

THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS CONTEXTS



The Holocaust and European Societies

Social Processes and Social Dynamics

Edited by Andrea Löw
and Frank Bajohr



The Holocaust and its Contexts

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Editors

The Holocaust and European Societies

Social Processes and Social Dynamics

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The Holocaust and its Contexts

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CONTENTS

Part I	Introduction	1
1	Beyond the ‘Bystander’: Social Processes and Social Dynamics in European Societies as Context for the Holocaust <i>Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw</i>	3
Part II	Jews in the German Reich After 1933	15
2	Fading Friendships and the ‘Decent German’. Reflecting, Explaining and Enduring Estrangement in Nazi Germany, 1933–1938 <i>Anna Ullrich</i>	17
3	Living in an Abnormal Normality. The Everyday Relations of Jews and Non-Jews in the German-Dutch Border Region, 1933–1938 <i>Froukje Demant</i>	33

4	Economic Trust in the ‘Racial State’. A Case Study from the German Countryside <i>Stefanie Fischer</i>	47
5	‘Life in Illegality Cost an Extortionate Amount of Money.’ Ordinary Germans and German Jews Hiding from Deportation <i>Susanna Schrafstetter</i>	69
Part III Case Studies from Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Europe		87
6	Collaborators, Bystanders or Rescuers? The Role of Local Citizens in the Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Belarus <i>Olga Baranova</i>	89
7	Nationalizing the Holocaust. ‘Foreign’ Jews and the Making of Indifference in Macedonia Under Bulgarian Occupation <i>Nadège Ragaru</i>	105
8	Genocide in Times of Civil War. Popular Attitudes Towards Ustaša Mass Violence, Croatia 1941–1945 <i>Alexander Korb</i>	127
9	The <i>Pazifizierungsaktion</i> as a Catalyst of Anti-Jewish Violence. A Study in the Social Dynamics of Fear <i>Tomasz Frydel</i>	147
10	Slovak Society and the Jews. Attitudes and Patterns of Behaviour <i>Barbara Hutzelmänn</i>	167

Part IV Jewish Leadership and Jewish Councils	187
11 Leadership in the Jewish Councils as a Social Process. The Example of Cracow	189
<i>Andrea Löw and Agnieszka Zajączkowska-Drożdż</i>	
12 The Role of the Jewish Council During the Occupation of the Netherlands	207
<i>Katja Happe</i>	
13 Negotiating and Compromising. Jewish Leaders’ Scope of Action in Tunis During Nazi Rule (November 1942–May 1943)	225
<i>Sophie Friedl</i>	
Part V Relations Between Jews and Non-Jews at a Local/Regional Level	241
14 Neighbours in Borysław. Jewish Perceptions of Collaboration and Rescue in Eastern Galicia	243
<i>Natalia Aleksium</i>	
15 Beyond the Bystander. Relations Between Jews and Gentile Poles in the General Government	267
<i>Agnieszka Wierzcholska</i>	
16 The Transformation of Jewish–Non-Jewish Social Relations in a Gendarmerie District of Hungary, 1938–1944	289
<i>Izabella Sulyok</i>	

Part VI The Aftermath. Post-War Returnees	305
17 Returning Home After the Holocaust. Jewish–Gentile Encounters in the Soviet Borderland <i>Diana Dumitru</i>	307
18 The ‘Aryanization’ of Jewish Property in Amsterdam and Its Consequences After World War II <i>Hinke Piersma and Jeroen Kemperman</i>	321
Place Index	337
Name Index	343

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 9.1 The inhabitants of Podborze in front of their burned down homes (Photograph taken immediately after the war. Courtesy of Maria Przybyszewska) 161
- Fig. 9.2 ‘Pacification’ of Podborze on 23 April 1943 and its immediate aftermath 162
- Fig. 16.1 Ghettoization and deportation of the Jews in Hungary, April–July 1944 (*Source*: http://www.hdke.hu/files/imagecache/mapf/images/maps/3_terkep.jpg, last accessed 14 January 2012) 299

PART I

Introduction

Beyond the ‘Bystander’: Social Processes and Social Dynamics in European Societies as Context for the Holocaust

Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw

At heart, the Holocaust—the mass murder of European Jews that took place in the course of World War II—was a political process originating in National Socialist Germany. It was essentially the result of political-ideological decisions made by the Nazi state leadership, who developed a practice of mass extermination that became increasingly radicalized. The murders were mostly carried out regionally or locally by the SS and the German-controlled police.

But the events of the Holocaust were also part of a social process. Raul Hilberg, the doyen of Holocaust studies, once formulated three basic categories that might apply to those involved, and these have attained wide usage: people might be ‘perpetrators’, ‘victims’ or ‘bystanders’.¹ These categories still have validity as rough differentiators—ultimately the Holocaust entailed one group of people murdering a larger group of ‘others’, while a majority of their contemporaries belonged neither to

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the first group nor the second. But if we seek to analyse how the persecution and murder of the European Jews became possible, we have to see developments as a social process, and here Hilberg's three categories do not suffice. In societies where the political order expects citizens to endorse the exclusion of particular groups in the population, there *cannot* be any completely uninvolved bystanders. The persecution and murder of the European Jews would not have been possible without a multitude of people being somehow implicated.

In recent debates on the issue, the category of 'bystander' has, therefore, been shifting quite rapidly to the 'perpetrator' side. In Germany, for example, the term 'perpetrator society' is gaining ground (especially in the media) to describe the society of the Third Reich. We can observe a similar development in many other European countries, and an even more radical change of paradigms. In the earlier post-war decades, for example, the Dutch, the French and the Poles all chose to present their recent history by casting themselves as victims of German occupation, who, at the same time, put up a resistance to German rule—with a few exceptions dubbed collaborators. But in recent years this picture has changed. Now great numbers of the populations of these countries appear to have been co-perpetrators of the Holocaust, well-informed about the murderous practices that were going on.

However, there is a basic difference between acts of murder (or supportive actions directly leading to murder) and social behaviour that goes no further than contributing to social exclusion. The current de-differentiation of Hilberg's categories is, therefore, not without its drawbacks. Does it yield a useful solution to our problem of dealing with the various forms of social behaviour that accompanied or contributed to the Holocaust?

Of course it would be possible to replace the term 'bystander' with dozens of more subtly differentiated categories, such as 'beneficiaries', 'denouncers', 'opportunists', 'sympathizers with exclusionary practices', 'indifferent spectators' and 'helpers', 'supporters' or 'rescuers'. Undoubtedly these categories would enable us to take a more nuanced approach in the analysis of social behaviour. Yet a possible objection to their use is the static character of all these terms. Under the intense and ever-changing pressures of violence, war and occupation that prevailed in the Nazi era, people's positions could change from moment to moment: they were seldom fixed. So it seems more appropriate to analyse the complex social processes that influenced their choices than to invent and define ever more static categories. Between 1933 and the immediate post-war years, Europeans were caught up in developments that led to the social exclusion, persecution and wholesale murder of the continent's Jews.

There is much to be said for an analytical perspective that defines those involved as social actors who acted and reacted to these developments in manifold and highly differentiated ways.

In the analysis of social processes, it is helpful to define 'rule' as various forms of social practice. This applies to societies under Nazi, fascist or authoritarian rule as much as to others, for even dictatorial regimes cannot simply be reduced to a dualism of rulers and the ruled, the dominators and the dominated. Hence, some decades ago, scholars in the history of everyday life urged that 'rule' should be conceptualized as a social process—a dynamic and amorphous field of forces in which various actors stand in relation to one another.² In this view of things, the population itself participates actively in the system of rule, and in multifaceted ways. As historians, if we accept rule as a social practice, we do not look for a clear and unambiguous *attitude* of a society towards its rulers. Rather, we search out and examine the multifarious *forms of action and behaviour* in the society we are investigating. Through that prism, a whole range of human reactions comes into sight—extending from enthusiastic acceptance, complicity, opportunism, adaptation, acquiescence to self-distancing and resistance. Across this spectrum, hybrid forms of behaviour are more the rule than the exception: compulsion does not exclude consent and pursuing personal interests. Conversely, cooperation can also go hand-in-hand with friction and difference. Moreover, depending on the temporal frame and juncture, one and the same social actor can behave in very different ways in similar situations. Social practice and social processes are especially relevant when we attempt to understand how the persecution of the Jews came about. The Nazis and those allied with them did not persecute the European Jews solely by means of political-administrative measures and the exercise of brutal state force. As well as using these means, they established new social norms, in particular their hierarchy of race, and social models such as the ethnically homogenous ideal of a '*Völksgemeinschaft*' ('national community') which presupposed the exclusion of 'undesirable' minorities. Many of the persecuted Jews in Europe had grown up within a system of norms and values that conferred social status or merit on individuals according to their property, education and achievements. In the Nazi model of society, which gave 'racial status' a higher priority, these personal assets had only limited validity for the excluded. They could even be disadvantageous: respected dignitaries who had once belonged to the ruling social strata were often treated especially nastily if—hoping to be accorded some respect for their previous achievements in life—they referred to their former social status. Their world had been turned upside down.

The loss of social position that befell Jews opened up new and attractive opportunities for others, as the places the Jews had held in society were snapped up. Thus, when Jewish physicians and lawyers could no longer practise, non-Jews stepped in to inherit their patients and clients; and when Jewish businessmen were compelled to cease trading, non-Jews took over their companies and customer-bases, acquiring in this way a share in the market and a step upward in economic status. Many of those swept from the social periphery to the centre of power after 1933 savoured this inversion of the traditional social hierarchy with sadistic glee.

* * * * *

The systematic social exclusion of the Jews in Europe began in Germany after the Nazi rise to power. The complicated process of social exclusion within the German Reich is analysed in the first chapters of this volume. In contrast to the pattern seen in many European countries later occupied by the German Wehrmacht, the isolation, exclusion and eventual persecution of Jews in Germany did not occur suddenly; rather these practices evolved in a gradual, inconsistent and sometimes highly contradictory train of developments extending over more than six years. Social relations between Jews and non-Jews were not immediately ruptured in 1933: many Germans continued to visit Jewish doctors, shop at Jewish stores and engage in economic relations with Jews. The chapters demonstrate what a real problem it was for Jews to interpret the ambivalent behaviour of the non-Jews in their neighbourhoods. This conflicted situation made it even more difficult for Jewish Germans to realize how the tide was moving and to orient themselves amid a changing reality. On occasion, there was even some public objection to the persecution of the Jews, and many German Jews later recalled in their memoirs that they kept up with non-Jewish friends throughout the first years of Nazi rule.

Anna Ullrich analyses such memoirs written by German-Jewish émigrés after they had gone to live in America, and finds in them a remarkable focus on positive encounters with non-Jewish Germans. She argues that the writers wanted to retain a feeling of connection with Germany and the Germans, and that they used the recollection of positive encounters as a strategy to make sense of the shift after 1933. Froukje Demant calls the new social situation Jews found themselves in during the earlier years of Nazi rule an ‘abnormal normality’, and she examines the everyday relations of Jews and non-Jews in the German-Dutch border region up to 1938. The social contacts non-Jews had with Jews there were gradually cut off,

essentially because association with Jews could bring stigma, trouble and disadvantage to non-Jews. In many instances, Jews themselves were the ones who broke off contact so as to save their acquaintances difficulty or embarrassment and avoid personal disappointment at their own rejection. This vicious circle doubtless contributed to their gradual isolation. Little can be identified that countered this process and slowed it down.

Stefanie Fischer draws our attention to one counter-element in her analysis of the relations between Jewish cattle-dealers and non-Jewish farmers in the German countryside. These relations depended strongly on mutual economic trust, and neither political pressure nor anti-Semitic agitation could break them for quite a while. Many farmers needed the Jewish cattle-dealers out of economic self-interest. Nevertheless, these farmers could also exploit the situation for their own benefit, and this was one of the reasons why the Jewish cattle-dealers were finally pushed out of the market.

Besides the farmers, many Germans combined the pursuit of personal self-interest with adherence to the ideological goals of the Nazi regime. The 'Aryanization' of Jewish property, in particular, opened up a range of possibilities through which citizens could enrich themselves. Both profiting from the spoils and falling in with the regime, Germans 'learned' in the span of a few short years that Jews did not belong to the national community, the so-called *Volkgemeinschaft*. Moreover, there was a close link between the gradual acceptance of anti-Jewish norms and the popularity of the Nazi regime—and of Hitler in particular—which peaked in the first years of World War II.

Those German Jews who failed to emigrate in time found it especially difficult to go into hiding and remain undiscovered in a Germany that would no longer tolerate their presence. For nationalist reasons, most Germans felt a basic solidarity with the Nazi regime, and assistance in hiding Jews was not, for them, an act implicitly targeted against a foreign occupier as elsewhere in Europe. Susanna Schrafstetter provides us with a rather more complex picture than we are used to, when she discusses ordinary Germans' reactions to Jews' attempts to hide from deportation. The terms 'rescuer' and (more effusively) 'Righteous among the Nations' imply that active helpers of Jews were always extraordinary, altruistic people. However, a detailed look at stories of survival and rescue very often reveals a complex interchange in which money and valuables might well play a central role in the motivation of helpers. In some extreme cases, the initial rescuer or helper could turn into a denouncer or even murderer when the financial

funds of Jews in hiding became exhausted. As a rule, rescue attempts only took place if victimized Jews themselves asked others for help. When they did so, they were entering a chancy web of social processes and interactions.

* * * * *

The studies that come next in this book deal with developments in countries of Eastern and Central Europe beyond the borders of Germany. In a number of these countries, the social isolation of the Jews had begun before the German occupations and was not initiated under direct German influence. In the wake of the global economic crisis, there was a strong political shift to the right in Europe, and in many states, governments came to power, seeking—like the Nazis—to promote ethnically homogeneous national communities. As a consequence, in these states, the social status of Jews was subjected to certain limitations through special laws and decrees. So a process of anti-Jewish social exclusion had commenced even before the Holocaust. The anti-Jewish laws in Romania and the racial laws in Italy are striking examples of such legislation. It was characteristic of the anti-Jewish climate spreading through Europe that, in early 1939, the Polish government negotiated with the French government, sounding out the possibility of settling Polish Jews in French colonial Madagascar—an idea the Nazi regime itself adopted for a short time, later on.

However, the fundamental conditions for the full-blown persecution of the Jews in Europe were created by German occupation, as German troops took over one country after another. The occupation regimes put in place varied a great deal according to the states involved. Yet there were almost always specific forms of violence and the imposition of anti-Jewish norms to which the population of each occupied country had to adapt and conform. In a number of countries, there were anti-Jewish pogroms in the initial period of occupation, as for example in the Baltic states, in eastern Poland and in Ukraine. These pogroms had their roots in anti-Jewish hatred among the indigenous populations, which had been massively stoked by local perceptions of the preceding Soviet regime of occupation. The German occupiers consciously exploited this anti-Semitic mood in their own plans of action. Thus, in the spring of 1941, the Nazi party's chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg, wrote in his guidelines for German propaganda in the East that the 'Jewish Question [could] to a significant degree be solved by giving the population a free hand some time after occupying the country'.³ Especially in Ukraine, Rosenberg maintained, the 'Jewish Question' would 'move on to extensive pogroms against Jews and killings of communist functionaries'. All the Germans would then

have to do would be to mop up, 'to take care of the remaining oppressors', by which he meant murdering the remaining Jews and communists.

What was the real situation? Once the war was over, the official line in many European countries was selective recall of a straight dualism existing in the time of enemy occupation. This was a dualism between the occupiers and a stoically resistant population—only spoilt by a few 'collaborators' who were branded national traitors. But the reality was far more complex than this. Actual social practice was marked by diverse and multifaceted forms of cooperation between occupiers and the occupied. To apply the concept of 'collaboration' to these various forms is problematic, because that term does not cover all forms of cooperation and is imbued with the stigma of treason. People's motivations for cooperation with the occupiers often sprang from the exact opposite ground: a desire to protect the interests of the population or to safeguard personal and family interests under existing, near-impossible conditions.

The exclusion and persecution of the Jews presupposed that the population in the occupied countries would cooperate, because in many instances the German occupiers did not know who was Jewish and who was not. They depended on the assistance of the locals and these locals' readiness to distance themselves from the Jewish minority and accept the anti-Jewish norms imposed.

In her article on Belarus, Olga Baranova demonstrates that cooperation between the German occupier and the occupied could take many forms. Though there were few spontaneous pogroms and many Belarusians refused to engage in the murder of Jews, there was often a readiness to participate in different forms of persecution or to provide the Nazis with indirect forms of support. The reasons the author gives are a mixture of traditional anti-Semitism, jealousy, personal grudges, greed, opportunism, a desire for material advantages and a certain anxiety to show loyalty to the occupier.

As we have seen, ideas of an ethnically homogenous nation state had spread in Central and Eastern Europe long before the Holocaust and had contributed to the social isolation of the Jewish minorities who depended on a multi-ethnic social environment. However, not all states and allies of Nazi Germany intended to get rid of their Jewish citizens or join in the Nazis' 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe'. Bulgaria was one of the states that opted out: the authorities refused to let Bulgarian Jews be killed. At the same time the idea of a homogenous nation state was one dear to Bulgarians and strongly influenced their attitude towards Jews in the territories their troops had occupied. The Jews living there fell victim to the Holocaust, as is shown in Nadège Ragaru's article on

Macedonia under Bulgarian occupation. In this multi-ethnic region, Jews were thought to be pro-Serb, pro-Greek or pro-Albanian—but not pro-Bulgarian. They were thus regarded as ‘foreign’ to a nation trying to elevate itself in a time of war and mass violence.

Alexander Korb uses the example of Croatia to explain the connection between genocide and civil war. Popular participation in acts of mass violence constitute a key element in civil-war scenarios, and especially in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, many governments who promoted programmes of ethnic cleansing set in motion a social dynamic that was not easy to control.

While ideas of national homogeneity, anti-Semitism and mass violence in wartime are all features that stand out clearly on a macro level, they tend to retreat into the background when the focus is shifted to social behaviour at a local level, particularly in societies that were oppressed by German occupation. In the countries the Third Reich took over, the authorities clamped down on rescue activities made to help Jews who had gone into hiding. Their repressive measures set in motion a spiral of violence and created an atmosphere of terror that is meticulously analysed in Tomasz Frydel’s article on the dynamics of murder and killing in a cluster of Polish villages. He shows how an atmosphere of expected reprisals and the social dynamics of fear formed the structure of anti-Jewish violence in the Polish village of Podborze. In the spring of 1943, German ‘pacification’ actions generated extreme fear among the local Polish population, turning Polish rescuers into traitors, and even into murderers in several cases. The article demonstrates impressively how anti-Jewish violence was decisively shaped by the threats and barbarities of repressive occupation.

Greed and the race for riches also played an important role for local populations and served as motivation for anti-Jewish actions. Barbara Hutzelmann emphasizes that such material motives influenced social behaviour towards the Jews in Slovakia. A desire for personal enrichment and ambition to climb the social ladder readily combined with a long-existing impulse in that country to reject Jews and deny them an equal place in society. While the state and the state authorities were the main perpetrators, broad sections of the population also supported the expropriation of Jews.

* * * * *

The next difficult and delicate set of chapters deals with how Jewish communities themselves behaved in the time of the Holocaust. The German authorities forced patterns of cooperation on them through

institutions like the Jewish Councils, which took on many responsibilities in the ghettos. When, in the post-war period, Jewish people looked back on the actions of the Jewish Councils, they made harsh accusations against their leaders for cooperating with the Germans even after the start of deportations to the annihilation camps. Hannah Arendt even described this cooperation as the 'darkest chapter of the whole dark story'.⁴ Research in the past decades has overcome such simplistic interpretations and has revealed a multitude of strategies and differing forms of action the Council leaders tried to pursue. Nevertheless, the Jewish Councils are still sometimes treated as static entities rather than as ad hoc bodies whose workings were part of a dynamic and rapidly changing social process.

Examining this process, the case studies draw the reader's attention to the dramatic and unexpected changes in German anti-Jewish policy, and how these influenced the Councils' strategies, limiting the leaders' attempts to change the course of events. The Jewish Councils of three different cities are given individual studies here, and the comparative perspective this offers helps in distinguishing what was similar and what diverged in their modes of behaviour. Although the situations differed a lot between Western Europe and the East, there are interesting similarities in the examples of Cracow and Amsterdam.

However, this comparative focus should not obscure the stunning differences and rapid changes that can be identified in the history of the Councils in almost every place where they were formed. The history of the Jewish Council in Cracow, presented by Agnieszka Zajązkowska-Drożdż and Andrea Löw, provides a very good example of the multitude of strategies tried out in one city alone. It shows that we need to analyse the Jewish Councils as bodies working within occupied societies, subjected to intense pressures from the social processes that accompanied war conditions and an escalation in the anti-Jewish policies the Germans imposed. The developments in the Jewish Council of Cracow, which had three successive chairmen all acting quite differently, demonstrate that a static interpretation of its workings would be insufficient and misleading. Instead, we have to examine the different phases and ongoing changes that step-by-step transformed it from an institution representing the interests of local Jews (with considerable efficiency) to an instrument used in German persecution policies.

The same is true for the situation in Amsterdam. In her article, Katja Happe presents the Jewish Council there in the context of the German occupation of the Netherlands. As in many other places, this Council tried to serve the interests of Jews by fulfilling German orders while gaining small concessions. Even after the deportations had started, the Council in

Amsterdam tried to prevent the worst by continuing its strategy of cooperation—although differences of opinion among the Jewish representatives became more and more pronounced.

In Tunis the situation was very different. For a multitude of reasons, the Germans did not implement a policy of annihilation in this outpost, so deportation and mass murder did not take place, and the Jewish Council was not confronted with the agonizing dilemma of whether to help in organizing deportations or not. Nevertheless, as Sophie Friedl demonstrates, the Jewish Council's strategy in Tunis was similar to that adopted by some of the Councils in occupied Europe—a dual strategy of apparent obedience combined with secret sabotage. When it could, the Council delayed carrying out orders or, surreptitiously, it implemented them only partially. In Tunis, where the Germans could not implement a policy of mass murder, this strategy of 'reluctant cooperation' did indeed save the lives of Jews.

In all three examples we find a complex picture of differing strategies, roles and tactics the Jewish functionaries resorted to. They need to be analysed within a complex field of forces and with reference to the social interactions occurring at particular times.

* * * * *

Everyday social relations between Jews and non-Jews also need to be investigated as part of a complex and dynamic social process. For Jews social relations with others became highly unpredictable in German-occupied Europe. This made it difficult for them to interpret their situation and gauge which people they could trust and rely on in their struggle for survival. The dramatic changes in their position happened at a rapid rate—not as the creeping development that had been typical of the 'abnormal normality' in Germany after 1933, with its many elements of continuity. The wrenches in social relations also had a huge impact after the war was over.

As Natalia Aleksiu demonstrates for Borysław in Eastern Galicia, neighbours could become rescuers *or* perpetrators *or* both. The social dynamics under German occupation made everything unpredictable: roles could change, and even former friends could turn into perpetrators. Here, not only did the German occupiers act with brutal repression; at the same time, the indigent non-Jewish population could exploit the changed social situation and the absence of a rule of law for their own benefit and in the pursuit of personal self-empowerment. Jews, therefore, could no longer rely on pre-war social relations and hang on to expectations from the past.

The complicated interethnic relations in Eastern Galicia aggravated their situation, as was visible in periodic eruptions of violence.

As another microcosm displaying local relations and social dynamics at this time, Agnieszka Wierzcholska presents the Polish town of Tarnów. Half the population was annihilated in this community, and, in such circumstances, the term 'bystander' becomes hopelessly inapposite: *everybody* was involved in one way or another, *everybody* had to make choices. Competition for social and material benefit fuelled the anti-Jewish violence, but the role of sheer fear should also be taken into account: The experience of witnessing the massacres at such close range had a significant impact on the behaviour of local gentiles and led to a general brutalization of social relations.

Izabella Sulyok examines the anti-Jewish legislation passed in Hungary from 1938 onwards, and assesses its effects on social relations between Jews and non-Jews in one of the Hungarian Gendarmerie districts. Her article reminds us of the decisive effects legal norms and bureaucratic regulations had on everyday social processes. Even a high level of assimilation and integration was not enough to save Jews from falling rapidly into social isolation. The situation worsened dramatically after the German invasion in March 1944, and after this any help offered to persecuted Jews was limited to individual cases.

* * * * *

The tribulations of the Jewish people did not cease with the end of the war. The dramatic changes that had taken place within so many societies made the way back to 'normality' very difficult—indeed almost impossible. This was the case in most of Europe, but Diana Dumitru spotlights the specific difficulties experienced by Jews in the territories of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transnistria. Jewish survivors came back to these areas on the Soviet borderland to face an economically disastrous and sometimes personally dangerous situation. The dismayed returnees learnt how their neighbours had participated in the despoliation of their property—or had, at least, shown indifference. In many instances these returning Jews struggled in vain to get housing and retrieve the things that were theirs. Many left their former communities, since they no longer felt 'at home'.

Comparable developments could even be observed in Western Europe, where Jewish survivors also met with a cold reception from non-Jews on their return. As a telling example, Hinke Piersma and Jeroen Kemperman focus on the 'Aryanization' of Jewish property in Amsterdam and the authorities' failure to address this issue properly after 1945. Although the

Germans had been the main beneficiaries of the ‘Aryanization’, Dutch individuals and institutions had participated in it as well, and the city of Amsterdam was one of these participants. Having purchased some of the buildings owned by Jews, the municipality was, of course, liable for the restitution of property after the end of the war. But, when returning Jews asked for their properties back, they were often faced not only with the old stereotype of being ‘money-grubbers’ but with a Dutch narrative of endurance during the German occupation which hardly recognised the specific suffering Jews had gone through.

* * * * *

Most of the contributions to this volume were presented during a conference, ‘The Holocaust and European Societies. Social Dynamics and Social Processes’, which was organized by the Centre for Holocaust Studies at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich in October 2014. The basic ideas from this conference were revisited in another joint conference held in 2015, mainly organized by the Duitsland Instituut at the University of Amsterdam. This had the theme, ‘Probing the Limits of Categorization. The “Bystander” in Holocaust Historiography’. The editors would like to thank the participants, their language editor Jon Ashby; their colleagues Kerstin Baur, Giles Bennett, Mario Boccia, Konstantin Eder, Anna Raphaela Schmitz and Anna Ullrich at the Center for Holocaust Studies for their tireless assistance in proof-reading the manuscript; and Chris Szejnman, Olaf Jensen and Palgrave Macmillan for integrating this volume into the book series, ‘The Holocaust and its Contexts’.

NOTES

1. R. Hilberg (1992) *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders. The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Collins).
2. A. Lüdtke (ed.) (1991) *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck); and his essay ‘Funktionseliten: Täter, Mit-Täter, Opfer? Zu den Bedingungen des deutschen Faschismus’ in the same volume, pp. 559–590.
3. J. Matthäus and F. Bajohr (eds) (2015) *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), Document 7, p. 373.
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PART II

Jews in the German Reich After 1933

Fading Friendships and the ‘Decent German’. Reflecting, Explaining and Enduring Estrangement in Nazi Germany, 1933–1938

Anna Ullrich

When Hitler was sworn in as German Chancellor on 30 January 1933, it brought decisive change not only in the political sphere but also in the social lives of Jews in Germany. The literature focusing on their personal experiences after this date and their own assessments of what was happening around them come to fairly consistent conclusions. The verdict Marion Kaplan reaches in her thoroughly researched book, *Between Dignity and Despair—Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* is representative. While analysing

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various autobiographical reports—mostly by women—on how relationships developed at this time, Kaplan concludes: ‘As Germans began to treat each other with reserve, they broke decisively with Jews.’¹ Needless to say, there were still certain acts of kindness and solidarity shown by non-Jewish Germans towards their Jewish friends and acquaintances. However, according to Kaplan, these actions tended merely to have a Janus-faced effect, since they ‘came as a great relief but also served as a false basis for optimism’.² This poignant comment sums up the fate that has befallen these small acts of solidarity in the course of historical research. On the one hand, they have been treated as mere footnotes to the process by which Jewish Germans became alienated from the rest of the population. On the other, the effects they may have had on individuals experiencing them have been reduced to two extremes—at best, momentary liftings of the burden of social and legal oppression; at worst, invitations to a false hope, luring Jews into the idea that life in Germany was still viable, and, in the long run, holding back decisions to get away.

In this chapter, I want to enlarge the set of possible interpretations and ascriptions Jewish Germans attributed to ‘friendly’ relations with gentiles. I will take a more detailed look at the often insular, but mutually corroborative reports and anecdotes Jews wrote about such threatened relations during the first years of National Socialist rule, when some friendships faded, some endured. My sources are ones frequently drawn on for insights into Jewish life during these years. They are the autobiographical accounts gathered by a group of scholars during the autumn of 1939 and spring of 1940, now known as the ‘Harvard Competition’ or *My Life in Germany* collection. Although it is often noted that these memoirs originated as submissions to a prize competition, the exact provisions and requirements the academic promoters laid down have seldom been explained. It is, however, necessary to understand these guidelines, as well as the people responding to them, to arrive at a fair critical interpretation of the assessments made in the accounts—especially the ones on Jews’ relationships with non-Jews.³

As a first step, I will take a closer look at what the organizers intended when they gathered these testimonies and what preconditions were set. I will then analyse some of the ways in which the writers of the accounts depicted relationships between Jews and non-Jews after Hitler’s rise to power and how they tried to make sense of the developments in Germany.

THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION *MY LIFE IN GERMANY*: HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The initial idea of gathering people's testimonies in a collection can be traced back to three professors at Harvard University: the psychologist Gordon W. Allport, the historian Sidney B. Fay, and the sociologist Edward Y. Hartshorne. In August 1939, these three commissioned a one-page advertisement, which was published in the German exile press and in a couple of American newspapers.⁴ The appeal asked those 'who have known Germany well, before and since Hitler' to send in a written account of their recent experiences. As an incentive, the authors of the most insightful submissions were to be rewarded with prize money which ranged from \$500 (first prize) to \$20 (fifth). As for the formalities: the accounts were to be at least 20,000 words long (about 80 pages) and could be written in German or in English. The authors had to supply a short personal data sheet giving details of age, sex, religion, social position, and their last place of residence in Germany. The three professors made it quite clear what content they expected: their aim was to gather material for the 'purely scientific purpose' of assessing the 'social and emotional effects that National Socialism had on German society and the German people'. Therefore, they advised the following:

Your life-history should be written as *simply*, as *directly*, as *fully* and as *concretely* as possible. You should aim to *describe*, in so far as you can remember them: things which actually happened, things people did and said. The Judges are not interested in philosophical reflections about the past but in a record of personal experience. Quotations, wherever possible from *letters, notebooks and other personal documents*, will help to give your account the *authenticity* and *completeness* which are desired. Even if you have never written before, if you have a good memory, a good insight into human nature, you should try. Even if you do not win a prize, your manuscript will be of value as a source of information about modern Germany and National Socialism.⁵

In view of the similarities, it is reasonable to assume that the three scholars based the form of their appeal on the work of another professor, the Columbia-based sociologist Theodore Abel. In 1934, after travelling through Germany, Abel had promoted a similar open contest. However, he addressed a quite different pool of potential authors: his search was for 'the best personal life story of an adherent of the Hitler movement'.⁶ He got more than 600 responses and, in 1938, published them in his book *Why Hitler Came into Power*.⁷ The initial idea for the Harvard competition may thus be regarded as a supplement—maybe even a balance—to Abel's findings, since it was exclusively

addressed to people who had already left Germany and hence could hardly classify as supporters of Hitler. The competition probably had a personal purpose too: of the three Harvard scholars who initiated it, Allport and Fay were already established scholars with a tenure, but Hartshorne, who was Fay's son-in-law, was only at the beginning of his academic career. It seems likely that the evaluation and analysis of the material gathered—following Abel's research methods, which were well thought of at the time—was to be Hartshorne's break-through into academia.⁸

By the autumn of 1940, about 260 manuscripts had arrived at Harvard University, roughly two-thirds written by recently emigrated German and Austrian Jews. In social background, the contributors were doubtless a rather homogenous group. A clear majority came from the German upper-middle class: many were doctors or lawyers. About one-third of the manuscripts came from women. Though the ages of the contributors began at the mid-twenties, most of the accounts were written by women and men between 40 and 65. A large proportion of the contributors had only emigrated from Germany after the 1938 November Pogrom, so certain major public incidents are referred to in almost every account—the Boycott of April 1933, the 'Night of the Long Knives' (1934), and the passing of the Nuremberg Laws (1935). However, most contributors followed the guidelines and focused on descriptions of their *personal* experience of relationships with non-Jews—lasting, fading or broken.

The preconditions for an in-depth examination of the manuscripts seemed ideal: an interdisciplinary team of scholars, a pre-prepared questionnaire for a psychological and sociological analysis, and about 220 accounts complying with the formal guidelines, and offering the content required.⁹ However, ultimately, only one journal article appeared in which the accounts were used in the way the scholars seem to have planned when they set up the project. In their article, 'Personality Under Social Catastrophe: Ninety Life-Histories of the Nazi Revolution', Allport and two colleagues made a qualitative and quantitative analysis of responses from questionnaires applied to a selection of the manuscripts.¹⁰ They examined the contributors' reactions to oppression in Nazi Germany and how experiences of such treatment may have influenced the personality structures and political beliefs of the persecuted.¹¹ It remains unexplained why so few research results emerged from the project as a whole—an ambitious venture at its beginning—but it is likely that it was quietly abandoned when Hartshorne transferred from Harvard to the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS) in 1941.¹² Much later, in 1958, the manuscripts were deposited in the Houghton Library in Harvard's campus.

It is due to Monika Richarz, a German-based historian, that the manuscript collection gained renewed attention in the early 1980s. In her three-volume collection of sources, *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland*, she included several excerpts from the manuscripts' accounts.¹³ Since then, a number of these writings have been edited and published in their entirety,¹⁴ while portions of others have appeared in source books.¹⁵ Starting from the mid-1990s, Detlef Garz and a group of sociologists and educational scientists around him applied a wider range of theoretical approaches to individual manuscripts. These ranged from exile studies to moral and recognition theory,¹⁶ and, based on this work, they established a general foundation for the analysis of processes of de-recognition.¹⁷ Less concerned with theory, historians have used the accounts in a more descriptive way, often quoting especially poignant examples to yield insights into personal aspects of the disintegration process, as seen through the eyes of the excluded.¹⁸

EXPLAINING FADING FRIENDSHIPS: BELIEVING IN THE 'DECENT' GERMAN

In the paragraphs that follow, I will approach the manuscripts from a different angle. I will focus initially on the way the contributors responded to one of the key requirements of the competition—relating, from personal experiences, impressions of the effects the National Socialist regime was having on the German people. The writers were not only encouraged to report on encounters with non-Jewish Germans, but were left free to interpret the behaviour of their former fellow citizens and assess their motivations. After presenting various recurring narratives and interpretations of non-Jewish behaviour, I will discuss the intentions the authors may have had in choosing to depict these incidents.

My central thesis is that, when the authors dwell on positive encounters with non-Jewish Germans and reflect on these, their perceptions and thoughts are an integral component of the explanations they strive to present—both to themselves and to outsiders—for the situation in Nazi Germany. They use reminiscences of the 'good German' as a strategy to make sense of the shift in the whole tone of German society that followed 1933. This strategy helped them uphold their own identification with Germany and with at least a portion of the German people. To understand the contributors' assessment and the interpretations made, the time when the manuscripts were written is important. Herein lies an additional peculiarity of the collection, since all of the autobiographical accounts were written well before the autumn of 1940. Dire experiences in Germany

after 1933 and, all too often, nerve-racking wheeling and dealing to get out of the country had left their mark on the authors,¹⁹ but they did not yet have any knowledge of deportations, death camps and the killing units of the *Einsatzgruppen*. In writings after 1945, knowledge of the sheer horror of the Holocaust necessarily coloured Jews' reassessments of their former lives in Germany.²⁰ The accounts and reflections in the *My Life in Germany* collection, written between 1939 and 1940, may sometimes sound strangely innocent. However, untouched by hindsight, they let us see how contemporaries perceived historical processes as they unfolded. We can gain a better understanding of the motivations and expectations shaping people's lives at the time.

When Albert Dreyfuss, a doctor from Franconia, gets to the day of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor in his memoir, he is quick to point out that 'not only the relatively small group of Jews but, at least equally, the great mass of communists, social democrats, commoners, [people in] ecclesiastical circles, especially the Catholics, and the nobility were deeply troubled'.²¹ Harry Kaufman, who had been the manager of a shoe company in Essen, admits that a certain percentage of Germans were supporters of Hitler, but also stresses the fact that 'a higher percentage are opponents [of the regime], although they don't make an appearance in public'.²² These quite sweeping assertions bring out a point that recurs in the manuscripts, albeit with varying degrees of urgency: this point is that it was not only the Jews, but many non-Jewish Germans who found themselves adversely affected by the newly appointed Nazi government. Henriette Necheles-Magnus, who worked as a doctor in Hamburg, recalls a range of non-Jewish friends and acquaintances who were badly treated by the Nazi authorities. She includes them in her account because 'the fate of Jewish families is well enough known. But not the devastating effects on the Christian intellectual who was not a party member at the time of the breakdown [of democratic rule]'.²³ She cites examples of imprisonment, lay-offs and revocation of work permits. Non-Jewish Germans had to fear such reprisals as well as Jews.²⁴ Elaborating on this, the writers refer to a vast increase in surveillance as the most ubiquitous danger both Jews and non-Jews faced during the first years of National Socialism. The manuscripts describe in detail how next-door neighbours, the grocer, co-workers, or guests at the next table in a restaurant could turn out to be party informants. And it is repeatedly pointed out that, while Jews in Germany could at least speak their minds behind closed doors, even this level of privacy was often denied their non-Jewish friends and acquaintances. Mally Dienemann, wife of the rabbi of Offenbach, quotes friends who said: 'You