

ATS2600 – The Holocaust

Lecture 1 – The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide

The Age of Genocide

History has been scarred by genocide and mass murder

- Rwanda
- Genocide of Armenians by the Turks
- Fire Bombing of the Japanese
- The Australian Indigenous Populations (Colonisation)
- Cambodia
- Bosnia
- Enslavement of African Populations

Why Study the Holocaust

The holocaust refers to the pre meditated, mass murder of Europeans between 1933 and 1945

- Among the Jewish people that died, two thirds of Roma (gypsies) may have died during the holocaust as well
- The holocaust has been described as being mysterious, inexplicable and incomprehensible to rational discourse

There are fundamental aspects of the Holocaust that cannot be explained by Historians:

- How could a group of human beings be so cruel to other human beings
- How could witnesses stand by and let this atrocity take place?
- How could the world stand by for so long?

We are studying the holocaust to:

- [Learn about human nature and understand human beings](#) – How can people be induced to exert such cruelty? How can peer pressure lead people to exert such cruelty? How can people delude themselves into believing what they believe?
- [Understand about genocides in our modern world](#)

Part 1: Explicability

The holocaust cannot be explained and discussed in the same way we describe other historical events – we can only understand half of the holocaust (half closed window on the holocaust experience)

- Survivors cannot convey the sheer horror they went through – we will never know what fully happened and we can never grasp the immense suffering that millions of people had to endure

In order to understand the actions of the Nazis and the Jews, whose actions were not inexplicable, we need to enter their minds and view this traumatic event from their perspective

Some people have argued that the holocaust can be repeated – and it has been repeated – we live in the age of genocide:

- The phrase “**Never Again**” has never been actualised
- Because of all these genocides, it shows that the Nazis behaviour was human as it has occurred again
- This will lead us to understand how genocide will continue to occur as we are all human

Modernity and the Holocaust

Zygmunt Bauman - "The holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilisation and at the peak of human cultural achievement and for this reason it is a problem"

We think modernity is **progressive** and getting better, however the holocaust occurred during modern (20th Century) Germany, the birthplace of freedom and equality

A salient feature of the holocaust was that it used **modern bureaucracy and technology for murder**:

- **Modernity** should make the world a better place, instead the Nazis used the tools of modernity for evil
- The leaders of the third Reich believed that the Jews were not human and that they threatened the German society, killing them, they believed meant improving German society
- The holocaust is a garden and the Nazis were weeding the garden with pesticide, to structure and create a perfect German society
- The Nazi's believed they were creating a utopian society

The holocaust was the height of modernity

- Modernity is about making the world a better place – The Nazi's used medicine and bureaucracy to create a better society as they defined it

Part 2: Comparability

Can we make comparisons between the holocaust and other genocides?

- Focusing on the killing of the Jews over other victims, gets in the way of us understanding the mass murder that took place
- **"Genocide does not necessarily mean mass killings of all members of a nation, but the destruction of the central foundations of the life of national groups"**
- The intent to stamp out a cultural group
- This is the definition used to prosecute and is used for international intervention

1948 UN Convention of Genocide:

The Convention defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Problems in Defining Genocide

- There are forms of genocide that do not involve mass killing ie. The Stolen Generation
- How can intent in a genocide be assessed?
- Do genocides necessarily involve state action or leadership?
- Should mass killings based on political motives be included in genocide?

The Debate about Making Comparisons

Unprecedented and Unique:

Bauer: racial ideology towards Jews, global character, totality

- These people argue that the holocaust is unique – it is not more evil, there is no hierarchy in suffering, but what makes the holocaust unique is the global ideological character of the genocide

- For Bauer **ideology** is at the centre of the Holocaust – the Nazi motivation of for killing the Jews = they saw them as corrupting power sites, parasites, a medical problem, they believed in the utopian dream of humanity once the Jews had been eliminated
- The hatred of other victim groups did not reach the same height as the hatred of the Jews
- Other genocides had pragmatic implications ie land – but the holocaust was irrational (non-pragmatic)
- The Jews had no land, no military or political power so they were not a threat, they were also not an economic threat contrary to stereotypes
- **Global Character:** other genocides focused on one geographical area, the Germans sought to eliminate each and every Jew in the European continent and hoped to eradicate them from the whole world through allies
- **Totality:** the Nazis wanted to hunt down each and every Jew **ALL** – all persons with 3 or 4 grandparents were classified as a Jew and sentenced to death but this did not occur in other genocides, in the Armenian genocide, some women and children were spared
- The Final Solution only talked about the Jews not the other groups

Universal and Comparisons:

Friedlander et al: at the racial state

- They argue that the Nazis had a broad racist ideology not just for the Jews and they argued that the Nazi state was a racial state – they wanted to purify the blood of the German state
- All groups were targeted by the Nazi racial regime
- If the Nazi regime hadn't collapsed, they would have turned their eyes to these other groups
- The Nazis did not exceed in murdering all of Europe's Jews (they only murdered half), half of them survived
- They really object to the definition of the holocaust being purely about Jews

Lecture 2 – Jewish Life in Pre-war Germany

The history of Jews in Europe is quite complex – need to not just focus on the holocaust, there was a time when there was peace between the Jews and their neighbours

- The Jews in the 19th century could not have envisioned Auschwitz

Chronology:

1. 1789 – 1871 Age of Emancipation
2. 1871 – 1914 Anti-Semitism and Integration
3. 1914 – 1933 WW1 and Between the Wars

Age of Emancipation

Pre-emancipation Jewry:

- Before the age of emancipation, Jews had no rights
- They were not citizens of any state, they could not vote, they were traditional and observant in their religious practice and that had profound implications
- This meant that they dressed differently, their days and their calendars were governed by their Jewish calendar
- Jews did not work on Fridays and Saturdays and many days were set aside for religious observance and synagogue attendance
- Jews could not dine with their non-Jewish neighbours, they ate separate food, had to buy Kosher meat
- Jews were restricted in their professional horizons, they couldn't become a lawyer or governmental administrator, they leaned towards more Jewish fields ie. merchants

Emancipation in Western Europe:

- **France: Emancipation → Integration**

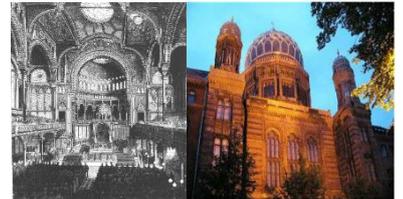
- Jews (men) in France were emancipated in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789)
- The French Revolution was motivated by the ideas of enlightenment ie. equality, freedom and this is why male Jews were emancipated (given the right to vote)
- However, the French still believed the Jews were problematic, but if they created the conditions for Jews to change and gave them opportunities to gain socio economic status, it would allow the Jews to integrate into French society
- The expectation was that Jews were expected to assimilate

- **Germany: Integration → Emancipation**

- Germany did not become a unified nation than 1871 (much later than France)
- Jews were told first to integrate then they would be emancipated
- Jews had to prove themselves worthy of emancipation
- In Germany, emancipation was a constant topic of debate – should Jews be emancipated? Are they integrating? Are they worthy of citizenship?
- From the stand point from the Jews, they had to work on change and self-integration

Neue Synagogue 1866 in Berlin

- Why were the synagogues so visible? So conspicuous?
- They look a lot like Spain under Arabic Rule (15th Century) – The Golden Age of Spain – a period of co-existence between Muslims, Christians and Jews
- The structure of these synagogues could signify that the Jews thought they were living in the Golden Age again, life was looking up
- The Jews were making a statement – the synagogue was massive, expensive and it was publicised around the world
- The Jews were proud of their lives, they weren't scared



Integration and Antisemitism

Integration:

- The Jews ultimately agreed to the bargain, they sought to change and integrate into the society of Germany
- The Jews aspired to be accepted into the middle class – the home of liberalism
- The middle class, the vision of the nation was rational and enlightenment
- They increasingly spoke German, rather than Yiddish
- They dressed and furnished their homes like other Germans, they read German books, they played Beethoven and Bach
- They began a religious movement – reformed Judaism – sought to modify the laws of Judaism to modern life
- In the 1840's the leaders of the reform movement got rid of prayers that prayed for a return to Israel, they suspended the laws of Kosher, they nullified some religious holidays, they increasingly used German and rather than Hebrew in prayers, and they sought to bring order and reform to the Synagogues
- The reformers did not want Jews to be distinct (educationally, linguistically etc)
- The compromises that Jews had to make were worth it, as long as they didn't have to lose their Jewish religion

Painting Hanging in a Jewish House:

- Painted by Jews to put in their home, but there was nothing Jewish about it – it depicted them engaging in German middle class activities



