



VICTIMS OF NAZISM

A mosaic of Fates

”Victims’ faces,
barbed wire,
arbitrary registration
numbers,
strata and traces

**Pedagogical
Factsheets
for teachers**

Text: Régis Schlagdenhauffen
and Francine Mayran.
Illustrations: Francine Mayran

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ALL VICTIMS OF THE UNSPEAKABLE

Oil on canvas. Polyptych. 9 panels 30 x 60 cm. 2013

Victims' faces, the plight of individuals behind the collective tragedy

Barbed wire, imprisonment by an ideology, by barbarism

Arbitrary registration numbers, the inhumanity of the concentration camp system and the visible marks of dehumanisation

Strata, traces, imprints of a past, of painful remembrance, which mark our world, our peoples, our history, our present and our future.

Francine Mayran

www.fmayran.com



Francine Mayran, "Remembering these lives".



Francine Mayran, a Strasbourg based painter-ceramics artist and psychiatrist, born after World War Two, gives expression to the memory of the Holocaust in her creations, bringing together art, remembrance and history.

Through her work (paintings, ceramics and texts) the exhibition *Témoigner de ces vies** builds a path of European remembrance, with over 20 exhibits linking, amongst other locations or events, the Struthof camp, the Alsace-Moselle memorial, the Royallieu-Compiègne camp memorial, the World Peace Centre in Verdun, the Maison de la Région and the Temple neuf protestant church in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe, the Breendonk Fort and Boortmeerbeek railway station in Belgium, the Deportation Memorial in Luxembourg, the Franco-German Cultural Centre in Karlsruhe, Albania, Thessaloniki, various gypsy festivals, and so on.

■ **Her aim is to awaken and spread awareness in public places and places** of remembrance, prompt people to question the indifference and responsibility of those who lived through the events of this period in history, honour the memory of the victims, keep alive the message of the survivors and study the indelible marks left by all instances of genocide on those who escape them, subsequent generations and the whole of humanity.

■ **As a chronicler of remembrance, she takes over from the last direct witnesses**, who are dying off one by one, addressing herself to new witnesses to ensure that past events are not forgotten, people are made aware, human values are promoted and new generations come to realise the dangers of history repeating itself.

■ **She works on educational projects with the Council of Europe** so as to ensure that art and not just history speaks to young people, making them aware of civilised Man's capacity for barbarism, of the danger of denying humankind and humanity, and reminding them of the human dimension of the Holocaust so that they can pass this knowledge on in their turn. This therefore entails working with European teachers to reflect on how art can help perpetuate remembrance.

She connects witness reports and archive photos, objective markers of the past, and ties them together in her creative work like an artistic family tree so that these images live and endure and become real to us in the here and now.

■ **Her portraits on concrete symbolically commemorate individual victims**, giving them their name, their face and their humanity.

■ **Her work refuses to be partisan, but** seeks to revive memories of all the victims – Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, resistance members, Jehovah's Witnesses or disabled people.

■ **In portraits of the Righteous Among the Nations and others who saved the honour of humankind** during the Holocaust she seeks to demonstrate the amazing capacity for Good of some people, people who for future generations shine as lights in a dark world.

■ **Her work sets out to be a message of life** and of hope for the future, reminding each of us of the value of human rights and the precious, priceless worth of every human life.

■ **Her paintings** are included in public collections at sites of remembrance and have been used to illustrate the educational fact sheets on the victims of Nazism which the Council of Europe has prepared as part of its programme "Passing on the Remembrance of the Holocaust and prevention of crimes against humanity".

■ Her book "*Témoigner de ces vies-peindre la mémoire*"** was published in 2012 by Editions du Signe.

■ <http://www.fmayran.com>

* "Remembering these lives"

** "Remembering these lives through painting"



■ **Régis Schlagdenhauffen is a sociologist and historian.** He holds a doctorate from the University of Strasbourg and a PhD from the Humboldt University of Berlin. Since 2012 he has been teaching sociology at the IRIS political science institute, which is part of EHSS (the *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales*). He is the author of the educational fact sheets prepared by the Council of Europe as part of its “Passing on the Remembrance of the Holocaust and prevention of crimes against humanity” programme.

■ Specialising in remembrance, he worked initially on the mobilisation of memory as a meeting point for collective group remembrance and the formulation of demands (social, political, public and economic). In this context he studied the monuments to the victims of Nazism in Berlin (*La Bibliothèque Vide et le Mémorial de l’Holocauste de Berlin*,* Paris, 2005), the presentation of remembrance at the new Yad Vashem centre in Jerusalem and the commemoration of homosexual victims of Nazism in Western Europe.

■ His doctoral thesis, awarded a prize by the Auschwitz Foundation, was a comparative analysis of custom and practice in the commemoration of homosexual victims of Nazism in Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam. For the last two years his research has led him to assess the conflict between the said and the unsaid in autobiographical statements and writings, in an attempt to identify the part played by gender, age and sexual orientation in a contemporary reshaping of views on sexuality. At the same time he is continuing his research into the political and educational dimensions of the Europeanisation of the “Nazi victim group” category.

■ His two latest works are *Triangle rose. La persécution nazie des homosexuels et sa mémoire*,** Paris, Ed. Autrement, coll. Mutations/Sexe en tous genre, 2011, 308 pp. and (with A. Ehresmann et al.) *Die Erinnerung an die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Akteure, Inhalte, Strategien*,*** Berlin, Metropol, 2011, 280 pp.

* “The empty library and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin”

** “Pink triangle: Nazi persecution of homosexuals and its remembrance”.

*** “Remembering the Nazi concentration camps: players, content, strategies”.

Since 2011 the Council of Europe has been developing a cross-cutting programme (education, culture, heritage, youth and sport) dedicated to remembrance of the Holocaust and prevention of crimes against humanity. This constitutes the third phase of a project which began in the late 1990s in connection with the teaching of European 20th century history. From 2001, with the introduction by member states of a national day of Holocaust remembrance and prevention of crimes against humanity, campaigns were organised to raise awareness of this theme's importance, targeting both education ministries and the teaching profession. Regular European training workshops have been held by the signatory countries to the 1954 European Cultural Convention, and the Council of Europe also publishes educational materials to meet the needs and wishes of European teachers.

A fact sheet for each victim group

The educational fact sheets on the different categories of Nazi victims are designed to help teachers prepare their lessons on the history and remembrance of the Holocaust. Each sheet (format A4, two-sided) gives an overview of the Nazi persecution of a specific victim group.

■ The sheets cover the following victim groups: **People with disabilities – Homosexuals – Jehovah's Witnesses – Resistance members and political opponents – Slavs – Poles – Roma (gypsies) – Jews – Asocials.**

■ All the sheets are structured in the same way for easier readability.

■ They can be used in two ways: analysis of the text and photographs or work based on the artistic content, looking at the message which the artist seeks to convey.

■ The aim is to neutralise any tendency to prioritise one group of victims over another. The idea is to follow a comparative approach, highlighting the specific features and background of each of the policies enforced against victims. The chronological limits set are broad, from 1933 (when the Nazis came to power) to 1945 (when the regime unconditionally surrendered).

■ Analysis of the mechanisms involved is necessary in order to prevent their repetition. The following aspects will be examined for each victim group:

- ▶ Chronology, ideology
- ▶ Measures taken against this group and timelines
- ▶ Consequences
- ▶ The Council of Europe's position
- ▶ A photo to analyse
- ▶ An excerpt from a text, for further discussion
- ▶ Bibliography and film references
- ▶ A remembrance-related painting, drawn from history, which makes pupils think and reflect, focusing their attention on the individual human dimension of the victims and the contrast between their humanity and the inhumanity of the barbaric acts perpetrated against them.

■ The chronological limits set are broad, from 1933 (when the Nazis came to power) to 1945 (when the regime unconditionally surrendered).

■ The text of the fact sheets is the work of Dr Régis Schlagdenhauffen, a researcher at the Interdisciplinary Institute for Social Research (IRIS), part of the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en sciences sociales* (EHESS), with assistance from Noémie Musnik (historian, documentalist) and Ségolène Debarre (a history and geography teacher and alumna of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*).

■ Artistic content is provided in the form of paintings by Dr Francine Mayran, a painter and psychiatrist.

■ The Council of Europe's educational fact sheets consider the Nazi persecution as a European phenomenon across national borders. For that reason no sheet deals with a specific country (apart from the one on the persecution of the Polish people).

These sheets look at the nature of the Nazis' crimes against humanity, highlighting the specific features of each category of victims in terms of the genocide perpetrated against the Jews and Roma in the history of humanity generally and in the history of Europe in particular and of the specific fate of the "other" victim groups.

Teaching and remembrance

■ The cross-cutting programme “Passing on the Remembrance of the Holocaust and prevention of crimes against humanity” comes within the institutional framework of the 1954 European Cultural Convention and Recommendation Rec(2001)15 on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe:

■ Whilst highlighting the positive advances obtained in the 20th century, such as the peaceful use of science to improve the quality of human life and the development of democracy and human rights, it is necessary to implement the entire range of educational measures with a view to preventing the repetition or denial of the devastating events having marked that century, namely the Holocaust, genocide and other crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and large-scale breaches of human rights and of the fundamental values which the Council of Europe holds dear. This means that:

- ▶ pupils must be helped to learn and know the facts – and their causes – about this darkest period in Europe’s history;
- ▶ there must be implementation, follow-up and monitoring of the education ministers’ decision and schools must observe a day of Holocaust remembrance and prevention of crimes against humanity, chosen in the light of each member state’s history;
- ▶ activities – to be defined - are needed in the field of history teaching, so as to strengthen trust and tolerance within and between countries and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Objectives of history teaching in the 21st century

■ History teaching in a democratic Europe should:

- ▶ play a vital part in the training of responsible and active citizens and the fostering of respect for differences of all kinds, rooted in an understanding of national identity and the principles of tolerance;
- ▶ be a decisive factor in reconciliation, recognition, understanding and mutual trust between peoples;
- ▶ play a vital part in promoting fundamental values such as tolerance, mutual understanding, human rights and democracy;
- ▶ be an instrument for preventing crimes against humanity.

EDUCATIONAL USE OF THE WORKS OF FRANCINE MAYRAN: ART FOR REMEMBRANCE, USING HISTORY TO CONFRONT THE ISSUES AND CONTRAST THE VICTIMS' INDIVIDUALITY WITH NAZI BARBARISM'S NEGATION OF HUMAN VALUE

The artist's work is a polyptych of nine panels entitled "All victims of the unspeakable", nine paintings linked by strands of barbed wire and strings of numbers, intended as a neutral memorial not just to the individual victims, but to all of them.

Barbed wire and strings of numbers symbolising barbarism run in an unbroken curve from one panel to the next, linking all nine panels into a single work. This polyptych, which evokes all the victim groups and their specific features, symbolises the role of the Council of Europe, which works across national borders and stands for shared democratic values and respect for human rights.

Paintings based on historic traces of the past, on photos of deportees who survived the camps

These paintings are not a product of the artist's imagination, because the acts of barbarism committed by the Nazis are an undeniable reality. They are paintings which invite us not only to engage with history, but also to question it. Whilst the viewer sees archive images at one remove from history, the paintings speak directly to his soul. These paintings speak to Man to make him reflect, symbolising the unspeakable in an attempt to keep alive the individual human dimension of these collective tragedies, restore to the victims their individuality, their humanity, and resist efforts to negate human values. These works convey a universal message which goes beyond memory, so that the past may yield sustenance for the future.

The nine groups of Nazi victims are represented by the triangles they wore on their clothing

Victims were assigned to categories like cattle, like things, on the basis of a triangle sewn to their clothing. Jews wore two **yellow triangles** in the shape of the star of David. Homosexuals were known as "**pink triangles**" and wore triangles of that colour. Jehovah's Witnesses wore a **purple triangle**. Gypsies wore a **brown triangle**. "Asocials" and the disabled wore a **black triangle**. Resistance members, Slavs and Poles wore a **red triangle** (with the letter P in the case of Poles).

To contrast the inhumanity of Nazi barbarism with the humanity of each victim, the canvases use the triangle colours and their complementary colours

The inhumanity of the camps is symbolised by the colour of the triangle under the Nazi classification system, echoed in the colour of the barbed wire and the colour of the string of numbers which represents one of these barbed wire strands.

Inhumanity means loss of identity. Identifying people according to a labelling system, taking away their names and replacing them with registration numbers, and keeping them confined in unspeakable conditions, made the victims feel dehumanised. And for the Nazis, it was easier to torture and kill victims whom they perceived as "beasts" or things.

- ▶ The triangle was a mark of the reason for persecuting the victim and not a mark of who he was. Thus, for the Nazis, human beings were reduced to triangles.
- ▶ The numbers symbolise the registration of victims, for purposes of sorting and record-keeping. They were stencilled on by machine, by the inhuman, scientific machinery of the Nazi concentration camp system. They reflect a scientific desire to make the victims anonymous, deny them all individuality and rob them of their human dignity. They are registration numbers, visible marks symbolic of all the invisible marks of the unspeakable.
- ▶ The barbed wire symbolises the inhumanity and barbarism of interning, imprisoning and managing human beings.

Humanity is symbolised by use of the complementary colour for the deportee's clothing. Thus the clothing of Jewish deportees is purple, contrasting with the yellow of their star. That of Jehovah's Witnesses is yellow, the complementary colour of the purple triangle. That of resistance members, Poles and Slavs is blue-green, the complementary colour of the red triangle. Gypsy clothing is blue, the complementary colour of brown. That of homosexuals is green, the complementary colour of the pink triangle. That of "asocials" and the disabled is white, contrasting with the black of their triangle.

■ **The use of colours and their complementary colours represents the contrast between the barbarism of the Nazi system and humanity**, perpetuated in every deportee, every survivor. It symbolises the contrast between the inhumanity of the Nazis and their persecution machine and the sense of humanity which stands against barbarism. It shows that humanity is more powerful than inhumanity, and that there is room for faith in mankind despite this permanent stain on humanity's record.

In defiance of the Nazi objective, the paintings emphasise the individual as well as the group, with his specific features and individuality

■ **Each group is represented with its differences preserved.** The Jews and gypsies are accordingly represented by women and children, because they were the only ones to be deported and exterminated as entire families in the genocide known as the Holocaust or Shoah. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that they alone were persecuted on grounds of race. The gypsies were also victims, with their families, of a genocide known as Samudaripen. The other groups were victims of crimes against humanity and were not deported as families. The gypsies alone are depicted wearing their usual clothing rather than the striped overalls of the other deportees, a reminder that often, in camps like the Auschwitz Zigeunerlager, they were kept in their own social group, with their husband or wife and family and their own clothes, separately from the other deportees.

■ **The victims are symbolised not by anonymous groups, but by individuals standing** in front of us, faces and eyes gazing at us and asking that we never again turn a blind eye, never again act as if nothing were happening, never again allow a human tragedy to unfold around us – near or far – because we do not care. These gazes call on us, through the Shoah, through the gypsy genocide, through the tragedies of all the Nazi victims, to be witnesses to history. They appeal to school pupils who, caught by the image, themselves become witnesses to the individual and collective fate of these victims.

Texturing symbolises the indelible marks of barbarism

■ Textured layers, with superimposed colours, are used to symbolise the marks of barbarism.

■ From the layers emerge the indelible marks left on the survivors of this dehumanisation the imprinted recollection of things unspeakable, things past, resurfacing memories of those who are gone, the feeling of being alive when others are not, the sense of guilt for having survived and the imperative to survive.

■ And for subsequent generations there are the indelible marks of words spoken and left unspoken by the survivors, their silences, and the missing links in their family trees.

■ Not least for humanity as a whole, there are the indelible marks of our traumatic and abiding memory of "civilised" Man's capacity for barbarism, violence and inhumanity, marks which keep memory alive and make it impossible for us to forget.

Confusion persists between the terms “concentration camp” and “extermination centre”, wrongly called a “death camp” (because these were not camps). The **extermination centres** were for the killing of Jews as part of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” and were located at a railhead to which the Nazis could transport those they wanted to kill. The location of these centres, unlike that of the concentration camps, was kept secret. The Nazi **concentration camps** were forced labour camps, chiefly for the purpose of “re-education through work”. Inmates of these also died as a result of malnutrition, terrible hygiene conditions, promiscuity, the struggle to survive, forced labour and disease, further confusing the distinction between the two types of establishment.

History

■ The first Nazi concentration camps were improvised immediately after the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ or Nazi Party) came to power on 30 January 1933. These were small, ad hoc camps whose existence is now mostly forgotten. The majority of them were run by the SA (storm troopers) apart from Dachau, near Munich, which was run by the SS (*Schutzstaffel*).

■ After 1935, the many small camps scattered throughout the Reich were gradually subsumed into the big concentration camps: Buchenwald (near Weimar), Dachau (near Munich), Flossenbürg (near Weiden), Mauthausen (near Linz, in Austria), Neuengamme (near Hamburg), Sachsenhausen (near Berlin) and Ravensbrück, the only concentration camp for women (north of Berlin). From 1939, so during World War II, new camps were built: Auschwitz (near Cracow), Bergen-Belsen (near Celle), Natzweiler (near Strasbourg, in Alsace). In addition there were numerous external units serving the war effort.

Classification of concentration camps

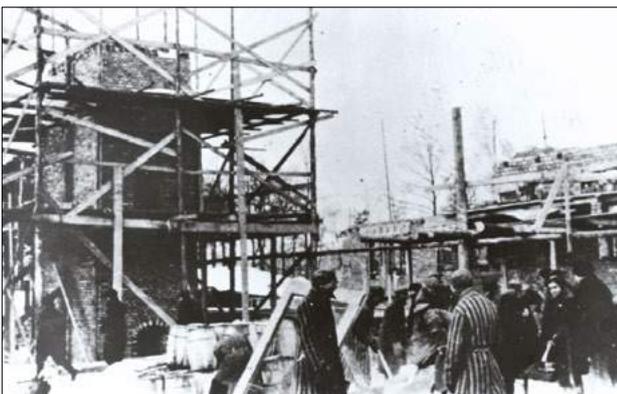
■ In 1941 a classification of concentration camps was drawn up. Category I camps were moderately tough camps; category II camps had harsher living and working conditions, and in category III camps the conditions were the harshest of all. This latter category were commonly known as death camps or Knochenschleifmühl (bone crushers). Lublin, Gross-Rosen, Mauthausen and Natzweiler were category III camps.

■ The existence of category III camps explains why survivors refer to extermination camps or death camps, since the inmates were literally worked to death. But again, category III concentration camps were in no way connected to the extermination centres, which were built in pursuit of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” and thus, with some exceptions, killed only Jews.

Origin of inmates

■ With the outbreak of war and the occupation of European countries, the proportion of German prisoners in the camps relative to foreigners steadily decreased. Between 1933 and 1939 the concentration camp system held only Germans, but from 1939 to 1945 camp inmates came from virtually everywhere in Europe. This explains the fact that, during the war, only 5-10% of inmates were Germans; the rest were from all over Europe and even from other continents.

■ It is important to note at this point that the concentration camps and their external units played a significant part in the German war effort, providing an inexhaustible supply of labour.



Treblinka: barbed wire and huts
(Shoah Memorial) MIX_1_111



Auschwitz: camp entrance
(Régis Schlagdenhauffen)

Sociology of the concentration camps

According to Wolfgang Sofsky, a social historian of the concentration camps, "With the reorganisation of the camps in 1936 the SS introduced a system of categories with which the various groups of prisoners were then visibly marked. The coloured triangles was sewn onto the left side of the chest and the right trouser leg. [...] Political prisoners, as a basic category, were initially unmarked; at the end of 1937 the red triangle was introduced for them. Foreigners, who were generally classified as "political", had the beginning letter of their nationality inscribed on the red triangle. [...] From these emblems it was possible to recognise immediately what class a prisoner belonged to and how he or she was pigeonholed or evaluated by the SS. [...] At the apex of the class taxonomy (category I) stood the racial contrast between human beings and Untermenschen – sub-humans. Jews were not regarded as part of human society."

"The category system served principally to distribute power and work. The imposed class channelled social perception. Every prisoner with a black triangle was now actually considered 'asocial', work-shy, cowardly, and filthy, every criminal was thought dangerous, brutal, and violent. Although it was forced on the prisoners by the SS, the category system was largely accepted by them. There was resistance to the status of individual classes, but not to the system as a whole. There were several reasons for this. First, the labels used by the SS matched existing stereotypes in the social environment; the camp regime only needed to radicalise them. Criminal, Asocial, Jew, Pole and Gypsy were common categories that also shaped social perception in civil society. For that reason, the prisoners attributed criminal, asocial or solidaristic behaviour, almost as a matter of course, to the respective categories."

A "class society"

The camp population was divided into two groups: the first consisted of SS personnel responsible for guarding and administering the camp; the second consisted of the inmates who had their own class society. They were required to run the camp according to a principle of self-management devised by the SS. Within this society there were four classes:

- ▶ **the "nobility"**, or Prominenten: these were at the top of the camp hierarchy. Camp chiefs, Kapos in the clerical services (Schreibstube), postal department, kitchens, certain block chiefs, Kapos in certain units received favourable treatment because their role was absolutely vital to the smooth running of the system;
- ▶ **the intermediate class**: these were the Funktionshäftlinge (prisoner functionaries), Kapos, foremen, secretaries, nurses, members of service units. They were the intermediate class between the Prominenten and the body of ordinary inmates;
- ▶ **the "mass"**: the body of ordinary inmates who struggled day by day for survival;

- ▶ **the Muselmänner**: these were the living dead, individuals who were socially ignored and mentally resigned to their impending physical death. The origin of the term Muselmann (and of many others spawned in the camps) remains a mystery. Some said that these men, half-dead and unable to stand, resembled Muslims at prayer. In Ravensbrück, women in a similar state to Muselmänner were known as Schmutzstücke (pieces of filth) and sometimes, with a ponderous play on words, as Schmuckstücke (jewels). In Dachau they were called Kretiner (cretins), in Mauthausen Schwimmer (swimmers), in Neuengamme Kamele (camels), and in Buchenwald müde Scheichs (tired sheikhs).

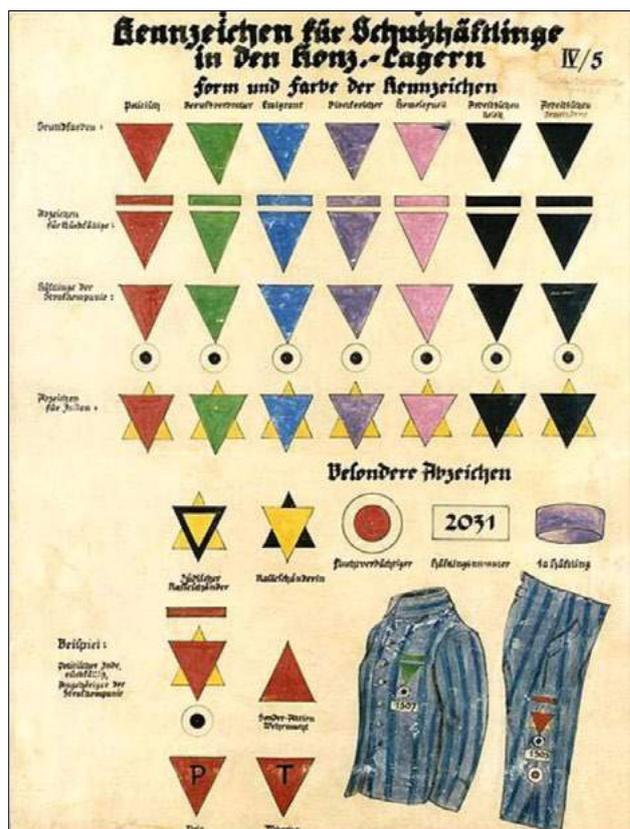
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- ▶ For a sociologist's analysis of concentration camp organisation, the book by Wolfgang Sofsky, translated into several languages, remains the definitive reference: Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, Princeton University Press; New Ed edition (6 June 1999).

Film references

Two films are of great educational interest for an insight into the concentration camp system and remembrance of the camps:

- ▶ *Et puis les touristes* (And along come tourists), dir. Robert Thalheim, 2007, 82 min.
- ▶ *KZ*, dir. Rex Bloomstein, 2006, 98 min.



Triangles worn by inmates (Régis Schlagdenhauffen)

OPERATION T4: NAZI PERSECUTION OF THE “DISABLED”

In the Nazi policy of eugenics a special place was given to what the Nazis ironically called the “mercy killing” of those whose lives “were hardly worth living”. Most of the individuals in question were physically or mentally handicapped. The code name given to this secret programme was “Operation T4”, deriving from the name of the building which housed the central body responsible for managing this operation of systematic murder, at number 4, Tiergartenstrasse in Berlin. From start to finish the planning of this “mercy killing of those whose life is hardly worth living” was an official secret. But details leaked out, and this led the Nazi regime to abandon the programme officially, in the face of fierce opposition from the Church.

Chronology, ideology, texts

“Operation T4” (Aktion T4) has its roots in the theories of “racial hygiene” which developed early in the 20th century and particularly just after World War I. These eugenic theories, linked to racial theories, sought to purify the peoples concerned by the application of two principles: sterilising flawed individuals and punishing or banning unions between persons of different origin. In the context of Operation T4, the term “euthanasia” meant the killing of persons with a disability. The first step, prior to this programme, was taken as early as 1933 when Hitler promulgated a law requiring the forced sterilisation of anyone with a hereditary illness.

Only in 1939, when Germany was at war, did the Nazis decide, secretly and as part of the war effort, to close down all establishments caring for the mentally and physically handicapped. This programme led to the killing of tens of thousands of people in conditions of the utmost secrecy. It ended in 1941 under pressure from the churches, as mysteriously as it had begun, but only after most of Germany’s disabled people had been wiped out.

Persecution measures and timelines

1938 the operation started by “euthanizing” children. At this time the operation was not yet known as “T4”. Then, in 1939, a circular of 21 September introduced compulsory registration of persons in psychiatric institutions and Operation T4 began in earnest. Its aim was the systematic elimination of children, adults and elderly people who were mentally deficient, incurably ill or physically deformed.



Illustration : Francine Mayran

Three methods were used: gas, lethal injection or drug overdose. Once the operation began, there were on average 121 decisions a day to perform euthanasia, or one decision every five minutes. The patients killed were invalids or physically disabled or suffered from psychiatric conditions.

Between 1939 and 1941 the Nazi regime set up six euthanasia centres throughout the Reich: Grafeneck, Brandenburg, Hartheim, Sonnenstein, Bernburg and Hadamar. The thousands of people scheduled to be killed were transported to these centres by bus. Afterwards, family members received a letter telling them of the death and a further letter – the dead were cremated – in which they were given the opportunity to collect the person’s ashes.

Operation T4 was a prelude to the mass extermination of Europe’s Jews in the gas chambers. On the way to these gas chambers, “disabled” people were told that they were simply to be disinfected as part of their medical check.

In this sense, Operation T4 was assuredly Act One of the “Final Solution” both in terms of logistics and of the executioners’ part in a murderous exercise.

Consequences

■ Historians currently put the total number of Operation T4's victims at between 70 000 and 200 000.

■ Operation T4 is symbolically important as the first major attempt to sideline and eliminate a defined social group. It also shows the extent to which members of an elite profession, doctors, colluded in the practice of a murderous ideology. After the war, the extermination of the mentally ill and disabled was covered up for a long time.

■ Only in the 1980s did historians and militants begin to look into Operation T4 and the elimination of "the disabled". During the post-war period no victim group was formed by the survivors, which is why the disabled long remained the forgotten victims of Nazism. Moreover, the consequences of this thinking continued to be felt in a number of countries after 1945.

The Council of Europe's position

■ Article 15 of the revised European Social Charter (1996) recognises the right to autonomy, social independence and participation in the life of the community.

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More info..

■ Hartheim is the name of an imposing Renaissance castle, with four octagonal towers at the corners and a kind of side dungeon in the Byzantine style. In 1940 Hartheim was unable to accommodate new patients. On 5 or 6 May 1940 the first transports arrived and the gas chamber began operation. Here is the testimony of a stoker at the crematorium:

"I started work at Hartheim on 2 April 1940. I served initially as number two on a wide range of duties. After two weeks or so Captain Wirth summoned us. He addressed us – we were all men – in the following words: 'Comrades, I've called you here today to explain how things are now here at the Castle, what's going to happen next. The Reich Chancellery has given me orders to continue operations here at the Castle. We are to build a crematorium to burn mentally ill people from Austria. Five doctors have been appointed to examine the mental cases and decide who should be spared and who should not. Those not being spared will be burned in the crematorium. The mentally ill are a burden on Germany and we want only those in good health. Mentally ill people are truly a burden on the State. One or two men will be designated to man the crematorium. Above all else, you must keep quiet about this, on pain of death. Anyone failing to hold his tongue will be sent to a concentration camp or shot.'"

(Vinzencz Nohel, crematorium stoker at Hartheim castle, quoted by Serge Choumoff, "Les exterminations par gaz à Hartheim", in Germaine Tillion, *Ravensbrück*, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p. 336 ff.).

*"How Hitler bought the Germans: the Third Reich, dictatorship in the service of the people".

**"Dear Uncle George: one woman's shocking inquiry into an unpunished doctor of death".

*** "Operation T4: the Nazis' state secret, extermination of the physically and mentally handicapped".

"PINK TRIANGLES": NAZI PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS

The facts surrounding the Nazi persecution of homosexuals were long covered up for two reasons: firstly because of hostility towards homosexuals, and secondly because of persistent confusion after the war between those deported to the concentration camps for being homosexual and the fact of sexual and loving relationships developing in the camps between persons of the same sex (circumstantial homosexuality).

Homosexuals were persecuted chiefly in Germany but also in the territories annexed by the Reich (Alsace-Lorraine, Austria, the Netherlands, Sudetenland, etc.). Between 5 000 and 15 000 of them died in the Nazi concentration camps.

Chronology, ideology, texts

Persecution of homosexuals began when the Nazis came to power. But even before then, sexual relations between men had been a crime under section 175 of the German Criminal Code.

In June 1935 the revision of section 175 radically altered the perception of homosexuality by the Nazi regime. Now it was not just homosexual relations that were a crime, but also the fact of being a homosexual. Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler's right-hand man, who had played a leading role in the persecution of homosexuals, took the view that homosexuals, as a minority group, had a lifestyle that threatened the National-Socialist utopia and formed a "state within a state". Moreover, because of their "femininity", they were a threat to the authority of the *Männerstaat* (masculine state) and they held back population growth. In 1936 Himmler decided to set up a Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion. The job of this body was to co-ordinate policy for the persecution of homosexuals.

Persecution measures and timelines

Hitler's accession to power was immediately followed by a campaign of repression against homosexuals. Within a few weeks three decrees were published. The first sought to control prostitution, the second closed down "indecent" bars and bars frequented by persons engaging in "unnatural" practices. In March 1933 homosexual magazines ceased publication. Measures against homosexuals continued from 1933 to 1945.

When someone was taken in for questioning, the police informed the suspect's family and employer of the reason for his arrest – homosexuality. Homosexuals who were sentenced were sent to either a forced labour camp or a concentration camp after first serving a period in prison. It was chiefly men who were persecuted, because only male homosexuality was a crime under the law. However, a number of homosexual women (lesbians) were interned in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück.

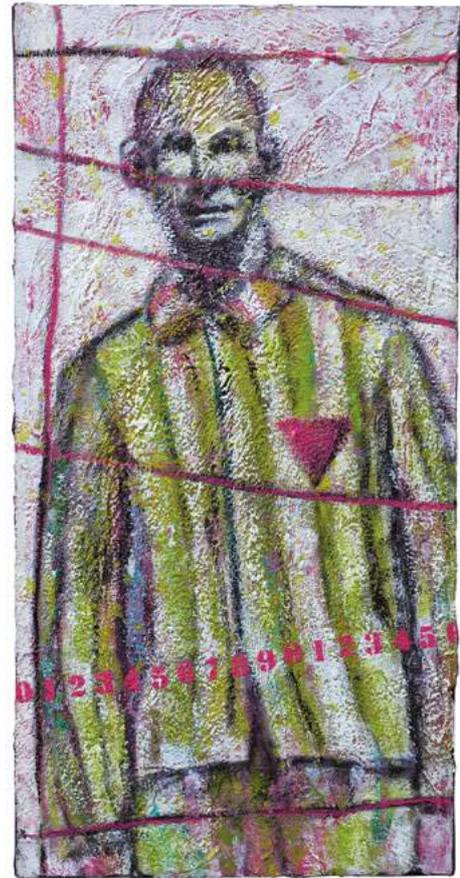


illustration : Francine Mayran

The proportion of homosexuals in the camps was never more than 1% of all inmates. In numerical terms this group was a tiny minority in camps holding tens of thousands of prisoners. Most homosexuals wore a distinguishing badge, the pink triangle. Some of them wore a triangle of a different colour, the green triangle of the "criminal" or the black triangle of the "asocial". Whichever colour triangle they had, they were always assigned to the harshest work units. They were certainly not the only ones assigned to these units, but they constituted the only group whose members were all routinely assigned there. They worked in quarrying, brick-making (see photo) or mines clearance. In some camps homosexuals were made to take part in medical or hormonal experiments aimed (unsuccessfully) at curing them of their homosexuality.

Consequences

Between 50 000 and 100 000 men were given prison sentences by the civil and military courts for homosexuality. At the same time, several thousand men and women were confined in psychiatric units on account of their homosexuality.

Between 5 000 and 10 000 men were sent to concentration camps because of their homosexuality. Only a dozen or so women have so far been identified.

The fact that homosexuals were assigned to the harshest work units and held in separate huts in the camps meant that their mortality rate was far higher than that of the other categories.

It is only recently that homosexuals have been recognised as victims of Nazism; for a long time they were not commemorated because in the eyes of some groups, persecution of them was not regarded as an injustice.

The Council of Europe's position

The question whether homosexuals should be recognised as victims of Nazism has long been a subject of debate in Europe. It has been dealt with differently in each country, depending on existing remembrance issues and on whether recognition was supported or opposed by the other victim groups already recognised.

Right from the outset of its work on the subject, the Council of Europe's position was that all victims of Nazism should be commemorated in the context of the "Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity".

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- ▶ *Un amour à taire* (Love that dares not speak its name), dir. Christian Faure, 2005, 102 min.

More info...

Here is an excerpt from the testimony given by an executioner during his trial. He was Rudolf Beer, SS-Obersturmführer at the Ravensbrück men's camp: "In July or maybe August 1942, a young German prisoner, wearing the pink triangle of the homosexuals, was no longer able to work because he was too weak. At the evening roll-call, he was punished by immediate transfer to the [night-time] punishment unit, without any supper. Because he was so weak, the prisoner fainted as the unit was leaving. The accused [Rudolf Beer] and other SS men then tried to get him back on his feet by kicking him. As that did not work, they pushed snuff tobacco into the mouth of the prisoner, who was by this time unconscious. But the prisoner only came to after the accused had thrown several buckets of cold water into his face. The accused then ordered him to the latrines. Prisoners still lined up on the Appellplatz heard the sound of blows and the victim's cries. After a few minutes the SS dragged the prisoner, who could no longer walk, to the gate of the camp. The punishment unit line was waiting for him there. He again lost consciousness and fell to the ground. On the orders of the accused, his feet were tied with wire. The other prisoners were told to drag him like this to the work site, with his head bumping along the ground. In the evening, shortly before 11 p.m., witness F heard that the prisoner had died. Later, as a Schreiber [clerk], he was instructed to record the cause of death as 'weak heart and poor circulation'".

(Ravensbrück concentration camp trials (No. 222), in Adelheid Rüter-Ehlerman, H.H. Fuchs & C.F. Rüter (ed.), *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945-1966*,*** 6, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 1971, p. 669 ff.).

* "Nazi terror against homosexuals. Suppressed and unatoned for".

** "Pink triangle: Nazi persecution of homosexuals and its remembrance".

*** "Justice and Nazi crimes, collected German court sentences for National Socialist criminal killings 1945-1966"

Déportés homosexuels au camp de Sachsenhausen (Régis Schlagdenhauffen)

Classified as “ideological enemies”, Jehovah’s Witnesses (and the closely related *Bibelforscher*, or Bible Students) were excluded and persecuted because they refused to conform to Nazi ideology. They would not give the “Heil Hitler” greeting, salute the flag or serve in the armed forces. For that reason their attitude towards Nazism is often described as one of “passive resistance”.

■ The several thousand Jehovah’s Witnesses held in the concentration camps wore a purple triangle and were kept apart from other prisoners, for fear they might try to convert them. Another particularity was that Jehovah’s Witnesses were free to leave the concentration camps if they renounced their faith.

Chronology, ideology, texts

■ Prior to World War II, Jehovah’s Witnesses accounted for only a tiny minority of the German population; statistics show that there were about 20 000 of them, out of a total population of more than 60 million.

■ From 28 February 1933, a Decree for the Protection of People and State (the “Reichstag Fire Decree”) banned the *Bibelforscher* association in Germany and, from 1 April 1935, Jehovah’s Witnesses were officially banned too.

■ Only after 1936 did the Nazi regime seriously attack the Jehovah’s Witnesses, sending them to concentration camps. And once Nazi Germany was at war, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ pacifism (they refuse on principle to shed blood) meant that they were seen as traitors to the Fatherland. At the same time, from 1940 onwards, persecution of them spread to the territories annexed by Germany: Austria, Bohemia, Alsace-Lorraine, etc.

Persecution measures and timelines

■ In 1936 there were 400 Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. A special Gestapo unit was subsequently formed to conduct a census of all Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany.

■ The Jehovah’s Witnesses are a special group in the concentration camp environment, for two reasons. One, despite accepting their imprisonment, they refused to do certain jobs linked to the war effort or to obey orders they regarded as contrary to their faith. Two, solidarity amongst the group members remained intact despite the appalling living conditions in the camps. They were admired by other deportees for their resolve, which was stronger than the Nazi machinery of absolute power – the Nazis did not know what to do with these prisoners who doggedly resisted the Nazi ideology and were prepared to endure any



illustration : Francine Mayran

hardship. The attitude of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the concentration camps was praised both by their fellow-prisoners and by the SS, who were baffled by their extreme moral values.

■ Aussi, du fait de leur droiture et de leur probité, de nomBecause of their moral values and their honesty many Jehovah’s Witnesses were assigned to service functions in the concentration camps, as there was no fear of them stealing or “organising” themselves.

■ One peculiarity of the Jehovah’s Witnesses was that they had the option of leaving the concentration camps if they renounced their faith and signed a statement which read: “I hereby declare under oath that I recognise the activity of the Judaic International Bible Students Association to be hostile to the State. As a good German I have renounced any part I had in it or contact I had with it. The life of my people and the work of the *Führer* have primacy for me over all other considerations...” Very few Jehovah’s Witnesses signed this declaration.

Consequences

■ All in all, the number of those arrested is thought to be at least 6 000 (a third of all Jehovah's Witnesses), whilst the number of those who died or disappeared is put at between 2 000 and 3 000.

■ For many years after the war the Jehovah's Witnesses were not seen as victims of Nazism, chiefly because of the controversial nature of this Christian group which is accused of proselytising.

Bibliography

■ The seminal work on the Nazi persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses remains that of Detlef Garbe, published in German in 1994 and in English in 1998:

- ▶ Detlef Garbe, *Between Resistance and Martyrdom: Jehovah's Witnesses in the Third Reich*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

■ Other texts dealing with the question include:

- ▶ Sylvie Gaffard, Léo Tristan, *Les Bibelforscher et le nazisme (1933-1945). Ces oubliés de l'histoire*,* Paris, Tiresias, 1991.
- ▶ Hans Hesse, *Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses during the Nazi Regime 1933-1945*, Berghahn Books, 2003.

More info...

■ "When we Jews from Dachau went back to our blocks, the other Jews hid what they had in order not to have to share. You may look askance at that, but that's how it was. Outside we took care of each other, but when it was a matter of life or death everyone looked to save his own skin first and forgot about the others. But what do you think the Jehovah's Witnesses did? The Jehovah's Witnesses were forced to do very arduous work, they had to mend a water pipe, standing all day long with their feet in icy water during this cold weather. None of us could understand how they bore it. They said 'Jehovah will give us the strength to endure. Because of this they really needed their bread, just as we did, because they were very hungry. And what did they do? They collected all the bread they had, each one took half of his ration and gave the other to their co-religionists, who had also just been transferred from Dachau. They welcomed and embraced them. Before eating they prayed, and afterwards their faces were all bright and full of grace. All said they were no longer hungry. At that moment, you know, I said to myself, those are the true Christians, that's how I always imagined them."

*"The Bibelforscher and Nazism (1933-1945). The forgotten of history".

(Testimony of a Jew deported to Neuengamme, Edgar Kupfer-Korbewitz, *Die Machtigen und die Hilflosen. Als Haftling in Dachau*,* Stuttgart, 1957, p. 286.)

■ "This is the story of a man who wouldn't say 'Heil Hitler'. He belonged to a religious sect, the Community of Bible Students (Bibelforscher). God had forbidden him to greet people using the Nazi salute. His name was Frank or Franke, and he was some kind of engineer [...]. He didn't raise his arm in the salute. He didn't say 'Heil Hitler'. The first time the guard noticed this, he shouted at him:

- Why didn't you salute?
- Because God has forbidden me to.

The other couldn't believe his ears. He looked at him stupidly:

- You making fun of me?
- No!
- Which dormitory are you in?
- Number 3.

They came for him that evening. Off to solitary confinement! For a week! He came back from that with puffy, black eyes.

- 'Be reasonable', his friends said.'What does a Heil Hitler matter? Do as we do. We just say it, no problem.' He shook his head. Next day he got caught again. And it was off back to solitary confinement for another two weeks!"

(Testimony of Wolfgang Langhoff about a fellow-prisoner wearing the purple triangle at the Lichtenburg concentration camp, in Sylvie Gaffard et Léo Tristan, *Les Bibelforscher et le nazisme (1933-1945). Ces oubliés de l'histoire*,** Paris, Tiresias, 1991, p. 16-17).

**"The powerful and the powerless. A prisoner in Dachau".

***"The Bibelforscher and Nazism (1933-1945). The forgotten of history".



Resistance movement members and political opponents were among the first to be targeted by Nazism, both in Germany and in all the European countries under Nazi occupation. Resistance organisations were formed in each country. It is hard to talk of “the Resistance”, because it was a patchwork of organisations. In the camps, resisters and political opponents all wore a red triangle inscribed with the initial letter of their country of origin. Resistance members continued to fight the regime inside the camps, wherever possible.

They formed resistance committees, distinguishable by their allegiance to a political ideology (communists, socialists, Christian Democrats, etc.). Immediately after the war the resistance organisations played a major political role in rebuilding the national identity in those countries devastated by Nazi occupation.

Chronology, ideology, texts

When the Nazis came to power in 1933 the first to suffer persecution were the political opponents of the Nazi Party. As well as communists, social democrats and trade unionists these included members of the German churches. Between 1933 and 1940, more than a million people were arrested and imprisoned in Germany for “resistance activity”. From December 1941, political opponents and resistance members were deported to concentration camps in the utmost secrecy under the *Nacht und Nebel* (Night and Fog) decree.

Only during World War II did resistance become a Europe-wide phenomenon. One of the high points of the resistance movement in Europe remains General de Gaulle’s Appeal of 18 June 1940 broadcast from London by the BBC.

Resistance took a variety of forms. Sometimes it was peaceful (for example the strike of February 1941 in the Netherlands against persecution of the Dutch Jews or the general strike against forced conscription which paralysed the entire Luxembourg economy in 1942). Sometimes it was more violent, taking the form of guerrilla, paramilitary, or even military activity. There were the partisans in the Soviet Union, the Polish national army (see fact sheet on Poland), the French FFI (*Forces françaises de l’intérieur*), the CLN (*Comitato di liberazione nazionale*) in Italy, etc.

In Germany the plot of 20 July 1944 is seen as the most important act of opposition to Hitler: the avowed aim was the assassination of Hitler and a take-over by members of the army.



illustration : Francine Mayran

Resistance movements sprang up throughout Europe and continued to exist even in the Nazi camps. They had a variety of forms and composed networks of hundreds of thousands of men and women, who could not have achieved their objectives without regular or occasional help from the rest of the population in the countries concerned (who fed them, hid them and gave them material assistance in their fight).

Persecution measures and timelines

Efforts to defeat the resistance movement members and partisans cost millions of lives. Those arrested were always made an example of and punished severely.

Resisters and political opponents were either sent to Nazi concentration camps in Germany, where they wore the red triangle, or executed. Almost 3 000 political opponents were executed at the Plötzensee prison in Berlin. It was the same in countries under the Nazi yoke. In Paris a thousand political opponents were executed at Mont Valérien, including the members of the *Affiche Rouge* (Red Poster) group in 1944.

Consequences

■ The resistance movement is a major feature of the struggle against Nazism. Its members are generally not viewed as victims of Nazism but rather as heroes or martyrs. They played an important part in all European countries in the immediate aftermath of the war. The differences in their political allegiances explain why the resistance organisations and political deportations are commemorated differently from one European country to another.

The Council of Europe's position

■ The Council of Europe is among the institutions established after the end of World War II to ensure that Europe remained a continent of peace in the future. Its foundation may be seen as a legacy of the European resistance against Nazism and the racist and totalitarian ideologies which reached their terrible peak between 1939 and 1945.

■ For this reason, from its very beginnings the Council of Europe stood for human rights and democracy.

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"Red Poster", Nazi propaganda poster against a resistance group (the Manouchian network), 1944. Source: BNF



More info...

■ Testimony by Denise Vernay, who joined the French Resistance at age 16: "Patriotism and civic duty" are the two main reasons why I joined the Resistance. Who was I then? Denise Jacob, 16 in 1940. One of four siblings, brought up in Nice: I had one sister, Milou, a younger brother, Jean, a younger sister, Simone. Our father was an architect... and very little building was going on between the wars. Our mother was the soul of the house. Family, school and scouting were the three centres of our lives, which weren't easy but so full of tenderness, friendship and different activities.

The war broke out in September 1939. Then there was the 'phony war' from October 1939 to April 1940. It was called that because most people had a wait-and-see attitude, the war seemed to be in a state of suspended animation. In May 1940 came the German invasion, the flow of refugees, the rout of our troops even though some of them were valiantly grouped together at certain defence sites, the debacle, Pétain's quavering voice, the armistice, occupation and collaboration. I refused to believe that it was final, that our British allies had become our enemies overnight. France was no longer France. It was inconceivable to imagine collaborating with the Nazis and their totalitarian, inhuman regime. For several years we had been hosting German Jewish refugees who had had to leave everything behind to save their lives. I can still remember the first decrees against the Jews, the one Pétain signed in August 1940, I think it was, handing political refugees over to their torturers, our 'conquerors'. I felt ashamed, it was unacceptable, contrary to my idea of France. In October 1940 I started secondary school, concentrating in elementary math. The press was censored, French radio was in the hands of the occupier and television didn't exist. All we had was the BBC and the 'the French speak to the French' broadcast. I and a classmate wrote the latest news from London on the blackboard at school. We copied and distributed tracts dictated by London. It wasn't much, but what else could we do? There wasn't a recruiting office where you could sign up against the occupier, no underground newspapers you could buy at newsstands! You needed more imagination than the teenager I was could have. There were shortages of everything and daily life was hard. We were cold, hungry and always waiting on line for something. We went to school. In autumn 1942 the raids to round up foreign Jews got worse. [...] In July-August 1943 the hunting of the Jews intensified. I was in a girl scout camp and decided not to go back to my family in Nice because I wanted to join a resistance network or movement. A friend who was a girl scout leader and elementary school teacher in Saint-Marcellin introduced me to the 'Franc-Tireur' movement, where I became a liaison agent. It was part of the 'Mouvements unis de Résistance' with *Combat* and *Libération*. Lyon was the centre. That's when I went underground."

(Denise Vernay, in *Franc-tireur*, 23 August 1946.)¹

* "Dictionary of the Resistance, Resistance at home and Free France".

** "Resistance in the Nazi camps", *Mémoire vivante* (quarterly journal of the) Foundation for Remembrance of the Deportation.

*** "Germany against Hitler".

Consequences

■ The consequences of the war of total destruction which Nazi Germany waged in the Soviet Union sometimes become confused with those of a targeted policy of wiping out civilian Slav populations under plans to extend the Reich towards the east. The Soviet Union suffered enormous losses as a result of Operation Barbarossa, the Generalplan Ost, and the internment of Soviet and Slav civilians and troops.

■ Some 14 million civilians from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other states of the Soviet Union lost their lives. Plus 10 million Red Army soldiers.

■ A total of at least 25 million Soviet citizens died between 1939 and 1945.

The Council of Europe's position

■ The question of the wartime violence inflicted on the populations of the former Soviet Union has become increasingly prominent in recent years. In some cases the violence done to civilian Slav populations is indistinguishable from that inflicted on the Jews of Eastern Europe, while in others specific actions are identifiable.

■ A special effort of remembrance is encouraged in the countries of central and eastern Europe, in view of the persecution suffered by the "Slavs".

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Slav women in the huts at Auschwitz (Shoah Memorial), XCVII_105

More info ...

■ Testimony by Germaine Tillion, a French ethnologist arrested in August 1942 for resistance activities and deported to the Ravensbrück camp:

"The huge mass of Russians were treated every bit as badly as us but remained alien to us: a virtually indistinguishable and heterogeneous hodgepodge. For example, there was a whole hut full of old peasant women from who knows where, touchingly kind and constantly praying, feeling a particular need to thank God for every last bit of turnip they found in their soup [...]. There were also all kinds of odds and sods – rounded up during city raids, I suppose – and they amazed us by their talent for thieving (matched unfortunately by their equally surprising brutality and ferocity)... The high level of the Red Army girls, their esprit de corps, was due to the fact that they had already been organised prior to their imprisonment; they were also young, robust, clean, honest, fairly primitive and uncultured. But there were some intellectuals amongst them (doctors, teachers) who radiated benevolence and goodwill; we also liked their spirit of resistance to the Germans. Their knowledge of world culture, though, was nil. The camp administration [...] had not seen fit to distinguish us [Frenchwomen] from the German women (they like us wore a red triangle with no added markings).

The Russians and Ukrainians were quickly decimated by a devastating form of tuberculosis which the imprisoned French and Czech doctors had never seen before [...] The Czechs' level of culture and political education was on average higher than that found amongst the other peoples of central and eastern Europe [...]. Like the Poles, the Czechs were early internees; like the Poles, they received parcels; many of them could speak and write German, and they also had a sense of organisation and a social mind-set which often enabled them to combine a bit of sabotage (for honour's sake), a bit of work (to be left in peace), some carefully camouflaged rest and well-timed 'recoveries' – all of it very cleverly dosed [...]

The Yugoslavs were the group with whom we got on by far the best. We did not know their language, and very few of them knew ours. But we hit it off whenever chance brought us together, sharing the same peasant probity, the same Mediterranean courtesy, the same reluctance to bow our necks to the German yoke. What pleased me most, however, was that these virtues of sweetness were not exclusive to any one class but were – as with us – to be found at all levels of that national group."

(Germaine Tillion, Ravensbrück, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p. 183-185.)

NAZI PERSECUTION IN POLAND: OPERATION TANNENBERG

Poland is the only country to have been directly enslaved by Nazi Germany during World War II. As soon as they had invaded the country, in 1939, the Nazis set about destroying Poland's culture and heritage, considering its people to be fundamentally inferior. Poland thus became the "General Government", a kind of colony in the east of the Reich.

■ The enslavement of Poland resulted in a brutal, planned policy to kill the country's entire intelligentsia and religious elite. And it was in occupied Poland that the Nazis built all their extermination centres and a number of concentration camps – including Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Chronology, ideology, texts

■ Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. That day marked the start of World War II. The invasion of Poland brought France, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries into the war. At the end of September Poland, attacked by both Germany and the Soviet Union, capitulated. The two countries then divided Poland up between them. German-occupied Poland was renamed the "Generalgouvernement" (General Government).

■ Nazi policy towards the Poles was very clear. Being part of the "Slav" race the Poles were, according to Nazi ideology, *de facto* destined for slavery. As for the Polish intelligentsia, it fell victim to a "genocide" planned in such a way as to make enslavement of the population easier: academics, lawyers, actors and leading politicians were arrested, tortured, deported to camps and murdered. The policy of genocidal terror against the Polish intelligentsia had been prepared in August 1939 (even before the invasion of Poland), under the code name "Operation Tannenberg". A list of more than 60 000 people to be "neutralised" had been compiled.

Persecution measures and timelines

■ Operation Tannenberg began in August 1939. Its aim was to destroy the vital forces of the Polish nation. Later, in 1941, a new operation codenamed *Generalplan Ost* (master plan for the east) was launched. The purpose was to extend Germany's "living space" to the east, an area of which Polish land and its Polish occupants were an integral part, all the way to the Soviet Union. The plan had a twofold objective: all those living in the Slav countries bordering the Reich were to be either



illustration : Francine Mayran

enslaved or wiped out, starting with Poland. As part of this plan, German families were moved, voluntarily or forcibly, to Poland as pioneer settlers in the eastward expansion of the Reich. At the same time, from 1939, tens of thousands of Poles were moved to the heart of the Reich to work there as forced labourers in industry. In addition, more than 50 000 Polish children were deported from their home country to the Reich to be "Germanised".

■ In addition to enslaving the population, the Nazis used Polish territory as a base for several concentration camps and, above all, the extermination centres of Belzec, Birkenau, Chelmno, Sobibor and Treblinka, making Poland the killing ground in the "Final Solution".

■ The first concentration camp built in Poland was Stutthof (September 1939). Then in 1940, Auschwitz was built on the site of an old army barracks. Up to 1942, most of those imprisoned in the camp were Poles (including a large number of Resistance members) (see the fact sheet on Resistance members and political opponents). For this reason, the Poles have come to regard Auschwitz as a leading site for remembrance of resistance to Nazi Germany.

Consequences

■ The invasion and annexation of Poland had disastrous consequences for the country, which was also coveted by the Soviet Union.

■ In response to the German occupation, the Poles developed an extremely dense network of solidarity and resistance – with the backing of the Polish government-in-exile in London. At the same time, members of the national army set up their own resistance movement called the *Armia Krajowa*.

■ About 1.5 million adult Poles were deported to Germany as forced labourers, and thousands of children too. Some 2 million non-Jewish Poles perished as a result of the Nazi policy of enslaving and murdering the Polish elite. Added to that are the 3 million Polish Jews who were victims of the Final Solution.

The Council of Europe's position

■ Poland has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1991.

■ The Council of Europe is vigilant to ensure the use of precise language, for example "Auschwitz-Birkenau, Nazi concentration camp in occupied Poland", so that responsibilities are clearly established.

■ The recent publication of the Organisation's "European Pack" for Auschwitz emphasises the special importance of Auschwitz as a place for commemorating Polish victims.

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More info...

■ Testimony of Mrs J. K., a resident of the city of Gdynia, in northern Poland: "On October 17, 1939, at 8 a.m. I heard someone knocking at the door of my flat. As my maid was afraid to open, I went to the door myself. I found there two German gendarmes, who roughly told me that in a few hours I had to be ready to travel with my children and everybody in the house. When I said that I had small children, that my husband was a prisoner of war, and that I could not get ready to travel in so short a time, the gendarmes answered that not only must I be ready, but that the flat must be swept, the plates and dishes washed, and the keys left in the cupboards, so that the Germans who were to live in my house should have no trouble.

In so many words they further declared that I was entitled to take with me only one suit-case of not more than fifty kilograms in weight and a small handbag with food for a few days.

At 12 noon they came again and ordered us to go out in front of the house. Similar groups of people were standing in front of all the houses. After some hours' waiting, military lorries drove up and they packed us in one after the other, shouting at us rudely and also striking us. Then they took us to the railway station, but only in the evening did they pack us into filthy goods trucks, the doors of which were then bolted and sealed.

In these trucks, most of which were packed with forty people, we spent three days, without any possibility of getting out. I hereby affirm that in my truck there were four children of under ten years of age and two old men, and we were not given any straw, or any drinking utensils, that we had to satisfy our natural needs in the tightly packed truck, and if there were no deaths in our transport it was only because it was still comparatively warm and we spent only three days on the journey. We were unloaded, half dead, at Czestochowa (southern Poland), where the local population gave us immediate help, but the German soldiers who opened the truck exclaimed 'What! Are these Polish swine still alive?'"

(Testimony from the *Black Book of Poland*, New York, Polish Ministry of Information, 1942, p. 184.)



Polish soldiers lowering a flag
(Shoah Memorial) CDLXVI_51

NAZI PERSECUTION OF THE GYPSIES: THE SAMUDARIPEN

The term “gypsy” (in French “tsigane”, a name used since the French Revolution) in fact covers several groups such as the Roma, Sinti, Manouche, *Gitans*, etc. German gypsies were persecuted and interned in the Nazi concentration camps. They wore a brown triangle on their clothing usually marked with the letter Z (for *Zigeuner*). As in the case of the Jews, gypsy men, women and children were murdered as part of a policy of extermination organised and planned at the top level of the Nazi hierarchy, after years of dithering over the nature of the crime. In total, several hundred thousand gypsy men, women and children from different countries of Europe were exterminated. Nowadays the Nazis’ policy of genocide against the gypsies is usually called *Samudaripen* or *Porrajmos*.

Chronology, ideology, texts

Ever since their arrival in Europe in the 16th century, the gypsies have constantly been driven out of the towns and countries where they settled. Various policies of repression have been used against them over the centuries: banishment to the colonies, removal of their children, enslavement or imprisonment. The 20th century saw the introduction of a gypsy census in virtually all European countries. This subsequently made it easier to operate a specific policy of persecution and extermination against this group. In 1925 the Munich *Zigeunerzentrale* (Central Office for Gypsy Affairs, founded in 1914) already held over 14 000 individual or family record cards for the Sinti and Roma in Germany.

Seen from the Nazi point of view, the case of the gypsies was somewhat complicated, because they were “Aryans”. They therefore fell within a middle ground between the racist and anthropological theories of Nazism and their social theories of racial hygiene. Thus it was not so much their “racial” origin that was a problem initially, but rather the fact that the Nazis regarded them as “asocials”. These factors show that there were many differences between the Jews and the Gypsies.

The legal basis for excluding the gypsies was established by the race laws of 1935. Then, in December 1938, it was confirmed by law that not only the Jews but also the gypsies belonged to the sub-races. In autumn 1939, the deportation of gypsies to the General Government was ordered. Then a decree signed by Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of all gypsies within the Greater Reich. This decree was extended to include those living in Austria, northern France, Poland, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. On 16 December 1942, Himmler ordered gypsies to be transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau following the signature of the *Auschwitz Erlass* (Auschwitz Decree). In early August 1944 the gypsy camp, the *Zigeunerlager* at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated by the SS.



Illustration : Francine Mayran

Persecution measures and timelines

Different kinds of measures were taken against the gypsies: families were registered using “anthropometric” record cards, nomadic groups were forced to settle, women were forcibly sterilised, medical experiments were conducted on women and twins in the concentration camp “sick bays”. After 1933 racial theory was incorporated into the laws of the Reich. Gypsies were generally regarded as “asocials” even when they were integrated into German society. After much genealogical study and lengthy debate they were deemed to be an “asocial race”. Between 1933 and 1935, Germany’s gypsies were assigned to special camps, the *Zigeunerlager*.

From 1938 onwards, gypsies were systematically interned. Because records were kept on them this was easier to do. The same year thousands of gypsies were sent to concentration camps under the *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* (extermination through work) programme. Gypsies were now exploited as slave labour in various large German companies and in the concentration camps. Whether in industry or the camps, the gypsies’ working conditions were extremely harsh. As a rule they worked 12 to 15 hours a day (on average a 70-hour week), with, of course, a reduced food ration which caused them to become undernourished, sick and exhausted. The forced labour to which they were assigned was an economically profitable way of killing them little by little, making them work until they dropped.

From 1941, the gypsies were the victims of massacres committed by the mobile death squads, or *Einsatzgruppen*. By 1942, it is fair to say that gypsy policy had become harsher both inside the Reich and in the countries of southern Europe (Yugoslavia). But for the gypsies, the question of the "Final Solution" became truly acute in 1943. Whole trainloads of them, known as "Z convoys", arrived at Auschwitz. More than 20 000 gypsies were deported to the camp. Soon afterwards the work of exterminating them began in earnest.

Consequences

It is impossible at present to give an exact figure for the number of gypsy victims; estimates range from 250 000 to 500 000. By the end of World War II more than 80% of gypsy families from Germany, Austria, Bohemia, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium and northern France had been exterminated. (In France, gypsies were held in special camps but were not deported to the Nazi camps.)

After World War II, officials dealing with gypsy affairs in Germany were sometimes the very people who had previously persecuted them. For a long time gypsies remained "unrecognised" victims, since the courts saw them as "asocials" who had quite rightly been persecuted. It took many years of campaigning to stop them from being forgotten and to ensure that Europe's gypsies were, at last, recognised as a group of victims of Nazism.

The Council of Europe's position

Since 1969 the Council of Europe has been involved in the education of Roma children and the training of Roma teachers. Educational fact sheets on the history of the Roma in Europe and the *Samudaripen* have been published and can be downloaded from the Council of Europe website. A website (<http://www.romagenocide.org>) has been created with the cooperation of OSCE/ODIHR. The Council actively works to improve learning about the genocide against the Roma in Europe through co-operation in international activities, for example within the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF): www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/remembrance/archives/Samudaripen-Porrajmos_en.asp.

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See also:

www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoculture_EN.asp.

More info ...

Paula Nardai, a Roma woman from Oberwart, Austria, recalls the fate of her family at Auschwitz-Birkenau: "My father was there, my mother, my eighteen-year-old sister, me and my nine-year-old brother. And my other brother, too, who was older, who had been working in Kiel. My mother – a month, I can say, a month she survived. My father, they beat him on the head so terribly that he turned blind. There was a barrack which they called 'Lazarett' (sick bay) – if they put you there, you never came out again. They did away with him, we didn't see him again. My sister went into the kitchen, they took her to peel potatoes. And my little brother, it was the first time that he had to work. I was away, I left him home in the barrack, I went away in the morning, at the 'Außenkommando' (outer squad) I was at work, and when I came home, what do I see? The child is not there. I say to the others: 'Where is the child?' – 'They have taken him out.' They took the children and carried them to the gas chambers. And I was not allowed to go out any more. I could not go out to ask anyone, because I was not allowed to leave the Barrack at finishing time. Only 'zum Abzählen' (for counting) – over."

(Gerhard Baumgartner, Education of Roma Children in Europe project)

Karl Stojka was the fourth of six children born to Roman Catholic Gypsy parents in a village in Austria. The Stojkas made their living as itinerant horse traders. They lived in a traveling family wagon, and spent winters in Austria's capital of Vienna. "I grew up used to freedom, travel and hard work. In March 1938 our wagon was parked for the winter in a Vienna campground, when Germany annexed Austria just before my seventh birthday. The Germans ordered us to stay put. My parents converted our wagon into a wooden house, but I wasn't used to having permanent walls around me. My father and oldest sister began working in a factory, and I started grade school. By 1943 my family had been deported to a Nazi camp in Birkenau for thousands of Gypsies. Now we were enclosed by barbed wire. By August 1944 only 2,000 Gypsies were left alive; 918 of us were put on a transport to Buchenwald to do forced labour. There the Germans decided that 200 of us were incapable of working and were to be sent back to Birkenau. I was one of them; they thought I was too young. But my brother and uncle insisted that I was 14 but a dwarf. I got to stay. The rest were returned to be gassed."

Karl was later deported to the Flossenbürg concentration camp. He was freed by American troops in 1945.

*"The Gypsies, a European destiny".

**"Every day we could see the smoke"...: The Nazi murder of the Sinti and Roma".

Shoah is a biblical Hebrew word from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 47, verse 11, meaning a disaster. Widely known to French-speakers following Claude Lanzmann's film of the same name, the term describes the project of the Nazi regime for the organised and systematic extermination of Europe's Jews. (In English the word "Holocaust" is more commonly used.) In practically all countries of Europe, those of the Jewish faith or categorised as such by the Nuremberg laws were victimised by racist measures before being rounded up. After that, men, women and children were either murdered on the spot or deported by train, in cattle wagons, to extermination centres in the east of Germany. All in all, two thirds of the Jewish population of Europe were wiped out – more than 5 million men, women and children. Some people (given the title of "Righteous") opposed the deportations, risking their lives to hide and protect Jews.

Chronology, ideology, texts

■ The ideology of anti-Semitism, which made the genocide of the Jews possible, predates Nazism. Hitler, in his book *Mein Kampf*, outlines a vision of the world that sees the Jews as being to blame for Germany's defeat in World War I and more generally for everything that was wrong with the world.

■ After the Nazis came to power the regime promulgated, over a period of six years, more than 400 laws that stripped Jews of their civic, civil and economic rights. At the same time, the process of looting Jewish property began.

■ On 15 September 1935, the Nuremberg laws were enacted, the first laws on "racial purity". Adoption of these laws made Germany a regime of official and legalised racism. After 1939 and the invasion of Poland, the first massacres of Jews took place. But these were isolated and were perpetrated against Slavs as well as Jews (see the fact sheet on the Slavs). From autumn 1941, wearing the yellow star was gradually made compulsory for Jews in Germany and the occupied countries. In the east (Poland, etc.), Jews were initially forced to live in ghettos. (The many acts of resistance in the ghettos give the lie to the stereotype of Jews as passive victims.)

■ The great turning point in Nazi policy towards the Jews came on 20 January 1942 at the Wannsee Conference, which endorsed the plan for the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question", in other words the plan to kill all Europe's Jews. From this moment on, extermination centres (incorrectly called "death camps") were set up. These centres (Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, Stutthof and Treblinka) were simply railheads. They had special units which indiscriminately killed men, women and children, by gassing them. The centres had only one purpose, to kill, and to that extent they were different from the concentration camps. The camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was an exception; it had a number of functions and was both a concentration camp and an extermination centre.



Illustration : Francine Mayran

Persecution measures and timelines

■ The laws promulgated against the Jews were designed to stigmatise them (labelling them with a star), ostracise them (forbidding them to use public transport or enter public parks) and steal their property (seizure of Jewish assets for redistribution to Aryans).

■ Once he came to power Hitler sought to clear Germany of Jews, by expelling them or encouraging them to emigrate. In 1939, after Poland was conquered, Jews were deported and held in ghettos. Later, in 1940, after the fall of France, it was suggested that all Jews should be sent to the island of Madagascar. At the same time the policy of ghettoisation began to be applied in earnest (the first ghetto was set up in April 1940 in Lodz). In the ghettos the Jews died of starvation and disease linked to promiscuity and poor hygiene. From 1941 onwards, Soviet Jews were shot by mobile death squads (*Einsatzgruppen*). In 1942, the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" was implemented throughout occupied Europe. Right up to the end of the war, the killing of hundreds of thousands of Jews was organised on an industrial scale and took priority over other military, economic or strategic objectives.

Consequences

■ The Shoah had multiple, irreparable consequences. Between 5 and 6 million persons of the Jewish faith fell victim to the Nazi policies of persecution and the “Final Solution”. By the end of the war most of Europe’s Jewish communities had been decimated. Poland, which had over 3 million Jews before the war, has only a few thousand today. The entire Jewish culture of eastern Europe, and the language used by these communities (Yiddish), were virtually wiped off the map.

■ The seriousness of the crimes committed and the methods used led to the coining (in 1945) of the term *genocide*. Another consequence was the establishment (in 1945) of the first international court (at Nuremberg), which judged and sentenced the Nazi leadership.

■ As for the survivors of the Shoah, some tried to rebuild their lives in their country of origin, but most emigrated, chiefly to Israel or America, in search of a new start.

The Council of Europe’s position

■ For the Council of Europe and all its member states the Holocaust is a European legacy with roots common to the various nations of Europe, creating a responsibility which Europe must assume. Council of Europe work on teaching remembrance of the Shoah has its basis in Recommendation Rec(2001)15 on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe, adopted in 2001, which suggests that each member state should designate one day a year for Holocaust remembrance.

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Films

- ▶ *La Rafle* (The Roundup), dir. Roselyne Bosch, 2010, 115 min.
- ▶ *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and Fog), dir. Alain Resnais, 1955, 32 min.
- ▶ *Les Survivants* (The Survivors), dir. Patrick Rotman, 2005, 114 min.

More info ...

Testimony by Georges Wellers, born in 1905, deported as a Jew from Drancy to Auschwitz and then to Buchenwald. After the war he gained an international reputation as a historian of the Shoah. “It happened like this. When the train stopped, the deportees had to get out of the wagons and line up on the platform. A German officer was standing there, rather elegant, and he sorted people. One by one, everyone had to stand in front of him. The officer didn’t ask any questions, simply waved each person either to the left or to the right. It was very soon apparent that the men and healthy-looking women went to one side, whilst all kinds of people, women with children, old people, etc., went to the other side. I thought the division was between those who were going to be put to work, and those who would get better treatment... True, I’d heard about the gas chambers at the end of 1942, when I was still in France, but I hadn’t believed it. I still didn’t believe it when I got to Auschwitz. So this selection process didn’t worry me. I finally understood forty eight hours later when one of my best friends, a doctor I’d known from before the war, told me his story. He had left with his wife and two children, a boy of 14 but quite tall, and a girl aged 11. On arrival the whole family went through the selection process. The officer in charge sent the father and son one way, not bothering about the boy’s age, and the mother and daughter the other way. My friend too thought they would receive better treatment. So he went up to the officer and said: ‘But my son is only 14. Can he stay with his mother?’ The officer simply replied: ‘Bitte’ (very well). And my friend concluded with the words: ‘So you see, I sent my own son to the gas chamber.’”

(Georges Wellers, “Les Juifs: des Einsatzgruppen aux chambres à gaz”, in François Bédarida (ed.), *La politique nazie d’extermination*,*** Paris, Albin Michel, 1989, p. 261.)

*“Shoah, the impossibility of forgetting, testimonies and documents”.

** “Deportee wisdom”.

*** “The Jews: from the Einsatzgruppen to the gas chambers”, in François Bédarida (ed.), “The Nazi policy of extermination”.

The "asocials", who wore the black triangle in the concentration camps, are rarely mentioned as a group of Nazi victims. But this forgotten group also has its place in the remembrance and history of Nazism because it aids our understanding of the National-Socialist mind-set of exclusion and persecution. Persons deemed "asocial" could be either men or women and the very definition of the term was vague. An asocial was anyone who did not fit directly in one of the other victim categories and whose behaviour or attitude did not conform to Nazi expectations. This made such people *Gemeinschaftsfremde*, or "aliens to the community".

Chronology, ideology, texts

The racist Nazi ideologues developed the idea that the weakest and least productive members of society had to be eliminated in order to safeguard what they called "racial purity". Examples of those to be rejected included the work-shy, people with tuberculosis, the unemployed, prostitutes of either sex, beggars, perceived alcoholics, or gypsies.

From 1933, a law on the prevention of hereditary illnesses required the preventive sterilisation of social undesirables. But it was only in 1937 that a law of 14 December, the Crime Prevention Decree, stated that "persons without employment, habitual criminals and anyone who, by his asocial behaviour represents a danger to the public shall be preventively detained in a concentration camp".

In a speech of September 1942, Joseph Goebbels explained that asocials were to be sent to concentration camps for life under the *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* (extermination through work) programme, which was also applied to the gypsies.

Persecution measures and timelines

There were two main phases of the persecution of asocials. The first was in 1933, that is to say when the Nazis came to power, and the second was in 1937-1938, before Germany was at war.

The first measure against asocials came in September 1933. A week-long press campaign was organised, with roundups in night shelters, inns, places where the homeless and those known to be on the margins of society gathered. These people were imprisoned and held in a camp set up for the purpose at Meseritz.



illustration : Francine Mayran

At the same time, the mayors of various municipalities, and some social workers, gave lists of asocials to the police. For these officials, this procedure enabled them to reduce the number of people on welfare or sleeping in shelters, especially as there was no charge for transporting people to and keeping them in concentration camps! In many cases, the camp dispatch form was marked "not to be returned" or "behaviour to be corrected at camp".

June 1938 brought a major change. Asocials were now routinely interned in concentration camps as part of the *Aktion Arbeitsscheu Reich*, a roundup of the work-shy. Tens of thousands of men and women were arrested and then interned in concentration camps under this operation. This accounts for the fact that for several months in 1938-1939 the asocials were the biggest group in the camps. They wore a black triangle.

Living conditions in the camps were particularly difficult for the black triangle group. Because their triangle meant they were "asocial", they were viewed with particular suspicion by their comrades in misfortune and they were given the most arduous tasks as part of their forced "re-education".

Consequences

Some 5 000 women and at least 10 000 men were persecuted as “asocials”. Most of them died in the concentration camps because they were not well integrated into camp society and were assigned to the toughest work units under the Vernichtung durch Arbeit programme. Asocials have not to date been recognised as victims of Nazism. For the survivors this means they have never been able to claim a deportee card or pension, nor have they received any official apology for their period of imprisonment in a concentration camp.

The Council of Europe’s position

The persecution of such a vaguely defined group prompts a reflection on the fundamentals of living together and the question of solidarity within society, as advocated in the Council of Europe’s Recommendation 1849 (2008) for the promotion of a culture of democracy and human rights through teacher education. A report is currently under preparation on the pan-European project “Living together in 21st century Europe”.

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There are no reference works in French; a better insight into this victim group can be obtained only from books by Wolfgang Ayass (in German) and Richard Evans (in English).

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* “Asocials under National Socialism”.

** “Inferior and asocial: stages in the persecution of social misfits”.

More info ...

Below are two excerpts from police files concerning «asocials» living in Cologne and Duisburg (Germany):

- ▶ “The legal file on W. shows him to be essentially an asocial man, lazy and alcohol-dependent. He has never yet managed to hold down a steady job. Because of his characteristic idleness he has been sacked from every job he has held, after just a few weeks. To date he has subsisted by begging, practices usually regarded as criminal or various forms of casual work. Between 1925 and 1928, he received eight sentences for theft, gang robbery, receiving stolen goods and begging. Between 1933 and 1942, he was twice admitted to an institution for alcoholics and twice in a care centre. W. was sterilised in 1934 on account of his poor heredity: his father drank and his grandfather and his mother’s sister spent/have spent many years in care centres.”
- ▶ “D. is an idler who has never had a regular job. He lives by begging and has no fixed abode. He is a financial burden on the community in every respect. For this reason he will be interned in a concentration camp under the work-shy programme.»



Poor quarter of Vienna
(Shoah Memorial)
MIII_192_29



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.