

Learning and teaching
about the history of Europe
in the 20th century



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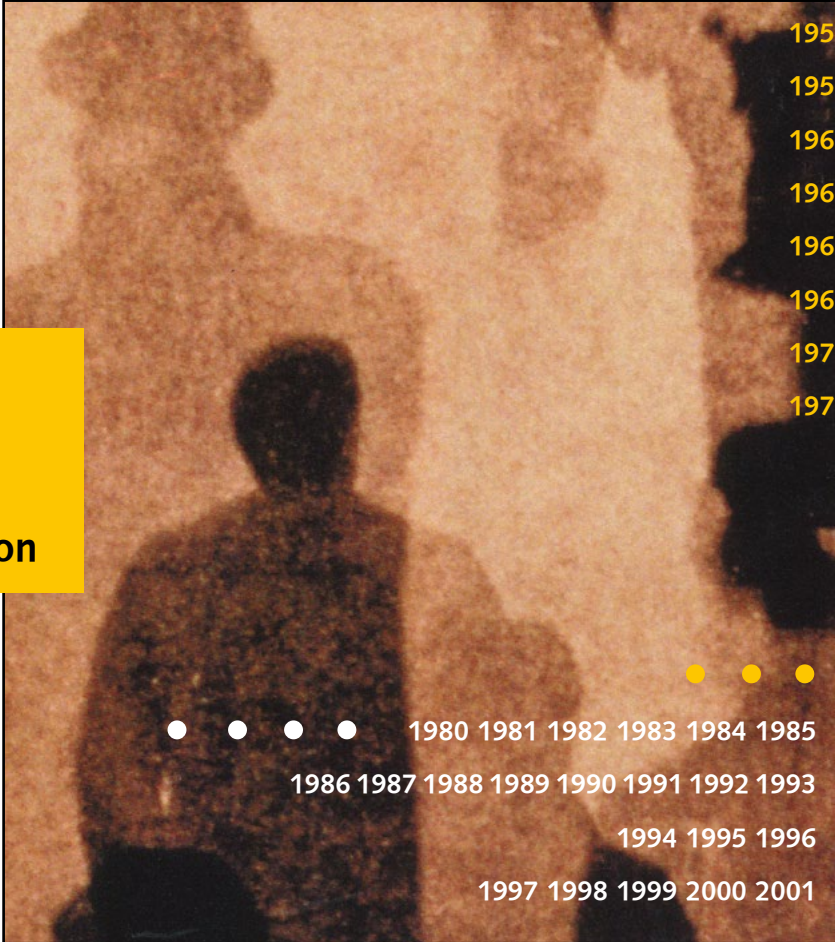
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Jean-Michel Lecomte

Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st century



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Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st century

Jean-Michel Lecomte

Translated from the French
by Allen McDonald, Kerry Goyer, Richard McQuiston,
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The **Council of Europe** was founded in 1949 to achieve greater unity between European parliamentary democracies. It is the oldest of the European political institutions and has 43 member states,¹ including the 15 members of the European Union. It is the widest intergovernmental and interparliamentary organisation in Europe, and has its headquarters in Strasbourg.

With only questions relating to national defence excluded from the Council of Europe's work, the Organisation has activities in the following areas: democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms; media and communication; social and economic affairs; education, culture, heritage and sport; youth; health; environment and regional planning; local democracy; and legal co-operation.

The **European Cultural Convention** was opened for signature in 1954. This international treaty is also open to European countries that are not members of the Council of Europe, and enables them to take part in the Council's programmes on education, culture, sport and youth. So far, 48 states have acceded to the European Cultural Convention: the Council of Europe's full member states plus Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Holy See and Monaco.

The **Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC)** is responsible for the Council of Europe's work on education and culture. Four specialised committees – the Education Committee, the Higher Education and Research Committee, the Culture Committee and the Cultural Heritage Committee help the CDCC to carry out its tasks under the European Cultural Convention. There is also a close working relationship between the CDCC and the standing conferences of specialised European ministers responsible for education, culture and the cultural heritage.

The CDCC's programmes are an integral part of the Council of Europe's work and, like the programmes in other sectors, they contribute to the Organisation's three main policy objectives:

- the protection, reinforcement and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and pluralist democracy;
- the promotion of an awareness of European identity;
- the search for common responses to the great challenges facing European society.

1. Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

The CDCC's education programme covers school and higher education. At present, there are projects on education for democratic citizenship, history, modern languages, school links and exchanges, educational policies, training for educational staff, the reform of legislation on higher education in central and eastern Europe, the recognition of qualifications, lifelong learning for equity and social cohesion, European studies for democratic citizenship, and the social sciences and the challenge of transition.

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Foreword

Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st century was produced as part of the Council of Europe's history project "Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century". The principal aims of this project are to:

- interest the young in the recent events of our continent and help establish links between historical roots and the challenges facing Europe today;
- help the young to identify with a greater Europe;
- teach the young to develop key skills of critical investigation;
- stress the importance of understanding the viewpoint of the "other";
- encourage teachers to introduce a wider European dimension into the classroom.

"Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century" is a product-oriented project which has produced teaching material designed for secondary school teachers, textbook authors and curriculum developers (see p. 131) on topics such as women's history, cinema, how to teach the 20th century, European migration movements and nationalism.

Given the alarming rise of anti-Semitism in certain parts of Europe and the accessibility of "denial" history sites on the Internet, the Holocaust was an important theme of the project. Although some countries, in particular Germany, have high standards for Holocaust teaching, others are lacking in material.

Teachers themselves often lack in-depth knowledge and, unless they are in a position to carry out personal research, do not know how to approach a topic much too vast to be categorised simply as "history". This teaching resource, based on the work of such widely recognised authors as Raul Hilberg, Sir Martin Gilbert, Saul Friedlander and Christopher Browning, plus first-hand accounts (including those of Primo Levi, Hermann Langbein and Claude Lanzmann's interviewees), offers teachers a body of knowledge for use in course planning. Included is a certain amount of material about the nature and implementation of the genocide in different countries, which should lend itself to work with older students on analysing nazism. Beyond any specific local characteristics, what emerges from the succinct descriptions of how and where this genocide was carried out is the comprehensiveness of the nazi enterprise.

The author, Jean-Michel Lecomte, is a teacher of social sciences. He works in educational publishing for the French Department of Education at a documentation centre in Dijon, where he was responsible for the production of a teaching pack entitled *Sur la Shoah* (About the Holocaust), comprising ten books and four educational posters. He is the author of three of the volumes: *Savoir la Shoah* (Knowing what the Holocaust was), *Enseigner la Shoah* (Teaching about the Holocaust) and *Shoah et formation citoyenne* (The Holocaust and civic education).

Glossary

This is a quick guide to some of the German and Yiddish terms used in the book. See also the definitions in fact sheet 1.

Aktionen: the rounding-up of Jews in the streets of the Ghetto to send them to the camps.

Anschluss: German annexation of Austria.

Arbeit macht frei: “Labour makes you free”, inscription on the gate of most camps.

Ausweis: passport, or laissez-passer.

Bibelforscher: “students of the Bible”, old name for German Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Einsatzgruppen: nazi mobile killing units.

Hitlerjugend: Hitler Youth.

Judenrät: the Jewish Council (in Jewish ghettos), plural: *Judenräte*.

Kristallnacht: the nazi name for Night of the Pogroms of November 1938. Sanctioned widespread rioting that occurred after a German Jew assassinated a German diplomat. A nation-wide pogrom took place in the space of one night.

Kapo: a deportee in charge of *Kommandos*, or work groups in the camps.

Kommandos: in the concentration camps, work teams made up of diverse prisoners.

Maquis: French opponents of the occupier and those seeking to avoid compulsory labour in Germany.

Mischline: term used to designate someone who is half Jewish, plural: *Mischlinge*.

NSDAP: National-sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, National Socialist German Worker’s Party

Shtadlanut: action taken by Jewish communities when they have no political representation. A *shtadlan*, usually with a glib tongue, is chosen to negotiate with the totalitarian authorities.

Shtetl: Jewish quarters in a village, originally in north-east Europe.

Vernichtung: the extermination.

Yishuv or *Yishouv*: Jewish community living in Palestine.

Weisse Rose: German activist group opposing nazi totalitarianism.

Definitions

Race, racial: A race is a subdivision of a species. In literary language, particularly that of the major cultural source texts, a race is a family line (not to be confused with a tribe, which includes different families that may or may not have a common ancestor). For many years, skin colour was the criterion used to differentiate human “races”. Apart from appearance, there has never been any scientific basis for such a classification. Indeed, in the 1970s, genetic research proved that either the human species consists of a single race or else each individual constitutes a race. Talk of races or racial characteristics with reference to any group of people is thus inherently racist and unscientific. Apart from its moral implications, racism is first and foremost a lie – a distortion of the facts.

Ethnic group: An ethnic group is a human community that shares a language, a culture and certain forms of family, economic and social organisation and perceives itself as a group. It may or may not have a defined territory. Its shared culture does not necessarily include a shared religion.

Jew, Jewish: A Jew is a person who practises Judaism. The word is on a par with “Christian”, “Catholic” or “Protestant”. But religion (with the concept of the “chosen people”) and history (with the diaspora) have combined to give Jews – if Hebrew may be regarded as their common language – the characteristics of an ethnic group. When the motives for anti-Semitism ceased to be exclusively religious (that is Christian), it gradually took on an ethnic and then a “racial” basis, reinforced by 19th-century pseudo-science and embraced by the nazis, who thus considered that anyone of Jewish descent was necessarily also a Jew, even if he or she converted to a different faith or belonged to none. Thus we speak of “the Jews” to describe, on the one hand, the ethnic group and, on the other, the victims of nazism.

Aryan: This is the name of a group of people, distinguished by their language, who came from Persia to settle in northern India around 1800 BC. Their migrations and associated linguistic diversification produced the so-called Indo-European family of languages identified in the late 18th century. Under nazism the meaning of the word (like that of “Jewish”) underwent a shift, the nazis postulating a superior “race” of “Aryans” (the Sanskrit word *arya* means “noble”). There is, of course, no scientific basis for this theory.

War crimes: “... violations of the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labour or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder

or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity” (Article 6(b) of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal – established under the quadripartite London Agreement of 8 August 1945 – before which the Nuremberg trials were conducted).

Crimes against humanity: These are defined as “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war; or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated” (Article 6(c) *ibid*).

Genocide: This means the systematic destruction of a group of people. The term was coined in 1944 by Raphaël Lemkin, a key figure behind the adoption in 1948 of the United Nations Convention on Genocide, which made it a crime under international law. The word “systematic” is important in the definition and the term “genocide” must not be used loosely, especially not to describe the destruction of non-human groups.

Ethnocide: This is the cultural destruction of an ethnic group.

Shoah: This Hebrew word, meaning “catastrophe” is used to signify the genocide perpetrated by the nazis and their allies against the Jews, which was also ethnocide. What made it unique was the avowed intent to eradicate a people and their entire culture so that no trace – no bodies, sites, language or memory – would be left. In other words, the very humanity of the Jews was denied. It is the combination of ethnocide and genocide that warrants the use of a special term.

Holocaust: A Hebrew word with Greek roots, which means “sacrifice”. This is the term normally used in English-speaking countries to signify the Shoah. Here we shall use it to mean all the genocide and crimes against humanity practised by the nazis and their allies, whose victims were not only Jews, Roma/Gypsies, homosexuals, people with mental and physical disabilities and political and religious opponents (including Jehovah’s Witnesses), but also the Polish nobility and intelligentsia and groups of Russian and Serbian civilians who were massacred, as were the inhabitants of various villages in different parts of Europe. Many prisoners of war were the victims of war crimes, and the particular fate of Soviet prisoners comes into the category of a genocidal crime against humanity. Reliable sources estimate the total number of victims of the Holocaust crimes to be at least 8 million, including two thirds of the Jewish population of Europe.

Judaism and Jewishness

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the three monotheistic religions, which have certain sacred texts in common. To each faith, however, the Bible represents something different. The word “bible” comes from the Greek and church Latin *biblia*, meaning “books”. The Hebrew Bible includes 39 books, which fall into 3 categories:

- the law books ascribed to Moses (known as the *Torah* in Hebrew and the *Pentateuch* in Greek), that is the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy;
- the (18) books of the Prophets;
- the books of poetic and philosophical writings including the 150 Psalms, the Song of Songs, the Proverbs and books of stories and wisdom.

The different books may be read as texts of religion, poetry or history. From the time of their writing to the present day they have been the subject of wide-ranging interpretations and commentaries, none of which, by definition, can ever be the last word on the subject.

In the 1st century AD, Judaism split into numerous opposing currents and sects, which sometimes clashed violently. There were divisions between ritualist, reformist and prophetic factions, between nationalists and pragmatists.

From the time of these divisions, and from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD until the diaspora, Judaism retained its identity because its followers observed the restrictions imposed by Moses: they shared “neither bed nor board” with non-Jews. In Judaism, anyone born of a Jewish mother is deemed to be Jewish and to this extent we may talk of a Jewish people – although it is also possible to be converted to Judaism.

Intellectually, Judaism presents itself as a philosophy, and in its concept of devoting one day a week to the study of texts it has something in common with the philosophical schools of the Middle Ages. For more than 1 000 years after Christ’s birth a feature of both Judaism and Christianity, and later of Islam too, was the ongoing debate about the relationship between law and reason. Indeed, this question was the subject of rational dialogue between the three faiths, particularly in Andalusia (al Andalus).

Being Jewish

What is the definition of Jewishness? One of the Germans' first concerns, in Germany itself and in the countries they conquered, turned into allies or controlled via puppet governments, was to define, through legislation or regulations, not what constituted Jewishness but who should be considered a Jew.

Until the beginning of the Christian era the Jews, who were not very numerous, lived in Palestine under the Roman Empire as one of several peoples with different customs and religions. Following the birth of Christ and the formation of a Christian Church, and after failed attempts at unification, the Christians' assertion that Christ was God triggered a major split and finally, when Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the emigration of the Jews. This movement, which had already begun as a result of earlier expulsions, was known as the diaspora, or dispersal, and led to the establishment of Jewish communities, mostly in Europe, that remained inter-connected through their customs and their support for one another.

Founding dates of Europe's Jewish communities¹

Greece: 297 BC	Netherlands: 1133
Italy: ca 167 BC	Poland: 1133
Rhodes: ca 67 BC	Belgium: 1233
France: 3 AD	Luxembourg: 1286
Bulgaria: 33 AD	Estonia: 1333
Hungary: 33 AD	Lithuania: 1333
Crimea: 33 AD	Belarus (White Russia): 1387
Romania: 133 AD	Gdansk (Danzig): 1533
Germany: 321 AD	Latvia: 1533
Austria: 903	Saarland: 1621
Czechoslovakia: 933	Denmark: 1622
Yugoslavia: 933	Klaipeda (Memel): 1664
Ukraine: 1117	Norway: 1851

The pattern of migration and the formation of new settlements was determined by the hazards of local history (persecution, wars, poverty and famine).

1. Based upon figures from Sir Martin Gilbert, *The atlas of the Holocaust*, Michael Joseph, London, 1982.

Nonetheless, the diaspora produced two major groups. The first comprised those people who settled initially in north-eastern France and then, in response to anti-Jewish measures and persecution, emigrated again, particularly to Poland and Lithuania where they set up *shtetl* (communities) and established a distinct culture based on the use of Yiddish (the word means “Jewish idiom”), a language that mixed Aramaic Hebrew, Germanic, Latin and Slav elements, and on high-level Hebrew schooling, family traditions and a most varied artistic heritage. These people, known as the Ashkenazim, were the European Jews (today their descendants are scattered round the globe and account for 70% of the world Jewish population). The other group, the Sephardim, settled first in Spain. When they were expelled in 1492 some emigrated to Italy but most to North Africa and the Islamic world generally, where they were officially categorised as second-class citizens but were guaranteed certain freedoms. When the state of Israel was founded, many Sephardim had to leave the Islamic countries and 80% of them are now Israeli.

Ideology aside, what does it mean to be Jewish? Definitions may be based on identification with the Jewish religion or a Jewish community (through integration and the observance of customs and cultural practices), or on ancestry. Being a Jew means more than following the Jewish faith but it is not a matter of “race”: identification with Judaism nowadays tends to be a matter for individuals, who define themselves according to one or more of the above-mentioned criteria.

Key dates¹

1207 BC

First mention of the name “Israel”, on an Egyptian stone tablet

Late 11th century BC

Saul establishes the monarchy

Circa 1010 BC

David becomes King of Judah at Hebron. *Circa* 1003 BC he founds Jerusalem and unites the kingdoms of Israel and Judah

Circa 971 BC

Death of David, who is succeeded by his son Solomon. The Jerusalem Temple is completed around 964 BC

1. Information taken from: *L'Histoire*, special edition on Israel, No. 212, July-August 1997, by permission of Société d'éditions scientifiques. Editor's translation.

Circa 931 BC

Death of Solomon and separation (schism) of the two kingdoms. The tribes in the north form the kingdom of Israel centred on Samaria, while those in the south belong to the kingdom of Judah, centred on Jerusalem

722 BC

Samaria falls to the Assyrians and the kingdom of Israel ceases to exist. Judah accepts the status of an Assyrian vassal kingdom

705-701 BC

Revolt by Hezekiah, King of Judah. A large part of the population is deported to Assyria

597 BC

The Kingdom of Judah rises against the Babylonian Empire, which has swept the Assyrians from power. The élite of the kingdom are deported to Babylon

587-586 BC

A fresh revolt under King Zedekiah leads to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Second wave of deportations to Babylon. The Kingdom of Judah becomes a Babylonian province

539 BC

Babylon is captured by King Cyrus of Persia, who issues a decree authorising the Jews to return from exile and rebuild the temple. The return migration to Judah continues until the mid-4th century BC

515 BC

The Second Temple is completed

Mid-5th century BC

Nehemiah is governor of Judea. Jerusalem's walls are rebuilt

Circa 398 BC

Ezra's mission in Judea and Samaria unites the various Jewish traditions. The Torah is codified in its current form

333-332 BC

Alexander the Great conquers Syria and Palestine

319 BC

The Macedonian Ptolemy I becomes ruler of the Jews

200-198 BC

Palestine is fully conquered by Antiochus III of the Seleucid dynasty

175 BC

The high priest Jason obtains authorisation from Antiochus IV to turn Jerusalem into a Greek city

172-169 BC

Following a civil war between Jason and Menelaus, the latter takes over the high priesthood

167 BC

In an attempt to quell the unrest in Judea, Antiochus IV issues the Edict of Persecution outlawing the *Torah*. This triggers the Revolt of the Maccabees against Seleucid political domination and the imposition of Greek culture

164 BC

The Maccabees liberate the temple and win a number of military victories over the Seleucids

161 BC

An alliance is concluded between Judea and Rome

160 BC

Death of Juda Maccabee, who is succeeded in turn by his brothers, Jonathan and Simon

143-63 BC

Period of the Hasmonean dynasty which followed on from the Maccabees

63 BC

Pompey besieges Jerusalem and the Romans conquer Judea

40 BC

Herod is proclaimed King of the Jews, in Rome, and rules in Judea from 37 BC to 4 AD. After his death, the kingdom is split between his sister and his sons

6 AD

Judea, now annexed to the Roman Province of Syria, comes under Roman control. It is ruled by a “prefect” (administrator)

66-74

Judea rises in force against Rome

70

Roman legions under Titus take Jerusalem and the temple is destroyed in an accidental fire that summer. Judea is made a province

73-74

The rebels last stronghold, Massada, falls to the Romans

132-135

General uprising in Judea led by Bar Kochba. The Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina, forbidden to Jews, is founded on the ruins of Jerusalem. The Jews are expelled from Judea. Hadrian crushes the revolt in 135 and the Roman province of Judea is renamed Syria-Palestine

3rd-5th centuries

Babylon emerges as the main centre of Jewish settlement and learning

636-638

Arab conquest of Palestine

711

Muslim conquest of Spain

Circa 800

First accounts of Jews migrating from the Middle East to North Africa

11th-12th centuries

The era of “al Andalus”, the golden age of Judaism in Muslim Spain

1096

Jews are massacred and forcibly converted in the People’s Crusade, which attacks Jewish communities in northern France, the Rhineland and along the Danube

1099

The Crusaders take Jerusalem

1140-1148

The Almohads conquer towns and cities in North Africa, forcing the Jews there to choose between conversion and death

13th century

Waves of emigration from western to eastern Europe. Evidence of organised Jewish communities in Poland

1394

The expulsion of Jews from France is completed

1492

Granada, the last bastion of Islam on the Iberian Peninsula, falls to the Christian forces, and the Jews are expelled from Spain

1497

Forced conversion of all the Jews in Portugal

1516

Venice becomes the site of the first ghetto

1516-1517

The Ottomans conquer Palestine

16th century

Regional and general Jewish representative bodies are established in Poland and Lithuania (the Diet of the Four Lands and Diet of Lithuania)

17th century

First Jewish communities established in the New World

18th century

Partition of Poland between Austria, Russia and Prussia. The Jews in the Russian zone have to settle in a specially demarcated area

Late 18th century

Beginning of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment

1781-1789

Emperor Joseph II's policies of tolerance towards Jews in Austria

1790-1791

Emancipation of Jews in France

1796

Napoleon's army declares the emancipation of Italian Jews

19th and early 20th centuries

As a result of colonialism, Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East come under western control

1830

France conquers Algeria. The emancipation of Jews in Europe is completed in 1874 with emancipation in Switzerland. Anti-Semitism in Europe grows in the second half of the century

1860

The *Alliance israélite universelle* is founded in Paris and subsequently sets up a French-language educational network in the Middle East and North Africa

1870

The French Minister of Justice, Crémieux, issues a decree granting French citizenship to Jews in Algeria (except the southern territories)

1881-1882

Pogroms break out in Russia after the death of Alexander II. They result in a mass exodus towards America, western Europe and Palestine

1882

Léon Pinsker publishes *Auto-Emancipation*, calling on Jews to seize control of their own destiny and form a nation with a homeland

1894-1906

The Dreyfus case

1896

Theodor Herzl, founder of Zionism, publishes *The Jewish state*

1897

The Bund, a Jewish socialist movement radically opposed to Zionism, is founded in Vilnius. In the same year, Herzl convenes the first World Zionist Congress in Basel

1903-1906

Second wave of pogroms in Russia and Ukraine

1917

The Balfour Declaration

1922

Britain is given a League of Nations mandate over Palestine. The first White Paper is drafted recognising the legitimacy of the Jewish presence in Palestine

1930

A second British White Paper declares that the territory earmarked as a Jewish homeland must be restricted

1933

Hitler comes to power in Germany

9-10 November 1938

Kristallnacht – a night of pogroms against German and Austrian Jews

1939

Final British White Paper strictly limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine and the colonisation of land there by Jews

1939-1945

5-6 million Jews perish in the Holocaust

The shtetl

“The small town of Krzywca was ... known in the Yiddish vernacular as a *shtetl* – a hundred Jewish families out of a population of two or three thousand. And they all clustered around a central square. ... I do remember going to *cheder*, which was a Jewish school. And boys, particularly, started at the age of three Jewish instruction, especially reading, learning the alphabet, and learning the prayers, which was the most important. ... I remember my grandmother’s house. ... I used to go Friday, and she had a little *pletzl* there,

a little piece of dough was left with some onions, delicious. And the smells of the baking! Thursday was the preparation, Friday afternoon nobody did any more. The men went to the *mikvah* (ritual baths) to get themselves purified. The women started preparing the children. So, it was a certain, it was a way of life that is – I don't know if it's duplicated any place unless in the Hasidic communities. But that was a way of life that was the culmination of hundreds of years of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. That was the spirit in this little town.

The Sabbath was an expression, it was a deep expression that made a deep, deep impression on children.”¹

1. Joseph W., in Joshua M. Greene and Shiva Kumar (eds), *Witness – Voices from the Holocaust*, The Free Press, New York.

Anti-Semitism

Christianity bears a heavy responsibility for the rise and spread of anti-Semitism. By recognising the Roman Empire as its secular arm (in the 4th century), it became a religion of state. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the imposition of Catholicism was part of the process by which its successor kingdoms gradually established themselves: in particular, they eradicated Celtic and Druidic culture throughout Europe. In a process that took several centuries, control was extended by locking more and more territory into the grid of feudalism.

Raul Hilberg has identified three major phases of anti-Semitism: conversion, expulsion and annihilation. Initially (in the 4th century), as the Christian Church proclaimed its universality, it offered conversion. In the case of the Jews this approach was a failure, not least because recently converted Jews were regarded in the church as undeserving, inferior, suspect and heretical.

The development of anti-Semitic policies was accompanied from the outset by the depiction of Jews as people of evil intent, guilty of profaning the Christian host, poisoning wells and serving the devil. Images propagated down the centuries took root in popular belief and often resulted in Jews being persecuted and even massacred. But right from the start anti-Semitism was also expressed actively in measures barring Jews from certain occupations or places of residence and thus forcing them to settle in particular districts and specialise in certain kinds of work – in finance, for example. This, in turn, led to the portrayal of Jews as usurers extracting money in the form of interest from Christians, and thus controlling them. From there, it was not a huge leap to depicting the diaspora as a conspiracy – while at the same time subjecting Jews to more and more forms of coercion. This is shown in the drawing below.

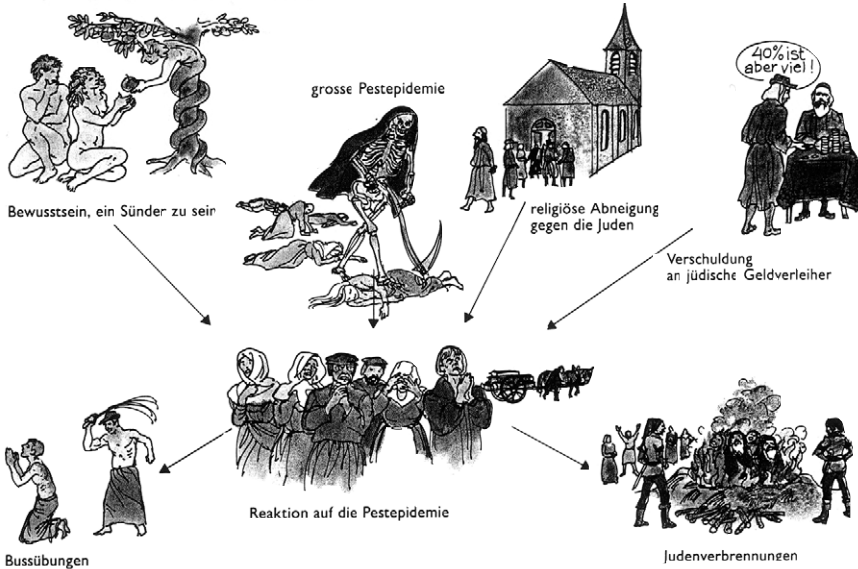
In the 16th century a similar process of reasoning led to the virtual abandonment of theological persuasion in favour of a policy of expulsion: the choice was no longer “convert or be expelled”, but “stay in the ghetto or go into exile” and its enforcement was unfailingly accompanied by outbreaks of violence.

Although, according to Hilberg, there was no major qualitative change in anti-Semitism in the 19th century, it developed and intensified, paving the way for the next phase – that of annihilation.

While Jews in central Europe achieved emancipation around 1840, this was also a period marked by important developments in the fields of linguistics and biology. Language groups were identified and a distinction was now made between Indo-European and Semitic languages.

Menschen und Staaten in Krisen

Die grosse Pestepidemie und ihre Folgen:



Durch Geschichte zur Gegenwart 3, ©Lehrmittelverlag des Kantons Zürich, 1999

Captions: title: The plague and its consequences. Clockwise beginning with Adam and Eve: Acknowledgement of sin; The Plague; Religions aversion to Jews; 40%, that's too high/Jewish usurers blamed; Penitential rites; Reactions to the epidemic; Jews burned alive.

In biology, Darwin introduced the study of evolution with the publication in 1859 of his *Origin of species*. Against this background, unscrupulous ideologists fused various notions, entirely unscientifically, to produce what looked like the basis of a theory, and between 1853 and 1855 Gobineau published his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. Anti-Semitism, hitherto based on religion, emerged from this intellectual muddling as a form of racism, the Jews having been deemed a "race".

Wilhelm Marr, for example, who coined the term "anti-Semitism" in the 1870s, described the Jews as a "scapegoat race" responsible for the financial crisis in Austria-Hungary in 1873.

The phenomenon was notably more virulent in the Germanic countries. Taking their lead from Johann Fichte, German nationalists saw language as their defining characteristic – and the German "race" as the "purest" of the "Aryan" group of Indo-European language speakers. Jews, although speakers of German – in the form of Yiddish, an Ashkenazi Germanic dialect – were portrayed as subverting the German language and nation. The fact that Germans were outnumbered in Austria-Hungary by Slavs and Hungarians only made them more

determined in their anti-Semitism. In the “other Germany” – that is Prussia and particularly Berlin – anti-Semitism was fuelled by opposition to economic liberalism.

In Russia the assassination of Tsar Alexander II was blamed on the Jews and the period between 1880 and the turn of the century was marked by pogroms (the Russian word means “massacre”), which drove many Russian and Polish Jews to emigrate. Around 1900 the Russian secret police began circulating the “Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion”, an entirely fake document said to have originated at a secret meeting held during the first World Zionist Congress (in Basel in 1897) and revealing a Zionist plot to take over the whole of Europe. Nazi propagandists made great use of this forgery (and it is interesting that in 1997 a fake recording was made in Poland of Polish Jews, including a government minister, allegedly “plotting” in a similar manner).

In France, after its defeat by Germany in 1870, Jews – many of whom had German-sounding surnames – were accused of having undermined the country and sapped its morale. The failure of the Union Générale bank was attributed to the duplicity of Jewish financiers, and nationalist and clerical factions were henceforth united in their hatred of the Jews.

By the end of the 19th century, anti-Semitism, thus reinforced, had become a form of racism.

Roma/Gypsies

Roma/Gypsies¹ are descendants of Banjara nomad tribes from north-west India who spoke an Indo-European language similar to Sanskrit and migrated in family groups to Iran and Europe between the 5th and 11th centuries. There is evidence of their presence in Crete in 1322, then in Bulgaria, then throughout Europe from the 15th century onwards. It is by no means certain that they chose to be nomads since the land was occupied when they arrived. They travelled in small groups and, unlike various migratory movements of preceding centuries, they did not come to conquer. Instead they earned a living from various forms of metal work and trading. Their way of life was peaceful and family-based, and they attached great importance to children, considering their freedom sacred.

The Greeks called them *atsigani*, which is the origin of the German *Zigeuner*, the Hungarian *Czigany* and the French *Tsigane*. In some regions, in the Middle Ages, they were referred to as Egyptians (some groups had passed through Egypt). This is the origin of the English word Gypsy and the French *Gitan*. These terms are generic names which are often tinged with negative or somewhat outlandish connotations. They include sub-groups with quasi-ethnic status (apart from a common homeland). Thus, the principal victims of the Holocaust were Roma (from *rôm* which means son or man). The second group of victims was made up of the Sinti or Manus (*Manouches* in French). The third group, made up of the *Kalé* or *Gitans*, more or less escaped the Holocaust because of their geographical distribution.

Because they had dark skin, were nomads, came from “nowhere” but had passed through lands occupied by the Turks and predicted the future, the attitude of Europeans towards them ranged from curiosity to assimilation with the devil. They arrived too late to be accused of propagating the Black Death – it was the Jews who were tarred with that particular brush – but they were held up for blame wherever a scapegoat might come in useful, for instance whenever there was a bad harvest, an epidemic, a drought or any other disaster. The church and the state introduced increasingly restrictive measures against them, systematically discriminating against them and harassing them. Various trades corporations saw them as a potential threat to their professional monopoly. Only a part of the nobility readily welcomed them as “modern” troubadours, though for the

1. Ed. note: Roma/Gypsy is the term used by the Council of Europe to refer to the vast range of groups and sub-groups of Gypsy origin. The term “Gypsy” is used throughout the rest of the text and refers to Roma/Gypsy.

most part because of their music. They were even accused of cannibalism. In Hungary, in 1782, more than 200 supposed cannibals were dragged before the courts and 41 had already been tortured and executed before it was “realised” that the people they were supposed to have eaten were alive and well.

This ostracism and persecution took place at every period and in every European country. In England, being a Gypsy or frequenting Gypsies was a capital offence. In most cases, Gypsies were simply expelled. They had no nationality and there were no laws or regulations to protect them. States either attempted to force them to settle, as in Hungary in the 18th century, or to isolate them by deporting them, by prohibiting them from certain areas, particularly towns, or by fencing them in.

The emergence of strictly administered, centralised states exposed them to new forms of persecution. The state would not tolerate what it could not control. This marked them out as obvious victims of all forms of totalitarianism and the nazi genocide.

After the Holocaust they were denied victim status by many bodies including numerous West German courts. Many of the West German officials considered that they had not been persecuted for racial reasons but because they were a-social, which was exactly what the nazis had argued. It was not until 1963 that a German Supreme Court decision acknowledged that they had been persecuted as from 1938.

The origins of nazism

From the emergence of the National Socialist German Workers' Party to the putsch of 1923

By Vincent Magnien, historian

We need to begin by considering the conditions that fuelled the rise of the nazi movement. While resisting simplistic and misleading determinism, we can show that various factors were at work.

The first aspects to look at are history and the geopolitical background. Germany is in the middle of Europe, surrounded by many other countries and lies on the path of migratory movements. Since the earliest times, this region of Europe has known wars, conflict and tension. While not the only country thus affected, Germany responded to the situation by going on the defensive and developing a mistrust of foreigners, a phenomenon particularly marked in Prussia, where, in the course of the 19th century, the defensive response was to evolve into an offensive, imperialist outlook that eventually spread throughout Germany after its unification in 1871. Its subsequent development was characterised by tensions between archaic values and modernism – between the traditional aristocracy, which continued to dominate politics, and the army, and the upper middle classes, who reacted to this top-heavy social structure by settling for control of the burgeoning economy rather than political participation.

Another important factor was the industrial revolution and the associated socio-economic upheaval affecting a substantial proportion of the German population around the turn of the century. The traditional structures that had united society began to come apart: many people left the church, for example, and families were dispersed. Individuals who previously had the support of a social network found themselves alone and disorientated.

Germany's defeat in the first world war is, because of its consequences, a key aspect in any attempt to explain nazism. Apart from inflicting pain and suffering, it gave the Germans something of a shock, for although the civilian population had had to endure deprivation during the war, people had never doubted its final outcome (we should remember that Germany had not been invaded from the west). The republic that emerged from the post-war chaos was fragile and did not enjoy the respect of either the public at large or the traditional political forces still entrenched throughout Germany. People also felt deeply wounded by the particularly humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles and by the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. It was thus no surprise that tension mounted and protests (in the form of revolts, coups and assassinations) became more frequent.

The postwar recession, which brought hunger, unemployment and bankruptcy and affected the whole of society, became a full-scale disaster in 1923 when

inflation hit record levels. (In December of that year the gold mark was worth 1 trillion paper marks.)

It was against this background that support for the *National-sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* or the NSDAP, really took off.

How the NSDAP was formed

A child of the lower middle classes and a failed artist, Adolf Hitler seemed to find his vocation, as a dutiful soldier, in the first world war. He was tremendously bitter about the German defeat in 1918 and hated the leaders responsible for the November Armistice (criminals, in his eyes), who dominated political life in the 1920s.

In 1919, in Munich, Hitler became a member of the German Workers' Party, a tiny group led by Anton Drexler, with marked anti-Semitic leanings – part of its attraction for the Austrian corporal. Hitler gradually distinguished himself as a firebrand orator and became a dictatorial leader of the party, which he re-launched in 1921 as the NSDAP. The next step was to militarise the membership, with the creation of the SA (*Sturmabteilung* or storm troops which acted as a paramilitary defence force) and the adoption of the red flag with the swastika.

The major ideas that the nazis subsequently put into practice had already taken shape in the early 1920s – notably virulent nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-communism. The NSDAP was still only one of many small groups of extremists who were better at protesting than working out policies. It got a favourable reception (and, indeed, financial support) from certain Bavarian industrialists who, in the crisis of 1923, felt threatened by “the red peril”.

The Beer Hall *Putsch*

In itself, this was an inglorious episode – a coup mounted in haste without proper preparation or organisation. In September 1923 the state of Bavaria, in the grip of reactionary separatism, broke away from the central government. Believing he could exploit the situation, Hitler and a group of strong-arm supporters gate-crashed a meeting of Bavarian government figures in the Bürgerbraukeller beer hall in Munich on 8 November. As Hitler's men were armed, he had no difficulty imposing his views and getting the meeting to accept the idea of a march on Berlin. But that same evening, on radio, the leaders collectively dissociated themselves from the plan. The following day saw a trial of strength between nazi supporters, bent on seizing power, and the state authorities. During bloody street fighting, Hitler was helped to make a getaway. He was arrested two days later, tried and imprisoned.

There was nothing very remarkable about this sequence of events for in late 1923 Germany was falling apart both politically and, especially, economically and attempted coups were regular occurrences. The important thing, for existing and future party members, was the signal that had gone out: the NSDAP was not

content merely to carp; it was a movement of action. Hitler, moreover, derived kudos from the episode as a victim of the impotent republic. And it was during what proved a cushy term of imprisonment that he dictated the first part of *Mein Kampf* and decided, on reflection, that his party would seek power through the ballot box.

Nazi doctrine

On 24 February 1920 the Nazi Party issued a programme that included the following:

4. Only members of the nation may be citizens of the State. Only those of German blood, whatever be their creed, may be members of the nation. Accordingly, no Jew may be a member of the nation.
5. Non-citizens may live in Germany only as guests and must be subject to laws for aliens.
6. The right to vote on the State's government and legislation shall be enjoyed by the citizens of the State alone. We demand therefore that all official appointments, of whatever kind, whether in the Reich, in the states or in the smaller localities, shall be held by none but citizens. ...
8. All non-German immigration must be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans who entered Germany after 2 August 1914 shall be required to leave the Reich forthwith.”¹

Hilberg points out that this is the party's only written position on the race question. Apart from *Mein Kampf*, there is little other relevant documentation. It is hard to discuss Hitler's and the nazis' aims as representing a theory, doctrine or ideology, for the nazis had their own interpretation of the terms and concepts involved, and used them to restate underlying assumptions. All we can hope to do is indicate what they were asserting.

“Race” was determined by “blood” and the “German race” was a lordly one. Its purity had to be maintained and this meant it could not mix with “inferior” races. The Germans were a superior people: they needed “living space”, which they were at liberty to conquer, annex, control and “cleanse” by any means at their disposal, their choices and actions being dictated solely by self-interest without reference to humanity or morality. The two greatest threats to the “German race” on its own territory, in Europe and worldwide were Judaism and Bolshevism, the latter being an emanation of the former (as indeed was Christianity).

The nazis' ideal or ultimate goal was to dominate a world rid of “inferior races”, religions and Bolshevism, in which, among the “Aryans”, the “German race” would enjoy unlimited power.

1. Text quoted by Raul Hilberg in *The destruction of European Jews*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., New York, Holmes and Meier, 1985.

The Jewish and Gypsy “races” were (literally) parasites. In the case of the Gypsies, the “parasitism” took the form of an “a-social” lifestyle. But “Jewish parasitism” was more pernicious and thus much more dangerous: the Jews had a centuries-old mission to control, enslave and degrade all other peoples, notably through the tool of finance.

Not one of these claims could bear scientific or academic analysis, although various “specialists” were roped in to theorise about them. They were incantatory utterances, repeated not only in *Mein Kampf* and in public addresses by Hitler and all the Nazi dignitaries but also in schools, in an unprecedented form of incitement to hatred. They were also accompanied by “prophecies” concerning, in equal measure, the question of living space and the “extermination” (*Vernichtung*) or “eradication” of the Jews.

None of this amounted to real theory and its primary function was one of propaganda and mass indoctrination. Nonetheless, it summed up Hitler’s purpose and, informed by international events and domestic developments, was to dictate the course of German foreign policy and the increasingly repressive measures taken against various groups (including political opponents, homosexuals, Jews, Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities and the socially marginalised). It represented the negation of western values generally.

“My ... Latin teacher, who always said ‘*Salvete, discipuli*’ ... came in a storm trooper uniform, the brown uniform. And the greetings were changed from ‘*Salvete, discipuli*’ and ‘*Salvete, Magister*’ to ‘*Heil Hitler*’. He came in and said, ‘*Heil Hitler, students*’ and we had to stand up and say, ‘*Heil Hitler, teacher*’. Then we had a different curriculum because we had this *Rassenkunde*, which was raceology. That was a regular subject we had. And we were supposed to learn what an Aryan is, the Aryan race. Opposed to the Aryan race, we were the Jews. And the students were to learn what makes the difference between a blond, blue-eyed pure Aryan to a Jew.”¹

1. Frank S. in *Voices from the Holocaust*, op. cit.

Anti-Jewish measures: 1933-39

A number of anti-Jewish measures had begun to be taken before 1933, reflecting the racism already at work in official circles: Jews were thus barred, for example, from serving in the army above non-commissioned officer level. And on 23 December 1932, Hans Globke, a senior Prussian civil servant had instructed that any applications by Jews for a change in civil status were to be opposed.

A “definition”

On 11 April 1933 a regulation was introduced to the effect that no one with a Jewish grandparent could be considered Aryan: the basis for this negative definition was still a religious one.

The Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in 1935 saw the hasty drafting and adoption of two successive measures: the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour and the Reich Citizenship Law. In the regulation (of 14 November 1935) implementing the latter statute, a Jew was defined as anyone who was descended from: (a) at least three Jewish grandparents, (b) at least two Jewish grandparents if he or she belonged to the Jewish religious community or (c) Jewish parents if he or she were born after September 1935. All other cases were classed as *Mischlinge* (Jewish half-breeds) and were allegedly to be “protected”, as, initially, were Jewish veterans of the first world war.

Personal and professional restrictions

With the Nazi takeover began a long series of bans and prohibitions directed against Jews. On 7 April 1933 they were barred from public service posts. Jewish doctors and lawyers were liable to be struck off. On 22 September Jews were prohibited from working in the arts and on 4 October they were barred from editing newspapers.

A boycott committee set up on 29 March 1933 had to abandon its plans due to lack of public response, but the SA and SS took up the initiative in their own way, “marking” Jewish businesses by posting sentries outside them. On 21 May 1935 “pure Aryan” descent was made a condition for active service in the military.

The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour (Nuremberg, September 1935) outlawed marriage and sexual relations between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans”. Couples who disobeyed were exposed to public condemnation.

In 1936 those Jewish public employees not already dismissed from their posts (Mischlinge and war veterans) were deprived of welfare benefits. In June of that year the Reich Appeal Court ruled that private companies could lawfully dismiss employees for having Jewish “racial” characteristics.

On 6 July 1938 Jews were barred from providing various commercial services – including estate agency, caretaking, brokerage and tourist services. On 25 July all but a few Jewish doctors were forbidden to practise and the exceptions were allowed to serve only Jewish patients. On 27 September a similar rule came into force for lawyers.

In August 1938 all Jews were required to adopt an additional first name: either “Sarah” or “Israel”.

On 19 November they were excluded from public welfare provision.

On 4 March 1939 unemployed Jews became liable to be conscripted for forced labour. On 24 December 1940, Jews earning more than 39 Reichsmark per month were required to pay an additional 15% in income tax.

From October 1941 onwards, Jews (including those who still had jobs) were not allowed to refuse forced labour, for which they were paid according to output, with no holiday entitlement or social benefits. It was, in effect, slavery. The next step was the “final solution”.

Aryanisation and financial penalties

Before the nazis came to power, a law had been passed requiring all emigrants who in 1930 possessed assets worth at least 200000 Reichsmark to pay a 25% “leaving tax”. On 18 May 1934, at a time when Jews were being driven to emigrate, the income threshold was lowered to 50000 Reichsmark.

The Schacht conference of 20 August 1935 decided that Jews were no longer to be awarded public contracts. As of 26 April 1938, all Jewish assets had to be registered, and from 14 June of that year any company with a Jewish director or senior manager was classed as a Jewish business.

In the area of taxation, 1938 saw the abolition of child rebate for Jewish taxpayers and of tax allowances for Jewish charitable enterprises.

On 12 November 1938 all Jewish retail businesses were closed and Jewish company directors were dismissed. The assets of “Jewish companies” had to be “Aryanised” by means of “agreed” sales. The Jewish population generally was required to make atonement payments, amounting to 25% of Jewish assets declared in the previous year, to cover the cost of the damage done during the *Kristallnacht*. On 3 December trustees were appointed to take over those com-

panies not already “Aryanised” and Jews were forced to sell land, forestry and property holdings and to give up shares and other securities.

Weakening the Jews through hunger

- Under the overall German rationing system there were four categories of food: non-rationed products; basic rations; supplementary rations (manual labourers, pregnant women etc.); special distributions in case of surpluses.
- On 1 December 1939 special distributions to Jews were stopped.
- Jews were allowed to shop only during fixed hours (after “Aryans”).
- Many parcels sent from abroad were confiscated.
- On 26 June 1942 a conference decision was taken to withhold certain produce from Jews (cake, white bread and meat, for example), supplementary rations for Jewish children were abolished and Jews were allowed only skimmed milk.

Emigration policy

From 1933 onwards, measures were taken to encourage German Jews to emigrate. Attempts were made to force “foreign” Jews to emigrate, but these met with failure, notably at the Polish border as Poland threatened to retaliate by expelling Jews of German origin (who were much more numerous) to Germany.

In 1933 there were 520 000 Jews living in Germany. By early 1938, death and emigration had reduced the number to 350 000. In March 1938 the *Anschluss* (German union with Austria) raised the total to 540 000 by the addition of the 190 000 Austrian Jews.

At the outbreak of war, 6000 Jews were transferred from central Europe to the Government General of Poland (the part of occupied Poland not integrated into the Reich).

The number Jews from Germany and central Europe who were sent to non-occupied France totalled 6 500.

As a result of the annexation of territory and the manipulation or direct control of governments, however, many more Jews now fell under the Reich’s authority.

As the conflict spread with the invasion of the Soviet Union, their numbers were swelled (despite the activities of roving death squads). The “Madagascar project” (a Nazi plan to settle European Jews on the island of Madagascar, hitherto ruled by France) was rendered impossible when Japan and the United States entered the fighting, turning it into a world war.

Sir Martin Gilbert has compiled a country-by-country estimate of the numbers of Jews “marked out for death” on 20 January 1942:¹

Germany:	131 800	Hungary:	742 800
Denmark:	5 600	Austria:	43 700
Norway:	1 300	Bohemia and Moravia:	74 200
Netherlands:	160 800	Slovakia:	88 000
Belgium:	43 000	Ukraine*:	2 994 684
Occupied France:	165 000	White Russia*:	446 484
Non-occupied France* (including French North Africa):	700 000	Occupied “eastern territories”:	420 000
Italy:	58 000	Soviet Union*:	5 000 000
Greece:	69 600	Estonia:	0
Bulgaria:	48 000	Latvia:	3 500
Romania:	342 000	Lithuania:	34 000
Albania:	200	Bialystok District:	400 000
Serbia:	10 000	Government General of Poland:	2 284 000
Croatia:	40 000		

* = territories not yet occupied in January 1942

Thus the number of Jews to be eliminated in territory controlled by the Axis powers stood at 4 745 500, with a further 9 141 168 in territory that the Germans were capable of occupying or coveted.

Note: These figures represent Jews who were still alive in January 1942. They are taken from German estimates used at the Wannsee Conference, which discussed arrangements for the “final solution”.

Night of the Pogroms of November 1939 (*Kristallnacht*)

After the assassination by a young German Jew of a minor German diplomat in Paris on 9 November 1938, Goebbels, the Minister for Propaganda, let it be known at a meeting of party officials that Hitler would not oppose widespread rioting. Accordingly, the SA ordered that synagogues should be burned. On the night of 9 November a nationwide pogrom took place.

As a result, 91 Jews were killed, thousands were wounded, 191 synagogues were burned, 7 500 shops were looted and 30 000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.²

1. *The atlas of the Holocaust*, op. cit.

2. Figures taken from M. Broszat and N. Frei (eds), *Das Dritte Reich im Überblick*, Munich, 1989.

The concept of “concentration”

In 1933 a concentration camp was set up at Dachau and others rapidly followed. Originally intended to house political opponents, the camps were soon receiving Jews, who were particularly ill treated there. The SS was granted immunity from police investigation and legal proceedings in relation to the summary execution of Jews.

The Madagascar project having proved impossible, it became clear, as Germany gained control of more and more territory, that emigration could not resolve “the Jewish question”. In many countries, Jews were historically well integrated. Before other solutions could be considered, the Jews had to be separated insofar as possible from non-Jews in order to avoid conflict and prevent manifestations of solidarity. A policy of “concentration” thus began to be pursued.

In the Government General of Poland there was a transitional phase with the creation of ghettos. The term “ghetto” was first used in 16th-century Venice, where the Jews expelled from Spain were confined in a closed quarter of the city. Now the same system was gradually adopted in towns and cities in eastern Poland, usually under the pretext of preventing the spread of epidemics to the non-Jewish population.

Forced labour, food restrictions, illness and individual or organised ill-treatment caused the Jews’ physical condition to deteriorate markedly – a fact used to fuel propaganda about the inferior nature of the “Jewish race”.

Even before the “final solution” went into operation, there had been many massacres in the east and systematic extermination had begun in Chelmno in late 1940.

At the Wannsee Conference, Heydrich announced that the Jews were to be sent to labour camps: the conditions there would “naturally eliminate” many of them thanks to their poor physical condition (the result of deliberate malnutrition). Those who managed to hold out would have to be “dealt with accordingly”.

In practice, the process of natural elimination, in the ghettos as in the concentration camps, proved too slow and costly, and the highest proportion of deaths took place in the extermination camps.

Concentration camps: their establishment and function

Germany in 1933 was not short of traditional penitentiary establishments (prisons and fortresses) but these could not accommodate extremely large numbers of people.

On 8 March 1933 (Hitler having just come to power on 30 January), Frick, the Interior Minister, announced that a number of concentration camps were to be set up: Orianenburg opened on 20 March, Dachau the next day, and by the end of the month there were already 50 camps.

They were constructed quickly and not always according to central plans; in fact the SS had to step in to “regularise” certain camps. “Regular” concentration camps were run by an SS inspectorate, a clear indication that they were not part of the legal penitentiary system, but were simply places of political, and thus arbitrary, detention. People were sent to the camps either without trial or else after serving a conventional prison sentence. The latter was the fate of many of the nazis’ opponents and of Jehovah’s Witnesses and homosexuals: for people in these categories, being sentenced to a month’s imprisonment in the years 1935-1938 could actually mean a month in jail plus up to 10 years in a camp or, more often, death there.

Only the Gestapo had the power to send people to the camps and to grant release from them: they were a political police force. The SS ran the camps and, significantly, had a free rein in doing so, the supreme court of the Reich having ruled at an early stage that members of the SS would not be liable to legal proceedings for the ill-treatment, torture or murder of deportees.

With a few exceptions (notably Auschwitz), the “regular” concentration camps were located within the Reich. Camps set up in the occupied territories had special status or functions: some were run by the occupying police force or army, others by local administrations or authorities; some were transit camps or holding centres, or camps for specific categories of prisoner such as Gypsies.

The “regular” camps had two purposes: to extract certain groups from society in order to control and standardise it more completely, and to create a pool of slave labour for direct exploitation or sale to companies. In some of the occupied territories, senior nazis were not slow to appreciate the potential of this system and set up their own “private” and highly profitable camps. As more and more Jews and “a-social” inmates were interned alongside the nazis’ various opponents, the camps took on a third function, which was to develop into their main *raison d’être*: the destruction of the inmates through hard labour, starvation and illness.

This function became significantly more important after the *Kristallnacht* on 9 and 10 November 1938, when the SA's orders were to arrest as many (preferably wealthy) Jews as the camps could hold at that time.

The six camps used for mass extermination were of a different type. Here, those inmates provisionally kept alive were used not for traditional industrial labour but solely to operate the extermination system. These camps were in the “business” of killing whole convoys of deportees immediately on arrival (without any preliminary registration or branding) and disposing of their bodies by cremation once their personal effects, clothing, hair and gold teeth had been recovered.

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

It was only in July 1931 that the group until then known as the Bible Students (*Bibelforscher* in German) adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses (*Zeugen Jehovas*). Their organisation, the Watch Tower (named, like their German headquarters in Magdeburg, after the American parent body) had already suffered harassment before 1933, both the Catholic Church and the NSDAP being deeply hostile to it.

From 1933 onwards, the *Bibelforscher* (as the nazi propagandists persisted in calling them) were outlawed in various regions including Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia and Baden. They fought back with appeals to the courts and letters of protest – American and Swiss Jehovah's Witnesses sent thousands of telegrams to Hitler and his chancellor. After a brief period of partial respite the organisation was banned throughout Germany in July 1935.

Why did Hitler and the nazis, who tolerated Protestantism and Catholicism, not take a similar attitude to the Jehovah's Witnesses? The first reason is that von Papen (the chancellor who vacated the post in Hitler's favour) drew his support from major Protestant and Catholic industrialists and the regime needed these people. But it was also the case that Jehovah's Witnesses were forbidden, under the rules of their religion, from swearing allegiance to Hitler, giving the Hitler salute or allowing their children to join the Hitler Youth and, in particular, were not allowed to bear arms. As nazism grew more and more like a new religion, rejecting any form of transcendence in favour of a mystic allegiance to the *Führer*, and the other churches (at best) simply registered a protest, the Jehovah's Witnesses not only protested but also opposed the regime and refused to obey. Consequently, they were treated as opponents: their texts were burned, they were forbidden to meet or attempt to make converts, denunciation was encouraged and offenders were sentenced and imprisoned. None of this had the desired effect: the totalitarian state could not induce them to renounce their principles or be silent.

Crude propaganda then began to be circulated, portraying the Jehovah's Witnesses as the vanguard and tool of the international Jewish conspiracy – a charge allegedly proven by their references to the Old Testament and Jehovah and by the fact that some directors of the Watch Tower were former Jews. Forged documents and pseudo-scientific theories proliferated.

Thus the way was paved for the process of “concentration”, that is arbitrary internment and the cycle of persecution leading to extermination. While not constituting genocide, for the Jehovah’s Witnesses did not claim to be a race or a people but simply a church, their extermination was clearly a crime against humanity. As individuals, they found themselves in the very rare position of having an alternative to internment and death: all they had to do was renounce their faith and pledge themselves to Hitler. They were regularly exhorted in the camps to do so, and their repeated refusals were unfailingly rewarded with fresh brutality.

François Bédarida estimates that between 2000 and 3000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were killed, out of a total in Germany of 10000.

The case of Carl von Ossietzky

An intellectual, confirmed pacifist and Jehovah’s Witness, Carl von Ossietzky wrote several works of protest against nazi aggression and persecution, and his publications were prominent among those that the nazis ritually burned. In 1935, however, the German League for Human Rights nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. With various currents vying to influence the Nobel committee, the 1935 prize was reserved and the award to von Ossietzky was not made until November 1936, by which time he was already in prison in Germany.

“Arrested in the last days of February, Carl von Ossietzky was held first in Spandau prison and then in the Sonnenburg, Esterwegen and Dachau concentration camps. It was in Dachau that he won his ultimate moral victory by refusing to give in and renounce his beliefs. Marshal Goering personally came to see the pacifist with the news that he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He said that von Ossietzky could go to Sweden for the award ceremony on condition that he stopped criticising national socialism. Von Ossietzky thought about the offer and refused it. He did not go to Sweden. He stayed in the camp. It was a moral victory – his victory.

As a result of the discredit that the affair cast on Germany and the international pressure on behalf of von Ossietzky, he was released. But his liberation proved little more than symbolic for he was suffering from advanced tuberculosis and was taken to hospital where he died on 5 May 1938.”¹

1. Guy Canonici, *Les Témoins de Jéhovah face à Hitler*, Albin Michel, pp. 382-383, editor’s translation.

Persecution of the Roma/Gypsies

The Nazi position on the Gypsies evolved in fits and starts, with an ideological analysis that was initially hesitant and measures that were inconsistent.

Gypsies in Germany in 1933 were deemed “second-class citizens” on the grounds of their “a-social” behaviour, that is their nomadic lifestyle and “un-German” activities. The authorities, especially the municipalities, therefore either expelled them or parked them in designated sites – but the totalitarian government found this situation unsatisfactory. It was not until 1938 that Himmler applied a “racial” rather than a social classification, categorising the Gypsies as *Untermenschen* (lesser beings) and thus triggering the same spiral of consequences suffered by the Jews. One class of Gypsy was, however, exempt – or “privileged” as the Nazis put it – namely those who agreed to adopt a settled lifestyle, living in permanent dwellings and doing “normal” jobs. But even for them, the respite was short-lived.

In the different territories that the Nazis occupied or controlled, the Gypsies, like the Jews, were first defined, then registered, then isolated. The question of appropriating their assets scarcely arose, for the Gypsies were not rich, and they did not have to be excluded from anything, except military service, for there were no Gypsy civil servants, doctors or lawyers.

Their progressive persecution was facilitated by the fact that Gypsies were already victims of racism in the great majority of European societies. This was expressed not in the type of virulent hatred reserved for the Jews, but simply as a rejection of the “dirty Gypsies who stole chickens”.

The process of concentration was initially less brutal: Gypsy tribes were required to set up camp in designated sites under the supervision of one or two guards. There were many such camps throughout the territory occupied by the Nazis.

Harsher measures began in 1941 with the first steps towards extermination. The Gypsies were now sent to real concentration camps, or in some cases (notably in Warsaw) were confined in the Jewish ghettos. The camps that housed Gypsies were termed “family” camps, for the importance of children and the family group in Gypsy culture is such that any attempt to separate families met with instant and violent resistance. The Gypsies were thus accorded the sad privilege, denied to the Jews, of going to the gas chambers *en famille*.

Most of the nazi militia in Germany's various satellite countries were notably zealous in their cruelty towards the Gypsies. Anti-Gypsy racism was deeply embedded in public attitudes and required no semi-abstract ideological underpinning in order to be translated into action. The Gypsies in Romania, Bulgaria and, particularly, Yugoslavia suffered terrible violence. In Croatia, members of the Ustashi movement set new standards of cruelty and bestiality.

On arrival in the extermination camps, Gypsies did not, as a rule, go through a selection procedure, and they remained in family groups. The Gypsy children in Auschwitz thus constituted a ready pool of subjects for Dr Joseph Mengele. Those who were twins or had light-coloured eyes or a distinctive skin tone were unfailingly picked out for experiments that ultimately killed them, but not before inflicting terrible suffering. Camp guards and *Kapos*, meanwhile, raped Gypsy women and girls inside their accommodation blocks and in front of their families – thus subjecting them to a form of humiliation that in Gypsy culture is regarded as worse than death. Many of them also experienced the butchery of so-called sterilisation procedures.

Between a quarter and a third of the Gypsies in Europe were the victims of nazi genocide, yet the level of racism directed against them in our different countries has not diminished.

Persecution of homosexuals

“If it is true that there are one to two million homosexuals, then 7%-8% or 10% of men must be homosexual. If the situation is not changed, then our people will be destroyed by this contagious disease. In the long term, no race could withstand its existence and sexual balance being so profoundly disturbed ... A pure race which has few children already has one foot in the grave; in 50 or a 100 years this race will be of no significance; in two hundred or five hundred years it will be extinct ... Homosexuality reduces all achievements to nought and brings down any achievement-based system; it destroys the very foundations of the state. Furthermore, homosexuals suffer from a serious mental illness. They are weak and cowards in all crucial matters ... We have to understand that if this evil continues to spread in Germany without our being able to halt it, it will be the end of Germany, the end of the Germanic world.”¹

Quite logically, it was primarily German homosexuals who were the main victims, because it was the German “race” which had to be preserved. As Alsace and Moselle had been annexed, homosexuals in those regions suffered the same fate, made all the easier by the fact that the local police had files on them which they handed over to the Germans. This does not mean that homosexuals from other countries were not persecuted; however, they were not the targets of specific campaigns, and they were deported only if they were caught in a raid or if they were unfortunate enough to fall foul of other aspects of life under the occupation (some militiamen were only too ready to root out homosexuals, as much as a game as out of conviction).

Other deportees despised or indeed hated homosexuals almost as much as the nazis. There is very little reference to their fate other than by the very few survivors, who had extreme difficulty in finding willing listeners – or more precisely found only a very restricted audience. Accordingly, books on this subject are very few and far between and once out of stock they were not reprinted. Sir Martin Gilbert cites homosexuals as one of the categories of non-Jewish victims at Mauthausen.

Eugen Kogon, in his report written for the Allies and used at the Nuremberg trials, *The theory and practice of hell – the German concentration camps and the*

1. Dominique Natanson website “Mémoire juive et éducation”, <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/d-d.natanson/>. Speech given on 18 February 1937 by Himmler.

system behind them, is one of the few to make explicit mention of their fate. The deliberate silence of other victims (in the collective sense, via their representative organisations) is nothing short of a second destruction inflicted on the deported homosexuals.

Dominique Natanson on his Internet site “Mémoire juive et éducation” (see fact sheet 50) estimates that victims numbered in the tens of thousands. He quotes the testimony of Pierre Seel, deported at the age of 17 to the Schirmeck camp: “In the camps, homosexuals were subject to the same hardship, brutality, forced labour and medical experiments, but the pink triangle they wore attracted scorn and more serious suffering. The SS dogs were let loose on some of them, ravaging them in front of the other detainees.”¹

On the subject of medical experiments, Eugen Kogon wrote that injecting synthetic hormones into the right groin was supposed to reverse the individuals’ tendencies and that doctors were constantly joking about it.

These experiments, which had no scientific foundation or value, resulted in the death of many prisoners. They were also given the option of being “freed” if they agreed to be castrated – an absurd proposal in the light of Himmler’s theory. Those who did not die as a result of the operation performed with a rare degree of sadism found themselves forced into the Dirlwanger disciplinary brigade, cannon fodder for the Russian campaign.

As in the prison environment generally, the youngest were used as objects of pleasure by the *Kapos*, elders, criminals and sometimes by other deportees. Aimé Spitz, an Alsatian homosexual deported as a political prisoner, recounted: “A young Alsatian from the *département* of Haut-Rhin was fought over by two *Kapos*; each Sunday, one of them gave him a bowl of soup and the other a cigar. As a direct result of the jealousy of each of the *Kapos* he was sent to the infirmary one evening to be disinfected. The following day he was found dead; petrol had been injected into his veins. He was only 19 years old.”

Lesbians, significantly fewer in number, were persecuted in the same way, and in some camps were used as prostitutes for the auxiliary guards and the *Kapos*.

A number of occupied or satellite countries adopted measures making homosexuality a criminal offence, in particular France in 1942. Often the Church approved of such measures.

There was a general refusal by various countries after the war to recognise homosexuals as victims (Austria did not recognise them as such until 1994). In France, the 1942 law became Article 331 of the Criminal Code. Under de Gaulle, a law classified them as a “social scourge” and homosexual relations between adults were liable to a prison sentence. It was not until 1982 that these measures

1. Pierre Seel and Aimé Spitz’s remarks, Dominique Natanson website, op. cit.

were abolished. In the Federal Republic of Germany, paragraph 175 was retained after the war.

This refusal of recognition is tantamount to approval of deportation. Despite the significant liberalisation of society since the 1970s, anti-homosexual racism still acts as a barrier to their being clearly recognised as victims.

The process of dehumanisation

It is not possible to exterminate a significant proportion of a population without taking into account the reactions of the rest of the population. If there are not too many opponents, they too can be exterminated. This was what happened in Germany and the occupied or controlled territories. But in order to avoid too great and widespread an emotional reaction, the majority of the population has to be turned into indifferent witnesses, accomplices, or agents of the massacre. We have recently seen in Rwanda that the Hutus were left with two possibilities: to be victims or executioners; moderate Hutus were massacred like the Tutsis. As a totalitarian state, the Reich did not expect to be able to persuade each German to murder his or her Jewish neighbour, particularly while the Jews were well integrated and assimilated into German society. But the main reason was that it would lead to disorder. Since the founding of nazism, propaganda and doctrine had sought to transform the majority into accomplices, and all children and adolescents who were part of the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) had virtually no choice. In order to turn the vast majority of the rest of the population into silent if not indifferent witnesses, the process of dehumanisation was opted for, so that at the appropriate juncture the actual extermination could be carried out effectively.

This process can be broken down into seven stages, although they took place concurrently.

The first stage was definition. A decisive prerequisite was to define this other category of persons who were so radically different that they had to be exterminated. The phenomenon of scapegoat is well known in all small human groups. It is much more complicated in the context of nations. With regard to the Jews, it has to be acknowledged that nazism invented nothing here (see fact sheet 1 on definitions, 3 on anti-Semitism, 6 on nazi doctrine and 13 on definitions and registration). In this case, the initial definition centred on a clear opposition between “Jewish race” and “Aryan race”.

Such a distinction had to be made in order to move on from individual scapegoat, from the pogrom, to the undertaking of systematic industrial extermination. For this to take place, society has to be organised in a totalitarian way. It is this totalitarianism which ultimately led to the other genocides and large-scale exterminations which made up the Holocaust: the nazi totalitarian state could not tolerate any exception to the supremacy and uniformity of the “master race”. The Gypsies, for example, as non-sedentary groups, could not easily be controlled. The mentally and physically disabled could not be part of a “race” defined as

pure. Homosexuals, different but not different, could also not easily be controlled. What could not be controlled was classified by nazism as “a-social”. This was how the inexorable mechanism of genocide was set in motion, that is the extermination of people who were different simply by their very nature. In addition, however, totalitarian states – not specific to nazism – cannot tolerate those who are different because of their beliefs or ideas. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, who refused to swear an oath, give the Hitler salute and bear arms, could not be tolerated and ultimately could only be exterminated. The same is true of political opponents, foremost among whom were the communists.

Clearly, this first stage has been underestimated, even though we have shown that it contained the seed which would determine the eventual outcome: by defining the Jews in this way, they became a “problem”, and hence the need to find one day a “final solution” to that problem.

The second stage was that of registration. This was all the more necessary given that these different people were in reality no different. In spite of the caricatures disseminated, Jews may not look Jewish. Hence the need to identify them, draw up a list, be able to locate them at an address, and be able to find them at the appropriate juncture. In the various countries under nazi domination, this was an almost immediate concern. It should also be noted that France carried out this and subsequent stages even before being asked to do so by the forces of occupation. Similarly, the Strasbourg police records on homosexuals were forwarded to the Germans, making it easier for them to be deported. As far as the Gypsies were concerned, not only was it imperative to register them, they also had to be kept in one place, as a nomadic lifestyle could not be tolerated.

The following three stages did not necessarily follow each other in succession. They took place at different times in different countries, often concurrently.

The third stage was designation. This meant enabling the population to see who was a Jew so that the propaganda references stigmatising the Jews as an “inferior race” and the need to defend oneself against them could take on a physical form. As a result, Jews were obliged to wear an identifying mark: in places an armband, in others the star of David. This practice was not a nazi invention either, nor even the colour yellow: it had been introduced centuries earlier in Europe in various forms. In Germany this obligation came relatively late, on 19 September 1941, that is after the decision on total extermination had been taken. But it had applied to business premises much earlier: in this way, shops and workshops had been marked out as being Jewish.

The fourth stage was restrictions and confiscation of goods. This related to possessions and ownership or acquisition thereof. The “Aryanisation” of companies perceived as “Jewish” was a long and widespread endeavour in Germany. It was not feasible simply to transfer ownership of large companies because of the possible consequences on the international markets which Germany needed for its

own industry. On the other hand, it was much easier for smaller companies. After war broke out, the confiscation of goods of all sorts turned to pillage. Above and beyond works of art, which were extremely valuable, it very soon applied to items such as furs when armies had to cope with the cold in the east, and all sorts of goods which had become scarce because of the war. Real estate and financial resources were also appropriated: over time, the Jews were deprived of pensions and all the various social rights.

The fifth stage was exclusion. It took place alongside the fourth. Not only were Jews excluded from the public service, they were also forbidden to exercise numerous professions in which traditionally they had been well represented (medicine, the law, etc.). At the same time, they were banned from certain places (public buildings, public transport, etc.). Even daily supplies ended up being severely limited (they could have access to shops only for one hour in the afternoon). In the occupied territories, geographical exclusion was accentuated by more restricted curfews or total bans in certain neighbourhoods.

The sixth stage was systematic isolation. This was merely making a systematic practice of the previous stage. By internment in camps of various sorts (labour camps or concentration camps) the Jews and other victims were removed from the population. However, as the camps did not have sufficient capacity and the number of Jews residing in the controlled territories increased in line with victories, isolation was brought about by the creation of ghettos: a large number of people were crammed into a limited area in neighbourhoods which were already somewhat rundown and badly damaged by bombardments. The amount of food allocated to ghettos, and managed within them by Jewish councils appointed by the Nazi forces of occupation, was much too small in terms of individual food rations for the enclosed population to survive. Epidemics, in particular typhus, encouraged by the unhygienic conditions and the large numbers of people, were able to complete what could be portrayed as “natural” disappearance.

But the extent of trafficking, black marketeering and all the ploys which a group of humans can, legally or otherwise, use in order to survive, meant that mortality, which reached unequalled rates in the ghettos, did not however empty them.

The seventh and last stage was mass extermination. It was introduced in various forms. At the time of the offensive against the Soviet Union, the *Einsatzgruppen* operated just behind the front, and in co-ordination with the army took part in “mobile killing operations” which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people: Jews and “political commissars” were the appointed targets. These *Einsatzgruppen* were made up of reservists and auxiliaries recruited in the occupied countries. They were not necessarily Nazis, nor were they necessarily perverted and sadistic monsters; they were just ordinary people led to such acts by the totalitarian logic.

The second form of extermination was the gradual wearing down of individuals, in the concentration camps, through work, hunger, cold, and ill-treatment, until

they died. Numerous testimonies of survivors have shown how this planned degeneration was organised. But the pace of mortality, frightening as it was both in the ghettos and in the camps, was not quick enough, especially when defeat on the Russian front made an offensive by the Soviet army to reconquer lost territory all the more likely. It was necessary therefore to adopt a more systematic approach to extermination: it was at this time that the camps solely designed for this purpose were set up, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chelmno, Lublin-Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka; in the latter, the vast majority of the 450 000 Warsaw ghetto survivors were gassed and burned. In the face of the continuing Soviet advance, they resorted to destroying places and killing their occupants. The response to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was to demolish the ghetto completely by bombardments and artillery fire. The various extermination camps were also themselves destroyed, with the few survivors taken on death marches, wherever military operations dictated, over a constantly reducing territory.

It should also be noted that this final stage is the last phase of dehumanisation, which, having been applied to Jews, was also extended to other categories of victims. The practice of tattooing a number on the arms of deportees arriving in concentration camps who were not immediately gassed or slaughtered was the most well-known symbolic form of this.

These different stages, clearly discernible in speeches, in administrative measures and texts, and in military operations show the organised and systematic nature of the genocide: as such they provide a perfect example and enable us to interpret other mass exterminations occurring in the century.

Definition and registration

A totalitarian state is bureaucratic. Even though it may act brutally, such action must be based on texts and legislation no matter how exceptional. The definition problem therefore had to be resolved quickly but comprehensively.

In Germany, this question was made more difficult by the high degree of integration of the Jews, a relatively large proportion of whom were non-practising. The number of “mixed” couples was high (30000), and had been for several generations.

Lineage was a decisive factor in defining “race”: religious practices or simple faith were merely secondary dimensions of the definition. The only cases for which the nazis were immediately in agreement were those where three or four of the grandparents had themselves been Jews.

In contrast, the others were considered as half-breeds, *Mischlinge*: but here too there was a lot of quibbling as to whether it was the same thing to be born of a mixed couple whose Jewish spouse was the child of another mixed couple (one Jewish grandparent) or of a Jewish couple (two Jewish grandparents). Of potential relevance here was whether or not there were children (a somewhat favourable factor), and whether or not they were being raised in the Jewish faith.

For the 1935 annual party congress, Hitler insisted on the drafting of a “Law for the Protection of German blood and German Honour” within two days. This law forbade any marriage or sexual relations between “Jews” and citizens of “German or related blood”. It therefore became urgent to define the term “Jews”. The various situations and categories were defined on the following 14 November by the “Law on Reich Citizenship” and the decree detailing the categories of “Aryans” and “non-Aryans”.

But in practice, its application was random, as it was based on subjective assessments made by the courts (whether or not the person was registered at a synagogue, minimal religious practice to please the family, and so forth).

Because of the ban on marriage and sexual relations, all children born of such unions after the promulgation of the law were considered as Jews – and their fathers liable to be sentenced to death.

Once these definitions had been made, in order to move on to the following stages, it was necessary to make an accurate inventory of this population: each decree introducing a restriction, an exclusion, an expropriation, could determine exactly the “non-Aryan” categories to which it would apply.

However, as is the case with any bureaucratic measure, there were still a number of exceptions. The first concerned “the privileged”. These were primarily former combatants in the 1914-18 war, who had been awarded military honours, or internationally renowned personalities from the world of science and the arts – and who had not emigrated. Next were the people who, exceptionally, were exempt on the decision of the *Führer* himself, for services rendered or for other reasons, spelled out or not as the case may be. The third category of exceptions was a category in itself, the Jews of mixed couples. Lastly came the particular case of Jews who had converted to Christianity: those who had converted a long time previously could qualify as non-Jews. In theory – although in practice the situation was always somewhat arbitrary – various measures were not supposed to apply to those who fell into these categories: for example, the first two categories made up a large proportion of the deportees to Theresienstadt, an “old people’s” camp and also a showcase camp for inspections by the International Red Cross – where the daily mortality rate was lower than in other concentration camps.

The third category escaped deportation until 1944. Mixed couples were obliged to live in “Jewish tenements”. The reason was to avoid any subsequent stirrings by the families of the non-Jewish spouses. This did not prevent the Jewish spouse from suffering other restrictions and exclusions, and the couples from being subjected to various kinds of harassment from the state and the population in general. In Dresden, Victor Klemperer, a university academic married to a non-Jew, owed his salvation first of all to his wife until 1944 and then, paradoxically, to the bombardment of the city, which enabled them to escape deportation and to hide until the end of the war. Their only chance of survival was to live underground, that is not to be included on the register.

In other countries

There were two distinct situations: the territories directly administered by the Germans bothered very little about the details of categories – the Warsaw ghetto contained Jews and *Mischlinge* of all sorts, long-standing or recent converts and even for a time Gypsies. During the great raids of the summer of 1942, the provisionally exempt categories performed certain useful functions: members of the Jewish Council, police officers and certain professions.

The situation was different in each of the occupied countries which had its own indigenous government or administration. Decisions as to definition and the subsequent stages had to take account of the nature and margin for manoeuvre of the authorities in the country concerned, the size and level of integration of the Jewish populations, and the state of mind of the non-Jewish population. France was unique in providing a definition (a status) and carrying out an inventory even before it had been asked to do so by the forces of occupation.

Designation

Designation makes immediate identification possible. As such, it is the first stage in dehumanisation: in a crowd, some people are designated as being different. The population therefore became accustomed to a differentiation and would be more easily persuaded to keep at a distance from Jews. Furthermore, the physical designation of people made police operations and harassment considerably easier. Lastly, it represented a humiliation: the hatred for the Jews needed to inflict suffering, and this was the beginning of a vicious spiral.

Initially, it was the shops and workshops which had to be clearly marked. The SA, whose ideology was more social-populist than that of the party, had carried out acts of violence against merchants and tradesmen even before the assumption of power. For 1 April 1933 they ordered a boycott, which was a failure. The majority of Germans, satisfied with their suppliers, could see no reason why they should forsake them simply because they were Jews. This failure showed the party that the time was not yet right and temporarily it was decided to abandon the idea of designation to attack the Jews in favour of targeted administrative measures, made easier by registration.

It was not until 1938 that new stages in the process of designation began. A number of Jews were already in concentration camps – and there were even more of them after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. But those who remained free were also the best integrated and, accordingly, could pass themselves off as any other German, despite the dissemination, primarily at school in the “raciology” lesson, of the description of “physical characteristics” of Jews. On 17 August, the Jews had to add Sarah or Israël to their first name so that there could be no doubt. On 5 October, at the request of Switzerland and despite some reluctance, the letter J was stamped on their passports. The reluctance was due to the fear that it would encourage certain countries to send back applicants for emigration: this was indeed Switzerland’s intention and it was also a sign of the extent of anti-Semitism in many countries, including in Europe.

However the ultimate designation is individual visible marking: the obligation to wear the Star of David in the majority of cases, a yellow armband marked with the same star in occupied Poland. It was in Poland that this marking was introduced first of all, as early as 1940. There, designation was made not only possible but also useful to the forces of occupation because of the size of the anti-Semitic component in the Polish population. In Germany, there were not many free Jews left by 1939, apart from the “privileged” categories (see fact sheet 13 on definition and registration). They were not required to wear the Star of David

until 19 September 1941. In this way, the forces of order could immediately identify Jews and carry out all sorts of checks on them – with varying degrees of arbitrariness and heavy-handedness – and the population in general, after years of the hatred campaign, could also harass verbally or physically Jews encountered in the street without fear. The wearing of a distinctive sign was undoubtedly one of the measures the Jews resented the most. For example, Adam Czerniaków, the President of the Jewish Council in Warsaw, one evening expressed the hope that the ghetto would be closed so that they could finally escape their fear and the ill-treatment from the Germans and many Polish nationals. Clearly, he wrote this as a paradox but in so doing reflected a more basic feeling on the part of the majority of the Jewish population.

As to the question of which was the most difficult day for Jews between 1933 and 1945, Victor Klemperer (who was not deported) replied in 1946:

“I always, without exception, received the same answer from myself and others: 19 September 1941. From that day on, it was compulsory to wear the Jewish star, the six-pointed Star of David, the yellow piece of cloth which today still stands for plague and quarantine, and which in the Middle Ages was the colour used to identify the Jews, the colour of envy and gall which has entered the bloodstream; the yellow piece of cloth with “Jew” printed on it in black, the word framed by the lines of the two telescoped triangles, a word consisting of thick block capitals, which are separated and given broad, exaggerated horizontal lines to effect the appearance of the Hebrew script ... The description is too long? But no, on the contrary! I simply lack the ability to pen precise, vivid descriptions.”¹

1. Victor Klemperer, *The language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii*, Athlone Press, London and New Brunswick, NJ, p. 125.

Confiscations and exclusions

From 1933 a series of measures were taken to exclude Jews from whole areas of social and economic life (see fact sheet 7 on anti-Jewish measures).

These measures referred to the theory of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy to control the “master race”. In all areas viewed as vital or fundamental, the presence of Jewish persons or interests was interpreted as a threat. “Jewish” firms became rich necessarily at the expense of Germans, Jewish legal professionals could only divert the law, Jewish doctors were dangerous, Jewish civil servants could only sabotage the state.

We can put forward three explanations for these measures. The first, which is also the most basic, is hatred, an expression of anti-Semitism.

The second reason is economic. It was simply a matter of appropriating Jewish possessions. The “Aryanisation” of firms and property, first of all “voluntary” by sale, was then decreed to be obligatory. It was occasionally difficult, in particular for the firms and properties of large families having considerable assets abroad and international ramifications, which directly or otherwise controlled industries in other countries whose output Germany needed to import. The state benefited directly from part of these expropriations. German individuals and firms benefited from purchase prices which were considerably lower than the actual value. But members of the Nazi hierarchy were the main beneficiaries of the pillage, and in particular Göring, under the cover of “Göring Enterprises”. Even the concentration camp system was a source of wealth for the SS, which apart from the personal assets of deportees, sold their work either to the state (road construction), or to industrial firms in a number of sectors, including armaments and chemicals.

The third reason for these confiscations and the various exclusions was political and was targeted at the German population, the majority of which was far from anti-Semitic in 1933. The aim was to cut them off as far as possible from Jews and to convince them of the Jews’ noxiousness and inferiority. This is why cultural exclusion was of prime importance. Not only were Jewish artists and their works forbidden but within a short time Jews no longer had any cultural rights; it was forbidden for them to own a book, borrow a book or even read a book and the same was applied to music, concerts and so forth.

Isolation

At the last democratic elections, the NSDAP had been able to obtain a parliamentary majority only by joining forces with the Zentrum, the conservative party of the former Chancellor von Papen. A strong minority on the left, the legacy of the Weimar Republic, formed an opposition which for the most part did not share the nazis' anti-Semitism. The confiscations and exclusion measures carried out against the Jews had no political effect on the opinion of these opponents, even when the communist and social democratic parties were banned.

Exclusion was then stepped up by measures aimed at isolating the Jews and Gypsies from the rest of the population. There was much discussion for example as to whether there should be special coaches or compartments reserved for Jews, or whether they should be allowed to get onto the train and in the corridors only once all "Aryans" had found a seat, or whether they should quite simply be banned from using this means of transport. As in many areas, the increase in discrimination and harassment took place faster in the occupied territories than it had in Germany – and it was in Poland that it was introduced the fastest and the most brutally. However it was not enough to take measures which were restrictive for Jews and Gypsies: it was also necessary to take measures *vis-à-vis* the Germans and the inhabitants of the occupied territories. Accordingly, forbidding Jews to buy from "Aryans" had to be reinforced by the prohibition – punishable by a fine, or indeed prison or concentration camp – for "Aryans" to sell to Jews. This prohibition concerned a wide variety of aspects of daily life, including even passing the time of day.

This isolation was a preparation for the abuses which were to follow. In Germany, it was essential to accustom the Germans not to frequent the Jews any more, not to speak to them, not to see them, to the point that when ultimately they disappeared, the population would hardly notice.

"A removal man who is friendly towards me following two moves – good people with more than a whiff of the KPD [the German Communist Party] – is suddenly standing in front of me in the Freiburger Strasse, takes my hand in both of his paws and whispers in a tone which must be audible on the other side of the road: 'Well professor, don't let it get you down! These wretched brothers of ours will soon have reached rock bottom!' This is meant to comfort me, and it certainly warms the heart; but if the wrong person hears it over there, my consoler will end up in prison and it will cost me my life, via Auschwitz..."¹

1. *The language of the Third Reich*, op. cit. p. 167.

“We were not permitted to have any social contact with non-Jews ... One day I remember, a young German, a childhood friend, a youth friend, came to pick me up from school after school was out. We had about a one-hour journey from school to home, we were about halfway home when we were suddenly stopped by a Gestapo agent who had obviously followed us all along. He approached this young boy. We were about 16 years old. I didn’t hear exactly what he said but I could see that he was arguing with him severely. He made his father appear at Gestapo headquarters and threatened the father that if his son would ever be seen again with a Jew or Jewess, he and the son would end up in a concentration camp.”¹

1. Golly D., in *Witnesses – Voices from the Holocaust*, op. cit.

The ghetto

The ghetto, the ultimate form of isolation, was a neighbourhood where Jews were forced to live. More often than not, these areas had previously been inhabited by a majority or a large proportion of Jews; they were also chosen for being amongst the poorest in the city. In Warsaw, there was hardly any ghetto street which had not suffered from bombardments. The non-Jews were forced to leave, and Jews living outside these areas – often more numerous – were forced to pile into them.

Initially, the ghetto was “open”: people lived there but were able to leave to go to their work. Very quickly however the ghettos became closed (in Warsaw in October 1940). Walls were built – which had to be paid for by the Jewish community – and it was impossible to leave without an *Ausweis*.

The ghettos were created primarily in eastern and north-eastern Europe. The Jews from Germany and the part of Poland annexed to the Reich were sent there before the extermination camps began operating.

The forces of occupation appointed a Jewish Council (*Judenrat*) from amongst community leaders. This council was headed by a chairman. Its only real power was to decide how to carry out the German orders or make plans to do so. It recruited a Jewish police force, carried out requisitions (furs, radio sets, furniture, and so forth), and organised collections to meet financial requirements. In certain cases, the council organised or attempted to organise social assistance.

Life in the ghetto was extremely difficult. Overcrowding was such (up to 25 people in a room) that some people had to go out for part of the day, regardless of the weather, to allow the others to lie down. As a result, the streets were crowded with people wandering about aimlessly. Food rations authorised by the forces of occupation were insufficient to ensure survival, and hunger caused devastation amongst the population. The most badly affected were first and foremost the poorest. Initially, most deaths were caused by typhus and illnesses brought about by the cold (there was no heating, and not always windows: the non-Jewish inhabitants who had been forced out had taken everything they could with them). Very quickly, hunger became the prime cause of death. Academics, deprived of activity and any income, were amongst those who resisted least. Soon the number of begging orphans multiplied in the streets and these were scarcely seen again after a few days or weeks.

The ghetto population formed a real human society, that is a disparate assembly of virtues and vices: they included criminals, black-marketeers, thieves,

prostitutes and procurers, traffickers and active collaborators. Although closed, the ghettos nevertheless had numerous dealings with the outside world. The better off – who had managed to hide part of their fortune in notes, gold or jewels – bought on the black market and still lived comfortably, whereas others would suddenly collapse and die in the streets.

Health conditions were frightful and continued to deteriorate. There was no hygiene anywhere, and hospitals and doctors had virtually no supplies. Bodies were thrown naked into the street by survivors who could not afford to pay for funerals.

This deterioration was part of the process of dehumanisation. What the inhabitants of the city outside saw were wretched people in rags whose faces and bodies had been deformed by hunger and disease to the point where they no longer looked human.

In 1942, the population of the ghettos, despite spiralling mortality, was still large. It was constantly increased by cramming in refugees deported from rural areas and other occupied countries – and children continued to be born. As part of the mass destruction initiative, *Aktionen* were carried out, rounding up hundreds or thousands of people who were then put on cattle wagons and sent off to the extermination camps, where the majority were gassed the day they arrived.

During the years after the war, there was much talk of the Jews' "passive" acceptance of the extermination (see in this connection fact sheet 38 on the reaction of German Jews and fact sheet 39 on the reaction of Jews in the occupied countries). But there was also much condemnation of the attitude of the Jewish councils who were regarded as collaborators. Clearly the councils in some ghettos could warrant such a description. Certain power-mad chairmen acted like dictators (in Lodz, for example). Members of almost all councils took advantage of their functions to traffic unscrupulously, to sell jobs or exemptions, but it must also be borne in mind that the ghettos did not house united communities but groups of people who very often had completely opposing outlooks. A large number of people, converts to other religions, or simply non-believers, had not considered themselves as Jews sometimes for several decades. Others included religious people (orthodox or *hassidim*), Zionists (who advocated a return to Palestine and the creation of Israel), socialists, communists and many "assimilationists", who felt themselves more Polish, or German than Jewish and claimed this out loud. These points of view were so distinct and divergent that it was not until 1943 that despair was so set in and widespread that revolt occurred. The Warsaw ghetto, which had at one time up to 500000 inhabitants, had no more than 75000 in 1943 (and virtually no elderly people or children) when the uprising took place.

For a long time, the Warsaw rebels were justifiably glorified as the heroes of the ghetto. But this glosses over the large number of individual reactions of revolt or acts of dignity which meant death for those involved. It also overlooks some

figures who made a significant contribution to halting, at least symbolically, the process of dehumanisation. The underground action of Emmanuel Ringelblum, who compiled the archives of the Warsaw ghetto – part of which was saved – is the most well known to the public. But he also contributed to the tragic loss of unity by opposing the Jewish Council so dogmatically.

Two figures from the Warsaw ghetto

Adam Czerniaków

In September 1940, when the German troops occupied Warsaw, Adam Czerniaków was vice-chairman of the Jewish Community of the capital (the chairman himself had fled), which he represented on the municipal council. He was an inflexible man, with opinions similar to those of General Pilsudski and the “colonels’ regime” which succeeded him on his death on 1935; he was also authoritarian, anti-democratic and violently anti-Soviet. He was not a practising Jew, except at the main festivals, he was an assimilationist and considered himself to be Polish in terms of patriotism and culture. Very quickly he did all he could to be appointed head of the community, which ultimately led him to be designated chairman of the Jewish Council. Even before the start of the war, and every day until his death, he kept a diary, brief notes jotted down when he was unable to sleep, sometimes in telegraphic form, in notebooks only one of which has been lost.

His daily notes are extremely valuable in many respects: they are crammed with information on the functioning of the Jewish Council, on life – and death – in the ghetto. But they also illustrate the development of a man who over a period of time devoted his energy and his intransigence to helping the most disadvantaged. It is not so much a change in his opinions, but a shift in the choices he made. On more than one occasion he complains bitterly about not being allowed by the forces of occupation to levy taxes on the richest inhabitants, whereas the community’s resources enabled him to offer the poor only one bowl of very clear soup per day.

The whole of his social and cultural endeavours (he developed vocational training, organised shows, conferences, concerts) were aimed at preserving the human dignity of the ghetto population. In response to German demands to supply forced labour or deportees he adopted an attitude which derived from an old diaspora custom: to agree to sacrifice the smallest part of the population in the hope of saving the majority. We know, today, that it was in vain but this hope was real despite growing discouragement, as we can see from his notes. And on 23 July 1942, when he understood that no category, not even children, would escape the rounding-up and deportation to Treblinka, the nature and significance of which he knew only too well, with 6 000 people being taken off each and every day, he swallowed a capsule of cyanide leaving these words: “I am being asked to kill the children of my people with my own hands. There is nothing left for me to do but to die.”

Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak, a paediatrician, was a colourful character whose specialisation led him to become an educator. He wrote several works on education and is known throughout Europe. He developed a system of democratic organisation of orphanages where children were treated as fully-fledged individuals and took part in administering the community. He was a very active individual and had a radio programme. Always adopting a very humanistic and socialising approach, from the beginning of the occupation and in the ghetto he carried out campaign after campaign for “his” orphans, in order to find decent premises, food, medicine and clothes. He addressed the population through communiqués, posters, but had no hesitation in haranguing the richest people at home or in public to obtain donations. He was no menacing missionary but enjoyed life and had a dynamism which could be aggressive. In all respects he was the opposite of Adam Czerniaków, but their respective choices brought them together and the two men respected and ultimately liked each other.

When the Jewish police and the SS came to take away his orphans, Janusz Korczak chose to accompany them and climbed with them into the wagon for Treblinka.

The decision on extermination

7 June 1941 – letter from Hans Heinrich Lammers, head of Reich Chancellery to Martin Bormann, head of the party Chancellery:

“Der Führer hat der vom Reichsministern des Innern vorgeschlagenen Regelung vor allem deshalb nicht zugestimmt, weil er der Meinung ist, dass es nach dem Kriege in Deutschland ohnedies keine Juden mehr geben werde.”

(The Führer has not agreed to the regulation proposed by the Reich Minister of the Interior, primarily because he is of the opinion that after the war there would not be any Jews left in Germany anyway).¹

31 July 1941 – text written by Adolf Eichmann at the request of Reinhardt Heydrich and signed by Hermann Göring, Deputy Chancellor:

“In Ergänzung der Ihnen bereits mit Erlaß vom 24. I. 39 übertragenen Aufgabe, die Judenfrage in Form der Auswanderung oder Evakuierung einer den Zeitverhältnissen entsprechend möglichst günstigsten Lösung zuzuführen, beauftrage ich Sie hiermit, alle erforderlichen Vorbereitungen in organisatorischer, sachlicher und materieller Hinsicht zu treffen für eine Gesamtlösung der Judenfrage im deutschen Einflußgebiet in Europa.

Sofern hierbei die Zuständigkeiten anderer Zentralinstanzen berührt werden, sind diese zu beteiligen.

Ich beauftrage Sie weiter, mir in Bälde einen Gesamtentwurf über die organisatorischen, sachlichen und materiellen Vorausmaßnahmen zur Durchführung der angestrebten Endlösung der Judenfrage vorzulegen.”

(Complementing the task already assigned to you in the directive of January 24 1939, to undertake, by emigration or evacuation, a solution of the Jewish question as advantageous as possible under the conditions at the time, I hereby charge you with making all necessary organisational, functional and material preparations for a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.

Insofar as the jurisdiction of other central agencies may be touched thereby, they are to be involved ... I charge you, furthermore, with submitting to me in the near future an overall plan of the organisation, functional and material measures to be taken in preparing for the implementation of the desired final solution to the Jewish question.)²

1. *The destruction of European Jews*, op. cit. vol. 2.

2. *Ibid.*

In June 1941 Hitler decided there was little point in pursuing the detail of legislation on the definition and fate of the *Mischlinge*, as this was no longer of any interest: his intention was therefore perfectly clear and he made it known. On the following 31 July, Heydrich was given explicit instructions. Moreover, with effect from June of that year the mass exterminations began, experimentally, in Chelmno.

On 29 November 1941, Heydrich convened the Wannsee Conference, held on 20 January 1942 at midday, on “*die Endlösung der Judenfrage*”, the “final solution” to the Jewish question”. A report of this conference was written in 30 copies. Among the possible solutions it refers to shootings and gas vans. It was only after that date that the gas chambers were “invented”. Apart from this report, no other written order was given.

The “protocol” (report) of the Wannsee Conference estimates the number of Jews to be eliminated at 11 million, including those in the territories “not yet” occupied. It states:

“Unter entsprechender Leitung sollen nun im Zuge der Endlösung die Juden in geeigneter Weise im Osten zum Arbeitseinsatz kommen. In großen Arbeitskolonnen, unter Trennung der Geschlechter, werden die arbeitsfähigen Juden straßenbauend in diese Gebiete geführt, wobei zweifellos ein Großteil durch natürliche Verminderung ausfallen wird. Der allfällig endlich verbleibende Restbestand wird, da es sich bei diesem zweifellos um den widerstandsfähigsten Teil handelt, entsprechend behandelt werden müssen, da dieser, eine natürliche Auslese darstellend, bei Freilassung als Keimzelle eines neuen jüdischen Aufbaues anzusprechen ist. (Siehe die Erfahrung der Geschichte.)”

(Under proper guidance, in the course of the final solution the Jews are to be allocated for appropriate labour in the east. Able-bodied Jews, separated according to sex, will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads, in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes.

The possible final remnant will, since it will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, have to be treated accordingly, because it is the product of natural selection and would, if released, act as the seed of a new Jewish revival. (see the experience of history).¹

1. Quoted in Lecomte, *Savoir la Shoah*, CRDP, Dijon 1998, editor’s translation.

***Einsatzgruppen* and mobile killing operations**

On 22 June 1941 operation Barbarossa, or the invasion of the Soviet Union, was launched.

Four mobile killing units were set up, *Einsatzgruppen* A, B, C and D, which operated behind the advancing troops in the conquered territories. The units were made up of SS and police officers, whose mission had been prepared for several months. Under the territorial authority of the army, they came under the general command of Heydrich, head of the Reich Central Security Office (RSHA). In all, there were some 3000 men: SS and police officers, reservists and local auxiliary police officers (Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian and Ukrainian), all assigned “routinely” to these units, and not selected because of some aptitude or predisposition. Christopher Browning, who has studied the reports of interviews with surviving members of one of these divisions, shows that they were in no way sadistic or perverted monsters, but simply “ordinary men” (this is the term chosen for the title of his book).

At the very beginning, the *Einsatzgruppen* executed only men. From August 1941, they were seasoned and better informed about their mission: the *Kommandos* scoured the land and killed all Jews (including the elderly, women and children) and also all “political commissars”.

From 22 June to 30 November 1941, the massacres registered broke down as follows (*source*: Sir Martin Gilbert, op.cit.):

- conquered Soviet territories: 22 June to 16 July: 59 380; 17 July to 31 August: 130 714; September and October: 372 486;
- Bessarabia and Bukovina, from July 1941: 17 487;
- all territories, November 1941: 175 171.

The most tragically famous of these massacres was Babi Yar, near Kiev, where 33 771 people were killed and pushed into a ravine.

Here we are considering only mass killings. We are not counting “small” massacres carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen Kommandos* as they went through the villages. To these numbers should be added 148 000 Jews of Bessarabia killed in Transnistria.

Raul Hilberg estimates the number of people massacred by *Einsatzgruppen* A, B, C, D up to 1942 at more than 700 000.

Once the extermination camps had been set up, the role of these *Einsatzgruppen*, and those created in satellite countries, changed to rounding up Jews and forming convoys for these camps.

Testimony: extract from the report of a commissar in Minsk, Carl, dated 30 October 1941

“I contacted the deputy commander, a captain, after a long search and demanded that the action be immediately stopped because it was not taking place according to my instructions and the economic damage already inflicted could not be made good. The captain was very astonished by my viewpoint and explained that he had received instructions from the commander to make the city free of Jews without exception, as they had also done in other cities. The cleansing had to take place on political grounds, and nowhere had economic factors so far played a role ... What else concerns this action, I must to my greatest regret emphasise, is last of all that it bordered on sadism. During the action the city itself offered a horrible picture. With indescribable brutality, by the German policemen as well but especially by the Lithuanians, the Jews and also White Russians were taken out of their lodgings and driven together. There was shooting everywhere in the city, and in the individual streets bodies of Jews who had been shot piled up. The White Russians had the greatest difficulty in extricating themselves from the round up. Aside from the fact that the Jews, among them also craftsmen, were brutally mistreated in a frightfully barbarous way before the eyes of the White Russians, the latter were likewise beaten with truncheons and clubs. One can no longer speak of a Jewish action, it appeared much more like a revolution. I and all my officials were in the midst of this all day without a break, in order to save what could still be saved. Repeatedly, I literally had to drive German police officials as well as Lithuanians out of the workshops with drawn revolver. My own gendarmes were given the same task but because of the wild shooting often had to get off the streets in order not to be shot themselves. The entire scene was altogether more than ghastly. In the afternoon, a large number of horse-drawn carts without drivers stood around in the streets, so that I had to assign the city administration immediately to take care of them. Afterwards it turned out that they were Jewish wagons that had been assigned by the army to transport ammunition. The Jews had simply been taken down from the wagons and marched off, without anyone caring for the wagons ... As I already mentioned at the beginning, the families of the craftsmen were also supposed to have been spared. Today it appears, however, that in almost every family some people are missing.”¹

1. Quoted by Christopher R. Browning in *Ordinary men: Reserve police battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Harper-Collins Publishers, pp. 21-22. Original quote taken from *Trials of major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, 42 vols. IMT27:4-8 (1104-PS Gebietskommissar Carl in Slutsk to Gerneralkommissar Kube in Minsk, October 30 1941).

The concentration camp

The following is not a description of a particular camp but of the features of the majority of camps. Obviously each one had its own individual characteristics depending on where it was situated, its size, the type of work carried out by the deportees (inside or outside the camp), the date it was built, etc.

The camp was surrounded by two or three barbed-wire fences, generally electrified, interspersed with watchtowers where guards equipped with machine guns could keep a watch on the camp perimeter night and day. There would be just one gate into the camp, above which more often than not was inscribed *Arbeit macht frei* (Labour makes you free).

Arriving detainees were taken to a quarantine area (room, hut, tent). There they had to undress completely; often they were given a shower and were disinfected, their heads would be quickly shaved. Finally they were registered and tattooed. The “lower numbers” were therefore deportees that had survived the longest: they were held in greater respect by the others and occasionally were given small advantages.

They were then given deportee clothing – the famous striped “pyjama”. Initially, new deportees swapped clothes so they could have something that fitted them. In the later years, as they were the same clothes recovered from those who had been killed, had died or had been selected, very often these were no more than rags and it was impossible to exchange them.

After some time, the new detainees were assigned to a block and a *Kommando*. The block was a group of huts, generally built out of wood, where the internees slept on wooden bunks, several levels high. Many had to sleep on the same bunk and more often than not on their side so that they could fit in. These bunks had a mattress, with a little bit of straw, or indeed nothing at all or a blanket at most. The block had no toilets. In certain cases, a bucket or a basin had to do the job (rinsed out, it could be used for the morning “coffee”). It was forbidden to leave the block at night to go to the latrines: those who nevertheless took the risk could be killed if they were discovered. The block was run by “elders” (*Eltern*) chosen by the guards: it was their responsibility to allocate the bunks and to keep order in the block. Experience quickly showed that “political” deportees acted much more humanely in this role than the criminals.

The *Kommandos* were work teams. Some were permanent, others temporary, depending on the nature of the work to be carried out. There were also disciplinary *Kommandos*. But the key element in survival at work was not necessarily

the nature or the arduousness of the work: it was rather the personality of the *Kapo* who directed the *Kommando*. Some of these, the criminal prisoners, acted brutally. On occasion, when the *Kommando* left for work in the morning, the SS guards would instruct the *Kapo* to come back bringing a given number of dead: it was up to him to choose who his victims were and how they would be killed.

Each deportee's uniform bore the mark of his or her category, the green triangle indicated criminals. They were the ones who made up the majority of the *Kapos*, and who were the most brutal. The red triangles were the political prisoners who sometimes also became *Kapos*: in some cases this led to improvements in detention conditions.

The other colours of triangles were black for the "a-social", brown for Gypsies, blue for stateless persons, pink for homosexuals and purple for Jehovah's Witnesses.

But by far the most common mark was the yellow triangle worn by the Jews. It was they who constituted the majority of those who in Auschwitz and then in the other camps were called the "Muselmänner" (Muslims): particularly weakened by hunger (the daily food rations comprised a bowl of the notorious broth and a small piece of "bread", providing a number of calories which in theory could not guarantee survival), the long roll-call session in the morning, the journeys to the worksites, exhausting work and frequent beatings, these men lost all their dignity, all awareness other than that of hunger, all capacity to speak and think.

In general terms, the fight for survival isolated each deportee, who had to fight to conserve what he had (clothes, shoes, bowl, spoon, daily piece of bread; to take one's eyes off them for a moment meant risking having them stolen) and to attempt to organise supplements by all possible means.

This situation was the most common. It should be noted, however, as pointed out by Hermann Langbein (*Menschen in Auschwitz*) that not all guards and SS officers acted like monsters, that not all *Kapos*, or even criminals, were animals and that, conversely, certain victims ended up supporting the system and became capable of the worst – in order to survive.

In many camps, deportees were used for medical experiments – the risk of death clearly was not a limiting factor. Often, these experiments were carried out with gratuitous sadism, of which Dr Mengele in Auschwitz is the most tragically notorious example.

Each day in the camp followed an unchanging ritual: getting up, tidying up the block, followed by distribution of the "coffee" and the daily piece of bread. After a necessarily rudimentary and speedy wash, prisoners had to assemble on the roll-call yard. Standing in line, all internees were called out by their registration number. If the roll call was incomplete, it began again as many times as was necessary. In this way, the roll call could last for hours, regardless of the weather.

The ordeal was systematically extended if an incident or escape had taken place the evening or night before.

The *Kommandos* then left for work. In certain camps, a deportee orchestra played as they left and as they returned in the evening. The working day (8-9 hours in winter, 10-12 in the summer) was interrupted only for distribution of the “soup”. In the evening, another roll call and return to the blocks. From time to time, deportees were entitled to take a shower.

Certain functions or certain *Kommandos* could offer a better chance of survival: infirmary staff, kitchen staff, those who were used in the auxiliary services (for example Primo Levi was employed as a chemist); in the *Kommandos* working outside the camp, it was rare for work in a firm not to result in some assistance being given by a sympathetic local worker. Those responsible for taking the soup to the *Kommandos* would help themselves to the very few pieces of meat it contained. Outside the very specialised jobs, in order to survive it was necessary to have the elder or the *Kapo* on your side, to find some way of coping, “to organise”, and more often than not it was at the expense of others. Prostitution was frequent, both feminine and masculine (and not only by homosexuals) – with the SS, local auxiliaries, elders or *Kapos*, or “privileged” deportees.

Certain *Kommandos* had a much higher mortality rate. Jews and homosexuals, the categories most hated by the SS, were assigned to these as a matter of priority.

Primo Levi comments on a text by Höss, the commandant at Auschwitz-Birkenau, written between his conviction and execution:

“With righteous disgust he bemoans the infighting among the prisoners. What ruffraff! They know neither honour nor solidarity, the great virtues of the German people. But several lines later he nevertheless admits that ‘rivalries were passionately maintained and constantly fanned by the camp administration’ – that is Rudolph Höss. With professional hauteur he describes the various categories of inmates, mingling his old-fashioned scorn with jarring cries of post facto hypocritical piety. The political prisoners were better than the common criminals, the Gypsies (‘my favourite prisoners’) were better than the homosexuals, the Russian POWs were animals, and he never liked the Jews.”¹

1. Primo Levi in the foreword to *Death dealer: the memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss*, ed. Steven Paskuly, De Capo Press, New York, p. 6. English translation of the foreword © Joachim Neugroschel.

Selection

Selection always represented an arbitrary and rapid sorting between those who would survive provisionally and those who would die. There were two forms of selection which were quite different in nature.

The form which led to the death of the greatest number took place as soon as the deportees came off the wagons on the ramp. After separation by sex (all children staying with women) the people passed in front of an SS officer, often accompanied by a doctor, who guided them either left or right. On one side, the smallest group, comprising men in apparent good health (depending on the time, from 16-50 years old or from 18-45 or indeed 40 years old: that had nothing to do with either the camp or the mood of the SS, but quite simply with the needs and places available) and some women. These were assigned to a labour camp or to the *Sonderkommandos* of the extermination camps. On the other side, the vast majority: the elderly, women and children. No woman with an infant or holding a child by the hand was spared. The wounded, sick and unaccompanied infants were loaded onto a lorry to be transported to the “hospital” – behind a hedge or a curtain of trees, a pit where they were shot. The others were taken to be gassed. The sinister Dr Mengele was proud of having selected tens of thousands of Jews in Auschwitz.

The second form of selection took place regularly inside the concentration camp as a means of reducing numbers, by getting rid of those judged “unfit”: it might apply to the whole camp, the block or blocks of a particular category, or the infirmary (the *Revier*). On such occasions, each deportee had to undress completely and walk in front of the officer or the doctor, and was then directed to one side or another. That day or the following day, those selected, the registration numbers of whom had been noted, would be taken away. In the camps which had no gas vans or gas chambers, they were killed by injection with phenol (it was quickly realised that the effect was much faster if it was injected directly into the heart). Otherwise they were gassed on site or sent to an extermination camp.

Both forms of selection ended up with the same result. But in the camps, deportees knew what was going on, whereas upon arrival, on the ramp, the people did not understand how soon the outcome would take place.

Testimony of Denise Holstein, survivor of the last French convoy for Auschwitz

The following is an extract from the cassette she plays to pupils she meets:

“ ‘Above all,’ he said to me as I got down, ‘don’t take that child by the hand.’ ‘But why?’ ‘You’ll understand in a few days. You see those children? They will be made into soap.’

I thought he was mad. I saw a little girl all alone crying on the platform. I didn’t have the courage to leave her. I took her by the hand. The deportee who had just spoken to me came up to me and said sharply. “Didn’t you understand what I just told you. Don’t take any children by the hand!” So, I left the little girl with a group of children and walked alone into the night. (The nine children of whom Denise Holstein was in charge were immediately gassed).”¹

The allusion to soap reflected the rumour circulating in the camps, ghettos and throughout the Reich that the bodies of gassed Jews were turned into soap. The waste-avoidance logic of the concentration camp system gave some credibility to this rumour, which was, however, false. Revisionists would make much use of this in their propaganda.

1. Testimony quoted in *Les cahiers pédagogiques*, No. 379, CRDP, Dijon, editor’s translation.

Gassing and cremation

The mobile killing operations, extermination through hunger in the ghettos and the concentration camps did not bring about an elimination speedy enough for the nazis: the Wannsee Conference (see fact sheet no. 7 on anti-Jewish measures) had set the objective: over nine million Jews. It was therefore essential to find a means of exterminating large numbers of people quickly, cheaply and without causing too great a psychological effect on those carrying out this task.

Execution by bullet or phenol injection which had been used up to then, remained an individual method: it was therefore slow and costly. A group method was first of all tried out on the mentally and physically disabled.

The “euthanasia policy”

This was not a direct consequence of nazi doctrine. From the end of the first world war, there was a pro-euthanasia feeling in Germany: a booklet had been disseminated entitled *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (authorisation to exterminate lives not worth living).

At the beginning of the war, Hitler signed a decree “to extend the powers of certain specified doctors to enable them to grant a merciful death to those considered to be incurable, after the most thorough assessment possible of their condition in the current state of human knowledge.” Behind this apparently humanitarian instruction lay not a desire to alleviate suffering but to free the German people of individuals who, from the mental, moral or physical point of view, were clearly not part of the “master race”. The victims of this decision included Down’s syndrome infants and children, persons suffering from water on the brain, those born with abnormally small heads, sufferers of cerebral palsy and the deformed, who were injected with luminal. Euthanasia centres were set up equipped with a gas chamber: patients suffering from senility or neurological disorders, those hospitalised for five years or longer, and the criminally insane (primarily sexual offenders) were sent there from hospices and mental institutions. The gas used was carbon dioxide. This “quiet” genocide was systematically extended to the occupied territories.

From 1941 to 1945, under the code name 14f13, the population of the concentration camps were “weeded out”: prisoners who had lost their minds, including a number of “Muslims” were sent to the euthanasia centres after a brief examination by a psychiatrist.

Perfecting and extending the gassing

Initially, the nazis had the idea of gas vans: the rear part had to be airtight and gas from the exhaust pipe was fed into it through a tube. The system was tried out in Chelmno on 8 December 1941, with Jews from the surrounding area.

The prisoners (in nazi jargon they were the “goods”) were loaded naked into the back of the van. The driver started the engine up and slowly moved towards a small wood. On arrival, after a 10-15 minute drive, all the “goods” were dead. The *Kommandos* would unload the van and throw the bodies into a pit they had dug behind the wood.

The automobile industry, particularly the Saurer company, collaborated clearly and consciously in perfecting the process. In June 1942, the nazis passed an order for changes to improve the way it worked. In effect, the back of the vans was too big: if only a few people were put in there at one go, the driver had to drive for a long time before the carbon dioxide took effect. If as many people as possible were crammed in, the volume of air available was reduced and the effect much faster, but the van had too great a load and was unstable on corners. It was also necessary to reinforce the housing of the lights inside as it was often broken by the desperate efforts of those inside to get out. Lastly, a central hole had to be made at the rear big enough (20-30 cm) for draining the more bulky mess during the subsequent cleaning.

It was Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, who had the inspiration of using Zyklon B during the construction of Birkenau. The idea came to him as a direct result of nazi ideology and phraseology. In fact, Zyklon B had been used hitherto to exterminate vermin – a word frequently used to describe the Jews. The first trials proved conclusive: Zyklon B was more effective and much faster acting – there were no people left in agony when the doors were opened, and no noise could be heard from outside after 3 or 4 minutes, which meant that it was possible to start the ventilation and open the doors of the gas chamber just 15 minutes after they had been closed.

On the gassing: testimony of R. Vrba and F. Wetzler, escapees from Auschwitz, recorded in 1944 in Geneva

“The unfortunates were brought into Hall B and told that they were to take a shower and that they were to undress in the room in which they were. To persuade them that they were actually being taken to the showers, two men dressed in white gave each of them a piece of soap and a towel. Then they were pushed into the gas chamber. About two thousand persons could fit, but each disposed of no more space than was necessary to remain standing. To get such a mass into the room, there were repeated gun shots in order to force those who were already inside to squeeze still closer. When everyone had entered, the heavy door was bolted. There were a few minutes of waiting, probably for the temperature in the chamber to reach a certain degree; then

SS guards, wearing gas masks, climbed onto the roof, opened the windows, and threw in the contents of several tin cans: a preparation in powder form. The cans were marked “Zyklon” (insecticide); they were manufactured in Hamburg. The contents were probably a cyanide compound, which turned into a gas at a certain temperature. In three minutes all the inhabitants of the room were killed ... The room was thus opened and ventilated, and the *Sonderkommando* began transporting corpses on flat carts towards ovens, where they were burned.”¹

A Swiss chemical engineer, Pitch Bloch, at the request of Pierre Vidal-Naquet who wished to respond to the allegations of the revisionist Faurisson, carried out a comparison between this testimony and the chemical composition of Zyklon B. He analysed Faurisson’s arguments that 2 000 persons could not have fit into 210 cubic metres, that work crews would not have been able to work without gasmasks, that Zyklon B could not have been injected from the outside without the co-operation of the prisoners, and that hydrocyanic acid could not have been used near a stove due to its inflammability.

He concluded that the two escapees’ testimony was authentic.

“... I find it, on the one hand, remarkably consistent with the characteristics of Zyklon B mentioned above and, on the other, virtually a “reply” to Faurisson’s arguments: people squeezed together; SS guards wore gas masks; the windows were on the roof and could be hermetically closed from without; the room was ventilated before the *Sonderkommando* entered; and the gas chamber was separated from the incinerating ovens since carts on rails were used to join the two”.²

Cremation

This is the ultimate point of dehumanisation: the destruction of the gassed victims’ papers robbed them of their identity, but the destruction of their bodies, precluding any individual burial – which has been a feature of humanity since Neolithic times – completed the process. There was nothing left but ashes, thrown into a river or scattered over the ground. In the opening sequence of Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah*, Simon Srebnic, the only survivor from the second period of gassing in Chelmno, returns alone to the countryside, bends down, picks up a handful of earth, lets it slip through his fingers: nature has removed all traces of these ashes.

1. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of memory*, Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 62, translated by Jeffrey Mehlman. This passage was a deposition by an eyewitness originally in *L’Extermination des Juifs en Pologne V-X*, Third series, Geneva, CJM, 1944, pp. 59-60.

2. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of memory*, Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 63, translated by Jeffrey Mehlman.

At the beginning of the mass extermination, the bodies were placed in pits, head to foot, layer upon layer with a few spadeful of earth in between. Very quickly, for reasons of space, the pit was set alight by throwing petrol on the first level of bodies and then throwing the rest onto the flames. When the pit was full, it was covered with earth and a new pit was dug. In neither case did the bodies disappear completely.

When defeat was obvious on the eastern front, Himmler quickly realised that the Soviets would regain these territories and could bring these mass graves, and thus the extent of the extermination, to light. All traces therefore had to be got rid of. He then gave two orders: systematically to build crematoria in the camps, and to dig up the remains in the pits for them to be burned again in the ovens. Obviously, it was the Jews who were given this task.

Extermination camps and *Sonderkommandos*

Auschwitz-Birkenau,
 Belzec
 Chelmno
 Lublin-Majdanek
 Sobibor
 Treblinka

Six camps dedicated to the death industry: isolated, like Chelmno, or in a larger complex (Auschwitz comprised three camps, Birkenau being camp II). As far as possible, these camps were camouflaged; if need be, the surrounding population was expelled so that there could be no witnesses. But the smoke rising from the oven chimneys could be seen from far away and the smell spread for miles. Each day, the locals near Treblinka would see full convoys arriving and empty trains leaving again.

Organisation of the extermination camps was simple. Once off the ramp, following separation by sex and selection, the deportees were taken to a room where they were told they were to have a bath or a shower. They had to undress; they were advised to remember exactly where they had hung their clothes and those who complained that they had had nothing to drink for two or three days were promised tea after the shower. When everyone was undressed, they were taken to the shower: at that point the mood changed; they had to run, the SS started shouting and beating them, there were gunshots in the air. They had to move as quickly as possible to avoid revolt (at the most there were only 20 or so guards and SS officers in charge of 1000 to 2000 people. Even using their weapons, they could not have stemmed a revolt without suffering losses). On these occasions, some gave vent to their sadistic instincts, which the hierarchy allowed, as it meant that the people moved all the more quickly to the gas chambers: one guard was renowned for taking infants and throwing them up in the air before throwing them against a wall, another would tear their hands apart, an NCO would unleash his guard dog which would bite off the genital organs of the men within its reach.

The extermination camp had few German staff: a few dozen or so SS officers at the most, auxiliaries, Ukrainians, Lithuanians or others depending on the location. None of them directly carried out the gassing or cremation. They themselves killed the sick and the children left alone on the ramp who were to be sent to the “hospital”. But all the dirty work was left to the *Kommandos* and *Sonderkommandos*.

The *Kommandos* began their work as soon as the deportees arrived: they helped them get off the wagons. Once they had got out, they took all their bags and clothes. They sorted the objects by type and put them into special blocks (“Canada”) where they were stored before everything of potential value was sent to Germany. In this way, the Dutch Jews owed their slightly longer survival to their profession of diamond merchants.

Sonderkommandos

These were very special *Kommandos*: generally they had no contact with the others, were kept in isolated blocks, were given varied and plentiful food and had access to a virtually unlimited supply of alcohol. This regime was due to the jobs they had to do: hairdressers quickly cut the women’s hair before they went into the gas chambers. Once the doors were open, a team pulled out the bodies and took them to the ovens, another cleaned the gas chamber. One team – dentists and others – extracted the gold teeth from the bodies under close supervision. Another team placed the bodies in the ovens and kept the fires burning with long rods, so that the cremation was complete. Another team put the ashes into sacks, ground the incompletely calcified bones and then went off to scatter the lot.

All these men, Jews, were therefore forced to carry out the worst of the tasks. All knew of course that they too would be killed in the continual “renewals” that took place. The nazis soon identified the various stages in these men’s reactions. Some, revolted by the horror of the task, rebelled as soon as they realised what they had to do – they were immediately killed – or committed suicide, most frequently by throwing themselves into the ovens. Those who got through this stage reached a phase of apathy, and carried out their task like automatons. The plentiful food enabled them to keep up their strength and be effective, the alcohol deadened their minds during rest periods. But there was always the risk of them talking to each other and thus of an organised and prepared revolt – and in fact these did occur. To avoid this risk, they had to be killed after a few weeks: out of whatever remnant of humanity survived, they were spared the gas chamber; they knew that their fate was a bullet in the back of the neck at the “hospital”.

The very few survivors of these *Sonderkommandos* escaped being replaced because of their pretended or simulated stupor or indifference. Simon Srebnic, who was 13 years old when he arrived in Chelmno in 1944 described how he felt nothing at all:

“When I saw all that, it didn’t affect me. Neither did the second or third shipment. I was only thirteen, and all I’d ever seen until then were dead bodies ... In the ghetto in Lodz I saw that as soon as anyone took a step, he fell dead. I thought that’s the way things had to be, that it was normal. I’d walk the streets of Lodz, maybe one hundred yards, and there’d be two hundred bodies ... So when I came here to Chelmno, ... I didn’t care about anything.”¹

1. Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah, an oral history of the Holocaust*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, p. 103.

The international response

Before the outbreak of war

Though Jews were quite openly encouraged to leave Germany and go into exile, they had to contend with largely restrictive policies.

Poland threatened to deport German Jews resident in Poland to Germany but refused to take in Polish Jews living in Germany. The United States refused to increase their quotas, which were established according to country of origin. Switzerland insisted that the word “Jewish” be added to German Jews’ passports. In 1938 France opened a camp for “undesirable aliens” where Jews were imprisoned along with ex-members of the international brigades in Spain. Great Britain even went so far as to intern Jews during the war because they came from an enemy country. In 1933 the Zionist organisation, the Jewish Agency, agreed that the *Yishuv* (a Jewish community living in Palestine) would import a large number of German products if, in exchange, Germany would allow 60000 Jews to emigrate to Palestine. This agreement was rejected by many European Jews (in his *Warsaw ghetto diary* Adam Czerniaków strongly criticised those who had acquired passports) because they did not realise how real a risk they were running. Great Britain, which was in charge of Palestinian affairs at the League of Nations, even attempted to counter these attempts at Jewish settlement by means of a White Paper published in 1939 which drastically limited the authorised number of new immigrants entering Palestine.

In July 1938 an international conference on refugees was held in Evian but it was incapable of finding host nations and even acknowledged Germany’s right to do what it liked with its citizens.

Georges Bensoussan reports that Chaim Weizmann had summed up the situation of the Jews on the eve of the war as a world divided into two parts, consisting of one where Jews could not live and the other where Jews were not admitted.

During the war and the Holocaust

On 8 August 1942: “Received alarming news that at the Führer’s headquarters a plan is being discussed and examined whereby all the 3.5 to 4 million Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany will be deported and assembled in eastern Europe and then exterminated in one fell swoop to resolve the Jewish question in Europe once and for all. Plan to be carried out in autumn; methods being investigated include prussic acid. Information passed on with reservations

as accuracy cannot be confirmed. Informer thought to have close ties with the highest German authorities and to provide largely reliable information.”

This message was from Gerhardt Riegner, a delegate at the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland, and was addressed to the British Foreign Office and the Chairman of the World Jewish Congress. In actual fact, by this date, Treblinka had already swallowed up more than one hundred thousand Jews from Warsaw and Auschwitz was already in operation.

The British had intercepted German messages and knew about the massacres as early as the summer of 1941. The French authorities were notified in November 1941 by their ambassador in Romania.

The representative of the Polish government in exile, Jan Karski, travelled incognito to Poland and got right inside the Warsaw ghetto but his reports of the Holocaust to London and Washington were met with indifference.

On two occasions the British refused nazi offers to exchange Jews, thereby sacrificing 60000 Jews who had taken refuge in Bulgaria and, in 1944, nearly 200000 Hungarian Jews.

The Red Cross was informed very early on but chose not to speak out. The Catholic Church, which was a powerful force in Poland, adopted an attitude close to that of Pope Pius XII. Indignation was considerably abated by anti-Semitic feeling and, in the Pope’s case, by a clear affinity for Germany.

In short, the whole world knew basically what was happening if not in any great detail as early as 1941-42. In 1943-44, formal condemnations and threats of judicial sanctions began to be expressed but most of the massacres had already taken place. The Americans ruled out the possibility of bombing the death camps although it would have been the only conceivable military solution. If anyone can be accused of passiveness, it is not Europe’s Jews, who were caught in a trap, but the rest of the world, namely the Allies, the diaspora and Palestine.

Rudolf Vrba explains to Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* that he realised one day that the Resistance in Auschwitz (and the death camps) could not set itself the same objectives as it had in Dachau and the concentration camps, namely to improve living conditions:

“[I]f the needs of the camp were, say thirty thousand prisoners, and five thousand died, they were replaced by a new force from the Jewish transport which came in. But if only a thousand died, well, only a thousand were replaced.”¹

His conclusion was that the Resistance should concentrate on destroying the machinery of mass murder even if this was suicidal. The Allies came to a different conclusion. As far as they were concerned, as early as 1943, the extermination of European Jews was a foregone conclusion even though it was not yet complete.

1. *Shoah*, op. cit. p. 152.

Germany and Austria

The Germans and the Austrians cannot be regarded as a single pro-nazi block. In March 1938, when the *Anschluss* occurred, it is clear that most of the population supported Hitler, partly out of ideological conviction, partly because of the impact of propaganda and indoctrination.

Many intellectuals and most of the political leaders of the left who had not been imprisoned or done away with had emigrated. Grassroots communist militants chose to remain silent, probably on orders from Moscow. The financial and industrial communities, which had been granted their share of property stolen from the Jews, had been rid of a so-called socialist threat when the “Night of the long knives” had wiped out the leadership of the *Sturmabteilung*. They were represented in the government by Von Papen, decided to promote their own interests, even after the war had started. The only thing which might have held back the slaughter was the demand from the arms and chemical industries for even more slaves. However, Himmler and the SS kept the “Jewish question” in the forefront of their minds, giving it precedence over any other aim, even, and indeed above all, when military defeats began to reduce the European territories controlled by the Reich.

Before the war the situation was like that in any totalitarian state. People who stepped out of line could be denounced by anyone, including their neighbours or even their own children, indoctrinated by the Hitler Youth. It should come as no surprise therefore that acts of opposition or resistance were very rare. Opposition was occasionally expressed in the sermons or the writings of Protestant leaders condemning the persecution of Jews and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Sometimes a group of young activists tried to fight back but these attempts, which were frequently based more on romanticism than on strict organisation, were doomed to failure when faced with the might of the totalitarian machine. The most well-known of these movements was the *Weisse Rose*.

During the war, from 1943 onwards, a part of the army was both demoralised by setbacks and needless slaughter and aware that Hitler’s decisions were leading to certain defeat. Some German soldiers on the Russian front had not appreciated having to stand by and watch the operations of mobile killing units (*Einsatzgruppen*) which clearly amounted to war crimes. Others, in occupied territories condemned the brutality of the SS’s methods. An attempt at a *putsch* was organised, which was to be triggered by the assassination of Hitler. It was a failure. But this attempt should not be considered as being anti-nazi.

However, in 1945, some German and Austrian Jews had stayed put and survived. Either they took advantage of their status as mixed couples or had been, or were still, in hiding. There were networks of forged papers and ties of professional loyalty and friendship which were stronger than the dictatorship.

In his *Atlas of the Holocaust*, Sir Martin Gilbert has established, for each of the countries occupied or controlled by Nazi Germany, the number of Jews assassinated and the number of those who survived and returned. In Germany's case the relatively large number of survivors can be explained by those who emigrated between 1933 and 1939.

Germany

Victims: 160 000

Survivors: 330 000

Austria

Victims: 65 000

Survivors: 7 000

Poland

Poland's history had been a series of collapses and reconstruction and so it should come as no surprise that there was a strong nationalist movement in the country between the two wars. In 1926, General Pilsudski established an authoritarian, anti-Soviet regime. Political parties were still authorised but practically all left-wing leaders were imprisoned. When Pilsudski died in 1935, the "regime of the colonels" took up where he had left off. Most of Poland's rural population was Catholic, strongly anti-Semitic, suspicious of Germany and hostile to the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, Jews were both hated and highly integrated, particularly in the cities, where they formed part of the intelligentsia. The Polish National Socialist Workers' Party, which was a copy of the German NSDAP, attracted little support because most of the people felt that they were well represented by their government.

Poland capitulated after one month of war. Though France and Britain had declared war against Germany they had not yet begun any military operations in the west and so Hitler was able to leave this non-existent front almost entirely unmanned and concentrate all his forces in Poland. Under a secret clause of the German-Soviet pact, Poland was divided in three. North-west Poland was simply annexed by Germany to serve the Lebensraum doctrine; the idea was to provide a home for a "pure-bred" German settlement and hence to empty this area of all of its Polish inhabitants, whether Jewish or not. Eastern Poland was left to the Soviet Union which occupied it without difficulty but not without some brutality – it has now been established beyond doubt that thousands of Polish officers were summarily executed. This part of the country took in a considerable number of Polish refugees who had escaped from the areas occupied by the Germans.

Some of the Jews among them continued east towards Soviet Asia and these people account for most of the Polish Jews who survived the war. Lithuania took over the region around its historic capital Vilna (now referred to by its Lithuanian name, Vilnius). The remaining region, in the centre and the south, was occupied by Germany and dubbed the General Government. The aim was to turn this area into a source from which Germany would draw materials and labour in the form of virtual slavery for the Christian Poles and full-blown slavery for the Jews. Therefore, it was to the General Government that European Jews were deported and it was in this region that four death camps were built (Chelmno and Auschwitz were in the annexed part of Poland but very nearby).

The Polish people had a very unusual attitude towards their occupiers which was not found in the other occupied countries. There was no puppet government and

no political fringe group collaborating with the occupying forces – apart, that is, from individual collaborators who were often also involved in trafficking. Major anti-Semitism was reflected everywhere by the mistreatment and persecution of Jews but it did not prompt the Poles to join forces with the nazis. Polish anti-Semites were also ultra-nationalist conservatives and Catholics. Most of the nobility and the intelligentsia were wiped out and many Poles were deported (Sir Martin Gilbert puts the number of non-Jewish Poles exterminated at Auschwitz at some 100 000). In the camps, Poles were a little less badly treated than Jews, homosexuals and Russians but were definitely worse off than all the other categories. And yet this did not prevent a good number of them from persecuting Jews themselves when they became *Kapos*.

However, the Polish, like any people, should not be regarded as a single whole. In his *Warsaw ghetto diary*, Adam Czerniaków notes that when the ghetto was first established many non-Jewish Poles came to the ghetto limits to bring food and seek news of Jews who had been their neighbours, friends, suppliers, customers, employers or employees. And when the ghetto was sealed off in October 1941 this contact continued by telephone. Outside the ghetto Jews were hidden under false names. Others were able to escape and find refuge. When, at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, a Jewish resistance movement began to take shape, it established contact with the Polish Resistance, which was also just beginning. This was how arms were got into the Warsaw ghetto, albeit in limited numbers, and what made the uprising possible. Even nationalist resistance workers were able to forget their anti-Semitism for a short time and regard the Jews as possible allies, particularly during the Warsaw uprising which has often been eclipsed in people's minds by the earlier uprising in the ghetto.

The Polish population's ambiguous response was not dispelled by the German capitulation:

“Incredible as it may seem, the massacre of Jews in Poland did not end with the war. Polish anti-Semitism took over, prompting huge numbers of survivors to emigrate to Palestine. After two young Jews were murdered in Biala Podlaska, the remaining 30 Jews in the town all left. Leon Fehlhendler, one of the leaders of the Sobibor revolt, was killed in Lublin, which was also the site of the assassination, on 19 March 1946, of Chaim Hirschmann, one of only two survivors from the Belzec death camp. The flight to Palestine reached its height after the Kielce pogrom in which 41 Jews were killed.”¹

Between the liberation and the summer of 1947, around 1000 Jews were assassinated in Poland and some 100 000 fled the country.

Poland

Victims: 3 000 000

Survivors: 225 000

1. *The atlas of the Holocaust*, op.cit.

France

During the 1930s France was swept by a strong, and sometimes violent extremist trend. The government formed by the Popular Front following the 1936 elections carried out major social reforms. However, because of its tradition of pacifism, it failed to assist the Spanish Republic in its attempt to resist Franco's rebellion. This lack of foresight was shared by the Popular Front's successors who focused only on the parts of Hitler's speeches in which he declared his peaceful intent. Refugee Spanish republicans were locked away in camps and later on this was to seal their fate. In 1939, having accepted both the *Anschluss* and the overthrow of Czechoslovakia, France could no longer stand by and watch the invasion of Poland without declaring war. The incompetence of the military command enabled Hitler to complete his occupation of Poland before regrouping his troops and opening a western front by invading Belgium and France. France was divided into five zones. One was annexed (Alsace and Lorraine), one in the north was attached to occupied Belgium, one including Paris was occupied, one was declared "free" and administered by the French government in Vichy, and the fifth was an alpine zone occupied by Italian fascist forces.

"Jewry" was expressly designated as a scourge in the ideology of the head of state, Philippe Pétain, and so the government did not wait for any orders from the occupier to establish a definition and a record of French Jews or to exclude them from public office. From 15 May 1942 it became compulsory for them to wear a yellow star and camps were set up throughout France for opponents and Jews as well as specific camps for Gypsies. The camps were organised by the French police, who also conducted the round-up in Paris's winter velodrome (the Vel d'Hiv) of thousands of Jews, most of whom were sent to the Drancy internment camp before being deported to Auschwitz.

After the exodus which preceded the invasion, the majority of French people remained essentially passive, attending chiefly to their own survival and provisions. The state and most of the civil service collaborated with the occupiers and a considerable proportion of the population supported them in this, going so far as to set up a militia, as in most of the other countries under German control. It was only from 1942 that the French Resistance grew up, taking the form of secret networks and, in the free zone, forces known as the *maquis*, made up of opponents of the occupier and people seeking to evade compulsory labour in Germany. The Resistance was co-ordinated and supplied with arms and ammunition by the French forces abroad, led by General de Gaulle.

Jews who fled Germany and other European countries were more or less sacrificed in the hope of saving French Jews. Of course this was a forlorn hope. Some Jews were able to escape via the free zone and Spain or Italy, provided they paid enough to those that smuggled them out and were not denounced. Others, including many children, were hidden away, particularly by Protestant communities and sometimes by Catholics (who “saved” some of them for their own church). A process which had taken nine years in Germany (1933-42) was completed in four (1940-44) in France. Only the Italian zone was relatively unaffected until 1943, as the Italian fascists were not interested in anti-Semitic activities.

Many Jews took part in the French Resistance or even organised combat groups or sabotage teams.

France

Victims: 83 000

Survivors: 200 000

The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium

This was the part of western Europe in which the highest proportion of Jews were victims of the genocide. A large number of them were refugees from Germany and eastern Europe and so they were more “obvious” because they had not yet been integrated. The region’s geography (no mountains, few forests) also made it difficult to hide for long. These countries were governed directly by the *Reichskommissare* (in the Netherlands, an Austrian-run office headed by Seyss-Inquart was particularly zealous and ruthless).

The Dutch population’s response to the first round-ups and deportations was a general strike. This was quashed and did not happen again. However, although the civil service and the police mostly collaborated, many Dutch people helped to hide Jews. Unfortunately, this did not prevent the community from being one of the most affected by the genocide.

In Luxembourg, operations were quickly conducted to round up the thousand or so Jews who had not emigrated before the invasion.

In Belgium, the SS encountered passive resistance from the population who hid many Jews. The Belgian authorities protested at the round-ups and deportations. Jewish Resistance fighters conducted various operations, for example burning the records of the Jewish Council. Here as well, Jews who had fled eastern Europe were among the first victims.

Netherlands

Victims: 106 000

Survivors: 20 000

Luxembourg

Victims: 700

Survivors: 1 000

Belgium

Victims: 28 518

Survivors: 36 082

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was dismembered and divided into different entities. The Sudetenland and Bohemia-Moravia were annexed to the Reich, a part of the country was given to Hungary and Slovakia was established as a puppet, satellite state presided over by a Catholic priest, Monsignor Joseph Tiso – who did not want to hear about the Jews. Czech Jews who had been unable to flee to Hungary were left in the hands of the Germans. In Slovakia, the state procrastinated in its definition, largely because it was under pressure from the Vatican to protect Catholic converts. Many Slovakian Jews took advantage of this to flee into the mountains or Hungary. But most ended up at Auschwitz – just across the Slovak border.

Czechoslovakia

Victims: 217 000

Survivors: 44 000

Hungary

Whereas Jewish communities were disappearing throughout Europe, the 750000-strong Hungarian community was the only one still intact by the beginning of 1944. This was due to the opportunism of the Hungarian government, which allied with Germany to serve its expansionist aims, and hence recovered territory from Czechoslovakia to the north, Romania to the east and Yugoslavia to the south. Hungary's ageing regent, Horthy, did not run the country himself and prime ministers came and went, alternating between leaders with varying degrees of pro-German feeling. This meant that the preliminaries to the Holocaust were completed much more slowly than they were elsewhere. Whenever a pro-German prime minister started going too quickly, Horthy replaced him with a more reticent leader, who would slow down or even halt the process. This approach can be put down to the fact that the Hungarian middle classes were almost entirely made up of Jews and that, in the various intellectual professions, the proportion of Jews ranged from one third to more than one half.

On 8 December 1942, replying to a question from a Hungarian deputy, prime minister Kállay wrote: "... Jews cannot be incarcerated in work camps and ghettos under the present legal rules" (quoted by Raul Hilberg, *op.cit.*). At the end of May 1943, he reiterated his objections in a public speech.

On a personal order from Hitler, Horthy was forced to replace his prime minister on 19 March 1944. Numerous SS offices were set up in Budapest. Two convoys of Jewish prisoners were dispatched in April. Following this, Eichmann proposed that all the remaining Jews would be spared in exchange for the supply of 10000 lorries and various commodities. He sent two Hungarian Jews to Istanbul to negotiate the exchange with the Allies and the Jews in Palestine. The British arrested the two emissaries and never reacted to the proposal.

In May 1944, the whole world knew the final destination of the trains full of Jews being sent to the east. The Allies had been given an opportunity to buy off the surviving Hungarian Jews who also knew what lay in wait for them; they were simply sacrificed.

In August 1944, Horthy appointed a government which was liable to sign an armistice. He was able to make Eichmann leave and stop the deportations. But in October 40 German tanks were sent in to depose Horthy and replace him with the leader of the extremist Arrow Cross movement, an ex-convict in charge of a bloodthirsty militia. Deportations were still held back for fear of reprisals from

the Allies but the Arrow Cross slaughtered thousands more Jews before Budapest finally fell to the Allies on 13 February 1945.

Nonetheless, the holding up of the process until 1944 had enabled many Jews to flee or hide and this was what saved them in the end.

Hungary

Victims: 260 000

Survivors: 300 000

Romania

Romania's political and military approach and its attitude towards Jews changed constantly even though it had the same leaders for four years. Initially it lost territory to the Soviet Union and Hungary, but then changed sides to take an extremely active part in the operations of the Axis on the Russian front, which enabled it to recover Bukovina and Bessarabia. In these provinces the Romanian army engaged in numerous massacres of Jews which were so brutal that even the Germans were shocked. Afterwards the Jews of central Romania (known as Old Romania) were resettled in these provinces.

However, a diplomatic incident – a Romanian minister who was given a poor reception in Berlin – caused another change of alignment and saved the surviving Jews whom the Romanian leaders now claimed to protect after being their persecutors. German military setbacks gave rise to fears of a fatal outcome. Romania capitulated on 24 August 1944 and immediately joined the Allied forces.

Among the Jewish victims, only 60 000 were from Old Romania and most of the Jewish survivors came from this part of the country.

Romania

Victims: 469 632

Survivors: 430 000

The Soviet Union and the Baltic states

Western Russia and the Baltic states were ancient cradles of Jewish settlement. Jews have lived in Lithuania since the inception of the Grand Duchy and were granted privileges by the Grand Duke Gediminas when Vilnius was established in 1323. In the 18th century, the Jewish community of Vilnius had a world-wide reputation for the quality of its religious interpretations. In these countries, the Jewish quarters, or *shtetl*, were often at the heart of the towns and villages. But persecutions were also a well-established feature of these regions, where pogroms were frequent and murderous.

At the start of the war, the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland and Lithuania recovered the Vilnius region. Many Polish Jews from the west of the country sought refuge in the eastern part, where they joined partisan groups or continued on further east. The German eastern offensive in 1941 was accompanied by the activities of *Einsatzgruppen*, who carried out systematic massacres just behind the front. The targets were specified: Jews of both sexes and all ages and “political commissars” (in practice, all those thought to be communists or denounced as such). The nazis received support from parts of the local population, particularly Lithuanians and Ukrainians, who sometimes – for example, in Vilnius – themselves initiated massacres and subsequently showed themselves to be zealous and bloodthirsty auxiliaries, both to the *Einsatzgruppen* and as camp guards. There were also many non-Jewish Russian victims – although in circumstances where military operations and massacres are hard to distinguish, it is difficult to know with certainty to which their deaths should be attributed.

At the Wannsee Conference (January 1942), the estimated number of Jews still to be eliminated gives a clear indication of the extent of the massacres: Estonia was classified as *judenfrei* (free of Jews) while in Lithuania no more than 34 000 still remained, concentrated in the ghettos in Vilna (Vilnius) and Kovno (Kaunas). Very few reached the camps, the majority being massacred on the spot.

Soviet Union

Victims:	1 000 000
Survivors:	300 000

Baltic states:

Victims:	224 000
Survivors:	25 000

Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece

In Serbia, which was occupied for four years, the partisans led an active resistance. The occupants used this as a pretext for the rapid elimination of Jews and Gypsies, by way of reprisals. By November 1941, the army had exterminated all the men. A gas van arrived from Berlin in March 1942. The remaining 15 000 Jewish and gypsy women and children were killed in May.

Greece was invaded in 1941, following an offensive by the Italians, who occupied most of the country. However, the majority of Jews lived in the part occupied by the Germans, in particular the ancient and large community of Salonika. The operations were relatively late, on account of deficiencies in the Greek railway network. The Salonika ghetto was sealed off in early 1943, and a subsection – the Baron de Hirsch district – was itself closed off and served as a sort of funnel pouring into Auschwitz. Between March and August 1943, 46 000 Jews were deported in this way. Jews from the Italian zone gained a respite until the fall of Mussolini, when Germany then took control and deportations started.

The roundups and deportation of the small Albanian community largely took place in 1944.

Throughout the islands, the operations were more complicated as it was easier for Jewish residents to disguise themselves or take flight. Nevertheless, many of the inhabitants of Crete and Rhodes were deported to Poland.

In April 1941, Germany “created” a Croat state, with uncertain frontiers, run by the Ustashi, a militarised Catholic-fascist movement, whose role and operating methods strongly resembled those of the SS – they also supervised the concentration camps in which many Serbs, Jews and Gypsies were interned. Coupled with hunger and typhus, the brutal behaviour of the Ustashis led to a high death rate, which was supplemented by the Polish-bound convoys. A certain number of Jews were able to take refuge in the Italian zone and Jews and Gypsies could also join Tito’s partisan ranks.

Yugoslavia

Victims: 67 122

Survivors: 12 000

Albania

Victims: 200

Survivors: 200

Greece

Victims: 69 481

Survivors: 12 007

Bulgaria

Throughout the war, Bulgaria was allied to Germany, but it did not take part in the military campaigns and tried to show signs of moderation to the Allies. Its alliance with the Axis enabled Bulgaria to occupy Yugoslav Macedonia and Greek Thrace.

The regime of King Boris launched the first stages of the anti-Jewish policy, but took steps to prevent it from taking effect, once persons had been identified. However, Bulgaria handed over Jews living in the recovered provinces to the Germans. By dint of prudence and moderation, the Bulgarian authorities succeeded in saving the Jewish community of Bulgaria proper.

Bulgaria

Survivors: 50 000

Denmark, Norway and Finland

Whereas Bulgaria saved “its” Jews mainly through opportunism, Denmark stands out and must be honoured for protecting its own through conviction and determination, and thanks to the commitment of nearly all the people, the Royal family at their head, even though the country was occupied by, rather than an ally of, Germany. After the first roundup, the whole of Danish society effectively organised itself, with astonishing efficiency and speed, to hide all the Jews, collect funds, and arrange for them to be transported to Sweden by night on fishing boats, all in the space of a few weeks.

In Norway, the puppet Vidkun Quisling launched the arrest process. The first deportations took place by ship in November 1942. But many Norwegian Jews were able to find refuge in Sweden, thanks to the easily penetrated 1 600 km frontier and the unstinting welcome offered by Swedes.

Finland was more or less spared, on account of its remoteness and sparse population, and the restricted availability of German troops.

Denmark

Victims: 77

Survivors: 5 500

Norway

Victims: 728

Survivors: 1 000

Finland

Victims: 11

Survivors: 2 000

Italy

In the Italian-occupied zones of France, Yugoslavia and Greece, the Jews remained practically undisturbed. It was the same in the Italian peninsula. Admittedly, in response to German pressure, extremely comprehensive and severe legislation was enacted. But it was not applied. Following the capitulation of Marshall Badoglio, who had succeeded Mussolini, Germany invaded Italy and immediately conducted roundups and deportations, from October 1943 to the very end. However, these were delayed, and their effectiveness reduced, by the intervention of numerous Italians, and particularly many priests, who protested publicly, and at the same time hid Jews or helped them to take flight. Almost alone, it can be said, Pope Pius XII refused to publicly condemn the mass arrests, which in Rome were taking place under his windows.

This very moderate reaction in Italy reflected the high level of integration of Italian Jews: many belonged to the diplomatic corps and the army, there had been Jewish ministers and mixed marriages were a frequent occurrence. In addition, though, fascist racism, directed essentially towards the African “races”, was more concerned with exclusion and exploitation than with destruction.

Italy

Victims: 8 000

Survivors: 35 000

The neutral countries

During the second world war, the notion of neutrality had two distinct connotations.

The first related to the traditionally and constitutionally neutral countries: Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. In practice, this neutrality gave rise to diametrically opposed policies and attitudes.

Switzerland certainly does not emerge well from any comparison: it took the initiative in asking Germany to mark the passports of Jews. During the war, it tried to seal its frontiers (although 28500 refugees were able to slip through the net and enter secretly or with false papers), and after 13 August 1942 (that is, one month after the roundup of the Paris velodrome), 9751 Jews were sent back to France, condemning them to almost certain death. A police document dated 25 September 1942, quoted by Sir Martin Gilbert, stated that persons could not be granted political refugee status purely on grounds of racial persecution. Moreover, as is now more widely appreciated, Swiss banks housed securities, cash and gold looted from European Jews.

The situation was quite different in Sweden, which opened its frontiers to all the Danish and many Norwegian Jews. Swedish diplomats issued numerous offers of shelter, Swedish passports and so on. Raoul Wallenberg's massive contribution to saving Hungarian Jews during his posting to Budapest lasted to the bitter end.

Turkey was concerned above all with the fate of "its" Jews in Europe, particularly in France. Its representatives succeeded in securing the release of more than 400 Turkish Jews from Drancy and repatriating them in 7 railway convoys across Germany, Austria, Hungary, Croatia and Bulgaria, between February and May 1944. Nine hundred others were able to escape via Spain or Italy.

The second case is that of countries that were neutral in this particular conflict, that is non-belligerents. The European examples are Spain and Portugal, both very Catholic dictatorial regimes, and any assessment of their attitude has to be somewhat mitigated. Both closed their eyes to varying extents to the transit of refugee Jews or resisters wishing to join the Allies. Portugal sometimes used its diplomatic influence on behalf of certain communities. But Spain, which was beholden to Germany for its air support (particularly at Guernica), made no efforts to save the 600 Jews of Spanish nationality trapped in the Salonika ghetto, who were deported with the Greek Jews.

Reactions of German Jews

Before 1933, the majority of German Jews failed to perceive the reality of the threat to them and after 1933, perhaps until *Kristallnacht*, the nature of this threat. Their reaction to Hitler's hate-filled outpourings was to treat him with ridicule. There were practically no real pogroms in Germany and even the harassment and provocations of the SS did not result in deaths, but simply reproduced the difficulties that they had suffered intermittently in Europe for centuries. Their level of cultural and economic integration was such as to make it inconceivable that they might risk their lives by remaining in Germany. So many Jews had given so much to Germans in the fields of art, literature and science that they had made a major contribution to the country's development. The number of Zionists was fairly limited, and they were sure that the German people would soon recover their senses and drive the nazis from power. More far-sighted and better informed intellectuals and politicians emigrated fairly rapidly. Businessmen and financiers thought that their international connections and assets would protect them and delayed leaving, and in the end many of them were only able to secure their departure at the cost of their possessions. But all those who lacked fortunes found themselves trapped.

What is most surprising is that some Jews supported the nazis' revanchist, expansionist and bellicose policies. Certain applauded at the outbreak of war, convinced that following a clear-cut victory their situation would settle down. Many discovered with stupefaction that according to the law they had once more become Jews, even though they had been sure they were 100% German. When the majority were forced to face up to reality, because remaining calm was not enough to escape, it was already much too late.

Reactions of Jews in the occupied countries

Since the Holocaust, there have been numerous and bitter arguments about the attitude of the Jews. There is nothing to be gained from comparing interpretations that serve only as the basis for ritual celebration or condemnation, the two extremes being those of collective passivity and heroic resistance. The facts supply evidence and explanations to show that the two phenomena existed side by side.

Between 1933 and 1940, only 300 000 people emigrated from the whole of Europe, even though the nazi regime encouraged their departure. The explanation is threefold: financial constraints, restrictive immigration policies of countries throughout the world and the tradition of the diaspora.

According to Israel Gutman, *shtadlanut* becomes necessary when Jewish rights are not safeguarded by the law, and when Jews are unable to demand their own political representation and cannot engage actively in political confrontation. *Shtadlanut* is based on negotiation between an individual with a glib tongue, who is ready to act and knows how to deal with tyrants. The *shtadlan* offers the governing authority material benefits and unfailing loyalty. Emancipation and civil equality had eliminated *shtadlanut* from Jewish life, but the nazis reinvented it and made intercession the only possible form of contact between Jews and the authorities.

This revival of the practice of *shtadlanut* was effectively exploited by the nazis, first in Germany and then in all the territories. It enabled them to secure collective docility, extending as far as co-operation (such as the supply of lists and “candidates” for deportation), even in their most extreme actions. The most insignificant concession extracted from time to time, even if cancelled the next day, sufficed to maintain the illusion that the arrangement worked.

The Germans installed *Judenräte* (Jewish councils) in the ghettos, and national organisations in the occupied countries, as their only interlocutors. Certain Jewish parties and organisations expressed their opposition to this principle, but did almost nothing to translate this into action until late 1942, when it was too late. For the great majority of Jews, any transition from opposition to active resistance posed a threat to the entire community; they failed to recognise that the danger was already there. The history of the Warsaw ghetto provides a good illustration of this collective attitude. When the Germans occupied the city, Adam Czerniaków was charged with setting up a Jewish council. As members, he selected representatives of various ideological and social groups, other than

Zionists, communists and orthodox Jews. The diaries offer a clear illustration of his role as *shtadlan*: every day he interceded with representatives, even minor ones, of the civil administration, army, SS and police. On 23 July 1942, after refusing to sign the appeal to 6 000 Jews to present themselves for “transfer” to Treblinka – this was the first convoy, which inaugurated the deportation of 300 000 persons – he committed suicide. That very day a secret meeting was held of representatives of various tendencies opposed to participation in the *Judenrat*. Following discussion, the group decided not to engage in active resistance, to save the mass of ghetto residents.

In mid-October of that year, when everything had been brought to fruition, Emmanuel Ringelblum, who had opposed Czerniaków’s conciliatory attitude, wrote in his notes:

“Why didn’t we resist when they began to resettle 300 000 Jews from Warsaw? Why did we allow ourselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter? Why did everything come so easily to the enemy? Why didn’t the hangmen suffer a single casualty? Why could 50 SS men (some people say even fewer), with the help of a division of some 200 Ukrainian guards and an equal number of Letts, carry out the operation so smoothly?”¹

The answer is two-fold: lack of unity in the community, which instead remained highly fragmented, even after nearly two years of confinement in the ghetto, and a population that had not yet reached a sufficient level of despair to provoke a general, spontaneous revolt, without the need for organisation.

Work is another – by no means negligible – explanatory factor. In the countries and economic regions where the Jewish community was firmly integrated, it naturally made a major contribution to employment and production. The war economy created considerable needs and not only the Jews themselves but substantial segments of industry, the army and the party considered the work of the Jews indispensable, particularly as it was almost free and compulsory. Right up to the implementation of the “final solution”, this common sense observation helped to maintain illusions. As Adam Czerniaków noted in his diary on 23 July 1943, a few hours before killing himself, “In the city there’s a rush to set up workshops. A sewing machine can save a life.” The following day it was announced that all the Jews were to be expelled to the east, at a rate of at least 6 000 a day. A first convoy had left. Yet people continued to believe that working could spare them the worst. At four o’clock that very afternoon, Czerniaków realised that this hope was definitely in vain.

It would be an oversimplification to say there was no revolt or resistance, but these only came at the very end, when for the great majority it was too late. The implementation of the “final solution” in 1942 was so rapid that the Jews of Europe were overtaken by events.

1. *The destruction of the European Jews*, op. cit.

After the war, Erich von dem Bach, supreme head of the police and the SS in central Russia, who directed the massacres in 1941, stated:

“Thus the misfortune came about ... I am the only living witness but I must say the truth. Contrary to the opinion of the National Socialists that the Jews were a highly organised group, the appalling fact was that they had no organisation whatsoever. The mass of the Jewish people were taken completely by surprise. They did not know at all what to do; they had no directives or slogans as to how they should act. That is the greatest lie of anti-Semitism because it gives the lie to the slogan that the Jews are conspiring to dominate the world and that they are so highly organised. In reality they had no organisation of their own, not even an information service. If they had had some sort of organisation, these people could have been saved by the million; but instead they were taken completely by surprise. Never before has a people gone as unsuspectingly to its disaster. Nothing was prepared. Absolutely nothing. It was not so, as the anti-Semites say, that they were friendly to the Soviets. That is the most appalling misconception of all. The Jews in the old Poland, who were never communistic in their sympathies, were, throughout the area of the Bug eastwards, more afraid of Bolshevism than of the nazis. This was insanity. They could have been saved. There were people among them who had much to lose, business people; they didn't want to leave. In addition there was love of home and their experience with pogroms in Russia. After the first wave of anti-Jewish actions by the Germans, they thought now the wave was over and so they walked back to their undoing.”¹

1. Ibid.

Reactions of Jews of the diaspora and Palestine

It would be just as inaccurate to speak of the Jews in the rest of the world as an organised and unified entity as to refer to “the” German or Polish Jewish community as a single whole. And just as it is too simplistic to talk about the attitude of the Germans or the French, there are no general conclusions to be drawn about the collective behaviour of all the Jews.

Indeed, observation might lead one to think that among the Jews of the world, centrifugal forces exercised a more powerful influence than centripetal ones: the daily lives of Cairo artisans, New York businessmen and farmers on a Palestinian kibbutz had very little in common. The situation of Jews in different parts of the world varied greatly, as it did within each region.

In Palestine, the inhabitants were all Zionists, that is they wanted to create a Jewish state, a minority view in the diaspora. But these Palestinian Jews included those – religious radicals or political or military extremists – whose first concern was to secure control over a particular territory and expel its Arab inhabitants, while for others the primary objective was to establish a collective way of life and form of production, according to a type of socialist ideal that included co-operation with their Muslim neighbours.

The Sephardi Jews lived peacefully in the Muslim areas, with the status of second zone citizens, which was nevertheless guaranteed, and confirmed by the length of their presence. In the towns, streets occupied by Jews intersected Muslim ones and daily life, including festivals, was mainly a shared experience.

There was a large Jewish community in the United States – in the sense that there was a significant Jewish population. Most of them had originally emigrated from north-east Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of this emigration was the result of pogroms, particularly in Russia. The American Jewish population was extremely disparate. Dynamic Jewish businessmen and entrepreneurs had become typical Americans, some of whom were hostile to the United States’ entry into the war. Orthodox Jews formed genuine communities, whose rules of life, work and study turned them in on themselves. Working class immigrants still spoke Yiddish and had formed genuine *shtetlach*, or small communities, where they earned their existence from various forms of labour and minor trades. Intellectuals, some of whom had rejected their Jewishness, played an active part in American cultural life, and many of them had formed mixed couples.

At global level, even the World Jewish Congress – let alone organisations based on a particular leaning or component group – could not claim to represent the entire diaspora.

The result was what happened in each European city, writ large. In response to the crisis, emissaries and other leading figures would enter into dialogue with the authorities – except that the authorities in Washington and London were not those responsible for the persecution in Europe, so that the only outcome of the numerous contacts between members of the world congress and the allied authorities or neutral countries was a series of statements of intent. All the international Jewish organisations could do was to vote for motions in the congress and conduct totally fruitless lobbying exercises.

If a general assessment had to be made, this diversity could be summed up by saying that the diaspora was simultaneously frightened, excessively formal, scandalised, unconcerned, impotent and resigned.

The righteous

The “Righteous among the Nations” are persons who strove during the Shoah to help the Jewish people, or individual Jews, often at risk to their lives. They hid children or families, organised networks to assist their flight and so on. Although in certain respects European Jews felt, with justification, that the world as a whole had abandoned them to the Nazi programme of annihilation, this was never totally the case. All bear witness to the fact that here and there they came across signs of support, comforting gestures, or sometimes minimal but always courageous acts of kindness. Even in Auschwitz, a few Germans showed pity.

After the war, the survivors and the state of Israel decided to honour the attitude and the acts of courage of a certain number of persons. The conditions for recognition are to have supplied decisive aid to a Jew, at a time and in a situation where he or she was in danger (and danger at that time meant death), to have been aware of the risk entailed in offering that help (sheltering a Jew was classified as a crime) and to have asked for no material reward for this help (many people-smugglers required to be paid). The facts have to be duly attested. The sort of help qualifying for recognition includes providing shelter, securing false or forged identity documents, baptism certificates and so on, conducting persons to a safe place, such as a frontier crossing, and adopting Jewish children, even provisionally. When the case has been drawn up and accepted, the “righteous person” is honoured in a ceremony in his or her country, attended by a representative of Israel.

The recognition of the righteous began in 1953. By April 1998, 16 000 had been so honoured. The Israeli government, and more generally the survivors, believe that there are many more potential “righteous persons”. On many occasions, a tiny gesture of passive resistance was sufficient to save a Jew from certain death, but to do so in a totalitarian country or under the yoke of a bloody occupier was a real act of courage. Yet often, the circumstances were so cloaked in secrecy that beneficiaries had no evidence on which to identify their benefactors. Today, the great majority of righteous persons – whether alive or (more often) dead – therefore remain anonymous.

The status of Righteous among the Nations is individual, but a particular group – a municipality, a religious congregation or a professional group – may have so many righteous members that it is itself recognised as “righteous”, as is the case with the French municipality of Chambon-sur-Lignon.

The Allies' military options

According to the nazis, the war had been fomented by the Jews and it was a struggle between Jews and Germans. If that had been the case, or if the fate of Europe's Jews had been the reason for the Allies entering the conflict, the military operations would certainly have been conducted differently.

Stopping this annihilation was not however a priority. From a strictly military standpoint, the death camps contained very few soldiers and the SS and their destruction would not have affected the situation on the various fronts, while at the same time it would have endangered a certain number of aircraft and pilots. In the military logic, destroying Auschwitz or disabling the railway network leading to it would be a totally profitless exercise, since the fate of the Jews was of no military significance. Before 1942, this objective would not have been realistic; after the first German reverses, priority was given to extending the fighting on all the fronts of the world.

These decisions were not based on the risk of killing Jews interned in the camps. When it seemed appropriate, the Allies would be quite prepared to destroy German cities, and then Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the objective of securing a rapid surrender.

Another political factor that weighed as heavily with the western powers as with the Russians was the post-war settlement, thus anticipating the cold war. The aim was to advance the front as far as possible to maximise the area of Germany – and Europe – under their control, with or without surviving Jews.

The end of the camps

The battle of Stalingrad, in February 1943, marked the start of the advance of the Soviet troops and the loss of territories occupied by the Reich. In withdrawing, the Germans took steps to ensure that they left no trace of the mass exterminations. Before the construction of the cremation ovens, the bodies had either been burnt in ditches or on pyres or buried in enormous ditches (particularly in the cases of massacres perpetrated by the *Einsatzgruppen*).

Himmler created special groups known as the “1005” units. These were composed of deportees, mainly Jewish (who were systematically liquidated after carrying out their tasks), responsible for digging up the bodies, burning them and dispersing their ashes.

Bodies dug up by the “1005” units between March 1943 and January 1945

- Treblinka: 840 000
- Belzec: 600 000
- Chelmno: 360 000
- Sobibor: 250 000
- Ponary: 58 000
- Babi Yar: 33 771
- Plaszow: 9 000

Destruction of the camps

However, it was also necessary to remove all traces of the extermination camps, as shown in the following:¹

- Chelmno: destruction of the house, to its very foundations, and planting of a lawn.
- Belzec: destruction of the gas chambers in spring 1943, plantation of pines.
- Treblinka: last traces removed, archives burnt, *Sonderkommando* (of remaining prisoners) shot on 17 November 1943. A farm was established and entrusted to a Ukrainian.

1. *The atlas of the Holocaust*, op. cit.

- Sobibor: ceased activities late 1943 and destroyed.
- Majdanek, in Lublin, was incompletely evacuated.
- Auschwitz-Birkenau was the last to operate. In October 1944, a revolt led to the firing of crematorium oven III. In November, Himmler ordered the dismantling of the gas chambers and ovens, but it was too late to hide the traces.

Death marches and trains

This was a systematically conceived undertaking affecting all the survivors of whatever category. All knew of, had seen or had experienced these events. Now that defeat was inevitable, the nazi officials knew that they would be held to account. The “logical” nazi response to such a prospect was mass murder, and so began their final crimes against humanity.

22 July-1 August 1944

From Majdanek to Kielce on foot, then train to Auschwitz, 1200 set out, 380 dead.

29 July-1 August 1944

3520 leave Warsaw on foot for Zychlin, 500 dead. Train from Zychlin to Dachau, 1000 dead.

August 1944

6000 leave Bor (Yugoslavia) on foot for Győr (Hungary): several thousand dead.

2-8 November 1944

50000 leave Budapest on foot for Strasshof: 10000 dead.

December 1944

3500 leave Lieberose on foot for Sachsenhausen: 2600 dead.

18 January 1945

9748 leave Auschwitz region, 1437 dead.

3000 leave Auschwitz-Birkenau on foot for Geppersdorf, 2720 dead.

98000 evacuated by train from Auschwitz, 4200 shot on the spot.

20 January 1945

29000 leave Danzig and Stutthof, 27 January arrive Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen, 26000 dead.

26 January 1945

1000 leave Neusalz, 11 March arrive Flossenburg, 800 dead.

March-April 1945

2000 leave Koszeg for Ebensee (number of dead unknown).

19-25 April 1945

17000 women leave Ravensbrück and 40000 men leave Sachsenhausen, thousands die.

20 April 1945

2775 leave Rehmsdorf by train for Marienbad: 1000 dead. The 1775 survivors leave for Theresienstadt on foot: 1200 die.

The last march took place from 1-5 May 1945, from Mauthausen to Gunskircher (numbers unknown).

The location of the camps and the successive prisoner transfers – despite the death trains and marches, there were survivors – meant that the last camps were liberated very late in the day. It appears that the conduct of military operations (with the recruitment of children and the elderly) and the stiff resistance on a number of fronts were motivated by the desire to complete the extermination, and perhaps also by the imposition of a sacrifice on the German people, who had not allowed Hitler to achieve his great design.

Majdanek was liberated on 23 July 1944, Auschwitz on 27 January 1945, Buchenwald on 1 April, Dachau on 29 April, Mauthausen on 5 May, and finally Theresienstadt on 9 May.

The liberation did not however save all the deportees. Many were still to succumb, to epidemics and the effects of deprivation and ill-treatment.

In total, between the liberation and mid-1947, 1000 Jews were assassinated in Poland and 100 000 fled the country.

Number of deaths

Jewish victims

We can only estimate the number of victims, in view of all the isolated and undiscovered murders. The two most important and reliable sources are Raul Hilberg and Sir Martin Gilbert, who base their estimates as far as possible on original documents, cross-checking them and using figures probably lower than the actual numbers in preference to random estimates.

Raul Hilberg, who reached a total estimate of 5 100 000 Jews killed, cross-checked his figures with analyses of natural demographic evolution. Sir Martin Gilbert points out that his estimate of 5 750 000 is lower than the actual figure: “Such a total ... can never be complete. Thousands of infants and babies were murdered by the nazi killing squads in the autumn of 1941, for example, before their birth could be recorded for any ‘statistical’ purpose. Thousands more individuals, especially in the remoter villages of Poland, were ‘added’ to the deportation trains which left larger localities, without any numerical register being made of their existence or fate”. He adds that a number of communities of up to 1 000 Jewish inhabitants had mysteriously disappeared by 1945.

Both the authors arrived at their estimates by highly rigorous means, only referring to confirmed sources, and so the figures must necessarily be underestimates.

Number of Jewish deaths		
	According to Hilberg	According to Gilbert
Poland	up to 3 000 000	3 000 000
Soviet Union	over 700 000	1 000 000
Romania (with Bessarabia, Bukovina, north Transylvania)	270 000	469 632
Czechoslovakia (including Ruthenia)	260 000	277 000
Hungary	over 180 000	200 000
Lithuania (including Memel)	up to 130 000	143 000
Germany	over 120 000	160 000
Netherlands	over 100 000	106 000
France	75 000	83 000
Latvia	70 000	80 000
Yugoslavia (including Macedonia)	60 000	67 122
Greece (including Thrace, Crete, Kos)	60 000	69 701
Austria	over 50 000	65 000
Belgium	24 000	28 518
Italy and Rhodes	9 000	9 700
Estonia	2 000	1 000
Norway	less than 1 000	728
Luxembourg	less than 1 000	700
Danzig	less than 1 000	1 000
Albania		200
Finland		11

The Jewish Museum in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania (also called Vilna in Polish), contains the following censuses of the city's Jewish population:

- 1897: 63 841;
- 1914: 98 700;
- 1928: 56 186;
- 1933: 58 500;

- 1939: 60000;
- September 1941: 40000;
- October 1941: 25300;
- April 1942: 18500;
- April 1943: 20192;
- December 1944: 800.

This is no direct indication of the number of victims: some Jews escaped and there were natural deaths – but there were also births. The increase in 1942 and 1943 was caused by an influx of refugees from the countryside:

“The killing squads were heavily armed and had strong local support. The Jews were unarmed, and surrounded by an extremely hostile peasantry, who sometimes attacked them even before the killing squads had arrived. In some cases this random butchery of so many Jews led the SS to order the locals to stop the killing, in order to put it on a ‘systematic’ basis, according to the killing squad schedules ... any Jews who managed to escape from their executioners at the pits (in Ponary) by a special unit of Germans and Lithuanians.”¹

According to Hilberg, the deaths can be broken down into three main categories:

- deprivation and general living conditions in ghettos caused over 800000 deaths (over 600000 of them in ghettos in eastern Europe);
- machine-gunnings: over 1300000;
- camps: 3000000, of which 90% were in extermination camps and 1000000 in Auschwitz alone.

H. Langbein gives the following figures on the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp:²

- registered internees: 405000 (those escaping the first selection who were recorded in the register and tattooed);
- 19 January 1945: the Red Army records 7650 survivors;
- 6 February 1945: only 4880 of these persons still alive (Red Cross). How many died in the ensuing days or weeks?
- members of unregistered (non-tattooed) *Sonderkommandos*: number unknown – since they were regularly “renewed”, they probably totalled several thousand.

The various Germans questioned immediately after the war provided estimates of from 2 to 5 million for the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp alone.

1. Ibid.

2. Hermann Langbein, *Menschen in Auschwitz*, Electra, collection 1018, 1984, editor’s translation.

Other victims

The numbers of Gypsy victims are estimated at 200000 at least. Sir Martin Gilbert advances a figure of 220000, and some writers go as far as 500000, no doubt including deaths due to bombings or military operations not specifically linked to the genocide

There were 2000 German infants and 17000 adults suffering from mental or physical disabilities, as well as several hundred thousand in the occupied territories, who were “released” from a “life not worth living”.

No specific separate measures were taken against homosexuals, but the evidence is that several tens of thousands died.

Between 2000 and 5000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were killed, most of whom were Germans, whereby an estimated 10000 *Bibelforscher* had been living in Germany in 1933.

The number of opponents of all tendencies, including many Spanish republicans interned in camps by France, runs into hundreds of thousands, while millions of Soviets were killed, including the victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) and prisoners of war transferred to be gassed in the extermination camps. The Soviets were mainly Russians. The Poles, who were considered an “inferior” people destined to serve the Germans, were also heavily targeted, especially the intellectual élite, as their survival could have given the lie to this inferiority theory.

The survivors return

There were several categories of survivors, and to each category the idea of a return covered a different reality. Survivors who are released from an extermination camp knowing that their families and their *shtetl* have been wiped out or that their houses are now occupied by Polish villagers do not feel really motivated to return home. On the other hand, people who have escaped the massacres and deportations thanks to local solidarity can still feel at home in the places where they survived. For western and southern European Jews, the presence of large sections of their families obviously prompted them to return. Jews in the Scandinavian countries had scant reason not to feel welcome and at home there.

A total of 100 000 individuals fled Poland, where Jews continued to fall victim to Christian anti-Semitism in the two immediate post-war years.

A total of 300 000 individuals emigrated from Europe after the war: 200 000 to Palestine, 72 000 to the United States and 16 000 to Canada.

Once the war was over, those who had previously gone into exile had to decide whether or not to return to their countries of origin. The reactions and choices varied enormously. Since most of those who had emigrated to Palestine were staunch Zionists, all or nearly all of them remained. Very few German Jews went back to their country of origin. Most of the Jews exiled in the United States between 1933 and 1939 stayed there, although some subsequently emigrated to Israel.

Silence

It might be more accurate to speak of “silences”.

Silences on the Holocaust

The great majority of the survivors of the camps had been deported for acts of opposition or resistance. On their return they spoke out to describe the realities of the concentration camps. However, the various populations, relieved at the restoration of peace and still subject to major food restrictions, soon only listened politely to the accounts of these horrors, preferring not to know about such things. As for the Jews, very few of whom returned from the extermination camps, they found it even more difficult to talk: to Jewish survivors the real victims were those who had been gassed and burnt, those who had gone through the “black holes” of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and the other camps. They also felt a searing guilt: why had they been spared? Their survival could only be culpable. In order to stay alive they had had to “organise” food or other treasures for bartering purposes, they had been selfish, they had committed what they would have described as “sins” or “offences” in normal social life.

Lastly, by definition, no one could describe the inside of the gas chambers, just as no one could ever forgive something like that. Even within their own families, therefore, most Jewish survivors maintained their silence for years, tormented as they were by the question why and how they had held out; in the personal testimonies collated in *Witness – voices from the Holocaust* everyone had his or her own personal theory: I was young and sturdy, I believed in God, I did not believe in God, I was stupid, I was intellectual, I was rebellious, I was irresponsible, etc. Casting around to understand, the survivors’ utterances are an attempt to cover over their intolerable doubt. Primo Levi is probably not too far from the truth when he notes a “bundle of small reasons”, small sparks of preserved humanity which add up to his survival – in other words a succession of tiny pieces of luck, chance events.

The Jews who had survived on the spot or returned from exile also remained silent: having been singled out for hatred and massacre they now aspired solely to blending in with the crowd, becoming normal citizens, and above all yearned for anonymity, to be neither seen nor heard as Jews.

The silence of non-Jewish nationals was also tinged with guilt: apart from the “righteous Gentiles”, what did anyone do to avert disaster? The soldiers had not opted for such destruction. The civilian population, apart from the Resistance

(and even at that, how many Auschwitz trains were sabotaged?), had remained passive. Collaborators, traffickers and informers all frantically endeavoured to be forgotten, as did a fair number of officials, particularly in the police and the judiciary.

Silence prevailed more or less throughout Europe. Some historians, mostly Jewish, set to work, attracting little attention. Some eye-witnesses produced a variety of writings on the subject. Some, such as Primo Levi, had difficulty finding a publisher.

Silences on the other Holocaust genocides

Roma/Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the disabled, Polish élites, Spanish republicans, Russian prisoners of war: at best some of these were merged under the general heading of "deportees and resistance fighters". However, there were also sporadic claims that the destruction of the Gypsies had not amounted to a genocide. Discrimination in fact continued against this people – even today their movements and encampments are restricted, or else they are forcibly settled, in virtually all the European countries through which they travel. Again, few countries have ever officially acknowledged homosexuals as victims (the various associations in France do not deign to recognise them), and historians seldom mention them.

The difficulty of testifying

Time passes, and since the wounds cannot heal up, people have since taken various opportunities to open up and start talking about their personal histories.

But talking means reliving the scenes of horror, the fear, the dread and the feeling of powerlessness. It means seeing the resurgence of excruciating guilt. It is striking to see, in *Shoah*, the contrast between the emotion and suffering of the former victims and the coldness, or even cheerfulness, of most of the German and Polish witnesses.

Even though each witness can obviously only speak of what he or she saw, there is a tendency to expect a complete, detailed account. Furthermore, people's memories are affected by what they have learnt since, by their current stock of knowledge. Some of the witnesses were only children at the time, which means that the memories are often anecdotal and vague, coloured by the child's view of the world and then by subsequently acquired information.

Lastly, the form chosen for the testimony may lead to bias. Elie Wiesel blends memories of events experienced with memories of his feelings, adopting a very personal theological stance: at once lyrical and mystical, his account is sublime, but this is what it is, an account, rather than a testimony in the historical or judicial sense.

Primo Levi opts for maximum rigour and concision, avoiding value judgments on the Germans and the nazis, but he cannot disguise the utter dread chill he feels at their very mention. His main work *Survival in Auschwitz – the nazi assault on humanity* bore the ambiguous title *Se questo è un uomo* (if this is a man) in the Italian original, referring, in diametrically opposed manners, both to the torturer and the victim.

The testimonies of the nazis are probably the most informative for historians, with the obvious proviso of subjecting them to very strict criticism: they provide maximum certainty by confirming the general situation surrounding the individual experiences of the testifying victims.

Revisionism and Holocaust denial

Revisionism

Revisionism is a phenomenon which particularly, but not exclusively, affects Germany and Austria. It posits that the Holocaust was a kind of first step in a policy essentially aimed at opposing Stalinist Bolshevism: this is of course an over-simplification of the arguments and counter-arguments put forward in the course of a wide-ranging intellectual controversy, of which we should at least recognise as legitimate the averred and necessary aim of reconstructing German national identity and conscience. This controversy, which concerned both history and philosophy, would now seem to be finished, or at least to have been wound up, apart from its (mis)use as a respectable front for Holocaust denial or other ideological strivings: we must remain on our guard against such dangerous distortions. It should certainly be noted, and deplored, that some theories exclusively or principally attributing the murderous frenzy against the Jews to the “German soul” are used to corroborate or illustrate specific ideological stances.

Holocaust denial

The phenomenon of Holocaust denial exists to varying extents in many European countries. It has never surfaced publicly in Germany, but has led to publications in Belgium and Switzerland, and is very high-profile and obtrusive in France. One of the foremost French historians, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, has had to devote a great deal of his work and his life to combating Holocaust denial.

Holocaust deniers are concerned to deny the reality not of the large-scale massacres but “only” of the gas-chambers and crematorium furnaces, with the corollary that the camps exclusively earmarked for the “death industry” never existed, which perniciously annihilates one of the main specific features of the Holocaust. This could imply that nazism was an “ordinary” dictatorship and that the gas-chambers were a fabrication – obviously, by the Jews, whom the deniers rename “exterminationists”.

Holocaust denial is pernicious because it presents itself as a “point of view” based on so-called scientific arguments, whereas in fact it is a tissue of lies – and as such cannot be tolerated in schools.

The arguments and justifications put forward by Holocaust deniers are characteristically stealthy, avoiding open statements which would be punishable as criminal offences: this is why they usually take the form of questions, which are

threefold. The first consists of pointing out that no gas chambers or crematorium furnaces have survived: so did they ever really exist? The main source is personal testimonies: however, and this is the second argument, these are human (and the word “Jewish” is implied) statements and are therefore fragile and dubious. And then come the shameless attacks on well-known figures. In *Night*, for instance, Elie Wiesel mentions his memory of gigantic flames leaping up from the furnace chimneys into the night sky. This is of course impossible. So Wiesel is making the flames up. And the furnaces.

The third type of argument is probably the most pernicious of all: it consists in sifting through historians’ publications for factual errors, which are often minute or concern marginal aspects, enabling the deniers to dismiss them as incompetent, or, even more often (seeing that the advocates of this theory are just as prone to hyperbole as the nazis before them) as liars or rewriters of history; it is then only a small step to claiming that any statements of any kind by these historians must be ill-founded and fallacious. An example of this procedure involves the rumour, which had circulated in some camps and ghettos but really was only an unfounded rumour, that the Jewish corpses were used for producing soap: a historian only needs to touch on this matter for his whole past and future work to become suspect, necessarily dishonest. How are we to react to these types of argument? Beyond the prohibition of peddling lies, the teacher can use this as an opportunity for elucidating what constitutes a scientific approach to history. This can be done on the basis of a series of examples, as set out below.

Personal testimonies: historians do not confine themselves to one single testimony – they put things into perspective by analysing the witness’ point of view to gauge his or her credibility. For instance, Wiesel is writing down, as an adult and in a literary form, the impressions of his childhood: the fact that his dreadful anguish is expressed in his memories by the vision of enormous flames does not prove any mendacious intent on his part. Moreover, it is interesting to consider the viewpoints expressed by Claude Lanzmann’s witnesses in *Shoah*: what are we to make of the words of the Polish peasant living near the camp, the comments of the train driver transporting Jews to Treblinka, or Mr Bomba’s difficulties in talking about his work as a barber in the anteroom to the gas chamber? Despite the small number of escapees, many testimonies have been recorded: we must consider why they all tally and why there is absolutely no evidence to the contrary.

Above and beyond witness consistency, testimonies are not the only evidence available. In the case of Treblinka, given the size of the camp, the number of trains arriving and the dearth of food deliveries, all facts which have been confirmed with evidence and traces from a variety of sources, the logical conclusion is that deportees had to be destroyed shortly after their arrival, and the number of guards and ammunition stocks rule out individual executions. As for the corpses, there was no room for mass graves for 750 000 bodies, and the rate of

arrivals ruled out burning them in the open air: the crematorium furnace is the only possible means of reducing the volume of these remains.

This is a macabre but irrefutable demonstration, which is in fact also corroborated by the confessions of the executioners themselves. “These confessions were extorted, they were accounts concocted for the occasions by people who had fallen into the victors’ hands”, cry the Holocaust deniers. These testimonies are probably eminently suspect, but that in no way robs them of all historical value. In his preface to the memoirs of Auschwitz Commander Rudolf Höss, Primo Levi provides a masterly definition (a veritable lesson in historical methodology) of how to distinguish between artificially “concocted” statements and real confessions, where the nazi in question cannot see any need for camouflage or even imagines he can shirk responsibility or bask in basely misplaced glory by boasting, for instance, about his devotion to duty or his efficiency.

The SS guard Suchomel, interviewed and recorded without his knowing by Claude Lanzmann, having received an assurance of confidentiality, lapsed into obscene bragging accompanied by a multitude of details which he could not have made up. Even the text of Eichmann’s memoirs, which are now available, is highly significant: while everything he says in the hope of bolstering his defence is suspect, there is no reason to doubt large sections of his account; they provide optimum conclusive evidence.

Films

Using films in class is no easy option: it necessitates specific prior educational work, if we wish to obviate the severe risk of being counterproductive.¹ Depending on the film category (fiction, documentary, personal testimony, etc.), projection of a film can have a variety of functions: providing an introduction to the work, illustrating a course or a class project, supplying a direct knowledge input, or helping students understand, discuss and interpret historical facts.

Pitfalls, dangers and precautions

Some types of film can have undesired or even harmful effects on the teaching or on the students. The first precaution that teachers must take is therefore to get to know the film as teachers rather than as viewers. Even if they have already seen it in the past, they could usefully watch it again with specific questions in mind: which aspects are dealt with in the film? Which aspects are not addressed? What prior knowledge do the students need? What bias might the film implant in the students' understanding and interpretation? The following films might illustrate this approach.

Night and fog by Alain Resnais has obvious cinematographic qualities, is highly evocative and constitutes a commentary of high literary quality. However, it does comprise a number of rather serious drawbacks. The first is the accumulation of horrifying images such as piles of naked corpses: this is liable to traumatise adolescents, obstructing reflection by focusing minds on emotion, or, on the contrary, to prompt sadistic pleasure, or at least some kind of sexual reaction, in some teenagers. The students therefore have to be forewarned: these images filmed by Americans bear witness to the horror they felt on discovering the reality of the camps, you can look away from time to time or you can choose not to look and merely listen to the commentary. As one teacher told me, the experience cannot be deemed an educational success if half the class (of pre-adolescents) were "in tears at the end of the period": on the contrary, it was a failure and a mistake if the teacher has been unable to help the students get over the emotion.

The second drawback concerns an episode which caused a huge outcry in France at the time: one sequence shows the entrance to the Drancy camp, a transit camp

1. Ed. note: see Dominique Chansel, *Europe on-screen: cinema and the teaching of history*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2001. Designed for teachers, this book gives suggestions for using 50 films, among which, *The Wannsee Conference*, in the classroom.

near Paris, where the Jews were interned after being rounded up pending deportation to Auschwitz. The frames in this sequence were processed to conceal the fact that a French policeman was standing guard at the entrance to the camp. This “doctoring” of the film was not the director’s doing but rather was attributable to state censorship, as the French government of the time was anxious to cover up this instance of collaboration. This should be pointed out to the students as an example of the fact that even a documentary, a supposedly objective report, can conceal part of the truth or mislead. Last but not least, the commentary quite simply “forgets” the Jewish genocide. The word “Jewish” itself is only mentioned once, and only in passing (“it was a Jewish student who ...”). It would be inconceivable to show this film without a great deal of work on the silence shrouding the Holocaust.

Although *Schindler’s list*, by Steven Spielberg, is a good film, it has the peculiarity of being first and foremost a commercial move for American audiences, whence the “requisite” happy ending (like in the *Holocaust* TV series). To that extent it is probably better not to use the film as an introduction to classroom work. On the other hand, it could be used to illustrate specific points (such as the “Righteous Gentiles”).

Life is beautiful by Roberto Benigni was an enormous box-office hit. Without extensive prior work students are liable to conclude not only that nazism was “benign” (no pun intended) but also that it was possible for a child to live in one of the camps without seeing or understanding what was really happening.

The specialist by Rony Brauman and Eyal Sivan was assembled from archive film of the Eichmann trial in 1961. The movie shows an official who claims merely to have been going about his work – all in all, someone very ordinary. This is the stance adopted by the authors, following directly on from Hannah Arendt’s analyses. The choice of sequences from the tens of thousands of metres of film corresponds to this “bias”. In the absence of a film assembled by other directors, of a different point of view which would no doubt show Eichmann in a different light (evidence presented at the Nuremberg trial showed him, on the contrary, as being a close friend of Heydrich’s, an individual virtually obsessed with the urge to destroy Jews), any projection of this film should be accompanied by additional information on the character of Eichmann and discussion of the viewpoints of documentary makers.

Each film should be the subject of a meticulous critical analysis, although high-quality films can always be put to a separate specific use.

Shoah, Claude Lanzmann’s film is a unique case. In cinematographic terms it is much more than a documentary, or even than a mere creative film: it is a masterpiece. A masterpiece cannot be used to introduce, illustrate or provide a commentary. This film must be used as a stage in an educational project – it normally constitutes a red-letter day in the life of anyone watching it. Any teachers wishing to derive something approaching a complete commentary from it would have

to put on a series of hats: art critic, historian, geographer, philosopher, literary critic, psychologist and political scientist. The film could not conceivably be shown to very young children, as they would at times get bored, at others be unable to resist the emotion, and lastly would be unlikely to be receptive to the extreme wealth of the content.

Shoah (or Lanzmann) might be described as an “interface”, facilitating access or rapprochement to what actually happened – never have we come so close to “knowing” the gas chamber. To that extent the film is probably the best possible preparation for a visit to a place of importance to the collective memory, and uniquely to an extermination camp. However, we have to be careful to protect teenagers’ sensibilities *vis-à-vis* the content of the testimonies, some of which are harrowing, rather than the actual images. It is vital for young people to be able to put their feelings into words. It should be noted that Claude Lanzmann himself has produced a 90-minute abridged version of his film intended for educational uses in various countries (particularly the Netherlands; a version is also being prepared in France).

A list of films

Abramowicz (Myriam) and Hoffenberg (Esther), *As if it were yesterday*, 1980

Arthuys (Philippe), *The glass cage*, 1964

Benigni (Roberto), *Life is beautiful*, 1998

Bluwal (Marcel), *Le plus beau pays du monde*, 1999

Brauman (Rony) and Sivan (Eyal), *The specialist*, 1999

Calef (Henri), *The hour of truth*, 1964

Charpak (André), *David Levinstein’s crime*, 1967

Finkiel, (Emmanuel) *Voyages*, 1998

Halter (Marek), *Tzedek – les justes (The righteous)*, 1994

Hillel (Marc) et Henry (Clarissa), *Of pure blood*, 1975

Holland (Agnieszka), *Europa, Europa*, 1990

Jakubowska (Wanda), *The last stop*, 1946

Kassowitz (Peter), *Jakob the liar*, 1999

Lanzmann (Claude), *Shoah*, 1985

Lelouch (Claude), *Les misérables*, 1995

Losey (Joseph), *Mr Klein*, 1976

Malle (Louis), *Goodbye children*, 1987

Mihaileanu (Radu) *Train of life*, 1998

Mitrani (Michel), *Black Thursday*, 1974

Munk (Andrzej), *Passenger*, 1963

Najman (Charles), *La mémoire est-elle soluble dans l’eau?*, 1996

- Ophüls (Marcel), *Hotel Terminus*, 1988
Ophüls (Max), *The sorrow and the pity*, 1971
Resnais (Alain), *Night and fog*, 1956
Rossif (Frédéric), *The witnesses*, 1961
Rossif (Frédéric), *De Nuremberg à Nuremberg*, 1988
Schirk (Heinz), *The Wannsee Conference*, 1984
Spielberg (Steven), *Schindler's list*, 1993
Stevens (George), *The diary of Anne Frank*, 1959
Veuve (Jacqueline), *Le journal de Rivesaltes 1941-1942*, 1997

Internet sites

The author has published a package entitled *Sur la Shoah* (About the Holocaust) at the Centre régional de documentation pédagogique (Regional educational documentation centre) in Dijon, France. This package comprises a bibliography of works in French, available on line at: <http://www.ac-dijon.fr/crdp/informer/prestase/bibliogr/shoah/index.htm>.

Dominique Natanson, a historian whose direct ascendants were deportees, has created a personal site with a section on *Jewish memory and education*, which comprises a huge number of documents in French, English and German, photos, a chat area for students, as well as many links to other informative and interesting sites, which he has personally checked and of which he presents a brief outline: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/d-d.natanson/>.

We have checked out all the sites listed below, as explored by Mr Natanson.

French student projects

Lycée R.-Loewy, La Souterraine

<http://www.educreuse23.ac-limoges.fr/loewy/realisations/enfants/sommaire.htm>
“Bonjour les enfants!”: the history of rescued Jewish children in the Creuse region.

Lyon

<http://persoeve.ctw.net>
“Récit d’un voyage à Auschwitz” (Account of a journey to Auschwitz) by Évelyne Py and her students, with one personal testimony and a series of photos of the trip.

Banon

<http://membres.tripod.fr/collegebanon/voyagememoire/accueil.htm>
“Voyage pour la mémoire” (A journey for the collective memory): 380 young people from southern France visited the Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz 1 camps. This site endeavours to forge a link between past and present racism and anti-Semitism.

Mornant

http://hpwww.ec-lyon.fr/hpserv/carip/memoire_net/tcheq/terezin.html

“Terezin”: a remarkable project on the Terezin camp by the Pierre-de-Ronsard junior school.

Béthune

<http://home.nordnet.fr/~fghesquier/Ausch000.htm>

“Auschwitz” – a high-quality project by the lycée André-Malraux. The teacher, Corinne Desfachelle-Krajewski, also gives examples of educational projects and other activities (with questionnaires and examples of students’ work) carried out by other teachers using the site.

Vendôme

<http://www.ctw.net/shoah/somm.htm>

“Le système concentrationnaire nazi” (The nazi concentration camp system). A very complete, well-structured and user-friendly site by Landry Bertaux, Julien Defaut, Marie Lahaye and Sylvain Prampart, students at the lycée Ronsard. A wide range of analyses and photos.

Grenoble

<http://www.ac-grenoble.fr/college/smh.fernand.leger/>

“De Marcel Peretti au n° 60415, l’enfer de la deportation à Mauthausen” (From Marcel Peretti to No. 60415: the hell of deportation to Mauthausen): an excellent project by the Fernand-Léger junior school for the “Résistance” competition 2000.

Deported families

“En mémoire d’Aron, de Miryam, de Lucien...” (In memory of Aron, Miryam and Lucien)

On Dominique Natanson’s site: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/d-d.natanson/>

His own family history in French, English and German.

“Elsa Landauer”

<http://www.4site.co.il/elsa/indexfr.html>

A tribute to Elsa Landauer, by her grandson. She was deported in 1942, and the site presents the last letter she wrote before her death.

“Shoah: un mémorial virtuel” (The Shoah: a virtual memorial)

<http://www.multimania.com/virtmemorial/>

A personal site (by Laura Quinones) describing the deportation of members of one family and comprising photos of a journey to Auschwitz.

“La destruction d’une famille, 1940-1945” (The destruction of a family 1940-1945)

<http://panoramix.univ-paris1.fr/APHG/Steinberg.html>

Jean-Louis Steinberg recounts the life of his Jewish family during the occupation, the arrests, deportation, etc.

“The Vichy government in France”

<http://levendel.home.sprynet.com/brief.html>

Isaac Levendel’s personal site. He presents a remarkable series of documents shedding light on the administrative machinery behind his parents’ deportation: censuses, circulars, a letter of denunciation, an arrest warrant, participation by Marseille gangsters, etc. Documents in French, explanations in English.

“Le sauvetage des enfants cachés durant la dernière guerre” (Rescuing children in hiding during the last war)

<http://www.orbital.fr/dletouzey/cercle/enfants.htm>

On Daniel Letouzey’s site, the 19 May 1999 conference, with a contribution by Sabine Zeitoun.

“Groupe de recherches Dannes-Camiers” (Dannes-Camiers research group)

<http://www.dannes-camiers.org/fr/index.html>

On the deportation of Belgian Jews, with a list of deportees from Liège and family photos. Historic section and archives: family documents and administrative forms. NB: there is a copy of *L’Ami du Peuple* publishing a list of Jews in Liège, thus exposed to public opprobrium and condemnation.

Camps

Birkenau

<http://remember.org/camps/birkenau/bir-list.html>

Recent photos of Auschwitz-Birkenau, with some comparisons with old shots.

“Images de la Shoah” (Images of the Holocaust)

<http://remember.org/image/index.html>

Photographs. Texts in English.

“Photos d’Auschwitz”

<http://remember.org/jacobs/index.html>

Photographs taken from 1979 to 1981 by Alan Jacobs.

Exposition d’images de l’Holocauste” (Exhibition of Holocaust images)

<http://remember.org/courage/pictures.html>

Photos of the Warsaw ghetto.

“Holocaust translations”

<http://www.tiac.net/users/kkrone/holocaust.htm>

A site containing documents (in German with English translations) and recent photos of Auschwitz.

“L’alphabet d’Auschwitz” (An Auschwitz alphabet)

<http://www.spectacle.org/695/ausch.html>

A sad, distressing alphabet. English text, photos. Numerous well-chosen quotations. Possible educational uses (studying quotations, creating a class alphabet using different words, etc.).

“KZ”

<http://www.mygale.org/expokz/>

This site, by independent photographer Serge Clauss, contains photos of the central European camps.

“Les camps oubliés” (The forgotten camps)

<http://www.jewishgen.org/ForgottenCamps/indexFr.html>

Vincent Châtel and Chuck Ferree present the “smaller camps” in English and French. A wide range of photos. Arguments to counter Holocaust denial. A mediocre library, which unfortunately recommends the highly dubious Goldhagen.

“Virtual Tour of Auschwitz”

<http://remember.org/educate/fotolist.html>

Virtual visit, photos.

“A Luke’s virtual world exhibition”

<http://shrike.depaul.edu/~lhandzli/auschwitz/>

In English.

“Samuel Radzynski: la résistance dans les camps d’Auschwitz” (Samuel Radzynski: Resistance in the Auschwitz camps)

<http://www.anti-rev.org/temoignages/Radzynski98a/>

Testimony on the well-known anti-revisionist site.

“Concentration camps”

<http://www.concentrationcampguide.com/>

A guide to the camps in English, with photos.

“L’Chaim, a Holocaust web project”

http://www.mybookmarks.com/public/jerry/expo_folders/

Virtual tour of the Dachau camp in English.

“Mauthausen”

<http://linz.orf.at/orf/gusen/>

In German and English.

Individual personalities

“Anne Frank House”

<http://www.annefrank.nl/>

In English and Dutch.

“Janusz Korczak”

<http://www.janusz-korczak.de/>

A site (mainly in German, with some English) on the educationalist Janusz Korczak, who stayed by the side of the orphans he had looked after in the Warsaw ghetto right up to the end in Treblinka.

“Primo Levi”

<http://www.multimania.com/contreloubli/primoveli.html>

In English

“Oscar Schindler”

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/schindler.html>

In English. Photos.

Extermination

“The *Einsatzgruppen*”

<http://www.netbistro.com/electriczen/>

These “killing squads” were established before the German invasion of the USSR for the purpose of liquidating Jews, Roma/Gypsies and political operatives of the Communist party. In English, with photos.

“The Ernest and Elisabeth Cassuto memorial pages: Survivors of the Holocaust”

<http://www.fred.net/nhhs/html13/dadmom.htm>

Survivors. In English, with photos.

“Expositions d’images de l’Holocauste” (Exhibitions of Holocaust images)

<http://shamash.org/holocaust/photos/index/shtml>

Belgian site in French. Distressing photos.

“L’autre face du génocide” (The other side of the genocide)

<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1995/12/BURRIN/2051.html>

The fate of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the genocide committed by the Nazi occupying forces in the USSR. An article published in *Le Monde diplomatique* by Philippe Burrin, author of “*Hitler et les Juifs: genèse d’un génocide*” (Hitler and the Jews: the genesis of a genocide) (publ. Seuil).

“Holocaust & Genocide Studies”

<http://cadvision.com/cja/holocaust.html>

A site on various genocides (Armenian, Jewish, Rwandan, etc). In English. Numerous links.

“Mars-avril 1943: la deportation des Juifs de Salonique” (March-April 1943: deportation of the Jews from Saloniki”

<http://www.sefarad.org/publication/lm/028/mars1943.html>

“The undeniable Holocaust”

<http://www.parascope.com/gallery/galleryitems/Holocaust/index.htm>

A huge range of documents, photos, letters etc. The killing squad operations in Russia, the mass extermination, the medical experiments. An extremely informative site.

Institutional sites

The Rhodes Jewish Museum

<http://www.rhodesjewishmuseum.org/holcaust.htm>

Deportation on the island of Rhodes (with sound effect and prayers in Ladino in various parts of the site ...).

Memorial museums for the victims of national socialism in Germany

<http://www.topographie.de/gedenkstaettenforum/uebersicht/e/>

All German sites of significance to the collective memory accessible via a map.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center

<http://www.wiesenthal.com/>

All the resources of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

US Holocaust Memorial Museum

<http://www.ushmm.org/>

The Washington Memorial Museum. Includes 50 000 photos.

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Authority

<http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/>

The Yad Vashem Memorial in Israel. Searches can be conducted for Holocaust victims by inputting their names. In English.

CDJC

<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/memorial-cdjc>

The site of the Paris “Centre de documentation juive contemporaine” (Contemporary Jewish documentation centre)

La Maison d’Izieu (Izieu children’s home)

<http://www.izieu.alma.fr/>

The site of the Izieu Children’s Home Memorial. In French and English.

Drancy

<http://www.chez.com/campdrancy/>

The site of the “Conservatoire historique du camp de transit français” (Historic museum for the French transit camp).

Holocaust Memorial Center

<http://www.Holocaustcenter.com/index.html>

The Detroit Memorial.

The American Friends of the Ghetto Fighter's House

<http://www.friendsofgh.org/>

The American Friends of the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters' House. Pictures of the fighting during the Warsaw rising.

The Mechelem Museum of Deportation and Resistance

<http://www.cicb.be/shoah/>

Belgian site in English.

Museum of Tolerance, Los Angeles

<http://www.wiesenthal.com/mot>

With educational site. In English.

Frances & Jacob Collection of Holocaust Materials

<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/library/Website/hiatt/kholbib.htm>

Impressive photos of the liberation of Buchenwald. Large international library. Site highlighting the Saint Edith Stein, whose canonisation prompted a great deal of controversy.

Miscellaneous

“Missing Identity”

<http://www.jewishgen.org/missing-identity/>

A site for persons seeking information on relatives missing since the Holocaust. In English.

“Literature of the Holocaust”

<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/holhome.html>

In English. Links.

“L’Hebdo”

http://www.webdo.ch/hebdo/hebdo_1997/hebdo_09/shoah_09.html

A talk given by a witness to an audience of Geneva students reproduced in issue 9 of L’Hebdo (February 1997).

“Le silence en face de l’antisémitisme en France sous l’occupation” (Silence on anti-Semitism in France during the occupation) by Mindy Myzak

<http://www.scrippscol.edu/~home/nrachlin/www/Vichy.html/myzak.htm>

On the attitude of the Catholic Church under the Vichy Regime.

“Chronologie du système concentrationnaire nazi (1933-1945)” (Chronology of the nazi concentration camp system)

<http://www.multimania.com/yhwh/chrono.htm>

“Clotexte” is a catalogue de texts useful for history teaching. The site also comprises a chronology of Auschwitz.

“Comment enseigner les crimes nazis?” (The approach to teaching about nazi crimes)

<http://www.ac-orleans-tours.fr/hist-geo/CRIMES-NAZIS.htm>

An interdisciplinary approach based on philosophy and history by Véronique de Montchalin of the Lycée Fulbert, Chartres (F).

“Procès Papon” (The Papon trial)

<http://www.matisson.com/affaire-papon/>

Site created by Matisson, who claimed damages during the criminal proceedings against Papon. Can be used to illustrate various individual histories.

Anti-négationnistes (anti-Holocaust-denial)

<http://www.anti-rev.org/>

Site by Michel Fingerhut. The most complete. Many documents, testimonies, etc. A site on which students can counter Holocaust denial arguments, in English (Dutch site): <http://www.uclorug.nl/project/Holocaust/boven.htm>

A site created by the lycée Edgar-Quinet, Paris: this secondary school has conducted a wide range of activities. The site and the lycée cater for the activities of the “Cercle d’études de la déportation et de la Shoah”, (Deportation and Holocaust study group), which is jointly led by the “Amicale d’Auschwitz” (Auschwitz Association) and the French association of history and geography teachers: http://lyc-edgar-quinet.scola.ac-paris.fr/mem_hist.#vie

Other publications from the project “Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century”

Towards a pluralist and tolerant approach to teaching history: a range of sources and new didactics (1999)

ISBN 92-871-4097-9

The challenges of the information and communication technologies facing history teaching (1999)

ISBN 92-871-3998-9

Teaching 20th century women’s history: a classroom approach (2000)

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ISBN 92-871-4315-3

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Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st century has been produced as part of the Council of Europe's history project "Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century". Given the rise of anti-Semitism in parts of Europe, the accessibility of "denial" Internet sites and the isolationist stand taken by certain European political leaders today, Holocaust teaching was given a prominent place in the project. The European ministers of education have also decided to institute in schools a Holocaust day of remembrance, reflecting each state's particular experience.

Although some countries have high standards for Holocaust teaching, others are lacking in material. Teachers often do not have in-depth knowledge of the subject and, unless they are in a position to carry out personal research, do not know how to approach a topic much too vast to be categorised simply as "history". This teaching resource, based on the work of such widely recognised authors as Raul Hilberg, Sir Martin Gilbert, Saul Friedlander and Christopher Browning, plus first-hand accounts, including those of Primo Levi, Hermann Langbein and Claude Lanzmann's interviewees, offers teachers a body of knowledge for use in course planning. In addition, the author brings to the forefront facts and figures on victims often "overlooked", Roma/Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Included is a certain amount of material about the nature and implementation of the genocide in different countries. Beyond any specific local characteristics, what emerges from the succinct descriptions of how and where this genocide was carried out is the comprehensiveness of the Nazi enterprise.



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