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. 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 violence

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%.  

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%. 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.

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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. 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.

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.

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

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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 Cvetkovic 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. 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 nar-
rative 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.”

One can imagine still other approaches – such as putting no victim
group, or a group other than the Jews, at the center. 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 lar-
gest group of victims of Nazism, the 3 million Soviet POWs who per-
ished: 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, how-
ever, 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 necessar-
ily 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 Cernigov, 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.

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 pol-
itical, 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.

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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. 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. 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. 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 km² 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. 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.
the war, and helped deport Jews from northwestern Greece who would later be killed at Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{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?\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{16} Blatman 2011 (pp. 416–18) makes the latter argument for death marches from concentration camps in 1945.
\textsuperscript{17} For example, see Commander of Rear Army Area 580 (2nd Army), directive of January 14, 1943, in Müller 1982, pp. 144–5.
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.\footnote{By contrast, Melson 1992 examines the murder of Jews in World War II as “total domestic genocide” (pp. 5, 39, 278).} 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.\footnote{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).} 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.
in large ghettos or killed in the fall of 1939.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim group</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
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<tr>
<td>Soviet POWs</td>
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<td>Famine victims</td>
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<td>Jews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forced-labor recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-guerrilla warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil wars</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1\textsuperscript{21} Temporal distribution of peaks of destruction

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{22} See Browning 1993, p. xv; Browning 1998a, pp. 127–8.

\textsuperscript{23} For example letter by Frank Pickesgill, September 1, 1939, in Bähr 1961, pp. 18–19.

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.\footnote{See Gerlach 1998a and Chapter 10.} 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,\footnote{For northwestern Russia see Hill 2005, p. 113; for eastern Belarus and western central Russia see Terry 2005.} 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...
in army custody. The conditions of forced labor were set in part by the management of private companies and sometimes by commanders of military units. Civil and military administrations organized forced labor recruitment, and they were also in charge of food policies in general and the feeding, housing and labor of Jews – at least until 1942–43, and locally even longer. They also carried out many selections of Jews either for forced labor or for death. Although the SS and police carried out most of the mass killings of Jews, this does not mean that they alone determined the underlying policies. The different attitudes, interests, life stories and education of others who co-determined these policies also matter.

Occupation policies were important given that the overwhelming majority of victims, also Jewish victims, were from occupied countries. However, there was no single German institution that organized the persecution of European Jews, nor was there a single Nazi office that assigned a place in the hierarchy for the peoples of Europe. “Neither was there a map showing how Europe was supposed to look after ‘final victory’ nor a master plan for the destruction of the European Jews.” This has profound consequences for analysis. The often-cited ‘new order’ that Germany introduced was nowhere defined. There was no planned or coherent system of occupation throughout German-controlled Europe – virtually every conquered country got a different status, and the occupation was organized differently in different places. So it would appear that we need to understand patterns in the practice of occupation. Multiple actors shaped this practice: the German leadership in Berlin, government ministries and other central agencies, different types of civilian and military administrations, which were given considerable autonomy, and, to a degree, also the SS and police. This in turn means that these agents acted on the basis of a variety of interests and attitudes. Many of the individuals involved were not even Nazis (i.e., members of the Nazi Party) but different sorts of conservatives, chauvinists and racists (see Chapter 6). Even among real Nazis, political and racial thinking was inconsistent; for example, there seems to have been no clear and unequivocal “racial” evaluation of Slavs (see Chapter 7).

Genocide experts and Holocaust specialists have both focused overwhelmingly on the state and on government-orchestrated crimes. The resulting narrative in Holocaust studies is a trap in which the state acts and the victims merely react or are altogether passive and powerless. Persecution, according to a widespread view, was conducted by agents of the state machinery merely to carry government policy into effect. Among the reasons why perpetrator and victim history often don’t quite

27 Hilberg 1992a, p. 22.
seem to match, one is also a methodological – perpetrator history has been written as political history, victim experience more as social history.

Overcoming this mismatch requires the writing of the history of mass violence more as one of social actors. This approach also addresses the unfortunate tendency in studies of Nazism to make the state, ‘the Germans,’ ‘the Poles,’ and so on, appear as monolithic. This paper over differences between social groups and contradictions in personal, local and regional behavior. Take, for example, anti-partisan warfare. To be sure, the writing of its history should include German strategies, German attitudes toward conquered populations, and a study of the German army, SS and police units and administrations. However, in no country could German functionaries totally disregard the local population or the national government, if there was one, as a political factor. And warfare against guerrillas usually involved local authorities, police forces or paramilitaries. Germans tried to utilize these forces, yet these also tried to instrumentalize the Germans just as much. Partisan conflicts were not only rooted in the German (or Italian, Bulgarian, etc.) occupation, but also in pre-existing tensions within the societies concerned. And occupation further deepened conflicts among Greeks, Soviets, Italians, and so on. All of the guerrilla wars included an element of internal struggle, and some of them evolved into outright civil war under German occupation in the early 1940s. Often, multiple parties fought over contrasting visions of their country’s future. It is possible, though too limiting, to write this purely as a history of Nazi treatment of other peoples. If one includes locals in the analysis, one could still write this strictly as a political history, but this approach would also disregard much of the broader context. Hence, I suggest including elements of a social history of mass violence, which, in this case, also facilitates a broader understanding of the survival chances of Jews caught in the middle of this pattern of conflict (see Chapter 11). I will make similar arguments about the participatory character of famines, which are complex social processes that no government – not even a Nazi one – can completely control. Market mechanisms sometimes helped Jews survive, at least for some time, but violent policies often tried to counter such survival strategies (see Chapter 9).

In connection with these two issues of ‘security’ and food, persecution against Jews and others took place in an environment of restrictions on movement and communication, of numerous prohibitions and threats, registrations, checks, raids, and the need for official papers, and of rationing, inflation and black markets – all of which

28 A similar demand is made in Bajohr and Pohl 2006, pp. 10, 17.
made the struggle for survival so hard. And it happened in the context of the waning of solidarity that accompanied social fragmentation in countries ridden by conflict. Those wanting to investigate one or more of the persecutions can hardly leave aside the crises in European societies.

Even if one focuses on the German persecutors, a concentration on government policies alone will not suffice. The possibilities offered for local participation to shape policies within the apparatus, the initiatives ‘from below’ to do so, the opportunities given to the forerunners of violent ideas and the denunciations – all this modified or diluted the state’s monopoly on violence. Many German initiators or perpetrators of violence were not Nazis, such that ideas other than those pertaining to strictly Nazi conviction (e.g., Christian, conservative, nationalist, anti-communist) motivated them (see Chapter 6). This, too, points to the need to include more social history in what is now perpetrator history. When one reconstructs a victim’s perspective, it becomes quite clear that the persecuted interacted not just with structures, authorities, or offices, but with people, and tried to find a modus of survival with them.

However, looking at Germans is not enough. The violence against Jews during World War II had not only a European geographical scope, but also a European political dimension beyond German actions. German forces occupied northern France for four whole years, and all of France for one-and-a-half years; and yet three-quarters of the Jews in France survived. This demonstrates that there were limits to German power, which implies, in turn, that the influence of non-German governments and societies on mass violence in the 1930s and 1940s needs to be studied. The roles of non-Germans, as we will see, were crucial beyond merely the low numbers of direct killings (non-Germans not under German command may have killed no more than 5–6% of the 6 million Jewish victims). Foreign influences were complex, as is again shown by the case of France, which had a national government and administration that was largely hostile to Jews, and a society comprised of many citizens who were not friendly to Jews either, but where deportation and murder were often obstructed. By no means should what I call the ‘European dimension’ imply that Europeans acted unanimously, all of them willing to victimize Jews. Much research has already been conducted on this European dimension, but so far there is little in the way of a synthetic analysis. My attempt to produce one (in Chapters 12–14) is informed by the approach of global history, which tries to go beyond national histories and make connections and comparisons across borders to include non-state actors. In the 1990s much research focused on German agents;
in the 2000s it was more about non-Germans. My account tries to fuse these tendencies.  

This leads us to some of this volume’s important limitations. It is a synthesis, not a comprehensive study that covers all aspects of its topic. It does not deal with the attitudes and actions of states fighting Germany and with the aftermath of persecution, and it does not discuss the many interpretations and debates in the historiography. On a certain level of abstraction, it deals with the interrelationships of different persecutions with that of the Jews, with a variety of contexts and policy issues, and with the policies of various countries. But in terms of persecutors, this book can only sketch tendencies in the behavior of groups. As a synthesis, it says little about the complexity and contradictions of individuals’ motivations and personalities. As part of this approach, this study will argue often on the basis of numbers and percentages – as this introduction already has done. Works on the persecution of European Jews that emphasize quantitative arguments have often been sharply criticized, yet I find them useful. It is true that statistics cannot provide a full understanding of a human life, be it a victim or a persecutor. But behind the statistics in this volume stand critical implications for human fates, and the options that persecuted people had and those that were barred for them. If read carefully, the numbers can speak volumes.

Terminology and structure of this volume

At this point, some remarks on terminology seem appropriate. There are a number of words I will try to avoid because of the serious misconceptions they might lead to. The terms ‘Holocaust’ and ‘Shoah’ are not useful since neither has any analytical value. ‘Holocaust’ (derived from the Greek holókauton, or burned sacrifice) has a religious connotation unbefitting of the event it is supposed to refer to, and users of this term may mean by it either the persecution and murder of Jews alone, or Nazi German violence against any group more generally. The word ‘Shoah’ carries undertones of natural disaster. Importantly, ‘Holocaust’ and ‘Shoah’ have also been criticized as “teleological and anachronistic” terms that convey a retrospective view that makes complex processes

Aside from Europeans, north African actors also have to be taken into account. About 2,000 Tunisian and Libyan Jews may have perished: see Sebag 1991, p. 254; Roumani 2008, pp. 29–35.

For example, Fein 1979. Criticisms of her study are summarized in Croes 2011, pp. 68–74 and Zeller and Griffioen 1996, pp. 35–6.


Bauer 2013, p. 345 note 2.
appear “as a single event.”

‘Auschwitz’ as a metaphor for the entire extermination of Europe’s Jews is misleading precisely because it implies a more centralized, factory-like process of the persecution and annihilation than what was actually the case. Only one in six who fell victim to the extermination of European Jews died in Auschwitz (and every second murdered Jew died by gas), and little more than 1% of all non-Jews who died as a result of German policies did so in Auschwitz. ‘Final solution’ is a popular term, but out of the question – not only because it is an expression of perpetrator language, but also because it has changed its meaning over time. In 1937 and 1940, those who used it usually meant something other than total extermination.

I shall not use the words ‘anti-Semite’ or ‘anti-Semitic’ because of the possible misunderstanding that I also mean attitudes hostile toward Arabs and other groups to be included. And despite the fact that Hitler and others called themselves anti-Semites, their thinking and policies did not necessarily apply scientific racism as much as the use of that term suggests (see Chapter 7). Instead of ‘anti-Semitic,’ I will use expressions such as ‘anti-Jewish.’ Some scholars have even objected to the term ‘Jew’ with regard to the persecution of the 1930s and 1940s because it had no clear definition. At the time, ‘Jew’ could include persons converted to Christianity decades before, who did not define themselves as Jews and people not recognized as Jews by Jewish communities. Rather, it applied to people who a state’s representatives or citizens categorized as Jews. But one doesn’t want to continually repeat this qualification, and writing the word ‘Jew’ in quotation marks instead does not solve this problem of terminology either. I will also avoid the terms ‘collaboration’ or ‘collaborator,’ since in this context they connote, for many Europeans, treason against one’s country – whereas in fact most so-called ‘collaborators’ regarded themselves as fierce nationalists. The concept ‘collaboration’ has hampered research in the past. Additionally, so-called ‘puppet states’ did not necessarily act like puppets. Finally, I will not speak of ‘perpetrators’ since this term – derived as it is from a legal framework that proved not very successful in analyzing or punishing the acts in question – unduly limits guilt to those few people carrying out, or responsible in a narrow sense, for violent acts, and separates them

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34 Here I differ from Traverso 1999, pp. 7–9.
35 For example, see the skepticism of Strauss and Kampe 1988, p. 10, and Wistrich 1991, p. xvi. Wistrich starts his book with the phrase: “Antisemitism is a problematic term” (ibid., p. xv). Nazis used the semantic field around “anti-Semitism” less frequently than many assume: Rüüp 1975, p. 112.
36 Cole 1999; less radical is Lewkowicz 2006.
too easily from larger groups involved in such acts. Rather, I will speak of ‘persecutors.’ It has to be added that, in my view, ‘persecution’ includes official and semi-state official measures, but also the actions of non-state agents.  

This book’s structure deviates from most studies of the persecution and murder of European Jews. Many syntheses and comprehensive studies follow a more or less chronological order. Some are arranged country by country. A few combine a chronological with a thematic approach. My book keeps the initial chronological account (which follows after this introduction) relatively short, and then offers two larger analytical sections in addition to chapters on persecutors’ and victims’ responses. One section consists of chapters that each deal with one ideological, political or economic context of the persecution of Jews and also make connections with policies against other major affected victim groups. The second group of chapters deals with the persecution of Jews by non-German states and societies. In this way, the book offers more analysis than narrative; it tells few exemplary stories.

38 For Pohl, the term includes only state and semi-state policies: Pohl 2003, p. 1.
40 Hilberg 1994a; Benz 1991.
41 Dawidowicz 1987.