neighbours was to be eliminated. The public deprivation of rights shattered the self-esteem of the Jews and made them more amenable to further persecution. The upright and independent attitude had first to be destroyed so as to permit the 'processions of human beings going like dummies to their death'.⁴⁰

The crime says nothing about the essence of the Jews but everything about the character of the murderers. The persecution and murder has nothing to do with a Jewish destiny or the behaviour of the victims but took place because of the actions of the perpetrators. Even if the crime is not explained by the essence of the victims, however, the crime itself remains inconceivable if the victims are not taken into account. It is only by considering their desperation and the hopelessness of their situation that the extent and nature of the crime can be recognized.

Vienna was the first place in which the 'solution of the Jewish question', as it was called, was attempted. It was here that it was tried out. The Jewish people could not have been prepared for what happened. They were still citizens of the Reich but already outlaws. They could still escape legally with a passport and at the same time they were already threatened with deportation. They were defenceless against the anti-Semitic bloodlust of former neighbours and colleagues because they were not, as the anti-Semites insinuated, separate and conspiratorial, an isolated community living apart

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from the rest of the population, but a heterogeneous group. Nazism made them into the number one public enemy but, unlike the Jews in the countries occupied later, they were still citizens of this anti-Semitic state.

What strategy was available to the Jews in their isolation? What did the Jewish movements decide to do? How did the Kultusgemeinde or the Jews of Vienna react to the experience of Jewish communities in the Germany of the Third Reich? How did they prepare for the threatened power takeover by the Nazis? What tasks did the Jewish institutions set themselves after March 1938? Was their policy before the annexation consistent with their reaction to the Nazi rule? Who were the functionaries? What did they have in common and how were they different? Had they already been active within the Jewish community before the Nazis came to power or were they put in place by the Nazi authorities? Which community leaders were an obstacle to the Nazi leadership and which appeared compliant? Did the Viennese Jews ever attempt to rebel against the Nazi Jewish policy? What were the tasks of the Jewish administration during the Nazi era? What type of contact existed between the community leaders and the Nazi authorities? How much did the Jewish functionaries know about the mass murder? When did they find out about the extermination? What did they have to do, how did they cooperate when the assembly points were set up and mass transports to the concentration camps began? How did the attitude of the Jewish functionaries change when the external conditions began to alter? Was there disagreement within the community leadership about the attitude to the Nazis and what were the differences about? How was the attitude of the individual Jewish functionaries regarded after 1945?

In order to consider the reaction of the Jewish community leaders in Vienna to the Nazi persecution and extermination policy, there is no need to relate the entire history of Austrian Jews from 1938 to 1945 but rather merely to discuss the relevant events. Every person and every situation needs to be dealt with separately. This calls for historical consideration of a subject that has barely been studied in the past.

In 1966, Hugo Gold published his *Geschichte der Juden in Wien*, in which he discusses the extermination.⁴¹ In the same year, Jonny Moser wrote about it in *Die Judenverfolgung 1938–1945*.⁴² These were followed in 1978 by the highly informative work by the Jerusalem-based historian Herbert Rosenkranz *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung*.⁴³ Various aspects of the Nazi persecution of Austrian Jews have also been dealt with in academic papers.⁴⁴

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This book discusses the functionaries and employees of the Vienna Jewish community authorities and their offices. They always worked, whether they cooperated or attempted to sidestep official decrees, under direct Nazi control. It shows that they were completely at the mercy of the perpetrators and that they got caught up in the crime. They were members of an institution whose divisions and departments never had independent power. Within the Nazi criminal regime they were nothing but authorities without power.

The question of authorities without power is not only of historical importance. The totalitarian crime forces its victims to sacrifice themselves and incorporates them in the machinery of destruction.⁴⁵ Michel Foucault said: 'Power functions. Power is exercised through networks and individuals do not simply circulate in these networks; they are in a position both to submit to and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them.'⁴⁶

Although, if not quite because, the principle of power, as Foucault describes it, permeates the entire system, a clear distinction must always be made between perpetrators and victims, between the power of authority, in particular a tyranny, and the powerless.