

Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic

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One of the duties of the “good citizen,” as constituted in modern Europe, was to inform the authorities in order to hinder the commission of crimes, track down criminals, or uphold the existing order. The surveillance societies that emerged over the past two centuries can be distinguished from their predecessors in part on the basis of their new formal policing activities, but particularly because of the role envisaged for citizens, whose duty became to watch, listen, and inform the authorities. As this participation became more systematized and became an integral part of routine policing, “panopticism” was established—the all-seeing society in which no one ever felt beyond surveillance. The theory of panopticism is identified now with the work of Michel Foucault. In a few oblique but illuminating phrases he directed attention to the development in modern Europe of a “faceless gaze”—that is, a “permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance” that “transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network” that extended into all parts of society.¹

It is only recently that historians have begun to investigate the importance for modern political systems of denunciations, understood broadly as a variety of popular informing to the police or other authorities. This has been associated in the literature on German history with Hitler’s dictatorship and, more recently, with the Communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).²

If denunciations have occurred in most modern political systems, historians are, nonetheless, concerned about their specificity. In what follows I shall attempt to show—on the basis of a study of their role in the operation of the Gestapo and the Stasi, the two secret police forces in Germany’s two dictatorships—that denunciations vary in many important respects such as their fre-

¹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York, 1979), pp. 195 ff., esp. p. 214.

² See Gerhard Paul, “Deutschland, deine Denunzianten,” *Die Zeit* (September 17, 1993), p. 16.

quency, effects, and significance. Although other institutions in both regimes contributed to the establishment, stabilization, and maintenance of these regimes, it was the secret police that played a decisive role in both. Denunciations were tolerated and produced on a greater scale in the Third Reich than (evidently) had been the case in German history until then, in part because the regime sought (like the GDR did later) to control and modify more areas of social life than ever before. If most denunciations flowed freely from below in Nazi Germany, they were more institutionalized, regulated, and routinized in the GDR.

It is difficult to distinguish informing—about breaches of criminal law, for example—from political denunciations of an “enemy” or “opponent” who spoke out of turn, especially in dictatorships in which the meanings of “law” and “political crimes” became so unclear that historians constantly must resort to quotation marks to underline the pseudolegal character of many measures. In this article I shall not draw a sharp distinction between informing and denunciation.

I. DENUNCIATIONS IN NAZI GERMANY

One way of assessing the nature and scope of denunciations is to examine their role in providing information to the secret police. As a number of recent studies suggest, however, denunciations were by no means restricted to the “police sphere,” and they performed numerous social and political functions besides those of assisting the police and contributing to the routine operation of the terror at the grassroots level.³ It certainly would be useful to compare the nature, extent, and consequences of denunciations to the Nazi Party and those that ended up on the desk of the Gestapo. But local and regional party headquarters destroyed most of the materials we would need as sources; and the party never kept anything like the file system of the Gestapo in the first place. The Gestapo was the final destination for all denunciations regarded by the Nazi regime as “important”—that is, those with an actual or supposed “political” content. To be sure, the concepts of “politics” and “political criminality” were given broad and arbitrary definitions. The Gestapo operated as a kind of clearinghouse for the countless denunciations it received that either streamed in directly from the people or were transmitted via the organizations and institutions of party and state. A study of Gestapo case files covering the whole period from 1933 to 1945, therefore, provides a unique opportunity for a sys-

³ See the new study by Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation im NS-Regime oder die kleine Macht der “Volksgenossen”* (Bonn, 1995) (hereafter cited as *Politische Denunziation*); and John Connelly’s article in this issue, “The Uses of *Volks-gemeinschaft*.”

tematic analysis of the practices of denunciation over the course of the entire Third Reich.

The mission of the Gestapo expanded steadily as, from 1933 onward, “political criminality” was given a much broader definition than ever before and most forms of dissent and criticism were gradually criminalized. The result was that more “laws” or lawlike measures were put on the books than ever. There was also a large new body of law that pertained to the private sphere and to racial and sexual questions, and the outbreak of war in 1939 brought a new stream of war measures that further strained limited police resources.⁴ On top of this, the Gestapo’s mission became defined as essentially a preventive one: that is, they were to arrest people and stop certain social “types” before they committed offenses.

In the context of these ever expanding tasks there arose the myth of an “all-knowing” and “ever present” Gestapo. However, the perceived omnipresence of the Gestapo was not due to large numbers of Gestapo officials. Their ranks gradually increased after 1933 until late 1938, when they thinned out as officials volunteered or were drafted for various military tasks.⁵ A recent estimate by Elisabeth Kohlhaas indicates that in 1937 there was a maximum of seven thousand officials in the entire Gestapo. And even by August 1, 1941, there were no more than seventy-six hundred in all of the *alt Reich*—that is, prewar Germany.⁶ In the war years, when many of the original police experts were drafted or sent to the occupied territories, the Gestapo personnel in Germany began to show signs of deprofessionalization and lowering of their police qualifications. So from the beginning to the end of the regime there was no getting around the limited personnel at the disposal of the Gestapo.⁷ In view of these changes it would have been structurally impossible for the Gestapo to accomplish its expanding tasks without cooperation from other police and especially from German society.⁸

⁴ For an analysis of the impact of the Gestapo on “crime,” see my “Die Gestapo und die ‘öffentliche Sicherheit und Ordnung,’” in “. . . Nur für die Sicherheit da?” *Zur Geschichte der Polizei im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert Reinke (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), pp. 94–115.

⁵ Chef Sipo, “Die Verhütung einer Überbelastung der Staatspolizei(leit)stellen,” September 6, 1938, Moscow Central State Archive, fond 500, opis 1, folder 4 (copies in U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum).

⁶ Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Die Mitarbeiter der regionalen Staatspolizeistellen: Quantitative und qualitative Befunde zur Personalausstattung der Gestapo,” in *Die Gestapo—Mythos und Realität*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt, 1995), pp. 220–35.

⁷ Elisabeth Kohlhaas, “Die Mitarbeiter der Gestapo,” *Archiv für Polizeigeschichte* 6, no. 15/16 (1995): 2–6.

⁸ See Robert Lewis Koehl, *The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Madison, Wis., 1983), p. 159; Koehl estimates for September 1939 a total

Some idea of the kind of cooperation that the Gestapo obtained from the population can be gathered from the case files that the Gestapo created on named individuals when they were accused or suspected of a "crime." Although nearly all of these files were destroyed at the war's end, we can deduce from the ones that survive that they reached very large proportions and that in time the regime would have had files on the political lives and opinions of nearly every citizen. The files were destroyed everywhere in Germany with the exception of seventy thousand dossiers in Düsseldorf, nineteen thousand in Würzburg, and about twelve thousand in Speyer.⁹ These remaining files are invaluable sources for understanding all aspects of everyday terror, broadly defined, and denunciations in particular.

II. DENUNCIATIONS AND RACE "CRIMES"

Precisely how important were denunciations to the Gestapo? In a book published in 1990 that used as its source base the Gestapo materials in Würzburg—a Catholic area slow to support the Nazis both before and after 1933—I indicated the crucial role of denunciations there. My analysis of 175 case files involving efforts to enforce the social and sexual isolation of the Jews concluded that 57 percent began with an identifiable denunciation from the population at large. The Gestapo discovered only one case on its own. By way of interrogations it uncovered information that led to an additional twenty-six cases, or 15 percent of the total; and eight more cases, or 5 percent of this sample, resulted from tips contributed by the rest of the police network. Nazi organizations provided information that originated twenty-one cases, or about 12 percent of the total. This collaboration suggests that the party played a role in the "formal" terror system, at the very least by passing on material to the Gestapo.¹⁰ "Informally," of course, the party tolerated, directed, and even sponsored all kinds of actions aimed at the Jews.

There is no question, however, that for the everyday activity of the Gestapo denunciations represented the single most important factor in initiating cases. Another point worth noting is that no source of information could be discov-

membership in the Gestapo of about twenty thousand. At the end of 1944, for all of the territory of the Third Reich there were approximately thirty-two thousand persons serving in the Gestapo; three thousand of these were administrative officials and 13,500 were workmen or clerks. See my *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1990), p. 44.

⁹ The case files for the Rhine-Ruhr jurisdiction of the Gestapo, whose headquarters were in Düsseldorf, are located in the Nord-Rhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (cited hereafter as HATA Düsseldorf). The files for Würzburg are in the Staatsarchiv-Würzburg (cited hereafter as STA-Würzburg) and pertain also to all of Lower Franconia. The case files from Neustadt an der Weinstraße are now located in the Landesarchiv-Speyer (cited hereafter as LA Speyer) and cover all of the Palatinate.

¹⁰ For all of the above see Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, pp. 130 ff.

ered in an additional twenty dossiers—11 percent of these files. Such dossiers open with a phrase like “This office has been informed” or “It has been discovered,” without saying more. It is very likely that an “ordinary citizen” (a non-official or non-party member) provided the tip but that the Gestapo could not ascertain, or for some reason did not note, the identity of the informant. Given the usual attention to detail in these files, any information that had come from the regular police and/or other official or party channels almost certainly would have been acknowledged by the Gestapo. So when no source can be determined, it is fair to assume that it was either a civilian informer or merely a rumor that circulated thanks to loose tongues or idle chatter. When “agents” of the Gestapo did pass along tips, which was very rare, this information is mentioned in the file. If the cases with “no source” were included with the denunciations from the population, it would mean that nearly 70 percent of Gestapo cases enforcing Nazi racial policies aimed at isolating the Jews could be traced to the participation of denouncers. But even without adding these cases, it is clear that informing by “ordinary” Germans played a crucial role.

Since 1990 I have broadened my research beyond Würzburg and Lower Franconia to include Düsseldorf and the Rhine-Ruhr area, where I have investigated the files of Polish foreign workers, particularly the cases of those accused of “forbidden contact” with Germans.¹¹ The object of this ongoing investigation is to look at other minority groups regarded as “racial enemies” under Hitler’s dictatorship and to study what happened in another social milieu.

If, behind the scenes, Nazi planners drew up schemes for the “extermination through labor” of the Poles, short-term contingencies made it necessary to exploit them. Some were brought to toil in Germany, and by August 1944 there were 1.6 million of them in the country.¹² A large contingent ended up in the jurisdiction of the Düsseldorf Gestapo,¹³ where official policy and police instructions portrayed them as “racially foreign and inferior.”¹⁴ On arrival in

¹¹ Reinhard Mann’s uncompleted but oft-cited study excludes such groups as the Jews and foreign workers, with dubious justification offered in a footnote. See his *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich: Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft im Alltag einer rheinischen Großstadt* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), p. 105, n. 27.

¹² About two-thirds of the Poles were male. See Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des “Ausländer-Einsatzes” in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin, 1985), p. 271, table 42, and p. 272, table 43. There were 5.7 million civilian foreign workers in Germany at that time.

¹³ There were 145,946 Poles in Rhineland and Westphalia in September 1944, of a total of 558,967 foreigners there. See *ibid.*, p. 272: Herbert’s figures are for Westphalia, North and South, Essen and Düsseldorf. In all, 2,137,137 Polish men and women at one time or another were “forced workers” inside Germany. Christoph U. Schminck-Gustavus, “Zwangsarbeitsrecht und Faschismus: Zur ‘Polenpolitik’ im ‘Dritten Reich,’” *Kritische Justiz* 13 (1980): 1.

¹⁴ Poles were subject to German law, but on top of that they were subject to special *Justiz*. The basic study here is Diemut Majer, “*Fremdvölkische*” im Dritten Reich (Boppard

Germany Poles were told not only that any socializing with Germans was taboo but also that those found guilty of having sexual relations with a German (female or male) would be executed.¹⁵ Marked with badges—a purple *P*—on their clothing, consigned to town, village, or farm like slaves, Poles were warned that failure to work zealously would be punished in a concentration camp. Employers were told to ensure that fraternization at the work site was kept to what was unavoidable.¹⁶

Threats of draconian punishment were accompanied by confinement in camps or barracks as much as possible.¹⁷ Yet there were complications: Poles had settled in the Rhine-Ruhr area before 1914, there were religious bonds with the German residents, and some degree of popular sympathy developed for the newcomers. Also, most Poles were employed in agriculture, billeted in villages or out of public view on the farms themselves, and, as if to preserve the illusion that they had volunteered to work in Germany, they were permitted a modicum of leisure.¹⁸

The Gestapo in Düsseldorf created a file system that by 1945 comprised fifty-two categories, arranged according to the “enemy,” “crime,” or “racial” group involved. Under “foreign workers” there are thousands of dossiers. I want to focus here on just one of the subcategories under “Polish foreign civilian workers”—namely, that pertaining to “forbidden contact” (*Verbotener Umgang*) with Germans. This “crime” was similar to the one I analyzed with re-

am Rhein, 1981). They were also subject to “police measures.” See, e.g., Reichssicherheitshauptamt to Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer usw., “Strafrechtspflege gegen Polen und Angehörige der Ostvölker,” November 5, 1942, HSTA Düsseldorf, RW 36/10, 71.

¹⁵ Indeed, numerous public hangings were carried out—arranged, like the “defamation” of the German women involved, to achieve maximum public relations effect. The exact number of *Einzeltötungen* of Poles is not known. Local and regional studies suggest that many more were killed than is usually suggested in the literature. For a brief examination of popular reactions to the executions, see Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, pp. 232 ff.

¹⁶ The phrase is “jeder gesellige Verkehr.” For all of the above, see R58/1030, 28 ff. “Schnellbrief” to local Stapo, March 8, 1940, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R58/1030, 28 ff., and 42 ff. Wages and division of labor in the workplace should reinforce the racial hierarchy of “master race” and “subhumans.”

¹⁷ Some factories had dozens of “camps,” some containing over one thousand people. At one time or another there were more than twenty camps in the city of Düsseldorf with a hundred or more persons confined in them, but there were many more camps than that. See Peter Hüttenberger, *Die Industrie und Verwaltungsstadt*, vol. 3 of *Düsseldorf: Geschichte von den Ursprüngen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 1989), pp. 640–41. Inside the camps the Gestapo recruited confidential informants from among the foreign workers to help with policing. For Düsseldorf, see, e.g., HSTA Düsseldorf, RW 36/12.

¹⁸ By mid-1944 more than two-thirds of the Poles were employed in agriculture. Herbert, p. 271, table 42.

gard to isolating the Jews in Germany, and I have selected it to facilitate comparisons. Socializing with people from western Europe was not “desired” and, in fact, was specifically criminalized for Poles and others from eastern Europe lest such contacts develop into friendly or sexual relationships.¹⁹ Having “forbidden contact” with Poles, like being “friendly to the Jews,” was a vague catchall covering a multitude of sins and reflected the intention to enforce not only the letter but also the spirit of the laws. I located 165 cases of “forbidden contact” between civilian Poles and Germans for the Rhine-Ruhr jurisdiction of the Gestapo. Actually, these are the files of the Germans involved, not the Polish men and women, whose dossiers are missing. I selected eighty-six of these by a random sampling technique—half of them in all. Here I want to pay particular attention to how infringements were detected and brought to the attention of the Gestapo.

The result that stands out is that the largest single number of cases (forty of the eighty-six, or 47 percent) began with denunciations from civilians acting in nonofficial capacities. If a phrase like “it has been observed” was in a letter from the rural police to the Gestapo, I classified the case as initiated by the police rather than as a denunciation, even when there are solid grounds in the file for concluding that a citizen almost certainly had informed the police, who passed along the tip. Unless specific evidence indicated that a citizen did the informing, I gave the police or other authorities the “credit” for starting the case. Even so, denunciations from the population were responsible for more cases than all police, state, or Nazi Party authorities put together. The extent of these denunciations suggests considerable social involvement in the terror system at the grassroots level.

In this sample, thirteen of the eighty-six case files provide no evidence of the source of information, but they almost certainly derived from civilian informers. If one were to add these cases to those that were definitely identifiable as denunciations, it would mean that about 60 percent of the Gestapo files in this sample began with a denunciation. Even the more cautious minimum figure, however—about 45 percent of all these cases—shows broad social participation in the terror system.

Not a single case in this sample resulted from the observations of the Gestapo-Düsseldorf and its spies, and only four began with statements made at interrogations. Other control organizations such as the city police or rural gendarmerie informed in twelve of the eighty-six cases. No tips came from the SS, apart from one from the Secret Service (SD). Altogether, the vaunted Gestapo and police network detected only sixteen cases (19 percent of the total).

Information provided by state and communal authorities—most notably the

¹⁹ See Gestapo Düsseldorf to Aussendienststellen, November 17, 1942, HSTA Düsseldorf, RW 36/d42.

post office, which opened mail—initiated seven additional cases against the Poles. And businesses (more specifically, guards on the premises), were responsible for six more. Nazi Party organizations—or, to be more accurate, usually a member of a party organization such as the Hitler Youth—provided tips that originated four additional files.²⁰ Again, although there are good grounds for including denunciations from party members with all other denunciations, I wanted to single out informing from private persons. Also, it might be thought that even party members represented an institutional aspect of the terror system.

I have also completed an analysis of seventy-three randomly selected cases in the Würzburg Gestapo files on “forbidden contact” with Polish civilian workers. For reasons of space I have excluded discussion of these findings from this article. However, the results of that analysis—particularly the rate of denunciations—parallel the research findings from the Rhine-Ruhr.

III. DENUNCIATIONS AND NONRACIAL “CRIMES”

As part of my continuing research I am also investigating the role of denunciations in the Nazi terror used against Germans themselves—that is, people not stigmatized as racial “outsiders.” It was easy for informers to prey upon the Jews and the Poles and anyone who would help, socialize, or just sympathize with them. All were vulnerable to denunciations. But what about policing German social and “political” life in general? I hypothesized that the Gestapo, which was in charge of this task, would have had a far more difficult time getting needed cooperation when it came to dealing with the behavior of “ordinary” Germans.

To what extent were denunciations used in the enforcement of “laws” in Nazi Germany, particularly during the war, that had little or nothing to do with race? I wanted to conduct a cross-regional analysis of Lower Franconia and the Rhine-Ruhr with the only other region for which Gestapo files survive—namely, the Palatinate, whose Gestapo headquarters was in Neustadt an der Weinstraße.

In order to limit the scope of this research, since the number of potentially interesting and relevant cases is vast, I studied the enforcement of the innocuous-sounding “extraordinary radio measures” introduced during early September 1939. The radio decrees made it a serious offense—subject to the death penalty under some circumstances—to listen to foreign radio.²¹ These measures were part of an effort to uphold morale in order to prevent a repeat of the col-

²⁰ See, e.g., HSTA Düsseldorf, Gestapo 41327.

²¹ Senior officials, including some in the police, expressed all kinds of reservations and doubts about the measure, including how it could be enforced. See Reichsminister-

lapse that occurred in World War I. However, by 1939 many people had radios and there was hunger for news. Listening to the radio already had become a widespread social ritual fostered by the regime and it could take place in private. How would it be possible to stop Germans from tuning in, especially when the Allies took ingenious steps to make their broadcasts relevant to German audiences?

I studied a random sample of 226 cases drawn from the three Gestapo jurisdictions. What is remarkable is that 164 of them, or 73 percent of the total, began with an identifiable denunciation from the general population. I selected this crime for closer analysis because I wanted to study a measure that had as little as possible to do with race or political issues. It is often assumed that anti-Semitism or some other form of racism lay behind citizen collaboration with the Nazi regime. In fact, the rate of denunciation in the sphere of nonracial "crimes" was proportionally greater than that involved in enforcing racial policies aimed at the Jews and the Poles.

Other studies now under way or nearing completion that examine the role of denunciations in Gestapo enforcement of political "crimes" that had little or nothing to do with race issues are beginning to confirm this finding. For example, Gerhard Paul's analysis of Gestapo dossiers dealing with the "crime" of listening to foreign radio, now preserved in the Special Court records of Kiel, shows that just over 80 percent of the 121 cases he studied began with a denunciation.²² Paul's and Klaus-Michael Mallmann's accounts of the Saarland suggest a similar pattern there.²³ Another analysis, which deals with Gestapo enforcement of the so-called malicious gossip law in the Rhine-Ruhr, shows that nearly 60 percent of the 261 Gestapo cases studied began on the basis of a named denouncer.²⁴ And Eric Johnson's analysis of records from the Special Court in Cologne (511 cases) and from the Gestapo in Krefeld (122 cases) shows that just over 60 percent of all cases dealing with matters other than the "Jewish question" began with denunciations. If the anonymous denunciations he found were added, the figure would be closer to 70 percent.²⁵

ium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, Bundesarchiv Abteilungen Postdam, 630, 174.

²² Gerhard Paul, *Die Gestapo in Schleswig-Holstein* (Hamburg, 1996).

²³ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, *Herrschaft und Alltag: Ein Industrieviertel im Dritten Reich* (Bonn, 1991), pp. 238–41, and their "Gestapo—Mythos und Realität," in *Die Ohnmacht der Allmächtigen*, ed. Bernd Florath, Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle (Berlin, 1992), p. 105.

²⁴ Bernward Dörner, "Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft und 'Heimtücke': Untersuchungen zu den Auswirkungen des 'Heimtücke-Gesetzes' vom 20.12.1934 am Beispiel der Stadt Krefeld" (*Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit*, Berlin, 1987), p. 90. This study excludes anonymous informers.

²⁵ Eric A. Johnson, "Gender, Race and the Gestapo" (paper presented at the conference "Gender and Crime in Britain and Europe," London, April 3, 1995), table 3.

So the assumption that the Gestapo might have a more difficult time obtaining denunciations in nonracial areas of social life does not hold up. Denunciations that were sent to the Nazi Party, at least to judge by one recent local study, show a similar preponderance of nonracial over race-oriented concerns. In her recently published analysis of 292 letters of denunciation sent to the Nazi Party in Lippe, Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann suggests that, while the largest single "offense" (just over one-quarter of the total) involved forbidden or undesired contact with Jews, virtually all the rest dealt with nonracial issues.²⁶ However, it is clear that care should be taken in generalizing about the nature and scope of denunciations in Nazi Germany, especially in the war years, on the basis of this sample of letters to the party, given how infrequently issues such as those stemming from "war measures" acts or those pertaining to foreign workers were mentioned by these denouncers, when in fact such matters dominated the operation of the Gestapo during the height of the terror.

Just why the rate of denunciations was proportionally greater in the nonracial sphere than it was with regard to racial issues is an important question.²⁷ Although further research is called for, at least four or five interrelated factors influenced the varying rates of denunciations elicited with regard to nonracial crimes compared to those that offended against anti-Semitic "laws."

1. *Opportunities for anti-Semitic denunciation.* Jews lived mainly in clusters in Germany and the general population did not have a chance to inform about possible breaches of racist measures they could claim to have witnessed directly. As the German Jews emigrated and/or were forcibly deported, such claims, and even pretexts for informing on Jews and people who offered them help or sympathy, diminished further. Of course, as is only too well known, anti-Semitism without Jews is entirely possible.

2. *Degree of direct Gestapo involvement.* The Gestapo was involved to a much greater degree when the "Jewish question" was at issue. This was the highest racial priority and to some extent the top political priority as well, so of course the Gestapo itself was more actively involved. One suspects that there was also more direct Gestapo involvement in cases against "hard-nosed" political opponents such as the Communists and in cases involving open opposition, such as the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler.

²⁶ See Diewald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation* (n. 3 above), pp. 62–122, esp. p. 63, table 1, and p. 91, table 2.

²⁷ Johnson, "Gender, Race and the Gestapo," also found this variation. In another sample (of seventy-three Krefeld Gestapo cases that involved the persecution of Jews) he found that 47 percent began with denunciations and a further 7 percent came from anonymous tips. Johnson excludes from his analysis cases where no source of information can be established; of a total of ninety Gestapo cases on the "Jewish question," seventeen (or almost 20 percent) were of this type.

3. *Timing.* The official drive to isolate Jews in Germany took place mainly before the war, and by September 1939 most either had left or been forced out of the country. Those who remained were deported two years later. Beginning at almost the same time, the terror system—in which denunciations constituted a vital ingredient—spread as never before. With the steady criminalization of various aspects of German social life, opportunities to relay information about transgressions of all kinds also increased proportionally.

4. *Expansion of the circle of vulnerability among Germans.* While not everyone could be accused of sympathizing with the Jews or of rejecting some aspect of Nazi anti-Semitism, for example, virtually everyone had access to a radio or was vulnerable to a charge of “malicious gossip.”

5. *Opportunities for denunciations against Polish workers.* Certainly the arrival of the Poles coincided with the deepening terror. However, many Poles were confined in camps of one kind or another and were therefore to some extent out of sight of many potential denouncers. There was also more official involvement in policing foreign workers. And there was even a brake on denunciations of foreign workers, since their labor was desperately needed at the time.

A final point should be made about the role of the Gestapo in policing the radio measures: the Gestapo and its mythical “spy network” were responsible for only six such cases in the three districts over the course of the war. Some of these were inquiries from other Gestapo jurisdictions or all-points bulletins. There were only two times when the Gestapo discovered cases on its own in this sample: once more or less by chance in the course of a police “roundup,” and once when an official overheard a conversation on the bus on his way to work.²⁸

What can be said about police-detected cases in these samples of cases dealing with the Jews, the Poles, and the nonracial radio measures? With regard to enforcing policies and various “measures” aimed at isolating the Jews and the Poles, the police network, including the Gestapo, was responsible for about 20 percent of the cases in each sample. My study of the radio measures shows that the entire police network accounted for only about 10 percent of these cases.²⁹ Such a relatively small amount of “active” police work in tracking nonracial crimes of ordinary citizens can also be seen in an extensive study of “malicious gossip” handled by the Gestapo in the Palatinate, which shows that

²⁸ Gestapo 2613, LA Speyer; Gestapo 42516 and 55490, HSTA Düsseldorf.

²⁹ Police other than the Gestapo found information that led to eight cases (4 percent of the total). This occurred most frequently when uniformed police saw windows improperly darkened at night and during their inquiries overheard a telling phrase or two coming from a foreign radio broadcast.

they came up with only six out of 660 of such cases, and that the police network as a whole was responsible for less than 8 percent of them.³⁰

If these findings hold up, it would seem that at least 80 percent of all Gestapo cases resulted from sources outside the ranks of the police. If we look at all three of the samples I have investigated here in detail, the Gestapo on its own came up with information to originate forty-four cases out of a total of 560—8 percent of the total—and in most of these—thirty-seven of the forty-four cases—the information came from interrogations of people already in custody.³¹

This relatively low rate of “active” police detection and investigation would support the hypothesis I have put forward elsewhere that the Nazi police were by and large reactive rather than active.³² The Gestapo was important to the terror, both for the reputation it gained for mistreating men and women in its grasp and for setting a new tone for the police. Certainly its responsiveness and (generally) positive attitude toward information provided by denouncers represented a major change from the pre-1933 era, and this new attitude must have fostered denunciations. And we should not forget that the Gestapo was very active with regard to certain groups, especially the Communists in Berlin, Hamburg, and elsewhere. Nor should we overlook the fact that the Gestapo went into high gear in the wake of the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, and it brought to bear all the police expertise it could muster to track down suspects.³³ Without underestimating the importance of this police activity, however, I would argue that at least for the routine operation of the Gestapo such actions were more the exception than the rule.

These findings about the role of denunciations in the everyday operation of the police, and my characterization of the Nazi police as generally reactive and greatly reliant upon help from the outside, does put into further question at least some of our understandings of the very notion of a “police state” and all that concept implies.

What about patterns of denunciations to the Gestapo and other forms of self-policing across the Rhine-Ruhr, Lower Franconia, and the Palatinate? Much

³⁰ Eginhard Scharf, “Justiz und Politische Polizei,” in *Justiz im Dritten Reich während der Jahre nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft im Gebiet des heutigen Landes Rheinland-Pfalz* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 611–711, esp. p. 685.

³¹ The total of 560 Gestapo case files includes eighty-six cases of “forbidden contact” with Poles in the Rhine-Ruhr and seventy-three cases in Lower Franconia, 175 “undesired contacts” with Jews, and 226 “radio measures” cases.

³² Dr. Werner Best, one of the key Gestapo leaders behind the scenes, claimed it was mainly reactive. See Nachlaß Werner Best, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NL 23, vol. 4, 60.

³³ For useful reminders of this aspect of the Gestapo, see the contributions in *Terror, Herrschaft und Alltag im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Brigitte Berlekamp and Werner Röhr (Münster, 1995).

research remains to be done, but it is worth offering some tentative conclusions. These regions vary in economic structure, social milieu, religious background, and political affiliation, including levels of support for Nazism. The Palatinate was the "brownest" of the three—that is, the one that offered the most support for Nazism—and its citizens had a slightly higher propensity to denounce. However, the "blackest" (most Catholic) of the three districts—the one around Würzburg—was nearly the same. At least with regard to denunciations in the enforcement of the radio measures decree, there seem to have been remarkable parallels. With all due caution, one may conclude that the extent to which "ordinary" citizens participated in denunciations seems to have been similar in different regions, and it is a reasonable hypothesis that this was the national pattern.

How were denunciations conveyed to the Gestapo in all three of these regions with regard to the foreign radio measures? The short answer is that, just as in the samples of cases dealing with the Jews and the Poles, nearly every conceivable means was used. At one end of the scale there were letters, either signed or anonymous, sent to the Gestapo or to some institution of the party or the state, including the Ministry of Justice in Berlin and even Himmler himself. Tips were also offered less directly, to local or regional branches of the party and/or to one of its affiliates. But in many cases one or more people went personally to the offices of the Gestapo to give information. A denunciation could be aimed at one or two people or sometimes at as many as a half-dozen people at the same time.

If we look at the content of the denunciations of suspected breaches of the radio measures, additional aspects of self-policing come to light. Germans became conscious of and self-conscious about language. In conversations about the war, they not only had to guard against incautious remarks as to its cause, course, and likely outcome; they also had to watch what they said lest it betray that their source of information might be foreign radio. Again and again in the files denouncers refer to the "way people spoke," from which their listeners deduced—often incorrectly—that the speakers must have listened to forbidden broadcasts.³⁴

What about the motives of the denouncers in this particular sample? It would be improbable and unrealistic to suppose that any single motive was at work. Should we at least regard the provision of denunciations as a measure of popular consensus or a sign of general agreement with the regime, as did the Socialists in exile in the 1930s?³⁵ Even that conclusion may be too simple, because at least some acts of informing ran directly counter to officially propagated social goals, like the "community of the people," which, at least in theory, was

³⁴ See Gestapo 58426, Gestapo 38569, and Gestapo 58336, HSTA Düsseldorf.

³⁵ Bernd Stöver, *Volksgemeinschaft im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf, 1993), p. 327.

supposed to be free of social conflict. In fact, the files provide less information than one might expect about the motives of the denouncers, and there are few cases in which the motive is unambiguous. And because some files contain denunciations from more than one person, there is often evidence of varying motives in the same case. When pressed by the Gestapo because of denials by an accused, some denouncers gave even more damning information, for reasons that are impossible to explain on the basis of the evidence in the dossier. One such ordeal led an accused man to commit suicide because he could not carry on in the face of mounting denunciations from neighbors.³⁶

The motivation behind a denunciation was definitely of secondary interest to the Gestapo, except when the denunciation proved to be unfounded or ran up against contradictions, or when the Gestapo considered it a “knowingly false accusation.” More importance was attached to obtaining information by any and every means, for without it the police could not function.

Setting aside the many files that contain no evidence of motivation one way or the other, the motives of informants in cases where there is some evidence can be divided into two groups: affective and instrumental. This distinction should not be overdrawn because motives were often mixed. Reinhard Mann’s study of the Gestapo cases in Düsseldorf suggests that, of 213 denunciations he analyzed, only fifty (24 percent) were motivated by what he terms “system-loyal views (political motives).” More people (eighty of them, or 37 percent) informed for “private motives, resolving private conflicts”; and in eighty-three instances (39 percent of these cases) there was no evidence as to why information was offered. This means that for 76 percent of all these denunciations there is no evidence that the informers were motivated by Nazi ideology.³⁷

³⁶ See, e.g., Gestapo 16584 and 61077, HSTA Düsseldorf. On November 12, 1941, a seamstress wrote to the neighborhood branch of the Nazi Party for Essen-Center to accuse her neighbor, Herr H., a sixty-six-year-old invalid, of listening to enemy radio. She named witnesses and said she was prepared to place her room at the disposal of the Gestapo “in order to catch H. in flagrante.” The motives of one witness, Fräulein P. (a thirty-six-year-old artist), were opaque. She told the Gestapo in the presence of H. that she “was prepared to answer to her conscience and before the courts under oath.” Indeed, she added new denunciations, including that H. defamed Nazi leaders, said Germany could not and should not win the war, and said the policies against the Jews were wrong. By December 10, 1941, H. was in custody. After face-to-face encounters with his accusers, and hopeless denials, H. took his own life and was found dead in his cell at three o’clock on December 11.

³⁷ See Mann (n. 11 above), p. 295. There is substantial agreement in the findings of Diwald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation* (n. 3 above), p. 150, who suggests that “system-loyal” and/or Nazi “convictions” played a decisive role in only 30 percent of the 292 letters of denunciation to the NSDAP she analyzed, while 38 percent had a “private” or personal motive and 4 percent were anonymous (p. 136). Presumably, the rest had no discernible motive.

In the sample of cases dealing with the "radio measures," expressions of affective motives, such as belief in National Socialism or worship of Hitler, were also extremely rare. There are instances when such emotions were mentioned or when the citizen's duty to support the system was invoked, but as often as not, under scrutiny by the police, there turned out to be more instrumental and personal considerations at work—even in cases where the information was offered by Nazi officials.³⁸ One point is clear: denunciations were not simply an expression of rabid Nazism; nor, as I have shown with regard to the enforcement of Nazi anti-Semitism, was overt or obvious racism always the decisive factor. It does come as something of a surprise to see in these materials that relatively few people even bothered to make explicit references to the "right kinds" of motives, such as hatred of a stigmatized enemy or commitment to an endorsed or privileged "official" value, even when they were trying to take advantage of the situation for purposes of their own.

But whether or not affective motivation and/or attitudes of civic virtue as defined under Nazism may have lurked behind the acts of some informers on occasion, there is far more evidence of overt instrumental motives. Indeed, it seems safe to conclude that, in spite of the newly proclaimed social ideals, self-interest fueled the self-policing system.

In earlier studies I have suggested that many Gestapo informers played the race card to reap personal advantages of one kind or another. But this instrumental utilization of the Gestapo was at least as pronounced in the sample dealing with the nonracial crime of listening to foreign radio. Denouncers offered tips in order to get rid of enemies, rivals, and competitors. No social group and few social enclaves were entirely immune.³⁹ Informing tended to occur within social classes, neighborhoods, (apartment) houses, even within families. For example, informing was used extensively to gain advantages in marital conflicts,⁴⁰ especially when one party or the other was contemplating divorce.⁴¹ Denunciations might also be made when a divorce was already under

³⁸ Gestapo 5043, LA Speyer. A Hassloch Blockleiterin of the Nazi Frauenschaft said it was her duty to inform (on a fifty-year-old widow), but the Gestapo concluded the allegation was baseless and "ein infolge Feinschaft entstandenes unverantwortliches Geschwätz."

³⁹ See Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society* (n. 8 above), pp. 152 ff. For the view that social "inferiors" also used denunciations to the Nazi Party against their "betters," see Diwald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation*, pp. 136 ff.

⁴⁰ Gestapo 53387, HSTA Düsseldorf; Gestapo 13900, STA Würzburg; LA Speyer, Gestapo 2907.

⁴¹ For denunciations grounded also in such claims, see Gestapo 57013, HSTA Düsseldorf; and Gestapo 1341 and Gestapo 1925, LA Speyer. For a sister acting on behalf of an abused wife against the husband, see Gestapo 9395, STA Würzburg.

way, or when it recently had been granted.⁴² The personal aims in such cases ran from seeking material advantage to gaining emotional revenge.⁴³ In spite of official guidelines from the Gestapo and Minister of Justice to do everything possible to stop these kinds of denunciations, the flood could not be held back.⁴⁴ Another example of informing within families involved a father who repeatedly denounced his son to the police not only for listening to foreign radio but also for seeking to avoid military service.⁴⁵ There were sisters who turned in siblings merely out of anger⁴⁶ or from a curious sense of idealism;⁴⁷ a nephew who informed on his widowed aunt for no apparent reason;⁴⁸ and one cousin who sought revenge on another.⁴⁹ Representative of many cases between in-laws was an instance in which a man was denounced by his father-in-law, allegedly for listening to foreign radio, but in reality because of domestic conflicts.⁵⁰ In another case a woman informed on her son-in-law in what the Gestapo tersely called an “instrumental denunciation.”⁵¹

⁴² Gestapo 42295, HSTA Düsseldorf; Gestapo 2240, LA Speyer.

⁴³ Gestapo 68352, 64749, 42407, 45907, HSTA Düsseldorf; Gestapo 1872, LA Speyer.

⁴⁴ See Chef Sipo und des SD to all Gestapo: “Betrifft: Anzeigenerstattung von Verwandten untereinander, insbesondere bei Ehegatten,” February 24, 1941, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R58/243, 317 f.; and “Richterbrief,” (November 1, 1944), in *Richterbriefe: Dokumente zur Beeinflussung der deutschen Rechtsprechung, 1942–1944*, ed. Heinz Boberach (Boppard am Rhein, 1975), pp. 363–76.

⁴⁵ Gestapo 2570, LA Speyer. Investigation showed there was nothing to the charges; but the motive, according to the gendarme, was that “der Vater nun der Sohn gerne aus dem Haus haben möchte, um sich ein besseres Dasein zu verschaffen.”

⁴⁶ See Gestapo 60365, HSTA Düsseldorf. The denouncer said she lived in conflict with her sister (who had nine children), who explained, “Dieser Streit entstand dadurch, weil ich meine Schwester gefragt habe, ob mein Kind ein reines Hemdschen bekommen hat.”

⁴⁷ Gestapo 16582, HSTA Düsseldorf. A woman could not convince her brother that a certain station was really forbidden. Her motive: “Ich habe nur die Anzeige gegen meinen Bruder erstattet, um ihm zu beweisen, daß er nicht recht hat. Mein Bruder ist stets rechthaberisch und meint immer, was er sagt ist richtig.”

⁴⁸ Gestapo 2607, STA Würzburg. The forty-nine-year-old woman was kept in jail from December 5, 1941, until early in the new year.

⁴⁹ Gestapo 1517, LA Speyer.

⁵⁰ Gestapo 2260, STA Würzburg. The original denouncer committed suicide. The police concluded he had made “unwahre Angaben über seinen Schwiegersohn.”

⁵¹ See Gestapo 11250, STA Würzburg. “Die Anzeige ist nichts anderes als eine Zweckanzeige.” For an example of a man informing against his father-in-law, who was found guilty and given four years in a *Zuchthaus* by the court, see Gestapo 6524, HSTA Düsseldorf. The wife of the denouncer noted about his motives: “Die Anzeige ist nicht aus Gehässigkeit erstattet worden. Zwar sind in unserer Familie hin und wieder Streitigkeiten gewesen.” For an example of a case between a woman and her brother-in-law, see Gestapo 4272, LA Speyer; for a man who informed against the stepfather of his wife, see Gestapo 2222, STA Würzburg.

Denunciations were often used to resolve frictions between neighbors.⁵² One party or another might try, as one couple did, to prevail in a conflict that had begun over the rent by bringing up a "political crime" and thereby involving the Gestapo.⁵³ The landlord who was denounced in one such case was a member of the Nazi Party and the SS, which, however, gave him no immunity from this kind of instrumental denunciation.⁵⁴ In another case the evidence suggests that a group of people living in a house denounced a neighbor when they grew afraid that they would all end up in jail because one tenant was "crazy enough" to be listening to the radio at a volume the whole neighborhood could hear.⁵⁵ Other files merely conclude that the parties were "enemies."⁵⁶

These dossiers strongly suggest that the denunciatory atmosphere that developed in Nazi Germany affected more than just those people who were officially stigmatized on the basis of race, or even because of their past politics. A case from Essen illustrates the tangled webs that were woven in this new atmosphere. It began on July 22, 1941, with a letter to the Gestapo in which an employee in the court system "denounced himself." He felt it was inevitable that the Gestapo would soon be at his door. The problem began with a dispute with his wife, who was also embroiled in numerous conflicts with their neighbors—so much so that she is referred to by all in the file, including the husband, as "not quite right" in the head. During one argument with her husband she called out that he was listening to forbidden news, an accusation overheard by a male neighbor. The latter decided to act on this news when he subsequently had an argument with the woman himself. "In order to get some peace and quiet," as this man explained when he was later called in by the Gestapo, he had said to the woman: "You'd better be careful; otherwise I shall turn the tables on you and make you a witness against your own husband." The implication was that the husband would be denounced and the wife would have to testify. That was meant to be only an idle threat; the man said he would never have denounced the husband, whom he and everyone else held to be a "fine and upstanding person." However, when the husband heard of this threat he denounced himself, as he told the Gestapo, because of his vulnerable and public position at the local court and because he had "no neutral witnesses" who

⁵² See, e.g., Gestapo 58102, Gestapo 5574, Gestapo 38794, Gestapo 52146, HSTA Düsseldorf; Gestapo 8071, STA Würzburg.

⁵³ Gestapo 5317, LA Speyer. The landlord as the denouncer in this case passed on information given him by his wife, but he made it clear from the outset that he had been having all kinds of conflicts with these tenants. After a considerable investigation, the Gestapo decided there was insufficient evidence to proceed to court.

⁵⁴ Gestapo 4830, LA Speyer.

⁵⁵ Gestapo 58889, HSTA Düsseldorf.

⁵⁶ Gestapo 6223, LA Speyer. The Gestapo concluded that the two women here were "verfeindet."

could support his innocence. The wife soon admitted to the Gestapo that she had deliberately yelled out and spread rumors in order to damage his reputation and get rid of him.⁵⁷

This denunciatory atmosphere also invaded the conflicts and disputes between workmates in factories,⁵⁸ and farm workers who became involved in personal strife did not shrink from bringing the most serious political allegations against comrades. One such case is illustrative of the swiftness of the terror “system” in action. A milker working on a farm near Düsseldorf was denounced on October 3, 1939, for listening to Radio Moscow and for making unflattering comments about life in Nazi Germany. He was soon interrogated and his case was sent to the Special Court, but by November 20 the court said there was too little evidence to proceed to trial, pointing out that, even if the man could be found guilty, the matter should be dropped because his “crime” fell under a führer amnesty. But the Gestapo was not content with this decision, and, in an example of “police justice,” quietly ignored Hitler’s amnesty and “corrected” the court’s verdict by placing the accused in “protective custody” on December 2. Just over a week later he was sent (“for the duration of the war”) to a concentration camp, initially to Sachsenhausen; his death was reported on November 6, 1940.⁵⁹

Informing the Gestapo of allegations was also a temptation for fired employees seeking revenge,⁶⁰ such as one young woman who was dismissed as a servant because of petty theft.⁶¹ Some people tried to get the boss in trouble when they wanted to cover up their own crimes or just to leave his or her service.⁶² In spite of the often transparent instrumental motivations of so many of these denunciations, they were still investigated, often at great length and over a considerable period of time.⁶³

Denunciations took place even among friends and acquaintances, and they

⁵⁷ Gestapo 63380, HSTA Düsseldorf. In spite of her selfish motives and poor reputation, and his excellent one, the case was sent to the Special Court, where it was dropped.

⁵⁸ Gestapo 9755, HSTA Düsseldorf. See also Gestapo 58353, where “hatred” between workmates was said by the Gestapo to have caused the denunciation.

⁵⁹ Gestapo 67565, HSTA Düsseldorf.

⁶⁰ Gestapo 47042, HSTA Düsseldorf. See also Gestapo 5249, LA Speyer, for a case from late 1944, fully investigated, where a fired employee denounced the employer and his wife. This case was investigated at length, even though the credibility of the denouncer should have been obvious from the fact that he was mentally disturbed and had been dismissed from the *Wehrmacht* “als geisteskrank.”

⁶¹ Gestapo 6939, LA Speyer.

⁶² Gestapo 5745 and Gestapo 4032, LA Speyer.

⁶³ One twenty-six-year-old woman’s lack of credibility over the years was summed up by the Gestapo by terming her a psychopathic liar. Her denunciation of her landlady, almost certainly to avoid paying the rent, was investigated seriously. See Gestapo 13226, STA Würzburg.

did not cease in the face of the mythical solidarity of the *Stammtisch*. One man at the evening gathering in the pub “made it evident to the five or six acquaintances by how he spoke” of events on the war front that he must have been listening to foreign news.⁶⁴

From other studies we are beginning to see that denunciations also found their way inside the German army, long thought of as one of the social enclaves more or less resistant to this kind of informing.⁶⁵ The impression gained by historians who have studied many cases of the (vaguely defined) crime of “undermining the will to win” (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) which often entailed little more than uttering incautious remarks—a total of thirty to forty thousand soldiers were found guilty by military courts—suggests that these soldiers were caught mainly because of investigations that began with a denunciation.⁶⁶

Soldiers enjoyed no special immunity with the population when they returned to the “home front,” either. A study of the Saarland shows, in fact, that all of the cases of “undermining the will to win” prosecuted in that region began with denunciations from the population, including neighbors, friends, and even wives and mothers. Their motives remain obscure for the most part, but they appear to have ranged from the usual instrumental ones (revenge seeking, envy, personal conflict) to political fanaticism and fear of impending defeat.⁶⁷

The widespread use of denunciations has to be seen in the cultural and social context of an interventionist system that fostered instrumental relations between citizens and regime. The Nazi system of party and state was certainly repressive and highly invasive, but it was almost immediately “normalized” by many people as they began to accept it as part of the structure of everyday life. It is easy enough for us to overlook the many ways in which the population began to count on and even solicit the intervention of the system in their daily lives and to calculate how, by offering information or appealing to certain official values, the “authorities” could be enticed or manipulated “from below”

⁶⁴ Gestapo 6142, LA Speyer. The phrase was “ließ . . . durchblicken.”

⁶⁵ See Manfred Messerschmidt, “Der ‘Zersetzer’ und sein Denunziant: Urteile des Zentralgerichts des Heeres—Außenstelle Wien—1944,” in *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, ed. Wolfram Wette (Munich, 1992), pp. 255–78.

⁶⁶ Manfred Messerschmidt and Fritz Wüllner, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz im Dienste des Nationalsozialismus* (Baden-Baden, 1987), p. 143; Norbert Haase, “Aus der Praxis des Reichskriegsgerichts: Neue Dokumente zur Militärgerichtsbarkeit im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 39 (1991): 379–411; Bernward Dörner, “‘Der Krieg ist verloren!’ ‘Wehrkraftzersetzung’ und Denunziation in der Truppe,” in *Die anderen Soldaten*, ed. Norbert Haase and Gerhard Paul (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 105–22.

⁶⁷ See the study of the Saarland, Gerhard Paul, *Ungehorsame Soldaten: Dissens, Verweigerung und Widerstand deutscher Soldaten (1939–1945)* (St. Ingert, 1994), p. 106.

into acting on their behalf. This point was brought out in a lengthy report of July 20, 1942, about “unnecessary demands on the authorities by the population.”⁶⁸ From all over the country, requests, supplications, and complaints were made to the authorities (*Behörde*). Even when such entreaties to party and state proved fruitless they were repeated endlessly or redirected elsewhere. Some people denounced each other so often that only direct threats to send both parties to a concentration camp put a stop to it. Business competitors, such as one in Breslau who accused another of “incorrect” practices, brought the most serious possible charges before ten different authorities, from the city administration, magistrate, and local and regional Nazi Party headquarters to the attorney general and the Gestapo, as well as to three different professional bodies and a branch of the *Wehrmacht*. This example highlights just some of the ways in which citizens acted on the new opportunities that opened up; they were not merely passive or dependent.

Indeed, letter writing to the “authorities” became a much favored form of citizen activity in Nazi Germany, as it evidently did also in other dictatorships of the twentieth century.⁶⁹ Hitler’s chancellery, for example, received at least one thousand letters and petitions every working day, and according to the postwar testimony of one official there might have been twice that many.⁷⁰ Citizens used such opportunities “to speak to the führer,” free from bureaucratic and other constraints, to demonstrate their loyalty, to express some wish, or to seek some favor. People also sent letters with similar aims to other Nazi leaders, from Himmler to Goebbels. Letters to the editors of national, regional, and local newspapers were frequent, and it was not only the ones sent to the more notorious Nazi rags like *Der Stürmer* that had specific denunciatory content—highlighting how some merchant sold goods to Jews, for example, or how a particular citizen failed to accept the spirit of Nazi anti-Semitism.⁷¹

Further indications of citizen activity in the form of letter writing can be seen in memoranda from the Higher Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) to its regional headquarters. For example, on February 5, 1942, the OKW

⁶⁸ The phrase is “unnötige Beanspruchung der Behörden durch die Bevölkerung.” See Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS, 1938–1945* (Herrsching, 1984), 10:3968–79.

⁶⁹ See Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* (Spring 1996): 78–105.

⁷⁰ See Jeremy Noakes, “Philipp Bouhler und die Kanzlei des Führers der NSDAP: Beispiel einer Sonderverwaltung im Dritten Reich,” in *Verwaltung contra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers*, ed. Dieter Rebentisch and Karl Teppe (Göttingen, 1986), pp. 208–36, esp. p. 221. From 1937 to 1940, 229,101–294,568 letters per year were sent in by citizens. For the larger figure, see the evidence cited in Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: “Euthanasia” in Germany, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 93.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Fred Hahn, *Lieber Stürmer: Leserbriefe an das NS-Kampfbblatt 1924 bis 1945* (Stuttgart, 1978).

wrote about the “numerous” letters it had received, signed and anonymous, addressed to the army and even to Hitler, complaining about who was or was not being drafted. Some people pointed to younger men, others to older ones, who could and should be sent to the front. The OKW complained that there were many citizens who regarded any able-bodied male who was not in uniform as a shirker and denounced them for one reason or another. However, such men might very well be essential workers, employed, for example, in a munitions factory. The OKW ordered that such denunciations, including anonymous ones, had to be investigated if for no other reason than to halt social discord.⁷²

The Gestapo followed up on the flimsiest information, even though many denunciations were never substantiated enough to merit sending them on to the courts. One new study of a small sample of denunciations in Würzburg suggests that only about 20 percent of the Gestapo cases went before Nazified, and presumably receptive, courts; and of these nearly 80 percent were dropped because they were considered either trivial or without sufficient evidence.⁷³ Such findings have led some historians to suggest that the Gestapo was “inefficient.” However, great care needs to be taken here, because any evaluation would have to take into account not only the Gestapo’s “successes” in obtaining judicial verdicts but also its political successes in winning over or influencing popular opinion. A study of the Gestapo’s “efficiency” also would have to deal with the multiplicity of social effects it achieved, such as the rumors and gossip that terrorized at least some sections of the population and caused anxiety in anyone faced with the prospect of having to appear at Gestapo headquarters. Police in a terror regime thrive not only on what happens to victims before the courts but as much or perhaps even more on the stories and myths that spread about what happened or could happen to anyone who had a brush with the police. So we should not conclude too readily that the Gestapo was somehow “inefficient” because it did not always get judicial convictions.⁷⁴

The sparse direct contribution to police detection by both the Gestapo and the rest of the police network (discussed above) and their consequent reliance on sources outside police ranks, and especially on civilian denouncers, may help to account for the fact that many suspicions recorded in Gestapo files proved either totally groundless or at least dubious and may explain why a good number were dropped. False accusations and anonymous letters of denunciations were prevalent and, notwithstanding a multitude of efforts at all

⁷² Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 21-65/13 (a).

⁷³ See Gerhard Paul, “Kontinuität und Radikalisierung: Die Staatspolizeistelle Würzburg,” in Paul and Mallmann, eds. (n. 6 above), pp. 161–77.

⁷⁴ See Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz* (Paderborn, 1990), pp. 308–9; and Hans Robinsohn, *Justiz als politische Verfolgung* (Stuttgart, 1977), p. 78.

levels to stop them, the problem was never solved. The country's leaders, including Hitler, expressed alarm about denunciations at various times over the course of the regime, not least because this behavior contradicted the oft-espoused ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁷⁵

In spite of what might appear to be the "petty" nature of so many of these denunciations, we should not lose sight of the real terror that lurked around the corner. People who were turned in could be spied upon, their mail could be watched, and their neighbors could be asked to testify against them. When enough evidence was collected, the accused could be interrogated without recourse to a lawyer, kept in a holding cell more or less indefinitely without any rights, or sent to a concentration camp. By the time of the war years, anyone who denounced someone to the Gestapo had to know of its ruthless reputation and of the uncertainty of the outcome; they must have reckoned on the eventuality that accused persons could and did pay with their lives. Death sentences and other harsh penalties were reported in the press with growing frequency as a deterrent.

Signs of the denunciatory atmosphere that was part of the new zeitgeist were in evidence also within private businesses. As Harold James has pointed out, denunciations began to arise inside the Deutsche Bank and were offered not on racial or even political grounds, nor against "obvious enemies," but as in German society more generally for entirely instrumental reasons.⁷⁶ The very example James cites—in which management tried to combat the problem by announcing that it was not interested in stories about the intimate lives of its employees—suggests by contrast that the Gestapo and the Nazi regime, insofar as they tolerated and even fostered denunciations, thereby encouraged their growth.

Policing and self-policing activities also took place under the auspices of the Nazi Party and its numerous affiliates, such as the Hitler Youth, which assumed some police-like functions—most obviously and publicly by way of uniformed patrols (*Streifendienst*) through city, town, and countryside.⁷⁷ The Nazi Party itself—in search of a role in society at large after 1933, when its major function up until that point (namely, mobilizing the voters for elections) became increasingly redundant—also took on tasks that at least bordered on policing. Of course, the Nazi Party—along with the Sturm Abteilung (SA) and SS—was denied all formal executive powers (of arrest, search, confiscation,

⁷⁵ Dieter Rebentisch, *Führerstaat und Verwaltung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1989), p. 126. See also Connelly (n. 3 above).

⁷⁶ Harold James, "Die Deutsche Bank und die Diktatur, 1933–1945," in *Die Deutsche Bank, 1870–1995*, by L. Gall, G. D. Feldman, H. James, C. L. Holtfrerich, and H. H. Büschgen (Munich, 1995), pp. 342–43.

⁷⁷ See Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), pp. 47 ff.

confinement, and so on) after the Nazi revolution was consolidated in 1933.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, evidence from city and countryside suggests that local Nazi Party bigwigs (*Ortsgruppenleiter*, *Kreisleiter*) continued to exercise discretionary and even (informal) police-like powers. There was some blurring of responsibilities in that some local Nazi Party leaders were granted, or took over, the office of mayor, which in German cities carried important police powers. Although it may be an exaggeration to suggest that such party leaders were the “real” repressive power over the people, at least out in the countryside, it is certainly clear that such leaders could and did exercise considerable pressure (if rarely open police terror) over the population. They did this not merely by turning people over to and/or working closely with the Gestapo—although that certainly happened also—or even by acting as extensions of the Gestapo when the police were nowhere in sight, but also in other ways, such as applying direct or indirect social and economic pressure.⁷⁹

If we look even at the wartime activities of Nazi Party organizations in policing the “radio measures,” it would seem they were not as involved in the terror as has often been assumed. They provided evidence to the Gestapo, which then opened seventeen of these cases, or 8 percent of the total. But a word of caution is in order about this “organizational” activity. Most cases in this sample began when a member of some Nazi organization denounced the crime. Only rarely did the neighborhood party hacks (*Blockwart*, *Zellenwart*) overhear someone listening to the radio. To judge by the instances in this sample, these officials were less omnipresent than was often assumed in the myths of contemporaries.⁸⁰ Citizens in a terroristic regime often project onto such men in uniform, even the lowly block leader, far more power and influence than they actually possess or exercise. And from the surviving documents it can be deduced that citizens almost certainly tipped them off; these officials served merely as conduits.

However, it is true that the party in rural and urban centers alike received more denunciations than it actually turned over to the police. The party operated as an institution of both conflict resolution and patronage. It was invariably asked—by state and party institutions and even private persons—about the political “reputations” of persons applying for state jobs, or promotions, and this consultative function gave the local party considerable leverage. From June 1935 this role as local information disperser was formally conferred on the party’s leaders (*Hohheitsträger*), but in practice all kinds of officials in the

⁷⁸ For useful information on all these developments, see George C. Browder, *Foundations of the Nazi Police State: The Formation of Sipo and SD* (Lexington, Ky., 1990).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Zdenek Zofka, *Die Ausbreitung des Nationalsozialismus auf dem Lande* (Munich, 1979), pp. 300 ff.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Aryeh L. Unger, *The Totalitarian Party: Party and People in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 99–104.

party continued to be consulted about issues like the political “reliability” of candidates for jobs, promotions, and contracts.⁸¹ To fulfill these functions by rummaging around behind peoples’ backs, the party virtually invited denunciations from the population, whether from well-meaning citizens, rivals for jobs, “true believers,” or just malcontents.

IV. COMPARING THE GESTAPO AND THE STASI

The euphoria that was so marked inside Germany and abroad over the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was soon followed by harrowing revelations about the ubiquitous Stasi and its spy system. It is not entirely surprising that these disclosures about the Stasi have led many people, including historians outside Germany and even moderate east and west German commentators, to accept the view that a “culture of denunciation” had persisted in the GDR since the days of Hitler’s dictatorship.⁸² This and other contentions, particularly those about similarities between the Stasi and the Gestapo, call for critical analysis.

A brief word is needed on the institutional structure of the Stasi and on the numbers of people who were formally or informally linked to it. After the initial reactions of outrage came surprise and disbelief at its sheer (numerical) size and the scope of its activities. At the end there were about one hundred thousand full-time members in the organization.⁸³ Perhaps the most bile was spilled over the large number of ordinary people—neighbors, colleagues at work, companions in leisure time—who, it turned out, had been involved with the Stasi though not formally part of it.⁸⁴ There have been estimates of the number of “Unofficials” (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, or IMs) active at the end of

⁸¹ See, e.g., Gerhard Kratzsch, *Der Gauwirtschaftsapparat der NSDAP: Menschenführung, 'Arisierung,' Wehrwirtschaft im Gau Westfalen-Süd* (Münster, 1989), pp. 91 ff.

⁸² Joachim Gauck endorsed the idea that there had existed a “culture of denunciation” in eastern Germany since 1933: see Daniel Benjamin, “Keeper of a Haunting Past,” *Time* (February 3, 1992), p. 18. For a recent reformulation of the same point, see Jürgen Kocka, “Ein deutscher Sonderweg: Überlegungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR,” in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B40/94 (October 7, 1994): 45. See also Jürgen Habermas, “Bemerkungen zu einer verworren Diskussion,” *Die Zeit* (April 10, 1992), pp. 17–19; Eberhard Jäckel, “Die doppelte Vergangenheit,” *Der Spiegel* (December 23, 1991), pp. 39–43.

⁸³ Joachim Gauck, *Die Stasi-Akten* (Reinbek, 1991), pp. 27, 61; see also Bürgerkomitee Leipzig, ed., *Stasi Intern: Macht und Banalität* (Leipzig, 1991), p. 363.

⁸⁴ Some critics said, after the wall fell and the files began to be opened, that psychologists would have to invent a new concept called *Aktenneid* (file envy)—i.e., envy of those who had found that there were files on them. The envious wanted to discover files on themselves to prove their own “resistance” retroactively. See Lutz Rathenow, “Teile zu keinem Bild oder das Puzzle von der geheimen Macht,” in *Aktenkundig*, ed. Hans Joachim Schädlich (Berlin, 1992), p. 64.

the GDR that range between as few as one hundred thousand to as many as five hundred thousand individuals. On December 31, 1989, the last date for which reliable statistics appear to have survived, there were as many as 170,000 "Unofficials"—but these figures continue to be revised upward.⁸⁵

There was enormous variety in the ranks of these "Unofficials," and the nature of their involvement changed over time.⁸⁶ Roughly 10 percent of them were "retired" each year and a new crop recruited in their place, so that within three to six years most were replaced, at least during the 1980s. This turnover indicates that a considerable number of citizens were directly involved at one time or another.⁸⁷ And although hidden devices were used to acquire information, "central to the activity [of the Stasi] stood the deployment of human beings; and the IM was the most important weapon against the enemy."⁸⁸ A former IM said that in the 1980s one in every eight persons in the country was formally involved in the effort to generate Stasi files, and that perhaps "a third of the population, more or less, had worked for the Stasi."⁸⁹ No profession, not even in the churches, appears to have been entirely immune from implication in the system.⁹⁰ One author observed that there was so much support for the Stasi that the dichotomy between victims and perpetrators did not stand up.⁹¹

What about the motives of the IMs? It is safe to say that a whole spectrum of factors led these people to participate in the Stasi system. Given the very large number of people who worked as IMs, a wide range of motives can be identified,⁹² as well as considerable variation in the duration and enthusiasm

⁸⁵ They were controlled by some twelve thousand full-time Stasi officials, so that most Stasi members (about 85 percent of the rest) had little to do directly with the "Unofficials." See Hansjörg Geiger, *Die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter: Stand der gegenwärtigen Erkenntnisse* (Berlin, 1993), p. 9. About 50 percent of all IMs were controlled at the local level and the other half from the MfS-Zentrale in Berlin. See Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *IM-Statistik* (Berlin, 1993), p. 17.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Peter Siebenmorgen, "*Staatssicherheit*" der DDR (Bonn, 1993), pp. 62–96.

⁸⁷ See Gauck, p. 64; and Geiger, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Geiger, p. 7.

⁸⁹ See Irena Kukutz and Katja Havermann, *Geschützte Quelle: Gespräche mit Monika H. alias Karin Lenz* (Berlin, 1990), p. 57.

⁹⁰ John S. Conway, "The 'Stasi' and the Churches: Between Coercion and Compromise in East German Protestantism, 1949–89," *Journal of Church and State* 36 (1994): 725–45, esp. 738, points out that it is now estimated that there were 113 IMs in the church out of about four thousand pastors in all of the GDR.

⁹¹ Jürgen Fuchs, "... Und wann kommt der Hammer?" *Psychologie, Opposition und Staatssicherheit* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 30–31.

⁹² For more on motives, see Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Der Gefühlsstau: Ein Psychogramm der DDR* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 23 ff.; Christina Wilkening, *Staat im Staate: Auskünfte ehemaliger Stasi-Mitarbeiter* (Berlin, 1990), p. 85; Lienhard Wawrzyn, *Der Blaue: Das Spitzelsystem der DDR* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 23–24.

of their commitment, their effectiveness as informers, the size and scope of rewards they garnered, and why they did or did not break with the Stasi.⁹³ From cases that have come to light thus far, it seems that some people were tempted by opportunities for personal enrichment, or merely by a chance to visit the West, while at the opposite end of the spectrum others were threatened, coerced, or even blackmailed into cooperating. Some went along, perhaps sincerely or self-deceivingly, to “prevent the worst,” telling themselves they could bring about improvements by “negotiating ‘preventatively’ with the system.”⁹⁴ The Stasi itself preferred people with “positive social convictions.”⁹⁵ In a number of strategically important social positions, such as those at the Humboldt University in Berlin, for example, most of those who worked as IMs appear to have done so precisely on these grounds.⁹⁶

The broad social participation in the policing of the GDR led a member of a citizens’ committee overseeing the dissolution of the Stasi to remark that “the only ones who are innocent are those who resisted, who tried to escape or were in prison.”⁹⁷ These statements, along with the statistics on the rates of turnover of the IMs, suggest the extent to which the GDR had become a self-policing society. In a sense, denunciation or informing from the general population had become institutionalized. Indeed, it was the revelations about the extent of this spying among friends, neighbors, colleagues, and even husbands and wives that led many people to talk about the “obvious” similarities between the GDR and Nazi Germany.

A common comparison drawn between the Stasi and the Gestapo involves the relationship each of them had to German society. Like the Gestapo—and all other modern police forces, especially those concerned with (broadly defined) “politics” and “subversion”—the Stasi could not have operated without the participation of the broader public. It is certainly true that if we wish to

⁹³ Joachim Walther and Gesine von Prittwitz, *Staatssicherheit und Schriftsteller: Bericht zum Forschungsprojekt* (Berlin, 1993), p. 20. Another study of 448 IMs in Gera shows the multiplicity of motives; see Andreas Schmidt, “Auskunftspersonen,” pp. 173–94. According to another writer, little pressure was exerted to win people as IMs; see Bärbel Bohley, “Die Macht wird entzaubert,” pp. 38–46. Both in Schädlich, ed. (n. 84 above).

⁹⁴ Hansjörg Geiger, quoted in Jane Kramer, “Letter from Europe,” *New Yorker* (May 25, 1992), p. 57. See also Kukutz and Havermann, p. 37; also Justus Werdin, ed., *Unters: Die Stasi: Berichte der Bürgerkomitees (Frankfurt/Oder)* (Berlin, 1990), p. 37.

⁹⁵ David Gill and Ulrich Schröter, *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit: Anatomie des Mielke-Imperiums* (Reinbek, 1993), p. 96.

⁹⁶ Hanna Labrenz-Weiss, “Die Beziehungen zwischen Staatssicherheit, SED und den akademischen Leitungsgremien an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin,” *German Studies Review*, special issue (1994): 131–45, esp. 138.

⁹⁷ See Nancy Travis Wolfe, *Policing a Socialist Society: The German Democratic Republic* (New York, 1992), p. 217. But IMs were also to be found in the prisons.

understand the functioning of the secret police we have to move beyond being overwhelmed by the monumental size of the Stasi—not least because, at the moment of collapse, the system never had more resources and personnel, was never larger, and thus never looked more impressive on paper.⁹⁸

One difference between the Gestapo and the Stasi can be revealed by looking at their attitudes toward “nonofficial” social participation by informants. The Gestapo, in spite of its ambiguous attitude toward denouncers, relied on information that was provided by such sources on a voluntary and occasional basis. Leaders of the Nazi police issued no more than a handful of guidelines and reminders in the press on the topic of denunciations, and in fact much of the concern was to warn people about offering false information or making careless charges. The Stasi, in contrast, dispensed to local leaders literally hundreds of regulations and guidelines pertaining to the unofficial informers—dealing with matters like recruitment, rewards, and duties. The regulations were renewed every ten years or so, and there was a host of follow-up directives. In 1989, for example, as the situation was growing more threatening for the regime with each passing day, there were an estimated seven hundred such regulations.⁹⁹

The Gestapo relied on denunciations from the population both directly and indirectly—in the latter case when information was passed to other authorities. At least officially and on the record, the Stasi regarded spontaneous informers with suspicion and skepticism. From the 1950s onward, according to policy directives, such people were themselves considered to be possible enemy agents.¹⁰⁰ To be sure, “occasional sources” gave some information to the Stasi, but this was considered by insiders, at least, to be “often unreliable” and “too subjective”; the aggression, zeal, or “hysteria” of some such informers could lead to their providing false or useless information.¹⁰¹ The rationale used by one Stasi official who was attempting to recruit an informer was as follows: “We need good people. People who can decide for themselves what is useful for this country and what is injurious. Not blind denouncers who pass along a few names. We need people who can tell us why this or that is going wrong in this country.”¹⁰²

From the late 1960s, therefore, Stasi boss Erich Mielke ordered local

⁹⁸ See Anne Worst, *Das Ende eines Geheimdienstes: Oder: Wie lebendig ist die Stasi?* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 11–17; and Manfred Schell and Werner Kalinka, *Stasi und kein Ende: Die Personen und Fakten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991), pp. 48–49.

⁹⁹ See Geiger (n. 85 above), pp. 7–8.

¹⁰⁰ See Richtlinie Nr. 21 (November 20, 1952), reprinted in *Die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter: Richtlinien, Befehle, Direktiven*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1992), 1:27.

¹⁰¹ Reinhardt O. Hahn, ed., *Ausgedient: Ein Stasi-Major erzählt* (Halle, 1990), p. 46.

¹⁰² F. Hendrik Melle, “I.M.,” in *Machtspiele: Literatur und Staatssicherheit*, ed. Peter Böhlig and Klaus Michael (Leipzig, 1993), p. 152.

branches not to sign up an “Unofficial” merely because of “favorable circumstances” (which is to say, because an opportunity presented itself); it should be clear from the beginning how that person could be used. Volunteers and zealots should be viewed with reservation. According to Stasi theory, at least, recruitment was to be carried out on the basis of the Cheka’s principle: “Every recruitment [of an informer] is tied to precise, concrete, politically oriented tasks and must be designed for the solution of these tasks.” Recruitment should take place when an “objective need” arose, and only then were candidates to be sought who met “the objective and subjective preconditions” required to complete precise “political-operative tasks.”¹⁰³ Of course, we have to be wary of accepting these remarks at face value. Although it might be true that the GDR was to some extent faithful to the Leninist tradition of suspecting and even combating “spontaneity,” scholars who have worked on Soviet history warn against accepting the Stasi’s self-description as following an alleged Cheka model (in which the mythical Cheka earnestly checks and organizes its sources) because this characterization bears little relation to the Cheka’s historical practices.¹⁰⁴

In any case, the Stasi devoted considerable attention to recruiting IMs, spending months and on occasion even years carrying out preliminary investigations and background checks. Stasi boss Mielke often alluded to the “wisdom” of such (alleged) Cheka procedures. Various kinds of reliability tests continued throughout the career of the IM. This thorough, systematic approach represents a dramatic contrast to the practices of the National Socialist period. The Stasi not only attempted to overcome the dysfunctional aspects of the procedures used in the Nazi era, when the Gestapo and numerous other public authorities were flooded with denunciations, many of them false or frivolous and more of dubious utility; it also endeavored to obtain the best possible sources and to avoid obvious pitfalls and inefficiencies.

There were certain parallels between the GDR’s “scientific socialist” aims for its planned economy and those for its political police system. In the Stasi regulations on the IMs, the words that recur (such as *planned, concrete, rational, quality control, precisely directed, effective, conspiratorial*) have a distinctly social-scientific ring to them. The intention of the Stasi seems to have

¹⁰³ The Cheka was the first political police agency of the Soviet Union, created under Lenin. See Richtlinie 1/68 (January 1968), in *Die Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter*, 1:161–73; and the Mielke speech (December 1975), in *ibid.*, 2:582.

¹⁰⁴ Thanks to Sheila Fitzpatrick and John Connelly for these comments. Readers are referred to Fitzpatrick’s article in this issue and the literature cited there (“Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s”). For the notion of Leninism fighting spontaneity, see Leszek Kolakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford, 1981), 2:387.

been to create a “scientific” and thoroughly modern approach to obtaining “complete coverage” of the country. In fact, for Stasi leaders who believed they were in a hostile world, surrounded by actual or potential enemies, it was self-evident that creating a ubiquitous spying system was the only way for the GDR to survive and to save Socialism from its enemies.¹⁰⁵

The “scientific” approach to informers in the GDR was to some extent grounded in law.¹⁰⁶ Concepts derived from the Marxist-Leninist theory of law were enshrined in the Code of Criminal Procedure. According to this theory, citizens had an important role to play in developing “the socialist state and legal consciousness” through their active participation in solving crimes. There was an implied duty to be on the alert and to report suspicions, and according to one recent study this suggested that in the GDR a citizen “had a legal obligation to aid the police.”¹⁰⁷ The legal code of Nazi Germany also encouraged citizens to inform: indeed, it made it a legal obligation to do so, but only when suspicion pertained to the most serious crimes, such as high treason. Even after the outbreak of war in 1939, leaders of the Nazi police were unable to obtain the government’s support to introduce a general duty to denounce. Reinhard Heydrich’s proposal for an organized “national reporting service” (*Volksmelddienst*) was rejected by the highest *Reich* officials on September 18, 1939.¹⁰⁸ Nor does Nazi incarceration practice seem to have been as “pedagogically” oriented as that in the GDR; rather, it carried on the older tradition of emphasizing punishment and deterrence over reformation and reeducation. That is, Nazi law, infused with racial and medical theories of criminology, aimed at quarantining offenders by declaring them to be enemies or opponents and removing them from the body politic. In contrast, the Marxist-Leninist legal doctrine of the GDR described criminals as those “left behind” (*die Zurückgebliebenen*) and thus tried to encourage informing in a socialist spirit of “rescuing” such lost souls for society.

However, given the motto that “everyone is a security risk,” the Stasi was not above treating “oppositional” persons outside the law.¹⁰⁹ In fact, as early as the 1970s the Stasi adopted clearly extralegal measures against individuals it regarded as “enemies” and attempted to discredit them in the eyes of col-

¹⁰⁵ See Hahn, ed., p. 90.

¹⁰⁶ For an introduction, see Karl Wilhelm Fricke, “Kein Recht gebrochen? Das MfS und die politische Strafjustiz der DDR,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B40/94 (October 7, 1994): 24–33.

¹⁰⁷ See Wolfe (n. 97 above), p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ For an account of the legal codes and failed efforts to change them by Heydrich, see Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, “Denunziantentum und Gestapo: Die freiwilligen ‘Helfer’ aus der Bevölkerung,” in Paul and Mallmann, eds. (n. 6 above), pp. 288–305.

¹⁰⁹ See Fuchs (n. 91 above), p. 13.

leagues, neighbors, friends, and family. Such tactics had devastating effects, particularly on writers and poets.¹¹⁰ Other people considered by the Stasi as actual or potential “enemies” were also victimized in these ways. At times, agents provocateurs were employed to establish intimate relationships with the spouses of suspect persons, with the aim of destroying their marriages and thus destabilizing these “enemies.”¹¹¹ The Stasi was also not above sending compromising photos and anonymous letters with false allegations to friends or neighbors, or fostering malicious gossip that the alleged “enemy” worked for the Stasi, was a counterrevolutionary, or had a “loose tongue” and could not be trusted. These operations were designed to mobilize ordinary men and women beyond the ranks of the police to put pressure on suspects and to destabilize those defined as enemies.¹¹² Such tactics set the Stasi apart from the Gestapo.

These kinds of Stasi campaigns amounted to nothing less than officially inspired stigmatization processes in which ordinary people were enticed or duped into playing parts. Such undertakings constituted a version of policing and self-policing not anticipated in the textbooks on modern police. No such approaches were adopted in the Nazi era. To be sure, social pressure was exerted or marshaled on occasion—for example, against spouses in mixed marriages with Jews—but such tactics were not employed quite so systematically as in the GDR. The preferred method under Nazism was the less “socialized,” more “individualized” one of marking, exclusion, confinement, and destruction. Public stigmatization was aimed primarily at “race enemies”: initially the Jews, and after the outbreak of war also the foreign workers from Poland and the East.

There were also similarities and differences in the nature of the victims of policing and informing in the two regimes. The full range of Gestapo activities can be divided into five main areas. With the aid of citizen denouncers and the rest of the police and Nazi Party network, the Gestapo focused on tracking down political opponents; pursuing everyday nonconformity; investigating “conventional criminality”; checking out infringements of administrative measures; and persecuting “outsiders,” especially members of groups like the Jews. In the GDR, campaigns against “enemies and opponents” were carried out with much less bloodletting, and there was simply nothing that came close to

¹¹⁰ Walther and Prittwitz (n. 93 above), pp. 1–2.

¹¹¹ For an exemplary case, see Ulrike Poppe and Gerd Poppe, “Ziel: Ein Intimverhältnis,” *Der Spiegel* (January 13, 1992), p. 30. For a detailed interview with one of the Stasi informers on the Poppes, see Kukutz and Havermann (n. 89 above).

¹¹² Classic cases of such approaches have been documented from the dossiers of people like Erich Loest and Reiner Kunze. See Erich Loest, *Die Stasi war mein Ecker-mann*, 5th ed. (Göttingen, 1992), pp. 50–53; Reiner Kunze, *Deckname “Lyrik”* (Frankfurt, 1990), pp. 87–89; see also Werdin, ed. (n. 94 above), pp. 71–72.

the activities that defined the Nazi terror, such as the persecution and extermination of racial groups and other social "out-groups." So the fate in store for those informed upon was different in the two regimes; and if one wishes to characterize informing the police as complicity—literally, "partnership in wrongdoing"—it is clear nonetheless that the gravity of the consequences of collaboration with the secret police was also radically different in the two dictatorships.

Was there such a thing as the denouncer as "social type" in the Gestapo and Stasi systems? If one looks at the social profiles of denouncers in Nazi Germany, it is safe to say that they tended to originate from the same social milieu as the denounced. More of those who appear in the Gestapo files come from the lower end of the social scale. It has to be recalled, however, that the police acted with more restraint when complaints came in about the "better" classes, who also had other avenues through which they could exercise social power. And, as Johnson has suggested, men tended to be more prominent as denouncers than women.¹¹³ In Diewald-Kerkmann's study, 80 percent of those who wrote letters of denunciation to the Nazi Party were male.¹¹⁴ In the "radio measures" sample I analyzed there was a more even split, but men still outdid women as denouncers.¹¹⁵ So, while denouncing was not always an overwhelmingly male proclivity, the notion that women were the "typical" informers in Nazi Germany is false.¹¹⁶ As for the GDR, 90–95 percent of all IMs of the Stasi were men aged 25–40. Gabriele Stötzer remarks caustically that women were refused, among other reasons, "because they were regarded as addicted to gossip [*klatschsüchtig*] or prone to emotion [*gefühlсанfällig*]." All but one of the twenty-five IMs in her own file were men.¹¹⁷

What about denunciations inside the ruling political parties of Nazi Germany and the GDR (another topic in need of research)? There are hints in the primary material and in some secondary literature that informing within the Nazi Party establishment was widespread. The party's "organizations" included the SA, SS, Nazi Frauenschaft, and others, and there were a number of "affiliated associations" as well (Lawyers', Teachers', and Doctors' Leagues,

¹¹³ Eric A. Johnson, "German Women and Nazi Terror: Their Role in the Process from Denunciation to Death" (paper presented at the International Association of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice, Paris, June 1993). He identifies about 20 percent of the denouncers as civilian females and about 60 percent as males; the rest came from officials or anonymous sources.

¹¹⁴ Diewald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation* (n. 3 above), p. 131.

¹¹⁵ There were eighty-six male and seventy-seven female informers and ten anonymous tips.

¹¹⁶ See Helga Schubert, *Judasfrauen* (Frankfurt, 1990). For a critical analysis, see Inge Marbolek, *Die Denunziantin* (Bremen, [1993]).

¹¹⁷ Gabrielle Stötzer, "Frauenszene und Frauen in der Szene," in Böthig and Michael, ed. (n. 102 above), pp. 129–37, esp. p. 134.

to mention several). All in all, the party establishment included more than a dozen such “legal entities.” Many of these organizations had not only their own disciplinary bodies but also their own “courts”; and on top of this elaborate and extensive court system was the Supreme Party Court (Oberstes Parteigericht). The party and its court system also kept a watchful eye over the entire civil service, from the Foreign Office and the massive German Labor Front (DAF) to the Propaganda Ministry and everything in between. Given the kinds of detailed aims and invasive desires expressed by the leaders of the Nazi Party, this complex internal self-policing—described in one account as a witch-hunt in search of the “disloyal,” the troublemakers, and especially those sympathizing with Jews—it could scarcely have operated without internal denunciations.¹¹⁸ Further investigation is needed, but it is likely that the party’s internal self-policing mirrored broader social processes at work during Hitler’s dictatorship.

Studies of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the GDR are only beginning. There were some 2 million members in the SED and, if it had followed the pattern typical of dictatorships, one would expect that party members had plenty of opportunities to report on each other’s “subversive activities.”¹¹⁹ Members had to write regular reports—part of the *Parteinformation*—and this represented a further dimension of the self-policing system. Indications are that the *Kreisleitungen* of the SED performed functions similar to those of the Nazi Party. Cooperation between local SED First Secretaries and the head of the Stasi was closer and more formalized in the GDR than cooperation between similar bodies in Nazi Germany: SED leaders worked hand-in-glove with the Stasi. Less clear at the moment is the precise role played by SED party members (beyond writing reports) within the *Kreisleitungen* in the policing of the country. At any rate, several writers have made the point that, notwithstanding the considerable number of full-time officials in the Stasi at the local level, cooperation of party members with all the institutions of party, state, and economy was thought by the regime to be essential, given the broad range of the Stasi’s goals. Indeed, a council at the district (*Kreis*) level regularly brought together all local political and “security” leaders. It looked and spoke like a miniature war council.¹²⁰ Precisely how these local councils functioned re-

¹¹⁸ See Donald M. McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler’s Management of Conflict in His Movement, 1921–1945* (Lawrence, Kans., 1974), esp. p. 140, for the notion of the witch-hunt for disloyal civil servants, which evidently intensified after 1936.

¹¹⁹ See Schell and Kalinka (n. 98 above), pp. 61 ff. Beyond the Stasi there were other official and semiofficial policing activities, not only those carried out under the auspices of the SED. See, e.g., Dr. Wolfgang Herger, exhead of Abteilung für Sicherheitsfragen im ZK der SED, in Ariane Riecker, Annett Schwarz, and Dirk Schneider, *Stasi intim: Gespräche mit ehemaligen MfS-Angehörigen* (Leipzig, 1990), pp. 109 ff.

¹²⁰ See Gill and Schröter (n. 95 above), pp. 63–66. The *Kreiseinsatzleitung* was led by the first secretary of the SED, but included one from each of the following: the local

mains to be investigated, but the aim was a thorough and rationalized (*lückenlos*) policing system. The Stasi developed a momentum of its own and, in spite of being formally under the leadership of the (local) SED, appears even there to have become increasingly independent by putting "security" issues above all else.

Hitler's dictatorship lasted only twelve years, half of them under exceptional wartime conditions, so there was insufficient time for denunciation to become routinized or institutionalized. However, the Nazi regime did propose a "scientifically justified" basis for the participation of citizens as informants, offering them a novel but quite systematic *völkisch* or fascist theory of the police in which they could play a part. Whereas the rationalization offered to the public early in the regime for the Gestapo and the concentration camps was the alleged threat posed by Communists and other political opponents, by the autumn of 1935 and thereafter the fascist theory of the police began to change and political opponents like the Communists, and even racial "enemies" like the Jews, were mentioned less and less as the Gestapo's mission was gradually broadened. Himmler, Heydrich, and others insisted again and again that the German people in general had to be brought to an understanding of the Gestapo's (changing) missions, and particularly of the part they themselves ought to play by cooperating with the police, keeping their eyes and ears open, and informing the authorities when their suspicions were aroused.¹²¹

The impression that emerges from the literature on the GDR—and other Central European states—is that the longer such regimes lasted, the more revolutionary zeal and improvisation dissipated, with numerous implications for citizen participation in the policing and security systems. Those in charge of the political police had more time to establish and improve the systems and to institutionalize denunciations, and the longer the regimes lasted, the more citizens came to terms with them. Furthermore, the Stasi and other parts of the system of domination (party and state) had more time to sink deeper roots and to spread through society in numerous ways, playing a role not only as repressor and persecutor but also as mediator of conflicts¹²² and as "paternalistic sponsor and dispenser of privileges, even a substitute for usual channels of interest articulation, which were closed in that patronized society."¹²³

head of the National People's Army (NVA); the head of the police office (*Volkspolizei-amt*); the head of the council of the district (*Rat des Kreises*); the head of the local Stasi (*Leiter der Kreisdienststelle des MfS*); the deputy secretary of the party; and the local person in charge of security of the SED.

¹²¹ For detailed citations, see my "Allwissend und allgegenwärtig? Entstehung, Funktion und Wandel des Gestapo-Mythos," in Paul and Mallmann, eds. (n. 6 above), pp. 47–70.

¹²² See Herbert Obenaus, "Stasi kommt—Nazi geht?" *Die Zeit* (August 7, 1992), p. 16.

¹²³ Habermas (n. 82 above), p. 18.

As long as it existed, there was a kind of Stasi image or myth not unlike that of the Gestapo. That image, perpetuated in part by rumors and gossip, was that the Stasi was ubiquitous. Everyone in the GDR had to come to grips with it.¹²⁴ Myths and the “paranoid fantasy” about its power and influence,¹²⁵ and whispers about the Stasi’s technical sophistication (as earlier about the Gestapo’s),¹²⁶ served in turn as informal reinforcement of its alleged omnipotence.¹²⁷ Joachim Gauck has pointed to the psychological impact of living in a world in which one might be under Stasi surveillance:¹²⁸ the possibility of being watched, and the uncertainty that accompanies that possibility, is the essence of the panoptic society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Any essay focusing on the role of denunciations in terroristic aspects of the German dictatorships cannot end without pointing out that to a considerable extent both of these systems attained a degree of loyalty from the population. Even if both the Gestapo and the Stasi represented the most important means for the preservation of these dictatorships,¹²⁹ hardly less significant was the acceptance by most people of the legitimacy of their governments and their willingness to comply and cooperate with the terror.

The sources of legitimation of the Nazi regime changed over time; they ranged from ending the Weimar “system” and bringing about economic recovery to restoring “law and order,” tearing up the hated Versailles international peace treaty system and reestablishing Germany as the dominant power on the continent. But the regime also made concessions, particularly to the working class, where they feared discontent might erupt. According to Tim Mason, it is the combination of terror, concessions to unrest, growth of legitimacy, and

¹²⁴ John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 178.

¹²⁵ See Maaz (n. 92 above), p. 23.

¹²⁶ A woman reported that the Stasi not only knew her dreams but had, she said, “built in sensors in my head and they clean out my brain through the telephone. Then I experience such an empty feeling in my head.” See Worst (n. 98 above), p. 109. A female medical doctor recalled of the Third Reich: “All the things one knew, that my husband told me, one kept *completely* secret, only in the family or with the most trusted people. You cannot imagine it at all. It was . . . One thought there are microphones everywhere and people listening. It was a terrible time.” See Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1993), pp. 373–74.

¹²⁷ For a contrasting insider’s report on the technological backwardness of the Stasi, see Wilkening (n. 92 above), p. 203.

¹²⁸ Gauck (n. 83 above), p. 26.

¹²⁹ This point is underlined by Clemens Vollnhals, “Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit: Ein Instrument totalitärer Herrschaftsausübung,” in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble et al. (Stuttgart, 1994), p. 513.

increasing divisions within the working class that is crucial to understanding how the discontent of the working class was contained and why, therefore, the regime survived to the end of the war without any mass challenge from that quarter.¹³⁰

The sources of legitimation in the GDR, which certainly were considerable, also changed over time.¹³¹ The relatively prosperous and more open 1960s were marked by what has been called somewhat euphemistically a "consultative authoritarianism," in which many east Germans felt that they not only had a stake in the system but also were proud of its political and ideological stance in the world.¹³² But even if the balance in those years was tipped, however slightly, toward consent, Mary Fulbrook is probably right to suggest that even in the 1960s the GDR "was a place many of its citizens would not freely have chosen to live in, had they had the choice."¹³³ In the years that followed there was a move toward still more coercion, especially from the mid-1980s, when the economy began to unravel and the regime began to lose control of the political agenda.

Denunciations in Germany's dictatorships as a subject for historical research has only been taken up for systematic study in recent years. We are beginning to reconceptualize the relationship between the police and the people and to raise new questions. There is considerable support in the documentation on Nazi Germany, especially from the Gestapo files, that the Nazi terror constituted a radical version of a self-policing society. Thanks to denunciations from the population, it was possible for a remarkably small number of Gestapo and other officials to police not only the public but also the private spheres of social life. Above all, these denunciations made possible the myth of the Gestapo as "all-knowing" and "ever-present." The systems of policing and self-policing worked in tandem and, especially in the war years, the circle of terror spread beyond racial "enemies" like the Jews and traditional political opponents like the Communists. The Gestapo was dependent on denunciations and received them routinely at least until the system began to falter in the last year of the war, when the Gestapo compensated for the decline in denunciations by stepping up its own brutalities.

¹³⁰ Tim Mason, "The Containment of the Working Class in Nazi Germany," in his *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 231-73.

¹³¹ For a sustained analysis, albeit one mainly researched before the Berlin Wall fell, see Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992).

¹³² Characterization of the GDR in the 1960s is by P. C. Ludz as cited in Mary Fulbrook, *The Two Germanies, 1945-1990: Problems of Interpretation* (London, 1992), p. 39.

¹³³ Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918-1990* (Oxford, 1992), p. 206.

In Germany's second dictatorship, although volunteered denunciations were no longer encouraged or welcomed—at least if we are to believe internal memoranda and official guidelines—many subtle forms of policing were organized on a more social-scientific basis. After the Berlin Wall came down, there was shock at the size of the Stasi and the apparently vast numbers of men and women who were formally and informally involved in its operations.¹³⁴ But many other varieties of policing and self-policing had also become prominent in the GDR. For example, subjective forms of self-policing were fueled not only by the secrecy surrounding Stasi activities and the possibility that a Stasi agent might be physically present but also by worry that party or state “authorities” might learn one way or another of information that could be considered subversive. Gauck has stated that the most frequently mentioned goal in the Stasi's plans aimed at individual suspects was to foster self-doubt.¹³⁵ These psychological aspects of self-policing—involving subjective psychological dimensions such as self-surveillance, self-discipline, and self-censorship of behavior, opinions, writings, and even thoughts—seem to play a very important role in modern dictatorships but so far have received relatively little attention.

No police force in modern European history has been able to function without the cooperation or participation of the population in its efforts. Because both the Gestapo and the Stasi sought to carry out surveillance of ever broader aspects of social and political life, and because the list of actual or potential “crimes” steadily grew, both were more dependent on denunciations, whether spontaneous or institutionalized, than any of their predecessors had been.

It is curious that the greater the degree of control that authoritarian regimes like Nazi Germany or the GDR attempted to exercise over the population, the greater the degree of participation from the population that was required. So these “police states” were not merely imposed from “above” on society at large by ruthless dictators.¹³⁶ Indeed, the concept of a “police state”—one that did not fit the self-understanding of either regime—is doubly misleading in that it puts too much emphasis on both the police and the state as entities that might exist independently of German society. Whereas the concept of a “police state” relegates the society “below” to a role of little significance, in fact policing

¹³⁴ *Zweiter Tätigkeitsbericht des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1995* (Berlin, 1995), p. 5.

¹³⁵ Gauck (n. 83 above), p. 25. See also Martin Walser, “Deutsche Sorgen,” *Der Spiegel* (June 28, 1993), p. 41.

¹³⁶ For the notion that many citizens fell prey to a “totalitarian temptation,” which entailed, among other things, a call for “law and order” and the establishment of an authoritarian system, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), pp. 236–42. For a recent examination of consensus in Nazi Germany, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (London, 1991), esp. pp. 87 ff.

(state) and self-policing (society) have tended to develop and to function in a complex interrelationship.

There developed in both German dictatorships a kind of denunciatory atmosphere in which people not only did not shy away from informing but also often used the system to pursue personal goals of their own. But quite apart from the subjective intentions of the men and women who offered information to the secret police, denunciations had multifarious effects. They assisted the police in enforcing both the letter and the spirit of the laws, as well as contributing greatly to other official goals, such as control of the population and suppression of opposition (broadly defined). The Gestapo, and later also the Stasi, took very seriously its preventive mission of hindering resistance, and indeed all "political criminality," before it occurred.

At the same time as they assisted the functioning of the police, denunciations also played a key role in eliminating the social enclaves that would have allowed people to gather, discuss, and organize resistance. Without denunciations in Nazi Germany, for example, there is no telling how many people might have helped Jews or members of other stigmatized groups or expressed solidarity with them. Insofar as denunciations and institutionalized informing made the Gestapo and Stasi myths come alive, they had a devastating effect on all forms of disobedience, much less resistance. Evidence of the extent and consequences of citizen informing in the German dictatorships remains a source of unease even now.