

Sammelrez: L. Joly: L'Etat contre les juifs

Semelin, Jaques: *The Survival of the Jews in France, 1940–44*. London: Hurst & Co. 2018. ISBN: 9781787380141.

Joly, Laurent: *L'Etat contre les juifs. Vichy, les nazis et la persécution antisémite (1940–1944)*. Paris: Grasset 2018. ISBN: 9782246862994.

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In *L'État contre les Juifs* Laurent Joly offers an overview of Vichy's anti-Jewish policy and collaboration in Nazi extermination policy between 1940 and 1944. In the 1980s Michael Marrus, Robert Paxton and Serge Klarsfeld explained that Vichy's collaboration was due to its leaders' efforts to firmly place France in the European New Order that they believed would emerge from Germany's victory. Joly works within this analytical framework but brings one key interpretative correction. In the last thirty years historians' understandable emphasis on Vichy's responsibility in the arrest of over 80% of the 74,150 Jews deported between March 1942 and August 1944 (p. 144) has had the side-effect of pushing Nazi Germany's role as initiator and stimulus to the genocide further and further into the background. Joly's book readjusts the analytical focus by placing Vichy's anti-Jewish policy and collaboration in the wider context of Nazi Germany's European programme of extermination and is thus able to reveal „the interconnectedness of French and German policies“ towards Jews (p. 12). As one can read in the brief introduction, from 1940 to 1944 French „antisemitic logic and the logic of collaboration intermingle[d]“ (p. 13). These two forces were not equal, however. Ultimately, for Joly Nazi Germany's antisemitism was key, not Vichy's.

The first four chapters of the book examine the key stages of the collaboration and reveal the ways in which Germany's decision to pursue genocide on a European scale spurred Vichy on to earn its place in the Nazi New Order. Chapter 1 discusses the genesis of Vichy's first Statute on Jews of October 1940 (followed by a new one in June 1941), which

marked the transition from a policy of systematic but covert discrimination during summer 1940 to one of outright persecution on „racial“ grounds. Chapter 2 follows the development of the persecution in the German-occupied north and the Vichy-controlled south in the period before the large-scale round-ups of summer 1942. Chapter 3 dissects the preparation and implementation of the „Vel' d'Hiv“ round-up in Paris (16–17 July) and the mass arrests across the unoccupied zone (26 August), which resulted in the deportation of almost 26,000 Jews to Auschwitz (p. 215). Chapter 4 explores the continuation of collaboration up to summer 1943 when, following Italy's surrender in September and the definitive turn in the tide of the war, Vichy began its slow but progressive disengagement from Nazi annihilation policy. This attitude was, however, countered by the SS's increasingly aggressive policy of indiscriminate arrests with the support of diehard collaborators.

While consistent with the antisemitism embedded in Vichy's political ideology, the progressive radicalisation of anti-Jewish policy from the initial decision to issue racial laws to the systematic spoliation of Jews' assets (the so-called „aryanisation économique“) until the decision by secretary-general of the police René Bousquet to take charge of the arrest and delivery of tens of thousands of men, women and children to the Nazis for deportation in summer 1942 were all, in Joly's view, first and foremost the result of Vichy's national mission to restore full French sovereignty and prove the French State a reliable partner in a Nazi-fied Europe (pp. 114–15).

The same logic of collaboration – that is, to defend the French State's prerogatives from German encroachment – stood behind Vichy's decision to give up non-French Jews while protecting certain categories of French *israélites*. Quoting Joseph Billig, Joly demonstrates, therefore, that „[c]ollaboration never was a rescue policy“ meant to save French Jews by sacrificing foreign Jews (pp. 11, 112). In fact, from the beginning Vichy's protection of French Jews was arbitrary. Of the almost 26,000 Jews deported as a consequence of the round-ups of summer 1942, 14% were French citizens. For the most part, these were

children with full French nationality whose only fault was being born to foreign parents (p. 118). This was the reason that pushed the head of government Pierre Laval to have them included in the deportations. Overall, the percentage of French Jews deported with Vichy's tacit or overt consent rose from 16,5% between March 1942 and June 1943 to 47% between July 1943 and August 1944 (p. 148).

In the last three chapters of the book Joly turns to a thematic approach. Chapter 5 convincingly argues that although the systematic nature of Nazi annihilation policy revealed itself only at the end of the war, the murderous reality that ultimately lay behind „resettlement“ in eastern Europe was known not only to the Vichy leaders, but also to many in the French administration's lower echelons involved in the everyday reality of collaboration. The differences were in the degree of that knowledge, which for many took the form of concrete suspicion, and in the willingness to accept, or instead deny or ignore it (as Laval and Bousquet as well as the senior officer in the Parisian police Louis Sadosky did). Chapter 6 describes the French administration's responses to collaboration, which ranged from enthusiastic to reluctant and even, but only in very few cases, overt and public disapproval. Finally, chapter 7 reveals that, contrary to popular belief, those responsible for the collaboration in the arrest and deportation of Jews did not systematically get away with it after the war. Taking the Parisian police that organised and carried out the „Vel' d'Hiv“ round-up as an example, Joly demonstrates that a reckoning of accounts did occur and that neither the voices of Jewish survivors nor the fate of Jewish victims were ignored. Likewise, Jewish assets robbed through the „aryanisation économique“ were slowly returned. This said, desk perpetrators, described as „typical of Vichy“ (p. 211), by and large emerged unscathed from the purge of 1944–49. The reason for this was a complex mix of corporate defence and inability to conceive of the indictment of the Vichy State and its administration as a whole, rather than in the terms of personal criminal conduct. In this regard, the trial (1997–98) and ensuing ten-year prison sentence to former secretary-general of the Gironde prefecture, Maurice

Papon, for his role in the deportation of the Jews of Bordeaux marked a watershed, finally bringing the „criminel de bureau“ (p. 210) to the stand.

Based on this comprehensive analysis, Joly concludes with the vexed question of why, if Vichy did nothing to mitigate the genocidal aims of the Nazi occupiers, as the book demonstrates, did roughly 75% of the 280,000 Jews who lived in France in 1940-41 survive the war? Joly's explanation points to the „unique French situation in Nazi Europe“ (p. 221). First, France's geostrategic importance for the German military effort and the small contingent of Nazi officials stationed in the country made the „final solution“ both negotiable and less efficient. Second, the possibility that Jews could flee by crossing into the Vichy-ruled south and Fascist Italy's refusal to hand over Jews in its occupation zone (following the German-Italian takeover of the unoccupied zone in November 1942) both hindered the Nazi plans. Finally, Joly emphasises the importance of pre-war Jewish integration which, especially after the bishops' public protest against the round-ups of summer 1942, created a comparatively less hostile context for Jews to escape the Nazis and their French collaborators. In this regard, while the relatively high Jewish survival rate should not be ignored, for Joly the total of 76,000 Jews perished in the Holocaust in France (p. 216) is the number that really matters. Whilst comparatively low in the context of western Europe, when set against the aforementioned structural reasons that number proves the ruinous effectiveness of Vichy's collaboration and, consequently, its leaders' culpability.

Joly's conclusions become even more interesting when put in relation with Jacques Sémelin's *The Survival of the Jews in France* in which the author calls for a refocusing of scholarly attention to the Jewish survival rates alongside their death toll in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust in France and across Europe.

The book is the condensed and revised English translation of Sémelin's study originally published in French in 2013, to which the author also added a new introduction and conclusion. Two key arguments support Sémelin's multi-causal explanation of the

comparatively high Jewish survival rate in France, what he calls „the enigma of the 75 per cent“ (p. 1). First, Jews were not rescued or saved; rather, they survived. By this Sémelin means that Jews were the main „agents of their own survival“ (p. 4). Thus, while in Joly's book Jewish voices are seldom heard, they take centre stage in Sémelin's account. Carefully intertwining individual experiences and general context, Sémelin builds his narrative and explanation on a series of „tranche de vie“ that illustrate the predicament of those whom he chooses to call „non-deported Jews“ (p. 85). This analytical and narrative choice is directly linked to the second argument underpinning Sémelin's explanation. By focussing on the 25% death rate, Marrus and Paxton – and Joly, as we have seen – intended to spotlight Vichy leaders' responsibility in the arrest and delivery of Jews to the Nazis. Sémelin fully concurs with this argument. However, he takes issue with Marrus and Paxton's argument that the French Gentile population's silence vis-à-vis Vichy's anti-Jewish policies was a sign of support and anti-Semitic belief. Sémelin overturns this assessment and contends that three-quarter of Jews survived the war because, after the mass arrests of summer 1942, their fight for survival found often haphazard, yet crucial support in the French population.

The first three chapters of the book investigate Jews' agency. Sémelin's narrative emphasises the impact of geography, legislation and chronology on Jews' reaction to persecution. Chapter 1 traces the general trends of Jewish movement across France between 1940 and 1944. The chapter is very effective in conveying the sheer chaos prompted by Germany's invasion of France, which caused millions of people (Jewish and non-Jewish) to take the streets and flee southward. In hindsight, the first turning point for Jews was the division of the country into two separate areas as a result of the Franco-German armistice. As Sémelin puts it, „the status of the area in which [Jews] were living would largely decide their opportunities to escape arrest“ (p. 30). The second, and more apparent, turning point were the first anti-Jewish decrees issued in the German zone and then Vichy's first Statute on Jews; both marked Jews' sep-

aration from the rest of the population. At the same time, despite Vichy's persecution, increasing anti-Jewish violence in the German zone pushed many Jews to venture in the direction of free France between 1940 and summer 1942. The round-up operations in Paris and across free France of July-August 1942 marked another turning point, causing a general dispersal into the countryside to escape arrest. This trend was amplified by the Axis forces' invasion of the free zone in November and lasted until the Liberation. Between November 1942 and September 1943 a considerable flux also occurred in the direction of the Italian zone, seen by many Jews as the first step before attempting to cross into Switzerland. Each of these phases had its exceptions, as proved by the fact that in mid-1944 between 40,000 and 60,000 Jews were still living in Paris (pp. 10, 79).

Chapters 2 and 3 survey Jews' various „strategies for survival“. Always mindful of the differences between northern and southern zones, and of the evolving nature of the persecution, Sémelin identifies three factors that affected Jews' survival chances. Nationality was the key discriminant, considering that roughly two-thirds of the final deportation toll was made up of non-French Jews. Besides Vichy's all-important decision to prioritise the handover of foreign Jews, French Jews could rely on stronger and wider social and professional networks than their non-French co-religionists. Moreover, foreign Jews – especially when only recently arrived in France – generally suffered from lack of funds, which translated into all sorts of difficulties in terms of paying for food, shelter, etc. Finally, Sémelin points to age and family size as factors that significantly affected Jews' possibilities to react against persecution. After summer 1942, Jews' chances of survival boiled down to two options: fleeing or disappearing into the surrounding environment (p. 136). These two chapters are particularly effective in rendering the sense of frustration and claustrophobia felt by the persecuted Jews. As Sémelin puts it, „[t]hey desperately needed to „breathe““. To do that „Jews increasingly became part of an in-between world that necessitated not only disobedience but in some cases recourse to criminality“ (p.

167). Here the value of Sémelin's analysis lays in that it recasts Jews' everyday acts of disobedience, for example, not wearing the „yellow star“ imposed by the Germans in the northern zone, as *not* grand gestures of resistance but as often ordinary efforts made by ordinary people who, in doing so, reclaimed the life and humanity that the Nazis and Vichy had denied them.

Semi- and outright illegal actions required „physical and psychological agility“ (p. 137), which not everyone possessed. Moreover, neither was sufficient on its own, for „[e]arly or late, rich or poor, from the moment they were targeted, if they were to have any hope of surviving, Jews had to rely on the help of other people“ (p. 250). The last chapter of the book investigates, therefore, what Sémelin labels „random acts of solidarity“ of Gentiles towards Jews (p. 189). Sémelin insists on the importance of even the smallest of gestures. Similar to Jews' own acts of disobedience, he argues that „miniature acts of solidarity“ did not constitute resistance, for they lacked the latter's „intentional and organised dimension“. Instead, given their „spontaneous and fluid“ as well as „inconspicuous and isolated“ nature, Sémelin considers them a form of „social reactivity“ (pp. 251–253). What was truly remarkable about this phenomenon was that it sprang up at the grass-root level after the mass arrests of summer 1942 and cut across French society as a whole. Precisely because of its widespread nature, the author considers individual altruism or flimsy generalisations about French national character as insufficient explanations. Instead, he points to the importance of the context in which this reaction occurred. Even though these gestures occasionally came from avowed anti-Semites, Sémelin contends that the support persecuted Jews received demonstrates that despite Vichy's policies and propaganda anti-Semitism did not permeate all strata of the French population. On the contrary, „as soon as the mass arrests began, the Nazis ran into the problem of widespread non-acceptance by the general population, who, instead of actively participating in the war on Jews, more often hid them or helped them flee“ (p. 257). Just as Vichy's collaboration was crucial to the Nazi „final solution“, the survival

of roughly 75% of Jews in France was, according to Sémelin, the result of the collaboration between the persecuted Jews and the majority of the French population. Material gain, a mixture of traditional republican secularism and widespread anti-German sentiments, plus the structural conditions listed also by Joly (to which Sémelin adds Vichy's internal contradictions even in the field of Jewish policy) and sheer luck were the factors that simultaneously fuelled and enabled this collaboration.

Taken individually, Joly's and Sémelin's analyses each bring significant contributions to our understanding of the Holocaust, namely the importance of the power dynamic between the Germans and local authorities/actors in the development of persecution and collaboration across Europe (Joly) and of the Gentile population's role not only in the persecution and killing processes but also in Jews' survival efforts (Sémelin). Read together, these two carefully argued books provide scholars of the Holocaust and general readers alike a comprehensive account of the persecution and survival of the Jews during France's „dark years“.

HistLit 2019-2-120 / Luca Fenoglio über Semelin, Jaques: *The Survival of the Jews in France, 1940–44*. London 2018, in: H-Soz-Kult 21.05.2019.

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