



Resilience and Resistance: Mischlinge Responses to Nazi Policies in Germany, 1933–1945

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the resilience and resistance strategies of Mischlinge (individuals of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry) under Nazi rule in Germany from 1933 to 1945, a topic often overlooked in Holocaust research. By examining the unique legal, social, and psychological challenges Mischlinge faces, this paper highlights their multifaceted responses to systemic oppression. The analysis begins with the historical and ideological underpinnings of Nazi racial policies, emphasizing how Mischlinge was classified and treated as neither fully accepted nor entirely rejected within the Nazi hierarchy. It then delves into the innovative strategies employed by Mischlinge to navigate oppressive laws, including exploiting legal loopholes and forming supportive networks. Social resilience emerged through community solidarity, relationships with Jewish and non-Jewish allies, and underground resistance. Psychological strategies such as coping mechanisms and navigating dual identities further demonstrate their agency in surviving a hostile regime. Case studies, including figures like Hannah Arendt and Kurt Weill, illustrate these themes by showing how Mischlinge adapted to their precarious status and contributed intellectually and culturally to resist dehumanization. This research enriches Holocaust studies by addressing the complexity of mixed identities and emphasizing the diverse forms of resistance during this period, thereby challenging binary narratives of victimhood and complicity.

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1. Introduction.

The rise of the Nazi regime in Germany marked a significant turning point in the history of the Jewish population, characterized by the implementation of systematic racial policies aimed at the exclusion and persecution of Jews. From 1933 to 1945, the Nazis enacted a series of laws and measures that sought to define and categorize individuals based on their racial heritage, culminating in the infamous Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Friedländer, 2009; Pegelow, 2006). These laws not only stripped Jews of their citizenship but also established a racial hierarchy that deemed individuals of mixed Jewish ancestry, known as “Mischlinge”, as racially inferior. The classification of Mischlinge was particularly complex, as it encompassed individuals with one Jewish grandparent or two Jewish grandparents, placing them in a precarious position within Nazi ideology. This classification subjected them to varying degrees of discrimination and persecution, often leading to confusion and fear regarding their status and rights (Noakes, 1989).

Despite the growing body of literature on the Holocaust and Nazi policies, there remains a notable gap in historical research concerning the experiences of Mischlinge. Much of the existing scholarship has focused primarily on the experiences of fully Jewish individuals or those who were considered “Aryan”. As a result, the unique challenges faced by Mischlinge, who navigated a complex identity in a society that sought to define them as outsiders, have been largely overlooked (Monteath, 2008).

The research questions guiding this exploration are: How did the Mischlinge demonstrate resilience and resistance in the face of escalating persecution?; and What legal, social, and psychological strategies did they employ to survive under Nazi rule? By examining these questions, this study seeks to illuminate how Mischlinge adapted to their circumstances, often employing creative and resourceful strategies to assert their identity and maintain a sense of agency amidst the oppressive environment.

This research aims to delve into the resilience and resistance of Mischlinge under Nazi rule, highlighting their experiences and responses to the challenges they faced. By focusing on Mischlinge within the broader context of Holocaust and Nazi studies, this study underscores the importance of understanding the diverse experiences of individuals affected by Nazi racial



policies. Recognizing the agency of Mischlinge not only enriches our understanding of this historical period but also contributes to a more nuanced narrative of resistance and survival during one of history's darkest chapters.

2. Historical Background: Nazi Racial Policies and the Mischlinge.

2.1. Nazi Racial Ideology.

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 marked a pivotal moment in the establishment of Nazi racial ideology, creating a legal framework that classified individuals based on their perceived racial ancestry. These laws defined Jews as those with three or more Jewish grandparents, while Mischlinge were categorized as individuals with one or two Jewish grandparents. This classification system not only institutionalized anti-Semitism but also created a hierarchy of racial purity that distinguished between “full Jews” and Mischlinge, who were seen as racially impure yet still partially acceptable due to their “Aryan” ancestry. The Nuremberg Laws thus served to legitimize the exclusion of Jews from German society while simultaneously complicating the status of Mischlinge, who were caught in a liminal space between acceptance and rejection (Matthäus, 2010; Fulbrook, 2018).

Mischlinge were treated distinctly by both Jews and non-Jews, leading to a unique set of challenges and discrimination. While they were not classified as “full Jews”, they were still subjected to various restrictions that limited their rights and freedoms. For instance, Mischlinge faced exclusion from civil service positions, military service, and educational opportunities, which were reserved for those deemed “Aryan” (Monteath, 2008). This legal distinction created a precarious existence for Mischlinge, who often found themselves navigating a complex identity that was neither entirely accepted nor wholly rejected by the Nazi regime. The ambiguity of their status led to significant psychological and social challenges as they were forced to contend with the implications of their racial classification in a society that prioritized racial purity (Pegelow, 2006).

The legislative measures enacted against Mischlinge were part of a broader strategy to enforce racial purity and maintain the Nazi vision of a homogeneous “Aryan” society. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws not only stripped Jews of their citizenship but also established a framework for the systematic discrimination of Mischlinge (Volkov, 1987). These measures included



restrictions on marriage, employment, and participation in public life, effectively marginalizing Mischlinge and reinforcing their status as second-class citizens. The legal framework surrounding Mischlinge was characterized by a series of contradictory and evolving policies, reflecting the ongoing struggles within the Nazi regime to define and regulate racial categories (Noakes, 1989).

2.2. Social and Political Position of Mischlinge.

The social and political position of Mischlinge within the Nazi hierarchy was marked by ambiguity and conflict. On the one hand, they were considered racially inferior due to their Jewish ancestry. However, on the other hand, their partial “Aryan” heritage afforded them certain privileges that were denied to “full Jews”. This duality created a complex social dynamic, as Mischlinge often found themselves in a precarious position, navigating a society that viewed them with suspicion and hostility. The Nazi regime’s inconsistent policies regarding Mischlinge further complicated their status, as different factions within the party held varying views on how to address the “problem” of Mischlinge (Pegelow, 2006; Monteath, 2008)

Competing Nazi views on the Mischlinge issue reflected the broader ideological struggles within the regime. Some officials advocated for the complete exclusion of Mischlinge from society, while others recognized their potential utility, particularly in military contexts. This internal conflict was evident in discussions surrounding military service, where the desire to utilize Mischlinge as soldiers clashed with the ideological imperative to maintain racial purity. The resulting policies often reflected a pragmatic approach, as the regime sought to balance its ideological goals with the practical needs of the state (Noakes, 1989).

The Reich Kinship Office (*Reichssippenamt*) played a crucial role in regulating the classification of Mischlinge and enforcing Nazi racial policies. This agency was responsible for determining the racial status of individuals and managing the complexities of racial classification. The Reich Kinship Office’s work exemplified the bureaucratic nature of Nazi racial policies, as it sought to expand its authority by interpreting and enforcing the regime’s racial ideology. The agency’s involvement in the classification of Mischlinge highlighted the broader project of remaking Germanness and Jewishness as it navigated the competing discourses and power dynamics within the Nazi state (Pegelow, 2006).



3. Legal Strategies: Navigating Nazi Legislation.

3.1. Challenges of Legal Classification.

The Reich Citizenship Law of 1935 was a cornerstone of Nazi racial policy, establishing a legal framework that categorized individuals based on their perceived racial ancestry. Under this law, Mischlinge was classified into two distinct categories: first-degree Mischlinge, who had two Jewish grandparents, and second-degree Mischlinge, who had one Jewish grandparent. This classification created significant challenges for those labeled as Mischlinge, as they were subjected to a complex and often arbitrary system of racial categorization that determined their rights and social standing within Nazi Germany. The legal definitions were vague and open to interpretation, leading to confusion and anxiety among those trying to navigate their status (Matthäus, 2010; Monteath, 2008).

Proving “Aryan” ancestry became a daunting task for many Mischlinge, as the burden of proof often fell on individuals to demonstrate their racial purity. This requirement necessitated the collection of extensive documentation, including birth certificates, marriage licenses, and genealogical records, which could be challenging to obtain, especially for those with mixed heritage. The process of proving one’s “Aryan” status was fraught with challenges, as the Nazi regime employed a bureaucratic system that was both convoluted and capricious. Many Mischlinge faced the constant threat of persecution, as the authorities could arbitrarily question their ancestry and subject them to discrimination based on insufficient documentation or perceived racial ambiguity (Matthäus, 2010).

The categorization of Mischlinge also had profound implications for their daily lives, as it dictated their access to employment, education, and social services. The legal framework established by the Reich Citizenship Law effectively marginalized Mischlinge, placing them in a precarious position where their rights could be revoked. This uncertainty created fear and anxiety as individuals struggled to navigate a system that excluded them from full social participation (Monteath, 2008; Pegelow, 2008).

3.2. Legal Loopholes and Appeals.

Despite the oppressive nature of Nazi legislation, some Mischlinge sought to exploit legal loopholes and ambiguities within the system to their advantage. Legal petitions and appeals



became a means of resistance as individuals attempted to challenge their classifications and secure their rights. The Nazi legal system, while rigid, was not entirely devoid of flexibility, and some Mischlinge were able to navigate the bureaucratic maze to obtain favorable outcomes successfully. This process often involved enlisting the help of sympathetic legal advocates who understood the intricacies of the system and could assist in crafting compelling arguments for their clients (Benecke, 2018; Fulbrook, 2018).

One notable strategy employed by some Mischlinge was to marry “Aryan” partners or convert to Christianity to alter their racial categorization. These actions were seen as potential pathways to escape the restrictions imposed by their Mischling status. Marriages to “Aryans” could provide a degree of protection, as the Nazi regime sometimes viewed these unions as a means of integrating Mischlinge into the “Aryan” community. Similarly, conversions to Christianity were sometimes perceived to distance oneself from Jewish heritage. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varied widely and were often subject to the whims of local authorities (Friedländer, 2009).

However, these legal strategies were fraught with risks, as the Nazi regime maintained a strict surveillance system to monitor compliance with its racial policies. The potential for betrayal or denunciation loomed large, and many Mischlinge faced the harsh reality that their efforts to navigate the legal system could lead to increased scrutiny and persecution. The precariousness of their situation underscored the broader challenges faced by those living under a regime that wielded legal definitions as tools of oppression (Friedländer, 2009; Fulbrook, 2018).

4. Social Strategies: Resilience through Community and Networks.

4.1. Family and Community Support.

During the Nazi regime, Mischlinge faced unique challenges that necessitated reliance on family networks for survival. These networks provided essential financial, emotional, and practical support, enabling individuals to navigate the oppressive environment of Nazi Germany. At the same time, they often worked alongside non-Jewish sympathizers engaged in resistance efforts, forming a united front against Nazi tyranny (Benecke, 2018). Family members often pooled resources to help one another cope with the increasing restrictions



imposed on Mischlinge, such as job loss, social ostracism, and the threat of deportation. The emotional support offered by the family was crucial in maintaining a sense of identity and resilience in the face of adversity (Benecke, 2018; Pegelow, 2006).

Communities of mixed-race families emerged as vital support systems, fostering mutual aid networks that allowed individuals to share information, resources, and strategies for survival. These communities often organized informal gatherings where members could discuss their experiences, share advice on navigating the legal and social landscape, and provide emotional encouragement. Such solidarity was essential for maintaining a sense of belonging and identity amidst the pervasive discrimination and fear that characterized life under the Nazi regime (Friedländer, 2009; Grözinger, 1995; Noakes, 1987).

These community networks provided emotional and financial support and practical assistance, such as finding safe housing, securing employment, and accessing food and medical care. The interconnectedness of families and communities allowed Mischlinge to create a buffer against the harsh realities of their situation, as they could rely on one another for help in times of need. This sense of community provided immediate relief and fostered a collective resilience crucial for survival (Duwell, 1987; Kaplan, 1987; Monteath, 2008).

4.2. Solidarity with Jewish and Non-Jewish Groups.

Mischlinge also used social resistance strategies involving solidarity with Jewish and non-Jewish groups. Mischlinge frequently collaborated with Jewish aid organizations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and local community centers, which provided vital resources like food, clothing, and shelter to those in need, including Mischlinge navigating their complex identities under Nazi oppression. These organizations often offered resources such as food, shelter, and legal assistance, helping Mischlinge navigate their status's complexities while fostering a sense of belonging within the broader Jewish community. By participating in these networks, Mischlinge could access vital resources and support while also contributing to collective efforts to resist Nazi oppression (Noakes, 1989).

In addition to connections with Jewish organizations, Mischlinge often formed relationships with non-Jewish allies in various social spaces, including workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. These relationships were crucial for creating a sense of safety and support, as



non-Jewish allies could provide protection and assistance in times of crisis. Many Mischlinge found that their non-Jewish colleagues or friends were willing to stand by them, offering help in navigating the increasingly hostile environment. Such alliances were often built on shared experiences and mutual respect, allowing for a degree of solidarity that transcended the rigid racial classifications imposed by the Nazi regime (Matthäus, 2010; Noakes, 1989).

Underground networks also played a significant role in the social resistance strategies employed by Mischlinge. These networks often included both Jewish and non-Jewish individuals who were committed to opposing the Nazi regime. Mischlinge could contribute to the broader resistance movement by participating in these clandestine efforts while securing their safety. These networks facilitated sharing information, resources, and safe passage for those seeking to escape persecution, highlighting the importance of collaboration across racial and ethnic lines in the fight against oppression (Matthäus, 2010; Monteath, 2008).

5. Psychological Strategies: Mental Resilience and Identity.

5.1. Coping Mechanisms and Psychological Resilience.

The Mischlinge, individuals of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish heritage, faced profound psychological challenges under the oppressive regime of Nazi Germany. To maintain a sense of identity amidst the pervasive racial ideology that sought to define and limit them, many Mischlinge developed various coping mechanisms that fostered psychological resilience. These strategies allowed them to navigate the complexities of their existence while preserving their sense of self in a hostile environment (Fulbrook, 2018; Monteath, 2008).

Psychological strategies of adaptation and resistance included denial, acceptance, and covert defiance. Denial allowed some Mischlinge to temporarily shield themselves from the harsh realities of their situation, enabling them to continue their daily lives with a semblance of normalcy. On the other hand, acceptance involves acknowledging their challenges while finding ways to cope with them. This acceptance often led to a form of covert defiance, where Mischlinge would subtly resist the oppressive norms of Nazi ideology by asserting their identity in private or through small acts of rebellion (Fulbrook, 2018; Monteath, 2008; Noakes, 1989).



Moreover, storytelling and sharing experiences within their communities became a powerful psychological tool. By recounting their narratives, Mischlinge could process their trauma, reinforce their identities, and foster a sense of solidarity with others who shared similar experiences. This communal sharing not only provided emotional support but also helped to create a collective memory that countered the erasure of their identities by the Nazi regime (Fulbrook, 2018; Monteath, 2008; Noakes, 1989).

5.2. Double Identity and Survival.

The struggle with a dual identity as part-Jewish and part-German had profound psychological effects on Mischlinge. This duality often led to feelings of confusion, alienation, and anxiety as they navigated a world that demanded strict adherence to racial classifications. The internal conflict between their Jewish heritage and their desire to be accepted as Germans created a complex psychological landscape where feelings of belonging and exclusion coexisted (Friedländer, 2009; Matthäus, 2010; Noakes, 1989).

The role of secrecy and “passing” as “Aryan” became a crucial survival strategy for many Mischlinge. By concealing their Jewish heritage, they could avoid the immediate dangers of persecution and maintain a semblance of normalcy in their lives. This act of passing, however, came with significant psychological costs. The constant fear of discovery and the need to suppress their true identities led to feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation. Many Mischlinge grappled with the moral implications of their choices as they navigated the fine line between survival and authenticity (Friedländer, 2009; Pegelow, 2006).

The psychological effects of this dual identity were further compounded by the societal pressures to conform to Nazi racial ideology. Mischlinge often found themselves in a precarious position where their very existence challenged the rigid boundaries of the Nazi racial hierarchy. This tension created a sense of urgency to define their identities on their terms, leading to a complex interplay of acceptance and resistance. Some Mischlinge chose to embrace their Jewish heritage openly, rejecting the Nazi narrative and asserting their right to exist as multifaceted individuals (Matthäus, 2010; Noakes, 1989; Pegelow, 2006).

6. Case Studies of Resilience and Resistance of Mischlinge.

6.1. Selected Case Studies of Mischlinge.

The experiences of Mischlinge during the Nazi regime provide a rich tapestry of resilience and resistance, illustrated through individual stories that highlight their struggles and triumphs. These case studies reveal how Mischlinge employed legal, social, and psychological strategies to navigate the oppressive environment of Nazi Germany.

One notable case is Hannah Arendt, a prominent political theorist and philosopher. Born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, Arendt faced the complexities of her mixed heritage throughout her life. Her experience of persecution began with her political activism, which led to her arrest in 1933. During this time, Arendt's dual identity posed significant challenges; However, her mother's non-Jewish status technically categorized her as a Mischling, and her Jewish heritage and anti-Nazi activities made her a clear target for Nazi authorities (Kaplan, 1987).

Following her release from custody, she fled to Paris, joining the ranks of many Jewish refugees navigating a hostile Europe (Young-Bruehl, 2004). Even in exile, Arendt encountered the stigmatization associated with her Jewish identity. Her internment in the Gurs camp in southern France after the Nazi invasion in 1940 underscored the precarity of her existence (Kaplan, 1987; Monteath, 2008). Arendt's eventual escape to the United States was a testament to her resourcefulness and determination to survive systemic persecution (Kaplan, 1987).

While her philosophical writings, including *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, were shaped by her experiences, they also reveal the intellectual struggle of reconciling her Jewish identity with broader human rights and justice questions. Her work critically examined not only the ideological roots of Nazism but also the societal complicity in perpetuating such ideologies (Young-Bruehl, 2004). Arendt's resilience was evident not only in her survival but also in her ability to transform her personal and collective suffering into profound contributions to political thought, challenging the dehumanization central to the Nazi regime (Kaplan, 1987).

6.2. Resistance Through Artistic and Cultural Contributions.

Mischlinge engaged in cultural resistance, utilizing artistic, literary, and intellectual forms to oppose Nazi policies. This cultural resistance played a crucial role in challenging the narratives propagated by the regime and preserving the richness of Jewish culture.

One prominent figure in this realm was Kurt Weill, a composer known for his innovative contributions to theater music. Weill's works often contained subversive elements that critiqued his time's societal norms and political climate. His collaboration with playwright Bertolt Brecht resulted in groundbreaking pieces such as *The Threepenny Opera*, which satirized capitalism and social injustice. Through his music, Weill not only resisted the oppressive atmosphere of the Nazi regime but also highlighted the importance of cultural expression as a form of dissent (Brenner, 2010).

Weill's identity as a Mischling was integral to his artistic output and his opposition to Nazi ideology. While he was legally classified as Jewish under Nazi racial laws, his mixed heritage allowed him a unique perspective that influenced his creative vision. This dual identity shaped his works, which often blurred cultural boundaries and challenged the strict racial hierarchies propagated by the regime. His compositions drew from both Jewish musical traditions and broader European influences, symbolizing the kind of cultural hybridity that the Nazis sought to suppress.

The personal challenges Weill faced as a Mischling also influenced his career trajectory. Like many individuals of mixed Jewish heritage, he encountered professional restrictions and social ostracism in Germany, forcing him to emigrate in 1933. His departure reflected the broader displacement experienced by Mischlinge, who was neither fully embraced by the Jewish community nor accepted within Aryan society (Brenner, 2010). In exile, Weill continued his cultural resistance by using his art to critique oppression. His subsequent works in the United States, such as *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *Lady in the Dark*, adapted his European musical influences to address themes of liberty and human dignity, directly opposing the totalitarian values he fled (Matthäus, 2010).

Moreover, Weill's collaborations and the reception of his works highlight the unique struggles and contributions of Mischlinge in the arts. His partnership with Brecht allowed him



to navigate the complexities of expressing dissent in a society that increasingly criminalized his existence. Even as his status as a Mischling was a source of vulnerability, it enabled him to articulate a critique of exclusion and injustice through a lens informed by his hybrid identity. His legacy is a testament to the resilience and creativity of Mischlinge, who used their marginality to challenge oppressive structures.

In Weill's life and work, the duality of his identity as a Mischling is reflected in his compositions and his ability to bridge cultural divides. His art resisted the dehumanization of Nazi ideology, preserving the cultural richness that totalitarianism sought to erase. Weill's contributions underscore the pivotal role of Mischlinge in the cultural resistance against the Nazis, illustrating how identity and artistry intertwined to create powerful forms of opposition.

7. Concluding Remarks.

7.1. Summary.

The experiences of Mischlinge during the Nazi regime reveal a complex interplay of resilience and resistance in the face of systemic oppression. Through individual case studies, it is evident that Mischlinge employed a variety of strategies—legal, social, and psychological—to navigate the treacherous landscape of Nazi racial policies. Figures such as Hannah Arendt and Kurt Weill exemplify how Mischlinge sought to survive, assert their identities, and challenge the oppressive narratives imposed upon them. Their actions, whether through legal maneuvering, cultural contributions, or intellectual engagement, illustrate a broader pattern of resistance that transcended mere survival.

The significance of these actions lies in their contribution to the broader context of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. While the narratives of Jewish resistance often focus on armed uprisings or organized efforts, the resilience of Mischlinge highlights the diverse forms of opposition that existed. Their ability to adapt, reclaim their identities, and engage in cultural resistance underscores the multifaceted nature of resistance against Nazi policies. This resilience not only served to preserve their own identities but also contributed to the collective memory and cultural heritage of Jewish communities, ensuring that the regime did not silence their voices.



7.2 Contributions to Holocaust Studies.

The inclusion of Mischlinge's experiences in the Holocaust and resistance scholarship is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of identity and survival during this dark chapter in history. By examining the unique challenges faced by Mischlinge, scholars can gain insights into the broader implications of Nazi racial policies and the varied responses of individuals categorized as "mixed race". This research challenges the binary understanding of Jewish and non-Jewish identities, revealing the nuanced realities of those who occupied a liminal space within the Nazi racial hierarchy.

Furthermore, the experiences of Mischlinge serve as a poignant reminder of the impact of state oppression on individual identities. Their stories illustrate the resilience of mixed-race individuals in confronting and resisting the dehumanizing ideologies of the Nazi regime. This research not only enriches our understanding of the Holocaust but also prompts critical reflections on contemporary issues of race, identity, and belonging in societies grappling with the legacies of discrimination and exclusion.

In conclusion, the resilience and resistance of Mischlinge during the Nazi era offer valuable lessons for understanding the complexities of identity in the face of state oppression. Their experiences underscore the importance of recognizing diverse narratives within Holocaust studies, ensuring that the voices of all victims, including those of mixed heritage, are acknowledged and remembered. As we reflect on this research, it becomes clear that the legacy of Mischlinge is not only one of survival but also of a profound affirmation of identity and humanity in the face of unimaginable adversity.

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