

PART I

THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

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FOREWORD: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND SPATIAL CONTEXT OF HOLOCAUST RESEARCH

Since the 1980s, the significance of the Holocaust has become clear to the intellectual elite in the West. It has become apparent that despite the passage of many decades since the end of the Second World War, the issue of Nazism and its crimes has continued to arouse lively public interest. At the same time, scholars and part of public opinion have realised that the Holocaust did not only involve Jews as the victims and Germans/Nazis as the perpetrators. Firstly, it was a part of an unprecedented plan to completely change demographic and socio-economic relations in the European continent in accordance with a racist ideology and the needs of German imperialism. Part of this plan was the systematic

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extermination of huge masses of people (Jews, Roma, mentally ill, Soviet prisoners of war, etc.), and these plans (which Nazis only partially succeeded in implementing as a result of their defeat in the war) particularly affected Central and Eastern Europe.

However, the extermination of Jews was of exceptional importance in the context of the overall Nazi extermination policy, as it was Jews who were assigned a unique role within the framework of the National Socialist ideology, which became the state ideology in the Third Reich. This was a radically negative role within its logic; Jews were supposed to be not only a racially inferior group to Germans, but also their eternal enemy. And even more than that, an alleged enemy of all nations, since they expressed in their racially determined action the anti-national principle as such. In other words, they were to seek the destruction of nations as separate groups, using the political instruments of democracy/liberalism, and the workers' movement/Marxism and the economic instruments of finance capital. Within the framework of the apocalyptic forecast formulated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, they supposedly acted in a covert manner, accumulating power and ultimately leading Europe and the world to civilisational and biological destruction.

These outlandish ideas, which whole groups of German scientists in the Third Reich tried to rationalise to a supposedly scientific level, found resonance in the tradition of European anti-Semitism. This was especially true of its political dimension, which became popular especially among the impoverished petty bourgeoisie during economic crises. The events of the First World War, workers' radicalism, and the revolution in Russia, followed by the Great Depression of the late 1920s and the early 1930s, brought anti-Semitism into the political mainstream, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The anti-Semitic character of the political programme of the nationalist right had the effect of spreading and legitimising in the consciousness of a large part of the public opinion of these countries the conviction that Jews were a threat to national communities and constituted a harmful factor. As a result, within the process of the Nazi-organised Holocaust, the fate of Jews was often treated with indifference, and in many cases with hostility, which facilitated acts of collaboration and complicity in the crime on the part of hard-to-quantify minorities in these societies (certainly not marginal cases, regardless of how strongly the representatives of the nationalist right in Poland, Ukraine and other countries of our region might argue otherwise). Moreover, Nazis deliberately conducted intensive anti-Semitic propaganda throughout occupied Europe, positioning themselves as defenders of European culture against Communist Asian barbarism, which was supposedly the instrument of Jewish domination. Such ideas (commonly referred to in Polish as the so-called "Judeo-Communism") coincided with the propaganda of influential catholic-nationalist right-wing groups and entered the popular consciousness of a large part of national communities (especially in Central and Eastern Europe).



Fig. 1. Liquidation of the ghetto in Pabianice (May 1942)

Source: State Archives in Łódź.

As this historical outline shows, the pan-European dimension of the Holocaust means that spatial issues play an important role in most empirical research on the subject. In this volume we show only a small selection of the themes that emerge in this context, but, we believe, they offer an overview of the comprehensiveness of the issues and of the research that emerges here. In addition to texts dealing directly with the war period, the spatial dimension also appears here in relation to the consequences of the Holocaust in the post-war period in terms of migration, science, and culture, and the forms of commemorating the locations of past atrocities and the traces of destroyed Jewish communities. Moreover, two texts devoted to the interwar period in the context of migration on the level of detailed studies show the situation of European Jews on the eve of the Second World War. Finally, the text on the situation in the Jewish autonomous district of Birobidzhan refers indirectly to the debates on the territorial solution of the so-called Jewish question among Jewish Zionist and Marxist intellectuals in the 1930s.