

## Podcast "The German Wiedergutmachung"

Episode 1: A question of property: between theft and law

[Beginning with music // quiet documentary-like background music]

[File is opened, pages are turned]

[Sebastian Gleixner:]

"Yes, let me read it to you. So, here's what he wrote: the cabinet's assessment of the Wiedergutmachung legislation was very contradictory."

[Susanne Kiel:]

"It's always a very sad moment in the research, when you realise that they have tried very hard and fought very hard for their rights and then didn't survive the outcome."

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"People always talk about the quiet 1950s, when the past didn't play a role, where there was just silence. But if you look into German courtrooms, it's exactly the opposite. Thousands of proceedings have taken place in the context of restitution, where the past has been dealt with in detail."

[Benjamin Lahusen:]

"And that's why it's different from what you might think, because many people have an intuitive impression, that so much has already happened. Germany had already made up for so much and so on, that doesn't apply to this area and couldn't apply before."

It is an echo that continues to reverberate to the present day. This podcast is about the question of how the Federal Republic of Germany dealt with people who survived the crimes of Nazi rule. People who were robbed and disenfranchised by the Nazis and who lost their loved ones to the regime's crimes. It is about the tough struggle to take responsibility.

My name is Nora Hespers, I am a journalist and author. My grandfather Theo was murdered by the Nazis in 1943. And my family also fought for a long time for compensation for the injustice he suffered. For an act of Wiedergutmachung. Even if, of course, nothing can make up for a murder. Nevertheless, the processes surrounding this compensation are really revealing, and in this podcast I would like to help you better understand how things went back then. This is:

[Intro Audio ID: Podcast Title TBA]

"The German Wiedergutmachung" – A podcast of the Online Collection "Wiedergutmachung for National Socialist injustice".

Episode 1: A question of property: between theft and law

Getting to the point of Wiedergutmachung first involves millions of applications from victims. Many applications were rejected, especially in the early years. It's about dashed hopes, but also about several billion marks paid to individuals and organisations.

But, of course, the crimes cannot be made up for with money. And that is the reason why the term "Wiedergutmachung" – "to make good again" – is and always will be controversial. However, it is not only researchers and academics who have adopted this term, but also the general public. Because it is the only term in the German language that encompasses the different facets of dealing with the consequences of National Socialism.

Even abroad, the German word is sometimes used, which is why we speak here of "The German Wiedergutmachung". It is a politically and socially rocky process that is of great importance for the history of the Federal Republic of Germany and will always be inadequate ... and never complete.

Also, in this podcast, experts from the academic world have their say and we look at places that have been exemplary for the question of Wiedergutmachung. The research begins in Koblenz, a city in the west of Germany, in the Federal Archives. Here, and in many other archives, there have been millions of applications for and decisions on compensation. However, the Federal Archives also hold the files that make comprehensible the political decision-making processes relating to Wiedergutmachung. All these documents will be digitally accessible in the Online Collection "Wiedergutmachung for National Socialist injustice".

[Sebastian Gleixner:]

"So, here we go. You can clearly see that the paper wasn't exactly ideal. That should also be a challenge for conservation. It was simply a very precarious situation back then. And then it starts. On top of the protocol the headline: 'short protocol'. Then there's the location and participants coming afterwards, including the federal chancellor, if he was there."

This is Sebastian Gleixner. He is a historian and archivist and is in charge of editing the cabinet minutes at the Federal Archives in Koblenz. In front of him is a thick pile of files. The cabinet minutes, as the name suggests, record the meetings of the Federal Cabinet attended by the ministers and chaired by the Federal Chancellor. Sebastian Gleixner has selected a particularly old document about the cabinet meeting of 21 December 1949.<sup>1</sup> It is part of one of the files open on the table in front of him. The paper is thin, heavily yellowed and was typed up on a typewriter.

[Sebastian Gleixner:]

"Interestingly, for example, the Federal Chancellor is already mentioned ... at times it is the Vice-Chancellor, which means that the Federal Chancellor must have been away from time to time, and then the individual participants are named. It was a very small group back then ... there would be a lot more of them later on."

Konrad Adenauer was Federal Chancellor at the time and the Federal Republic was only a few months old. The minutes are only a few pages long and are not particularly detailed. However, the sixth item on the agenda, which at first glance seems inconspicuous, is particularly important:

[Sebastian Gleixner:]

"And then we have just two sentences here on the subject of Wiedergutmachung. Shall I read them to you? Ehm. Whether it is advisable to standardise restitution law is discussed. The Federal Minister of Justice is requested to draw up a compilation of the restitution laws applicable in the Länder and zones. That's it."

What Sebastian Gleixner has just read out is a real novelty in the Federal Cabinet. For the first time at this high level, the topic of Wiedergutmachung is being addressed; in this case specifically, restitution. In other words, the question of how people who were persecuted and robbed under National Socialism can get their property back or receive compensation for it.

In addition, there are many other aspects of Wiedergutmachung such as compensation, i.e. payments for physical injuries, for imprisonment in a concentration camp, for example, and so on. You will hear more about this in the coming episodes. This episode is about restitution because it is one of the earliest and most direct forms of Wiedergutmachung.

Back to the file.

[Acoustic background music]

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the 32nd cabinet meeting of the Federal Government on December 21, 1949, December 22, 1949, in: BAArch, B 136/36088.

It takes a long time for such political issues to reach the cabinet: correspondence between the ministries, bilateral talks between state secretaries and ministers, and so on. Tracing all of this historically today is extremely time-consuming.

But Sebastian Gleixner also finds the document in a volume of the edition "The Cabinet minutes of the Federal Government". The edition contains a note from Federal Minister of Justice, Dehler, about the cabinet meeting, it states:

[Sebastian Gleixner:]

"The Chancellor took the view that the ongoing proceedings should be handled as quickly as possible in accordance with the existing laws in the zones. The Vice-Chancellor and the Minister of Finance point out the gross injustices and the dangers for the economy. It was decided that the Ministry of Justice should provide a summary of the current legal situation and the aspects in favour of standardisation."<sup>2</sup>

Few sentences, but lots of content: words like "gross injustices" are used, "dangers for the economy" – clear words, and yet they are actually talking about surviving victims of Nazi terror. From this perspective, the Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister do not appear in a particularly good light. According to the minutes, they oppose regulation in favour of the persecuted due to the post-war economic situation. The Federal Chancellor wanted to retain the previous regulations and bring the proceedings to a speedy conclusion.

On the basis of the note, I have to say that the commitment to really making amends is not that clear. In fact, the efforts to make restitution are primarily being made by the Western occupying powers.

[Acoustic background music]

Germany, shortly after the Second World War. The Nazi reign of terror is over. The country lies in ruins, occupied by the four victorious powers: The Americans, French and British in the south and west, and the Soviets in the east.

The occupying forces have different views on how Germany should proceed. But they all agree on one thing: to get the old Nazi regime out of the minds and hearts of the population as quickly as possible. And to take back misappropriated items and property.

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"For the Americans, it was very clear that the property system that had come into being during National Socialism was the result of violence and had to be scrutinised in any case. People who had unjustly obtained property from collectively persecuted people, as it was called at the time, had to give it back.

So, says Jürgen Lillteicher. He is a historian, director of the Allied Museum in Berlin and an expert on the restitution of Jewish property in the early Federal Republic. Restitution, i.e. the return of unlawful property, is an important issue in the transition from a dictatorship to a constitutional state. First of all, it is necessary to clarify who actually owns what legally. Experts say that the equivalent of 3.5 billion German Marks were redistributed via restitution.<sup>3</sup> And this is the early 1950s. That was a huge sum at the time.

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

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<sup>2</sup> Note by the Federal Minister of Justice, Thomas Dehler, on the sixth item of the agenda in the cabinet meeting of December 21, 1949, December 21, 1949, in: BAArch, B 141/407, pp. 19; Minutes of the 32nd cabinet meeting of the Federal Government on December 21, 1949. TOP 6, Anm. 11, in: Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, hrsg. für das Bundesarchiv von Hans Booms, Band 1 / 1949, bearb. von Ulrich Enders und Konrad Reiser, URL: <https://kabinettsprotokolle.bundesarchiv.de/protokoll/a79de2e8-c160-4cee-bc16-9529887c9d35#Kb83-5f6-416>

<sup>3</sup> Goschler, Constantin: Schuld und Schulden. Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945, 2., durchgesehene Auflage, Göttingen 2008, S. 204.

"So, the Americans were clearly pioneers on this issue in long discussions with the Stuttgart Länder Council."

[short ping tone announcing an insertion]

To put this in context: from 1945 to 1948, the Stuttgart Länder Council was the central coordination centre for the Länder or states of the American occupation zone.

"Because the Federal Republic did not yet exist at that time. For a long time, they were keen to work out a restitution law together with the German authorities or new representatives. But they realised there were limits. But in the end, I don't think German representatives wanted to take responsibility for it. And then the Americans passed this law themselves and that was actually the role model or the forerunner for the other occupying powers such as the British or French."

In 1947, the Military Government Law No. 59 becomes the first Restitution Act passed in a German occupation zone.<sup>4</sup> This was created by the US occupying forces in close co-operation and communication with the German authorities. The French follow with their own law on the same day for their zone, the British a bit later, in 1949.<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Lillteicher explains the procedure according to the adopted law as follows:

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"As a persecuted person, whether still living in Germany or abroad, I was able to submit a so-called restitution application. This had to be done by a certain date. And a German Wiedergutmachung office then actually decided on this application. So, this application was then sent to the owner at the time, saying: Hello, there is a decision for restitution here. Please reject the presumption of seizure! Then the person who has presumably enriched himself by acquiring a house or a plot of land at a favourable price has to declare and rebut this presumption of seizure. If this was not successful, the property had to be returned. However, the persecuted persons also had the choice of restitution in kind or a subsequent payment of the purchase price."

[neutral documentary music]

To illustrate this briefly, here's a fictional example: Let's assume that a Frankfurt Jew is expelled from his home in 1938. He emigrates to the USA. His house goes to a local functionary of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or NSDAP, for a favourable price.

The law, newly passed in 1947, now creates a basis for former victims of persecution to get their property back. The aforementioned persecuted person can therefore assert a claim for the first time and state that the NSDAP functionary acquired the house unlawfully. The accused NSDAP functionary is now obliged to prove the opposite. If he is unable to do so, he must return the house or pay an appropriate compensation or a subsequent payment of the purchase price.

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"The arguments put forward by people who had enriched themselves with Jewish property under National Socialism were, I would say, very, very astonishing to our ears. Especially when it came to the restitution of private property. In many cases, the persecuted and the persecutors, i.e. Jews and former beneficiaries of National Socialist rule, actually met again, or at least they crossed paths in written pleadings. That represented a very close confrontation over participation in Nazi injustice."

In the 1950s and 1960s, this restitution process took place swiftly on the basis of the Allied regulations. So, if you remember, we read at the beginning of the cabinet minutes, that the initial plans by the new Federal Republican government to standardise and tone down the regulations,

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<sup>4</sup> Military Government Law No. 59 on the Restitution of Identifiable Property to Victims of National Socialist Repression (USREG), November 10, 1947, in: ABl. Am MilReg 1947 G, pp. 1–25.

<sup>5</sup> Ordinance No. 120 on the Return of Stolen Items of Property (RueVO), November 10, 1947, in: Journal officiel 1947, pp. 1219–1222; Military Government Law No. 59 on the Restitution of Identifiable Property to Victims of Nazi Oppression (BREG), May 12, 1949, in: ABl. Brit MilReg 1949, pp. 1169–1187.

were dropped. Also, because the Allies said: "Don't touch the law we have created." Nevertheless, the Federal Government went ahead and created a Federal Restitution Act in 1957.<sup>6</sup> However, the Allied restitution laws in the occupation zones were not standardised into this law.

Rather, the law regulated the monetary liabilities of the German Reich, the NSDAP, and the State of Prussia as legal successors and other equivalent legal entities under restitution law. This refers, for example, to claims by victims of Nazi persecution whose assets were seized by the National Socialist state and who can now reclaim their money from the Federal Republic of Germany.

However, this does not mean that people will be able to regain their property without further ado once the relevant laws have been introduced. The road is often rocky and takes years. Proceedings involving the restitution of real estate, for example, take a long time.

But ownership goes beyond houses and plots of land, where at least the location is clear. It is much more difficult with furnishings and household articles. This applies above all to art and cultural assets.

[Music pause, short tonal transition]

[Kathrin Kleibl:]

"So, the case that I find particularly interesting is the case of the Klopstock family. Dr Felix Klopstock was a lung specialist in Berlin and lived with his family in a middle-class household. They had a very, very large flat, as was usual in Berlin, over an entire floor. Felix Klopstock also had his medical practice in his own flat, and in 1938 he was arrested after the Reichspogromnacht and deported to a concentration camp and only returned a few weeks later."

This is Kathrin Kleibl, a provenance researcher at the German Maritime Museum in Bremerhaven. Provenance research deals with the ownership history of objects. In this case, the possessions of the Klopstock family. By Reichspogromnacht Kathrin Kleibl is referring to the so-called "Night of Broken Glass" in November 1938, a series of coordinated violent pogroms against Jews in Austria and Germany.

"And that's when the Klopstock family decided that they had to do something and that they would probably have to leave Germany. They struggled with it for a long time because Felix Klopstock was a veteran of the First World War and had always said: 'They can't touch me because of that.' And the family then packed three so-called 'lift vans', applied to leave the country, paid the fees, went through the whole procedure and then emigrated to England. And when the family arrived in England, they naturally waited in vain for their removal goods, because the Second World War had already broken out in the meantime and the ships were no longer able to set sail, so the family's removal goods got stuck in Hamburg."

This story of the Klopstock family is just one example of thousands of families that Kathrin Kleibl is researching with the help of the LostLift database project.

Lifts, or lift vans, are large wooden containers transported by ship. The project aims to show what happens to the belongings of people who emigrate from Germany due to Nazi persecution shortly before the start of the war. Like the Klopstock family from Berlin whose belongings are now stuck in Hamburg.

After Nazi Germany starts the Second World War with its attack on Poland, civilian shipping is largely suspended. Ships that have already departed are ordered back. Others don't even set sail. The containers all end up in German harbours. If – as in the case of the Klopstock family – the owners of the containers were emigrating, their property was confiscated by the secret state police of national socialist Germany, the Gestapo, from 1940 onwards and subsequently sold at public auction. The proceeds of these unlawful sales went to the German Reich. Private individuals, dealers, museums

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<sup>6</sup> Federal Act for the Settlement of the Monetary Restitution Liabilities of the German Reich and Legal Entities of Equivalent Status (Federal Restitution Act), July 19, 1957, in: BGBl. 1957 I, pp. 734–742.

and libraries were able to obtain items such as furniture, books and paintings at very favourable prices.

[Acoustic background music]

Together with Kathrin Kleibl, Susanne Kiel uses files to try to trace what happened to all the goods moved from the two ports of Bremen and Hamburg. Susanne Kiel:

[Susanne Kiel:]

"The removal goods were probably confiscated from the beginning of 1940, and in Bremen we documented them until the end of 1943. We have not yet been able to find anything that was auctioned off in 1944. But that's probably because most of it had already been auctioned off by then. We have evidence of almost 800 auctions in that period because they were announced in the daily press, in the Bremer Nachrichten. Air strikes were also targeted at the harbour area, at the most economically intensive areas of the cities. And of course, a lot of things were destroyed as a result. But in Bremen, for example, not even 10% of the stored lift vans and Collies and crates that were still there from the move were destroyed. That's all there is to it."

This means that in Bremen, 90 per cent of the lift vans survived the Allied air raids unscathed and their contents were sold at auction. Collies are small loadings units used in transportations.

These are the entire possessions of several thousand families and individuals: furniture, clothing, miscellaneous artefacts, children's toys, and so on. After the war, some of those affected tried to get their possessions back:

[Susanne Kiel:]

"We have two cases in Bremen where possessions were actually being searched for, because an auction record was available in which the buyer's name was entered. And it could be clearly identified that the painting was bought by this owner from this dealer, but the dealer talked his way out of it. He didn't even know that what he had bought was Jewish property. The dealer appears well over 50 times in the surviving auction records as the buyer. And in the newspaper that announced the auctions it was made pretty clear where the goods came from. However, he and many other former profiteers always argued after the war: 'We were bombed out and therefore we haven't any goods or documents left.'"

Because restitution, i.e. the return of the actual goods, often does not work, some families try to enforce claims for compensation instead.

But even here there is strong resistance, with the offices working out exact numbers for what things were worth and making their value appear to be less, as Susanne Kiel explains:

[Susanne Kiel:]

"Well, I don't think I'm going too far out on a limb when I say that this has always been calculated very far down, and it has been calculated in Bremen by the Senator for Finance, who was the defendant alongside the Chief Finance Directorate in Bremen, that they had an expert here in Bremen, who really successively calculated it down, as if it had been discussed beforehand, but of course I don't have any written evidence of this. But it is very, very clear. A wear and tear fee of 25% was always calculated down again on the furniture. Then the applicant always had to prove again: 'But we only bought the things for the emigration, so nothing could have been worn out.' Then the applicant had to prove why it was worth more."

As a result, many families struggle for years with the German authorities when it comes to restitution. Some family members do not live to see the end of the process. Most of the proceedings ended in the 1960s – sometimes with compensation, sometimes with a settlement, sometimes with the proceedings simply being discontinued.

[Acoustic background music]

Decades later, Susanne Kiel and Kathrin Kleibl have managed to close at least a few gaps in the provenance chain. As in the case of the Klopstock family's possessions.

[Kathrin Kleibl:]

"So, for years they assumed that it had simply disappeared or that it had somehow been destroyed in the bombing. The family knew nothing about it and they were then compensated with a certain amount of money, but they never saw their belongings again. They arrived in England, so to speak, with only their hand luggage and recently, through our research, we were able to track down the family or daughter in England again and the now 100-year-old Eva Evans could still remember the time of emigration very well, as well as the feelings they had as a family, that they could never come back to Berlin."

However, so far, the case of the Klopstock family appears to be an exception, because often traces of goods simply fizzle out or cannot be fully traced due to the large number of different leads going in different directions. However, thanks to the modern possibilities of big data in databases, through better search options and digitally available documents, the conditions for research are more favourable today. And the more the researchers uncover in the course of their work, the more information they can pass on about the history of the property of the families concerned. And thus, they can also trace the fate and history of entire families.

[Kathrin Kleibl:]

"In the case of the Klopstock family, we know who the buyers are because of the notes of the bailiff, and some of them can be identified. Of course, we also have dealers among them, as was very often the case, who then resold the goods. But in the case of Klopstock, there were also medical professionals present at the auctions who bought up Mr Klopstock's medical or practice equipment. And among the buyers was, for example, a gynaecologist who bought medical equipment, and we know from this gynaecologist that she carried out forced abortions on forced labourers in the concentration camp in Hamburg. So of course, that makes it even more explosive somehow. And this gynaecologist also continued to practise in Hamburg after the war, unchallenged."

In turn, researchable objects and artefacts point to people, fates and stories, including stories of perpetrators. Projects such as the LostLift database and data linking such as the Online Collection Wiedergutmachung make this injustice easier to unravel.

Once the proceedings had been completed by the end of the 1960s, the authorities quickly put the issue of restitution behind them. It was not until the 1990s that the discussion about seized property flared up again. And this has to do above all with a very specific form of restitution, the return of art and cultural assets.

[Benjamin Lahusen:]

"It's often assumed that you take a cultural artefact in the institution, a picture from the wall, turn it round and then something is written on the back. This picture once belonged to this or that person. Or that there are some swastikas on it or confiscation stamps from the Gestapo or something. In other words, something that directly tells the story of this picture. It's now well known that it's not that simple, that it's very, very complex research and that today, as a larger institution, you can't afford to avoid it."

Says Benjamin Lahusen. He is a professor of legal history and heads the "Justice without Law" project, which is funded by the Federal Ministry of Finance's Nazi Injustice Education Agenda via the foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future". Together with his colleagues, he is researching the complex sale and purchase histories for the restitution of works of art. He describes the dilemma facing state or public institutions such as museums or libraries, which generally only return artefacts on a voluntary basis:

[Benjamin Lahusen:]



"In 99.99% of all cases, I would now say, the current holders of looted art have become the legal owners – in any case, according to the rules of good faith. If you acquire something in good faith, then you generally become the owner, or at least according to the rules of possession in good faith. Having had the object for ten years – to put it somewhat casually – that then makes me the owner."

The restitution of art and cultural assets thus remains voluntary, even if museums and galleries are highly willing to rectify wrongs, and provenance research is playing a more important role.

[Music pause, short tonal transition,]

Benjamin Lahusen is of the opinion that the extent of misappropriated art and cultural assets was not properly assessed for many decades, and perhaps could not be fully assessed due to circumstances at the time. Without more systematic research, we simply do not know how many works of art and cultural artefacts are still hanging in museums and galleries today that are the result of Nazi theft.

[Benjamin Lahusen:]

"And that's why it's different from what you might think, because many people have an intuitive impression that so much has already happened. Germany had already made up for so much and so on, that doesn't apply to this area and couldn't apply before."

The restitution process – and restitution of works of art and cultural artefacts alone – make it clear how difficult the overall issue of Wiedergutmachung is. Apart from the personal pain of everything they suffered, most victims of persecution are left empty-handed after the war. When trying to get their property back – or at least compensation for what was taken – they encounter great difficulties, and, in too many cases, a sometimes hostile bureaucracy. Or, they are simply no longer willing or able to face their former persecutors or beneficiaries, which is why many claims take years or decades to emerge and are often only tackled later by their heirs.

Despite all these facts, one should not be too quick to judge the restitution process, says the director of the Allied Museum, Jürgen Lillteicher.

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"People always talk about the quiet 1950s, when the past didn't play a role, where there was just silence. But if you look into German courtrooms, it's exactly the opposite. Thousands of proceedings have taken place in the context of restitution, where the past has been dealt with in detail."

What most court cases have in common is that those affected have a claim beyond just monetary compensation.

[Jürgen Lillteicher:]

"The expectation of the persecuted persons was, of course, that if I now apply for restitution, I want a German court to say that I have been wronged. It is this hope that can be heard in all the materials and sources. This hope that injustice had been done, you can really hear that in the materials, in the sources. However, the restitution was a civil matter. Unlike in criminal law, it was not a case of saying: you are guilty or not guilty. It was really about the fulfilment of purchase contracts. And now the question is to what extent the courts were prepared to take this persecution experience of the individual applicant into account."

These hopes for a general recognition of injustice and the restoration of a form of "justice" accompany many of the restitution proceedings. The restitution of houses has indeed often worked. Or at least it was possible to agree on a subsequent payment of the purchase price. It was much more difficult with movable property.

Susanne Kiel describes this here for those affected, whom she got to know through the LostLift database project:

[Susanne Kiel:]



"Many were ill or became ill. Many were also very old when they emigrated and they didn't realise what was the conclusion of their restitution application, or no longer paid attention to the process. That's always a very sad moment in the research when you realise that they've tried very hard and fought very hard for their rights and then didn't get it."

[neutral documentary music]

Restitution in this form to private individuals or successor organisations was a novelty in history at the time. From today's perspective, there are many inconsistencies in the restitution process. Particularly at the beginning, there is a sometimes ruthless bureaucracy, in which formerly staunch National Socialists are often still involved, which can cause the survivors of persecution to experience resurfaced or deepened trauma. There are external political circumstances over which those affected have no influence. And for many years, well into the 1980s, there was a lack of interest on the part of society, which wanted to leave the past behind and because "regular" German people – who had been expelled from former German territories, ended up as war invalids or who had been bombed out – also tended to see themselves as victims.

On the other hand, however, it can also be seen that many issues over property have been clarified, especially via restitution.

Restitution procedures, such as those in the aftermath of the Nazi crimes, were unprecedented in history. Therefore, at the time, there were no role models, no examples of best practice, as one might put it today. There was also a learning process that needed to be gone through on the part of the authorities, and which was often painful for the victims.

The long path from the Allied regulations and the cabinet minute from 1949, to the more recent declarations of fate made possible by the LostLift database makes it so clear to me how closely Wiedergutmachung is interwoven with post-war history right up to the present day.

As a member of a family that fought for a long time for Wiedergutmachung for my grandfather, who was murdered by the Nazi state, it is also important to me to understand and come to terms with the many factors involved in this process. Factors that we can only decipher with the help of the sources. For me, the looted objects and the files tell of the past on two levels.

First of all, there is the history of Wiedergutmachung itself and the question of what was recognised as persecution and unlawful expropriation after the Second World War. Who was recognised as a victim at what time? These are questions that touch on the self-image of the Federal Republic of Germany and shed light on many social and political discussions over the last 80 years.

And then there is this second level, which is no less important. These files from the Federal Archives and the state archives and the few remaining objects are often the only testimonies to the fate of persecuted people. They reveal what could not be told with the documents from the Nazi era alone; they also allow the victims to have their say in the applications.

Modern provenance research and large portal projects, such as the Online Collection Wiedergutmachung in Archivportal-D, make this possible. This means that the files do not remain in the dark storerooms of the archives. How we will deal with the legacy of Nazi crimes and the history of Wiedergutmachung in the future, what stories we want to tell, what we want to shed light on – these questions are very topical for the modern generations.

[neutral documentary music]

This episode was mainly about people who were persecuted within Germany. But what about those affected beyond the borders of the German Reich? After all, Nazi Germany occupied many other countries for a time during the Second World War.

This will be the subject of the next episode, when we take another look at the files and visit an office that still deals with applications for Wiedergutmachung today.

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"We also have the particularity that our clientele is on average 92 years old. (...) So if the main task used to be pension processing, pension support, then today 50% of it is also contact with researchers, historians, etc. Of course, we realise, and all employees here realise, that at some point the last case will be closed. But that was foreseeable. Interestingly, it is taking longer than we always expected and I am doing this work with great pleasure."

If you like this podcast, we would be delighted to receive a five-star rating and would be happy if you would recommend it to other people! Do you have any questions about the topic or would you like to browse through the files yourself? You can find the details in the show notes.

"The German Wiedergutmachung" – A podcast of the Online Collection "Wiedergutmachung for National Socialist injustice". The Online Collection is a co-operation between the Federal Archives, the State Archives of Baden-Württemberg and FIZ Karlsruhe in the Archivportal-D. It was initiated and is financed by the Federal Ministry of Finance.

The German Wiedergutmachung is a production by Escucha on behalf of the Federal Archives. I am Nora Hespers. Editors: Lukas Fleischmann, Jörn Petrick, Ralph Würschinger and Mirjam Sprau. Script and production: Escucha. Cover Hauer + Dörfler.