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Anti-Semitism and Urban Development in World War II France: The case of Paris’s *Ilot 16*

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Anti-Semitism and Urban Development in World War II France:  
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A 1921 report from the Seine Prefecture, presented to the municipal council, identified seventeen insalubrious îlots in Paris with above-average mortality rates from tuberculosis. These îlots were to be razed to the ground and rebuilt. Located in the southern portion of the 4th arrondissement, the sixteenth îlot on the list had the enduring reputation of being predominantly inhabited by foreign Jews. In the 1940s, the Secretary-General of the Seine Prefecture, Guy Périer de Féral, described the area as ‘sordid, inhabited by very poor people, the majority of whom are Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe’. In October 1941, this very same Prefecture and the very same Périer de Féral began a massive redevelopment of îlot 16. This urban redevelopment was to be the only one actually implemented before the end of the war.

Map 1 – Ilots insalubres in Paris, 1921

The municipal decision to evict the inhabitants of an îlot regularly described as ‘Jewish’ coincided with the start of a government policy of anti-Jewish persecution. This coincidence, if such it was, has been interpreted in two different ways. The first interpretation sees the eviction order as a racist policy disguised as an urban redevelopment plan implemented by a fundamentally anti-Semitic local administration. This analysis does not explain why many Jews living in the...
area, though identified as such by the municipal services at the time of the eviction, were not handed over to either the German authorities or the French police, and so escaped deportation. In fact, the eviction actually assisted the escape of some of these Jews.

The second reading uses statistics as proof that the administration treated the Jewish inhabitants of îlot 16 in exactly the same way as their non-Jewish neighbours. In 2000, the City of Paris, then under scrutiny, conducted a study to find whether Jewish landlords and tenants had been unfairly treated during the redevelopment process. Since the result was negative, no attempt was made to investigate the co-occurrence of racist persecution and urban redevelopment in Paris. This approach, which is chiefly quantitative, cannot penetrate further into the enigmatic motives behind the administrative action.

Thus, several questions are left unanswered. The issue of insalubrious îlots had been gnawing at officials since the beginning of the century; why, then, did the Seine Prefecture wait until 1941 before taking action? During the Second World War, why were municipal officials so eager to focus exclusively on îlot 16? Why did Paris then embark on a construction project on a scale not seen since the days of Baron Haussmann, in what was generally perceived to be an unfavourable situation both economically and politically?

To answer these questions, this article takes yet a third approach: it examines an ordinary town-planning decision that was made during an extraordinary period. We shall see that in 1941, local urban redevelopment
policies did indeed interact with a government policy of racial persecution. Which came first, a municipal desire to modernize the French capital or a desire to comply with the anti-Semitic policies implemented by the French government? Is it possible that the planning decisions affecting îlot 16 had little, if anything, to do with anti-Semitism? This question may sound provocative. However, while we do not wish in any way to minimize the acknowledged responsibility of the French government in the despoiling and extermination of French Jews, we hope that our research may open new directions for the study of the Holocaust in general and the Vichy era in particular. By asking one very simple question, based on a case study, it is hoped that this article will contribute to the current upsurge in Holocaust studies concerning topics such as the relationship between spatial location and persecution (with respect to ghettoization);\textsuperscript{13} the links between economic interests and ideological motives;\textsuperscript{14} and the interaction – or possibly the lack of interaction – between local and central government.\textsuperscript{15}

The article also engages with recent literature on bureaucratic networks under the Vichy regime. By October 1941, when the îlot 16 scheme began, Pétain was the head of State and his government had relocated to Vichy. Ever since the fall of France, the French State had actively participated in the implementation of a policy of racial persecution by ordering its administration to collaborate with the German authorities. The Jewish population of Paris had always been scattered across the city, although some districts held more Jews than others. In order to arrest the Jews, the government had first to locate them. In June 1941 in Paris, the Police Prefecture, which was a government authority, carried out a

racial census: heads of Jewish households were required to register their addresses and enumerate their family members.

In the past ten years, researchers have begun to focus on the institutional and administrative dynamics of the French State’s anti-Semitic policy.16 While this is important work, it has looked only at administrative entities which were required to participate actively in the racial persecution, from organizing a census of Jews to 'Aryanizing' their goods.17 This article departs from what we consider to be the largely tautological bias of the existing literature by focusing on the ways in which the State's anti-Semitic policy was implemented through the ordinary town-planning activities of the municipal administration.

This article is also intended as a contribution to the sociological debate on decisions and motivations relating to the Holocaust.18 It looks at a diverse range of actors (the French government, the Seine Prefecture, the Paris Police, the municipal council, the architects in charge of the project, and the inhabitants), and it is thematically wide-ranging (from various forms of corporatism to architectural modernism and conservation of buildings judged to be of aesthetic or historical interest).19 This enables us to take account of the possibility that while certain decisions clearly exploited the anti-Semitic measures imposed from above, the ideology behind such policies was not always anti-Semitic. In the present case, administrative organizations and interests appear far more significant for the understanding of the actual processes. Rather than 'Vichy measures' or measures taken 'under' Vichy,20 the case of the îlot 16 redevelopment project shows it is possible to speak of policies 'in the shadow of'
Vichy. This approach can be linked to Jean-Pierre Crom’s concluding remarks in his summary of the historiography of French legislation during the Second World War:

> It is not entirely appropriate to contrast ‘Vichy law’ with ‘law under Vichy’. Both existed, sometimes separately, sometimes intermingled, which means that we must be cautious about any kind of generalization. As in many other fields, the analytical scale requires continual adjustment [...] and a constant awareness of the wider context, which is usually possible given the rich archive material available from the period.21

The present article, situated at the interface between historiography and sociology, is fundamentally an essay in urban local history, paying particular attention to the interactions between the characteristics of a population and the events affecting its living space. We study the location of phenomena, the chronology of events, and the variations among analytical scales while observing the fates of individuals at the mercy of bureaucratic decision-making. We shall scrutinize the mechanics of the operation and the close and complex interplay between changes in the lives of the inhabitants and changes in the locality where they lived. Our aim is not to decide whether or not the îlot really was a ‘Jewish quarter’. 22 Rather, proceeding on the assumption that representations are realities and vice versa,23 we shall attempt to understand whether or not a certain ethno-religious characterization of the îlot had an impact on the redevelopment operations under consideration here, and if so, how.
This article draws on two major types of sources corresponding to the twin policies identified above. First, we systematically examined the 1900 W inventory containing the eviction and expropriation files on *ilot* 16, now kept in in the Paris municipal archives. Second, we searched for information on the identities and fortunes of the Jewish inhabitants in a variety of archive sources relating to the persecution of French Jews. In addition, we examined the records of everyday bureaucracy, from the Beaux-Arts administration to Police crime registers.

**Racial persecution and redevelopment: intersecting chronologies**

One of the historian’s main challenges is to elucidate the thought processes of the actors she is studying. In the case in hand, as for so many Vichy enactments, there is no clear evidence of how decisions were made – why the redevelopment scheme went ahead when it did, for example. We shall now conduct a careful, and hopefully instructive, cross-over study of the project’s chronology alongside that of the relevant racial persecution policies.

First, let us recall that the elimination of slums was far from being a priority before the war. On the brink of the conflict, several people were still asking what the list of seventeen *ilot* s was for. Our *ilot*, the sixteenth, did not have priority even when planned building schemes around the Hôtel de Ville were given the go-ahead in 1938 with a view to the construction of a large administrative *Cité* at the heart of the capital. These schemes were dropped in May 1941. In July 1941, the Paris urban planning service and the Public Health and Housing Bureau, both of which were to have a hand in the redevelopment
operation, had no plans to begin work on îlot 16. The outline scheme, which we found stapled to a letter, reads ‘îlots in “utmost urgent” need of rehabilitation according to responses based on building façade evaluations: 1, 2, 3, 4, possibly 11’. So how did it come about that îlot 16, absent from this list, was the only one that actually had been redeveloped by the end of 1941?

The motives behind the operation may become clearer if we can determine the exact date of the decision to deal with îlot 16. In so doing, it becomes possible to maximize the demonstrative value of the process’ temporal inscription. We have therefore traced the entire chronology of the operation step by step from its beginning in late 1941, using interlocking scales for analysis.

Map 2 – The twenty-one stages in the îlot 16 redevelopment operation, date unknown (probably October 1941)

A works schedule has been conserved in the archives (map 2). Each of its twenty-one stages corresponded to an order for the expropriation of landlords and the eviction of tenants. This preliminary operation began with the buildings adjoining those already owned by the city (Operations 1 and 2), and continued outwards in concentric circles. Thus the operation began in a place where it was easy to secure a large landholding, significantly accelerating progress on the project. Other priorities interfered, however. Operations 1 to 5 applied to areas that included aristocratic hôtels particuliers (Aumont, Châlons-Luxembourg); as a result, actors with an interest in conserving historical monuments (the Beaux-
Arts department, some intellectuals and scholars, etc.) attempted to influence the process of legislation.\textsuperscript{35} Another ostensible purpose of the project was to open up traffic routes, particularly roads leading to bridges, such as the Rue des Nonnains d’Hyères (Operations 10, 8 and 11). This preliminary stage in the operation, relating to the central area, was abandoned in 1941 but did reflect the city’s plan to create an administrative Cité in the heart of Paris. The idea was that the new Cité, located behind the Hôtel de Ville, would include the hôtels particuliers and use them to house the secretarial services of the Beaux-Arts department. It may be that the redevelopment plan sought to reconcile conservation concerns with notions of public utility, with the additional advantage of being able to eliminate an insalubrious îlot before the end of 1941. However, when the project proper began in 1942, it departed significantly from the original ordinance. What was the reason – or reasons - behind the change that took effect some time between planning stage and implementation? (Table 1).\textsuperscript{36}

Table 1: Changes to the operations, building demolitions, and the Jewish presence

We attempted to determine whether there was something in common among the buildings that were dealt with either earlier or otherwise than originally planned. Among the 171 landlords (none of whom lived in the îlot) we could find no correlation between changes in priority and characteristics such as the landlord's

identity (individual versus real estate company, Jew versus non-Jew, owner of one building versus owner of several buildings); the location of the property in the îlot; or the landlord's reactions to the bureaucratic intervention, which ranged from approval to dissent. The case is quite different for tenants. We have drawn up a list of the households in the îlot, with particular attention to location, time of move and administrative status (paying particular attention to which tenants were kept on file by the administration and which were not); nationality; and racial identity under Vichy law. We then compared the chronologies of the two policies: on the one hand, the eviction of the îlots inhabitants, and on the other, the persecution of the Jews.

Map 3 – Distribution of Jewish households in îlot 16 (Paris), 1941-1945

The first two operations (6A and 6B) began ahead of schedule, which put them out of order with respect to the other sub-sections of the îlot, those with the largest Jewish populations (50% and 62% respectively). Operations 1, 2 and 3 were started in accordance with the original schedule, at two-month intervals. Operation 6A was put forward to follow Operation 3, beginning only ten days later. Operation 6B began only ten days after 6A. We found several examples of this connection between the moving forward of an operation and a significant Jewish presence. Operation 13, which would involve the eviction of a large number of inhabitants, was also brought forward. This section had one of the îlot’s largest proportions of Jewish inhabitants: 44% of households.

How are we to make sense of these changes to the original timings? By comparing the chronologies of the redevelopment operations and the Jewish persecution we may find some clues to the answer. Between the start of Operations 3 (10 April 1942) and 6A (20 April 1942), the Germans set up an administrative department to organise the looting of Jewish apartments. This Dienststelle Westen (Western Department) was officially created on 17 April 1942, but had been in operation since March, when the first convoy of deported Jews left France. From April on, large numbers Jews living in France were arrested or forced to flee, leaving or (as the Germans put it) ‘abandoning’ their accommodation.\textsuperscript{38} Particularly affected were foreign Jews, the perceived majority of the îlot population, who had contributed to the area’s pre-war characterization as a ‘ghetto’.\textsuperscript{39} This change to the original order by bringing forward Operation 13 coincided with a new phase in the Jewish persecution: the order of expropriation for Operation 13 was the first to be made after the Vel’ d’Hiv round-up.\textsuperscript{40} In this instance there are strong indications that the co-occurrence of changes in the timing of the redevelopment project in the mostly ‘Jewish’ areas of the îlot, on the one hand, and on the other, the nature and intensity of the persecution of the Jews of France was not coincidental. We asked ourselves how the persecution and deportation of the Jews may have encouraged, or even incited, the expropriations and evictions in îlot 16. In answer to this question, we shall now examine the primary obstacles to renovating the îlots insalubres of Paris: obstacles that persisted until 1940 although the earliest regeneration schemes...
date back to the 1920s. Our research grimly highlights the way the Seine Prefecture exploited the persecution of the Jews.

**Redeveloping îlot 16: a chance to circumvent rehousing problems**

Inter-war justifications for failing to take do anything about the problem of the insalubrious îlots can be summarized in two principal points, formally enunciated by the municipal council at the end of the First World War:

> First the financial aspect, then the problem of rehousing the dispossessed...

... Was it at all possible to begin such a vast programme directly after the war, during a full-out housing crisis? It was illegal to evict tenants, and there were other moral and social obstacles as well. It was necessary to build new homes for the occupants before demolishing the old ones.\(^{41}\)

Despite constant amendments to the law between 1935 and 1942, all attempts to ease these constraints failed. None of the legislation bearing on the operation touches on the rehousing problem,\(^{42}\) although it was evidently something that required official attention. From 1941 onwards, the Seine Prefecture rehoused inhabitants on a case-by-case basis, in response to complaints from large families that there was no point in simply warning them that they were going to be turned out into the street in a few weeks’ time.

Other actors, not themselves affected by the procedure, shared these families’ concerns. In 1938, the architect Albert Laprade, future director of the îlot 16 project, stated that:

In order to house the inhabitants of the derelict buildings, we must build attractive housing on the outskirts of the city, and this time they must be genuinely intended for the workers, genuinely suited to their tastes and resources. We must build Le Corbusier's cités radieuses in the green spaces around Paris, as soon as possible. This is an absolute necessity.43

Thus the prospect of not having to rehouse a whole category of inhabitants may have appeared as a double boon. In a neighbourhood classified as 'Jewish' by all the actors concerned, tenants who had been arrested or forced to flee clearly did not require re-housing. And the apartments left vacant – all over Paris – by their ‘departure’ would come in very handy when it came to re-housing evicted non-Jews.

In July 1941, then, îlot 16 was not seen as a priority. However, from August on, Seine Prefecture officials actively participated in organizing the detention of foreign Jews who had been arrested during the first Parisian round-ups.44 On 27 August the occupying authorities, along with the Police Prefecture, the Gendarmerie and the Seine Prefecture, met to organize the creation of the Drancy camp. The Seine Prefecture’s role included supply provision, logistics, and setting up the site. Hence this Prefecture was directly responsible for ‘rehousing’ the arrested Jews. This means that the decision to completely clear îlot 16 was made by a department that had just realised the implications that the internment of Jews (still mostly foreign Jews at this stage) might have for housing in the capital city.

The links between the Seine Prefecture’s îlot 16 operation and successive stages in the persecution of the Jews were not confined to 1941, nor to the Drancy camp. We have already seen that in the spring of 1942, the escalation of evictions and the re-ordering of the îlot subsections coincided with the looting programmes organized by the Germans. This is not surprising, given that contacts between the Prefecture and Dienststelle Westen were becoming more frequent at the time. The ‘abandoned’ apartments in the îlot were emptied of their furniture; the Seine Prefecture stored the contents at the Crédit Municipal and made it available to the German department, with which it was in regular correspondence.45

The persecution and deportation of the Jews was, in fact, a windfall for the Seine Prefecture – and not just at the start of the operation in October 1941, or even during its acceleration in the spring of 1942. The Prefecture went ahead with the operation despite opposition from all other actors, including the German authorities and the îlot’s inhabitants. The German order of 22 May 1942 made it virtually impossible to implement any redevelopment scheduled to take effect after the expropriation and evictions at the îlot. The pre-scheduled eviction operations took: Operations 5 and 13 are proof of this.46 Some of the evicted tenants confronted the Prefecture directly, protesting loudly and claiming their right to rehousing.47 These protests came to a head in the summer of 1942.48 In September, the Seine Prefect finally ordered a ‘general appraisal of the question’.49
A glance through the archives of Parisian housing organizations shows that in September 1942, the plight of Jewish tenants – members of a group which was being widely and systematically persecuted – was a powerful inducement to continue with the controversial redevelopment operation. Several of the housing companies under the authority of the Seine Prefecture’s Housing Department alerted it to the fact that some city properties had been vacated by Jews without official notice and therefore could not be legally reallocated. Unsure how to proceed, the Department reported to the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, CGQJ), which replied that the accommodation must be offered as soon as possible to non-Jews. Certain îlot 16 families would benefit from this opportunity. At the same time, another question presented itself: could this vacant accommodation be used to rehouse Jews evicted from îlot 16? In the end, Parisians with a 'special' (racial) status – i.e. Jews – were to be decreed ineligible for municipal housing.

The second question put by the Housing Department to the General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in September 1942 arose from a specific rehousing case concerning one of the evicted Jews from îlot 16. In response, the Commissariat ruled that the Housing Department must rehouse tenants who had been evicted by reason of 'public utility operations'. Among these tenants was a Jew, M.L., who had been evicted from 10 rue des Nonnains d’Hyères. He asked to be rehoused. He was a war veteran and a father and as such was entitled to this service.
Examining his request, the Housing Department was uncertain whether a Jewish tenant was entitled to be housed in a communal building. Some weeks previously, the Germans had demanded from the *Régie Immobilière de la Ville de Paris* (Paris Properties Register, RIVP) a list of apartments managed by the company and inhabited by Jewish families. Seals were regularly put on the apartments whose Jewish inhabitants had been deported, or had left for the unoccupied zone or gone abroad. In most cases, all furniture was removed before the apartment was sealed. So the CGQJ told the Housing Department that no Jewish tenants from the *ilot* were to be rehoused in communal buildings.

Moreover, internal correspondence from 10 April 1943 specifies that a ‘list of accommodation vacated by Jews’ had been given to a female inhabitant of the *ilot* who was complaining that she had nowhere to go. As in Berlin, where accommodation vacated by Jews was used to rehome tenants whose homes had been demolished during the implementation of Albert Speer’s project for the reshaping of the capital, the arrest, deportation or escape of Parisian Jews provided the town planners with a long-awaited opportunity to deal with *ilot* 16.

**Redeveloping *ilot* 16: a chance to avoid paying compensation**

Jewish tenants who had vacated their apartments did not need to be rehoused, nor were they entitled to compensation. The prospect of paying substantial compensation to evicted tenants had been a major obstacle to projects for redeveloping insalubrious *ilots* during the 1930s. In 1936, the prospect of starting a major construction project rekindled these anxieties. Estimates on file reveal
the huge potential cost of the operation, as a result of which not a single project could be implemented before the start of the war. The Occupation and the ensuing widespread financial hardship tended to depress property values, and hence potential compensation.\textsuperscript{54} This idea that falling property values would save the Prefecture money on compensation were dashed, in the end, by the first conciliation commission’s ruling on compensation.\textsuperscript{55}

The idea that costs might be reduced reinforced by various conjectural factors, may also have been encouraged by the systematic stripping of Jewish assets under the Vichy regime. Once again, it appears that between July 1941 (when îlot 16 was not on the list of redevelopment priorities) and October 1941 (when it was decided that all the îlot’s landlords should be expropriated and all tenants evicted) the Seine Prefecture was directly concerned in the despoliation of the Jews, Following the German ordinances of 20 May and 18 October 1940, the French law of 22 July 1941 confirmed that all French government departments were to be systematically Aryanized. All Jewish real estate, except private homes, would be seized. The same French law compelled administrative departments to determine the racial status of each constituent. Fifty-three merchants and shopkeepers in îlot 16 (13\% of the total 397) were put under 'provisional administration' (administreurs provisoires),\textsuperscript{56} fact which immediately led to the devaluation of their property. It also devalued adjacent business premises.

It is now possible to explain what lay behind the planning decisions and actions of the Seine Prefecture with respect to the start and pursuit of the îlot 16
redevelopment projects in October 1941. Throughout the previous summer, the Prefecture had known that Jewish property was to be Aryanized. It had also been directly involved in organizing the internment of foreign Jews. Hence the reputation of îlot 16 as a ‘Jewish’ quarter may have induced the Prefecture to see the racial persecution as an opportunity to circumvent the main obstacles that had been preventing the expropriations and evictions in the îlot which were the necessary preliminary to acquiring an invaluable piece of real estate in the very middle of Paris. At the time the expropriation and eviction orders were published, the Prefecture did not actually know the percentage of Jewish inhabitants in each section, so this information had no impact on changes to the order in which various redevelopment operations were implemented. The publication of each expropriation order was followed within a fortnight by a visit from a city’s architectural surveyor. The surveyors visited every lodging and were required to draw up an administrative file for each household, specifying the family’s race. This file was used when awarding compensation. Evidently it was not until this had been done that the administration was able gradually to map the distributing of Jewish households throughout the îlot 16. It may be that the percentage of Jewish inhabitants affected by the first three operations (8%, 1%, and 0 respectively) may have seemed so insignificant that a disappointed Prefecture decided to re-order the expropriations in such a way as to give priority to areas with a higher percentages of Jews.

Even before the architectural surveyors’ visits, it had long been a matter of common but unofficial knowledge that the îlot contained “Jewish pockets”. In « Antisemitism and Urban Development in France in the Second World War : The Case of Îlot 16 in Paris », with I. Backouche, Contemporary European History, 23 (3), 2014, p. 381-403.
1941, for example, Raymond Lecuyer noted, in an article published in *L'Illustration*, that it was an area 'swarming with stateless persons' where you could hear ‘echoes of bastardized Hebrew’. The area he described was precisely the one affected by Operations 6A and 6B (rue des Jardins) and Operation 13 (rue du Figuier). The majority of its inhabitants were Jewish. These operations were the ones relating to the three main sections which were brought forward in the schedule and were thus slated to begin in April 1942.

Independent of this unofficial view, once the Prefecture was in possession of the architectural surveyor architects’ reports it immediately amended the operation plans so as to prioritize the more ‘Jewish’ zones. Under this new strategy, the evictions were frequently confined to certain buildings, or just parts of a street. Operation 19B covered both the rue Saint-Antoine, where few Jews lived, and the rue Charlemagne, which had a significant Jewish population. Only the inhabitants of the second street were to be evicted; those of the rue Saint-Antoine were to be spared. Thus the persecution of the Jews was a godsend for a department anxious to lighten the twofold financial burden of redeveloping îlot 16 and rehousing its erstwhile inhabitants. Many of the îlot’s Jews had already left before the arrival of the architects, so there was no need to rehouse or compensate them. They were the forgotten people of the operation. As tenants living in the area, they should have been dealt with by the administration, but they were not. Families without any administrative files made up 21% of the 639 Jewish families that we identified as living in expropriated buildings. The copious correspondence found

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in the archives bears witness to the Prefecture's desire not to discriminate against any of the tenants while complying with the law.58 Of the total number of evicted households 5% 'disappeared' from the administrative records, saving the Prefecture the cost of rehousing and/or compensating them. It may not seem like a very significant percentage,59 but the Prefecture's bureaucrats thought that it would be, and that is why they seized on it so eagerly. The actual results of the operation were less beneficial to the administration than originally expected.

The original voluntarism at the base of the operation may at this stage seem paradoxical. In part it derives from the Jewish reputation of îlot 16,60 which promised to prove advantageous to the administration at a time when Jews were being persecuted. But the promise proved deceptive. For one thing, most of the inhabitants of the area were not in fact Jewish; for another, the Prefecture's haste outstripped the ongoing process of racial persecution. As the operations continued, the number of Jewish households without an administrative file appears to have grown (graph 1). It seems, then, that while the Seine Prefecture’s redevelopment plans may have been assisted by the persecution, this did not happen until later than the Prefecture had anticipated, and then only to a lesser degree.

**Redeveloping the buildings or changing the population structure?**

That the decision to expropriate the inhabitants of îlot 16 was contextually determined is confirmed by the fact that the redevelopment plan purported to use eviction as a tool to restructure the îlot's population. There was no scheme for

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financing the redevelopment as such,\textsuperscript{61} and on 19 July 1944, by which time most of the evicted families had already left the îlot, Périer de Féral wrote to the Délégué Général à l’Equipement National that ‘as far as finance goes, a decision has not yet been made’\textsuperscript{62}.

As if to confirm the windfall effect of the eviction operation, the buildings were not renovated until long afterwards. The photo library at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal in Paris contains a series of topographic images showing buildings shored up with beams and left derelict until the 1970s. The evictions continued from 1942 onwards and the properties were left to deteriorate.\textsuperscript{63} The registers of the Paris Prefecture of Police reveal an urban space given up to cupidity and greed. The only action taken by the Seine Prefecture was to file complaints. Between January and March 1943 alone, Henri Drouin, a Seine Prefecture engineer in charge of evacuating îlot 16, made fifteen visits to the commissariat in order to report thefts of lead from buildings for which he was responsible.\textsuperscript{64} The haste with which the buildings had been evacuated actually caused more damage than the actual toll; this is all the more surprising in that the Beaux-Arts Department had made considerable efforts to ensure the preservation of buildings in the area.

Since no actual redevelopment ever took place, it soon became apparent that the evictions had been pointless. The empty apartments were to be rented out again. On 8 February 1944, after most of Paris’s Jews had already been deported, an internal memo from the Seine Prefecture signalled the change of course:

The Secretary-General believes that we can no longer prevent the better apartments from being rented out, despite the public utility declaration. He would like you to co-operate with the legal department to determine how we can authorize the renting of this accommodation. At first glance it appears that short-term contracts should still be valid if we plead force majeure, and we do not have to rent only to disaster victims. Various archive records confirm the post-Liberation reallocation of accommodation that had been 'emptied of tenants'. By the end of the 1950s, the city had begun collecting taxes on short-term housing contracts.

Map 4 – Rental situation of expropriated buildings in îlot 16, 1950

This reoccupation of the buildings signalled a change in the population structure, but in fact quite a number of people who had officially been evicted from the îlot had stayed in, or returned to, their old homes. However, the eastern section of the îlot was totally destroyed and the population totally changed. Officially, îlot 16 had been expropriated and evacuated in order to demolish buildings that did not merit preservation, which meant most of them. And it appears that most of the buildings slated for demolition had, before the war, been inhabited largely by Jews. By 21 August 1943, the odd-numbered side of the rue des Nonnains d’Hyères had already been razed to the ground; the odd-numbered side of the rue des Jardins-Saint-Paul had been demolished by the following September. A map made by the Seine Prefecture in 1946 shows the
extent of the destruction by December 1945. When this map is superimposed on the map of operations, it is clear that, aside from Operations 1-5 which involved demolition for ‘reasons of public utility’, the other demolition operations took place in areas with high concentrations of Jewish inhabitants (table 1).

Map 5 – Demolished buildings in ilot 16 (Paris), December 1945

**Conclusion**

Our analysis has revealed a complex relationship between administrative action and racial persecution. The idea that the municipal authorities played an ‘innovative role’ in the persecution of the Jews is anything but new. Wolf Gruner drew attention to the ‘racist outlook of the municipalities’:

> in fact it was at the local level that practical administrative interests had a particularly strong influence on the planning of active persecution by municipal officials.

However, the operation that took place in ilot 16 from October 1941 was not intended to support the persecution policy. All inhabitants, both Jews (those who had not already left) and non-Jews, were given identical treatment by the Prefecture. The officials could easily have devised files for the Jewish inhabitants, but they did not. As it turned out, 57% of the 415 Jewish families who were evicted by the Prefecture (and thereby formally and openly identified as Jewish) escaped deportation. This indicates that if the ilot 16 development operations were connected with the anti-Semitic policies of the French state, the connection

was only opportunistic. Here, our conclusions converge with those of several other recent research projects that emphasize that the way various actors approached the ‘Jewish problem’ was dictated by their own interests rather than by ideology or opinion. However, and more surprisingly, if the Seine Prefecture’s redevelopment projects were not inspired by state anti-Semitism, they did help to normalize and trivialize it. Tal Bruttmann came to a similar conclusion in his study of Aryanization in the Isère region of France. Our article supplements these previous studies. It demonstrates that identical processes could take place in connection with policies that, strictly speaking, had nothing to do with the persecution.

It is unwise to assume direct causal links; nor should we concentrate on purely structural effects to the neglect of individual behaviour. Rather we must reveal the mechanisms that underlay the decisions made at this particular moment in the history of the French State, particularly the chronology of that state’s evolving policies. It then becomes strikingly obvious that 'by re-situating the despoliation within the framework of medium-term economic and social history we can expose a rationale that would otherwise remain opaque. As is often the case, one policy made it possible to carry through another.'

In taking this approach and in drawing our conclusions, we are very aware that the results are specific to a particular situation and are therefore, unavoidably, fragmentary. We need to compare other contexts, including some that are right outside the domain of racial persecution in Paris in the early 1940s. The Vichy period represented one moment for works and reforms in sectors that
the Third Republic had neglected, and, as we have shown, this more general context helps to explain the redevelopment process in îlot 16. Moreover, the exodus from Paris affected all social groups and all areas of the city. This massive exodus may have also played a role in the administration’s decision to address the issue of insalubrious îlots in October 1941. Paris was not the only city so affected: Joseph Dawidowicz, a resident of Lens before the war, returned in 1944 to find that his home was occupied by a local government department, which had acquired the building from the temporary manager in control of the property.

Different studies are perforce on different scales, but this does not prevent dialogue between them.

Overall, this article is the first step in a larger study of the fate of the Jews living in a certain part of Paris. We believe that the approach and scale of our study are unprecedented; we hope that, in conjunction with studies of the fortunes of certain individuals, it will contribute to an understanding of the processes which determined both persecution and survival. In this perspective, the interface between sociology and history turns out to be a particularly fruitful area of study.

1 The administration of Paris was conducted jointly by the Seine Prefecture and the municipal council.
2 The îlots insalubres were of various sizes (see map 1), but always larger than a single block.
3 The section was labelled ‘16’ because ‘this îlot has the sixteenth lowest tuberculosis rate of the seventeen in question’. Hereafter ‘îlot 16’.
4 This view had been prevalent in the municipal government at least since 1910. See Archives de Paris (hereafter AP), VO NC 1342, Rapport à monsieur le préfet, 17 Nov. 1910. From then on, articles written about the neighbourhood, mainly for journals produced by local scholarly associations, witness to the enduring nature

5 Médiathèque de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine (hereafter MAPA), 81/075/04, carton 1, Letter from Guy Périer de Féral to the Ministre Secrétaire d’Etat à l’Education Nationale, 2 Feb. 1944. On the same day, Périer de Féral sent nearly the exact same letter to the Délégué Général à l’Equipement National.


8 Vichy law required all persons subject to expropriation or eviction to declare their racial status. For Jews, compensation payments were to be paid into separate accounts in their names, but to which they had no access (law of 22 July 1941 on ‘aryanisation économique’).


This opposition was suggested in 1990 at a conference organized by the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent, and was taken up again by Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, eds., *Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).


Our principal archive sources for the persecution of the Jew are: archives of the despoliation of the Jews in the Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), Series AJ38; the restitution orders for looted property, AP 47 W, 1994 W, 2330 W; war damage files, 50 W and 1131 W; the Seine Prefecture’s files on local families; the Drancy camp file; the search notebook for the Drancy camp; the archives of the Union Générale des Israélites de France, and the Mémorial de la Shoah.

Relevant material in the AP includes papers from the Seine Prefect’s office (Pérotin Series), Municipal Council (13W, D4K3, D5K3, 2331 W), the Seine Prefect’s memoranda sent to the Municipal Council (D9K3), the official municipal bulletin from the City of Paris (D3K3), the 1936 and 1946 censuses, the Crédit municipal archives (1ETP), the Arrêtés de réquisition des parcelles (58 W), the Bureau du contrôle des sociétés immobilières de la ville de Paris (1397 W), the Gestion des îlots insalubres (1427 W, VONC 1342), lease statements from the 4th arrondissement (1833 W), school registers (2630 to 2639 W), the sommier foncier (DQ18), the plot plans (1937-1968), the Bottin du commerce (2mi3), and Gestion du domaine privé de la ville de Paris (3067 W). We also explored the following archives: MAPA; the Archives of the Vieux Paris Commission (Généralités, îlot 16); the archives of the Police Prefecture (Répertoire analytique du quartier Saint-Gervais, CB 14-71 to 14-77, May 1938-Dec. 1945); and the AN (Fonds Albert Laprade, 403 AP; Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives, AJ 38).


Albert Laprade, one of the three architects who, in the end, directed the operation, is an example. See *L’Illustration*, ‘Les métamorphoses de Paris’, MMMMCMLXIX, 28 May 1938.


AN, F/2/4212, Letter from the Seine Prefect, Magny, to Darlan, Minister of the Interior, 2 May 1941.
31 AP, 1427 W 89, Correspondence between the Plan de Paris and the Public Health and Housing Departments, 24 July 1941.
33 The archives relating to the operation are held in the Collection 1900 W, AP: Expropriation de la zone non aedificandi et du quartier Saint-Gervais (îlot insalubre n° 16), 1792-1977.
34 AP, 1427W87, Projet de la Société d’études pour l’aménagement urbain d’îlots insalubres and AN, Fonds Laprade, 403 AP 500, item 1, Mar. 1941.
35 The loi sur les abords restricts building on land in the vicinity of buildings of recognized historical or aesthetic importance. The law was passed on 25 Feb. 1943, and published in the Journal Officiel on 4 Mar. 1943.
36 This number was calculated as follows. First we calculated the total number of households reported to the Prefecture as ‘Jewish’ at the time of the eviction. We then added those unaccounted for by this procedure which we located from sources outside the 1900 W inventory. This total was then compared to the number of inhabited apartments according to the 1936 census data. Evidently, we may have failed to account for certain Jewish households. Our percentages provide a relative scale for the purposes of comparison and represent minimum values; we have used them in order to compare social structures and administrative policies. At this juncture we are not interested in decisions made by actors who, by definition, were unaware of these percentages at the time. We will return to that question later.
37 Operation 12 may be considered separately: the only two buildings concerned adjoined the school on the rue Geoffrey L’Asnier, and were expropriated in order to enlarge this school.
39 This is confirmed by our research: 93% of the heads of Jewish families were born outside metropolitan France and 64% of them were not of French nationality.
40 The order for Operation 5 was put into effect on 20 July 1942; it had been drawn up on 16 July, i.e. before the end of the 16-17 July raids which led to the arrest of 12,884 Jews. This mass arrest is referred to as “Vel’ d’Hiv” because 8,160 of those arrested were initially interned inside Paris’s Vélodrome d’Hiver.
41 CVP, Îlot 16, Généralités, carton 1, Mémoire sur les îlots insalubres présenté au conseil municipal le 23 décembre 1921. Another memorandum, dated 1934, also refers to these obstacles: AP, 13W54.
42 Law of 21 Sept. 1941 dealing with the renovation of îlots insalubres in Paris, Journal Officiel, 10 Oct. 1941, p. 4371; law of 1 Mar. 1942 dealing with...
insalubrious buildings and the areas covered by the old city wall, *Journal Officiel*, 5 Mar. 1942, p. 916.

43 *L’Illustration*, ‘Les métamorphoses de Paris’.

44 From August 1941 to August 1944, Jews awaiting deportation were held at the Cité de la Muette in Drancy; 65,000 of the 76,000 Jews deported from France spent some time there.

45 AP, 1 ETP 624, Letter from the Department of Architecture and Urban Services to the director of the Crédit Municipal, 10 Jan. 1942; and memorandum to the director informing him of the Dienststelle Westen’s GAGE blocking, 19 Apr. 1944.

46 CVP16G, carton 1, memorandum Note from the Director of Architecture and Urban Services to the Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, 9 Sept. 1942. The German ordinance, dated 22 May 1942, prohibited all unauthorized construction projects priced at more than 100,000 francs.

47 Various voices were raised in opposition when the operation was started: CVP16G, Généralités, carton 3, Letter to the Seine Prefect, 12 Dec. 1941.

48 The problem appeared on the Seine Prefecture’s agenda in September 1942, but it was not new. As early as March of the same year, the tenants of 16 rue Charlemagne had sent a request and petition to the Seine Prefect and the Municipal Council of the 4th arrondissement, calling for the demolition of the building to be postponed. CVP16G, carton 1, request and petition.

49 CVP16G, carton 1, memorandum to the General Secretary of the Seine Prefecture from the Director of Administrative and Technical Affairs, 21 Sept. 1942.


51 AP, 1397W 184, Archives of the Supervisory Authority of the Paris City Housing Organizations, letter from the Housing Department, 17 Sept. 1942.

52 CVP16G, carton 1, memorandum to the assistant director of the General Secretariat, 10 Apr. 1943.


55 CVP16G, carton 1, Report from the director of the Department of Architecture and Urban Services of the Seine Prefecture, 29 July 1942.

56 AP, 1900 W and A.N., AJ 38, topographic index.


The number was perforce a minimum (see note 41 above); moreover, other sources, yet to be fully confirmed, suggest that the number was in reality probably larger. These sources include the ‘rouleau Epstein’ held at the Mémorial de la Shoah. In all likelihood, this document is a register of donations made to the UGIF by Jews from various Paris neighbourhoods in November 1942.

In the course of our research it became clear that only 23%, and not the majority, of households in the îlot were actually Jewish.


CVP16G, carton 2, Letter of 1 July 1944.

CVP16G, carton 2, memorandum on the maintenance of buildings to be conserved after redevelopment, 18 June 1944.


CVP16G, carton 2, Note, 8 Feb. 1944.

AP, 3067W 898. In the case of an eviction for reasons of public utility, the city is prohibited from leasing to a new tenant.


AP, 1900 W 203. Register summarizing Operation 6B.

AP, Seine Prefect’s communication to the municipal and general councils on the problem of accommodation and development plans for Paris and its suburbs, 1946.


