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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Gellately, R. (1997). Denunciations and Nazi Germany: new insights and methodological problems. *Historical Social Research*, 22(3/4), 228-239. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.22.1997.3/4.228-239>

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## Denunciations and Nazi Germany: New Insights and Methodological Problems

*Robert Gellately\**

Abstract: Since 1990 or so, the role of denunciations in the Nazi terror system has been highlighted by a number of writers interested in the functioning of the Gestapo in the context of everyday life in Germany. Several historians have claimed that ordinary citizens who volunteered information on suspected infringements of the letter or spirit of the laws played a crucial role in everyday terror under Hitler's dictatorship. This cooperation by German citizens and their apparent willingness to denounce calls for historical analysis. In this paper I discuss the full range of denudations in Nazi Germany and outline briefly some of the main theoretical problems involved. Essentially, historians have adopted two methods. The first takes a systems approach and focuses on the structures of state, society, and to some extent also on political culture. The other adopts a "life-world" perspective, and attempts to reconstruct the experiences of historical actors, including those of "ordinary people". Each approach has its own advantages, but neither seems to do justice to the phenomenon of denunciations as discussed in the recent literature. The new findings impel us to rethink what we mean by willingness, consent, and support when these concepts are applied to modern dictatorships. The paper should be of interest to a wide variety of specialists. It will offer new substantive findings, suggest directions for future research and delineate some of the main methodological issues and problems that must be confronted.

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An earlier version of this paper was presented to the German Studies Association (Seattle) 12 October 1996.

In the last decade or so I have been engaged in a study of the terror system in Nazi Germany.<sup>1</sup> The primary sources I have been using are the files of the Gestapo that survive for three regions in Germany and are now stored at archives in Düsseldorf, Würzburg, and Speyer. Virtually all other such materials were destroyed. I began my archival studies with an examination of the persecution of the Jews, and I have expanded the scope of research to focus on other racial "out-groups," such as the foreign workers brought to Germany from eastern Europe during the war. For a deeply racist regime like Hitler's, with its pathological fear of "race mixing," it was crucial to isolate "racially foreign people," whether they were Jewish or eastern workers, and above all to restrict social contacts and hinder sexual relationships. It was one thing to pass laws and publish new regulations, but how was the Gestapo going to enforce them? In order for the endeavours of any modern police to succeed, the support of the population is essential, and this rule of thumb also applied to Nazi Germany and the enforcement of its highly discriminatory "measures." Certainly, the key factor in the routine operation of the Gestapo was the provision of information from the general population by way of denunciations. In "Stasi" Germany, by contrast, although the information was considered to be every bit as important, it was gathered far more systematically, and potential informants were recruited and checked out carefully.<sup>2</sup> In Nazi Germany, in spite of occasional second thoughts by the leaders of the Nazi police, the regime was heavily dependent on volunteer and occasional denouncers. Perhaps, in the circumstances of the times, the Nazis were not able to institute a more systematic and "professional" communications flow, but as far as we can tell, in the Third Reich, compared to earlier periods, there was also a greatly increased propensity of citizens to inform on each other.<sup>3</sup> Two major factors would seem to have fostered denunciations in the Nazi era as never before in the country: (1) there was a drive, led by the Gestapo, to control ever more

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<sup>1</sup> See my *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1990), A German translation appeared in 1993. I am now completing a book entitled *Hitler's Terror: Images, Institutions, Practices, 1933-1945* (to be published by Oxford University Press).

<sup>2</sup> For a comparison between denunciations in Nazi Germany and "Stasi" Germany, see my "Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989* (Chicago, 1997), 185-221.

<sup>3</sup> Only more work on the practices of denunciation in the Weimar and the Imperial periods in Germany will settle the matter. It is only recently that historians have begun to investigate systematically the importance of denunciations for modern terror systems. In the last several years, however, denunciations — understood broadly as a variety of popular informing to the police or other authorities, have been highlighted in the literature on Hitler's dictatorship and more recently with the Communist regime of the German Democratic Republic. See Gerhard Paul, »Deutschland, deine Denunzianten,« *Die Zeit* (17 September 1993), p. 16.

aspects of social and personal life, and (2) given the (perceived) urgency of this task, the police were necessarily more solicitous of and receptive to tips than ever. Denunciations flowed not only to the Gestapo, but to the Nazi Party and other organizations." Indeed, denunciations became so common that the Jewish war veteran and dismissed philology professor Victor Klemperer recorded in 1934 in his diary the sick joke of the day, that the Catholic Hitler had anointed two new "saints," one of them said to be Maria Denunziata.<sup>5</sup>

At any rate, there is more than sufficient evidence to suggest that Hitler's dictatorship was able to accommodate a radical version of a self-policing society. The term "self-policing society" refers to the general phenomenon in the modern period of a new nexus of relationships between the people, their leaders, and the policing authorities. 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 the past 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.<sup>6</sup> As Klemperer clearly demonstrates, self-policing also had subjective dimensions.<sup>7</sup>

I want to focus here on a number of the critical issues that have arisen from my recent research. Let me begin with a brief word about the Gestapo as police institution and then I will discuss several issues about denunciations. The other

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent local study, see Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, *Politische Denunziation im NS-Regime oder die kleine Macht der Volksgenossen* (Bonn, 1995). For an interesting account of letter-writing to the Nazi Party, see John Connelly, "The Uses of Volksgemeinschaft: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung Eisenach, 1939-1940," in Fitzpatrick and Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices*, 153-184

<sup>5</sup> See the entry for 14 October 1934 in Victor Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten*, Bd. 1 (Berlin, 1995), 157.

<sup>6</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York, 1979), pp. 195 ff., esp. p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> One can trace in Victor Klemperer's diary, how he came to see the dream of being accepted as a German to be an illusion, and also how the overwhelming majority of the population gradually came to accept and support anti-Semitism and the Third Reich. We cannot ignore these aspects of the life-world if we wish to understand the operation of Hitler's terror system.

"saint" allegedly anointed by Hitler, according to the joke recorded by Klemperer, was Mariae Haussuchung — which should remind us again of the importance of the Gestapo. The two Nazi "saints" worked hand in glove.

(1) The image of the Gestapo that was fostered in the Nazi era — particularly in newspaper stories — was that it was ever-present, all-knowing and all-powerful. This image was also reflected in popular narratives about the secret police, as reinforced by rumour and gossip, and recorded in diaries, letters and so on.<sup>8</sup> Just as not everyone in Germany was terrorized, or needed to be terrorized, popular reactions varied greatly, according to issue, and changed over time.<sup>9</sup> The historian Alison Owings has recorded many stories told her by women who experienced the Third Reich as "wonderful times."<sup>10</sup> Hitler's dictatorship was maintained not just by terror, but by a combination of terror and consensus."

(2) We should under no circumstances underestimate the importance of the Gestapo, or the Kripo for that matter. If we subject the image of the police to critical evaluation, however, we must conclude that they contain some exaggerations, even on basic issues, like its numerical strength.<sup>12</sup> We now know the exact figures of the distribution of the Gestapo, and we can show that there were nothing like as many officials involved in active police work as often assumed. Even in relation to population, there were far fewer in Hitler's Germany than in Stalin's Soviet Union. There was approximately one secret policeman per 10,000 in Germany, and about one per 500 — or twenty times as many — in the USSR in the same period.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, most Gestapo officials were trained policemen and not merely SS-fanatics.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis, see my "Allwissend und allgegenwärtig? Entstehung, Funktion und Wandel des Gestapo-Mythos," in Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (eds.), *Die Gestapo: Mythos und Realität* (Darmstadt, 1995), 47-70.

<sup>9</sup> See Tilla Siegel, "Whatever was the attitude of German Workers? Reflections on Recent Interpretations," in Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge, 1996), 61-77.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, 1993), 9, when Frau Margarete Fischer says: "We also had good years. We had *wonderful* years." She continues, "I actually *wanted* only to see the good." (13)

<sup>11</sup> This was the conclusion reached after much soul-searching by an outstanding historian of the working class, the late Tim Mason, in his "The containment of the working class in Nazi Germany," in his *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge, 1995), 231-73.

<sup>12</sup> Although much was revealed and known about the Gestapo, this was a secret police and in the dictatorship there was no free exchange of information in the public sphere as the latter term is usually understood in "bourgeois society." There are many reasons why the image of the Gestapo fostered in the Nazi era persisted after 1945, but it was inadvertently reinforced by the way the Gestapo was charged at the Nuremberg trials and by its representations in the post-war literature.

<sup>13</sup> For details see Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, "Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History," in Fitzpatrick and Gellately (es.), *Accusatory Practices*, 1-21, here 9. The Gestapo total of 7,500 at a maximum does

It would be false to conclude, however, in the context of the Third Reich and the ensuing war years, that the Gestapo was insignificant and meaningless. In time it was given far-reaching new powers. I argue in my new book on "Hitler's Terror" that in fact a unique "system of police justice" (Polizeijustiz) emerged in Germany.<sup>15</sup> This system grew not only at the expense of citizens' legal rights and the rule of law, but to a very large extent it pushed aside the courts and, during the war, contributed greatly to their radicalism because it threatened to make the courts redundant. To keep a step ahead, the courts radicalized themselves. The importance of these institutional changes can hardly be underestimated, nor can the effect of the war, which revolutionized everything about Hitler's terror. Inside Germany this terror was constituted by a system of "police justice" and that system was fuelled at the enforcement level in society at large by a radical self-policing system. The two systems functioned in dynamic interaction.

(3) What about the routine modus operandi of the Gestapo? Like most police forces, it was less active than citizens either hoped or feared, but also like police elsewhere, by and large it was reactive. Routinely the Gestapo relied on information offered by those in the best position to provide it, namely civilian denouncers, and information was also passed along by official or semi-official bodies. When the Gestapo was faced by a real political emergency, such as after the attempt to assassinate Hitler on 22 July 1944, it grew far more active. As usual for police responses in such emergencies, especially after conspiratorial bombings, their fever-pitched activities attempted to find as many people as possible who knew something and who could provide clues.<sup>16</sup> With the assistance of the population, the police tracked down the conspirators against Hitler, including some of the key ones who went underground.<sup>17</sup> A similar combination of police activism and denunciations from civilians led earlier to the capture of the White Rose resistance group in Munich.

We do not need to choose between interpreting the terror in Nazi Germany as either comprising an evil police or many cooperative denouncers. Clearly both existed and both made the terror possible.<sup>18</sup> Just as evidence that the Gestapo

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not include concentration camp guards, whereas the Soviet NKVD total of 366,000 includes the personnel in the gulag.

<sup>14</sup> For details and also much information on what follows, see my *The Gestapo and German Society*, 21-75.

<sup>15</sup> There is no adequate study of this topic, but an introduction, which stops in 1940, is the massive account of Lothar Gruchmann, *Justiz im Dritten Reich: Anpassung und Unterwerfung in der Ära Gärtner* (Munich, 1987), 535 ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Johannes Tuchel, "Die Sicherheitspolizeischule Drögen und der 20. Juli 1944 - zur Geschichte der Sonderkommission Lange," in Florian von Buttlar et al (eds.), *Fürstenberg-Drögen: Schichten eines verlassenen Ortes* (Berlin, 1994), 120-42.

<sup>17</sup> For the case of Karl Gördeler, see Inge Marbolek, *Die Denunziantin: die Geschichte der Helene Schwärzet* (Bremen, 1993). This book formed the basis of a movie by Thomas Mitscherlich.

<sup>18</sup> For numerous contributions that assert such an either/or viewpoint on the Nazi terror,

was extremely active on occasion does not undermine my thesis that denunciations played a pivotal role in the terror, so too does the fact that much assistance was offered by denunciations in no way detract from the evils of the Gestapo.

(4) What about police "actions," that is, sweeps to pick up designated groups? For specific "preventive actions" such as the ones to pick up habitual criminals and repeat offenders and anti-social types (Asozialen) in the first part of 1938, for example, the Gestapo and Kripo relied on information from many sources, including work exchange offices and welfare institutions. The police had some information on anti-social "elements," as they were called, but not nearly enough. Working with those institutions in better positions to have such information, the police carried out "actions" as part of the new "preventive" police mandate and were integral to "police justice." Very similar procedures were used later in 1938 to pick up Jews as part of "Kristallnacht" and later still to deport the Jews who remained in Germany; the Gestapo went by census lists that had been prepared. All such "actions" clearly reveal the broadened and politicized police mandate, and that in turn tells us a great deal about how the police changed in Germany after 1933. As time went on and especially in the war years the Gestapo became judge, jury and executioner. It operated with legal impunity, as to some extent did the Kripo, beyond the limits of the law as the latter concept is commonly understood in liberal democracy.

Now I want to change gears and move from a systems analysis to an introduction of life-world perspectives. In my writing I have adopted a systems approach to the study of the Gestapo and denunciations because I wanted to try to explain how the system worked. Thus, I focused attention on the role of denunciations in the everyday operation of the Gestapo. However, I also tried to integrate life-world perspectives by paying considerable attention to the specifics of the local context — particularly attitudes towards Jews, Nazism, and so on. For that purpose, I drew on official sources of popular opinion and studied private sources, such as diaries, letters and autobiographies. I understood denunciations from the population to the police to be situated in the sphere of activity that linked the "Gestapo system" to the life-world of the day. Now I want to say just a little more about the life-world.

Jürgen Habermas suggests that "subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a life-world. Their life-world is formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This life-world background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic. In their interpretive accomplishments the members of a communication community demarcate the one objective world and their inter-subjectively shared social world from the subjective worlds of individuals and (other) collectives."<sup>19</sup>

see the collection Brigitte Berlekamp and Werner Röhr (eds.), *Terror, Herrschaft und Alltag im Nationalsozialismus* (Münster, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston, 1984), 70.

Habermas notes further, that "from a perspective turned toward the situation, the life-world appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation."<sup>20</sup>

What kinds of taken-for-granted, unspoken assumptions, unproblematic background convictions constituted the life-world of denouncers in Nazi Germany? Let me narrow the focus, by looking into the most difficult question of all about the denouncers, namely their motives and their life-world as context.

From a detailed analysis of well over a thousand Gestapo dossiers in three contrasting regions of Germany, I have concluded that for the system, the motives of the denouncers were almost always secondary questions. But they are not unimportant for us, because we want to understand not only how the system worked, but also why people denounced, that is, why the German people cooperated with Nazi evil and betrayed their ethical commitments to fellow human beings. What can we say about motives on the basis of the evidence in the Gestapo files?

Before addressing the question specifically, I must make three relevant points about Gestapo files:

(1) Gestapo operating procedures were such that the evidence recorded in the files on the motives of the denouncers is usually unsatisfactory and incomplete: often there is no evidence about motives at all. The police invariably responded to denunciations and investigated, no matter how dubious the source or far-fetched the accusation, even when the motive was quite obviously self-serving. They grew more concerned about motives when they got bad information, were sent on a wild-goose chase, or when they were drowning in too much information and denunciations became dysfunctional. As a rule, however, the files are more often than not silent on motives. It is precisely this silence we need to interpret and I shall return to it.

(2) In the files that begin with a denunciation, the evidence of affective motivation is rare. Affective motives include love of Nazism, patriotism, wish to express support for "law and order," or hatred of social outsiders or others such as the Jews who were defined as enemies. As several studies have shown, on balance the predominant motives of the denouncers — in so far as these were recorded — appear to have been instrumental ones, such as informing on a rival or someone involved in a social dispute.<sup>21</sup> Such instrumental denunciations took place within families, among friends and colleagues, and certainly inside the army, so that no social enclave appears to have been

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<sup>20</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston, 1987), 124.

<sup>21</sup> See Reinhard Mann, *Protest und Kontrolle im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 287-312.



entirely immune. Denouncers took advantage of the state's means of coercion for selfish purposes, and in that respect at least, citizens in Nazi Germany were not entirely unlike those in other "totalitarian" regimes. They rendered a service to the state — by providing the police with information — and the state rendered a service to them — by settling a conflict or removing one of the parties involved. In all of these systems, citizens lost many of the "traditional" means for resolving conflicts, and soon adapted and relied on unmediated access to the means of coercion.<sup>22</sup> We can find an abundance of evidence of such instrumental denunciations from many parts of Europe in the 20th century.<sup>23</sup> In Nazi Germany, not only did the denouncers go to the police with information, others offered to work for the Gestapo as agents — or "V-Leute." Some of the latter were "turned" by the Gestapo to work against the Communist Party and at times their contribution was decisive in finishing off what remained of the local Communist network — as happened in the mid-1930s in Wuppertal, when one agent's information contributed to the arrest and trial of some 1,500 people.<sup>24</sup> But other "V-Leute," like many denouncers, volunteered totally false information to gain personally, even when that meant in one "agent's" case from 1938-39, getting between 50 and 60 innocent people in trouble with the Gestapo in Dusseldorf on the serious charge of high treason.<sup>25</sup>

(3) That the terror system could be used or manipulated belonged to the life-world of denouncers and the "V-Leute" in Nazi Germany. But we cannot let the matter rest there, because it is the anti-Semitic and racist dimensions of denunciations that differentiate informing in Nazi Germany, from Fascist Italy or even informing the police in the United States or Canada today. Supporting law and order in Toronto in 1997 constitutes a different act from informing on the Jews or the Communists in Berlin in 1937.

The problem for the historian is that we have little firm evidence on the precise linkages between the life-world in general and specific acts as recorded in Gestapo files. What kinds of minimum statements can we make that will help us at least to delimit the main parameters, the broad contours of the denouncers' life-world and the social knowledge of the terror that was available at the time?<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> There are a series of relevant studies in Fitzpatrick and Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices*.

<sup>23</sup> See the interesting examples in Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 1988), 119-20.

<sup>24</sup> See Hauptstaatsarchiv Dusseldorf: Gestapo 11490.

<sup>25</sup> See Hauptstaatsarchiv Dusseldorf: Gestapo 3691.

<sup>26</sup> There is no clear line dividing the life-world from the system's approach. I have been critical of histories of the life world such as those that were quite popular in German history not long ago, because I found that *Alltagsgeschichte* was not useful in understanding how the system functioned. I distanced myself from this work, not least

(1) What could citizens have known about the Gestapo and expect to happen to the person they denounced? At the least, denouncers had to know that their tips would help to enforce Nazi ideology — and what it stood for was well known. Thus, for most denouncers, their act of collaboration implied a degree of agreement with these beliefs, even if they did not accept everything. Few people would have been disingenuous enough to think they could destroy or undermine Nazism by actively collaborating.

(2) What was known about the terroristic aspects of Hitler's regime? I am presently completing a detailed study of the public representations of the terror in the press, but it is already clear to me that many stories were published about the Gestapo and the Courts and the camps. Even though these were "cleaned up" versions, no one could be in much doubt that the rule of law as understood in liberal democracies was over. Virtually anyone informing the Gestapo could hardly have been unaware of the harsh penalties meted out by the courts and published in the press.

(3) What was the social attitude to informing the police? There was a civic tradition in Germany that accepted and even promoted contacts with the police and the state. In this respect German tradition contrasted with modern Italy, with its distrust of the state, and even with France and Britain.<sup>27</sup> However, in Germany informing the police had to be accompanied by the "right" motives. There is a well-known German motto that "the denouncer [ie. an informant with the "wrong" motives] is the biggest scoundrel in the whole country." This motto was repeated by Nazi officials mainly in a context of condemnations of those who falsely accused another.<sup>28</sup> Informants with the "right" motives — that is, the right affective ones — were encouraged (never ordered) to come forward.

(4) What about denunciations of infringements of various race regulations? Even though the consequences for breaking these codes were made reasonably clear to citizens, the Gestapo had no difficulty in obtaining denunciations until the last days of the war. It would be fair to hypothesize that, whether a motive was explicitly mentioned in the Gestapo file or not, many denouncers accepted

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because some of it tended to inflate the significance of small "r" resistance. Grumblers tended to become resisters and they seemed to be everywhere in Nazi Germany. Yet I was finding that the Gestapo was able to detect the slightest sign of dissent with the help of denouncers and, on balance, it seemed to me that there was a danger of both exaggerating the extent of resistance and at the same time failing to understand what the terror was all about and the odds faced by anyone who even *wanted* to dissent or resist.

<sup>27</sup> See Tim Mason, "Whatever happened to Fascism?," in his *Nazism, Fascism, and the Working Class*, 329. Note also the detailed study of Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1943* (London, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Minister of Justice Thierack repeated this motto ("Der Denunziant ist der größte Schuft im ganzen Land") in his guidance to judges. See Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Richterbriefe: Dokumente zur Beeinflussung der deutschen Rechtsprechung* (Boppard, 1975), 171.

the racist teachings. It would be hard to think they did not know that their act supported racism. This point holds both for the persecution of the Jews and the foreign workers in Germany during the war and the hounding down of anyone who expressed solidarity with them.

(5) What changed during the war? From day one, press reports made it clear that every effort would be made to uphold the home front and that penalties for minor offenses would be severe. Hitler himself intervened to "correct" legitimate court verdicts he felt were too mild and ordered the death penalty. In spite of public brandishing of draconian punishments, the Gestapo had no difficulty in obtaining denunciations also when "ordinary Germans" were the offenders.

(6) If we look at specific denunciations, we find at one end of the scale, people who informed on what seem to have been almost entirely affective motives, even when it cost them materially. That was rare. But I have found an "idealist" grandmother who turned in her beloved grandson in hopes the police would dissuade him from making hurtful remarks about Hitler, and she did this at a time when anyone guilty of an anti-Hitler remark was as good as dead. At the other end of the scale there were people who denounced for what they later confessed were entirely instrumental reasons, and some people did so when the information was "knowingly false" and were even subsequently charged by the police. Even though the files contain little evidence of affective motives, we should not conclude these were absent altogether. I would suggest that these sorts of motives were not routinely recorded by the police for any number of reasons. In general such motives were simply taken for granted, part of the background beliefs of both police officials and denouncers, and in most cases the police official wanted to know the precise, immediate, and instrumental motive that brought the denouncer to Gestapo headquarters. We can conclude that both instrumental considerations and affective beliefs about the system were at work in the minds of many denouncers and part of their life-world. No doubt, the precise mixture varied from person to person.

What does the widespread incidence of all these denunciations tell us about the life-world in Nazi Germany? It is a reasonable hypothesis that, as even the underground Socialists began to see at the end of the 1930s, this behaviour reflected an emerging social consensus and acceptance of the system.<sup>29</sup> And that point may well hold even for those who merely used or even "misused" the system for their own purposes. Such a conclusion is supported if we take some snapshots from other contemporary sources, like diaries, that offer insight into the life-world of the times.

(7) It is against the backdrop of this increasingly Nazified life-world that we need to return to the Gestapo's apparent lack of concern about the motives of

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<sup>29</sup> A detailed study now is Bernd Stöver, *Volksgemeinschaft im Dritten Reich: Die Konsensbereitschaft der Deutschen aus der Sicht sozialistischer Exilberichte* (Düsseldorf, 1993).

the denouncers. The Gestapo were zealous sticklers for detail, why not here? One answer pertains to unspoken assumptions and taken-for-granted. In face-to-face communications between a denouncer and an official of the Gestapo, many unspoken assumptions, accepted values and axiomatic prejudices, would have gone unmentioned. They would have appeared as "natural" and not in need of formal (explicit) recognition. In the situation at the time, it is also reasonable to assume that not all verbal utterances and exchanges, nor even explicit expressions of motives, were recorded. The meeting of minds, the social "givens" might well have been too obvious. It is possible, therefore, to interpret the silences in the dossiers as also signifying affective support for the "system."

## Conclusions

People governed by terroristic regimes in modern societies are involved in everyday terror in countless ways: they are not just victims who are silenced or driven in retreat to their private spheres. It is true that certain forms of political participation, such as in elections, are robbed of real meaning when opposition parties are banned, criticism of the government is turned into a crime, and there is fear that the secrecy of the ballot will not be respected. But if participation in formal politics is virtually brought to an end, or made into a hollow exercise, certain avenues remain open through which citizens can express their opinions, articulate their interests, and seek to satisfy them. One of the ways citizens participated in the Nazi system was to utilize methods left to them such as denunciations. They also mailed countless thousands of letters of supplication, complaint, or accusation to officials at all levels. These "signals from below" constituted attempts to get some "action" from the state or the party, and some of them were nothing but expressions of loyalty and even love for Hitler.

I would argue that the Gestapo's mythical powers and its reputation, was part of what made it into a much favoured destination for accusations. Informers were well aware of what was and "was not done." They knew what would be taken seriously, the probable consequences, and certainly what it took to get the police to respond. In contrast to Imperial Germany and especially the Weimar Republic's rule of law, citizens in Nazi Germany, had more direct access to the coercive apparatus of the state. Judicial procedures were "simplified" and citizens could take advantage of unmediated access to the system. Germans could not fail to become aware, that the Nazi regime needed more information than the Weimar democracy it had replaced, and they learned that this great hunger for certain kinds of information could be capitalized upon for purposes of their own.

Many citizens took advantage of the system and even sought to manipulate it "from below." But this instrumental utilization of denunciations should not lead

us to ignore the fact that there were also many kinds of affective motives at work. Denunciations occurred in a social context that was dramatically and obviously coloured by Nazi ideology from top to bottom. Anti-Semitism and other forms of racism were so deeply a part of "normal" social life that Gestapo officials would not have thought it necessary to record race-based motives in the dossiers they created. No denouncer could be entirely lacking in affective motives.

Let me end with reference to Victor Klemperer, a Jewish war veteran, an anti-Zionist and ardent nationalist, who thought in early 1933, that it was self-destructive for Hitler to put anti-Semitism at the centre of his program. All too soon he was shocked to see how most Germans came around, and he came to understand, he said, that the Nazis understood the people far better than he had.<sup>30</sup> On 23 February 1938 he notes: "Neulich ein Werbebericht der Wach- und Schließgesellschaft.' Aufzählung ihrer Taten im letzten Jahr x Diebstähle verhindert, x Brände verhindert, x Straftaten zur Anzeige gebracht, eine Rassenschändung."

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<sup>30</sup> Writes Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen*, 25 (25 April 1933): "Das Schicksal der Hitlerbewegung liegt fraglos in der Judensache. Ich begreife nicht, warum sie diesen Programmpunkt so zentral gestellt haben. An ihm gehen sie zugrunde." By 16 January 1935 he was reporting that 90 percent of the people were behind Hitler (p. 178). In with almost every month that followed, he came to recognize (27 September 1936) that the Jews in Germany were (p. 306) "so mittelalterlich hilflos ausgeliefert." The same date he wrote "daß die NSDAP die Volksstimmung ganz richtig bewertet hat und daß der jüdische Traum vom Deutschsein doch wohl ein Traum gewesen ist. Das ist mir die bitterste Erkenntnis." (p. 308)