

nights I lay in my bed, crying, and didn't want to live any more."⁶⁵

Some mothers could not bear the thought of parting from their children. Almost fifty years later, Miriam Gillis-Carlebach recalled that when she told her mother that she wanted to leave for Palestine, Lotte Carlebach covered her face and cried, "My only Miriam." The teenager tried to console her: "But Mommy! Eight children will remain at home with you!" Her mother would not be comforted: "Each child is my only child. I yearn for you already." Whereas Lotte Carlebach sympathized with her daughter's desires and approved of her emigration, Ruth Klüger's mother showed no such understanding. As a result, both mother and daughter wound up in Auschwitz. Both survived, but even late in life, Ruth Klüger recalled her frustration when her mother refused to let her join a children's transport. A young man from the Jewish community had told her mother there was one last chance to send her child to Palestine:

My heart pounded, for I would have loved to leave, even if it had been a betrayal of her. But she didn't ask me or even look at me once, rather she said, "No. One does not separate a child from her mother." On the way home I struggled with my disappointment, which I could not express to her without hurting her. I believe I never forgave her for this.⁶⁶

These children were willing to cut all ties with their homeland. Parents feared an unknown future abroad. Children, however, reacted almost viscerally to present dangers at home.

By 1939, 82 percent of children aged fifteen and under and 83 percent of youth aged sixteen to twenty-four had managed to escape Germany. The remaining Jewish children and teens had fewer and fewer friends, especially outside the big cities. By 1937, in Hessen-Nassau, for example, seventy-eight communities counted fewer than ten Jewish children and teens, and only thirteen communities counted between twenty and thirty-five children and teens.⁶⁷ Opportunities for those increasingly nervous and frightened children who remained—the *Kindertransporte*, like other exits, were never sufficient—continued to dwindle. By July 1941, about 25,000 Jewish children and youth under age twenty-five still lived within the borders of pre-1938 Germany.

5

The November Pogrom and Its Aftermath

The store was boarded up.... Our home no longer offered us ... security. Our family was now scattered in three different locations.

—SHLOMO WAHRMAN

The November Pogrom struck like lightning, suddenly shattering everything it touched, shocking those who suffered it. Although it represented the intensification of the political disenfranchisement, economic strangulation, and social segregation that had begun in 1933, no one expected the widespread violence—a pogrom of the sort connected only with czarist Russia. The public manifestations of Jewish life in Germany stood covered with broken glass. Businesses and synagogues were ransacked, Jewish livelihoods destroyed. The Nazis also destroyed private, interior spaces. Homes, which had previously felt safe, were transformed into nightmares of smashed furniture and torn feather beds. Jewish men, often humiliated and beaten, were now forced into concentration camps. Jewish women remained behind, trying frantically to free their men, repair their homes, and help their families flee for their lives.

THE BACKGROUND TO NOVEMBER 1938

The Nazis stepped up their persecution of Jews in 1938. In March the German annexation of Austria sparked the public abuse of Jews and the looting and pillaging of their shops and homes in Austria. In annexing Austria, the Reich had added 200,000 Austrian Jews, canceling out the reduction of German Jews by recent emigration. In Germany that same month, the Nazis enacted the "Law Regarding the Legal Status of Jewish Communities," the first major piece of anti-Jewish legislation since the

Nuremberg Laws. This law deprived Jewish congregations of legal protection and subjected them to the administrative control of the regime. In addition, they could no longer tax members, a restriction intended to reduce them to penury. The law proclaimed a renewed attack upon Jews.

The noose tightened in the spring, when Jews and "Aryan" spouses of Jews had to assess and report the value of their domestic and foreign property worth over 5,000 marks: "From here it was only a short step to the outright seizure of Jewish property." Jews would have to inform the government of whatever they planned to take abroad and were forbidden from taking valuables out of the country. As if preparing its inventory of sites to be ransacked, the government required the registration and identification of all Jewish commercial establishments in June. A Jewish teenager recalled his fury upon first noticing a sign labeling a "Jewish" store. He tried to erase it. The Jewish owner chased him away, since he had to identify himself as specified by the new regulation.¹ By June, fresh boycotts intensified.

Most ominously, the government rounded up Jewish men and sent them to concentration camps. First it singled out "foreign" Jews. As a result of Germany's intentionally difficult and exclusionary naturalization laws, many of these so-called foreign Jews had actually resided in Germany for generations; about 40 percent were born there² but had not achieved citizenship. In February the government ordered the expulsion of "Soviet Jews"—often people whose grandparents had come to Germany at the beginning of the century. Those who had not emigrated by May were sent to concentration camps, from which they would be released only when they had emigration papers in hand.

In its "June Action" the Gestapo arrested about 1,500 so-called anti-social Jewish men, sending them to concentration camps. Most of these men had previously been convicted of minor legal infractions—some 500, for example, of traffic violations. The pettiness of these "crimes" notwithstanding, 146 died at Buchenwald alone while wives, families, and friends exerted major efforts to have the others freed. They, too, would be set free only when they could prove readiness to emigrate. That same summer, the Nazis destroyed three synagogues—in Munich, Nuremberg, and Dortmund. In addition, all Jews were required to have the letter *J* stamped on their passports as of the fall. In January 1939 they would receive a new identity card, also stamped with a *J*. The *J* marked them as easy prey and made looking for housing or jobs impossible, since no one would rent to or hire a Jew.³

It was the deportation of Polish Jews—many of them also resident in Germany for generations—that sparked the incident that led to the

November Pogrom. Germany expelled 17,000 Polish Jews on October 27 and 28, 1938, sending them to the Polish border. Poland denied them entry. They languished in a no-man's-land between two borders, in the cold and without food or shelter, while their families and communities became more and more desperate. The deportation of the Polish Jews, usually mentioned only as a prelude to and then overshadowed by the November Pogrom, sent shock waves through the entire Jewish community in Germany.

The manner in which the Polish Jews were deported foreshadowed the brutality to come: officials picked them up without warning, gave them a few moments to pack necessities, allowed them to take only ten marks, and then herded them away. For the first time, the Nazis swept up Jews without regard for age or sex. Various states and cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Munich rounded up whole families. In Württemberg and Saxony, women and children made up the majority of deportees. One deportee wrote:

Everyone . . . was loaded onto the wagons. . . . Crying women and children, heartrending scenes. . . . [A]rriving at the border at 5 P.M., we were shoved across it. . . . For three days we were on the platform and in the train station, 8,000 people. Women and children fainting, unconscious, incidents of death, faces yellow as wax. . . . Women and children half-dead. On the fourth day help finally came . . . from the Warsaw Jewish Committee.⁴

Whatever food, clothing, or succor the deportees received came from other Jews. Jewish communities in Germany, too, helped the Polish Jews. In Munich, a leader of the League of Jewish Women quickly organized members to race to the homes of the deportees in order to pack some clothing and food for them. One volunteer discovered five terrified children whose parents had hidden them from the roundup. The oldest was ten. The volunteer slipped them out of the apartment and brought them to an orphanage, preventing their immediate deportation. Those involved in relief activities all felt the imminent threat to themselves. In Hamburg, the women who brought food to the trainloads of Polish deportees returned saying, "And who will bring *us* bread and butter at the train?"⁵

THE POGROM

As the pitiable deportees languished in the cold, wet, no-man's-land between Poland and Germany, young Herschel Grynszpan, whose parents and sister were among them, was driven to despair. He shot Ernst vom

Rath, a diplomat at the German embassy in Paris. The Nazis used the death of vom Rath as a convenient excuse to launch their largest pogrom to date. Organized by the government and Nazi organizations and supported by mobs, the attacks began around 3 A.M. on November 9/10.⁶

Destruction and Persecution

Assailants wielding hatchets and axes ravaged Jewish homes and businesses, while others used incendiary bombs and dynamite to demolish synagogues. Mobs destroyed holy items and books and plundered Jewish homes while forcing Jews to watch. Rowdies rounded up Jews—women and men—half dressed or in their pajamas and herded them into the marketplace or main squares to taunt them. Firemen and police looked on or prevented aid as synagogues and other Jewish property burned, attempting only to save neighboring “Aryan” buildings from destruction.

In the frenzy of this “public degradation ritual,” the Nazis went beyond plundering and terrorizing Jewish women and men. They also invaded Jewish hospitals, old-age homes, and orphanages. In Königsberg, a band forced the children of the Jewish orphanage out onto the street in their nightclothes. The freezing children huddled close to the burning synagogue to warm themselves. When Nazis stormed an orphanage in Dinslaken, in the Rhineland, the director ordered the children, aged six to sixteen, outside, assuming that the troopers would not dare harm the children out in the open. Despite the cold, the children scrambled into the street, without coats, running after the director to the town hall to obtain police protection. They encountered about ten police and a crowd of eager onlookers. “We do not give protection to Jews,” the police chief announced, “Get out with those children or I’ll shoot.”⁷

The next morning the SS forced Jews to sweep up the broken furniture, destroyed household items, feathers, and glass that littered the streets. The SS stood around, laughing and taunting. Moreover, the job was left to a community deprived of most of its able-bodied men. The Nazis had systematically rounded up Jewish men and imprisoned them in concentration camps: 11,000 to Dachau; 9,845 to Buchenwald; 9,000 to Sachsenhausen. There, brutality and humiliation reigned. Guards prevented Jewish men from washing and drinking water while subjecting them to long days of torturous exercise, standing at attention, or sitting in the sun without permission to move. The Jewish men suffered sickness, madness, and death. The lucky ones were released if they could prove they were about to emigrate and agreed to sell their businesses for minute sums. The first group left after six days; others stayed for months. The men who were lucky

enough to return from internment, with shaved heads and frozen limbs, were often physically and psychologically ravaged. Gerdy Stoppleman’s husband left Sachsenhausen in March 1939: “More than his body, my husband’s mind was deeply affected. Almost every night he experienced Sachsenhausen concentration camp anew in nightmares so alarming that I feared for his sanity.” Still, others faced even worse: “On a daily basis one heard that the ashes of a dead person had been delivered to this or that family. These urns were sent cash on delivery (for which the post office took the sum of 3.75 marks).”⁸

Threatened with worse punishment if they told anyone of their suffering in the camps, many Jewish men were too terrified to tell their families. Others wanted to repress their experiences. Ingeborg Hecht’s father, however, described his ordeal in Sachsenhausen: “In a low voice, punctuated by the hollow cough that lingered with him for a long time to come, he recounted his terrible experiences. If he hadn’t been our own father, a qualified lawyer, and in his right mind, we would never have believed him.”⁹

The November Pogrom claimed the lives of at least one hundred Jews, not counting the camp deaths or suicides occurring shortly thereafter. The pogrom also destroyed hundreds of synagogues and countless homes and shops. Damage was estimated at several hundred million marks: the broken glass alone was valued at 24 million marks. Jews were made to pay a fine of 1 billion marks as punishment for the vom Rath assassination. The government, not the Jews, would collect on insurance payments for damages incurred. The Nazis used the pogrom not only as the occasion to accelerate their plunder of the Jewish community but also to dismantle the Central Organization of Jews in Germany. In 1939, the government forced the Central Association of Jews in Germany (*Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland*) upon the Jewish community. It would oversee emigration, education, and social welfare programs and would represent all individual Jews in Germany. The Gestapo, not the Jewish community, would appoint its leadership.

German Reactions

The November Pogrom provides examples of the contradictory behavior of Germans toward Jews—a mixture of rampant viciousness, studied ignorance, and occasional kindness. Many Germans joined mobs to attack and burn Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues. Others chose to take advantage of their Jewish neighbors. In Bavaria, for example, an “Aryan” neighbor offered a Jewish woman and her mother a “deal” after the arrests of their husbands. The Jewish woman should sign over the deed of her

house to him and leave Germany. Should they decide to return, he would give it back to them! She declined. Ingeborg Hecht's neighbor chose to make excuses: she gave Ingeborg a big bag of groceries for her father upon his return from Sachsenhausen, assuring her that "the Führer knows nothing of this."¹⁰

One Jewish woman recalled the events as a mixture of mobs and helpers:

While I was sweeping up some of the debris, I noticed another mob of hoodlums, among them women. They were armed with axes as they approached [and] proceeded to ransack the entire house. . . . I thought of Anna K., the former parlor maid. . . . Soon we were on our way in hope that there would be some straw bed in her barn. . . . She had two such beds, but we would have to leave early the next day . . . because her brother had become a member of the SA.

Mally Dienemann of Offenbach am Main was deeply touched when her non-Jewish landlady helped clean up her apartment: "Her devotion and guilt . . . knew no bounds. These simple people . . . brought me flowers when I was alone . . . and other Jews must have also known such people in one form or another. For officially we were all supposed to starve during these November days."¹¹

What were the reactions of Germans not immediately involved either in the destruction or in helping Jews? While most approved of, or went along with, "moderate" antisemitism, many disapproved of the open barbarism of the November Pogrom: "Shame at the act, shock at its extent, and regret for the property destroyed converged to create a negative reaction." Even if Nazi Party members approved, the large majority of the population condemned the violence—even those who had previously endorsed "moderate" antisemitic measures. Still, there are almost no cases of public opposition to it. In the wake of Hitler's triumphs (incorporating Austria and dismembering Czechoslovakia) and in the shadow of an increasingly terrorist state (in which there were also no protests against the arrest or murder of political opponents), the pogrom was met with silence. In addition, when Germans watched what was happening to Jews they became still more mute, fearing for their *own* lives and property. Some thought the pogrom would only start with Jews and soon spread to other opponents of the system. When neighbors in the small town of "Sonderburg" saw the furniture and possessions of a Jewish family being tossed from a second-floor window—watching in horror as the feathers from the down quilts

floated in the air—they tightened their shutters, secured their doors, drew their curtains, and trembled for themselves.¹²

As it was happening, the Nazis referred to the pogrom as the "Jew Action," a typically bureaucratic euphemism. Afterward it became known as "Crystal Night" (*Kristallnacht* or *Reichskristallnacht*)—a term commonly used through the late 1980s. Although the origin of the term is unclear, many Germans used this euphemism to describe the tons of shattered glass spread over public areas, streets, and squares, from the ruined homes and shops of Jews.¹³

A powerful image, mentioned often in Jewish women's memoirs, is that of flying feathers—feathers covering the internal space of the home, hallway, and front yard or courtyard. As in Russian pogroms at the turn of the century, the mobs tore up feather blankets and pillows, shaking them into the rooms, out the windows, and down the stairways. Jews were deprived of their bedding and the physical and psychological sense of well-being it represented.¹⁴ Broken glass in public and strewn feathers in private spelled the end of Jewish security in Germany.

WOMEN'S ROLES AND REACTIONS DURING THE POGROM

The image of feathers flying is one of a domestic scene gravely disturbed. This was women's primary experience of the November Pogrom. The marauders beat and arrested men. Although some women were publicly humiliated, bloodied, beaten, and murdered,¹⁵ most were forced to stand by and watch their homes torn apart and their men abused. Later, women anguished as their men disappeared into concentration camps and many strove, heroically, to free them.

Personal testimonies show the massive terror. In the small town of "Sonderburg," for example, with 4,000 inhabitants and only 150 Jews, one Jewish woman recalled:

It was around 6 o'clock in the morning when five young fellows came in . . . one from Sonderburg who had worked with me at . . . the department store for at least ten years. He didn't do anything, he only sent the others in and they destroyed everything. . . . They . . . told me to go to the window, then they came with an axe but instead of hitting me, they hit the windows. A couple of hours later . . . children came by and threw stones in. . . . The man who worked with me said nothing; I looked at him . . . but he lowered his face. Among the four was the veterinarian and he came to my

father's bedroom and said, "Mein Herr, following orders, we must destroy your house. You and your wife, go out."

The veterinarian had known her father from community sports events. Another woman recalled her experiences as an eleven-year-old in "Sonderburg": "Men . . . ran around axing all our furniture and throwing things out the window. They smashed the closet door and broke all my toys. Afterward, we hid in a closet in a neighbor's apartment." In Berlin, where the pogrom spread unevenly at first, Toni Lessler described the children arriving at her school from various neighborhoods exclaiming that the synagogues were burning. Fearing that they might be attacked at school, she sent them home with their teachers. Many arrived home to find only their distraught mothers: ninety-two of their fathers had been sent to concentration camps. After the pogrom, Jewish schools limped on, taught and directed, for the most part, by women and a few elderly male teachers.¹⁶

Although the ravage was thorough, in large cities a few escaped the worst because of oversights by the Nazis, because some buildings were protected by "Aryan" owners, because the vandals did not have enough time to get to them, or because, having been forewarned, some families split up and hid. In Leipzig, for example, as arrests of men continued after the pogrom, the Wahrman family split three ways: the father stayed with friends; the mother, aunt, and daughter went to (non-Jewish) neighbors; and the two young sons hid with other neighbors. Eleven years old at the time, one son later recalled: "How sad it was. . . . The store was boarded up. . . . Our home no longer offered us safety and security. Our family was now scattered."¹⁷

Those fortunate few who managed to escape still experienced days of terror, often trying to distract themselves or calm their families with the kind of avoidance behavior they had used in previous situations. One woman wrote: "We were at the piano and played a Mozart concerto. Often our eyes went to the window, but we did not stop. . . . We did not want to admit disturbing reality. We wanted to spare our nerves."¹⁸

Immediately after the cataclysm, with men imprisoned, many women continued to hide from further persecution; others had no way of remaining in their ransacked homes. Deprived of their men, women gathered together for consolation, encouragement, and advice. One young woman joined her fiancé's mother in Mannheim, "who had found refuge with about twenty other women and girls in one relative's apartment. All the men were already in Dachau." In another small town, where all the Jews had been herded together and then separated by sex, an observer noted: "We met nothing but young wives and mourning mothers" lingering in the area

where the men had been imprisoned. Visiting a local hospital, she saw many women lying in the reception area, "all of them had escaped from small towns [where they would have been recognized] just in time, but did not know any longer where to go."¹⁹ Eventually, most women returned home to clean up the wreckage and salvage a few objects or pieces of clothing. Since most of the dishes, pottery, or porcelain had been smashed, clothing slashed, and furniture axed, cleanup involved throwing away most items or saving shards of family treasures.

The most crucial task confronting Jewish women was to have their men freed. Since 1933, women had frequently represented their husbands to the authorities; now they would have to rescue them. Wives of prisoners were told that their husbands would be freed only if they could present emigration papers. Although no statistics are available to indicate their success, these women displayed extraordinary nerve and tenacity in saving a large number of men and in facilitating a mass exodus of married couples in 1939. Many women summoned the courage to overcome gender stereotypes of passivity in order to find any means to have husbands and fathers released from camps. Charlotte Stein-Pick wrote of the November Pogrom: "I tried . . . day in and day out, to find a connection that could lead to my husband's release. I ran to Christian acquaintances, friends, or colleagues, but . . . people shrugged their shoulders, shook their heads and said 'no.' And everyone was glad when I left. I was treated like a leper, even by people who were well-disposed toward us." Undaunted, Stein-Pick entered Nazi headquarters in Munich, the notorious Brown House, to request her husband's freedom based on his status as a war veteran. There she was shown her husband, twenty pounds thinner, and begged repeatedly for his release. The Nazis demanded that she explain the finances of her husband's student fraternity, of which he was still treasurer. She did. Upon his release, she had to return to the Brown House monthly to do the fraternity's bookkeeping until she emigrated.²⁰

Ruth Abraham impressed not only her family but also the SS with her determination and bravery. During the November Pogrom, she pulled her fiancé out of hiding and led him through the teeming crowds: "His store was in ruins and I found him hiding behind a pillar." She then traveled to Dachau to ask for the release of her future father-in-law. She arrived at the concentration camp in a bus filled with SS men. She assumed that because of her "Aryan" looks she was taken for a member of the League of German Girls. She requested an interview with the commandant and begged for the elderly man's freedom. After three days and the intercession of a Nazi Party member, she succeeded. Again she attributed her success to her looks, since

the men she met refused to believe that she was a "full Jew" and seemed to take pity on her. Abraham's unconventional behavior found a conventional reward: the couple married immediately. The rabbi who performed the ceremony had bandaged hands, an indication of the treatment he had received in a concentration camp.²¹

Some women saw not only to their husbands' release and the necessary papers but also to the sale of their joint property. Accompanying her husband home after his imprisonment, one wife explained that she had just sold their house and bought tickets to Shanghai for the family. Her husband recalled that anything was fine with him, as long as they could escape from a place in which everyone had declared "open season" on them.²² Expressions of thankfulness tinged, perhaps, with a bit of surprise at women's heroism can be found in many men's memoirs. They were indebted to women even after their ordeal, when many men were too beaten in body and spirit to be of much use in the scramble to emigrate.

The testimonies of both men and women emphasize women's calm, dry-eyed, self-control in the midst of turmoil. For example, a Jewish community leader wrote: "The highest praise . . . goes to our wives who, without shedding one tear, inspired the hordes, some of whom had beaten their men bloody, to respect them. Unbroken, these women . . . did everything to have their men freed." Charlotte Stein-Pick recalled her husband's counsel on the day of the pogrom: "'Just no tears and no scene.' . . . But even without this warning I would have controlled myself." Hanna Bernheim, remembering the pain of giving up prized family heirlooms to the Nazis some months after the pogrom, reflected on the dignity and self-control of Jews around her and on her own form of defiance: "I was glad that the Jews I saw behaved well, they didn't show any excitement noticeable to strangers. And I told an acquaintance I met loud enough for the employees to understand it, that I had never cared for these things." When the Nazis confiscated all her valuable ritual objects and jewelry, a Hamburg woman wrote in a poem that expressed her grief and her quiet defiance, "I will separate myself without tears."²³ This stoic calm in the face of danger was not merely a proclamation of female stalwartness to counter the stereotype of female "frailty." German-Jewish bourgeois upbringing had always valued decorum, and so women maintained their dignity as part of their Jewishness in the face of general dishonor. Jewish women's heroism reproached "Aryan" savagery and suggested a new task for women. Traditionally men had publicly guarded the safety and honor of the family and community; suddenly women found that they stood as the defenders of Jewish honor and pride—and of Jewish life itself.

On their own, many women faced the dizzying procedure of obtaining proof of immediate plans to emigrate in order to free a relative from a concentration camp. They had to decide whether to send children abroad while they organized their papers, settled on a destination (if they had not already discussed this previously), sold property, and arranged the departure. In spite of their apparent calm, the inner stress for women was massive.

EMIGRATION

The November Pogrom decisively tipped the balance toward emigration. For those in camps, the only way out was proof of readiness to emigrate, and for those not in camps, the violence influenced their decisions. Psychologists who studied refugee memoirs determined that almost 40 percent of memoir writers did not give up psychologically until 1938 or 1939. It was only after the pogrom that Jews were finally convinced that they faced physical danger. After November 1938, "essentially everyone tried to find a possibility of emigrating."²⁴

Obstacles to Emigration

In the period following the pogrom, emigration became the highest priority within the Jewish community. Still, immigration restrictions in foreign countries and Nazi bureaucratic and financial roadblocks stymied Jews. Countries of potential refuge thwarted Jewish entry. Elisabeth Freund described her and her husband's many attempts to leave Germany:

It is really enough to drive one to despair. . . . We have filed applications for entry permits to Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden . . . in vain, though in all these countries we had good connections. In the spring of 1939 . . . we obtained an entry permit for Mexico for 3,000 marks. But we never received the visa, because the Mexican consulate asked us to present passports that would entitle us to return to Germany, and the German authorities did not issue such passports to Jews. Then, in August 1939 we did actually get the permit for England. But it came . . . only ten days before the outbreak of war, and in this short time we were not able to take care of all the formalities. . . . In the spring of 1940 we received the entry permit for Portugal. We immediately got everything ready and applied for our passports. Then came the invasion of Holland, Belgium and France. . . . A stream of refugees poured into Portugal, and the Portuguese government recalled . . . all of the issued permits. . . . It was

also good that in December 1940 we had not ... paid for our Panamanian visas, for we noticed that the visas offered us did not ... entitle us to land in Panama.

Freund was frustrated with friends who urged them to leave Germany: "As if that were not our most fervent wish." She agonized: "There are no more visas for the U.S.A. My husband has made one last attempt and asked our relatives in America by wire for the entry visas for Cuba. . . . No other country gives an entry permit to German Jews any longer, or is still reachable in any way."²⁵

Once they received permission to *enter* a foreign country, Jews still had to acquire the papers to *exit* Germany. "Getting out . . . is at least as difficult as getting into another country and you have absolutely no notion of the desperation here," wrote sixty-six-year-old Gertrud Grossmann to her uncomprehending son abroad. Getting the required papers took months of running a bureaucratic gauntlet, which many women faced alone, meeting officials who could arbitrarily add to the red tape at whim: "There was no rule and every official felt like a god."²⁶

Bella Fromm summarized the plight of all German Jews: "So far I have gathered a collection of twenty-three of the necessary documents. I have made a thorough study of the employees and furniture in fifteen official bureaus . . . during the hours I have waited." Bewildered, she reported that she did not yet have all the papers she needed—and this was a few months before the November Pogrom. Afterward, Mally Dienemann, whose sixty-three-year-old husband languished in Buchenwald, raced to the Gestapo to prove they were ready to emigrate. Next she rushed to the passport office to retrieve their passports.

After I had been sent from one office to another . . . I had to go to . . . the Emigration Office in Frankfurt, the Gestapo, the police, the Finance Office, [send] a petition to Buchenwald, a petition to the Gestapo in Darmstadt, and still it took until Tuesday of the third week, before my husband returned. . . . Next came running around for the many papers that one needed for emigration. And while the Gestapo was in a rush, the Finance Office had so much time and so many requests, and without certification from the Finance and Tax offices . . . one did not get a passport, and without a passport a tariff official could not inspect the baggage.²⁷

Finally arriving in Palestine in March 1939, Rabbi Dienemann died from his ordeal.

By 1939, new arbitrary laws slowed emigration even more. Even with a U.S. affidavit in hand, Else Gerstel could not simply leave "immediately," as her brother abroad urged. "It was impossible even to buy the ship tickets before we had the official permits. And that meant to pay taxes which were much higher than everything we owned. There were several months of red tape, desperate struggle." The elderly were physically ill equipped to endure the strains of this paper chase. Gertrud Grossmann confided by letter: "I dread going to the consulate and possibly standing around there for hours, which is physically impossible for me." The situation deteriorated so much that by 1940 she wrote her son: "Your emigration [in 1938] was child's play compared to today's practically insurmountable difficulties."²⁸

As the government harassed the desperate Jews, individual Germans sought to enrich themselves at Jewish expense and Jews, often women, since the men were in camps, regularly encountered corruption. Charlotte Stein-Pick, anxious to get her husband out of a camp and expecting to receive visas from the American consulate imminently, was shocked to learn that there were Germans at the embassy who expected bribes in order to forward her papers. She went to a lawyer, who informed her that it would take 3,000 marks to pay off the swindlers: "I ran around bewildered. . . . In spite of everything, we German Jews still continued to resist believing the terrible corruption which National Socialism brought with it." In a respectable shipping company's elegant office on Berlin's exclusive boulevard, Unter den Linden, another desperate woman had to hand over a 100-mark payoff for a place on a ship's waiting list. Moreover, she had to participate in the expensive farce of paying for round-trip tickets because, even though the Germans would have blocked their reentry, her family's visas to Cuba had to be tourist visas. Since this family had hidden money before the government blocked it, she was able to pay for the trip.²⁹ A situation like this was frustrating and nerve-racking before the war; it could cost Jewish lives thereafter.

Even before the pogrom, the government had no intention of letting Jews escape with their money or property. Afterward it blocked bank accounts more stringently and robbed potential emigrants more thoroughly. In Berlin, the Gestapo set up a special "one-stop" emigration bureau where: "the emigrating Jew was fleeced, totally and completely, in the manner of an assembly line." When they entered they were "still . . . the owner[s] of an apartment, perhaps a business, a bank account and some savings." As they were pushed from section to section "one possession after the next was taken." By the time they left, they had been "reduced to . . . stateless beggar[s]," grasping one precious possession, an exit visa.³⁰

Nazi avarice is illustrated by the experience of the Bernheim family. They left in July 1939, falling prey to the Nazi decree of February 1939 that expropriated all valuable stones and metals from Jews. Thus, before emigrating, Hanna Bernheim packed a suitcase and headed for a Nazi "purchasing post" to give up her valuables:

There were many people who had three, five suitcases, full of marvelous things: old [bridal] jewelry, Sabbath candles and goblets . . . beautiful old and modern plates. . . . The young officials were in high spirits. . . . These treasures, often collected by generations, were thrown together. . . . They were small-minded enough to take jewelry not at all precious as to the . . . value, but precious to us as souvenirs of beloved persons.

Shortly thereafter, at the airport, agents examined Bernheim's hat box and confiscated a brass clock, toiletries, and underwear. The guard even insisted on a body search. She recalled: "The propellers started. . . and I could only beg the woman to do the examination immediately. She was nice and correct, helped me with dressing, and the French pilot waited. And so I flew out of . . . hell."³¹ Nazi insatiability was so great that a dentist warned one woman to see him before departing "and have him cover a gold crown and filling I had with a white coating. A patient of his had missed her ship while the gold in her mouth was removed by a Nazi dentist."³²

Despite chaos and barriers, the largest number of Jews to leave in one year emigrated directly after the November Pogrom, reaching 78,000 in 1939. The United States, Palestine, and Great Britain took the most German Jews, but Jews left no escape route untried, as the 8,000 who fled to Japanese-occupied Shanghai show. By September 1939, about 185,000 (racially defined) Jews still remained in Germany; their numbers sank to 164,000 by October 1941, when Jewish emigration was banned. Another 8,500 managed to escape between 1942 and 1945. Exact figures of those who left Germany as a result of racial persecution cannot be established, but a good estimate is between 270,000 and 300,000 Jews. That is, close to three-fifths of German Jews managed to flee Germany. Yet approximately 30,000 of those who got out were later caught by the Nazis in other European countries. Ultimately, about half of those Jews who had lived in Germany in 1933 could save themselves through emigration to safe countries. Their friends and relatives who remained behind were murdered.³³

Packing for Good

When Jews finally reached the stage of packing, they believed their departure would be permanent. Women took charge. As Berta Kamm put it: "Only a woman knows how much there is to deliberate and resolve in such a rushed departure." Packing was so clearly considered "women's work" that some women stayed behind to do it, sending men and children ahead. Packing quickly became an art as Nazi rulings and red tape skyrocketed. To emigrate with one's belongings, one had to receive a permit from the Finance Department. This permit was obtainable only after preparing lists of all the items one wished to take. Lisa Brauer spent an entire week writing "endless lists, in five copies each . . . every item entered, every list neatly typed, and in the end I could only speak and breathe and think in shoes, towels, scissors, soap and scarves." Another woman recalled how "a science of emigration advisement came into being [and these advisers] prepared the lists. For example, one was not allowed to say 'one bag of sewing supplies,' but had to detail every thimble, every skein of wool, every snap." Also one could not take just anything: "Only those things were allowed which had been purchased before 1933." Other items could be taken only in limited amounts and only "if the complete purchase price was paid to the Gold-Discount-Bank once again."³⁴

After completing the lists, and often with ship or plane tickets in hand, Jews had to await the authorization of the Finance Department. Despite official policy encouraging emigration, the Nazi bureaucracy dawdled and delayed Jewish emigration. Again, connections and bribes seemed to speed up the process and, again, women had to master the world of officialdom and the art of bribery. To obtain the necessary papers before her boat departed, Lisa Brauer begged for assistance from a former student whom she knew was married to someone in the Finance Department. She arrived at the student's door early one morning, when it was still dark, "to avoid being seen and recognized by curious neighbors." Shortly thereafter, a clerk from the Finance Department appeared at her home. Brauer offered him any books in her library. "Three days later I got my appointment at the Finance Department."³⁵

With the arduous packing accomplished and papers in hand, some families sent the freight containers, known as "lifts," to interim stations, frequently ports in Holland. They remained there until the family knew its final destination. Some families lost their possessions when access to their containers was cut off by the German invasion of Holland. But others could not even consider packing most of their possessions, since the giant containers and the surcharge demanded by the Nazis for every item cost

too much. One man recalled "that these giant containers . . . stood in front of many houses in my neighborhood, with the designation . . . New York or Buenos Aires or Haifa. However, most emigrants could not afford such costly things and traveled to foreign lands with only a few suitcases."

Many emigrants, mourning their loss, sold their homes and furnishings for a pittance. Lisa Brauer, trying to create what she viewed as a dignified moment amid her misfortune, set the table with coffee and cake and invited neighbors to purchase items: "Only a few . . . took advantage and tried to grab as much as they could carry." Dismantling her home after the November Pogrom, Alice Baerwald wrote: "It was so terribly difficult to destroy . . . what one had created with so much love." She had cultivated every plant around the house: "Flowers, nothing but flowers, that was my joy. . . . My children had played and laughed here and romped in the grass with the dogs. And now suddenly to sell to total strangers." The city of Danzig decided the price of her house and chose the buyer. She then sold the contents of her home to "Aryan" purchasers, many of whom complained of *their* plight. Since Nazi ideology asserted that Germans suffered because of Jews, many Germans could simultaneously ignore Jewish suffering, exploit Jews, and lament their own lot. A pastor's wife proclaimed, "We're suffering just as much as you," but Baerwald retorted, "only with the difference that you're buying and I'm selling."³⁶

It was clear to the emigrants that their German neighbors were benefiting greatly from their misery and doubtlessly clear to these Germans as well. Placing an ad in the paper, Lotte Popper tried to sell her "bedroom, living room, kitchen furniture." The ad was simply one among many other ads by Jews. She commented: "Yes, the Aryans had it good. They could now beautify their homes cheaply with the well-cared-for furniture of emigrating Jews." Only "the stupid among the populace were persuaded not to buy anything which had been used by Jews. The others, however, crowded the auction rooms, for the belongings [of Jews] were to be had for a song."³⁷

Packing gave some women the chance to smuggle valuables out of the country. What their ingenuity managed to salvage was paltry compared with what the Nazis stole from them. Still, it helped some families subsist for a short time when they arrived penniless at their destination and saved precious mementos. While most women packed feverishly under the scrutiny of one or two officials,³⁸ some women managed to bribe these officials. One woman, who smuggled gold, silver, and jewelry into her bags, commented on the officials who demanded huge payoffs to make this possible: "This corruption of the Germans, which grew into the monstrous,

rescued the lives and a modest existence for many people, particularly Jews." A few women bribed officials without consulting their husbands. They knew full well that their plans would have been vetoed, but they hoped to save some valuables for their immediate needs abroad. Else Gerstel, the wife of a judge, hid silverware with "Aryan" friends until the night before she packed. She then paid off packers to hide the silver while "seven Gestapo men were watching." She also smuggled other valuables in a secret compartment of her desk, built especially for this purpose: "I had risked of course the concentration camp and my life, probably all our lives. Alfred had no idea of what I had done. The night before we arrived in Cuba I whispered the whole story in his ear."³⁹

Other women smuggled jewelry or money abroad for their relatives. Visiting her grandchild in Switzerland, one grandmother smuggled jewelry on each trip. Alice Baerwald, a resident of Danzig, agreed to smuggle her sister-in-law's jewelry from Berlin to Danzig in order to mail it to her when she emigrated. It was not yet forbidden to send one's own jewelry from Danzig, a "free city" according to the Treaty of Versailles, and she could claim it belonged to her. Then other elderly family members begged her to take their jewelry to Danzig too. None of them wanted to become dependent upon their adult children once they arrived abroad. Even more fearfully, she agreed, noting that "if someone caught me, I'd be finished." A few years later, she reflected: "One lived . . . in such danger that one . . . forgot completely that there could still be a normal life elsewhere. . . . Naturally one did many forbidden things, but because, in fact, everything was forbidden to us Jews, one had absolutely no choice."⁴⁰

Women committed "illegal" acts not only to support their families but also to help the community at large. Beate Berger, for example, smuggled money from Berlin to Palestine in order to buy land for a children's home. Faithful friends, too, helped Jews take valuables abroad. The patient of one Jewish doctor, who was driven to commit suicide because of Nazi persecution, helped the doctor's widow smuggle jewelry and fur coats to Switzerland. She even accompanied the family to the border to assure their safety.⁴¹

While for many, "packing reduced a lifetime of possessions into three suitcases," for others, the clothing, shoes, and linens they packed had been donated by the Jewish Winter Relief Agency. Having sold the little they had to pay for their voyage, they had nothing left to take with them. The Jewish organization proclaimed: "They should not be uprooted and arrive in a foreign country with the mark of poverty stamped upon them."⁴²

Final Farewells

In fear for their lives, some people fled immediately after the pogrom. Alice Oppenheimer, with exit papers in hand and a husband in Buchenwald, packed bags for her five children and looked up the next train to Switzerland. It would leave on a Saturday. Because she was religiously observant, she phoned a rabbi for his advice regarding travel on the Sabbath. He told her to disregard the prohibition against travel since her life was in danger. She left with only some jewelry to sell in Italy in order to tide the family over until its departure for Palestine: "I could sell only a few articles, and those I practically gave away. I had to have some money in hand. How else could I proceed with five children? [In Italy] I bought a loaf of bread for them and said: 'I cannot give you any more to eat, or I won't have enough money.'" Several days later they embarked for Palestine, where they met up with the sixth child. Her husband also joined them, freed after sixteen days in a concentration camp because of his Palestine certificate. Oppenheimer remarked that the camp had "transformed a still youthful man into an old man whom I failed to recognize when he finally landed by boat at Tel Aviv."⁴³

For those lucky enough to leave Germany, most faced painful farewells with friends and relatives. "More and more, one learned to say farewell," wrote one woman, as she listed friends who had scattered over the entire world. Moreover, all worried that those left behind would face increasing torment, and neither side knew whether they would ever see each other again. Fleeing shortly after the pogrom, Toni Lessler said her farewells in the only public place left for Jews, the railroad station café. There, no one noticed a few Jewish people visiting with each other. Referring to the Zoo station in Berlin, Lessler wrote:

As we looked around . . . we saw similar groups to ours . . . friends and relatives who were taking leave from one another, none of whom could find any other meeting place than this dismal train station . . . in the midst of renovation and which offered the most inhospitable sojourn imaginable. I am unable to say how many tears were shed that evening.

When Elisabeth Freund finally escaped, shortly after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, her good-byes were excruciating. In the midst of real terror, having experienced bombings, forced labor, and the removal of Jews to tighter quarters, she tried not to break down: "Just no tears. One must not start that, otherwise one cannot stop. Who knows what will become of

these people. In a situation like this, one can no longer say farewell in a conventional way."⁴⁴

Individuals took leave in their own personal ways of what had been their *Heimat*—an almost untranslatable, nostalgic word for a romanticized homeland. In 1962, Ann Lewis and her parents described their feelings as they embarked for England. Ann, ten years old at the time, recalled the farewell at the train station:

Relatives and friends—perhaps twelve or fifteen people—had gathered to see us off. . . . Everyone had brought presents . . . flowers, chocolate, sweets, magazines, books. . . . I have never forgotten this picture of the little knot of our friends and relations, standing close together as if to give each other mutual comfort, waving to us as the train carried us away. Sometimes I am surprised how often it comes into my thoughts. Although this leave-taking occurred when I was still so young, it marked the most important turning-point of my life . . . the fundamental break with my roots.

Her mother wrote:

We are waiting at Bahnhof Zoo. . . . Many relatives and friends are there with flowers and presents. The train comes into the station, we get in, the children are excited and are looking forward to opening their presents—the train begins to move, we wave. Everything vanishes, we sit down—try not to think—dull apathy—mind a complete blank, vacant, oppressed, not a single tear. Courage—we *must* win through.

Her father wrote:

It is comfortable in the compartment . . . the luggage-racks are crammed with suitcases. . . . The four . . . are silent . . . the two adults, their faces looking serious and tired, are gazing with unseeing eyes through the windows, deep in thought. . . . Barely a quarter of an hour from now . . . Germany will lie behind them—Germany, the country which had been their home, where they had experienced happiness and suffering, the land whose language they had spoken—Germany, the country whose landscape was so dear to them . . . the Germany of poets, of thinkers and of the great composers.⁴⁵

Strikingly, even as both parents experienced relief, their farewell thoughts echoed the general orientation of women and men when contemplating

emigration: most women covered their pain and maintained a courageous front, while many men looked back, mourning for the country and culture they had once loved and had now lost. Adding to these differences, as we have seen (in chapter 2), were more immediate concerns: women looked forward to a safer environment for their families, while men agonized about how to support them.

It was terribly distressing for Jews to leave their homeland, family, and friends, especially when they saw the present suffering and feared for the future of those left behind. They also worried about how they would fare abroad. Their anguish notwithstanding, these émigrés were the lucky ones, and not only in hindsight. When Toni Lessler confided to a friend that “emigrating is terribly hard,” he responded tearfully, “Remaining here is much harder!”⁴⁶

Who Stayed Behind?

A gender analysis of the desire to emigrate (see chapter 2) highlights women’s and men’s unique expectations, priorities, and perceptions. Women wanted to leave well before their men. Paradoxically, it does not follow that more women than men *actually* left. To the contrary, fewer women than men left Germany. Why?

Although life was becoming increasingly difficult in the 1930s, there were still compelling reasons to stay. First, women could still find employment in Jewish businesses and homes. They could also work as teachers in Jewish schools, as social workers, nurses, and administrators in Jewish social service institutions, and as clerical workers for the Jewish community. And older, educated women found jobs in cultural and social service fields within the Jewish community. Hedwig Burgheim, for example, found challenging and important work. In 1933, she was forced to resign as director of a teacher training institute in Giessen. Thereafter she directed the Leipzig Jewish Community’s School for Kindergarten Teachers and Domestic Services, which trained young people for vocations useful in lands of emigration. After the November Pogrom, her own attempts at emigration having failed, she taught at the Jewish school and, by 1942, headed the old-age home in Leipzig. Along with its residents, she was deported in early 1943 and died in Auschwitz. Martha Wertheimer, a journalist before 1933, also found her skills in demand thereafter. She plunged into Jewish welfare work, while also writing books and plays, contributing to the Jewish press, and tutoring English to earn extra money. She escorted many children’s transports to England; worked twelve-hour days without pausing for meals in order to advise Jews on emigration and welfare procedures; took great



Office staff of the Jewish Winter Relief Agency, Berlin. The poster with a hand around a collection cup reads “Do Your Duty.” (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York)

joy in leading High Holiday services at the League of Jewish Women’s Home for Wayward Girls; and organized education courses for Jewish youth who had been drafted into forced labor. Ultimately, she wrote a friend in New York that, despite efforts to emigrate, she was no longer waiting to escape: “A great dark calm has entered me, as the saying of our fathers goes ‘*Gam zu le’tovah*’ (‘this, too, is for the best’).” She continued: “It is also worthwhile to be an officer on the sinking ship of Jewish life in Germany, to hold out courageously and to fill the life boats, to the extent that we have some.”⁴⁷

While the employment situation of Jewish women helped keep them in Germany, that of men helped get them out. Some men had business connections abroad, facilitating their immediate flight, and others emigrated alone in order to establish themselves before sending for their families. Among Eastern European Jews who returned east between 1934 and 1937, for example, the majority were male, even though almost half of them were married. A handful of men, some with wives, received visas to leave Europe from groups hoping to save eminent intellectuals and artists. Women’s organizations agreed that, if there was no choice, wives should not “hinder” husbands from emigrating alone, but they argued that it was often no cheaper for men to emigrate without their wives.⁴⁸

Before the war, moreover, men faced immediate physical danger. Men who had been detained by the Nazis and then freed, as well as boys who had

been beaten up by neighborhood ruffians, fled Germany early. After the November Pogrom, in a strange twist of fortune, the men interred in concentration camps were released only upon showing proof of their ability to leave Germany immediately. Families—mostly wives and mothers—strained every resource to provide the documentation to free these men and send them on their way while some of the women remained behind. Alice Nauen recalled how difficult these emigration decisions were for Jewish leaders:

Should we send the men out first? This had been the dilemma all along. . . . If you have two tickets, do you take one man out of the concentration camp and his wife who is at this moment safe? Or do you take your two men out of the concentration camp? They took two men out . . . because they said we cannot play God, but these are in immediate danger.

Even as women feared for their men, they believed that they themselves would be spared serious harm by the Nazis. In retrospect, Ruth Klüger reflected on this kind of thinking and the resulting preponderance of women caught in the trap: "One seemed to ignore what was most obvious, namely how imperiled precisely the weaker and the socially disadvantaged are. That the Nazis should stop at women contradicted their racist ideology. Had we, as the result of an absurd, patriarchal short circuit, perhaps counted on their chivalry?"⁴⁹

Despite trepidations, parents sent sons into the unknown more readily than daughters. Bourgeois parents worried about a daughter traveling alone, believing boys would be safer. Families also assumed that sons needed to establish economic futures for themselves, whereas daughters would marry. In 1935, one family sent its son to Palestine because "it was proper for a young man to try to leave and find a job elsewhere." His parents were reluctant to send their daughter abroad. Like other young women, socialized to accept their parents' judgment, she consented to remain behind and even made it "possible for him to go abroad by supporting him financially." As more and more sons left, daughters remained as the sole caretakers of elderly parents. One female commentator noted the presence of many women "who can't think of emigration because they don't know who might care for their elderly mothers . . . before they could start sending them money. In the same families, the sons went their way." Leaving one's aging parent—as statistics indicate, usually the mother—was the most painful act imaginable. Ruth Glaser described her own

mother's agony at leaving her mother to join her husband, who had been forbidden reentry into Germany: she "could not sleep at night thinking of leaving her [mother] behind." Men, too, felt such grief, but more left nonetheless. Charlotte Stein-Pick wrote of her husband's anguish: "This abandonment of his old parents depressed him deeply. . . . He never got over this farewell. . . . To be sure, he saw that we could never have helped them, only shared their fate. I almost believe he would have preferred it."⁵⁰

As early as 1936, the League of Jewish Women noted that far fewer women than men were leaving and feared that Jewish men of marriageable age would intermarry abroad, leaving Jewish women behind in Germany with no chance of marrying. Still, the League was not enthusiastic about emigration to certain areas because of anxiety about the possibility of forced prostitution. The League of Jewish Women also turned toward parents, reminding them of their "responsibility to free their daughters" even though daughters felt "stronger psychological ties to their families than sons do, [which] probably lies in the female psyche." As late as January 1938, one of the main emigration organizations, the Aid Society, announced that "up to now, Jewish emigration . . . indicates a severe surplus of men." It blamed this on the "nature" of women to feel closer to family and home and on that of men toward greater adventurousness. It also suggested that couples marry before emigrating, encouraged women to prepare themselves as household helpers, and promised that women's emigration would become a priority. Yet only two months later the Society announced it would expedite the emigration of only those young women who could prove their household skills and were willing to work as domestics abroad.⁵¹ Jewish organizations also provided less support to emigrating women than to men.⁵²

That some women and men took the advice to marry before going abroad, or came upon the idea on their own, can be seen from marriage ads in Jewish newspapers. These ads frequently included the requirement that the future spouse be amenable to emigration. For example, in 1936, one woman sought a "marriage partner . . . with the possibility of emigration," while another woman gave the value of her dowry in Swiss francs. A businessman offered a "pretty, healthy, and young woman" the opportunity of emigrating to Palestine together. By 1938, almost every ad announced the desire or ability to emigrate, occasionally boasting "affidavit in hand." Some may have entered into phony marriages before emigrating to Palestine. Since a couple, that is, two people, could enter on one certificate, a quick

marriage of convenience, to be continued or broken upon arrival, saved an extra life.⁵³

Families were often reluctant to consider Palestine, and the kibbutz, as an alternative for daughters. One survey of graduating classes from several Jewish schools in late 1935 showed that 47 percent of the boys but only 30 percent of the girls aimed for Palestine. Statistics for the first half of 1937 indicate that of those taking advantage of Zionist retraining programs, only 32 percent were female. Overall, fewer single females than males emigrated to Palestine: between 1933 and 1942, 8,209 "bachelors," compared with 5,080 "single" females, entered from German-speaking lands.⁵⁴

Those young women who actually wound up in Palestine preferred the cities. The majority of German-Jewish girls and young women did not take available positions on kibbutzim or in agricultural training centers but rather took jobs as cooks or milliners. Better jobs, such as social workers, kindergarten teachers, and nurses, were much harder to find. While emigration consultants encouraged young women to take up the adventures of kibbutz life, articles appearing on Palestine, often written by committed Zionists, must have given pause. In one such article, the male author described a situation in which eight young women cared for fifty-five young men. They cooked, washed "mountains" of laundry, darned hundreds of socks, and sewed ripped clothing, working long days and into the night. But even more was expected of them. They were to do the emotional housework as well:

A friendly word at the right time will bring a young man to his senses who once had a dozen shirts . . . and now noticed that his last carefully maintained shirt was taken by another. . . . Whether the kibbutz thrives is up to the girls! They have to mother one, be a comrade to the other . . . and have the endlessly difficult task of always remaining in a good mood [and] smiling.

Such reports, plus the numerous news items regarding Arab-Jewish discord, left most young women looking elsewhere for refuge.⁵⁵

The growing disproportion of Jewish women in the German-Jewish population also came about because, to begin with, there were more Jewish women than men in Germany. In 1933, 52.3 percent of Jews were women, owing to male casualties during World War I, greater marrying out and conversion among Jewish men, and greater longevity among women. In order to stay even, a greater absolute number of women would have had to

emigrate. The slower rate of female than male emigration, however, meant that the female proportion of the Jewish population rose from 52.3 percent in 1933 to 57.5 percent by 1939. After the war, one woman wrote:

Mostly we were women who had been left to ourselves. In part, our husbands had died from shock, partly they had been processed from life to death in a concentration camp and partly some wives who, aware of the greater danger to their husbands, had prevailed upon them to leave at once and alone. They were ready to take care of everything and to follow their husbands later on, but because of the war it became impossible for many to realize this intention and quite a few of my friends and acquaintances thus became martyrs of Hitler.⁵⁶

A large proportion of these remaining women were elderly. Age, even more than being female, worked against timely flight; together they were lethal. Between June 1933 and September 1939, the number of young Jews in Germany under age thirty-nine decreased by about 80 percent. In contrast, the number of Jews over sixty decreased by only 27 percent. As early as 1936, a Jewish woman released from prison for her work in the communist resistance recuperated in a sanatorium. She remarked upon its "dismal milieu": "The guests [were] nearly all old people who had remained behind by themselves. Their children were either in prison camps or in Palestine, the U.S.A., and still farther away. . . . [They] longed for death." By 1939, the proportion of people over sixty had increased to 32 percent of the Jewish population; by 1941, two-thirds of the Jewish population was past middle age. In Berlin alone, the number of old-age homes grew from three in 1933 to thirteen in 1939 and to twenty-one in 1942. Already in 1933, the elderly had consisted of a large number of widows, the ratio being 140 Jewish women over the age of sixty-five to 100 men. By 1937–38, 59 percent of the recipients of Jewish Winter Relief aged forty-five and over were female. In 1939, 6,674 widowed men and 28,347 widowed women remained in the expanded Reich.⁵⁷

In short, in slightly less than eight years and drastically increasing after the November Pogrom, two-thirds of German Jews emigrated (many to European countries where they were later caught up in the Nazi net), leaving a disproportionate number of old people and women. Jewish newspapers featured articles about old women whose children had emigrated, whose living quarters were small, whose help had disappeared, whose finances were meager. Thrown together, sometimes in old-age homes,

sometimes as paying guests in the homes of other Jews, these women passed their days reliving memories of better times. Financial worries plagued them, but they were even more tormented by not knowing their children's exact whereabouts or circumstances. They constituted a "community of old people, who supported . . . and consoled each other." When Elisabeth Freund, one of the last Jews to leave Germany legally in October 1941, went to the Gestapo for her final papers, she observed: "All old people, old women" waiting in line.⁵⁸

6

War and the Worsening Situation of Jews

[We're] not afraid of the bombings. . . . That is a danger we . . . share with . . . millions. . . . We are only afraid of the Gestapo.

— ELISABETH FREUND

Well before the outbreak of World War II, Jews endured warlike conditions. But after Germany went to war, the Nazis accelerated their economic and social persecution. The government confiscated Jewish business and personal property and limited food and clothing purchases. It herded Jews together, tagging them and compelling them to do forced labor, and it banned Jewish emigration. Jewish women and men shared increasing deprivations. They also faced frightful bombings and even more dreadful news of concentration camps. On a daily level, women remained responsible for shopping, making meals stretch, repairing clothing worn to shreds, organizing their children's schooling and free time, and, even in ghetto housing, providing a home life and community for their families.

THE IMMEDIATE PREWAR PERSECUTIONS

Restrictions and Responses

While the viciousness of the November Pogrom alerted Jews to the acute physical dangers of remaining in Germany, the decrees following it put an end to the hopes of any who might have believed that Jews could continue to eke out an existence. Economic ordinances after November 9/10, 1938, prohibited almost all employment and business activity to Jews, forced "Aryanization" of all remaining Jewish firms and property, demanded a punitive tax on Jewish assets, and ordered the deposit of cash and other