New Perspectives on Kristallnacht

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INTRODUCTION

Memoirs, diaries and correspondence from Jewish and Non-Jewish members of mixed marriages offer the striking impression that families with Jewish husbands reported experiencing excessive violence during Kristallnacht, while families with Jewish wives generally talked more about violence happening to other Jewish relatives and friends rather than about self-experienced violence. Certainly, this assessment does not apply to every single source, but reading some dozen documents written by intermarried Jews and looking into at least one hundred of their compensation files from all over Germany, this rule seems to be evident.1

To demonstrate why the experience of violence in mixed marriages during Kristallnacht was highly gendered, this article begins by taking a close look at the spaces where violence was directed on November 9 and on subsequent days. Depending on the gender of its Jewish part, intermarried couples had different access to social spheres and spaces. For a better understanding, why persecution in general and Kristallnacht violence in particular had a more severe impact on mixed marriages with Jewish men, the general situation of intermarried Jews under Nazi-rule will briefly be outlined in the beginning of this chapter. Thereafter the text focuses on gender and shows how members of mixed
marriages reacted to Kristallnacht and how this experience affected their agency. The last section deals with the aftermath of Kristallnacht and demonstrates how the experience influenced the family situation of mixed marriage couples. In doing so, the information drawn from memoirs and testimonies will be contrasted with statistics focusing on Munich.²

With the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, the Nazi-regime prohibited weddings between Jews and non-Jews. Existing mixed marriages were not dissolved by force, but Nazi officials increased pressure to get such couples to divorce. From 1933 on, while Jewish spouses were subjected to all anti-Jewish measures of the regime, their gentile partners also had to accept restrictions at work or even lose their positions because of being related to a Jew. Public servants married to Jews were systematically demoted, retired or dismissed.³ With the introduction of the so-called Arierparagraph in 1933, gentiles married to Jews were excluded from most professional institutions and from becoming civil servants. In addition to the loss of economic security, many intermarried couples lost their social networks as more and more of their gentile friends and family members turned their backs on them. Gestapo and party officials openly blackmailed gentiles to leave their Jewish spouses in order to free themselves from persecution.⁴

All mixed marriages suffered persecution, but anti-Jewish measures had far greater effect on families with Jewish breadwinners, who were mainly male. These families were hit by economic sanctions with full force and gentile spouses had little chance to compensate for the loss of income and security. Jewish men/gentile women couples were also attacked for ideological reasons. German women, especially German mothers, were considered as preservers of the German race. Children of such liaisons, the so-called Mischlinge, had in Nazi ideology no value to the “Volksgemeinschaft.” This is why the regime placed extraordinary pressure on intermarried gentile women and their families. A significant number of mixed marriages did not stand up to this pressure, yet as late as mid-1938 the majority remained intact.⁵ In Munich, e.g., less than five percent were dissolved before Kristallnacht.⁶
SPACES OF VIOLENCE AND THE IMPACT OF KRISTALLNACHT ON MIXED MARRIAGES

In 1933 close to 500,000 Jews lived in Germany, and about 35,000 lived in a mixed marriage.7 Up to that moment intermarriage was a rising phenomenon. One year earlier, just before this development was ended abruptly with the Nazi takeover, twenty-three percent of all Jews who got married, chose a non-Jewish partner. As the social environment in metropoles was far more liberal than in rural regions and smaller towns, the proportion was even higher in cities like Berlin—which had by far the largest Jewish population—Breslau, Hamburg and Frankfurt. A total of almost fifteen thousand Jews lived in Munich during 1933–45; approximately one thousand of them were intermarried.

How did the events on November 9 and November 10 affect those intermarried families? As far as we know, there were no official instructions on how to treat intermarried Jews that night. They were neither exempted nor treated in a special way.8 The reason why intermarried Jewish men and their families were hit comparatively harder than families with gentile men can be found by observing the general line of attack during Kristallnacht. Indeed, by examining the spaces under attack, the gender-specific impact of Kristallnacht on mixed marriages becomes more obvious.

The violence unleashed by Nazi perpetrators during those nights was not solely directed against Jewish men; large numbers of women were also affected. Brutal force even was often explicitly directed against Jewish women.9 Nevertheless, most attacks were directed against Jewish property and against its mainly male owners. This was done in order to destroy the livelihood of Jews in Germany and to force them and their families to emigrate. Subsequent to the brutal attacks on companies, shops and houses—not to mention the burning of synagogues and demolition of Jewish institutions—the Gestapo arrested vast numbers of Jewish men and brought them to concentration camps to pressure them to abandon their businesses, sell their assets, and leave Germany immediately. The thirty thousand persons rounded up included many intermarried men.10 Women were only arrested as an exception and promptly released.11

In regard to the mixed marriages, these preconditions were of central relevance. It determined who was affected by Kristallnacht and who predominately was spared. Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. Some shops owned by intermarried non-Jews were destroyed and looted on November 9 too and had to close for a short time afterwards,12 but most were spared even if they were situated in a Jewish neighborhood.13 There is also no
Maximilian Strnad

indication in the available sources, that gentile intermarried men were arrested in their homes during the raids.

Still, intermarried Jewish woman and their families became victims of violence during the events in the night from November 9 to November 10. In Frankfurt, for example, rioters threw the furniture of the Lehr family out the windows of their flat.\(^\text{14}\) This was especially true in rural communities and small towns where violence was directed against all remaining Jews. In Immenhausen near Kassel, for example, some drunken SA-men threw a brick through the window of the Jahn family’s home.\(^\text{15}\) In Solingen, once the local SA leader and his brigade finished their bloody work against all Jews, they extended the nightly hunt for Jews to include intermarried women. They even demolished the house of a physician who was divorced from a Jewess and threatened him in order to get a hold of his ex-wife, who they assumed was hiding in his place. They only left after one hour of unsuccessful interrogation and upon destroying the furniture and windows in his medical practice and living quarters situated above.\(^\text{16}\) But the general line of attack was against Jewish men.

Before Kristallnacht, many Jews found shelter from growing Nazi hostility in the private spaces of individual households. As violence reached their homes, their illusion of security was destroyed.\(^\text{17}\) In his contribution to this volume, Wolf Gruner points to the fact that violence in private homes—which was an integral part of Kristallnacht—has been overlooked by historians, especially when compared to the widely known demolition of shops and synagogues that was taking place under public scrutiny. This statement is even more surprising, as the violence to their homes, the destruction of their furniture and the physical assaults during the attacks often are essential elements in victims’ recollections of Kristallnacht shortly after the war and are well documented in their claims for compensation. Until recently, oral history interviews and compensation files only played second fiddle in historiography. Focusing on these sources will contribute to shifting our perception of violence in Kristallnacht from public to private spaces.

In addition to Gruner’s observation, the impact of another element of Kristallnacht has largely been neglected in historiography. As mentioned earlier, immediately after the attacks during Kristallnacht on synagogues, shops, houses and flats, the Gestapo conducted a well-known raid against Jewish men. With this raid a second wave of violence was brought directly into their homes. When police officers, often accompanied by SS- and SA-men, were knocking on their doors to arrest all Jewish men between the age of sixteen and sixty, not only the Jewish head of the household, but the entire family was in great
danger. The perpetrators used the opportunity to extend their actions against the Jews, even after most violence ended on the morning of November 10. A large percentage of the violence against Jews conducted in private space occurred during these raids. With regard to intermarried couples, this fact is of important significance, because only families with Jewish men were affected.

The following examples show the serious consequences such mixed-marriage couples had to face. In Memmingen, a small town in southern Germany, the order to attack the Jews did not reach Nazi-officials in time during the night from the 9th to the 10th of November. The next morning, a horde of local SA-men and police officers destroyed and looted Jewish property, and forcibly entered the house of the Guggenheimer family in Herrenstrasse 7. They arrested Alfred Guggenheimer, smashed his furniture, windows and the flatware, slashed the sofas and blankets, and even cut the family's underwear in pieces. Such intrusions often introduced life-threatening situations. Many intermarried Jewish men were badly injured and some even murdered. In Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm Block was shot when members of the SA came to arrest him on November 11. After his non-Jewish wife Lotte returned home, the murderers told her that he committed suicide. These situations also were very dangerous for the gentile family members. Lotte Block was immediately arrested and put in Gestapo prison for several months. We do not know if she was mistreated, because her statement does not shed light on this question.

In other cases severe attacks on gentile wives are well documented. In a home next to Alfred Guggenheimer, Hugo Günzburger's wife was beaten by the SA men when they came to arrest him. In Munich a group of unknown men assaulted Heinrich Obermayer and his non-Jewish wife on November 10 in their apartment. They were both brutally beaten with a cudgel and Mrs. Obermayer lost her left eye as a result of the attack. In Kleinmachnow near Berlin, a Mischling was arrested and detained in custody for several days because the policemen could not lay their hands on his Jewish father, who had gone into hiding after a non-Jewish colleague warned him of the forthcoming arrests. Several hours earlier, the SA had smashed all windows of the house where Harry Loewenberg and his family lived.

We do not know how many intermarried Jews were arrested nationwide on Kristallnacht and the following days. Since Jewish men more often married gentile women than the other way around, and younger men in particular tended towards mixed marriages, one can expect that their number among all arrested Jews aged sixteen to sixty during Kristallnacht was significant. According to the Database on Jews of Munich from 1933–45, every sixth Jew
from the Bavarian capital who was arrested and detained in the Dachau concentration camp after Kristallnacht was intermarried.24

Many of those who were beaten to death or who perished due to the catastrophic conditions in the crowded special sections in the camps for Jews were intermarried too. One of them was the thirty-seven-year-old typesetter Theodor Oppenheimer from Frankfurt, who died in the Buchenwald concentration camp.25 Others died immediately after their release—a release often informed by the desire to make sure these deaths could not officially be linked to their imprisonment. Sixty-five-year-old Georg Kalischer died on November 27, 1938 only three days after he was discharged from Buchenwald. Pastor Otto Haas, who held the funeral, later recalled that Kalischer, who was a well-known chemist at I. G. Farben in Frankfurt, had to be entombed “like a criminal.” The Gestapo banned all former colleagues, friends and relatives from attending the funeral and forbade them to express their condolences in public. Only his wife Marie was allowed to take part in the funeral, but she was not allowed to speak a word.26

From the end of November on, the remaining prisoners were released. Harry Stein argued in his publications that intermarried Jews were among the first group of prisoners to be set free by the SS.27 However, there is no evidence for this argument. Actually, veterans of World War I were released first28—many of them were intermarried. Maybe this is why fellow prisoners got the impression that intermarried Jews were privileged. Statistics for Munich reveal that most detained intermarried Jews were released from mid-December on, along with the majority of all other Kristallnacht-prisoners from Dachau Concentration Camp.29

REACTIONS OF INTERMARRIED FAMILIES TO KRISTALLNACHT
The impact of violence during Kristallnacht was generally much higher in mixed marriages with a Jewish male householder. The reactions of intermarried families to the events significantly depended on gender too. This section will discuss how intermarried Jews responded to the violence of Kristallnacht.

Like Harry Loewenberg, many Jewish men avoided arrest by going underground. For several weeks the Gestapo searched the streets for hidden Jews and frequently went back to their homes. We know that many men found shelter in the homes of elderly Jews, who were not affected by the raid and in the
homes of families whose husbands had already been arrested and where the police probably would not return. Sometimes non-Jewish friends offered shelter. Intermarried Jewish men more often had opportunities to access gentile spaces in order to wait for the end of the raid, because they could call upon gentile family members.\textsuperscript{30} Harry Loewenherz found shelter at the home of a former colleague, an elderly Jew himself, and then with non-Jewish family members in a nearby town. Eduard Meyer and his gentile wife and newborn baby left Düsseldorf straight after SA-men invaded the family’s flat and brutally beat him with steel rods. Meyer was seriously injured and endured a serious concussion when they traveled to the Munich hinterland where his gentile sister-in-law gave them asylum.\textsuperscript{31}

The shocking experience of Kristallnacht resulted in a wave of mass emigration. Ten thousand Jews sought to leave the country immediately after November 9. While only a few intermarried Jewish wives emigrated, a large number of intermarried Jewish men left Germany. In Munich 255 out of 1,094 intermarried Jews emigrated, 140 after Kristallnacht. While every second Jew of Munich left Germany to live abroad between 1933–41, only twenty-three percent of the intermarried ones did.\textsuperscript{32} Looking into the details helps to explain this gap. Indeed, the quota of emigration for intermarried couples was generally lower, but with a distinct discrepancy regarding gender. While thirty-two percent of all intermarried men of Munich emigrated, only 9.5 percent of intermarried Jewish woman did.\textsuperscript{33} This fact becomes even more obvious when examining the exact numbers of intermarried refugees fleeing Munich: 215 of the 255 intermarried Jews were men (eighty-five percent), only forty were women.

Jewish men and their families were not only affected to a much higher degree by the violence during Kristallnacht, but also responded to it more directly. The economic impact of persecution was more severe for them than for mixed marriages with non-Jewish men. The latter still had much to lose. Some maintained businesses or were employed, others did not want to lose their non-Jewish relatives or their heritage. They rather accepted persecution, hoping that it wouldn’t be that bad and National Socialism would be over soon. The price of losing their social status, of leaving their homeland, and of maybe not finding an equivalent position in a foreign country with a foreign language was too much to cope with, so they often remained in Germany, reluctant to pay more than a quarter of their fortune as the Reich flight tax, which they would need to pay to obtain the right to leave, or in other cases unable to pay the high visa and transit costs for emigration.\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, non-Jewish husbands and half-Jewish sons could not legally emigrate if they were of military
Kristallnacht had two dramatic effects on the integrity of mixed marriages. Due to the imminent threat of being detained in a concentration camp, many Jewish men, intermarried or not, had to leave the country immediately. Since it often proved impossible to get all the visas and collect enough money for all family members within a short period of time, some couples sent the jeopardized men first, because as the Aub family of Augsburg recounted after the war, “the Aryan woman and half-Aryan children, did not have to fear serious danger at the time being.” For non-Jewish wives who had to manage all necessary arrangements for their imprisoned men, this often meant saying farewell for a very long time. It often proved impossible for them to rejoin their husbands before the borders closed at the beginning of the war; since reunion was impossible directly after the war, these separations often lasted until 1946 or longer—as was the case of the Aub family.

Sometimes this spatial segregation led to breakup and divorce. For gentile wives, divorce was the only opportunity to avoid further ostracism and persecution. The Gestapo pressured these solitary women to divorce and to return to “Volksgemeinschaft.” Many women decided against divorce, but some decided in favor in order to protect their children. Others did it for their own convenience.

Pressure on mixed marriages to split up increased after 1933. Statistics for the city of Munich reveal that Kristallnacht had a major effect on the integrity of those marriages. In the Bavarian capital, the divorce rate of intermarried couples reached its climax after November 9, 1938. Half of all 117 divorces were submitted between Kristallnacht and the end of 1940. Several factors were responsible for this. The Nazi-regime, for example, had eased legal conditions for gentiles to divorce Jewish partners in the summer of 1938. Nevertheless, the experience of personal threat during the violent events in November 1938, together with the fear of losing economic security during the forthcoming Aryanisation process had a major impact on this development. Mathilde Edelstein chose to divorce her Jewish husband Ludwig in December 1938, after party officials threatened to take their draper’s shop in Munich away from her because she was married to a Jew. The greatest number of divorces occurred in mixed marriage households headed by Jewish men. In Munich this figure reached nearly seventy-five percent; in other cities, such as Hamburg, it was even higher.
AFTERMATH
Kristallnacht fundamentally disrupted the life of German Jews. Immediately after the event, Nazi-leadership implemented a number of new laws and decrees in order to increase pressure on the Jews. At the same time, they offered gradual exceptions from persecution to some specific types of mixed marriages. In late December 1938, Hermann Goering, with Hitler’s approval, created the category of privileged mixed marriages. Families with gentile husbands and families with children raised as non-Jews, were exempted from some key persecution measures because of their supposedly closer ties to the German “Volksgemeinschaft” and spared from being ghettoized. With the onset of war, those female Jewish spouses were not subjected to food restrictions and did not have to wear the yellow badge required of all Jews after September 1941. Intermarried Jews were generally exempted from deportation, which started on the eastern and western boarders of Germany in 1939–40, followed by hundreds of mass-transport from all over the German Reich from October 1941 on. Divorced intermarried Jews were deported in a nationwide action in January 1944 to the ghetto of Theresienstadt. After some time, many were transferred to Auschwitz and killed. One year later in February 1945 the Gestapo finally decided to lay hands on intermarried Jews too. At that time, approximately 12,500 of them still remained in the territory of the so-called Old-Reich (without Austria and the annexed countries). Due to the turbulences in the final stage of the war a majority of those affected managed to avoid deportation by going underground or with the help of others, often informed by the desire to gather credit for the time after the imminent collapse of the regime. Nevertheless 1,901 persons were sent to Theresienstadt. Most of them fortunately survived the last weeks of Nazi-rule. Due to their exceptional status, intermarried Jews were by far the biggest group (twelve to thirteen thousand) among German holocaust survivors after the war. Two to three thousand other German Jews survived in hiding, some six thousand returned from the camps and ghettos.

Their high survival rate is also the reason why many intermarried Jews testified in trials against perpetrators and applied for compensation. Many of those testimonies are related to Kristallnacht. They give an impression not only of the extent of violence towards mixed marriages but also on how these experiences strongly influenced those Jews in their feeling of self-worth within their own family.

When the Nazi-hordes attacked his house in Kleinmachnow, Harry Loewenberg, who had converted to Christianity many years earlier, attributed
his predicament and that of his family to his Jewish descent. “It was through me, that they had been drawn into this. (. . .) I felt, they all were looking at me full of reproach—which was not the case—reproach that I, with my existence and my origin as a member of the ‘vilest of all races,’ had brought on this calamity.” Loewenberg’s first reaction was to withdraw from his family in order to protect them. “I went downstairs, put on my old, grey overcoat, and wanted to leave the house. I felt that my personal existence was now completely worthless as I was not only unable to be of any use to my family and take care of them, but was actually putting them in personal jeopardy by my presence.” Only after a hard struggle, was his family able to persuade him to stay.46

For intermarried Jews, this feeling of being responsible for the misery of their family often lasted for decades. Ludwig Edelstein, who was hardly disappointed with his wife for divorcing him after Kristallnacht, and who wanted to receive compensation for losing the family’s draper’s shop, in 1971 still felt guilty for his spouse’s situation in 1938, when he declared before compensation authorities: “nevertheless, I do not want my ex-wife to pay me compensation. I know exactly what it was like by the time for an Aryan woman to be married to a Jew.”47

CONCLUSION
The impact of Kristallnacht on mixed marriages was gendered to a high degree. In contrast to Jewish families, in intermarried couples only one spouse was Jewish. Focusing on the spaces where violence was mainly committed on November 9, 1938 and on the following days, reveals that the assaults were most prominent in the households of Jewish men, while households of non-Jewish men often were lucky to escape violence. This statement is not only true for the looting of their businesses and shops, but also for the destruction of their homes. Historiography has overlooked for a long time the fact, that a significant number of the assaults on Jewish homes were not only conducted in the nightly events from November 9–10 but also during the following raids against Jewish men, when police, SS- and SA members together with local NSDAP-officials invaded their homes. Often the intruders did not content themselves with arresting the Jewish men. They demolished their furniture and even brutally attacked them. Many were killed or even murdered during these raids, which also degenerated into attacks on non-Jewish members of the
family. This experience of helplessness affected the self-esteem of many intermarried men. Their feeling of guilt sometimes lasted for decades.

Consequently, intermarried Jewish men and their families not only were hit harder by but also reacted more directly to Kristallnacht. Their emigration rate after Kristallnacht increased dramatically. In mixed marriages more than three quarter of all refugees were men. Often, they had to flee the country immediately, leaving their families behind. The divorce rate among intermarried couples also increased significantly after Kristallnacht. Again, far more marriages with Jewish men were split up than the other way around.

This was not a random development. In Nazi-ideology Jewish men were a direct threat to the “purity of the race” and thereby to the “Volksgemeinschaft.” By targeting Jewish men National Socialists intended to weaken especially those mixed marriages in order to get the non-Jewish wives to abandon their husbands. After the divorce, the regime promised the women a return into “Volksgemeinschaft.” This leitmotif of the Nazi-policy towards mixed marriages becomes once more evident, when taking a close look at the spaces where violence affected intermarried couples most during Kristallnacht.
Notes


2. The Database Biographisches Gedenkbuch der Münchner Juden 1933–1945 contains close to fifteen thousand datasets of Jews from Munich. It is the biggest and most sophisticated collection of information on Jews in Nazi-Germany. For this article, the Database was systematically evaluated for several questions related to Kristallnacht. All following statistical information on Munich are drawn out of it (as of December 31, 2016).


6. Stadtarchiv München (StadtAM), Biographisches Gedenkbuch der Münchner Juden 1933–1945, Database.


14. See Material on the Lehr family, in Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche in Hessen, Nassau und Frankfurt am Main (EKHN), 160, Vol. 5.


17. Schüler-Springorum, Geschlecht und Differenz, 126.


21. Application for compensation of Hugo Günzburger, March 27, 1950, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Landesentschädigungsamt (LEA) 1369.

22. Application for compensation of Käthe Obermayer, March 27, 1950, BayHStA, LEA 27255.

23. Peter C. Loewenberg, Requiem of a B-Man (Great Falls, self-published, 1998), 79–81. A copy of the manuscript is located at the Library of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington DC.

24. Fifty-one out of the 301 registered cases. After Kristallnacht a total of one thousand Jews of Munich had been arrested. See Andreas Heusler and Tobias Weger, eds., “Kristallnacht”: Gewalt gegen die Münchner Juden im November 1938 (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1998), 122. Not all of the cases have been added to the database yet.


29. See, for example, BayHStA, 222 (Berthold Lehmann, released December 27, 1938), 10246 (Heinrich-Carl Emmerich, released December 20, 1938), 12046 (Adolf Freitag, released December 19, 1938), 18451 (Edmund Jonas, released December 15, 1938), etc.


32. A total of 6,394 (45%) of all 14,286 persons registered in the Database emigrated. See StadtAM, Biographisches Gedenkbuch der Münchner Juden 1933–1945, Database.

33. 670 out of 1094 intermarried were men (61%), 424 were women (39%), ibid.

34. For general information on Reichsfluchtsteuer see Dorothee Mußgnug, Die Reichsfluchtsteuer 1931–1953 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993).


36. Benigna Schönhagen, “Getrennt von allem, was uns geblieben. . . .” Der Weg der Familie Kraus aus Augsburg (Augsburg: Jüdisches Kulturmuseum Augsburg-Schwaben, self-published, 2008), 22. See also the case of Robert Breusch, Harvard University Library, MS Ger 91 (38), 57–58.


42. Decree of the Reichs Ministry of Alimentation and Agriculture, March 11, 1940, Nürnberger Dokumente (Institut für Zeitgeschichte), NI 14581; Police regulations on the mandatory identification of Jews, September 1, 1941, in Reichsgesetzblatt (RGBl) I 1941, 547.


46. Loewenberg, Requiem of a B-Man, 79–81.

47. Ludwig Edelstein to Bayerisches Landesentschädigungsamt, June 18, 1971, BayHStA, LEA 9789.


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