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The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: A Comparative Western European Perspective

There, the transports ran so smoothly it was a joy to watch them. (Adolf Eichmann)

Some statistics have a lasting impact. This is particularly true when one compares the mortality rates of Jews in German-occupied European countries during the Second World War. The high percentage of Jews from the Netherlands, around 75 per cent, who perished as a result of Nazi policies, is on a par only with the figures for eastern Europe and stands in stark contrast to neighbouring western European countries where the percentages were much lower: France, around 25 per cent; Belgium and Norway, around 40 per cent. Most remarkable of all is the case of occupied Denmark, where nearly all the Jews survived. Bearing in mind the high percentage of victims in the Netherlands, the intention of this article is to attempt some international comparisons of the circumstances and factors which may serve to explain this marked difference between the Netherlands and other western European countries.

The constraints of space make some narrowing of the discussion essential. Comparison has therefore been restricted to the western European democracies occupied during the war, since, for the most part, the Nazis dealt very differently with eastern Europe. Moreover, the structures and traditions of these western democracies, although not entirely similar, are markedly different from those of the eastern European states. On these grounds, it seems reasonable to limit the discussion to Norway, Denmark, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, a limitation which will allow for a more meaningful comparison than if all the occupied countries are taken into consideration.

With the exception of Norway, the literature on the subject is extremely extensive¹ and this study relies entirely on secondary sources.² Thus it makes no claim to introduce any new material into the debate and there is no new archival research underpinning the conclusions. The question of these differing percentages has not gone unnoticed in the literature and one can find many observations

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and brief comments, but it is surprising how little detailed or systematic international comparison of this question has taken place. For the most part, such discussion is confined to a few disparate observations, even in the well-known major works such as those of Hilberg, Reitlinger, Dawidowicz, Gilbert and Marrus. By themselves, these comments are both clear and relevant, but usually related to only one country. There appears to be only one study which takes these national differences as its central theme: Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*.³ Yet although her book is illuminating in some respects, it leaves the reader somewhat unsatisfied. There is a great divide between her demands for methodological precision on the one hand, and the rather impressionistic conclusions on crucial points on the other. Furthermore, the book gives too little attention to the role of German policy and, although raising some notable points about the Netherlands, produces only some rather weak conclusions about the country. Thus, although the Netherlands often appears as the exception in Fein's overall conclusions, the stark contrast between it and the rest of western Europe is lost as Fein deals with the whole of occupied Europe.

Apart from Fein there exist two shorter articles in periodicals which are of direct relevance to the argument. The first is an exceptionally lucid article by M.R. Marrus and R.O. Paxton.⁴ In it, they identify three phases in Nazi policy towards the Jews in western Europe. In the discussion of these phases, they also touch on the differing percentages of survivors, but remain pessimistic that an international comparison would provide many answers and conclude that 'generalizations break apart on the stubborn particularity of each of our countries'.⁵ The second piece is a very short, but sober and enlightening, article by A.J. van der Leeuw.⁶ He attempts to find the answer for the high number of Dutch victims in the absence of a 'favourable factor', which may have been present in various forms in other countries and acted as a counterweight to the otherwise untrammelled activities of the Nazis.

A third limitation on this paper emerges from the first two. The question which has been broached is highly complicated, not least by its attachment to other equally complicated issues. This means that a study of the secondary sources alone cannot justify precise conclusions or answer. In fact, the analysis may serve to create more questions than it does answers, and the conclusions will inevitably be of a broad and very impressionistic nature. To some extent, therefore, it consists of a series of hypotheses which may lead to further research in the future. It also seems appropriate to mention here that there is

effectively a fourth restriction to the paper in that the whole emphasis is placed on explanation and analysis. As far as is possible, moral judgements concerning guilt and responsibility will be avoided, since it must after all be clear that guilt and responsibility rest entirely with the National Socialists in Germany and their supporters elsewhere.

The structure of the argument is relatively simple. After some initial observations about the statistics themselves, there are three basic areas of analysis: firstly, that of the persecutors – the plans made inside Nazi Germany and the character and activities of the occupying regimes; secondly, that of the setting – the general history of the occupation in the western European countries under discussion together with specific aspects related to the persecution of the Jews; thirdly, that of the victims – the possible differences in the composition of the Jewish communities in the five countries, and their reactions to the persecution.

In order to arrive at meaningful statistical comparisons, it is first necessary to ascertain whether the figures for different countries were compiled on the same basis and indeed whether they can be considered reliable. It is well known that the number of victims from each country cannot be determined with any great precision. The available literature often presents differing statistics, but a close analysis of the figures suggests that these differences are relatively small and do not affect the percentages and overall totals to any degree. Of the approximately 140,000 so-called 'full-Jews' in the Netherlands at the beginning of the war, about 100,000 (about 75 per cent) did not survive. Of the 60,000 to 65,000 Jews in Belgium, about 25,000 perished (about 40 per cent). In France there were about 350,000 Jews – a figure which includes those who fled there in the spring and early summer of 1940 – and of these approximately 80,000 (nearly 25 per cent) were killed. In Norway, there were at most only 1800 Jews, of whom about 800 (about 40 per cent) perished. Of the 6500 or so 'full-Jews' in Denmark, the vast majority escaped, only about 100 (or less than 2 per cent) dying as a result of Nazi persecution.

A second statistical question, and one which effectively determines the focus of this paper, relates to whether the differences in percentages could be accounted for by the victims' chances of survival in the camps, or whether they coincide roughly with the percentages of those deported. The latter is in fact the case. Although there are indications that Jews from the Netherlands died more quickly in the camps than

Jews from other countries, the differences are so small that for the purposes of this study they are of only minor importance. In the case of all but one of the countries, only a very few of the deported Jews survived. The survival rates for the other four varied between 1 per cent and 5 per cent. Perhaps the Jews from the Netherlands survived on average a few weeks less in the camps, but this makes very little difference to the overall figures. The exception to this is Denmark. Nearly all of the Jews deported from that country – although small in number – enjoyed ‘protection’ and were taken to the camp at Theresienstadt. As is well known, the chances of survival were much greater there than in the extermination camps where nearly all the other deported Jews were sent.

Finally, there is also the question of the importance of total numbers. Was it, on the one hand, important that the numbers of Jews in Denmark and Norway were relatively small? Did this influence the activities of the occupying Germans, for example in Norway, and increase the chances of escape of the Danish Jews? Was there, on the other hand, a possibility that the Germans had a maximum capacity for the tracking down of Jews, and for the provision of transit camps and transport facilities? The fact that the total numbers deported from France and the Netherlands are more or less the same tends to support this contention. Further research on this aspect of the Nazis’ logistical planning may well provide some of the answers.

For the first area of analysis – that of the persecutors – attention must first be given to the ‘planning’ of the ‘final solution to the Jewish Question’ (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*) in the Third Reich. As such, there are no discernible differences in the plans for the western European countries. The purpose was clear – to make all the territories occupied by the Germans ‘free of Jews’ (*judenrein*). Nevertheless, some differences in the application of this policy can be detected, mainly for pragmatic or opportunistic reasons. To begin with, Denmark fell outside all the plans on account of the special occupation policy applied there. In the same way, Norway was initially given very little attention by the administrative centre in Germany, perhaps because of the small number of Jews there, and also perhaps because of the trouble which anti-Jewish policy was expected to cause.

In the Netherlands, Belgium and France it was somewhat different. In the preparations for the great systematic deportations after June

1942 which were the consequence of decisions taken at the Wannsee Conference (earlier deportations had not been part of any large-scale systematic plan), it had originally been expected to organize the rapid removal of 100,000 Jews from France, 10,000 from Belgium and 40,000 from the Netherlands. This amounted to a roughly equal percentage of the Jews from France and the Netherlands, and a slightly smaller percentage from Belgium. It soon became apparent that the target figure for France was not going to be met, and it was therefore reduced to 40,000. In the Netherlands, however, everything went according to plan, even when the deportations had been running for some time. Speaking of the Netherlands, Eichmann was later quoted as saying, 'there, the transports ran so smoothly that it was a joy to watch them'.⁷

This contrast had much to do with the nature of the occupation regimes and the quality of the people employed in crucial positions. Again to deal first with Denmark, the system chosen for that country in 1940 was based on the fact that German troops had been allowed to enter unopposed, making it impossible for the Germans to exercise detailed supervision over the administrative system. The Danish king and his cabinet remained in office and had 'only' an occupying German army and, in the diplomatic field, a Reich plenipotentiary (*Reichsbevollmächtigte*) to contend with. While this state of affairs continued, Denmark, despite some trouble, was spared the implementation of anti-Jewish measures. This changed only after a series of conflicts, both between the Germans and the Danes and also within the German command, when the Germans attempted to aggregate all power into their own hands in the late summer of 1943. At this point, the tensions between, on the one hand, the Danish government and people and, on the other, the occupying power, became so great that there was scarcely any further co-operation between the two sides. At this time, there were a number of factors which helped to make possible the ambitious rescue of the Jews from Denmark: anti-German forces inside the country were increasingly prepared to take action against the occupying power; the Swedish government expressed its willingness to give sanctuary to Jewish refugees at the end of 1942; and the Danish leadership was given details of the planned actions against the Jews. These factors, combined with the German armed forces', and especially the navy's, lack of enthusiasm for the measures, all contributed to the success of the rescue plan.

As to events in the other four countries, these can be divided into two distinct patterns. Norway and the Netherlands, as 'Ger-

manic' peoples, were given a civilian administration led by a Reich Commissioner. These civilian administrations were not numerically significant, but were ideologically and organizationally extremely purposeful, and they made good use of the existing central and local government bureaucracies, intact except for the cabinet ministers who had departed in the spring of 1940, to carry out their plans. The Reich Commissioners were appointed by Hitler personally and in principle were responsible only to him. From the very beginning, this system brought with it a strong SS and Nazi party representation. Yet in spite of all the underlying conflicts and disputes which occurred between the various German organizations and functionaries in these countries, there was always a unity of purpose in relation to the persecution of the Jews. In the case of the Netherlands, there existed one other special circumstance. The Reich Commissioner was Arthur Seyss-Inquart, and he was assisted by four *Generalkommissare*: Hans Rauter representing the SS; Fritz Schmidt from the Nazi Party; and Friedrich Wimmer and Hans Fischbock, two personal acquaintances of Seyss-Inquart. All, apart from Schmidt, were from Austria and this 'Austrian connection' served to facilitate contacts with various functionaries in Germany who were also from Austria, for example Adolf Eichmann and Ernst Kaltenbrunner. These Austrian Nazi circles were well known for their strong anti-Semitism. Thus, in general, the occupying powers in Norway and the Netherlands possessed greater control over society than was the case elsewhere in western Europe. This may help to explain the large number of victims generated by the anti-Jewish actions in Norway during the autumn of 1942, which took place despite the fact that the Germans had not planned for any mass deportations, and notwithstanding the earlier protests from the Norwegian Church and judiciary and the proximity of an escape route over the Swedish border. After these more or less unexpected measures, most of the remaining Jews effected their escape from Norway.

In Belgium and France, military governments were installed, producing great tensions between the Wehrmacht and the other German authorities, most notably the SS. While it is true that the SS did eventually manage to establish itself in an influential position when it came to the question of anti-Jewish actions, the unwillingness of the Wehrmacht and especially its commanders to play their part led to many problems and delays. In France the situation was further complicated by the fact that considerable influence had initially been given to the Vichy regime. Although Vichy was inherently unfriendly

to the Jews, even anti-Semitic, in the course of time all kinds of government-sponsored chicanery, some relating to Jews of French nationality, did have detrimental effects on the German plans. In addition, the size of the German police apparatus in the occupied countries probably also played a role. According to Hilberg, whilst this amounted to only 3000 men in France, the Netherlands – a smaller country with fewer Jews – had about 5000.⁸

It is obvious that all these factors played some role after the summer of 1942 in holding up and delaying the extensive deportations planned for Belgium and France. In France, the transports began a month earlier (June 1942) and were originally on a larger scale than those planned for the Netherlands. The deportations from Belgium between August and October were also relatively extensive. In the autumn of 1942, a definite reduction in activity can be discerned both in France and in Belgium; during 1943 and 1944 the deportations remained on a smaller scale and took place less frequently. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, while there is evidence of some reduction in the scale of deportations in the autumn of 1942, in 1943 the level was restored. In addition, the frequency of deportations was uniformly high until the end of the summer of 1943. This contrast is most evident in the figures for March to July 1943. It was during this period that the notorious trains to Sobibor left the Netherlands, claiming approximately 35,000 lives. Before and after this period, all the transports went to Auschwitz, as did nearly all those from Belgium and France. At more or less the same time as the deportations from the Netherlands to Sobibor, and the virtually complete halt in the deportations from Belgium and France, Auschwitz was almost entirely occupied with the extermination of the Jews from Salonika (March to May 1943). This may go some way to explaining the discrepancy. On the other hand, the problems related to the Auschwitz typhus epidemic (June and July 1943), which have also been raised in this context, were probably of very little importance. In the course of 1943, the Germans ran into further problems when they tried to enforce their anti-Jewish measures in all the occupied western European countries. After July 1943, the size and scope of the transports from the Netherlands also decreased – down to a level comparable with that of France. (See graph on page 340.)

This raises an important question, and one which, as it concerns up to 35 per cent of them, may well help to shed some light on the high percentage of victims from the Netherlands. Why, in the spring and early summer of 1943, at a time when Auschwitz could only take a

Figure 1
The Deportation of the Jews from France, The Netherlands and Belgium, June 1942 – September 1944

Illustration after K. Treurniet, based on: G. Hirschfeld, 'Die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen "Endlösung" in den besetzten Niederlanden', in W. Benz (ed.), *Die Zahl der jüdische Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (München, 1953); M. Steinberg, *Dossier Brussel-Auschwitz. De SS-politie en het uitroeien van de joden* (Brussels, 1981); S. Klarsfeld, *Le Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France* (Paris, 1978).

small number of Jews from western Europe, did the Germans decide that trains were to continue to leave from the Netherlands, while much less attention was paid to France and Belgium? There is no obvious answer to this question but it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the Germans' satisfaction with the conduct of affairs in the Netherlands on the one hand, combined with their problems in Belgium and France on the other, may well have been important contributory factors.

If any 'explanation' of the Holocaust is possible, the first area of analysis, that of the persecutors, is undoubtedly the most important. There we find the initiatives and motives, the urge for the persecution. However, for an insight into the degree of success achieved by the persecution, the second area of analysis, that of the setting, is of equal importance. Although it cannot be considered as decisive, geography seems an appropriate factor with which to begin. The presence of nearby borders which could be used for escape undoubtedly played some part. Without its geographical location, Denmark's rescue operation, for example, could not have taken place. The number of Jews who escaped from France was also undoubtedly influenced in this way. The nature of the landscape also had some impact – for example in France, where there were vast but thinly populated areas which could serve as hiding places. While these factors might be considered as necessary conditions rather than independent elements with an individual impact, their absence in the Netherlands could be seen as a specifically unfavourable circumstance.

Of the other factors which may have played some role, there is only space to mention the most noteworthy. Yet here, too, we meet some striking paradoxes. The aforementioned greater vulnerability of the Jewish community in the Netherlands in comparison with its counterpart in France should not deflect our attention away from the pre-war situation in those countries. Before the war, France had relatively strong anti-Semitic sentiments and movements, while the Netherlands, although certainly not free of anti-Semitism, had a better reputation in this respect. Such pre-war Dutch anti-Semitism as existed tended to be less virulent and less evident than its counterpart in France. The strongly anti-Jewish policies of the Vichy regime compared with the rapid and powerful Dutch protest, in the form of the 1941 February strike in Amsterdam, against the anti-Jewish measures seem to support this contention. The February strike

protest, the impulse for which originally came from communist circles, occurred as a result of general indignation over the violent measures carried out by Dutch National-Socialists and the German occupiers against the Jews. This expression of public feeling in the Netherlands seems to point rather to the opportunities for Jews there than to their greater vulnerability. In looking for explanations of this paradox, one might ask if the situation in France did not in some way engender an extra alertness on the part of the Jewish community and strengthen resistance to anti-Semitism. Conversely, the situation in the Netherlands may have given the Jewish community a sense of security – false, as it turned out. Thus, they were less prepared for what was to come. The sharp reaction of the Germans to the February strike – most of which was directed at the Jews – thus created a deterrent effect on other potentially oppositional activities. Also, because the Germans resisted the temptation to resort to other public shows of force, opposition among the Dutch population was not further stimulated.

Another important factor was the nature of the people's and the bureaucracy's reaction to the occupation. The reaction in the Netherlands appears to have been marked by a high degree of co-operation – certainly up to the beginning of 1943. It should be noted that, in general terms, an accommodating and co-operative attitude prevailed in all five countries at the beginning of the occupation period, largely on account of the catastrophic events of 1940 and the apparently permanent superiority of the Germans in Europe.⁹ Only later, with Stalingrad acting as a turning-point, did growing irritation begin to manifest itself, and the effects of the occupation become so serious for the whole population that we can begin to talk of widespread discontent, aversion and resistance. Yet within this framework there were many variations.

Again, Denmark has to be mentioned as the least typical example. There, the Germans could only bring in their own legislation late in the summer of 1943; and, as soon as they attempted this, they ran into all kinds of opposition. By comparison, Norway had a high proportion of Germans on its soil (primarily soldiers but also more German police than there were Jews) and also an indigenous National Socialist party with some influence from an early date. As a result, and in spite of early, publicly expressed protests by Church and judiciary, the first major actions against the Jews in the summer of 1942 were undoubtedly a 'success' – as has already been shown.

The situation in France, complicated by the existence of the Vichy

regime, was very different from that elsewhere in western Europe. On the one hand, the Vichy regime probably collaborated more than bureaucracies elsewhere in Europe. On the other hand, the very closeness of this collaboration was actually a hindrance to the execution of German wishes, including the persecution of the Jews. The defeat in 1940 at the hands of her traditional enemy had been a great insult to the honour of France – and this undoubtedly continued to affect Franco–German relations. Thus France's status as a former Great Power probably had a greater impact on her relations with Germany than in the case of the smaller states.

At first sight, reactions in Belgium seem to resemble those in the Netherlands; on closer examination, however, the Belgian administration and the Belgian people in general appear to have been less co-operative. Without engaging in open conflict, the Belgians tried to do as little as possible to carry out the wishes of the Germans, seeking out as many ways as possible of hindering and delaying anti-Jewish measures. The experience of German occupation during World War I may well have played some role in this, and the clearer leadership from the Belgian government-in-exile in London may have exercised some influence. Also, as has already been mentioned, the divergent nature of the occupation regimes, with the Belgians having a military authority and the Netherlands a civilian one, may have been of some importance. The situation in Belgium was further complicated by the fact that King Leopold III, unlike the Dutch and Norwegian monarchs, had remained in the country and had therefore become dependent on the Germans. Lastly, the traditional rivalry between Flemish and Walloon communities in some cases led to a certain benevolence towards the German occupiers on the part of some Flemish circles, a factor which made the situation in Belgium more complicated than that in the Netherlands. Even a prominent social democrat, Hendrik de Man, saw opportunities in the new situation for the implementation of his ideas on reconstruction. Although these circumstances may at first sight seem to be more of a help than a hindrance to the wishes of the occupying power, as it turned out, compliance with typical National Socialist wishes ran less smoothly in Belgium than in the Netherlands.

This brings us to the factor which is, by all accounts, crucial to an understanding of the situation in the Netherlands: the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the Dutch bureaucracy. Dutch government administration was characterized by a thoroughness more closely resembling the German than the French or Belgian traditions.

The almost perfect registration of the civilian population and the forgery-proof identity cards were the most relevant examples of Dutch efficiency in this context. For a long time there was little or no question of the Dutch bureaucracy's employing sabotage of, or internal opposition to, German-imposed measures. Indeed, the opposite was true. The view predominated that the occupying power had some right to impose its will; the majority response was thus an ultra-correct and thorough implementation of German wishes. In this regard, the bureaucracy reflected a traditional deference to authority which characterized Dutch society as a whole. In Belgium and France there existed a tradition of opposition to, or rather evasion and avoidance of, government authority; in the Netherlands, on the other hand, the predominant feeling was one of respect and docility towards 'Authority' with a capital 'A', an Authority which acted out of a deeply-felt sense of duty towards a population for whom chaos (and did not the disruption of the bureaucracy lead straight to chaos?) was thought to be the greatest evil. The vast majority of the population, or so it would seem, held this view.

Thus the occupying Germans, who always tried to operate through existing channels wherever possible, were able to achieve a great deal. It is therefore perhaps understandable that they were able to bring about the segregation of the Jewish community in the Netherlands more easily than in any other western European country. In spite of the relatively high levels of integration and assimilation of Jews in the Netherlands, especially when compared to Belgium and France, there was little more than incidental opposition from Dutch society to the gradual implementation of segregation. Even when opposition did occur, it was usually unsuccessful – as the February strike showed. By the time opposition had become stronger, and illegal organizations more powerful, it was already too late for the Jews. By then, their deportation from the Netherlands had reached the stage where the Nazis already regarded it as a successful operation. On 20 July 1944, Otto Bene (the representative of the German Foreign Office in the occupied Netherlands) reported 'the Jewish question as solved'.¹⁰ In the case of the illegal organizations, it can generally be said that in comparison with the Netherlands, the groups in France and Belgium organized earlier and had a stronger emphasis on paramilitary activities. The chance to escape over a 'friendly' border may also have been made easier by their existence.

One further element which needs to be taken into account when discussing the special situation in the Netherlands is whether, in addition

to the prestige of the bureaucracy and the people's respect for authority, the *verzuiling* of Dutch society may also have been important. The term *verzuiling* (literally 'columnization' or 'pillarization') refers to the relatively strict segmentation of Dutch society. This segmentation dates from the sixteenth century when the country became a nation divided by religion. Many historical processes have since influenced its development: the traditions of internal accommodation during the Republic of the United Netherlands; the secularization and religious revival of the nineteenth century; the changing nature of social relations under the impact of modernization and industrialization; the emancipation movements of Roman Catholics, Protestants and socialists; the development of democratic politics and the growth of modern organized living. The combination of these forces produced a situation in the 1920s and 1930s of quite marked segmentation, or, put another way, of clearly delineated groups living alongside one another within Dutch society. Apart from some smaller groups, a Roman Catholic, a Protestant and a social democratic *zuil* ('column' or 'pillar') or section of the population can be clearly identified. Those people who did not belong to one of these groups formed, more or less unintentionally, their own neutral or general group which tended to have a liberal political character.

Members of each *zuil* lived most of their lives within it. They had at their disposal a whole range of organizations based on their own religious or political/ideological principles: political parties, trade union organizations, newspapers, broadcasting organizations, schools, youth organizations, sports clubs, medical institutions, etc. Many governmental functions were in practice carried out by the private organizations of the *zuilen*. These were given generous subsidies by the state (for example in the field of education). All of this brought with it a strong sense of purpose to each circle, to the affairs of its own group and to its own leaders. As a result of this, each *zuil* developed its own customs and its own atmosphere. Although there were naturally voiced criticisms of this situation, it was widely considered to be desirable; operating from a secure base, it was believed, one could make a fully-fledged contribution to Dutch society as a whole. In this context it is reasonable to ask whether the creation of a separate *Jewish* community would not, at first sight, have seemed perfectly acceptable to the rest of society. In reality, what happened was far from the creation of a new Jewish *zuil*; nevertheless it is not impossible, thanks in part to this tradition of *verzuiling*, that the anti-Jewish measures were seen as less of a danger

by the Dutch than by other western Europeans, and therefore did not engender similar feelings of solidarity. Against this background, it may be easier to understand the almost total absence of actions to help Jews of Dutch nationality. Actions to help 'native' Jews did occur in Belgium and France, although it should be noted that both these countries had much higher proportions of 'foreign' Jews than did the Netherlands.

In terms of explaining differences in Jewish mortality, the third area of analysis – that of the victims – seems by far the least important, especially given the overwhelming power of the persecutors over their victims. This has been characterized by Jacob Presser as a game of cat-and-mouse in which it is not primarily the movements of the mouse which determine the result of the game. Nevertheless, some aspects of this area do deserve attention, if only to highlight further paradoxes. First, it is necessary to consider the composition and characteristics of the Jewish communities in the various countries. It is often said – and the reasoning for this is at first sight perfectly plausible – that the Jews who possessed the nationality of the country in which they were resident were less vulnerable than the 'foreigners'. These 'foreigners' had usually been resident in their country of refuge for only a short time, having been part of the great stream of refugees in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from eastern Europe, or after 1933 from Germany. These groups were rarely integrated or assimilated into their country of refuge. Thus, according to the theory, the vulnerability of the Jewish community as a whole would be greater in proportion to the number of 'foreign' Jews it contained.

A comparison between France and Belgium seems to confirm this supposition. The higher percentage of victims in Belgium (40 per cent) than in France (25 per cent) corresponds with the higher percentage of foreign Jews there (more than 90 per cent against about 50 per cent). Furthermore, in France it appears that foreign Jews had twice as much chance of falling victim to the persecution as those with French nationality (about 30 per cent mortality compared with 15 per cent). In the same way, the very small number of foreigners among the Danish Jews may have been important for the success of the Danish rescue operation. On the other hand, the figures for Norway, where there was a relatively small number of foreign Jews but the mortality rate was about 40 per cent, and especially the case of the Netherlands, seems to cast some doubt on this theory. In spite of the high levels

of integration and assimilation of the overwhelmingly indigenous Dutch Jewish community, it appears to have been by far the most vulnerable group in the whole of western Europe. The figures for the Netherlands are not sufficiently detailed for us to know if the 20,000 or so 'foreign' Jewish refugees in the country fared better or worse than their Dutch counterparts, but there are reasons to suppose that they did – in complete contrast to the situation in France.¹¹

In addition, there are a number of other questions which cannot be answered from the available statistics. It can be argued that a relatively large proletarian element among the Jewish community may have made it more vulnerable. However, the ill-defined nature of the term 'proletariat' and the nature of the statistics do not allow us to draw any comparative conclusions. It can reasonably be assumed that the impact of the activities of the Jewish Council (*Joodse Raad*) in Amsterdam did fall most heavily on the Jewish proletariat in the city, but whether the *existence* of high concentrations of Jews in Amsterdam, Paris and Antwerp made these groups more vulnerable remains uncertain. It seems likely, but there is insufficient evidence for a more definite conclusion. Again, the case of Denmark stands in contradiction. Here, the overwhelming concentration of the Jewish community in Copenhagen undoubtedly assisted the rescue operation; but in this case, the fact that Copenhagen was situated on the Sont, and close to the border with Sweden, was perhaps much more important.

A further question concerns the importance which should be attributed to the influence of, and adherence to, Zionism. Such adherence was much less marked in the Netherlands than in Belgium or France, perhaps owing to the greater degree of Jewish integration into Dutch society and the relatively small number of 'foreign' Jews. One final, tentative hypothesis might be that the Jews in France differed less from the surrounding community than the Jews in the more northern countries and therefore found it easier to 'vanish into society'. If this is true, hiding in this way also relied on a relatively inefficient form of population registration and on the compliance of the rest of the population.

Secondly in this context, some thought has to be given to the actions of the Jewish Councils. In Norway and Denmark, these did not exist. Regarding those in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, although in general they co-operated in similar ways, there remain some important differences, most notably between Belgium and the Netherlands. In France, the situation was made more complex by

the existence of the Vichy regime. Alongside the *Union Générale des Israélites Français* there existed the *Commissariat Générale aux Questions Juives*, an organization which was not in Jewish hands but which at certain times played an important role. In Belgium, a so-called *Comité de Défense des Juifs* came into existence in 1942 – in opposition to the official *Association des Juifs en Belgique* (AJB). The *Comité de Défense* tried very hard to oppose the co-operative attitude of the AJB and also tried to prevent the Jews in Belgium from collaborating with it. Moreover, even the AJB, perhaps on account of certain eastern European traditions,¹² had some reservations about co-operation and sometimes even perpetrated acts of semi-sabotage. This was rarely seen in the Netherlands.

As is well known, the Dutch Jewish Council was marked out by its very co-operative attitude – an attitude which owed a great deal to the pre-war traditions of organization amongst the Dutch Jewish community and the resultant contacts this created with governmental authority. This attitude was further reinforced by the fears of reprisals engendered by the aggressive actions of Jewish youth groups prior to the 1941 February strike. In general, the well-organized and carefully administered Jewish Council¹³ complemented the more or less co-operative and docile attitude of the Jewish community in the Netherlands. Yet it must not be overlooked that nearly a quarter of the Jews in the Netherlands did manage to avoid deportation through escape or by going into hiding, and that a relatively high proportion of Jews were involved in the resistance movement.

All this can be seen as a consequence, or as a reflection, of the relatively integrated nature of the Jewish community into pre-war Dutch society. As we know, the reaction of the Dutch people as a whole to the occupation by the Germans and the measures they initiated was for a long time one of co-operation, administrative efficiency, docility and respect for the regulations imposed by the government. In harmony with this, the Jewish Council and the Jewish community generally reacted with similar co-operation, administrative efficiency and respect for authority, in the belief that the leaders of the Jewish Council would act in their best interests. This factor appears to have a close relationship with the aforementioned paradox of the Dutch Jewish community's greater vulnerability due to their lack of alertness to the danger facing them, not to mention a false sense of security engendered by their relatively favourable position in the pre-war Netherlands.

Given the limitations outlined at the beginning of this article, and bearing in mind the problems associated with a direct comparison of all five countries, this conclusion concentrates on the three factors which seem to have been of the greatest importance in explaining the situation in the Netherlands. First, the Netherlands had a united and capable government of occupation with a strong SS influence, from whom the authorities in Germany rightly expected great things – especially in relation to the deportation of large numbers of Jews from the Netherlands. Secondly, the population and the bureaucracy were equally co-operative and deferential, especially in the first years of the occupation. The immediate and strictly enforced segregation policies of the Germans were, partly perhaps because of the traditions of *verzuiling*, not only accepted in the Netherlands but even willingly and efficiently assisted. Opposition to the occupation and sabotage of the German measures came, in spite of some exceptions, relatively late and had little to do with the persecution of the Jews. By the time there was any illegal opposition on a large scale it was already too late to help the Jews. Finally, in the pre-war period, the Jewish community in the Netherlands was relatively well-integrated and assimilated. As a result, the community generally exhibited the same reactions to the occupation as the rest of the Dutch population: that is to say, acceptance and a high degree of co-operation, especially in the early years. After that it was not really possible for them to escape their fate. In this way, the relatively high vulnerability of the Jewish community in the Netherlands during the occupation, exemplified by high rates of mortality, is in turn connected with the relatively favourable and quasi-secure position of the Jews in the Netherlands before the war. This is an interesting paradox which deserves further study.

Notes

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1. The relevant literature on this subject is plentiful and it is possible to mention only a small selection from it here. What follows is a list of the best-known works on

the Holocaust and a limited number of publications on the history of the persecution of the Jews in the five countries specified.

R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York 1983, reprint)

G. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe* (New York 1961)

L.S. Dawidowics, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945* (New York 1981, 7th edn)

M. Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London 1986)

M. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Toronto 1987)

L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* Vol I–XIII (The Hague 1969–1988).

J. Presser, *Ondergang, De Vervolging en Verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom 1940–1945* (The Hague 1965).

A.J. Herzberg, *Kroniek der Joden Vervolging 1940–1945* (Amsterdam 1985 5th edn).

B. Sijes, *Studies over Jodenvervolging* (Assen 1974)

S. Klarsfeld and M. Steinberg, eds, *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage in Belgien. Dokumente* (New York/Paris/SA).

M. Steinberg, *Dossier Brussel/Auschwitz. De SS-Politie en het uitroeien van de joden* (Brussels 1981)

L. Steinberg, *Le Comité de Défense des Juifs en Belgique 1942–1944* (Brussels 1973)

M. Steinberg, *L'étoile et le Fusil. La Question Juive 1940–1942* (Brussels 1983)

M. Steinberg, *L'étoile et le Fusil. Les cent jours de la déportation des juifs de Belgique* (Brussels 1984)

M. Steinberg, *L'étoile et le Fusil. La traque des juifs 1942–1944* (Brussels 1986)

A. Latour, *Jewish Resistance in France 1940–1944* (New York 1970)

Z. Szajkowski, *Analytical Franco-Jewish Gazetteer 1939–1945* (New York 1966)

M. Rajsfus, *Les Juifs dans la Collaboration: l'U.G.I.F. 1941–1944* (Paris 1980)

J. Billig, *Le Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives 1941–1944* (Paris 1955)

M.R. Marrus and R.O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York 1981)

S. Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz. La rôle de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France 1942* (s.l. 1983)

J. Adler, *Face à la persecution. Les organisations juives à Paris de 1940 à 1944* (s.l. 1985)

L. Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy* (Philadelphia 1969)

E. Thomsen, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Dänemark 1940–1945* (Düsseldorf 1971)

R. Petrow, *The Bitter Years* (New York 1974)

From this point, only the most important references will be footnoted as almost all the information used is from well-known sources.

2. In examining the literature, I have been greatly assisted by approximately thirty history students at the University of Amsterdam who followed a doctoral course related to this subject in the academic year 1985–6 and from whose work I have drawn. They are too numerous to mention here, but this should not detract from the importance of their work, which can be consulted (with the permission of the students concerned) at the Historisch Seminarium of the University of Amsterdam. In addition my thanks must go to C.J. Misset, research assistant at the University of Amsterdam, and to G. Durlacher, who was kind enough to listen to and make comments on my ideas.

3. H. Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York and London 1979).

4. M.R. Marrus and R.O. Paxton, 'The Nazis and the Jews in Occupied Western Europe 1940–1944', *Journal of Modern History*, 54 (1982), 687–714.

5. *Ibid.*, 713.

6. A.J. van der Leeuw, 'Meer Slachtoffers dan elders in West-Europa', *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad*, Jubilee edition 15 November 1985.

7. In a post-war interview, recorded on the so-called 'Sassen Tapes' and cited in M. van Amerongen, 'De Geheimzinnige Memoires van Adolf Eichmann 2', *Vrij Nederland*, 18 April 1981.

8. Hilberg, op. cit., 407.

9. See also P. Luykx, 'Collaboratie', *Spiegel Historiael*, Vol. 17, No. 7/8, 382-7.

10. Sijes, op. cit., 108.

11. See also Presser, Vol. II: 510. The figures Presser cites do not, however, support his conclusions. He does not name his source, and the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie cannot provide a source for numbers of victims differentiated as to nationality.

12. For a Dutch example of the influence of eastern European traditions, reference can be made to F. Weinreb; for a good short overview, see I. Schöffer, 'Weinreb, een affaire van lange duur', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 95 (1982), 196-224. In the Netherlands, in complete contrast to Belgium, the number of eastern European Jewish immigrants was very small.

13. In addition it can be noted that the administration in the Dutch transition-camp Westerbork was also considered perfect. However, this was, for the most part, in the hands of pre-war refugees from Germany.

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