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Gay and lesbian life in Vienna 1938–45 (and before)

by Kurt Krickler

The focus of this presentation is on the life of gay men and lesbian women in Vienna between 1938 and 1945. However, this period cannot be looked at in isolation. It must be contextualized by examining the years before in order to compare and see what actually changed after the *Anschluss* and what did not.

I will not include other groups such as intersex, transgender or queer people into this discussion. There is a dearth of sources regarding these groups, and in the case of transgender or queer it would be anachronistic to refer to these categories in our contemporary meaning and understanding of these terms.

Indeed, even with regard to gays and lesbians, it is imperative to acknowledge the lack of empirical data and research that would allow us to draw a valid general picture of their situation and living conditions. Not only do we lack authentic reports of gays and lesbians from that period, but there are also relatively few mainstream accounts. One significant exception is Josef Kohout's account described in Heinz Heger's *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, but this focuses primarily on his six years in concentration camps and contains little about life in Vienna.

And so it seems that the most yielding sources for producing such a picture are police records and court files. We have to bear in mind that these sources are anecdotal "cases" which represent only a very specific small segment of the gay and lesbian population. Furthermore, this source specifically documents individuals who were subject to police investigations and court proceedings. It is therefore a negative selection that definitely does not mirror the situation and fate of the vast majority of gays and lesbians. The number of prosecuted homosexual men and women, in absolute figures, represents only a tiny fraction of the total gay and lesbian

population. That is also the reason why, after giving a general overview, I will present a couple of individual case stories or microhistories, from these “official” sources in order to illustrate what it was like to be gay or lesbian in this period.

From these figures however, we can draw the safe and very general conclusion, that the vast majority of gays and lesbians, who did not come in contact with the police and the judiciary, lived in the closet, hid their sexual orientation, and kept a very low profile in their public and social life. It is also safe to assume that most of them sooner or later also entered into a marriage in order to cover up their homosexuality. This was not much different from how gays and lesbians used to live before 1938 and after 1945. Such patterns prevailed even until the 1970s – not at least because homosexual acts – including among consenting adults – were forbidden by law in Austria until 1971. And the law was enforced until its very end.

However the period of war, in some respects, offered “better conditions” for lesbian women. Of course, it was out of question to live openly as a proud lesbian in Vienna during this time. Yet circumstances may have made it easier to hide and cover up a homosexual life-style. Two women living together without male partners could easily be explained as a practical and economic arrangement in wartime. Any possible suspicion about two women spending leisure time together could be warded off by mentioning that their male partners were away at war. Additionally, many women started to work in positions left vacant by men who were fighting as soldiers. In addition to working in non-traditional roles and fields, wartime also opened up the possibilities for lesbians to earn their own money and live an economically independent life outside a heteronormative partnership – without even having to justify such a choice. However, these possibilities were soon reduced again after the end the war.

It is also important at this point to look closer at some of the legal and societal features of the era. These factors will help explain the developments that occurred after 1938 when the Nazi regime actually tightened and increased persecution of homosexuals. Indeed, the ground had been well-prepared for the actions that followed.

Legal aspects

As mentioned previously, throughout its modern history until 1971, homosexual acts in Austria were forbidden. Contrary to Germany, the total ban provided by Article 129 I b of the Austrian criminal code also included female homosexuality. This article remained unchanged from 1852 up until 1971. A “milder” version of this article had existed between 1803 and 1852, providing punishment of “only” a prison term of up to one year, while after 1852, the law stipulated a minimum sentence of one year in jail, and a maximum penalty of five years’ imprisonment.

The legal definition of homosexual activity was quite complete in Austria and even included mutual masturbation. In addition, an invitation or even the attempt to engage in homosexual activity was also punishable. This too was in contrast to the law in Germany, where the relevant article in the penal code, *Paragraph 175*, only prohibited sexual acts similar to intercourse, such as oral, anal and intercourse between the thighs. Mutual or joint masturbation were not punishable acts in Germany.

Since intercourse-like acts mostly happened in private and, therefore, were difficult to prove, criminal proceedings involving such offences were relatively rare. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, they were unsatisfied with this legal situation. Therefore, they amended the law in 1935 to broaden its applicability. The new legislation made all male same-sex sexual contacts illegal, and prohibited any behaviour deemed to have a sexual intent, including “simple looking” or “simple touching”.

After the reform of section 175 in 1935, this provision was now closer to Austria’s section 129, and even more comprehensive. However, the elements constituting the offence still continued to differ. And indeed, there was some controversy regarding the jurisprudence of the Austrian courts after the annexation, so that even the Reich Ministry of Justice had to deal with the issue, urging Austrian courts to be stricter in their application of the Austrian law. Although attempts were made to impose

German legal standards in this field on the “Ostmark”, these attempts did not bear any results before the end of the Nazi rule, and consequently the Austrian penal code provisions on homosexuality, including the ban on female homosexuality, were applied within the territory of the “Ostmark” throughout Second World War.

Social aspects

The legal aspect, however, was not the only one that had direct consequences on the daily life of gays and lesbians. Another major aspect was the social environment. Although even before 1938 homosexuality was a crime and a societal taboo, it still belonged, even in Austria, to the public sphere and was a topic that was discussed and talked about. Therefore we must have a closer look at this aspect in the 1920s and early 1930s and ask: Was there a sexual reform movement, an early homosexual movement in Austria? Did a vibrant gay and lesbian subculture such as in Berlin exist in Vienna?

The obvious answer is that Vienna was definitely not Berlin during this era. There was no gay and lesbian sub-culture in Vienna that could compare with the one in the German capital during the Roaring Twenties. Certainly, in Vienna there were specific places, cafés and bars where gays and lesbians socialised, for example Café Tirolerhof was a well-known meeting place for lesbians in the 1920s, and Café Herrenhof was popular both amongst gays and lesbians. In 1925, the literary magazine *Die Fackel* described the bookshop Lanyi in downtown Vienna as the “meeting point of the Viennese homosexual intelligentsia”. And of course there were cruising areas in public toilets, parks and baths. But I would hesitate to define all this as a gay/lesbian community in today’s understanding. In no way did this infrastructure come close to what Berlin was famous for.

There are obvious reasons why there are no reports about gay life in Vienna in the inter-war period similar to the stories told about Berlin by Christopher Isherwood. One of the few accounts of an irritatingly modern, glamorous and even gender-fluid way of life in Vienna, however, is related by famous Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig in his book *The World of Yesterday: Memories of a European*:

There was rebellion purely for the fun of rebelling against everything once accepted, even against the natural order and the eternal difference between the sexes. Girls had their hair cut in such short bobs that they could not be told from boys; young men shaved off their beards to look more like girls. Homosexuality and lesbianism were very much in fashion, not a result of a young person's instinctive drives but in protest against the old traditional, legal and moral kinds of love.¹

This, of course, was not a realistic description of a real mass phenomenon but rather an exaggeration for the sake of provocation. Zweig mentions this in the context of describing the total frustration of the young post-First World War generation that felt betrayed in every respect by the older generation. As a result, the young generation in bitterness and as a violent reaction turns its back on all traditions and moves forcefully from the old past to the future, as Zweig notes.

The World of Yesterday, is also an exceptional literary work to better understand the socio-economic conditions in Austria during the interwar period. After the First World War and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the new Republic of German-Austria was created in 1919. The former empire was reimagined as a small country comprising not even one ninth of the former territory. The new Austrian state emerged with just 6.5 million people; out of more than 51 million at the end of the Habsburg era.

Few believed that Austria could survive economically as an independent state, and most political parties, including the Social-Democrats, wanted Austria to join Germany. However, a union with Germany was not an option as the victorious powers prohibited this in the treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919. Austria had definitely no bright future; it was extremely poor, had to pay war reparations, and suddenly there were customs regimes implemented in trade with the territories of the former empire. In the early 1920s the country suffered from hyper inflation, and later from the repercussions of the world economic crisis. The eternal antagonism between the

¹ I used here the English translation by Anthea Bell, Pushkin Press, London 2009.

two traditional political blocks, the Christian-Social conservatives and the Socialists, even led to a civil war in 1934.

Germany however, was in a different position. Of course, they had also lost the First World War and subsequently abolished the monarchy but Germany still was a vast country and in a much better economic position to survive as a nation-state which Austria had actually never been. Germany and its formidable cities led by Berlin, was in a much stronger position to progress in many fields including civil society and lifestyles. Austria on the other hand was busy struggling to survive.

Vienna's golden age had been at the fin-de-siècle, at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. It had been a cosmopolitan multi-cultural world capital and a hotbed where the arts and sciences flourished. In 1918, this era had passed into history. Vienna with its population of almost 2 million was left as an imperial capital without an empire to sustain it. All this was certainly not a fertile ground for progress in the field of gay and lesbian equality. And we should not forget that Austria had always been a very Catholic country where the Roman-Catholic church played a very important role in politics and shaped societal attitudes.

However, in Vienna during the 1920s and 1930s there were initiatives for sexual reform and sexual education in general and for decriminalisation of homosexuality in particular. The noted German physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld paid a couple of visits to Vienna where he gave well-attended lectures. A branch of his *Scientific-Humanitarian Committee* was founded in Vienna, although regrettably no further activities are recorded.

As well, one should not interpret Stefan Zweig's remark on homosexuality and lesbianism as purely homophobic. Indeed, Zweig had signed a petition, which Otto Ekstein, a Viennese lawyer, had submitted to the Austrian minister of justice in 1930 calling for the repeal of Article 129. Many well-known personalities signed this petition including Franz Werfel, Arthur Schnitzler and Sigmund Freud. However, the petition did not produce any response, as was the case with many other lobbying initiatives and activities.

Speaking of Dr. Freud, I may also mention – as one of many anecdotal features about this period – that he had also published one, single essay on lesbian sexuality. It described the case of one of his patients in Vienna, a young lesbian girl and a friend of Baroness Leonie von Puttkammer who was considered a demimondaine by Viennese society.

In summary, I may say that due to the different developments both legally and socially, the negative impact on the lives of gays and lesbians, once the Nazis came to power, was much severer in the more advanced and liberal Germany than in the hinterland of Austria. In Vienna there was not even a Hirschfeld Institute in the first place to be destroyed by the Nazis. Gay and lesbian people in Austria had always lived under a greater risk of legal prosecution where attitudes were much more conservative. The psychological impact and signal of this backlash on society in general and on gays and lesbians in particular, therefore, was much less dramatic in Vienna than in Berlin.

After the Nazis took over

In any case, both in Germany and in Austria the number of police and court investigations, court cases, and convictions spiked dramatically. In Germany this occurred after the tightening of the law in 1935, and in Austria after the *Anschluss* three years later. Circumstances deteriorated, not at least because police authorities started to increase the pressure on homosexuals and persecution started to become more systematic and draconic. It was now dangerous to make contact with unknown persons, because strangers could be police informers, and any invitation could be a trap. It was also dangerous to be known to other gays because once arrested by the police or the Gestapo, torture and blackmail were used to extract the names of previous sex partners and other gay friends. The police and Gestapo would also search the house and confiscate the mail of persons suspected of being homosexual. In addition, it was dangerous to frequent traditional meeting or cruising places such as parks, public baths or bars, because the police knew these places and carried out raids. Many people were also victims of denunciation by neighbours, colleagues and even relatives. The social control exerted on homosexuals was intense. Moreover,

Article 20a of the German penal code was also used to pronounce more severe punishment for “*Gewohnheitsverbrecher*,” habitual criminals or recidivists. This provision was also applied in Austria after the *Anschluss*.

However, the most devastating impact on the life of gay men was the prospect of being sent to a concentration camp. One did not need to be convicted by a court in order to be sent to a camp, because the regular police and the Gestapo had the power to send homosexuals directly to a concentration camp, especially in cases of recidivism. It was not even unusual for first time offenders to serve their court imposed sentences in a prison setting and then to be sent immediately to “protective custody” in a concentration camp instead of being released.

Nevertheless, it should be noted once more: in absolute figures, we are talking about annual low 3-digit numbers of persons convicted in Vienna for homosexuality, oscillating between 104 cases in 1931 and the peak number of 258 cases in 1939 (thereof 8 women). There were far fewer convictions for female homosexuality, the numbers oscillating between 0 in 1931 and the highest number of 20 women convicted in 1942. With regard to the social aspects, we can assume that staying or even returning to the closet, if still possible, was the key issue, the order of the day, in these years.

It should also be mentioned that gay men were also fascinated by the Nazi cult of the Nordic male and some joined the ranks of paramilitary combat organisations such as the SA which at least until the purge in 1934 had also attracted gay men, as it was an open secret that SA leader Ernst Röhm was a homosexual.

There are also very rare cases of prominent homosexuals who were tolerated by the regime and survived without any repression. The most famous case is the one of Raoul Aslan (1886–1958), a very famous actor of the time performing at the Burgtheater in Vienna. He is often described as the Austrian Gustaf Gründgens, who was also protected by the Nazis despite of his homosexuality. From 1934 until his death in 1958, Raoul Aslan lived in a long-term relationship with his partner Tonio Riedl, who was 20 years younger, even sharing the same apartment in Vienna during this period of 24 years.

There were of course cases where two or more reasons for being persecuted by the Nazis coincided. The lives of homosexual Jews were threatened in the first place for being Jewish. A famous case story in this context is the one of the stage actress Dorothea Neff (1903–1986) and her Jewish partner Lilli Wolff (1896–1983). Neff, risking her own life, had hidden Wolff for four years in her apartment in Vienna. Wolff survived and emigrated to the USA, never returning to Austria again. The relationship, however, had not survived the tense circumstances and conditions of four years of hiding. It is also tragic but also typical that it was not until 1978 that Neff actually told or dared to tell the story – this also illustrates the trauma and the continuity of oppression after the end of the Nazi rule.

Case stories

Next, I will present individual case stories, microhistories of individual experiences. Here I have to credit the work of Andreas Brunner, Hannes Sulzenbacher and Niko Wahl and their team at QWIEN, the Center for gay/lesbian culture and history in Vienna, who unearthed the files in the Vienna city archives. Such case stories were first presented in an exhibition in Vienna in 2001, which still is available online, in German and in English. More cases have been published on a more or less regular basis in *LAMBDA-Nachrichten*, a gay and lesbian magazine in Vienna, over the last years.

I would also like to highlight the research of German historian Claudia Schoppmann on the specific situation of lesbian women, published in her books *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich* and *Verbotene Verhältnisse* („Forbidden Relationships”), which, to my knowledge, has not been translated into English. In the latter one, Schoppmann presents ten case stories of lesbians prosecuted in Vienna. These stories also underline that denunciation started to play a more significant factor than before.

Schoppmann quotes from a letter dated January 1988 which she had received from a Viennese lesbian, Maria K, born in 1913, whose story Schoppmann had researched.

Maria K. had been active in the Social-Democratic movement from early youth on. I have translated the following portion from one of her letters when she writes:

All socialistically minded people knew what the Hitler regime was about and that utmost caution was required. For we were at risk in two ways: politically and sexually. Only to these circumstances I can credit the fact that in our circles nobody was aware of persecution for homosexuality. If anybody of our ages was caught, it had always been for political reasons; of course, it was concealed that some of these women privately felt differently than the dictatorship prescribed.

You also have to bear in mind, and in my opinion, this is an important aspect: There was war, and all men fit for military service were enlisted, so it did not attract attention at all, if a woman lived alone or together with another women or if they spent the holidays together. This I can testify from my long-year experience. Nobody, for example, raised an eyebrow when in 1943 I together with a girl-friend was hiking in the Austrian mountains (...).

It was a dreadful, a terrible time, but still there were moments and hours, when the compulsion of the youth demanded its tribute ... due to the blatant lack of men some lesbians, if they did not bother too much about fidelity, could take home the memory of some beautiful adventures. Of course, highest prudence was necessary. If you did not know the partner well enough, the first imperative was, not to declare yourself to be a lesbian, but rather to use as a pretext the "longing for the male partner serving in the army" etc. During the war-time, many heterosexual women were indeed open for lesbian contacts."

This is one of the few authentic statements from that period. One important factor, therefore, needs to be stressed for the following individual case stories: They are not authentic personal testimonials, but based on reports produced by the police and justice system, and therefore they are full of biased information that in the first place convey the attitudes and perspectives of the justice system.

Friedrich Links and Eugen Chubawa

Friedrich Links was an actor, neither as prominent nor as fortunate as Raoul Aslan. He had met Eugen Chubawa, a 20-year old man, in a public toilet in Vienna in September 1941. Chubawa had originally been arrested for desertion. When interrogated by police officer Karl Seiringer, who was specialised in and famous for prosecuting gay men, Chubawa confessed that he had sex with ten men against payment, Links being one of them. Subsequently, Links was also interrogated by officer Seiringer. Every detail of the sexual contacts was meticulously recorded in the police files, as both the type and the frequency of these contacts were relevant for the conviction. A single contact under the influence of alcohol for example was punished less severely than frequent sexual contacts with various partners. Obviously trying to avoid implicating others, Links only confessed a long-term relationship with a language teacher, who was Jewish and had left the country in 1939. He also admitted to various homosexual contacts in the 1920s in German cities, when he was working as an actor in the local theatres. Back in Vienna since 1933, he had occasional contacts with various unknown men. Links declared that he had invited Chubawa three times to stay overnight with him, and had also given him some money as Chubawa was in a difficult financial situation, however blackmail was not involved. Links was sentenced to six months in jail.

In October 1942, the Vienna police urged the court in Vienna to submit the file as they wanted to examine whether Links should be taken into preventive custody, which could mean being sent to a concentration camp. Till today, no records indicating whether this was implemented have been found. Links survived the Nazi period, moved to the German Democratic Republic, and worked there as an actor in film and TV productions. He died in East-Berlin in 1976. Eugen Chubawa was sentenced to a prison term of ten years, not only for homosexuality but also for desertion, he also survived the Nazi era but died in 1947 at the age of 26.

Franz Doms

The case of Franz Doms is not only very tragic but also a piece of almost Kafkaesque bureaucracy. And it highlights again the role of denunciation by neighbours, colleagues and even relatives which could destroy the lives of people. In the case of Doms, the reason for being denounced was not even his homosexuality but it became an issue during the police investigation. Doms, aged 18, earned money by occasional sex-work, and obviously was quite self-assured and imprudent publicly stating: *“With my ass I earn more money than in any job, and even Hitler can kiss my ass; if he expects me to join the Reich Labour Service, he could wait 100 years...”*

This was the quote one of Doms’ neighbours told another neighbour who reported the statement to a local NSDAP district leader. This party official informed the police which had to refer the case to the Gestapo, as insulting the Führer was considered a political crime. When interrogated by the police later, the ear-witness could only confirm that Doms was a homosexual, but not remember the exact wording of his statement. Therefore, the crime of insulting the Führer could not be proven, and Doms only received a strict warning.

Since Doms had confessed homosexual acts during the Gestapo interrogation, his case was referred back to the criminal police for further investigation. He confessed a couple of sexual contacts. Due to his open confession and his young age, the court considered that a sentence on probation, handed down in September 1940, would suffice. However, in January 1942 he was again tried before a court. Although the file of this case was lost, later records reveal that he was arrested during a raid in the Römerbad, a public bath and famous meeting-point of gay men in Vienna. Doms received a sentence of one year in jail which he served throughout the year 1942. He was soon arrested again in April 1943. Ferdinand Jetzek had filed a complaint against a young man whose identity he did not know but had invited home and sex with. The unknown man was not satisfied with the 15 Reichsmark offered by Jetzek, threatened him with filing a complaint with the police and stole an alarm-clock before leaving the flat. It took only one day for the police to identify Doms as the suspected and arrest him in his parents’ apartment.

Doms was also interrogated by the notorious police officer Karl Seiringer who over the next two months summoned Doms from pre-trial detention over and over again –

until Doms finally confessed sexual contacts with 18 partners altogether. In August 1943, the whole file was solicited by the state prosecutor in order to try Doms before a special court. This possibility of trying “dangerous habitual criminals” before a “*Sondergericht*” had been introduced by an amendment to the penal code in 1941 which also provided the death penalty as a maximum penalty in such cases. These special courts opened up a complete new dimension of prosecution. Now Doms’ complete career as a criminal, sex-worker and homosexual was put on trial. The state prosecutor stated that Doms was completely prone to his lewd instincts against nature, and therefore, no educational or off-putting success could even be expected from prison sentences. On 10 November 1943, the three-judge jury decided unanimously to impose the death penalty on this “dangerous habitual criminal” for homosexual acts with 18 men, in most cases against payment, for theft and for blackmail. There was no appeal possible against the verdict of such a special court, only the minister of justice could mitigate the sentence upon a petition for pardon. On the morning of 7 February 1944, Doms was informed that his and his father’s appeals for clemency had been rejected and that his execution by guillotine was set to take place in the execution room of the court on the very same day at 6 pm. Even the execution was meticulously recorded in the files:

At 6.41 pm Franz Doms is presented. The leader of the execution procedure orders the headman to perform the execution.

At 6 hours 41 minutes and 8 seconds the convicted man is handed over to the executioner.

At 6 hours 41 minutes and 18 seconds the headman declared the execution accomplished.”

This process took ten seconds. Doms was 21 years old.

There is evidence that the special court in Vienna had at least pronounced three death penalties in cases involving homosexual acts.

The really puzzling and striking thing about this case is how imprudent, careless and naïve people still were even in 1943 – both Franz Doms, but also Ferdinand Jetzek who was reckless enough to file a complaint with the police because of the theft of a cheap alarm-clock, incriminating himself at the same time for a serious offence.

Leopold Freitendorf and Karl Müller

As one of two last cases I would like to present that of Leopold Freitendorf and Karl Müller because it perfectly illustrates the way the police worked in order to get more and more names out of those arrested, and how the prosecution of homosexuals continued unchallenged and without the slightest interruption after the collapse of the Nazi regime.

Police officer Karl Seiringer did not wait passively at the police station until a crime against nature was reported, he and his colleagues pro-actively frequented the meeting places where gay men had sex, especially the Esterházy bath, in order to catch them in the act. There was no other place in Vienna where more gay men were arrested during the Nazi era. It was well-known as a gay meeting place, and it was even forbidden for Wehrmacht soldiers to go there. On 17 November 1944, there were four men at the Esterházy bath who Seiringer observed committing homosexual acts and arrested. One of them was unskilled worker Leopold Freitendorf who had two previous convictions for homosexual acts. During police interrogation he confessed sexual contacts with several unknown men both in the Esterházy and two other public baths in Vienna. He also named his landlord Matthias Schuh as a sex-partner. Schuh denied but Freitendorf maintained his testimony and named another sex-partner of Schuh, of whom Freitendorf only knew the nick-name. Indeed, most people used “noms de guerre”, alias names, when frequenting the gay scene in order to protect themselves. However, this unknown sex-partner was quickly identified as Karl Müller, again an unsophisticated labourer who in no way was up to Seiringer’s interrogation methods. He confirmed that he had sex with Schuh. As a result, soon two more people were involved in the case.

But much more detrimental for Müller was the rest of his testimony: He declared that he had been homosexual from early youth on and had frequented the Margarethenbad in the past 15 years, having 25 to 30 partners on an average. The police noted down the total number of 350 partners. Seiringer was eager in his interrogations that the suspects would confess high numbers of sex-partners. In a later interrogation by the investigating judge, Müller denied the number of 350 partners and explained that the police officers had prompted what was noted down

and he only repeated this or just said “yes”. The public prosecution office submitted Müller’s and Freitendorf’s cases to the special court which, however, returned them back, for reasons not communicated. This may have saved the lives of both suspects.

Again for reasons, we don’t know today, the prosecutor’s office only brought the charges against Müller before the regular court a year later, in November 1945, when the Nazi regime was gone. Incredulously, the prosecutor of the newly founded republic, however, argued they would accord more credibility to Müller’s confession before police officer Seiringer than his statements before the investigating judge. The continuity was striking: A court of the new republic was supposed to try Müller for homosexual acts in 350 cases committed between 1919 and April 1944. However, the court proceedings never started, and the case was finally quashed and closed in December 1946 as part of a general amnesty, stipulating a five-year probation period. Freitendorf’s case could neither be finished during the Nazi period, an attempt to reassume it after the war failed because the accused could not be traced. In April 1948 this case was finally also closed based on the amnesty provisions of 1946, to which again a five-year probation period was attached.

Erwin Widschwenter

My last case also perfectly illustrates the unbroken continuity of prosecution. In January 1944, Erwin Widschwenter was arrested in the famous Esterházy bath when police carried out a raid. In May 1944 he was sentenced to a prison term of five years and sent to the prison of Stein near Vienna. With the Red Army approaching in April 1945, the SS invaded the prison with the intention of liquidating all the inmates. Hundreds of inmates were killed in what came to be known as the “Bloody Friday of Stein”, but Widschwenter and a few others survived. They were evacuated to prisons in Germany, and so Widschwenter ended up in a prison in Bavaria. When the US army liberated that part of Germany, most of the prisoners were released, the only exceptions being the Communists and the homosexuals. The Americans only released Widschwenter in May 1946, more than a year after liberation. Upon his return to Austria, Widschwenter found himself treated as an ordinary criminal,

banned from taking up his former job as a civil servant in the tax collection office. People convicted for homosexuality had to face the same consequences as ordinary criminals and these included not being able to work in the public services, the loss of civic rights including the right to vote in elections, the revoking of their academic and professional degrees and licenses. From today's perspective it is hard to believe, but such practices existed up until 1971.

In conclusion, I want to stress this strong continuity not only in the criminalisation of homosexual acts but also in the attitudes of society. This continuity is also reflected in the number of convictions in Austria after liberation. The numbers peaked in an unprecedented way in the 1950s. In 1952, the annual number of convictions (in the whole of Austria) increased to more than 700 for the first time and reached with 815 in 1955 an all-time high – such levels were neither reached before nor during the Nazi period. Almost needless to say, Karl Seiringer continued as a police officer after the war, and that some victims also met the same judges at court who already had sentenced them before 1945.

The post-war climate was definitely neither favourable to the repealing of the legislation criminalizing homosexual behaviour nor to the recognition of the homosexual victims of Nazism. It took 60 years, until 2005, until a legal entitlement to compensation was finally granted. At that point, however, no survivors with the pink triangle were still alive. The homophobic brainwash during the Nazi era continued to impact on society for much longer than the end of World War II, basically for most of the rest of the 20th century.

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