

THE FINAL SOLUTION: THE TERM AND THE PLAN

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In the language of the Nazis, the term the 'final solution of the Jewish question' (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*) referred to their plan to remove the Jewish population in Europe. This removal took on various forms, following a precise chronology: emigration, expulsion/deportation, murder. But before examining the chronology of Nazi policies, which is of central historiographical importance since it provides a comprehensive interpretation of Nazism and the Third Reich, we should look at the history of the term, which first appeared in nineteenth-century Europe.

WHAT WAS THE 'JEWISH QUESTION'?

A 'solution' necessarily implies a 'problem' or a 'question'. The 'Jewish question' had featured heavily in political discourse and debate in Europe ever since the French Revolution. The Revolution had given French Jews full equality and citizenship, removing all the legal restrictions they had suffered under the divine right of a Christian monarchy. Enabling Jews to 'come out of the ghetto', in the legal and geographical sense, it had brought them political dignity and equal rights. The 'emancipation of the Jews' in France coincided with that of the Protestants who had been 'tolerated' since 1787 and became full citizens in 1789. But much more than for the Protestants, the granting of citizenship to Jews marked a break with age-old prejudice and persecution in the Christian West.

In the wake of the French Revolution, ideas contained in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) and in the Civil Code (1804), spread through Europe, and Jewish emancipation was achieved in several countries. Initially, these were states created by French conquest (Batavian Republic, 1796), territories occupied by France (Kingdom of Westphalia, 1808) or French allies (Prussia, 1812), followed by other

countries (Sweden in 1835, Britain in 1858, Russia in the 1917 revolution).

In 1843, the German theologian and philosopher Bruno Bauer published *Die Judenfrage* (The Jewish Question), in which he examined the compatibility of the Jewish religion with the political and legal framework of Christian states. In 1844, in his commentary *On the Jewish Question*, Karl Marx proposed a radical response to this problem: Jews should merge into the universal and abandon the particularism of their culture and religion which, perhaps more so than Christian religions, contributed to alienating and marginalizing Jewish individuals in western societies (Marx's own family had converted to Protestantism).

As emancipation progressed, the 'Jewish Question' (how to make Jews full citizens) began to turn into a 'Jewish problem' for anti-Semites, who perceived the success of this emancipation and the integration of Jews into states and nations as a threat. They argued that Jews, having emerged from the ghettos to become full citizens, were now hard to distinguish from anyone else: they had often changed their surnames or adopted non-Jewish first names, or they had converted or moved into 'Christian' neighborhoods. They thus threatened to change and subvert traditional Christian societies or even, according to those well-versed in the racial sciences that were in vogue at the time, to endanger the 'racial body'. The 'racial anthropology' that had become so popular almost everywhere in the West since the start of the eighteenth century, turned the 'Jewish Question' into a problem of biology. The arguments put forward were becoming ever more threatening, and by the 1860s the use of the expression 'the Jewish question' was a clear sign of anti-Semitism: emancipation and integration were merely cultural phenomena and did nothing to change the biological nature of Jewish identity. Integration, it was claimed, was therefore impossible, and changes of first names (from *Moses* to *Friedrich* in Germany) and patronyms, or baptism into the Catholic or Protestant faith, altered nothing. *Jud bleibt*

Jud, according to the proponents of the most extreme biological and racist anti-Semitism. In Germany, the journalist Wilhelm Marr popularized the word 'anti-Semitism' during the 1870s (the 'League of Anti-Semites' was set up in 1879), clearly indicating the hardening of this racial-biological approach: the Semite is a biological foreign body. Famous and highly regarded intellectuals joined the fray: in 1881 the economist Eugen Dühring published *Die Judenfrage als Racen-, Sitten- und Culturfrage: Mit einer weltgeschichtlichen Antwort* (The Jewish Question as a Question of Race, Customs and Culture: With an Answer Relating to World History). His ideas were vulgarized by fanatical propagandists like Theodor Fritsch, author in 1887 of an *Antisemiten-Katechismus* (Anti-Semitic Catechism), republished in 1907 under the title *Handbuch der Judenfrage* (Handbook of the Jewish Question). The German equivalent of Édouard Drumont's *La France juive* (1886) in its crudeness, stupidity and violence, it was equally popular. In a context of economic recession, and in the face of waves of Jewish refugees fleeing from pogroms in Eastern Europe to seek safety in France, anti-Semitism of a basically xenophobic type (stigmatizing the poor, foreigners, those who spoke with strong accents) spread in Western Europe, less in Germany than in Austria (a multinational state where those on the Right warned of the danger of 'being swamped' by the German part of the population) or in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair.

In 1946, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Jean-Paul Sartre revived the expression ironically, in his *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Anti-Semite and Jew*), an examination of the nature of anti-Semitism, which he saw as a particular form of racism based on an age-old cultural heritage reinforced by 'racial science' and the resentments created by the economic development of contemporary societies (for any individuals crushed by their social circumstances, such as unemployment, antisemitism will always provide the means to feel superior or better, simply through their birth).

THE 'SOLUTION' TO THE 'JEWISH QUESTION'

Anti-Semitic texts proposed 'a definitive solution to the Jewish question', as Eugen Dühring wrote in 1881. Details varied from author to author, but the basis of the 'solution' was always the same: removal of the Jews.

While some, like Karl Marx, advocated that Jews should disappear as Jews, elevating themselves to a rational, civic universality by abandoning their culture and religion, anti-Semites argued that it was impossible for Jews to disappear as Jews (by becoming Christian, for example). They had to disappear altogether, at least geographically, and, as the most extreme argued, biologically.

To achieve this aim, 'solutions' were proposed which basically advocated a return to the situation before the French Revolution, to that of the Christian *anciens regimes*: limited civic rights, social and physical ghettoization, numerous legal restrictions. The Jews were not seen as citizens of the nations that were forming in the nineteenth century but as foreign guests of those nations. Thus, they were not entitled to the same rights as citizens.

Given the progress of emancipation and the successful integration of the Jewish population, anti-Semites sometimes advocated more radical solutions, inspired by the 'racial science' of the time: for example, restricting numbers through compulsory sterilization. Confronted with this flood of hostile propaganda, and disturbing events like the Dreyfus Affair in France, some Jews took the anti-Semites at their word. They prepared to leave to recover the land they had lost through the Roman conquest and the diasporas since 67 BC. In response to Dühring, Fritsch, Drumont, Vacher de Lapouge, Paul de Lagarde and others, Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, published *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) in 1896. The Protestant theologian Johann Friedrich Heman followed in his footsteps in 1897 with *Der Weg zur endgültigen Lösung der Judenfrage* (*The Path to*

a Definitive Solution to the Jewish Question), advocating the creation of a Jewish nation state in the Middle East.

These Zionist arguments and plans provoked much debate. Some anti-Semites believed that this was undoubtedly the best way of getting rid of the Jews, while others, obsessed by the notion of a Jewish 'conspiracy' or a Jewish 'international', feared that a concentration of Jews in the Orient would create a kind of Jewish Vatican, much more powerful than the Catholic version, which would become the military headquarters for future world domination.

NAZI ANTI-SEMITISM

These arguments and proposals from the second half of the nineteenth century reappeared in Nazi discourse and in the political development of the NSDAP and then the Third Reich in relation to German and later also other European Jews. Given the extent to which Nazi anti-Semitism was part of a European – and more broadly, Western – culture deeply impregnated with Christian anti-Judaism and biological and political anti-Semitism, this is hardly surprising.

Anti-Semitism flourished in the ranks of the nationalist Right in Europe, whose members were anxious to preserve the homogeneity, the composition and the authenticity of the social groups which had formed nation states in the nineteenth century. Without such cultural and racial homogeneity there could be no nation, they claimed. Anti-Semitism was also found in the Left: the 'Jew' became the metaphor of rootless capitalism, the embodiment of the oppression of the proletariat.

All these different strands (right-wing nationalist anti-Semitism, religious anti-Semitism, left-wing anti-Semitism) came together in the melting pot and synthesis of Nazism, as expressed in the 25 points of the NSDAP programme announced on 24 February 1920. Mainly drawn up to win over the working class from communism and social democracy, this programme adopted

some of the rhetoric and ideas of the Left (such as the struggle against war profiteers, nationalization of major industries) but also embraced the *völkisch* anti-Semitism of the ethnic-nationalist Right, who defined a people as a homogenous body, a pure racial and biological unity. Articles 4 and 5 of the programme thus proclaimed 'Only a member of the 'Volk' can be a citizen. A member of the 'Volk' can only be one who is of German blood, without consideration of creed. Consequently, no Jew can be a member of the Volk.' Therefore, a Jew can 'live in Germany only as a guest, and must be under the authority of legislation for foreigners.'

Everything had to be precise and clear. As Hitler declared, the Nazis rejected 'emotional anti-Semitism'; the anti-Semitism they practiced was a rational one. Pogroms achieved nothing – their aim was 'quite simply the total removal of the Jews' from the German race and German territory. In his letters and speeches Hitler often mentioned other, even more radical, 'solutions'. He seemed to revel in the violence of his language, which he amplified by raging at the catastrophic circumstances Germany was facing (defeat, the 1918 revolution, the Treaty of Versailles, the quasi-civil war between 1919 and 1923, hyperinflation, the occupation of the Ruhr, the Weimar Republic and democracy), for which he held the Jews responsible. Once again, there was nothing new in the Nazis' message: behind every social trauma, every shocking or even inexplicable event (the revolution and the defeat of 1918, for example), there was a plot, a conspiracy. The Jews were accused of stabbing the German army in the back and bringing the socialists and communists to power.

NAZI POLICY

The menacing language of the Nazis was firmly in the tradition of the most extreme anti-Semites since the end of the nineteenth century. From Paul de Lagarde, who had drawn his ideas from the natural sciences and medicine using terms like 'bacillus' and 'microbe' as metaphors, they borrowed seemingly incontrovertible arguments drawn from the language of science and diagnostic

medicine: 'the body of the German people is sick', 'we cannot take half measures with a dangerous virus', etc.

Does this mean that they thought that the Jews should be eradicated (*ausgerottet*) like a disease? Crushed (*vernichtet*) like insects? The words are used, the reasoning is there, and this indisputably creates a mental universe in which terrible atrocities acquire a meaning and a justification.

But it is important not to lose sight of history and to remember how things changed over time: not everything was written down or decided in 1919. Treblinka was not created by Paul de Lagarde or Theodor Fritsch. The murder of millions of people was unthinkable for a long time (if only at the logistical level) even for the most extreme Nazis. Contexts and plans had to slowly evolve for 'the final solution' to take on the meaning – the definitive meaning – as it became known a posteriori.

From 1933 to 1941, Nazi policy was summed up in the notorious slogan *Juden raus!*, 'Jews out!', a classical example of the most brutal form of political anti-Semitism. From a biological point of view, it was argued, Jews were not only foreign but also dangerous because they were contaminating, so they had to be driven out from the German 'race' and its *Lebensraum* (living space). All the measures taken by the Nazis after 1933 aimed at achieving this goal of a Germany that was *judenfrei* or *judenrein* ('free of' or 'purified of' Jews).

More than 400 new laws and decrees descended on German Jews after the 'seizure of power' in January 1933: the exclusion from the civil service (law of 7 April 1933 on 'the restoration of the professional civil service'), and from a growing range of professions, bans from driving, owning musical instruments, shopping before 5 pm, entering an ever-increasing number of public places, etc.

More than sudden attacks of a pogromic nature (like the – unsuccessful – boycott of Jewish shops on 1 April 1933), it was this slow suffocation that led German Jews to emigrate. From this point of view, Nazi policy was a success: a significant number of Jews left Germany. Of the 500,000 Jews recorded in the census of 16 June 1933, 175,000 had emigrated by 1937.

1938: PERSECUTION INTENSIFIES

Jews were leaving Germany but the country itself was expanding through the Anschluss of March 1938 and the annexation of the Sudetenland to the German Reich (October 1938) to become Greater Germany.

The remarkable success of German foreign policy in achieving the aims of the pan-Germanist programme through this ethnic concentration posed an obvious 'racial' problem. With Austria and the Sudetenland, 200,000 Jews came under Nazi jurisdiction – more than the total number of Jews who had emigrated from Germany since 1933.

Slow repression by the law was now replaced by harsher methods. In Austria, the SD and SS set up a 'Central Office for Jewish Emigration' (*Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung*) in Vienna, run by lieutenant-colonel Adolf Eichmann, who was considered an expert on the 'Jewish question' within the ranks of the SD, as was his assistant, captain Alois Brunner. The expulsion of Austrian Jews was brutally efficient. In November 1938, Reinhard Heydrich was pleased to announce the departure of 45,000 Jews in record time.

The Vienna 'Central Office' became a model: the Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Reichszentrale für jüdische Auswanderung*) opened in Berlin on 11 February 1939. This was created on the initiative of Hermann Göring, following a proposal by Heydrich. The first director of the Office was Colonel Heinrich Müller, succeeded a few months later by Eichmann.

Between the 'success' in Vienna in the summer of 1938, and the winter of 1939, when Göring decided to extend his Austrian experiment to the whole of the Reich, there came the annexation of the Sudetenland (which created a new demographic problem, as it had in Austria) and the pogrom of *Kristallnacht*.

This pogrom, the first display of mass violence against the Jews in Germany since the humiliations and boycott of 1933, marked a break with the line of political and 'rational' anti-Semitism followed since the Nazis had come to power.

It is usually seen as a response to the killing of Ernst vom Rath, an official at the German embassy in, by the Polish Jewish immigrant Herschel Grynszpan. Grynszpan had given political significance to his act by claiming that he had wanted to protest against the treatment of Polish Jewish immigrants in Germany whom Berlin had just – on 17 September 1938 – expelled and that Poland and its own anti-Semitic government had refused to take back. Held in a no-man's-land on the Polish-German border, these Jews, including members of the Grynszpan family, were now stateless, with all the dangers that this legal status entailed, and penniless. Berlin's move (the forced expulsion of foreign Jews) was directly linked to the situation in 1938: according to the government, there were too many Jews in Germany.

It was the NSDAP which organized the so-called *Kristallnacht* (the name given to it by the Nazis: 'Crystal Night' or 'Night of Broken Glass') while claiming it was a legitimate, spontaneous response by the German people to a cowardly murder. In fact, the SDA, SS and Nazi militants led the destruction and burning of property, the beatings and murders, following orders coordinated at the highest level (from Goebbels for the Party, Heydrich for the police).

Nonetheless, the pogrom was controversial within the Nazi hierarchy. Nearly one hundred people killed, billions of Reichsmarks of damage – all this harmed Germany's image and economy. Hermann Göring in particular, commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe and responsible for the Four-Year Plan, was furious.

He summoned a meeting at the ministry to evaluate the economic and financial damage done by the pogrom of 12 November 1938. It was during this meeting that he finally aligned himself with the SS and especially with Reinhard Heydrich with whom he shared a cold and economically rational approach to the 'Jewish question': order and discipline, not rioting; efficiency, not financial expense. This meeting made two decisions: to levy a fine of one billion Reichsmarks on the Jewish community for the disturbances to public order and the damage caused by the violence of that night; and to achieve the full Aryanisation of the German economy. It was Göring who, in close collaboration with the SS, set up the *Reichszentrale für jüdische Auswanderung* (Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration) on 24 January 1939. Because of the Luftwaffe's success in Poland and France, in 1940 he was given the rank *sui generis* of *Reichsmarschall des Großdeutschen Reiches* (Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich). His prestige and authority made him the person to whom the SS always turned to get approval and authority to apply their anti-Jewish policies.

THE POLISH LABORATORY

Until the autumn of 1941, the policy of the Reich remained unchanged: all Jews had to be expelled. Where to? The defeat of France in the summer of 1941 seemed to offer one 'solution': the island of Madagascar, to where the Jews of the Reich could be transported by ship. Madagascar had the advantage of being an island, which would allow millions of Jews to be confined under Nazi control: fears of the creation of a 'Jewish Vatican' were thus allayed. But the Madagascar plan, which was very carefully drawn up under the direction of Eichmann, turned out to be impractical because of British control of the sea.

At the same time, Nazi violence was unleashed on Poland and Polish Jews. Poland was considered to be a colonized territory, and the Nazis sought to eliminate the intelligentsia of the country's Slavic population: to make sure that the Polish nation ceased to exist as a nation they had to destroy its leadership and

elites. As part of Operation Tannenberg, special units of police and SS (*Einsatzgruppen*) murdered more than 60,000 people in September and October 1939, including Jews. They were killed not so much as Jews as for being part of the Polish elites (intellectuals, artists, members of the liberal professions, senior civil servants and officials) that the Nazis wanted to eradicate to destroy Polish culture.

Meanwhile, Jews in regions that had been annexed and incorporated into the Reich (*Reichsland Warthegau, Gau Danzig-Westpreußen*) were expelled to the south of conquered Poland, a zone not annexed by the Reich and known as the General Government. The plan was to use this as an area in which to hold Jews and Poles driven out of the north. Very soon, ghettos were established in the General Government, to accommodate the expelled Jews and concentrate those from villages and the countryside: the 'cleansing' of territory, along with its supervision, involved the concentration of 'undesirable' populations considered to be enemies of the Reich.

It was hoped that conquered Poland would also take in German Jews. Eichmann, who in the meantime had opened a new Office for Jewish Emigration in Prague (annexed in March 1939), was ordered to oversee six transports to deport 5,000 Jews of the Reich (mainly from Vienna, Kattowitz and Moravia) to a *Judenreservat* (a Jewish reservation) or a Reichsghetto near Cracow or Lublin, but eventually created at Nisko, in the Little Carpathians (the Nisko Plan). These deportations, carried out between 18 and 26 October 1939, were openly designed as feasibility studies: how easy would it be to deport Jews and hold them in camps that they had to build and maintain themselves, while awaiting their deportation further east to regions that had not yet been defined? Protests against what the SS was doing by the German occupying authorities, and the growing frustration of Governor-General Hans Frank, who wanted to turn the General Government into a model, productive state, led to the abandonment of the plan. In the spring of 1940, the Madagascar

plan, seriously considered since 1938, took on clearer shape, before being abandoned at the end of 1940.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA: TWO 'SOLUTIONS' TO 'THE JEWISH QUESTION'

What should be done with the Jews of Europe? The SS in particular were worried: after the victory in Poland and equally rapid victories in the West and the Balkans, more than three millions extra Jews were now in 'regions under German control'. Plans to conquer and colonize Eastern Europe, developed since the 1920s and set out in detail in the 1930s by the RuSHA (SS Race and Settlement Main Office) and then the RKF (Reich Commission for the Strengthening of German Nationhood), which had been set up by a decree of Hitler on 7 October 1939, seemed to offer a territorial 'solution' to the 'Jewish question'. If the sea route to Madagascar was closed, if emigration was not an answer because no country wanted to receive the Jews of the Reich (Evian Conference, July 1938, and British opposition to any Jewish immigration in Palestine), the East seemed full of possibilities. The Nazis had closely followed the forced movements of populations in Europe since the end of the First World War: the transfers between Turkey and Greece in the 1920s, the mass deportations carried out by Stalin in the 1930s – all these proved that good logistics and an efficient rail network could accomplish enormous tasks and shift millions of people in record time.

Operation Barbarossa (the invasion of the USSR) opened up a potential new way to remove the Jews – by using the railway system for mass deportations far to the east, preferably to the Arctic Circle, where they could be left to their fate. The problem was that there were already Jews in the East, and in the eyes of the Nazis they represented a danger to military security and a demographic liability. Since German armies were supposed to support themselves using the resources of the countries they occupied rather than being funded by the Reich, it seemed imperative to reduce the number of mouths considered useless

(the *Generalplan Ost* made provisions for the death in the medium term of 30 million Slavs considered surplus to requirements). In the eyes of the planners of the Third Reich, the Jews of the East were not only a burden but also a danger: in the Nazi conception of the world and of history, Bolshevism was a Jewish creation, and the Jews were accused of running the international communist movement, with Moscow being the 'headquarters of Judeo-Bolshevism'. The Jewish populations of the East were thus main enemies: every Jew, whether a soldier in the Red Army, a political commissar or a poor peasant in a Ukrainian *shtetl*, was an ontological, implacable enemy of the Reich, a great threat.

The exceptional conditions of the Eastern campaign in the summer of 1941, which for the Germans involved rapid advances, euphoria, exhaustion (from heat and lack of rest) and fear (the German advance was so fast that many Soviet units now fought as guerrillas behind the lines of the Wehrmacht, without any coordination and sometimes very bitterly), led to unprecedented violence: the *Einsatzgruppen* of the SS and German police were given the task of 'securing' the rear against combat units by murdering all Jews and communists on the spot. These massacres turned into genocide from August 1941, when women and children were also murdered alongside men of military age who could bear arms. At the end of August 1941, the HSSPF (*Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer*) *Russland-Süd* Friedrich Jeckeln, oversaw the first large-scale massacre at Kamenets-Podolsk, a town in Eastern Ukraine: between 27 and 29 August, 23,600 Jews, mainly Hungarians who had been expelled from that country, were shot by less than one hundred men from police battalion 320 and a *Sonderaktionsstab* composed of members of the SS close to Jeckeln. This was the first centrally planned mass murder, preceding that in Babi Yar a few weeks later.

AUTUMN 1941

From the Nazi perspective, the military situation in the East in the summer of 1941 led the way towards a possible 'solution' of the 'Jewish question'. It was in the context of the rapid German victories in Operation Barbarossa that Göring, in a letter of 31 July 1941 to Reinhard Heydrich, gave the SS the responsibility of finding 'an overall solution to the Jewish question':

'As supplement to task which was entrusted to you in the decree dated 24 January 1939, namely to solve the Jewish question by emigration and evacuation (...) I herewith commission you to carry out all the preparations with regard to organization, the material side, and financial viewpoints for a final solution of the Jewish question in these territories of Europe which are under German influence. If the competency of other central organizations is touched in this connection, these organizations are to participate. I furthermore commission you to submit to me as soon as possible a draft showing the (...) measures already taken for the execution of the intended final solution of the Jewish question.'

This letter makes explicit reference to the establishment of the Reichszentrale in January 1939 and to the policy of emigration which, over some time, evolved into forced evacuation to the East.

The 'final solution' envisaged in the summer of 1941 signified the end of any presence of Jews in territories controlled by the Reich. To achieve this, the Jews of the East were condemned to death, and the Jews of the West to deportation to the furthest regions of the East.

As the military situation in the East became worse and worse for the Germans, the 'goal' of their 'final solution' changed its nature.

Since the hoped-for swift victory had not been forthcoming, it seemed questionable whether the evacuation of Western Jews to

the East could be achieved. After months of retreats and defeats, the first Soviet counter-attacks in October and November 1941 put an end to any prospect of a victorious *Blitzkrieg*. The road to the East seemed blocked, and the German military now faced a long war in the USSR with a mixture of fear and resignation.

At the same time, the situation in the Polish ghettos had deteriorated: some of these had now existed for two years, with a growing population living in appalling sanitary and nutritional conditions. In the particularly hot summer of 1941, typhus was rife, an epidemic that did not only hit the Jewish inhabitants but also threatened German administrators, police and soldiers. This health problem had become more acute for the Germans now that the evacuation of the ghettos to the East seemed postponed *sine die*.

Finally, worldwide geopolitical developments had led to a war on two fronts: the resistance of the USSR, and then the entry into the war of the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. For the Nazis this looked as if the nightmare of 1917 was about to be repeated: a real-world war, on two vast fronts. It is in this context of the unfavorable evolution of a war 'wished for by the Jews' that Hitler and Himmler took the decision, in all likelihood between 11 and 16 December 1941, to murder all the Jews on the European continent. It is important to note here that the date of this decision is still debated by historians, but the one which Christian Gerlach proposed at the end of the 1990s seems the most plausible to the present author.

DEATH CAMPS AND MASSACRES

Although it is occasionally claimed that there was a chronological succession from a savage, uncoordinated Shoah in the East (which has sometimes wrongly been called 'Shoah by bullets') to an organized, rationalized Shoah in the death camps, there is no evidence for this. The two forms of mass murder were concurrent: while the extermination camps were being built in the

former Poland to 'deal with' Polish Jews, and then with Western Jews (Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, etc.), massacres were being carried out in the East, sometimes on the spot, sometimes in camps (such as Ponari forest, the ravine of Babi Yar, the death camp of Maly Trostenets), as Tal Bruttman has recently shown. In both cases, temporary structures (Treblinka, Sobibor, Ponari, for example) masses of people were transported (by train or truck) to temporary structures to be killed immediately, either by firing squads or gassing.

Whatever the means (bullets, gas, Zyklon B) and the site (mobile gas chamber, built gas chamber, a ditch) the aim was identical, the death of an entire population, with similar forms of organization and logistics (assembly in a central location, swift, large-scale murder).

Nothing remains of these killing sites, for the temporary structures were destroyed by the Nazis themselves. Only the formidable extermination camp of Birkenau, next to the various concentration camps of Auschwitz, had permanent buildings that the Nazis scarcely had time in the winter of 1944 to 1945 to demolish completely. The vast number of prisoners in the camps here and the fact that Jews from the whole of Europe were transported to them has made this site into a place of collective memory for all Europe: here there were some survivors (from the concentration camps), while at Sobibor and Treblinka, entirely devoted to murder, there were almost none.

The 'final solution', in precisely its final sense, came late in the war, was applied erratically and over a very short period (between 1941 and 1944/45). Yet its victims number nearly six million.

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