

## “A Section of the Gestapo”? The Role of Jewish Auxiliaries, the *Reichsvereinigung* and the Hunt for “Illegal” Jews in Berlin between 1943 and 1945

“They sent you a message to be ready and wait in your apartment for deportation the next day or the day after. The messengers were people from the *Gemeinde*. Even ‘chapel master S’ delivered such death sentences, for in reality, it was nothing else. The *Gemeinde* was a section of the Gestapo.”<sup>1</sup> A survivor from Berlin wrote this about representatives of the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* (Berlin Jewish Community). There was neither a *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) nor a ghetto within the prewar borders of Nazi Germany. In 1939, however, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office, RSHA) forced upon German Jews the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich Association of Jews in Germany, RV), a pseudo self-administration organ to be run by German Jews under the supervision of the Gestapo. The *Reichsvereinigung* can be characterized as a prototype of *Judenräte* later established in countries occupied by Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The *Reichsvereinigung* was a national body that gradually incorporated all remaining German-Jewish institutions, including the Berlin *Gemeinde* in mid-1943. The Berlin *Gemeinde* was the largest Jewish community in pre-1938 Nazi Germany; 160,000 of the 530,000 to 566,000 German

- 1 Camilla Neumann, “Erinnerungsbericht,” in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland: Selbstzeugnisse Zur Sozialgeschichte 1918–1945*, ed. Monika Richarz (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982), 414. Translation by author.
- 2 “German Jews” encompasses a heterogenous group that has only one thing in common: they were persecuted on antisemitic grounds between 1933 and 1945. In contrast, “Jewish Germans” describes people who were Jewish by religion/heritage and choice.

Jews lived in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> By autumn 1941, 72,972 were left.<sup>4</sup> The Reich's capital became the focal point of the deportations of Jews from Germany. The Nazi regime deported 56,088 Jews from Berlin. The RV and *Gemeinde's* initial strategy of supporting Jewish emigration evolved into a "rescue through work policy."<sup>5</sup> However, as Beate Meyer has argued, under the auspices of an unprecedented mass murder that defied economic rationale, the RV's strategy of self-preservation by cooperation transformed into aiding in self-destruction.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, different types of Jewish auxiliaries from the RV and the *Gemeinde* adopted police-like methods and functions. They located deportees, marched them to trains, accompanied the police during raids, and assisted with bureaucratic processes during the phase of mass deportations between October 1941 and mid-June 1943, as well as during the second phase of smaller deportations between mid-1943 and May 1945. Depicted as "worse than the Gestapo" by some survivors in hindsight, RV and *Gemeinde* staff also helped run the Gestapo *Sammellager*, that is, the "assembly camps" where Jews were held before they were deported.<sup>7</sup>

Existing historiography has predominantly focused on "leading" RV functionaries throughout the Reich.<sup>8</sup> Dozens of low-ranking RV clerks and Jewish *Sammellager* staff were accused of collaboration after the war.

- 3 Francis R. Nicosia, "Introduction: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses," in *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses*, ed. Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), Kindle E-Book Version.
- 4 Martina Voigt, "Die Deportation der Berliner Juden 1941-1945," in *Die Grunewald-Rampe: Die Deportation der Berliner Juden*, ed. Annegret Ehmman and Horst Neumann (Berlin: Edition Colloquium, 1993), 26.
- 5 Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 21; Doron Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht: Wien 1938-1945* (Frankfurt a. M.: Jüdischer Verlag, 2000), 423.
- 6 Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 423.
- 7 LBI CJH, AR 2657, Fritz Fabian Collection 1942-1962, Fritz Fabian: Lebenslauf, April 21, 1962.
- 8 Beate Meyer and William Templer, *A Fatal Balancing Act: The Dilemma of the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, 1939-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Gideon Botsch, "Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig: Vom preußischen Medizinalbeamten zum 'Ein-Mann-Judenrat,'" in *Jüdische Ärztinnen und Ärzte im Nationalsozialismus: Entrechtung, Vertreibung, Ermordung*, ed. Thomas Beddies, Susanne Doetz, and Christoph Kopke (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 103-16; Gideon Botsch, "Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin? Zur Frage des Widerstands Berliner Juden gegen die Vernichtungspolitik," in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933-1945): Formen und Facetten*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen, and Gideon Botsch (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016) 240-54; Susanna Schrafstetter,

This chapter addresses these previously understudied auxiliaries who were subject to pressure from both the Gestapo and the *Reichsvereinigung*. I am especially interested in the period of the Berlin Gestapo's intensifying hunt for Jews in hiding after spring 1943 and the problematic role of said auxiliaries in this context. During the later phase of smaller deportations between 1943 and 1945, the Berlin Gestapo's "Jew section"—subordinated to Eichmann's office—was not only tasked with the deportation of the small remnant of the Berlin Jewish population. The officers were also compelled to catch the 6,500 Jews who had evaded deportation by escaping into "illegality," i.e., hiding with someone or posing as non-Jews with fake identity cards. The Gestapo put fugitive Jews on a wanted list, and willing non-Jewish denouncers were the Gestapo's biggest help in tracking down these Jews.<sup>9</sup> Some escapees, however, fell victim to specialized Jewish *Sammellager* auxiliaries and/or Jewish informers, called *Greifer* ("Snatcher") or *Fahnder* ("investigators"), operating out of the Berlin Gestapo *Sammellager* from mid-1943 onward. There were small numbers of both Jews in hiding and (alleged) Jewish informers elsewhere in Germany, but in Berlin, this occurred on a larger scale than elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

After the war, the phenomenon of Jews "hunting" other Jews was blamed on certain individual Jews, a stance that downplayed not only the role of the Gestapo but also the RV's obstructive policy concerning escape into hiding. Demonizing *Greifer* in the heated Jewish milieu of postwar reckoning in Cold War-era Berlin obscured the worst aspects of the police-like functions the RV had adopted. By focusing on these *Greifer*, less attention was paid to higher-ranking RV officials. Building on conflicting postwar reports, scholars made a questionable distinction: "Regular" *Sammellager* auxiliaries allegedly only followed orders, while "irregular" *Greifer* who were not attached to the Gemeinde or the RV supposedly took advantage of others for personal gain.<sup>11</sup> Some *Greifer*, however, were part of the regular auxiliary and at least nominally on the payroll of the Gemeinde/RV, whereas others were Jews who had previously been caught while in hiding and now informed on others to avoid deportation.

*Flucht und Versteck: Untergetauchte Juden in München; Verfolgungserfahrung und Nachkriegsalltag* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).

9 Carsten Dams and Michael Stolle, *Die Gestapo: Herrschaft und Terror im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 2008), 84.

10 Dams and Stolle, *Die Gestapo*, 83.

11 Doris Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat: Jüdische "Greifer" im Dienst der Gestapo 1943-1945* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2006), 72.

This chapter reassesses the alleged distinction between *Greifer* and “regular” auxiliaries and examines the RV’s contribution to the Gestapo’s crackdown on Jews in hiding—an insufficiently researched topic thus far.<sup>12</sup> It zooms in on the nexus between *Sammellager* auxiliaries’ actual and perceived room for maneuver, especially during the later phase of deportations. It uses Jewish auxiliaries’ room for maneuver and their defense strategies after the war as a lens to learn more about how the RV’s policies concerning escape into hiding developed. It also examines how these policies were perceived after the war. How did individual *Sammellager* auxiliaries navigate the dual pressure placed on them by both the Gestapo and the RV? Can their decisions be explained through the desire for personal gain, following orders, or “choiceless choices”?<sup>13</sup> What room for maneuver did they have? Addressing these questions, this chapter expands the existing research on the RV, *Greifer*, and the postwar reckoning among surviving Jews.<sup>14</sup>

Briefly touching on the overarching questions of this edited volume, the first section of this chapter offers a chronological overview of the RV’s role in the process of mass deportations up to mid-1943. The second section shows that the RV adopted policing strategies to prevent individual escapes into hiding earlier than has previously been established in the literature. The third section highlights the changes of the RV’s role after mid-1943 and explores the alleged difference between “regular” auxiliaries and *Greifer*.<sup>15</sup> The fourth and final section illustrates the postwar fates of some former auxiliaries, demonstrating how postwar retribution trials shaped narratives on collaboration.

12 Karoline Georg, “Rezension zu: Beate Meyer: Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945),” *Medaon—Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Kultur und Bildung* 7, no. 13 (2013): 3.

13 Lawrence Langer, “The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps,” in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 118-27.

14 In addition to works cited in footnote 5 and 11, see: Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel After the Holocaust* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015).

15 Philipp Dinkelaker, “Worse than the Gestapo? Berlin Jews Accused of Collaboration during and after the Shoah” (PhD diss., Technische Universität Berlin, 2022).

## *The Reichsvereinigung and the Deportations, 1939-1943*

After the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, entrepreneurs, companies, and Reich and communal institutions such as the Berlin city administration and individuals enforced policies of impoverishment, "aryanization," the racial segregation of welfare, and later the impressment of Jews into forced labor.<sup>16</sup> Over the years, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* and the Gestapo—one of the RSHA's policing organs—became the major institutions of persecution in Nazi Germany.<sup>17</sup> After the November 1938 pogroms, these organs established the RV. Envisioning a centralized institution for Reich Jews, the Gestapo staffed the RV with functionaries from the previously dissolved *Reichsvertretung* (Reich Representation). The latter had been a democratically elected Jewish self-help organization and had already been closely engaged with the regime's attempts to compel the mass emigration of Jews. Former *Reichsvertretung* functionaries agreed to work for the RV because they perceived it as a chance to continue their work supporting persecuted Jews. However, rather than a care-taking institution, the RV was designed to be a tool of persecution.

In 1939, a regulation added to the Race Laws of 1935 forced every person declared to be Jewish according to the Nazis' criteria to become a member of the RV.<sup>18</sup> Jewish communities, welfare, educational and self-help organizations all over the Reich were forced to become RV branches. The national RV's board in Berlin answered to Eichmann's department at the RSHA, whereas local and regional branches answered to the local Gestapo and sometimes to locally powerful individual Nazis. The Berlin *Gemeinde* suffered this fate as well. It had played an important role in the city's public services before the Nazis came to power. The *Gemeinde* with all its social and educational institutions became the RV's largest district branch. Even though both organizations merged their boards in November

- 16 Wolf Gruner, *Öffentliche Wohlfahrt und Judenverfolgung: Wechselwirkungen lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat 1933-1942* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002); Wolf Gruner, "Armut und Verfolgung: Die Reichsvereinigung, die jüdische Bevölkerung und die antijüdische Politik im NS-Staat 1939 bis 1945," in *Juden und Armut in Mittel- Und Osteuropa*, ed. Stefi Jersch-Wenzel (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 405-433.
- 17 Wolf Gruner, "Die NS-Verfolgung und die Kommunen: Zur wechselseitigen Dynamisierung von zentraler und lokaler Politik 1933-1941," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 48, no. 1 (2000): 125.
- 18 Akim Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin: Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik und das Sammellager Große Hamburger Straße* (Berlin: Be.Bra Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 115.

1941, until its dissolution in June 1943, the *Gemeinde* operated alongside the RV and partially retained its independence, answering primarily to the Berlin Gestapo.

Operating on both the nation-wide and local levels, the RV and its district branches such as the *Gemeinde* were simultaneously instruments of segregation and vehicles for self-preservation.<sup>19</sup> The RV provided health care, social welfare, housing, education, and even organized cultural activities while trying to mitigate the effects of some Nazi measures.<sup>20</sup> Effectively, the RV became the intermediary between the Nazi state and the Jewish population, Eichmann's prewar training ground and a sort of prototypical *Judenrat*.<sup>21</sup>

The RV's most controversial contribution to the regime's antisemitic measures was the assistance it provided the Gestapo in the deportation process. In contrast to some *Judenräte*, the *Reichsvereinigung* leadership did not encourage resistance activities. Some functionaries and lower-level employees secretly did so on an individual basis,<sup>22</sup> but the compliance of the RV was harshly enforced: the RSHA incarcerated and murdered some RV functionaries who refused to cooperate early on.<sup>23</sup> At the start of the systematic deportations from the Reich in October 1941, the Gestapo threatened *Gemeinde* and RV representatives in Berlin with pogroms and—in order to compel them to cooperate—deceived them with promises that Jews would only be “partially evacuated” to “work camps in the East.”<sup>24</sup> The Gestapo probably believed it would be beneficial if the long-established *Gemeinde*, which enjoyed a certain degree of legitimacy among Berlin's Jews, would communicate and implement Gestapo measures. The Jewish functionaries, by contrast, believed they could save the many and shield them from the harshest measures by

19 Gerrit Schirmer, “‘A Living Organisation’: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland 1943 bis 1945” (Master thesis, Touro College Berlin, 2016), 5.

20 Beate Meyer, “Gratwanderung zwischen Verantwortung und Verstrickung: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland und die Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin 1938–1945,” in *Juden in Berlin 1938–1945: Begleitband zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung in der Stiftung “Neue Synagoge Berlin—Centrum Judaicum” Mai bis August 2000*, ed. Beate Meyer and Hermann Simon (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), 292.

21 Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990 [1982]), 196.

22 Botsch, “Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin?,” 244.

23 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 103.

24 Beate Meyer, “Das Unausweichliche Dilemma: Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Die Deportationen und die Untergetauchten Juden,” in *Überleben im Untergrund: Hilfe Für Juden in 1941–1945*, ed. Beate Kosmala and Claudia Schoppmann (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2002), 294.

helping the Gestapo deport the few. Historian Beate Meyer characterized this as an "implicit offer" of collective survival at the cost of a partial loss—a strategy of anticipatory compliance and cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

Merging their boards while confronting this radicalization of Nazi "Jew policy" in November 1941, the RV and *Gemeinde* provided the Gestapo with data on Jews and helped select deportees from the beginning of the systematic deportations on. At the same time, the sources on this issue are difficult to interpret. Following Gestapo orders, some provincial RV chairmen provided the names of local Jews, which the Gestapo then used to deport those not married to non-Jews.<sup>26</sup> In Berlin, the combined *Gemeinde* and RV board was most likely at least involved in selecting a pool of names from which the Gestapo would choose the victims of the first four deportations from Berlin in late 1941.<sup>27</sup> In the majority of cases, however, the Gestapo compiled the lists alone and always had the final say.

At first, the RV and the *Gemeinde* had some moderating influence. They could request people being removed from the deportation list due to pregnancy, illness, their employment at the RV/*Gemeinde*, or their forced labor assignments, but the Gestapo did not always respect such requests. For example, the protection afforded by forced labor contracts in the armament industry eroded in late 1942. By November 1942, more than half of the total number of deportees from Berlin had been concentrated, registered, and expropriated in one of the Gestapo's *Sammellager* and were ultimately deported.<sup>28</sup> The last thing they saw were *Gemeinde* or RV officials managing the logistics of expropriation and other Jewish auxiliaries preventing escapes from the camp.<sup>29</sup>

25 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 21.

26 Steffen Held, *Die Leipziger Stadtverwaltung und die Deportation der Juden im NS-Staat* (Leipzig: Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig, 2011), 17; Beate Meyer, "Handlungsspielräume regionaler jüdischer Repräsentanten (1941-1945): Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland und die Deportationen," in *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland: Pläne—Praxis—Reaktionen; 1938-1945*, ed. Birthe Kundrus and Beate Meyer (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 76-80.

27 Philipp Dinkelaker, *Das Sammellager in der Berliner Synagoge Levetzowstraße 1941/42* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2017), 49-51.

28 Dinkelaker, *Das Sammellager*, 11-17.

29 Siegmund Weltlinger, "Hast Du es schon vergessen?" Erlebnisbericht aus der Zeit der Verfolgung. Vortrag Siegmund Weltlingers anlässlich des Tages der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung (30. Januar 1933) in der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit im Amerikahaus Berlin am 28.1.1954," ed. Deutscher Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Koordinierungsrat der Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit), 25.

There were several short-lived and three more permanent Gestapo *Sammellager* in Berlin that were located in *Gemeinde* buildings such as a synagogue and a care home for the elderly. Supervised by the Gestapo, the camps were co-run by Jewish staff. This staff was headed by a Jewish camp commander appointed by the *Gemeinde* and/or *Reichsvereinigung*. The camp commander and any auxiliary answered to any Berlin Gestapo and/or RSHA officer present. Sharing its name with the ghetto police in occupied Poland, *Sammellager* auxiliaries formed the *Ordnungsdienst* (“order service”) or *Ordner*. In line with permanent changes in Gestapo structures, the *Ordner*, too, underwent several changes until their policing function took primacy. During the early mass deportations, most *Ordner* had been *Gemeinde*/RV employees transferred to such assignments. Later, some *Ordner* were prisoner functionaries or forced laborers officially on the RV’s payroll.<sup>30</sup> Generally, they worked in shifts, pairs, or task-related sub-groups, always controlling each other and marked with different color-coded armbands that indicated their access to certain camp areas or whether they were on “outbound” duties.

In 1941, *Ordner* only accompanied Gestapo officials during arrests, carrying the luggage of deportees. Over the course of 1942, however, they also arrested deportees on behalf of the Gestapo and brought them to the assembly camps with no supervision.<sup>31</sup> Within the camps, *Ordner* were jailers (*Schließer*) or they strip-searched new arrestees.<sup>32</sup> The Gestapo repeatedly warned the *Ordner* that allowing deportees to escape or transmit messages was punishable by death, thereby compelling obedience through threats of deportation on the spot.<sup>33</sup>

A *Gemeinde* manual for *Ordner* and other “helpers during emigration transports” from late 1941 or early 1942 emphasized that “breaches of discipline,” i.e., not following Gestapo orders, would not only result in “harsh punishment” but also in collective retaliation against all Jews.<sup>34</sup> “Helpers” were held personally accountable by the Gestapo, and none of them assisted entirely voluntarily. Thus, we see the dual pressure on Jewish auxiliaries and also the development of the belief that preventing harm to the collective entailed persons renouncing individual acts of resistance for the greater good. Despite the pressure on them, many *Ordner* and other Jewish auxiliaries engaged in acts of unarmed resistance such as

30 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 126

31 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 383.

32 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 335.

33 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 208.

34 Centrum Judaicum Archives (CJA) 6.14 Nr. 7, Depositum Scheurenberg, Bl. 4: Jüdische Kultusvereinigung e. V., Merkblatt für die Helfer in der Levetzowstraße.

smuggling messages and tools in and out of the *Sammellager*. Ultimately, auxiliaries' existence was precarious; most were eventually deported and murdered.

### *The Reichsvereinigung and Gemeinde and the Gestapo's Hunt for "Illegals"*

Jewish resistance, the resistance of German Jews, and the resistance of people persecuted as Jews is believed to have been disproportionately high within the Reich versus the resistance of non-Jews.<sup>35</sup> The Nazis responded with collective retaliation. In May 1942, the Gestapo shot 25 Jewish Berliners and deported 250 after an arson perpetrated by (mainly Jewish) communists.<sup>36</sup> The *Gemeinde* and RV heads wanted to avoid a repetition of these events at all costs. On October 19, 1942, Gestapo officers raided the *Gemeinde* headquarters in Berlin, ordering a roll call and announcing that there were too many employees. In fact, the *Gemeinde* and RV had employed as many people as possible because employment meant exemption from deportation in 1941 and for most of 1942.<sup>37</sup> The so-called *Gemeinde Aktion* that resulted from this Gestapo order ended with the selection of 533 of the 1,500 remaining employees to be deported together with their families.<sup>38</sup> When twenty of the selected deportees went into hiding, the Gestapo threatened the *Gemeinde* with collective retaliation and took hostages, threatening to shoot leading Jewish representatives such as Leo Baeck. Fearing a repetition of the events of May, *Gemeinde* employees served as investigators, tracking down most of their escaped coworkers who were then deported. Despite these frantic efforts, the Gestapo shot seven or eight Jews. Beate Meyer highlighted that taking on this policing function in October 1942 was the pivotal moment when the role of the RV and *Gemeinde* shifted from self-preservation to assistance in self-destruction.<sup>39</sup>

35 Rabinovici, *Instanzen der Ohnmacht*, 318-24.

36 Günther Morsch, "Die Ermordung der jüdischen Geiseln im Mai 1942 im KZ Sachsenhausen: Rede zum Gedenktag für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus am 27. Januar 2012," accessed April 30, 2021, <http://guenter-morsch.de/rede-die-ermordung-der-juedischen-geiseln-im-mai-1942-im-kz-sachsenhausen-27-januar-2012/#more-15>.

37 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 122.

38 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 206.

39 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 206-30.

Such incidents were, however, not isolated, and the RV/*Gemeinde* took a harsh stance toward those who had gone into hiding even before the mass retaliation of the Gestapo in May 1942. An internal RV note from April 22, 1942 sheds more light on the context of Gestapo coercion and the RV's obedience. A senior Jewish *Sammellager Ordner* named Leopold Stargardter (1889-1946) signed a handwritten document in the presence of a superior RV official serving as intermediary to the Gestapo: "I have been informed by Dr. Eppstein<sup>40</sup> that I have to report to the Berlin Gestapo any information that comes to my attention concerning the smuggling of individuals. When anyone asks me about my task, I am obliged to remain silent."<sup>41</sup>

Scholars have misinterpreted this note as evidence of Stargardter's decision to collaborate with the Gestapo, allegedly substantiating his initiative to become an informer or *Greifer*.<sup>42</sup> In fact, this declaration implies the opposite: a note scribbled on the corner of the document and dated April 21, 1942—a day before Stargardter signed it—says that the Berlin Gestapo ordered the *Reichsvereinigung* via telephone to assign these investigation tasks to the *Ordner*. Thus, this source does not prove Stargardter's independent decision but rather a shift in the *Ordner's* tasks due to pressure from the Gestapo and the RV. *Ordner* were to report on escaping Jews, effectively serving as informers. It is unlikely that Stargardter was the only person who received such a task or was briefed in this way. Most likely, as a senior *Ordner*, he later briefed others.

In April 1942, escapes into hiding had only just begun and were far from their peak in 1943,<sup>43</sup> the latter period coinciding with the emergence of the phenomenon of *Greifer*—a term that only appears in sources starting in 1944.<sup>44</sup> Even before escape became a major issue, the Gestapo made the *Gemeinde*/RV an accomplice in combating this form of individual Jewish resistance. Thus, a leading RV functionary tasked "regular"

40 German sociologist Dr. Paul Eppstein (1902-1944) had been a *Reichsvertretung's* functionary before he became the RV's contact to the RSHA and Gestapo. After the May 1942 arson attack, he was taken hostage and later murdered by the SS at Theresienstadt.

41 Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, Archiv der Zentralstelle (BStU), MfS HA IX/II, PA 3472 Bd. 1, Bl. 000425: Leopold Stargardter, Schriftliche Erklärung, April 22, 1942.

42 Tausendfreund, *Erzuungener Verrat*, 194.

43 Richard Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface: The Not-so-Hidden Jews of Nazi Berlin 1941-1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 212-22.

44 Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), O.1 Ball-Kaduri Collection File No 58: Else Hannach, Aussagen von Else Hannach, geb. Broder, gekommen mit dem Austausch Juli 1944, July 31, 1944.

Jewish *Ordner*—like Stargardter—with informing on other Jews before the very concept of *Greifer* was formally introduced.

This does not fundamentally alter Beate Meyer's assessment of the RV's limited options in the face of intensifying persecution. The constellation between the subordinate *Gemeinde*/RV clerk Stargardter, his superior Eppstein, and the Gestapo is paradigmatic. Eppstein decided that individual escapes had to be prevented so that collective survival would not be jeopardized. Knowing he and his children would be deported if he disobeyed, he conveyed the Gestapo orders. Stargardter was defined as a "full Jew" by the Nuremberg Laws, and because he was not married to a non-Jew, he had no protection from deportation.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, he was not in a position to "decide" much in the face of Eppstein's demand, and Eppstein, in his own right, had little room to maneuver too. Both men were aware that if they quit or disobeyed Gestapo orders, they and their family would be deported. Stargardter did not face the same "choiceless choice" in the sense of Langer's understanding of ethics; he was neither a prisoner in a death camp nor imminently threatened with execution.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, all of his options produced an unethical sham choice.

### *The Post-1943 Deportations and Jewish Auxiliaries in the Gestapo Sammellager*

On the eve of the mass deportations from the Reich in autumn 1941, 6,000 *Gemeinde* employees were caring for 72,972 Berlin Jews.<sup>47</sup> In June 1943, 6,790 Jews remained in Berlin (9,529 in the entire Reich), mostly *Mischehe* Jews (persons in so-called "mixed marriages") administrated by four hundred employees.<sup>48</sup> The mass deportations of up to one thousand individuals per transport had petered out after the "Factory Action" on February 27, 1943—a massive raid that terminated the presence of Jewish forced laborers in the Berlin armament industry. Consequently, the Gestapo restructured the RV. They deported most RV personnel (including former *Gemeinde* officials) on June 16, 1943. This did not

45 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 549.

46 Lawrence L. Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps," in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 120.

47 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 37.

48 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 50 and 69.

mean that the RV ceased to exist or was rebranded.<sup>49</sup> Rather, the Gestapo replaced some of the deported staff with Jews in *Mischehe* or Jewish *Mischlinge* (“mixed-race”) and seized all remaining *Gemeinde* assets for “aryanization,” which spelled the end of this institution in its previous iteration and made the position of the few remaining “full Jews” even more dire.<sup>50</sup> After June 1943, only approximately one hundred people were transported on each train.

Despite the appearance of continuity, the restructuring process of the RV and the dissolution of the *Gemeinde* marked a caesura. The Gestapo replaced the former shared board with the “one-man *Judenrat*” of Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig, a former *Gemeinde* employee and the head of the RV’s health department who became the sole remaining functionary leading the RV from June 1943 onward.<sup>51</sup> As in many other places in German-occupied Europe, there were two consecutive Jewish imposed self-administrations in Berlin with a different staff. Lustig and his subordinates—mostly former government officials in mixed marriages—tried to exploit the Nazi bureaucracy to shield the remaining Jews.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Lustig apparently used his position to coerce women to exchange sex for protection.<sup>53</sup> Now based at the Berlin Jewish Hospital in Berlin-Wedding, the RV headquarters served as the “liquidation company” of German Jewry. Presumably, the RSHA planned to keep the RV operational until the regime found a “solution” to *Mischehe* Jews, who

49 Daniel B. Silver, *Refuge in Hell: How Berlin’s Jewish Hospital Outlasted the Nazis* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005); Rivka Elkin, *Das Jüdische Krankenhaus in Berlin zwischen 1938 und 1945* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1993); Dagmar von Doetinchem and Rolf Winau, eds., *Zerstörte Fortschritte. Das Jüdische Krankenhaus in Berlin, 1756–1861–1914–1989* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1989).

50 Botsch, “Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig,” 113.

51 Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig was born to Jewish merchants in Ratibor, Upper Silesia in 1891 and died in Berlin in 1945. He studied medicine in Breslau, was licensed in 1915, and undertook military service as medical doctor in World War One. In 1920, he became a health department official in Koblenz. He authored handbooks on public health care practice, and was probably a member of the Social Democratic party member. In 1927, he got married and was employed as medical officer for the Berlin police, earning several promotions. However, in 1933, he was dismissed, and in 1934, he became employee of the *Gemeinde* health department and doctor’s office for Jewish patients. By 1939, he was the head of the *Gemeinde* health department and was later employed at the RV health department. Lustig became the head of the “Transport Complaints” department at the Jewish Hospital in 1941, a role through which he worked to shield Jews from deportation for medical reasons. In 1943, he came the RV head, and in 1945, he became the head of health department Berlin-Wedding. He was executed by the Soviets. See footnote 48.

52 Schirmer, “A Living Organisation,” 113.

53 Botsch, “Dr. Dr. Walter Lustig,” 114.

made up the bulk of the remaining Reich Jews. Heretofore, this group had enjoyed very tenuous immunity from deportation but experienced increasing repression until the RSHA finally decided to deport them in January 1945.<sup>54</sup>

While the pre-1943 RV had overseen Jewish schools and religious communities, Lustig enforced the Gestapo's ban on what scholars understand as "cultural resistance" by "Jewish Councils."<sup>55</sup> Concentrating all remaining RV departments, quarters for homeless Jews, and the *Sammellager Schulstraße* located in the hospital's pathology wing, the new RV headquarters at the Jewish Hospital Berlin was called the "Hospital Ghetto."<sup>56</sup> The reconfigured RV was involved in organizing housing, administering the Jewish forced labor force, assisting in the deportations, and maintaining the Gestapo's "Jew index."

As in the period before 1943, the central RV was under the control of the RSHA, and the *Sammellager* was controlled by the Berlin Gestapo. Due to the RV's centralization at the hospital, however, both Nazi authorities and the remaining RV staff met at the same locality and formed a complex triangle.<sup>57</sup> Serving as a substitute administration for the Jews who remained in Berlin, the three RV departments—central administration, health, and welfare—organized care for the sick and children and provided legal representation for Jews vis-à-vis the Reich. The departments also created statistics, organized the RV's accounting, and administered the estates of "deceased" Jews—often those murdered in the camps.

By late 1943 and early 1944, seven RV specialist employees were tasked with the liquidation of Gestapo-seized assets. Eighty-five forced laborers under direct Gestapo supervision sorted looted Judaica, cleared rubble from Allied bombs, and worked on RSHA construction sites. The little we know about some of them reveals how the system of coercion functioned. As part of the 1943 re-structuring, the RSHA forced some RV employees to move to the hospital or other Gestapo-controlled spaces, where they and their families practically lived as hostages. The Gestapo brought back former *Reichsvertretung* and RV functionary Hans-Erich Fabian from Theresienstadt to function as a liquidation specialist, holding his family back in the ghetto. Consequently, under tremendous pressure, Fabian assisted in the Nazi state's large-scale robbery of Jewish

54 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 118.

55 Botsch, "Wer rettete das Jüdische Krankenhaus Berlin?," 254.

56 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 551.

57 Schirmer, "A Living Organisation," 39.

assets. Arthur Schönfeld, a former janitor of the *Gemeinde's* home for the elderly, had to continue in this function when the Gestapo turned the home into *Sammellager Große Hamburger Straße*. The camp housed the Gestapo's "Jew index," which contained information on the whereabouts of Berlin Jews, and served as prison and torture chamber for many arrested "illegals." Forced to live in the building, Schönfeld's daughter (b. 1933) later testified that the family heard the cries of those being tortured and that the family was put "on transport" lists and then removed several times; thus, the family lived in a constant state of terror. On top of these inhumane conditions, Gestapo officers and other SS and police staff abused her with kicks in an effort to cow her father into submission. Even Jewish resistance fighters advanced Gestapo goals. The former Prussian government official Dr. Curt Radlauer was married to a non-Jewish woman. As one of the RV clerks forced to live at the hospital, he produced statistics on Jews remaining in the Reich until the liberation, effectively helping the regime's deportation machinery operate smoothly. Secretly, he had been part of a resistance cell that helped Jews in hiding. Even after the Gestapo broke up the group and arrested its members, Radlauer's resistance activities remained undetected until the war's end. His statistics and other RV-generated data helped the Gestapo to monitor the group of *Mischlinge*. Other RV employees proactively updated the RV's index of Jews, effectively making it easier for the regime to track down Jews.

Although they were not directly involved in arrests of Jews in hiding, such employees contributed to the efforts of fifty-one clerks who staffed the RV's "Emigration" sub-department in late 1943. This department performed a variety of duties in the *Sammellager* and assisted with deportation-related logistics. The same department had previously existed in the Berlin *Gemeinde*. Stargardter was one of these clerks. According to his RV staff index card, he had first been an unpaid "helper" in the *Gemeinde* before the "Emigration" sub-department officially employed him on August 24, 1942.<sup>58</sup> He held key positions in different *Sammellager* until 1945. Stargardter was involved in hunting down Jews in hiding.

There were several other similar cases that show how "Jew hunting" became a regular task of *Gemeinde* and RV clerks in cooperation with the Gestapo by mid-1943.<sup>59</sup> In spring 1943, the RV reassigned First World War veteran and former businessman Hermann R. from his previous

58 Bundesarchiv (BArch) R 8150/63, Bl. 156r: Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Mitarbeiterkartei Stargardter, Leopold, August 24, 1942.

59 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

forced labor in the RV's finance department to duties in the *Sammellager*, where he became Stargardter's fellow *Ordner*.<sup>60</sup> In much the same way Jewish officials had done after the raid on the *Gemeinde* in October 1942, Hermann R. interrogated at least one Jewish woman arrested after the "Factory Action" in March 1943 until she gave away the hiding place of her husband and child, sparing her a Gestapo interrogation and making the Nazis' task easier at the same time.<sup>61</sup> Thus, he appears as having investigated Jews in hiding—a task usually ascribed to *Greifer*. While clearly helping the Gestapo, according to witness reports, Hermann R. hid a Jew in his apartment and smuggled food and messages to prisoners. He was not the only *Ordner* who defied the dichotomy between "bad" collaborator and "good" resistance fighter.

The case of Alfred S. illustrates the specific pressures on Jewish auxiliaries in greater detail. Alfred S. was a Jewish Berliner born into a wealthy family of real estate owners and investors in 1900.<sup>62</sup> He was drafted into the military at the end World War One, but his unit was "overrun by the revolution" in 1918, and he could "not take part in hostilities," something he later regretted.<sup>63</sup> After the First World War, he became a Berlin city official and business owner, but his businesses were ruined after the 1929 stock market crash. Unable to find a different job because of his Jewish background, he worked as a construction worker. In 1937, he fell from scaffolding and damaged his lungs. According to him, an antisemitic coworker had secretly removed a plank.<sup>64</sup> He never fully recovered—his lungs collapsed several times until the Nazi authorities assigned him to work in a machine shop, which was physically less demanding work.

According to Alfred S.'s description, his wife Charlotte managed to convince the Nazi authorities to change her "racial" status because she had no Jewish grandparents. Because of her previous conversion and marriage to Alfred, Nazi officials could have counted her as a Jew due to her proximity to Judaism. To avoid this designation, she left the *Gemeinde*, and the couple baptized their daughter, born 1941, in the Christian faith,

60 Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) B Rep. 002 Nr. 4861, Nachlass Weltlinger, Ehrengerichtsverhandlungen, [no page]: Ehrengericht der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Entscheidung Ehrengerichtssache Hermann R., March 22, 1948. Names of individuals accused of being collaborators are abbreviated except in cases of persons who have prominently featured in other scholarly works.

61 LAB, C Rep. 118-01 Nr. 38314, OdF-Akte Hermann R. [no page]: Erna Kopsch, Abschrift Schreiben, April 21, 1950.

62 Landesamt für Bürger- und Ordnungsangelegenheiten Berlin (LABO), Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7: Alfred S., Lebenslauf, November 1, 1954.

63 LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7.

64 LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. E7.

thus “privileging” their *Mischehe*. Alfred S. did not have to wear the “Yellow Star” and was exempt from deportation.<sup>65</sup> This status saved their lives, but it also produced envy among other persecutees.

In late 1944, Alfred S. was assigned to forced labor in a machine shop. His superior recognized his mercantile training and moved him into a higher position than he as a Jew was supposed to hold. The Gestapo came after him because a denouncer employed in the machine shop told them Alfred had hidden the fact that he was Jewish and even oversaw non-Jews.<sup>66</sup> The Gestapo imprisoned Alfred at *Sammellager Schulstraße* located in the Berlin Jewish hospital’s former pathology wing. There, Alfred became a forced laborer in the camp’s sewing workshop. Eventually, the Gestapo questioned him:

During the interrogation, which I wish on nobody, the commissioner yelled at me “why didn’t you stay a coolie.” I tried to explain that I was feeble and had collapsed during heavy work in the past. He wasn’t having any of it, and I had to sign a paper that I had been informed that I would be sent to a concentration camp if I did not bring a certificate of employment as a load carrier as soon as possible. In passing, he mentioned that I could also sign up as *Ordner* in the assembly camp. I did that, and this is my alleged volunteering as *Ordner* in the Schulstraße camp.<sup>67</sup>

Alfred’s *Mischehe* status protected him only in theory because the Gestapo could have used his “camouflage” as a means to justify his deportation. With his weak lungs, he would likely not have survived the winter. And more importantly, his wife and child would not have an income. As a result of this indirect threat to his and his family’s survival, he decided to sign up as an *Ordner* in the employ of the RV in November 1944.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike Stargardter, Alfred S. had not been a *Gemeinde* employee but was “elevated” from the ranks of camp prisoners. His motives and alter-

65 LAB C Rep. 118-01 Nr. 38314, OdF-Akte Hermann R, [no page]: Hermann Rothschild, Lebenslauf zum Fragebogen zur Anerkennung als “Opfer des Faschismus,” October 25, 1945.

66 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 2-4: Alfred S, Anerkennungsfragebogen mit Lebenslauf, October 25, 1945; LABO, Abt. I, Entschädigungsakte Nr. 71.247, Bl. C6: Eduard Mayer, Eidesstattliche Erklärung, April 2, 1953.

67 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 13-16: Alfred S, Schreiben betreffs Anerkennung als OdF, December 4, 1946.

68 BArch R 8150/9, Bl. 406: Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Verfügung Betr. Alfred Israel S, November 23, 1944.

natives, however, resembled those of Stargardter. Alfred S.'s regular assignment was guard duty on the *Sammellager's* outer perimeter, where he was to prevent the escape of previously caught "illegals." At times, he had to guard Jewish prisoners who undertook errands outside of the camp without Gestapo supervision.<sup>69</sup>

Much like Stargardter and Hermann R., the Gestapo made Alfred S. investigate Jews in hiding. The "Factory Action" of February 1943 had caused a 43 percent increase in hiding attempts, which created an awkward problem for the Gestapo since Berlin was supposed to be "Free of Jews" by the summer of 1943.<sup>70</sup> The approximately two thousand escapees who remained at large by the time Alfred S. became an *Ordner* in late 1944 continued to embarrass the police. To tackle the issue, the Gestapo relied on denunciations from the non-Jewish population, as well as investigations, interrogations, and surprise raids. This included *Wohnungswachen* ("apartment watches"). Alfred S. was sent to watch an address the Gestapo suspected to be a hideout. Sometimes, this meant entering the apartment and arresting the inhabitants or waiting for "illegals" to show up. Thus, Alfred S. actively searched for Jews in hiding.

Much like Hermann R., Alfred S. regularly used his position to help others. While guarding prisoners performing errands outside the *Sammel-lager*, Alfred S. made deals with prisoners, leaving them alone for a while and trusting them to not betray him. He smuggled food into the camp, and his wife gave him linens that he secretly passed on to mothers with babies. Even such a small "breach of discipline" could have cost him his life. He later claimed that he dared not raise the alarm when a prisoner ran away while he was on guard duty in April 1945. The Battle of Berlin began on April 16, 1945. Alfred S.'s emphasis on this date likely meant that he had raised the alarm during previous escape attempts. Even with the Soviets close by, allowing someone to escape was still risky.

According to historian Doris Tausendfreund, the Gestapo coerced up to thirty individuals using a combination of torture, false promises, and threats against family members to inform on or search for Jews in hiding; these Jewish informers or even investigators were in the service of the Gestapo and were colloquially dubbed *Greifer*.<sup>71</sup> Building mainly on postwar court testimony, Tausendfreund disassociated these "irregular" Gestapo auxiliaries from the "regular" *Ordner*, ascribing to the former

69 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte von Alfred S, Bl. 13-16.

70 Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface*, 212-22.

71 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 125-210.

motivations of personal gain that set them apart from the latter.<sup>72</sup> After the war, only the *Greifer* were understood as having actively investigated their Jewish compatriots for selfish reasons, whereas *Ordner* with ties to the RV supposedly only passively followed orders. The examples of Hermann R., Alfred S. and Stargardter are three out of a number of cases of “regular” *Ordner* who were involved in investigations after Jews in hiding,<sup>73</sup> and their experiences disrupt the alleged distinction between the *Ordner* and the *Greifer*.

At least nine *Greifer* identified by Tausendfreund had been regular *Gemeinde* and/or RV employees and *Ordner*—like Stargardter.<sup>74</sup> Tausendfreund did not count Alfred S., Hermann R. and many others among *Greifer*. Most other *Greifer* had, in fact, been fugitives caught in hiding who became one-time or serial informers. The group of so-called “irregular” auxiliaries was not homogenous. The overall impact of *Greifer* on the number of deportees has been exaggerated in the past: apprehended fugitives were present in each “transport” during the phase of smaller deportations from mid-1943 to 1945, but contrary to common belief, most deportees were former *Mischehe* partners or people who lost their status as “protected” *Mischlinge*.<sup>75</sup> Also, betrayal among Jews cannot be blamed on a limited group of informers. Jews caught in hiding betraying others was the rule, not the exception. Most escapes into hiding in Berlin were spontaneous, and most escapees were not trained to withstand police interrogation.<sup>76</sup> Confronted with Gestapo officers not bound by law and brutalized after practicing terror for a decade, most Berlin Jews arrested in hiding “betrayed” others. Gestapo brutality targeted every form of disobedience. Those caught in hiding and those who had worked as *Ordner* shared the same basic predicament as soon as they seemed helpful in tracking down Jews in hiding or appeared to know something: a choice between cooperation with the Gestapo or possibly torture and deportation with their family. Thus, the difference between Jewish auxiliaries—*Ordner* and *Greifer*—was not their actions during the Shoah but rather how the postwar world perceived them.

72 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 90.

73 Dinkelaker, “Worse than the Gestapo?,” 190-206.

74 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 125-210.

75 Jah, *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin*, 519.

76 Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface*, 212-22.

*Postwar Reckoning: Between Collaborators and  
"Honorable" RV Clerks*

Auxiliaries with an exposed position in the *Sammellager* were often the subject of denunciations after the war. As a senior *Ordner*, Stargardter had conducted body searches of newly arrived inmates; announced the names of those destined to be deported when a train was arriving; and was present at the train station during deportations.<sup>77</sup> He was, therefore, literally the person who introduced arrestees to the *Sammellager* and the last face deportees saw when they involuntarily left Berlin on a deportation train. Despite the pressure he experienced from both the Gestapo and the RV, the Soviets executed him on January 26, 1946 as a "German-fascist criminal."<sup>78</sup> Stargardter was not a singular case. The Soviets, for example, also arrested the former janitor Arthur Schönfeld in Berlin in 1945; he shared the same fate as six of the forty-two local RV leaders who faced criminal prosecution in other parts of Germany after the war.<sup>79</sup> No one wanted to share this fate, so Fabian, Radlauer and many other surviving Berlin RV employees attempted to obscure their former roles in the *Reichsvereinigung* after 1945, providing each other with exculpating letters of recommendation.<sup>80</sup> They succeeded in evading execution because they did not hold as exposed positions as Stargardter and Schönfeld. In contrast to the fate of Schönfeld and Stargardter, Hermann R., Alfred S., and many others faced only moral and ethical accusations from survivors after the war. Their cases illustrate a pattern of attacking members of the RV who played more public roles, whereas members of both the Gestapo and the RV faded into the background.

Other former Berlin Gestapo *Sammellager* auxiliaries received prison sentences following postwar trials. Measuring them against an antisemitic double standard, both East and West German authorities found them guilty of betraying or even hunting Jews.<sup>81</sup> In an Orwellian inversion of cause and effect, courts ascribed to Jews significant room for maneuver

77 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 194.

78 Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, "Datenbank Todesurteile Sowjetischer Militärtribunale Gegen Deutsche Zivilisten (1944-1947): Eintrag Stargardter, Leopold," accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.stsg.de/cms/dokstelle/auskuenfte/verurteilte-sowjetischer-militaertribunale-smt/todesurteile-sowjetischer?suchwort=Stargardter&beginn=Name+beginnt+mit>.

79 Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*, 367.

80 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 213.

81 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

and a degree of agency that implied a moral obligation to sacrifice themselves, which in turn would serve as a manifestation of an idealized form of Jewish collective honor. At the same time, dominant German postwar discourses asserted that the actual perpetrators of the Shoah had been under duress, faced existential threats, and were left with no choice but to kill. In this climate, victims had only one “choice”: they had to occupy the moral high ground, otherwise they “unbecame” victims.<sup>82</sup>

After liberation, there was not much room for ambiguity. Alfred S. became a Berlin city official. In March 1946, he received the legal status of *Opfer der Nürnberger Gesetzgebung* (Victim of the Nuremberg Laws, OdNG), i. e., victims of antisemitic Nazi persecution. An officially recognized OdNG received social benefits. Later that year, however, Shoah survivor Freddy W. demanded Alfred be stripped of this status. Freddy W. was furious because Alfred now claimed “that he is Jewish but did not want to be known as Jewish back then,”<sup>83</sup> alluding to baptisms during the Shoah. Shortly after, Freddy W. also made similar charges against Hermann R. Such resentments against formerly “privileged” couples and attempts of self-“aryanization” were frequent and relate to Jewish religious debates during and after the Holocaust as well as to the issue of “mixed” marriage.<sup>84</sup> Freddy W. also stated that Alfred S. had not been forced to work as an *Ordner* but was a willing collaborator.

Following these accusations, the OdNG office demanded that Alfred S., Hermann R., and many others be put on trial by the internal Jewish *Ehrengericht* (honor court). The post-1945 Berlin Jewish Community formed an internal court to deal with collaboration cases, assessing them on the moral level.<sup>85</sup> So far, the Berlin *Ehrengericht* has been interpreted as independent of the state’s justice system, but it was not: it was intertwined with the OdNG office, and despite its lack of punitive legal power, a negative verdict could result in the loss of compensation.<sup>86</sup> The

82 Dinkelaker, “Worse than the Gestapo?,” 151.

83 CJA, 4.1., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 6: Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, Hauptausschuss “Opfer des Faschismus,” Betreff Alfred S, October 20, 1946.

84 Irving J. Rosenbaum, *The Holocaust and Halakhah: The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 3-5; Maximilian Strnad, *Privileg Mischebe? Handlungsräume “jüdisch versippter” Familien 1933-1949* (Hamburg: Nomos Verlag 2021).

85 CJA, 5A1, Nr. 0046, p. 132: Vorstand der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Schreiben an die Repräsentantenversammlung betreffs Schaffung eines Ehrengerichts, December 14, 1945.

86 Philipp Dinkelaker, “Jewish Collaboration? Honor Court Cases Against Survivors of the Shoah in Postwar Germany,” *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 33, no. 4 (2019): 254-76.

case of Alfred S. is exemplary of how a certain narrative about *Ordner* was produced. In Alfred S.'s case, the OdNG's letter demanding his trial included statements of witnesses which they deployed in order to avoid "unfair measures" against Alfred, who had supposedly "used his position to help many people."<sup>87</sup> Thus, the office was already on Alfred's side, revealing the heterogeneous views of survivors. Among the witnesses supporting Alfred was a Jewish resistance fighter, who stated that Alfred S. "had to fulfill the same tasks as all other *Ordner*, i. e., arrest actions," but he never engaged in "anything unsavory like betraying others."<sup>88</sup> The *Ehrengericht* chairman Ernst Bukofzer acquitted Alfred S. and stated that "the Gestapo forced" Alfred S. "to become an *Ordner*" because no witness reported that he "fulfilled his compulsory duties to the detriment of Jewish interests at any time."<sup>89</sup> Notwithstanding the alleged difference between passive *Ordner* and active *Greifer* claimed by survivors later on, investigating illegal Jews and conducting "apartment watches" was not considered a violation of collective Jewish honor in the eyes of the 1946 *Ehrengericht*. The internal Jewish court acquitted most of the other former *Ordner*, RV clerks, and prisoner functionaries who had actively searched for "illegals" or assisted the Gestapo in other ways; Hermann R. and Schönfeld were among this group, having been released from East German prisons.<sup>90</sup>

In another trial, however, the very same judge convicted the Jewish resistance fighter Rudolf S. as a traitor. Rudolf S. had been involved in hiding over a dozen Jewish "illegals."<sup>91</sup> In 1944, tipped-off by captured "illegals," the Gestapo arrested and tortured Rudolf S., threatening to rape his wife and murder his children. Under pressure, he betrayed a hide-out he mistakenly believed to be "cold," which led to more arrests. Reversing his evaluation of Alfred S. and ignoring several witnesses attesting to the defendant's resistance activities, *Ehrengericht* judge Bukofzer and his co-judges stipulated that Rudolf S. should have sacrificed himself and his family rather than betray an address. Effectively, former RV

87 CJA, 4.I., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred, Bl. 7-8: Julius Meyer, Antrag auf Ehrengerichtsverhandlung gegen Alfred S, October 22, 1946.

88 CJA, 4.I., Nr. 2305, OdF-Akte Alfred S, Bl. 10: Abteilung Opfer der Nürnberger Gesetzgebung beim Hauptausschuß "Opfer des Faschismus," Protokoll Zeugen-aussage Alexander Rotholz und Adolf Metz, November 4, 1946.

89 LAB B Rep. 002 Nr. 4861 Nachlass Weltlinger, Ehrengerichtsverhandlungen, [no page]: Ehrengericht der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, Entscheidung in der Ehrengerichtssache Alfred S, December 11, 1946.

90 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 190-206.

91 Dinkelaker, "Worse than the Gestapo?," 123.

clerks retrospectively minimized Gestapo coercion and punished a resistance fighter for betraying Jews in hiding. They declared as honorable the investigation of “illegals” by *Ordner* such as Alfred S. (and several others), insinuating that these actions advanced the goal of collective survival under pressure, while at the same time portraying Rudolf S.’s forced betrayal as dishonorable. Thus, the *Ehrengericht* defined the line between legitimate activities and collaboration, along with the categories of “honorable” support of the RV’s strategy of cooperation and “dishonorable” personal gain, ignoring the fact that everybody who cooperated also did so to mitigate personal consequences and protect their families.

The uneven judgements rendered by the court were the result of continuity in the personnel of the RV and postwar Berlin Jewish institutions. Some *Ehrengericht* staff had, in fact, been subject to the same forced collaboration they were now supposed to adjudicate. Rather than displaying empathy, they retrospectively defended the RV’s harsh position toward individuals who escaped into hiding. Bukofzer, who was married to a non-Jewish woman, had been a forced laborer for the RV. In this role, he was compelled to catalogue Nazi-looted Jewish books on behalf of the RSHA Amt VII’s “enemy studies.”<sup>92</sup> Together with Curt Radlauer, he later coauthored the legal commentary on Berlin’s compensation law and was heavily involved in shaping how exclusionary terms against alleged traitors were to be interpreted.<sup>93</sup> In addition to their personal networks, most former *Ordner*, such as Alfred S., and most *Ehrengericht* judges and former RV heads shared an educational, military (World War One), and social background. Their strategy of collective survival during the deportations can be seen as an outcome of the First World War: in accordance with military logic, human loss was a calculable resource in the name of the greater good.<sup>94</sup>

92 Utz Maas, “Ernst Grumach: Verfolgte deutschsprachige Sprachforscher,” accessed October 31, 2021, <https://zflprojekte.de/sprachforscher-im-exil/index.php/catalog/g/234-grumach-ernst>.

93 Ernst Bukofzer and Curt Radlauer, *Kommentar zum Gesetz über die Entschädigung der Opfer des Nationalsozialismus vom 10. Jan. 1951* (Koblenz: Humanitas Verlag, 1951).

94 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 120–21.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that the RV continued its cooperation with the Gestapo after 1943, notwithstanding its increasing awareness of the mass murder taking place in the occupied east. Beate Meyer demonstrated how the RV continued to support the Gestapo's efforts—despite the failure of its strategy to protect the many by deporting the few—because there were limited other options, and because they wanted to protect the dwindling number of Jews who remained in Germany. The present chapter does not change Meyer's fundamental argument but rather expands it. Fearing collective retaliation against the remaining Jews in Germany, the RV not only assisted with deportation logistics but also systematically opposed individual hiding attempts in the name of collective survival, effectively posing an additional threat to Jews in hiding. Assisting with the Gestapo's manhunt for Jews in hiding was not limited to isolated events. Rather, it must be understood as a part of the RV's structural support resulting from its overall strategy of cooperation.

Based on the available sources, the alleged distinction between RV *Ordner* or "regular" deportation camp auxiliaries and *Greifer* cannot be sustained. The year 1943 marked a caesura in the history of the German Jewish pseudo-self-administration. A closer look at its lower-ranking employees reveals how *Gemeinde* and RV functionaries were involved in the manhunt of "illegals" long before the campaign peaked in mid-1943. Their involvement in these efforts stemmed from the extreme circumstances of their employment. The interconnectedness of the *Ordner*'s passive guard duties and active investigatory measures was not deviation from but rather a continuation of the cooperation strategy adopted by the RV in response to the Gestapo's shift in focus away from mass deportations and to the hunting down of Jews in hiding. The RV's Gestapo-enforced decision to order, "pay," and house "regular" Jewish auxiliaries to inform on or investigate "illegal" Jews must be considered an integral part of the *Greifer* phenomenon.

*Ordner* effectively resembled auxiliary police, fulfilling the role envisioned by and answering mostly directly to the Gestapo while remaining nominally on the RV's payroll. As the examples show, some used their individual room for maneuver to support fellow persecuted Jews and, consequently, defy a clear classification. Navigating the requirements of the RV's cooperation strategy, Gestapo pressure, and the possibility of resistance simultaneously was an incriminating double role that was structured by the unethical choice between hurting others and endangering

oneself. Participation in the Gestapo's manhunt resulted from this double pressure. It was not solely the moral failure of individuals who were unable to withstand such coercion. The fact that most individuals eventually succumbed is evidence of the brutality of a regime that took advantage of the fact that people could be blackmailed with their spouses or children even if it meant harming others.

Therefore, in terms of ensuring one's survival, there is no fundamental difference between *Greifer*, *Ordner*, or other RV personnel. Just like those captured illegals who became *Greifer*, RV clerks from all the organization's departments obeyed the Gestapo and tried to remain "useful" because this is how they could save their families and themselves. All instances of compliance must be placed within this context without levelling individual differences between people who tried to survive at any cost and people who tried to help others despite the high personal risks.

The dilemmas confronted by individual RV auxiliaries shed light on the RV's continued cooperation after mid-1943. Despite the obvious failure of the initial strategy to save "the many," the remaining RV officials went through with it anyway because continuing their cooperation with the Gestapo also facilitated their individual survival. Examining how the Gestapo enforced officials' individual compliance exemplifies how the regime enabled the RV's overall functioning in the final phase of the war.

The way the postwar Berlin Jewish Community handled the cases of former *Ordner* Alfred S. and Hermann R. in contrast to that of former Jewish resistance fighter Rudolf S. illuminates clashing Jewish perspectives on the morally impossible question of the "right" Jewish response to the collective threat of mass murder. The Jewish Honor Court was shaped by a conflict between the "top-down" perspective of the former *Reichsvereinigung* personnel among the judges and the bottom-up view of those who accused former *Ordner* and others as traitors. The accusations of survivors against Jewish auxiliaries represented feelings of having been betrayed by the *Reichsvereinigung* as an institution, but they were, by and large, lodged against the organ's most visible employees, namely those who "brought" Jews to the *Sammellager*. Demanding punishment, survivors' accusations did not distinguish between the functions of *Greifer*, *Ordner*, other RV employees, and the Gestapo.

Former RV clerks among the *Ehrengericht* judges, however, redirected survivors' anger toward individuals like Rudolf S.—who had not been aligned with the RV—and protected most of the former *Ordner*. The unequal treatment of former (forced) RV clerks and those who had not been on the payroll obscured the *Reichsvereinigung's* strategy of coopera-

tion and its negative impact on persons in hiding. It also offered a retro-active legitimization of the *Reichsvereinigung's* cooperation with the Gestapo, in contrast to Poland, where former resistance fighters sat in judgement over former Jewish Council members who were generally assessed negatively.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, there was no coherent definition for acts of Jewish collaboration in postwar Germany. Determining whether someone was classified a traitor or a tragic victim of extreme historical circumstances was based not on objective acts but on postwar interests and power relations.

95 Gabriel N. Finder, "Judenrat on Trial: Postwar Jewry Sits in Judgement of Its War-time Leadership," in Jockusch and Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*, 83–106.