

## CHAPTER 4

# Social Relations and Bystander Responses to Violence: Kristallnacht November 1938<sup>1</sup>

*by Mary Fulbrook*

**T**he organized violence against Jews across Germany on the night of November 9–10, 1938, often termed “Reichskristallnacht” or “Kristallnacht,” and which continued in different forms over the following days and weeks, constituted a major turning point for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.<sup>2</sup> The burning of synagogues, destruction of sacred objects including Torah scrolls, physical violence and public humiliations, violation of domestic spaces, smashing of shop windows and looting of goods, and the arrests and incarceration of some thirty thousand adult male Jews in Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen—all this, in the context of ongoing pauperization, “aryanization” of property, exclusion from public spaces and loss of social status, dramatically signified the unmistakable end of any viable life in the Third Reich for people of Jewish descent. For hundreds of Jews, the November events were fatal, whether immediately or in the weeks that followed. For individuals who had the necessary financial means and personal support, the events were the final precipitant for emigration, in face of by now almost insurmountable challenges. Those left behind struggled on for three or four more years before being subjected to radical policies of deportation and murder.

Much attention has focused on decision-making at the top, the coordination of violence by the Nazi leadership, and on the experiences of Jews. Less

well understood to date are the roles played by “bystanders” to this nation-wide explosion of state-sponsored violence, with debates over popular reactions from participation and plundering to expressions of sympathy and shame. In relation to bystander passivity, the question has been raised as to whether the widely noted apparent “indifference” of ordinary Germans in November 1938 in fact amounted to a form of “moral complicity,” paving the way for genocide. Following a brief review of historical debates, I argue that bystander behaviors were not only a result of opinions on specific issues at the time of the event, but were also rooted in a distinctive combination of complicity and constraint in preceding years.

Bystander behaviors may be plotted along a spectrum of possible responses to specific incidents of violence, depending on both sympathies and actions.<sup>3</sup> Those who are initially neither direct perpetrators nor immediate victims cannot stay neutral for very long. Let us call this apparently “neutral” position 3, and place it in the middle of a theoretical five-point scale, as below:

Bystander Responses				
1	2	3	4	5
Active intervention on behalf of victims	Demonstrative sympathy for victims	“Neutral”: Inactive, impassive eyewitnesses	Demonstrative support for acts of perpetration	Participatory complicity: active on the side of perpetrators

Time is crucial in this scenario. Depending on circumstances, bystanders may try to remain impassive and inactive for as long as possible. But, having sized up what is going on, they may eventually express sympathy for victims (position 2) or even intervene actively on their behalf (position 1). Moving in the other direction, by contrast, they may express solidarity with the perpetrator side, perhaps jeering at victims or egging on the perpetrators (4), or they may themselves participate in or profit from the fruits of violence (5 on the scale). Inaction, position 3, is only at the beginning neutral. In a persisting system of state-sustained collective violence, it is difficult for people to remain neutral. They may try not to register what is going on, seeking “not to see” and “not to know,” precisely in order not to feel the discomfort occasioned by facing the question: “Whose side are you on?” But by not acting, bystanders effectively condone violence, allowing perpetrators to proceed unhindered,

uncensored, unreported, and failing to give even symbolic succor to those on the receiving end of violence.

I draw on autobiographical accounts written between August 1939 and April 1940 to explore the development of what I call a “bystander society” that, through widespread passivity, effectively permitted violence. These essays, under the title “My Life in Germany before and after 1933,” were composed for a competition announced by three Harvard professors and advertised in the German-language exile press and American newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Some 230 individuals entered the competition; they came from across the Reich and at the time of writing were mostly well beyond its borders, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Palestine, Shanghai, Australia, with a few still in Europe. As well as Jews, writers include Protestants, Catholics, people of no religion, in mixed relationships or mixed marriages, as well as the offspring of such liaisons. They represent views across the political spectrum, with even a few Nazi sympathizers, and a wide range of ages and occupations, with a predictable preponderance of professionals. Precisely because memories were not as yet overshadowed by knowledge of the organized mass extermination yet to come, these essays give vivid and detailed descriptions of everyday life, and provide illuminating insights into changing social relations in Nazi Germany during the peacetime years.

### **HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF NOVEMBER 1938**

Despite the relative richness of sources—official state and party reports, critical commentaries by regime opponents, snippets gathered for the exiled social democratic party (Sopade), eye-witness accounts from varying perspectives—scholars disagree on how best to characterize popular reactions to Kristallnacht.<sup>5</sup>

Many highlight widespread disapproval of specific aspects. Ian Kershaw and others comment on shock at the wanton destruction of property; David Bankier vividly describes people registering that they were “ashamed to be German,” and points to egoistic concerns about business being adversely affected by how Germany might be viewed in the wider world.<sup>6</sup> Wolf-Arno Kropat points out that people were critical not only of the destruction of material goods, but also of the inhumanity of the rabble, and were shocked that the state engaged in open terror in this way; even those who supported the

regime, and approved of Nazi social and economic measures, including party members, saw this violence as “unworthy” of the German “cultural nation” (*Kulturnation*), amounting to a “break with culture and a national scandal.”<sup>7</sup> Dieter Obst paints a picture in which large numbers helped individuals in distress; both neighbors and people who did not personally know the victims gave short-term assistance in the form of shelter, food, or loans of household objects to replace those that had been damaged or stolen.<sup>8</sup> This picture of individual assistance is confirmed by Wolf Gruner’s detailed work on Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

A recent tendency among other historians, by contrast, has been to highlight popular support for and indeed participation in the violence, which was by no means restricted to party activists. Alan Steinweis uses the records of postwar trials to emphasize widespread involvement in public humiliations and looting, including by women and children, some of whom came on organized school class trips.<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Benz notes that, particularly in rural areas, “adults encouraged children and young people to participate in the pogrom” which “suggests the enthusiasm with which the aims of the regime were, for the most part, shared by the inhabitants.”<sup>11</sup>

Not merely attitudes towards material goods and cultural values, but also the social dynamics of local situations and particular personalities played a role in shaping responses.<sup>12</sup> While the pogrom was instigated from above and organized on a nation-wide basis, research on specific areas and communities is contributing to a multifaceted picture of regional variations. The big cities—Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt—were more secularized, the sizeable Jewish communities more assimilated, than was the case in the countryside. Close-knit communities in provincial towns and villages enacted rituals of public humiliation and violence against Jews in a manner not so evident in large cosmopolitan environments. Religious differences between predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant areas, as well as prior voting patterns—areas with high support for Nazism compared with those previously more resistant—also played a role. Bystanders seem more likely to have intervened on the side of Nazi activists in small communities and rural areas—even when victims and perpetrators knew each other personally—than in large towns and cities, where crowds of onlookers seemed more likely to remain silently disapproving at the time of violence, and some even offered assistance on an individual basis.<sup>13</sup> Benz suggests that “a silent majority in large cities expressed solidarity with the discriminated and humiliated minority” whereas in smaller towns “bystanders were caught in the whirlwind of the vandalistic avant-garde: curious onlookers mixed with raving fanatics, forming a marauding, hooting, violent mob

charging through the streets”; driven by a “desire for excitement,” people went onto the streets, where “neighbors had turned into plundering intruders, and individual citizens had become part of a collective frenzy.”<sup>14</sup> In small communities, it would seem, peer group pressure to go along with Nazi violence counteracted inhibitions rooted in personal acquaintance with the victims. Despite a growth of local studies since the 1980s, however, there remains much to be done to explore patterns and variations.<sup>15</sup>

For all the differences of emphasis, it would nevertheless appear that in 1938 a majority of non-Jewish Germans remained passive onlookers. Even those who disapproved of violence were generally not prepared to intervene on behalf of victims. It is the passivity of bystanders on which I wish to concentrate.

Passivity or *inaction* is sometimes interpreted as “indifference,” arguably helping to make genocide possible. Ian Kershaw has indeed notably suggested that while the “road to Auschwitz was built by hate” it was “paved with indifference.”<sup>16</sup> Kershaw’s pithy assertion, appealing though it may be, is not uncontentious.

A debate has arisen about apparent “indifference.” Does it mean simply “lack of interest,” as Kershaw intended, or, more strongly, can it be interpreted as a “lack of moral concern,” amounting in effect to “passive complicity,” as Otto Dov Kulka and Aron Rodrigue argue?<sup>17</sup> Was it rather, as Frank Bajohr suggested, an “embarrassed distance”?<sup>18</sup>

Kershaw prefers “indifference” as a supposedly neutral, descriptive term, and considers “moral complicity” to be a normative term. But “indifference” is a substantive description of attitudes, which may be more or less apposite. And “complicity” too can be used as an analytic category: it is both a legal and an everyday concept to indicate morally compromised proximity to wrongdoing: being an accomplice or accessory to a crime, facilitating a crime; knowing about a crime, but not seeking to prevent or report it. (Reporting, of course, could hardly apply where the authorities themselves instigated or condoned the violence.) In these senses, a considerable degree of complicity was arguably prior to and underlay apparent indifference. People were aware of the inhumanity of Nazi exclusionary policies yet continued to comply with and actively perform the precepts underlying the “people’s community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*), as well as to benefit from the consequences.

Conversely, could inaction be largely explained not by indifference or complicity but rather by apprehension and fear? Terror certainly played a role for some. Choosing not to intervene resulted from considerations about personal risks, as well as possible rewards and benefits. Actions were also

affected by assumptions about the likely behaviors of others, and how one might oneself be perceived. Importantly, too, inaction might result from a sense of lack of agency or frustrated impotence. Even those who felt strong sympathy for victims, and were by no means indifferent to their fate, thought there was little they could do to help.

Could the inaction that Kershaw interprets as indifference be better understood, then, as behavioral conformity born of a complex set of uneasy compromises, where sympathy with victims might be combined with concern for more immediate personal interests, including fear of retribution? In this case, it would be changing circumstances that account for variations in behaviors, as people weighed up potential risks and benefits around participation on one side or the other in any given situation. Particular historical constellations foster conditions in which people are more likely to be wary of intervention, rather than willing to stand up for victims. Considerations about the wider situation are, then, just as important as specific opinions or attitudes towards particular aspects of violence.

It is important therefore to refocus attention on the underlying social processes, experiences and contexts accounting for bystander *behaviors*—which were, of course, what made a difference to those who were targets of violence. This context-based instability and fluctuation is why it is not possible to provide estimates of the proportions of the population falling into one category or another: the typology of positions relates to *behaviors*, not *people*, and any individual might move right across the spectrum depending on circumstances.

But it was not only circumstances that changed, in the sense of, for example, the changing risks of intervention in an expanding system of terror and repression. People's relationships with one another also changed over time. In Germany, people who were not excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft* changed both emotionally and socially in accommodating themselves to the new regime over time. Responses to violence in 1938 were not just a matter of specific opinions, but were also a product of distinctive social processes. Where there was indeed indifference, a declining sense of empathy might be based not only on pre-existing antisemitism or newly learned prejudices, but also on changing relations between "Aryans" and those who were ousted from the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Where there was rather a declining sense of personal agency, irrespective of sympathy with victims, it might be rooted in growing apathy reinforced by repeated experiences over the years, or in pangs of a bad conscience and related emotional strategies for covering up moral compromises that had been entered into along the way.

There are different aspects of significance in understanding passivity in face of violence and inhumanity: not caring (indifference); not feeling able to do anything about it effectively, rendering it not worth taking the risk of intervention (impotence); and there is a further layer of complexity, in that behaviors were often at odds with emotions, sometimes making it easier simply to look away, disregard, not know (ignorance). To understand bystander responses in November 1938, we have to bear in mind the ways in which not only politics but also social relations had changed since Hitler's accession to power.

### **THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF INDIFFERENCE, IMPOTENCE, AND IGNORANCE**

Ideological antisemitism clearly played a significant role among Nazi activists; debates and disagreements were primarily about the means, manner and timing of policies to "cleanse" Germany of Jews. A less virulent, everyday form of antisemitism, in the sense of implicit assumptions about invidious distinctions between Jews and non-Jews, was more widely prevalent. But among a significant proportion of the population, particularly in cities with assimilated Jewish communities and high numbers of conversions, the salience of religious differences had been decreasing in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, with rising rates of intermarriage there were growing numbers of so-called *Mischlinge*, children or grandchildren of marriages between Jews and Christians.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that they formed only a tiny percentage of the German population, their experiences point up markedly what was involved in the severing of emotional bonds with the imposition of racial categories.<sup>20</sup>

Nazi policies set in motion significant shifts in ways in which Germans thought about their identity. People increasingly began to talk in the racialized terminology of "Aryans" and "non-Aryans," rather than referring to themselves and others as "Gentiles" or "Christians" and "Jews." This is evident in unwitting slides from one vocabulary of distinction to another. Along with official stigmatization and legal discrimination went informal processes of social isolation, including the dropping of friendships and loss of social status.<sup>21</sup> Overall, people began to identify more with others in a similar situation. Many "non-Aryan" Germans now began to address what a "Jewish" identity might mean, and to spend more time with Jews, even while rejecting the supposed distinction between "German" and "Jew." The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 also set in

motion processes of legal and physical segregation, with “non-Aryans” having to dismiss any non-Jewish household servants under the age of forty-five, or having to change their lodgings if they were renting in a property with “Aryan” servants.

Those not excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft* were in many ways complicit in enacting a new “aryanized” society through multiple tiny acts in everyday life. Many engaged in social performances of conformity out of peer group pressure, fear of humiliation or loss of personal advantages, and dislike of being on the receiving end of epithets such as “Jewish lackey” (*Judenknecht*). Only a few stood out against the rising tide.

These experiences have been well documented from the perspective of Germans of Jewish descent.<sup>22</sup> Less well explored, however, is the question of what this meant for members of the “majority society.” For “Aryan” Germans it became easier to ignore what was happening to those with whom one had anyway dropped contact. “Learned indifference” and “learned ignorance” were in this way added to pre-existing or newly acquired antisemitism. Under the influence of schools, the Hitler Youth and related social activities, there was growing enthusiasm for Nazism among younger Germans (although with notable exceptions and misfits). A generational split became widely evident, posing significant strains between parents and children and adding to pressures to conform, as evidenced in many accounts at the time, even from as early as 1933.

When looking at changes in social relations up to 1938, it becomes clear that people repeatedly took little steps to enact segregation and discrimination in everyday life, not wanting to be cognizant of the consequences for the ousted other. They did in some sense “know” what was going on, because they were actually “doing” it themselves. But they could also claim they did not “know” the fate of these ousted others, since “non-Aryans” were increasingly physically as well as socially isolated.

In November 1938 violence against Jews was no longer in any way masked as “legal” discrimination, as in the Nuremberg Laws, but was brutally visible across the Reich, no longer something that could be “not seen.” Violence had of course been evident from the early months of the regime, against political opponents and against Jews (including both the boycott and the legislation of April 1933), and was sporadically and repeatedly evident in the following years, including on the part of radical activists in the summer of 1935. Yet with the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 there had been a sense, among those not directly affected, that matters had been “regularized”; they



could more easily turn a blind eye to the consequences for those now officially ousted from the community.

But in November 1938 the possibility of “not knowing” diminished massively: it was virtually impossible to ignore what was happening to the victims of state-sponsored antisemitism. Yet many ordinary Germans did not step in on behalf of the persecuted. This was not only a result of indifference; it was also a consequence of decreasing willingness to act—or at least to be seen to be acting in support of the victims.

By 1938 perceptions of what actions might be possible had changed. Right from Hitler’s accession to power those who actively opposed the regime had been brutally maltreated and political opposition repressed. The majority of Germans had neither the will and courage nor the organizational links to stand up against Nazism, and popular responses covered a broad spectrum. Some were swept up by a sense of national renewal; others found it easiest just to go along with the new tide; many felt that their material circumstances were improving even if there remained much to grumble about; careerism, opportunism, and fear of the consequences of not “falling into line” also played a crucial role; there was also a hope, in more critical quarters, that the Hitler regime would be as short-lived as most of its Weimar predecessors, and the storm clouds might well blow over soon. As the regime became more deeply entrenched, however, and particularly from the mid-1930s, many became increasingly apathetic, resigned, feeling they were unable to stand out against the prevailing tide. Denunciations might result in significant penalties for expressing opinions that did not conform to Nazi views, and there was a corresponding growth of mutual mistrust; it was safest to mutter only muted jokes or critical comments among friends. Personal experiences or second-hand knowledge of regime brutality also acted as a significant deterrent in some quarters. Many simply conformed through their external behavior, enacting what was required of them; and some even, since this was easier to live with, persuaded themselves that they had genuinely changed their convictions.

Debates about the extent to which the Third Reich was primarily based on terror or was a “consensual dictatorship” miss the psychological complexities of these processes at a personal level.<sup>23</sup> All of these approaches were daily rehearsed and repeatedly practised, establishing a repertoire of responses that became “second nature.” By 1938 few, in short, were in a place where they were willing to act on behalf of victims. Even so, the eruption of physical violence across the Reich came as a shock.

### EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AND BEHAVIORAL CHOICES IN NOVEMBER 1938

During the night of November 9–10 and the following days, young people were readily mobilised to engage in violence. These were members of a generation that had by now been particularly steeped in Nazi propaganda and actively involved in the organizational life of Nazi Germany. They were mobilized by people in positions of authority, including not only the obvious groups—SS, SA, HJ—but also by schoolteachers, and there are indications that there were additional pecuniary inducements for their involvement.<sup>24</sup> Everywhere, too, there were adults who were willing to engage in acts of self-enrichment, looting and plundering, as well as onlookers who appear to have been laughing at the humiliated victims of violence.

In terms of a spectrum of bystander involvement, there was far more apparent popular support for the perpetrator side—positions 4 and 5 on my scale—than there had been at the time of the April 1933 boycott.<sup>25</sup> This can in part be accounted for first, by the mobilization of youth; and secondly, by the pursuit of personal advantage, which was in a sense the opposite of the situation in April 1933, when the boycott of Jewish shops had disrupted consumers' habits. There was also apparently less willingness to intervene on the part of victims than there had been in 1933 (positions 1 and 2 on the scale), though even then the passivity of most onlookers had been notable.

Most prevalent in 1938, arguably, was a position of unhappy passivity. Rudolf Bing, for example, summarizes reactions in Nuremberg, as “a feeling of deep depression and shame” spread among the population; “for the first time, some circles were prepared to express their sympathy,” saying they were “ashamed to be German”—a point now noted by innumerable historians.<sup>26</sup> Erna Albersheim, a half-Jewish widow and businesswoman, commented after her shop was smashed in and she herself beaten up: “For the first time I heard open criticism [of the regime]. The people were shocked and disgusted. Before that if they had no contact with Jews, they thought that they were being treated well; they saw them on the streets, in their stores. Some even thought that they were being treated with too much consideration. Now, their eyes were opened. If they made a remark, in public, they were arrested. You could hear more whispering than formerly.”<sup>27</sup>

There are some patterns of intervention on behalf of victims that are worth brief consideration here. Reading through accounts written close to the events of November 1938, it is clear that there were several categories of people prepared to register sympathy, assist or intervene on behalf of victims of violence.

Least surprisingly, those with personal connections or emotional links with victims of persecution were more likely to intervene on their behalf. Many accounts mention how the intervention of good friends assisted them, whether through prior warnings or providing refuge in order to evade arrest and imprisonment. Alfred Oppler was first warned by a friend of impending arrests, and later managed to stay overnight with other friends.<sup>28</sup> Several remark on the interventions not only of close friends but even of known Nazis related through marriage to Jewish families. Erna Albersheim repeatedly “heard of Aryans helping their former Jewish friends during this terrible time,” and also recounts the story of a Nazi party member helping his Jewish brother-in-law whom his sister had married.<sup>29</sup> “Aralk” comments extensively on how her faithful household servant Anna helped to save her life by her reactions during Kristallnacht.<sup>30</sup>

The relationship could simply be one of supportive neighborliness. Maria Kahle, an “Aryan” housewife, recounts how she and her sons attempted to assist local Jewish businesses where they knew the shopkeepers. This assistance had severe consequences for her family: her husband was dismissed from his university professorship, one of her sons lost his place as a student, the family was ostracised by former friends and colleagues, and she herself was offered the deadly Veronal by a friendly doctor, who advised her to commit suicide, saying that this was the only way to save her family. In the end, the Kahle family succeeded in escaping to England.<sup>31</sup>

Rather more surprisingly, however, a remarkable number mention the friendly assistance of officials—civil servants and police officers, people in positions of authority. They make distinctions between the really bad individuals, the brutal thugs, and those who evidenced a degree of sympathy with their plight, by making it a little easier to deal with bureaucratic hurdles, treating them with some civility, almost apologising for what it was they had to do. Oppler remarks that the police officers with whom he came into contact seemed to dislike the task of arresting Jews, and treated people relatively decently, in contrast to the Gestapo and SS.<sup>32</sup> Eugen Altmann comments in a similar vein, speaking of how police officials, “particularly those of the old school, were friendlier than one was used to even in normal times.” He speaks of the feeling, shared by others, that the “polite and obliging behaviour” of many police officers might be an expression of their “dislike of their rivals, the Gestapo.”<sup>33</sup> Even more surprisingly, it was a young man in SS uniform who assisted Altmann to avoid being sent to a concentration camp on November 10, 1938, by “placing words into his mouth” that would provide the appropriate answers to questions, providing the written basis for his release.<sup>34</sup> Altmann says

further that he had heard of many similar stories from others. Albert Dreyfuss was saved from the general arrest of all Jewish adult males by a hair's breadth—a decent officer in charge of a troop of four SA men looked at his WWI papers and medals and obtained the authorisation not to arrest him. In the following days Dreyfuss discovered how lucky he had been.<sup>35</sup> These people in official positions of responsibility were clearly uncomfortable with the violence they were tasked with administering. Even some young people, as Erna Albersheim noted, sought to evade their duties: "Hitler youth was forced to help in this work. I know of boys who pretended to be sick so that they did not have to join the mob. One S.S. man was foolish enough to openly voice his disgust. On the following day his parents were informed that he had accidentally shot himself while cleaning his rifle."<sup>36</sup>

Particularly interesting is the question of bystander reactions when these were people who did not know the victims personally. For them, action on behalf of victims was both without obvious reward and evidently risky; spontaneous intervention on behalf of victims at scenes of violence was likely to bring about severe penalties. Altmann recalled that many "Aryans" who even showed their sympathy were "arrested on the spot"; twelve factory workers who had organized a protest on behalf of the Jews were shot dead, while some four hundred others were deported to a concentration camp.<sup>37</sup> Whether or not a protest of this magnitude can be independently verified (Altmann does not provide details of the location), it is significant that Jewish contemporaries perceived that there was such strong sympathy among "Aryan" compatriots; and there are numerous examples of incidents when an individual intervened only to be severely harmed, sometimes fatally, or arrested, while others got into trouble simply for criticizing the events at a distance.<sup>38</sup>

In the light of such experiences, it is scarcely surprising that probably most Germans opted for passivity. Alfred Oppler noted that the events "unleashed a wave of sympathy for the Jews" but that "in fear and trembling, most did not dare to speak of this."<sup>39</sup> But from these accounts, it would appear that passivity was not always or entirely rooted in indifference, in the sense of not caring, being uninterested in the fate of the Jews. For many it was based rather in a well-grounded fear of the likely consequences of intervention, sometimes accompanied by admiration for those who had dared to act. Maria Kahle received an anonymous letter of support on November 20, 1938, stating that "all decent human beings would like to have done the same, but we lacked the courage."<sup>40</sup> Others, as summarized by Miriam Arrington in Vienna, were simply overwhelmed by a sense of "apathy," or "exhaustion of the spirit."<sup>41</sup>

The situation was clearly complex, and perceptions of the likely reactions of others played a role in expressions of emotion or otherwise. Ernst Schwartzert summarized his experiences of November 10 in Berlin in terms of the general unwillingness of members of the population to express any reaction at all, remaining silent and retaining their distance from each other. Even the police who were placed near sites of destruction simply “stared into the air” without meeting anyone’s eyes; no-one dared to put a question.<sup>42</sup> Non-Jewish diary-writers made similar comments about the perceived responses of other Berliners, emphasizing that there were widespread indications of sympathy despite an inability to act or intervene effectively on behalf of victims.<sup>43</sup>

When not observed by others, however, some individuals were prepared to indicate sympathy with victims of violence who were preparing to emigrate, saying that they too would like to get out if they had the chance. Others tried to deal with the potential distress occasioned by witnessing such events simply by pushing them out of consciousness. Alfred Oppler comments on a “deadening of the soul: one gradually got used to the fact that the Jews were being persecuted and had to suffer.”<sup>44</sup>

Ernst Rathgeber’s response was unusual. Having helped his Jewish friends to emigrate, this committed Christian now felt he too could no longer remain in Germany:

As long as such vandalism is carried out, without facing any opposition, by a regime that styles itself as the standard-bearer of the “moral sensitivity of the Germanic race,” then my own humanity forbids me to continue any longer to consider myself a member of this state. And should the German people, as its current leaders claim, really affirm and approve of such barbarism, then I am no longer a German!<sup>45</sup>

The majority remained part of a radically changed national community and one, moreover, that was on the brink of war.

Although these considerations are somewhat speculative, the autobiographical essays collected by the Harvard professors provide hints as to the kinds of social psychological processes involved. Only in November 1938 were those who had been complicit in the ousting of Jews from German society clearly confronted with the consequences, and forced to realize where this complicity had led. While some “onlookers” now preferred to “look away” and accept the justifications of the regime, others may have engaged in expressions of being “ashamed to be German” in part because this displaced the shame they felt about themselves and their own complicity in isolating Jews and making

the violence of activists possible. In order to restore a degree of inner emotional equilibrium and make themselves feel better, many engaged in expressions of shame or moral outrage amongst each other when they felt it was safe to do so. Mutual expressions of shame also helped to make people feel part of a wider collective of those who were “inwardly opposed” but felt helpless, lacking in agency, unable to do anything about it. The circumstances in which it was felt safe to express one’s feelings were highly restricted, and might only be momentary, fleeting, within intimate settings—among just a couple of friends, or within the relative privacy of one’s home. It is remarkable that in November 1938 such settings were also, on occasion, among anonymous strangers in public places, on a bus or tram, as noted by some contemporaries.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of his reading of the Harvard essays, historian Leonidas E. Hill suggests the pogrom revealed that “large numbers of Germans disapproved, but their resistance was minimal. The war itself would prove that ‘ordinary men’ not only would fight dependably but could be relied upon to murder innocent civilians of all ages who were designated as the enemy.”<sup>47</sup> This is true, as far as such a brief summary goes, but it does not do justice to the sheer extent of changes in both interpersonal relations and an associated sense of self among “Aryan” Germans over the course of the preceding years.

Put simply: the Nazi regime had from 1933 introduced a hostile environment and initiated practical measures, from violence through legislation, to establish the desired “people’s community”; and by being largely compliant with this environment, for whatever reasons, the majority of those included in the “people’s community” had further transformed themselves, in the process creating an even more hostile environment—one in which it was possible to carry out terror in broad daylight without significant unrest or intervention on behalf of the persecuted.

Living within the Third Reich was not only a matter of “reacting” to policies according to different values or interests; it was also a process of “enacting” the Nazi community over a period of time, to such an extent that many people gradually became able to believe in their own performances, while for others there was a continuing, underlying sense of discomfort about compromises that had been entered into, and unease about the outcome, while at the same

time being too fearful to act in any way other than conforming while expressing shame. These experiences and emotions would feed into the decades of unease about the Nazi past in postwar discourses.

An analysis of bystander behaviors is crucial to understanding the dynamics of collective violence more generally. “Bystanding” can make all the difference, tipping the balance of historical outcomes; it is all the more important to clarify the different aspects involved. In the case of the run-up to Kristallnacht, it can be argued that the social production of indifference, through complying with the injunction to separate “Aryans” from “non-Aryans,” was indeed a form of complicity. But it can also be suggested that the fear of doing more than express sentiments of shock and shame was in large measure a product of constraint and fear, and indeed a sense of impotence. The ensuing emotional imbalance for many was soon subsumed by the far more immediate and life-threatening demands of a nation at war. But the reactions of both engagement and self-distancing would be rehearsed once again, in the ultimately more fateful radicalization of antisemitic policies on the road to genocide.

## Notes

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1. This paper is based in a research project on “Compromised identities? Reflections on perpetration and complicity under Nazism,” sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and on the related book that I am currently writing, entitled *On the Brink of Genocide: Bystander Society in Nazi Germany*. I am very grateful to the AHRC for its support.
2. There are debates over terminology, and difficulties with the terms “pogrom” and “Reichskristallnacht”—the latter having a slightly ironic flavor, mocking the Nazi predilection for the prefix “Reichs-.” Irrespective of the relative merits of different positions, I shall continue to use “Kristallnacht” as well as “pogrom” to refer to these events. For these discussions see the chapter by Ulrich Baumann and François Guesnet in this volume.
3. Mary Fulbrook, *Bystanders to Nazi Violence: The Transformation of German Society in the 1930s*, Search and Research 29 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018); Mary Fulbrook, “Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi, or Crucial Clue?” in *Bystanders in Holocaust History*, ed. Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (New York: Berghahn, 2018), ch. 1, 15–35.
4. Harry Liebersohn and Dorothee Schneider, “My Life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933.” *A Guide to a Manuscript Collection at Houghton Library, Harvard University* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2001) (hereafter HHL).
5. Published collections of sources include not only the Sopade and SD reports, long used by historians, but also, notably, Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, eds., *Die Juden in den geheimen NS-Stimmungsberichten 1933–1945* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2004); and Ben Barkow, Raphael Gross, and Michael Lenarz, eds., *Novemberpogrom 1938. Die Augenzeugenberichte der Wiener Library, London* (Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008).
6. Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent. Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
7. Wolf-Arno Kropat, “Reichskristallnacht.” *Der Judenpogrom vom 7. bis 10. November 1938—Urheber, Täter, Hintergründe* (Wiesbaden: Kommission für die Geschichte der Juden in Hessen, 1997), 168.
8. Dieter Obst, “Reichskristallnacht.” *Ursachen und Verlauf des antisemitischen Pogroms vom November 1938* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991).
9. Wolf Gruner, “Indifference? Participation and Protest as Individual Responses to the Persecution of the Jews as Revealed in Berlin Police Logs and Trial Records, 1933–45,” in *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, ed. Susanna Schrafstetter and Alan E. Steinweis (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 59–83.
10. Alan Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2009).



11. Wolfgang Benz, "The November Pogrom of 1938: Participation, Applause, Disapproval," in *Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History*, ed. Christoph Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 152.
12. Andrea Löw and Frank Bajohr, eds., *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Obst, "Reichskristallnacht," 319–48; Sven Felix Kellerhoff, *Ein ganz normales Pogrom. November 1938 in einem deutschen Dorf* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2018); Herbert Schultheis, *Die Reichskristallnacht in Deutschland nach Augenzeugenberichten* (Bad Neustadt: Rötter, 1985).
13. Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, *Der Schattenmann* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2000; orig. 1947 and 1984); Gruner, "Indifference?"
14. Benz, "November Pogrom," 149.
15. An attempt at popular synthesis by renowned historian Martin Gilbert unfortunately evidences sloppy scholarship, as when he claims that in three southern German villages there was significant resistance to the pogrom, even "preventing" it: Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 39, mis-citing a book by Anthony Read and David Fisher (with inaccuracies relating to the name of one of the villages, the title of the book footnoted, and even the page reference), whose discussion appears in fact to be based on an analysis of these three villages by E. N. Peterson, *The Limits of Hitler's Power* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 404–27.
16. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 277.
17. Ian Kershaw, "Preface to the Second Edition," *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), xxv; Otto Dov Kulka and Aron Rodrigue, "The German Population and the Jews in the Third Reich," *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984): 421–35; Ian Kershaw, "German Popular Opinion and the 'Jewish Question,' 1939–1943: Some Further Reflections," in *Die Juden im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1933–1943*, ed. Arnold Paucker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 365–86.
18. Frank Bajohr, "Über die Entwicklung eines schlechten Gewissens. Die deutsche Bevölkerung und die Deportationen 1941–1945," in *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland: Pläne—Praxis—Reaktionen 1938–1945*, ed. Birthe Kundrus (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004), 180–95; cf. also Peter Longerich, "Davon haben wir nichts gewusst." *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 2007), 7–21.
19. Beate Meyer, "Jüdische Mischlinge." *Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933–1945* (Munich: Dölling und Galitz, 1989).
20. Mary Fulbrook, *On the Brink of Genocide: Bystander Society in Nazi Germany* (forthcoming).
21. Mary Fulbrook, "Subjectivity and History: Approaches to Twentieth-century

- German Society” (*German Historical Institute London Annual Lecture 2016*, November 4, 2016); Mary Fulbrook, “Private Lives, Public Faces: On the Social Self in Nazi Germany,” in *Private Life and Privacy in Nazi Germany*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey, Johannes Hürter, and Maiken Umbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2019), 55–80; Anna Ullrich, “Fading Friendships and the ‘Decent German’: Reflecting, Explaining and Enduring Estrangement in Nazi Germany, 1933–1938,” in *The Holocaust and European Societies*, ed. Andrea Löw and Frank Bajohr (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), ch. 2, 17–31.
22. Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
  23. For an overview, cf. Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 113–18.
  24. Barkow, Gross, and Lenarz, eds., *Novemberpogrom 1938*, 141.
  25. Cf. Benz, “November Pogrom of 1938,” 142.
  26. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (28), Rudolf Bing, 44.
  27. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (3), Erna Albersheim, 61.
  28. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (172), Alfred Christian Oppler, 71–72.
  29. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (3), Erna Albersheim, 64–65.
  30. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (8), “Aralk.”
  31. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (101), Maria Kahle; Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
  32. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (172), Alfred Christian Oppler, 75–76.
  33. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (5), Eugen Altmann, 52.
  34. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (5), Eugen Altmann, 42.
  35. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (54), Albert Dreyfuss, 38–39.
  36. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (3), Erna Albersheim, 67.
  37. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (5), Eugen Altmann, 43.
  38. E.g., HHL, b MS Ger 91 (172), Alfred Christian Oppler, 72; HHL, b MS Ger 91 (3), Erna Albersheim, 61; HHL, b MS Ger 91 (217) Karl (Charles) Sorkin, 68–69; HHL, b MS Ger 91 (54), Albert Dreyfuss, 39; Willy Cohn, *Kein Recht, Nirgends. Tagebuch vom Untergang des Breslauer Judentums 1933–41*, ed. Norbert Conrads, 2 vols. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 2:541.
  39. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (172), Alfred Christian Oppler, 79.
  40. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (101), Maria Kahle, “Anhang,” 3.
  41. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (9), Miriam Arrington, 77.
  42. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (209), Ernst Schwartzert, 75–76.
  43. E.g., Andreas-Friedrich, *Der Schattenmann*, 26ff.; Jochen Klepper, *Unter dem Schatten deiner Flügel. Aus den Tagebüchern der Jahre 1932–1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1956, repr. 1983), 676, 679.
  44. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (172), Alfred Christian Oppler, 79.

45. HHL, b MS Ger 91 (181), Ernst Rathgeber, 17.
46. Cf., e.g., Andreas-Friedrich, *Der Schattenmann*, 26–35.
47. Leonidas E. Hill, “The Pogrom of November 9–10, 1938 in Germany,” in *Riots and Pogroms*, ed. Paul Brass (London: Macmillan, 1996), ch. 3, 108.

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