1 Introduction

This book offers a particular perspective on the destruction of the European Jews. It places the persecution of Jews in the context of interdependent policies regarding warfare, occupation and policing, social issues, economics, racist thought and popular racism. The study also describes the murder of Jews amidst massive violence against other groups and attempts to make connections among these different sorts of violence. This differs from narratives that examine the persecution and murder of Jews alone with little regard to the fate of other groups, on the basis of a history of ideas with relatively few other forms of contextualization. In addition, this book gives more prominence than many other works to the persecution of Jews by non-Germans and tries to provide a general analysis of this persecution across national boundaries.

This book's perspective is derived from a new approach to understanding mass violence that I have recently suggested.[1] In brief, I find the prevailing explanations too state centered, too focused on the intents and plans of rulers and too concentrated on race and ethnicity as causes, and they are usually concerned with the persecution of one group that is treated in isolation from other victim groups. Historically, by contrast, various population groups in many countries were victims of massive physical violence in which diverse social groups, acting together with state organs, participated for a multitude of reasons. These three aspects – the participatory character of violence, multiple victim groups and multi-causality – were interconnected. Simply put, the occurrence and thrust of mass violence depends on broad and diverse support, but this support is based on a variety of motives and interests that cause violence to spread in different directions and in varying intensities and forms. In emphasizing that mass violence is based on complex participatory processes, I speak of extremely violent societies. These phenomena can be traced through many important historical cases of mass

[1] For this paragraph see Gerlach 2010, esp. Chapter 1. This introduction also takes up some ideas mentioned in ibid., pp. 236–8.

violence such as the Soviet Union from the 1930s through the 1950s, the late Ottoman Empire (including the destruction of the Armenians), Cambodia, Rwanda and North America in the nineteenth century.

The same traits – broad participation, multiple motives and several victim groups – can also be found in the violence of Germans and people from other nations during World War II. I shall elaborate on this shortly, but it is important to note that it is of little value simply to mark these as extremely violent societies. Rather than being the goal, this classification should be the point of departure in thinking about how that persecution and violence came about.

A multitude of victims

Around Christmas of 1944, Buchenwald concentration camp made a monthly list of its and its sub-camps' inmates. In a printed table, the 63,837 prisoners from 28 European countries, plus "others" and "stateless," were listed in 13 categories: persons in protective custody (who were mostly political prisoners, many of them French), Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, members of the German military, clergy, "Red Spaniards," "foreign civil workers," Jews, "anti-socials," professional criminals, habitual offenders, "gypsies" and (Soviet) prisoners of war (POWs). The three largest categories, in order, were political prisoners (a specialty of Buchenwald), foreign workers and Jews. Together they accounted for close to 90% of the prisoners; Jews alone numbered about 20%.[2] Many of these prisoners, whether Jews or not, did not live to see liberation. They perished from privation and disease, especially in the overcrowded main camp; and from exhaustion and killings, above all during the death marches.

It wasn't just Jews who were killed under the Nazi regime. Contrary to popular belief, except for the period November–December 1938 most concentration camp prisoners were not Jewish. After mid 1944 more than a third were Jews again. From 1938 to 1941 – in Buchenwald and its sub-camps – 14–19% of the inmates were Jews; by June 1, 1942, it was 11%, and 2.4% by late December. In 1944 their numbers rose again – from less than 1% in May to more than 24%; by the end of February 1945 the figure was 32%.[3] Generally, there were multiple groups under persecution – victims of a variety of policies, subject to different fierce resentment, and struggling to evade repression and maintain their livelihoods

[2] "Schutzhaftlager-Rapport," KL Buchenwald, December 15, 1944, facsimile in Rose 2003, pp. 192–3. See also Gerlach 2010, p. 236.
[3] Stein 1998, pp. 169–71, 182, 184, 187. For Jewish victims of the concentration camp at Neuengamme see Bauche 1991, p. 130.

by interacting with German occupiers, national and local authorities, and diverse other social groups.

In this the German case is not unique. Not only did other regimes in Europe in the early 1940s stage (and other societies allow) anti-Jewish persecutions, usually a variety of groups were simultaneously stripped of their jobs, robbed and expelled, exposed to forced labor or murdered.

In many European countries the number of non-Jewish victims of German and Axis violence – even putting military losses aside – far surpassed that of Jews who were murdered. In the Soviet Union (as constituted by its borders of May 1941), about 30% of all German-induced loss of human life outside of battle were Jews; in France, 40%; in Greece, 20–22% and in Italy and Yugoslavia 6% each. Among Germans, about a third of the victims of Nazism were Jews.[4] In Poland, Belgium (38%) and the Czech lands (32%), non-Jews were a sizable minority of the victims. In Hungary the civilian dead were mostly Jewish.[5]

During World War II, Germans (and people from other powers) killed not only 6 million Jews but also 6–8 million other non-combatants. The largest among these non-Jewish victim groups were Soviet POWs – of whom 3 million died. Anti-guerrilla warfare in the countryside (especially in the occupied Soviet territories, Yugoslavia and Greece) claimed about a million lives. Another million, mostly urban dwellers, perished in famines caused directly by German policies. The death toll from urban terror was high, but I am not aware of reliable Europe-wide figures. Out of about 12 million people deported to Germany in the forced labor program, 300,000 may have perished – a figure that surpasses the number of disabled people and Roma and Sinti who were murdered.[6]

When non-Jewish victims appeared on the radar of historians in the past, many works focused on certain of these groups: the disabled, Sinti and Roma ('gypsies'), homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses or political

[4] About 500,000 Germans were killed by their own regime, or by their compatriots, between 1933 and 1945 – including about 180,000 disabled people and 165,000 Jews. See Pohl 2003, esp. pp. 35, 109. The number of Germans who fell victim to their own regime equaled the number of German civilian victims of Allied aerial bombing. For Greece, see Gerlach 2010, p. 238; for Yugoslavia, see Cvetković 2008 and Biondich 2002, p. 41 note 2; for Italy, see Klinkhammer 1993, pp. 552–3, 573–4; for Soviet Ukraine, see Kumanev 1991, p. 66; for France, see Lagrou 2002, esp. pp. 318–20, Lieb 2007, pp. 306, 412–13 and Lafont 1987, pp. 60–8. Approximately 75,000 French Jewish residents were murdered; among France's non-Jewish victims, about 10,000 were executed in France, 35,000 resisters died in German concentration camps, up to 20,000 civilians were victims of anti-partisan warfare, at least 30,000 mentally disabled people starved to death and 21,000 POWs died. (In addition, aerial bombing claimed up to 60,000 victims.)

[5] For Belgium, see Brachfeld 2005, p. 44 note 16; for the Czech lands, see Brandes 2006, p. 459.

[6] See Pohl 2003, p. 153; Spoerer 2001; and my own estimates.

opponents. This had much to do with a research perspective concentrating on violence against Germans and, in some cases, with pressure groups promoting the memory of their fate, a memory which served the construction of group identity. Among Germans, the focus on German victim groups served a nationalist view that excluded victims who were not compatriots and ignored German imperialism as much as possible. The disabled and Roma seemed to be worth investigating because methods similar to those used against Jews were employed to kill them, or because it was, in part, the same personnel who conducted the mission. By contrast, this book, dealing with the persecution of Jews, will otherwise largely be devoted to the quantitatively deadliest phenomena: the destruction of Soviet POWs, anti-guerrilla warfare, famines and the forced labor program.

Of course, given that much research remains to be done, one could investigate the fate of these groups one by one. In the long run, however, neatly treating each group separately will not be sufficient.[7] This study is, rather, concerned with such questions as why a variety of groups suffered from mass violence, what connected the fate of these groups, the policies against them and motives underlying the deeds. To what degree did violence against different groups occur in the same context? What did it mean for each group that they had to operate within a wider web of persecution? What was going on in societies where not just one group, but many, were excluded, stripped of their rights, dehumanized or declared hostile elements? What relationships were there between victim groups, German officials and non-German authorities? And how well integrated within their societies were those under persecution? By understanding these connections we may reach a better understanding of not only the general picture but also the persecution of each group, including the fate of the Jews.

Ways to do research on multiple victim groups

This book puts the persecution and murder of the Jews at the center and searches for links to other persecutions, and for common contexts between violence against Jews and other groups. It also offers comparative views, but it goes beyond the not uncommon, but unproductive, 'who suffered most?' approach.

Other avenues would be possible. Henry Friedlander pursued continuities of policies, ideas and perpetrators among the murders of the disabled, Jews and Roma; Dieter Pohl has offered a general account of

[7] See Friedlander 1995, p. 295 (with reference to Jews, the disabled and Roma).

different Nazi crimes one by one; Doris Bergen presented a short narrative providing a limited glance at policies against other victim groups; and Donald Bloxham placed the destruction of Jews primarily in the context of what he called "ethnopolitics."[8]

One can imagine still other approaches – such as putting no victim group, or a group other than the Jews, at the center.[9] But the reality looks different. There are thousands of books in English devoted to the destruction of 6 million European Jews. One cannot really say how many – although one can say with certainty how many books there are in the English language dealing exclusively with the second largest group of victims of Nazism, the 3 million Soviet POWs who perished: none. In English, there is neither a single monograph nor a single collected volume on this subject. So there are good reasons to talk a bit more about non-Jewish victims and not to put Jewish victimhood at the center every time one writes about German violence. This book, however, is not so avant garde as to establish this as an overall structural principle. It does not really consider non-Jewish victim groups in their own right, as they deserve. Yet the fact that the fate of Europe's Jews lies at the heart of this book by no means suggests that Jews were necessarily at the center of the thoughts of historical actors. In fact mostly they were not.

Other potential ways to approach the multitude of victims include examining those who faced persecution in one country, region or city. For example, an expert forensic commission reported about German atrocities in Černigov, Ukraine, in September 1944:

> In November 1941 there was a three-day so-called campaign to shoot the Jewish population of the city. In January 1942 the mentally disabled were shot, in the spring of 1942 the gypsies, and in the following months of the year of 1942 Soviet activists. In February and March 1943 were shot the prisoners of war and those civilians just held in the [local] camp.[10]

In reality, the 2,000 Roma were shot in June or August rather than in the spring of 1942, and the shooting of psychiatric patients started in October 1941. Beginning with these facts, one could explore the political, ideological, organizational and other connections between these massacres as well as their social effects, possibly also in conjunction with the large-scale deportations of forced laborers from the town in 1942–43 and with anti-guerrilla warfare in the vicinity.

[8] Friedlander 1995; Pohl 2003; Bergen 2003; Bloxham 2009.
[9] For all of the major victim groups in a single country see Gerlach 1999 (for Belarus) and Dieckmann 2011 (for Lithuania).
[10] Quoted in Holler 2009, p. 74; for corrections to this statement see pp. 74–6.

One can research about how one German organization, institution or unit (or individual) acted against different sorts of people. For example, there have been discussions about the motivations of 'apolitical' men in German Order Police battalions when shooting Jews in great numbers in 1941 and 1942.[11] In the debate about how these men could kill, hardly any of the authors took into account that the same units also used extreme violence against other groups. Before shooting Jews in Poland, the hotly debated Reserve Police Battalion 101, for instance, had participated in deporting almost 37,000 non-Jewish and Jewish Poles from western to central Poland in 1940, guarded the starving ghetto of Warsaw in 1941 and accompanied transports of fatally exhausted Soviet POWs in the same year.[12] Police Battalion 322, which also incited such arguments, deported or killed civilians during anti-partisan warfare in the same months when it shot Jews in the western Soviet Union in 1941, and it took part in bloody operations against guerrillas in Yugoslavia and Albania in 1943–44.[13] The approach of considering the violence of one unit against different groups has proven illuminating in respect to the 253rd Infantry Division, a German frontline division deployed to the Soviet Union. This unit killed stragglers of the Red Army, took civilians hostages, carried out reprisals against, or looted, villages near sites where there was partisan activity, employed first Soviet POWs and then civilians as forced laborers, shot some POWs and sent others back after having used them to the point of total exhaustion, forced civilians to clear mines, recruited civilians as forced labor for the Reich, helped concentrate 33,000 women and children in an improvised camp that was mined and intentionally infested with typhoid (killing 9,000) in 1944, and destroyed housing on 5,000 km^2 while in retreat. A study showed that virtually all sub-units took part in violence against non-combatants and that some of the relevant policies and strategies were developed within the division without detailed instructions from above.[14] The German 1st Mountain Division was involved in the pogrom against Jews in Lvov, Ukraine, in 1941, killed thousands of civilians during anti-guerrilla warfare in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania in 1943–44, shot hostages, massacred Italian officers and soldiers in Kephalonia, Greece, after Italy had withdrawn from

[11] See the controversy about Reserve Police Battalion 101 between Browning 1993 and Goldhagen 1997.
[12] Keller 2011, pp. 132–3; Mallmann 2004, p. 81; for certain aspects see also Browning 1993, pp. 41–3. Curilla 2006 (pp. 125–702) mentions other victims for many Order Police units, especially during anti-partisan warfare.
[13] See the extensive files of that unit in BA D-H film, p. 812–27.
[14] Rass 2003, pp. 331–402; Rass 2005, pp. 80–6.

the war, and helped deport Jews from northwestern Greece who would later be killed at Auschwitz.[15]

Another set of questions could be linked to documents such as the aforementioned Buchenwald roll call report. Here, the Germans had herded people from different backgrounds into a single place. But were they really in a position to treat them differently according to their thirteen neat categories? Did they receive different food rations, clothing or medical treatment? Could the guards keep them spatially separate? Could the prisoners be forced to do distinct sorts of work? In the cramped camp, did the guards have time to mete out different kinds of beating, or torture, to prisoners from each category? Or did the conditions tend to level the maltreatment in such a way that it converged to become the same for everybody?[16] How far, then, were things under control and going according to plan in Buchenwald? Were imaginations of racial-social stratification actually being carried into effect (as it was indeed often possible for German organizers in forced labor camps and POW camps)? And what were the crucial dynamics among the prisoners, who comprised – according to prisoner categories and nationalities – one hundred groups and included native speakers of at least twenty-four languages?

There were other multi-purpose camps for civilian inmates, some of which were run by the German military.[17] Here too it would appear that managing violence turned out to be more difficult than expected and that people who had started out as being subject to distinct types of persecution were thrown together. Analogous observations can be made about other camps such as the German camp in Semlin (Zajmiste), Serbia, or the Croatian camp of Jasenovac. Even what may appear as a single group often consisted of different sub-sets – like the non-Jewish Polish prisoners in Mauthausen who included members of the intelligentsia, forced workers, political resisters and forced evacuees from Warsaw.[18]

Not all of these approaches can be taken in this book, and not all these questions can be answered. As a synthesis, it cannot offer a comprehensive study of individual localities, units or institutions. Rather, this study traces the fate of one group and tries to establish systematically how this fate was related to the treatment of other people. This has not been done

[15] Meyer 2008, pp. 58–65, 113–27, 159–224, 384–95, 463–555, 567–609.
[16] Blatman 2011 (pp. 416–18) makes the latter argument for death marches from concentration camps in 1945.
[17] For example, see Commander of Rear Army Area 580 (2nd Army), directive of January 14, 1943, in Müller 1982, pp. 144–5.
[18] See Mataušić 2006, p. 48; Mihovilović and Smreka 2006, pp. 218–9; Pavlowitch 2008, p. 70 note 19; Cvetković 2008, p. 367; for Mauthausen see Filipkowski 2005, pp. 129–36.

before. Jews found themselves in what could be called a labyrinth of persecution that was almost inescapable; but simultaneously, other groups wandered around trapped in their different mazes. Thus, I will also compare survival and coping strategies of the different groups.

A variety of contexts and motivations for violence

As with the persecution of the Jews, whoever considers the non-Jewish victims of German and Axis violence in their entirety must also take account of imperialism. Some 300,000–350,000 of the 6–8 million non-Jews killed were German; that is, about 95% were foreigners from the German point of view. Of the 6 million Jews slain, about 165,000 were German, meaning 97% were foreign.[19] Quantitatively, non-German non-Jews were at an almost tenfold greater risk of being killed under the Nazi regime (3–4% out of a population of 220 million) than German non-Jews (0.4–0.5%). To a degree, this tendency can also be observed among Jews, who ran a much higher risk than non-Jews: a third of German Jews died, but more than 80% of non-German Jews were killed.[20] Overwhelmingly, both the Jews and the non-Jews who were killed were foreign; most perished in German-occupied countries, and, of course, most died after September 1939. This is why it is difficult to discuss the fate of these people outside the context of war and occupation. Needless to add, Germany did not wage a war of expansion just to bring more Jews under its control.

Had the Nazi regime ended in the summer of 1939, before World War II started, it would have been remembered for causing several thousand deaths, for persecuting German, Austrian and Czech Jews and driving half of them into exile, for arresting more than 100,000 political opponents and tens of thousands of social deviants, and for sterilizing 300,000 people by force. At that time, many much bloodier regimes ruled in Europe and elsewhere. Had Nazi Germany collapsed by May 1941, it would be remembered for a war of aggression, forced labor deportations, the deportation of 300,000 non-Jews and Jews from western to central Poland, and the murder of 200,000 civilians: half the latter victims were mentally disabled people in Germany and Poland, a quarter belonged to the Polish leadership, tens of thousands were innocent victims of German aerial attacks, and many thousands were Jews who were starved to death

[19] By contrast, Melson 1992 examines the murder of Jews in Wold War II as "total domestic genocide" (pp. 5, 39, 278).

[20] These figures are based on an estimate of about 1.3 million survivors from Axis-controlled territories (including Tunisia and Libya, but excluding Soviet Jewish citizens who fled eastward and never came under German rule).

Table 1.1[21] *Temporal distribution of peaks of destruction*

Victim group	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Soviet POWs		---------			
Famine victims			--------		
Jews				-------	
Forced-labor recruitment			----------	----------	
Anti-guerrilla warfare				----------	----------
Civil wars					----------

in large ghettos or killed in the fall of 1939.[22] By that time, Soviet and Japanese policies had caused millions of deaths, and, arguably, fascist Italy (primarily in Africa) and Francoist Spain killed more civilians than Germany did. Soldiers went into battle having watched newsreels about war and atrocities in China, Ethiopia and Spain.[23] Only later would Nazi Germany surpass the death toll of all these regimes and societies. But on May 13, 1940, when Winston Churchill took office as Prime Minister of Great Britain, it was an exaggeration to call Nazi Germany a regime "never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime."[24]

Therefore, the evolutionary dimension is also important in the search for connections among different forms and directions of violence. So identifying temporal clusters may be illustrative. What is presented in Table 1.1 is a very tentative, macro-level version of them. Obviously, the bulk of German killings of civilians and other non-combatants took place during World War II; more precisely, 95% of all these deaths occurred after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Table 1.1 shows the most intense period of violence relating to Nazi rule for each of the largest victim groups.

Persecutions clearly became more brutal as the war intensified. Geographically, violence spread from the German-occupied Soviet territories and Yugoslavia to other parts of Europe that were increasingly also treated and exploited nearly as brutally as the rear areas of the Eastern Front. With the outcome of the world conflict seemingly on knife edge in

[21] For the data on Soviet POWs and famine victims, see Chapter 9; for Jews, see Chapter 4; for forced labor recruitment, see Chapter 8; for anti-guerrilla warfare and civil wars, see Chapter 11.
[22] See Browning 1993, p. xv; Browning 1998a, pp. 127–8.
[23] For example letter by Frank Pickesgill, September 1, 1939, in Bähr 1961, pp. 18–19.
[24] See www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/92-blood-toil-tears-and-sweat (accessed March 8, 2013).

1941–42, the German attempt to appropriate Europe's resources – first food and then labor – intensified. Food denial caused the death of millions of Soviet POWs. They were the largest victim group in 1941. In 1942 it was the Jews, and in 1943 the Jews were on a par with rural populations suspected of supporting guerrillas. Food policy was also linked to the murder of Jews in Poland and elsewhere.[25] The peak of the destruction of Jewry coincided with a giant mobilization of labor, primarily of Soviet and Polish civilians who created a reservoir large enough for Germany to be able to do without badly weakened Soviet POWs and Jews. In the second half of the war, the focus of the German leadership shifted to conscripting labor in the countryside and combating resistance to the occupation. The German regime became even harsher in rural areas than before as taxation and the collection of agricultural produce intensified,[26] and hiding became more difficult, including for Jews. Violent conflicts within societies under occupation also came to the surface. These were the result of political disagreements about the future, as well as earlier internal stress caused by the oppression and impoverishment of many, and gains for a few. Of course, these are only tendencies, and this is in no way exhaustive. Locally, events often may have evolved quite differently.

Many facts suggest that factors other than anti-Jewish attitudes influenced the fate of Jews and their chances of survival. The Nazi government largely allowed Jews to function within the economy as entrepreneurs, and as professionals, until 1938; it deported Jews to Germany as forced labor in 1944 having previously declared Germany to be more or less free of Jews before then; the great majority of British, American, French and Yugoslav Jews in German POW camps survived the war unharmed. Also, the fiercely anti-Jewish Romanian government first organized the mass slaughter and starvation of at least 250,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in occupied Transnistria, but then refused to hand over another 250,000 Romanian Jews to Germany, allowing them to survive. This book examines such factors.

Participatory violence

As more victim groups enter the picture, the fact that a wide array of people took part in the violence becomes even clearer. Persecution was not only a matter of centralized government policies and a handful of state authorities, particularly the SS and police. Most Soviet POWs died

[25] See Gerlach 1998a and Chapter 10.
[26] For northwestern Russia see Hill 2005, p. 113; for eastern Belarus and western central Russia see Terry 2005.