SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Letters of denunciation in the Lyon Region 1940-1944

Williams, Benn

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Williams, B. (2001). Letters of denunciation in the Lyon Region 1940-1944. *Historical Social Research*, *26*(2/3), 136-152. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.26.2001.2/3.136-152

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:
This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-31390

Historical Social Research, Vol. 26 – 2001 – No. 2/3, 136-152

Letters of Denunciation in the Lyon Region, 1940-1944

Benn Williams[*]

Abstract: While the historiography concerning practices of denunciation in central and eastern Europe has advanced rapidly in the last decade, this has not been the case in terms of western Europe. Scholars have devoted impressive amounts of energy to the study of *collaboration*, but few have touched upon denunciation – except perhaps in passing with an oblique reference to a letter of denunciation. Intrigued by such references and strongly influenced by *Alltagsgeschichte*, this essay offers an introduction to the culture of denunciation in the *départements* of Isère and Rhône, of the Lyon region of France, during World War II. Organized around four specific cases, this essay explores a spectrum of denunciatory experiences found in a sampling of letters and judicial records from French local and national archives. Reports and correspondence of the prefects, gendarmerie, and police forces provide greater context and help to flesh out these examples.[1]

The Nazi 'Final Solution' was not a democratic decision. It was, perhaps, democratically implemented. The success or failure of this World War II experiment relied on the participation of large numbers of people – and not simply Nazi bureaucrats in the Eichmann mold. It required, at the minimum, a level of

[*] Address all communications to Benn Williams, University of Illinois at Chicago, Dept. of Historie (m/c 198), 601 Morgan Street, Chicago, II 60607 – 7109.
E-mail: Bwilli7@uic.edu.

[1] I am indebted to numerous people and institutions and there is insufficient space to mention them all by name. Nonetheless, I wish to acknowledge the support of the *équipe* at the Institut d'histoire du temps présent under the direction of Henry Rousso; the archival assistance of Tal Bruttmann, formerly of the Archives départementales de l'Isère; the stylistic advice from members of Professor Huppert's Fall 2000 writing workshop; and VW Foundation and, last but not least, Drs. Marszolek and Stieglitz.

tacit acceptance of resettlement and, later, extermination policies.[2] How popular were these policies among ordinary people? This remains an open question. Research on denunciation will help us to understand the implementation and acceptance of the 'Final Solution' at the grassroots-level.

Initial research on denunciation focused on Nazi Germany, as some contributions to this volume do underscore again. Denunciation in the context of World War II France, however, remains understudied. In this piece I hope to offer insights into the culture of denunciation and how denunciation functioned within a regional French population under significant wartime stress. The reader seeking definitive conclusions similar to those for Nazi Germany will be disappointed. I may pose more questions than I answer. Based on preliminary research, this paper represents only the groundwork for larger works in progress[3] which will treat more thoroughly the themes introduced here, such as antisemitism, collaboration, occupation, and policing.

Was denunciation rampant in France during World War II? Although not part of the current wave, Henri Amouroux and André Halimi deserve much of the credit for bringing attention to this phenomenon vis-à-vis wartime France. Amouroux stumbled upon a few hundred letters of denunciation, apparently addressed to the German authorities, while researching his "La vie des Français sous l'Occupation" in the early 1970s.[4] While he probably was not the first to suggest gigantic proportions, a decade later journalist-filmmaker André Halimi estimated that during the war the French denounced to the tune of three to five million signed and unsigned letters of denunciation. His "La délation sous l'Occupation", a rich source of transcribed letters and press clippings, marks the first recent book-length treatment of denunciation during the war.[5] Henry Rousso, a prominent historian of the Vichy period and its legacies, offers a more conservative estimate of "hundreds of thousands" of denunciations addressed to the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives*.[6] I do not know

---

[2] The Nazi 'Final Solution' remains a much-studied topic, with conflicting views on the roles of key Nazi leaders and the means by which it evolved. Most scholars agree, however, that the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 marked its systematization. See Christopher Browning, Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers, Cambridge 2000, chapter 2.

[3] A doctoral dissertation in history at the University of Illinois at Chicago directed by Richard S. Levy.

[4] Despite the title, his examples include letters addressed to the Vichy-created *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives*. He unfortunately provides no archival references. Cf. Henri Amouroux, La vie des Français sous l'Occupation, Paris 1963.

[5] Fitzpatrick and Gellately mention that, in their work "La dénonciation et les dénonciateurs" (Paris 1948), French psychologists L. Colaneri and G. Gérente treated denunciation as a "childish behavior that well-adjusted adults ought to have outgrown." Gellately a. Fitzpatrick, Introduction, fn. 55.

[6] Henry Rousso, Les années noires: vivre sous l'occupation, Paris 1992, p. 96. For an excellent brief history of the CGQJ, see Michael R. Marrus a. Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France and the Jews, New York 1981, pp. 123-158.

how many letters exist(ed), but based on preliminary research I prefer a lower estimate.

Since Halimi's work, the literature on denunciation in France remains small. Deemed a landmark by many social scientists, Luc Boltanski's article "La dénonciation", published in 1984, is a study of letters addressed to "Le Monde" from the angle of the social protest. Only recently has Julien Papp devoted ten pages to denunciation in a case-study of collaboration in the *département* of the Eure. Pierre Assouline, editor of "Lire", provides a well-informed and intriguing fictional account of the immediate and long-term effects of one denunciation on the denunciator, on two generations of the denounced family, and on the historian who discovers the paper trail some sixty years later.[7] Two other recent texts focus on the definition of terms and will be discussed next.[8]

1. Project Design

"The quality of *délateur* and that of *dénonciateur* are in essence the same thing; it seems that the quality of *délateur* applies singularly to the most odious denunciations."[9] This encyclopedic entry dates from the 18th century, so how does one currently define denunciations? Quickly defined, they are "spontaneous communications from individual citizens to an organization (like the state or police) which implicitly or explicitly call for punishment." [10] Can one word in fact satisfactorily address the many shades of gray manifested in the comparative studies of denunciation? I opt here for the French (and little known English) distinction between *dénonciation* (denunciation) and *délation* (delation), treated in depth most recently in France by Jean-François Gayraud, Christiane Kohser-Spohn and Michaela Hohkamp.[11] Drawing upon the Encyclopaedic tradition, Jean-François Gayraud stresses the 'good' civic quality of *dénonciation*, which is derived from the Latin *denuntiato* [the action of announcing] and *denuntiare* [*faire-savoir* or inform]. Gayraud considers *délation*, derived from *delatio* [report or accuse] or *delator*, a morally reprehensible 'bad' act used to

---

[7] Luc Boltanski with Yann Darré and Marie-Ange Schiltz, La dénonciation, in: Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales 51 (1984): pp. 3-40; Julien Papp, La collaboration dans l'Eure, 1940-1944, with a preface by Henry Rousso, Paris 1995, pp. 174-184; and Pierre Assouline, La cliente Paris 1998.

[8] Jean-François Gayraud, La dénonciation, Paris 1995; and Christiane Kohser-Spohn and Michaela Hohkamp, La dénonciation ou l'apprentissage de la docilité citoyenne, in: European Review of History – Revue européenne d'Histoire 7 (2000), pp. 33-43.

[9] Entry for 'délateur' in the *Encyclopédia ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, tome 4, Paris 1754, p. 777. Emphasis added.

[10] Fitzpatrick and Gellately, Introduction, p. 748.

[11] Gayraud, Dénonciation*;* Kohser-Spohn and Hohkamp, La dénonciation ou l'apprentissage, 33-43, esp. p. 34.

'demonize' an enemy.[12] Thus, a *dénonciateur* (denunciator) is a person who informs while a person who delates is a *délateur* (delator). Gayraud rightly uses an historical example to demonstrate the difference. For him, the distinction rests on the legitimacy of the political system under which the information is furnished: "To inform the *Milice* or the Gestapo of persons planting bombs was *délation*" whereas "to inform the police of members of the FLNC *[Front de libération nationale corse] ...* constitutes *... dénonciation*."[13]

As the German historiography demonstrates, small case-studies better serve initial research into denunciation than a sweeping national study. The same holds true in France as Henry Rousso states in the preface to Julien Papp's "La collaboration dans l'Eure, 1940-1944": "[T]he regional and local dimension is particularly necessary from the moment that one attempts to seize upon the complex realities of the history of the Occupation" which is, he continues, "one of great diversity of fortunes and situations."[14] In this paper I focus specifically on the Rhône and Isère *départements*, a sub-set of the Lyon region.[15]

Why this region and not the Ile de France? As they often are, the reasons are both personal and professional. Personally, my formal introduction to the French language, culture, and life came in Grenoble, the capital of the Isère. Professionally, the greater Lyon region, renamed Rhône-Alpes in 1961, has been 'confrontational' at several critical junctures in French - and European - history.[16] Formerly a Roman river port and later a center for French Protestantism and silk production, during the war Lyon was considered the anti-governmental capital of the *Résistance*. It was and remains a regional administrative and judicial center for the Vichy and post-*Libération* governments.[17] At the dawn of the third millenium the region is taking a leadership role in the growing European regionalism.

Anyone researching a sensitive topic in terms of France under Occupation must, however, possess patience. While the French public archives surely boast more kilometers of WWII-era documents than her German counterparts, the

---

[12] Gayraud, Dénonciation, p. 20-31. Fitzpatrick and Gellately provide the parenthetical shorthand in Introduction, p. 763. The unabridged 1967 edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language tacitly imparts positive connotations to 'denounce' and 'denunciation' but it does not signal negative connotations for the archaic 'delate', pp. 386-387, 381.

[13] Gayraud, Dénonciation, p. 30.

[14] In Papp, La collaboration dans l'Eure, pp. 7-8.

[15] The Vichy law of 19 April 1941 defines the region in terms of seven *départements*: the Rhône, Isère, Savoie, Haute-Savoie, Jura, Loire and Haute-Loire. The decree of 24 September 1941 removed the Loire and added the Ardèche and the Drôme. See Philippe Rosset (ed.), Les archives du préfet régional du Lyon durant la seconde guerre mondiale, Lyon 1998, p. 10; see also Marc-Olivier Baruch, Le régime de Vichy, Paris 1996, p. 737. This article will concentrate on the Rhône and Isère.

[16] This paragraph draws largely from John Newhouse, Europe's Rising Regionalism, in: Foreign Affairs 76 (1997), pp. 67-84, particularly p. 80.

[17] Gérard Chauvy has published widely on the city of Lyon, see idem, Lyon 40-44, Paris 1985.

access to, and organization of, these precious documents can try the researcher. Current legislation applying to the archives presents obstacles in viewing the more tantalizing documents.[18] According to Law no. 79-18, articles 6-8, of January 3, 1979, all public documents are to be made available to the general public – including foreign researchers – after thirty years with the following exceptions: documents "bearing on personal behavior or affecting state security" (after 60 years), court documents and statistical records containing „personal information" (100 years), personnel records (120 years), and medical dossiers (150 years). In the meantime, the researcher can attempt to access classified [*non-communicable*] documents by completing a request for consultation.[19]

The guides for France's individual World War II collections are either quite recent or non-existent. Published in 1994, the comprehensive '*guide bleu*'[20] represents one of the oldest. At the other extreme, two *archives départementales* in the region published their guides in 2000 while another will require several more months – or even years.[21] In general, archives have been slow in adapting to the digital age (websites and online resources) so one must physically go to consult the inventory guide(s).[22] Despite these difficulties, due in large part to budgetary constraints, excellent assistance is to be had from personnel in the *archives départementales*, at least if my experience is typical.

Despite the regional focus, my research also relies on sources collected and housed in Paris. It draws heavily from letters of denunciation and inter-office correspondence in the recently declassified archive of the *Commissariat général aux questions juives* (CGQJ),[23] with assorted materials gleaned from the

[18] When this article went to press, the reformative *projet de loi* presented by the government in December 1999 had not been adopted. The debate over accessability continues, inscribed in the rhetoric of transparence and admist the clash between national memory *versus* the protection of state secrets and of the personal lives of individuals. To sample a growing literature on the political, philosophical, and professional issues confronting historians and archivists, see the journal „Histoire et Archives" launched in 1997, and more recently, Vincent Duclert, Les historiens et les archives, in: Genèses 36 (1999), pp. 132-161.

[19] *Une demande de consultation d'archives non librement communicables* is also known as a *dérogation*.

[20] Brigitte Blanc, Henry Rousso a. Chantal de Tourtier-Bonazzi (eds.), La seconde guerre mondiale, Guide des sources conservées en France, 1939-1945, Paris 1994. Relying largely on self-reporting by the different public and private archives, this guide represents a strong effort and a good point of departure – but is already out of date.

[21] Those of the AD-Savoie in Chambéry and of the AD-Haute-Savoie in Annecy are becoming available. Time required to inventory AD-Isère's collections is based on a private communication to the author, 18 August 2000.

[22] Some exceptions, both public and private, should be applauded for their technological progress, e.g., the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* (http://www.calvacom.fr/calvaweb/memorial/cdjc_fr.htm), and the *AD-Savoie* (http://savoie-culture.com/archives/).

[23] The archives of the CGQJ constitute series AJ38 at the *Archives nationales* in Paris. See Marie-Thérèse Chabord and Jean Pouëssel (eds.), Inventaire des archives du Commissariat

Institut d'histoire du temps présent (IHTP) and the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* (CDJC). In terms of the Lyon and Grenoble-based sources, I focussed on reports and correspondence of the prefects, gendarmerie, *Renseignements Généraux*, and other police services, as well as judicial records and the odd letter of denunciation.[24] Although I have yet to analyse systematically local and regional newspapers, radio transcripts, and conduct interviews, the regional archives provide a strong indication of public opinion.

In his masterful study of popular protest in France, Richard Cobb stated that „unfortunately, [denunciation] is an international phenomenon; any period of war or civil disturbance or acute shortage is likely to stimulate that vocation."[25] During WWII, France had all three: German occupying forces, a gradually intensifying Franco-French civil struggle, and economic restrictions and shortages all helped to create an atmosphere conducive to delation.

Charting public opinion vis-à-vis the shortages will hopefully lead to a fuller understanding of the subsequent atmosphere of delation. Dominique Veillon and Jean-Marie Flonneau state that in a large number of *départements*, citizens accused the bureaucrats directing the *Ravitaillement général* [national rationing and quotas] of causing difficulties in the program's implementation.[26] Restrictions did not carry the same meaning in each *département* because of such factors as the onerousness of the occupation, local agricultural and production resources, and the relative effectiveness of anti-black market measures. Nonetheless, shortages could materialize suddenly.[27]

Legend states that there were 40 million French Pétainists in 1940 and four years later 40 million Gaullist *résistants*. Clearly this is too simple, but it raises

---

général aux questions juives et du service de restitution des biens des victimes des lois et mesures de spoliation: Sous-série AJ38, Paris 1998. Letter writers addressed their correspondence to Pétain, Vallat, Darquier de Pellepoix, Laval, simply the CGQJ, or more simply „Monsieur." Unfortunately, few envelopes, with their more specific means of address, remain. I have concentrated on five specific „cotes": AN, AJ38, 6, 9, 67, 3599, and 3618.

[24] Letters found in the AD-Rhône and the AD-Isère were often addressed to the local prefects and French police commissioners (by title). Due to the lengthy petition procedure, I was not able to consult caches of denunciatory letters at these two archives. Nonetheless, at AD-Rhône, I concentrated on the following series: 45W, 182W, 3490W, 3554W, and 3571W. At AD-Isère, I focussed on 13R, 20U, 52M, 53M, 57J, 2797W, 2902W, and 2988W.

[25] Richard C. Cobb, The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820, Oxford 1970, p. 80.

[26] The general ideas of this section, substantiated by my own archival work, have been borrowed from Dominique Veillon and Jean-Marie Flonneau (eds.), Le temps des restrictions en France (1939-1949), in: Cahiers de l'IHTP, 32-33 (1996), here p. 12. Curiously, this collection neglects the Lyon region.

[27] Ibid., pp. 12-13, 15, 20.

a suitable question. Faced with restrictions, how did public opinion in the unoccupied zone change? Flonneau distinguishes six periods.[28]

Stage I began in the summer of 1940 as the majority of the French, perhaps ¾, accepted the armistice and welcomed Philippe Pétain, the hero of 1914-1918, as their national leader. Meanwhile, however, the French began to tighten their belts and to dread dearth associated with winter. By late July Lyon lacked butter, coffee, sugar, and gasoline. Meanwhile, residents of neighboring Meximieux complained of nonexistent coal for the upcoming winter.[29]

In stage II, spanning fall 1940 until spring 1941, the majority of the population voiced anti-German sentiments but demonstrated no divergence from Vichy. In the Rhône and the Isère, monthly reports on public morale during the winter of 1940-1941 consistently chronicled low spirits and ubiquitous grumbling about the restrictions and the widespread shortages of wine, tobacco, vegetables, and coal. Salaries plunged and the cost of living soared. One Lyon police official had already reported „psychological shock and stupor“ in September.[30]

With these economic and social restrictions heightening tensions and discontent, perhaps only half the population supported Pétain during stage III, Spring 1941–December 1941.[31] That summer, police reports from Grenoble complained mightily about anonymous denunciations, inspired by “jealousy”, “rancor”, and “vengeance” sprouting in reaction to the black market, rationing, and restrictions.[32] In a January 1942 circular sent to the prefects of the unoccupied zone, one Vichy official, Pierre Pucheu, would express his surprise at the unending flow of anonymous letters and slanderous denunciations [*dénonciations calomineuses*] sent to different administrations[33] over the previous few months. “These practices[34] create an insupportable *atmosphere of suspicion*” he claimed before declaring: “They [the practices] have already brought many regrettable incidents due to a *profound malaise*...” that, he continued, “risks throwing the French into discord at a moment when the Country needs to keep

[28] For an elaboration of the six stages of public opinion in the unoccupied zone, see Jean-Marie Flonneau, L’évolution de l’opinion publique, 1940-1944, in: Jean-Pierre Azéma a. François Bédarida (eds.), Vichy et les Français, Paris 1992, pp. 506-521.

[29] Summary of postal interceptions by the ‘contrôle technique’ of Lyon, 28 July 1940. ADR, 45W43.

[30] State of the spirit of the population, no. 1187. ADR, 45W35.

[31] Veillon and Flonneau, Restrictions, pp. 16-17; Flonneau, L’evolution de l’opinion publique.

[32] Ref. no. 6526/41. ADI, 52M136/1.

[33] “Or to the Authorities of Occupation” was deleted at this point in the final draft of this corrected copy of circular no. 1, dated Vichy, 2 January 1942, sent by the minister secretary of state of the interior to the prefects of the unoccupied zone. ADI, 52M144.

[34] “Of délation” appeared here in the press release version of 6 January 1942. ADI, 52M144. Emphasis added.

intact all its moral forces to ensure its recovery."[35] His hesitations suggest a dual nature of *délation*. An effective tool of police repression and social control, could delation also undermine Vichy's unifying National Revolution?

During stage IV, January – November 1942, support for the Vichy government fell to around 20% with the return of Laval. In the vicinity of Lyon, meanwhile, even the French police did not escape scarcity. In a report the following January, the deputy prefect begged his prefect for a "vehicle with a motor" so that the Inspector of Special Police in La Tour-du-Pin, would no longer have to patrol his jurisdiction of 128 communes on bicycle.[36]

The German occupation of the then-free zone, following Allied success in northern Africa, marked stage V. This period, November 1942 – Summer 1943, also witnessed implementation of forced labor (*Service du travail obligatoire* or STO), which further turned the screw and led to a measureable lack of cooperation from the exasperated French population.[37] To make matters worse, the gendarmerie was intent on repressing forced labor infractions and black marketeering. As conditions worsened and discontent became widespread, denunciations tended to increase: "Each ha[d] the tendency to perceive his neighbor as a monopolizer and then denounce him."[38]

Impatience and anxiety over the pending liberation defined stage VI, September 1943 – July 1944. By the Liberation, disenchantment was "total."[39] The public's hostility toward the Vichy regime increased greatly and affection for Pétain evaporated. According to Flonneau, however, the French did not hate the grandfatherly *Maréchal*.

Up to this point, it would seem that a poor economic situation largely motivated denunciations. In reality, no dominant form or theme of denunciation appears in the French case. Even after having looked in two *archives départementales* and in the archive of the CGQJ and studied approximately 200 letters of denunciation, I am not prepared to suggest a monochromatic landscape of denunciatory experiences. This is not to say, however, that a few types from the archives cannot elucidate the tableau. As the following examples will demonstrate, denunciation proves a complex issue. Not only did the French denounce each other to the German forces of order (for example the *Gestapo* or *Feldgendarmerie*) but they also denounced both to pre-Vichy and Vichy-era French authorities (Gendarmerie, police, *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives*).

---

[35] Ibid. Emphasis added.

[36] ADI, 52M136/3.

[37] One post-war deposition fixes the number of STO deportees at 18,000 for the entire Rhône *département*, a calculation which therefore includes refugees and transients. AN, 72AJ/180, A.I.20. "Deposition of Mr. Nougein on the STO", 14 April 1955. In addition, already in October 1940 the Rhône counted 15,000 unemployed. State of public opinion, report n° 2597. ADR, 45W35.

[38] Veillon a. Flonneau, Restrictions, p. 18.

[39] Ibid.

Furthermore, these four cases which follow will demonstrate a multitude of motivations and definitions of denunciation.

2. 'Lolita'

"In the year 1943, ... following denunciation by anonymous letter, an investigation by the gendarmerie has established that for several months, Mr. P. habitually had sexual relations in the fields, or in other public locations, with the young H. whom he had met while he was the agricultural laborer for her father .... [S]he recognizes, that, aside from the first time, she gave herself voluntarily to the desires of P. [...] [P]rior to 9 July 1943, H. was less than 13 years old...."[40]

Married and the father of five children, the forty-seven year-old Mr. P. was charged with public indecency [*outrage à la pudeur*] for exposing his sexual parts, to which the girl was deemed not an involuntary witness "while participating"of her own free will. For this, "she, too, could be taken to court."[41] Even though H.'s father "intervened regularly in the debates to demand reparation ... valued at twenty thousand francs"[42], the Correctional Tribunal of Grenoble sentenced P. on 8 February 1944 to four months of imprisonment and a 1,200 franc fine.

While not representative of what looks to be thousands of denunciations in southeastern France during the war, this 'Lolita' case touches upon several important aspects of the phenomenon. First, this denunciation was anonymous and directed against a fellow, presumably non-Jewish, French citizen. Second, the motivations appear ambiguous: financial gain – moral outrage – revenge – envy – old grudge? Third, although not a motivating factor, denunciations during Vichy offered French and German forces of law and order a potential tool for repression.[43]

Instead of an exception, the action of H.'s father in fact represents one type of denunciation as found in the archives. In her article "Signals from Below", Sovietologist Sheila Fitzpatrick uses heuristic categories to understand motiva-

[40] Correctional judgment, Correctional tribunal of Grenoble. ADI, 6000W12. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Names have been changed per legal stipulations. I would like to thank Tal Bruttmann for signaling this dossier.

[41] ADI, 6000W12.

[42] Ibid. Reading the police and gendarme reports in the dossier, we can surmise that H.'s father was the most likely author of the anonymous letter mailed to the French gendarmerie, thereby launching the judicial process of investigation and civil trial.

[43] There is a burgeoning literature on the *forces de l'ordre* operating in France. See, for example, Bernd Kasten, 'Gute Franzosen': die französische Polizei und die deutsche Besatzungsmacht im besetzten Frankreich 1940-1944, Sigmaringen 1993.

tions for denunciation.[44] While her categories may apply to the Soviet example, I find that they tend to overlap and to blur in the French example. There is one exception. Letters written by family members for moral offenses, sexual deviance, or familial feuds constitute an excellent comparative category. In the French sources, variants on the theme include a spouse denouncing the other in order to end an illicit affair or to pursue one more freely.[45]

H.'s father's paternal desire to protect his minor daughter and his moral outrage directed towards Mr. P. could have been two strong motivating factors for this denunciation. However, if we assume the girl to be of sound mind and acting consensually "of her own free will", a "not involuntary witness", as the court transcript states, then perhaps her father had different motivations. With H.'s father's insistence on "reparation...valued at 20,000 francs" during court proceedings that harsh winter of 1943, financial gain cannot be ruled out.

Denouncing Mr. P. to the French gendarmerie and not to a German authority suggests that this type of denunciation could very well have occurred during peacetime – and probably did. On the other hand, one could argue that in this particular case Mr. H. would not have been so eager to denounce outside of the context of the war, what with the economic restrictions and shortages. Did he also have a glimmer of hope that the case would be taken up by the occupying forces? Then again, denunciations could backfire.

3. Court Portraits: *Délateurs* Young and Old

One aspect of my current research involves ascertaining the *délateur*'s name, age, gender, residence, socio-economic class, social origins, education, etc. French judicial dossiers from the period can aid the researcher tremendously in such an endeavor. One folder might contain court transcripts, copies of police reports, witness testimonies, and even letters of denunciation. Some folders are empty. In addition to the 'Lolita' case, in which the *dénoncé* was convicted, the judicial dossiers of 1944-45 reveal two cases in which the Grenoble Court of Justice[46] convicted the *délateurs*. Using their recorded testimonies and, in one case, that of a medical expert, I intend to sketch the portraits of Mrs. C. and Mr. B. These two cannot be fitted into our current type of denunciation. They represent two new types. These two cases have something else in common. Both

[44] Sheila Fitzpatrick, Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s, in: JMH 68 (1996), pp. 831-866.

[45] ADI, 20U 5, dossier no. 28/44.

[46] For an excellent treatment of the purges in France that began near the end of the war, see Henry Rousso, L'épuration en France, une histoire inachevée, in: Vingtième Siècle Revue d'histoire 33 (1992), pp. 78-105. Authorization for Lyon court records was not granted in time to be considered for this piece.

individuals addressed their denunciations to German forces of order and not to the French.

a. Mrs. C.

Eight handwritten letters were discovered in the former German police station in Grenoble after the city's liberation on 22 August 1944. Signed with an easily recognizable nickname, these letters provided vital information on the activities and names of members of a local Resistance cell. Accused of writing these letters, Mrs. C., at age 26, was the first suspected collaborator to appear before the court in October 1944.[47] According to a report of the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI), Mrs. C. confessed to providing the German police with lists of dissidents in her canton over a period of four months. She also recognized her guilt before the Chief of Judicial Police and the magistrate. Her motivation(s)? According to her FFI confession, she received thousands of francs in payment.[48] Said to have "surrendered herself to prostitution", the mother of two was sentenced to death.[49]

That Mrs. C. provided information to the German police over an extended period suggests that she was not only a repeated *délatrice*, but also, perhaps, a regular informant [*indicatrice*].[50] While I have not unearthed any documents stipulating payments to specific informants or *délateurs*, Serge Klarsfeld has uncovered a document dated 14 April 1944 and signed by Dr. Knochen. In it, Knochen, the chief of police and of the SIPO-SD in France, stipulated that informants aiding in the arrest of Jews would receive cash taken from the denounced Jew. Should she or he not have any, the money would be taken from another Jew.[51] Were financial incentives limited to the denunciation of Jews and only offered by the Germans? A letter from a special commissaire of Vienne (Isère) to the deputy prefect suggested that the national (French) police kept double books to hide the costs of certain services. The Vienne office paid informants between 150 and 300 francs per month for a total of 1,800 francs for the period January–September 1941.[52]

---

[47] This paragraph is based on the *réquistoire définitif* dated 20 October 1944. ADI, 20U3 dossier no. 1/44. The letters can be found in this dossier.

[48] Report of the FFI, 2ème bureau, 3 October 1944. Her confession of financial motivation appears in the court records as well. Ibid.

[49] ADI, 20U3, dossier no. 1/44.

[50] For a discussion of 'informants', see Jean-Paul Brunet, La police de l'ombre. Indicateurs et provocateurs dans la France contemporaine, Paris 1990.

[51] Notice on subject of the rise in Jewish arrests. Original document CDJC, CXXXII-56. Serge Klarsfeld, Vichy-Auschwitz 1943-1944, Paris 1983, p. 387.

[52] Ref. no. 3599 and 3955, 9 and 11 October 1941. ADI, 2902W52. For comparative purposes, the lowest grade inspector earned a monthly wage of 1,650 francs. Interior Ministry decree no. 630, dated 19 October 1941, announces the creation of the police of Jewish questions,

Before turning to our next convicted *délateur*, let us examine the present case more carefully. With two children to feed and having opted for at least occasional prostitution, there can be little doubt that financial strain constituted a major motivation for Mrs. C. The case is instructive for other reasons as well. First, as noted earlier, the mother of two collaborated with the German police. Such an option would hardly present itself during peacetime. The inherent war context is now doubly evident: either for ideological reasons, for monetary gain, and/or for revenge, this *délatrice* denounced *concitoyens* who formed a local cell of the Resistance. The object of the denunciation has shifted from the private sphere of the 'Lolita' case to the public sphere. Entering a symbiotic relationship with the Germans, Mrs. C.'s collaboration targeted not a personal opponent but enemies of the state. If her confession to the FFI was valid, she comes across as a victim of circumstance, one who exchanged denunciations for much needed cash. At a second level, however, her denouncing became in the hands of the Germans (and in those of the French if needed) an instrument of social control. That is, social control arising from the people.[53]

b. Mr. B.

The fourth case before the court that same October involved Mr. B., a 74-year-old retired city worker. Charged with treason, B. had sent a signed letter, addressed to the Officer of the *Feldgendarmerie* in Bourgoin, denouncing a young Alsatian. Even though the youth had fled his homeland and service in the German army, B. considered him a deserter whose "place would be better on the front."[54] A cell of the Resistance intercepted the letter and later discovered an identical copy of the letter at B.'s house. When confronted by the local chief of the FFI, the childless widower confirmed his authorship and reiterated his sentiments: "I recognize being the author of the letter of denunciation....I denounced the young man because he was a foreigner and reported to be a German deserter, and I estimated that his job was to go fight." Without missing a beat, B. insisted: "I had not realized the impact of my denunciation; I sincerely regret my gesture."[55]

In his effort to determine B.'s fitness to stand trial, a doctor of psychiatry examined B.'s body and mind. According to the report, B. gave the physical impression of an arteriosclerotic old man. Dr. Clerc, however, seemed more

attached to the cabinet of this ministry, to "collaborate with the other sections of the police in informing them on suspected activities of Jews." ADI, 52M122. Furthermore, this decree authorizes the subaltern agents to assist the regional delegates.

[53] For a concise discussion of self-policing, see Robert Gellately, Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic, in: JMH 68 (1996), pp. 931-967.

[54] The letter contains numerous misspellings. ADI, 20U3, dossier no. 4/44.

[55] Testimony dated 11 September 1944. ADI, 20U3, dossier no. 4/44.

interested in B.'s motivations. While there is evidence that exterior factors, such as references to Vichy antisemitic legislation, newspaper articles, and radio programs, often incited denunciations, Dr. Clerc reported that Mr. B. "rarely read the newspapers and does not own a radio".[56] In fact, "he hardly knew his victim, having met him accidentally" and had not yet had a conversation nor an argument with the youth – he was simply afraid. Although the doctor did not diagnose Mr. B. as having a paranoid personality, he does indicate that B., who had never known his father and whose mother died when he was 20, appeared "always wary and anxious" and that "everything unknown [to him]" seems suspicious.[57]

With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can build upon Dr. Clerc's conclusions and demonstrate a third type of denunciation, one unaffected by financial gain and instrumentalization by the German or French forces. This case instead highlights xenophobia, perhaps exacerbated by war-induced population movements, as a motivating factor. If he feared a quasi-French Alsatian, Mr. B., like many of his compatriots, probably would have feared – and denounced – Jewish refugees fleeing eastern and central Europe or even long-term Jewish residents of France.[58]

4. *Il postino* - The Sellams

In a letter dated August 18, 1942 and simply addressed to "Monsieur," a veteran of 1914-1918 accused the Sellams of black marketeering.[59] An Algerian-born Jewish family, the Sellams consisted of the postman father, mother, and four children. Demonstrating the efficiency common in such matters, an unsigned memo to the chief of the Police of Jewish Affairs, dated two only days later, asked for an investigation of the "presumed Jewish" Sellam family, who, "according to *certain statements* reign over [an] abundance of ... rationed foodstuffs."[60] Two months later, inspector Deveze reported back that the postman Sellam, who had served seven years in the French military, was currently without work, thereby placing the family in a "precarious" financial situation exac-

[56] On radio broadcasts, see a two-page letter to the CGQJ, National Radio Broadcasting at Vichy, dated 6 July 1943 with CGQJ reference no. 16097, which refers explicitly to an emission on the Jewish question, Saturday, 3 July 1943 at 7:40p.m. AN, AJ38, 6. Cf. Marrus and Paxton, Vichy France, pp. 298-299.

[57] Medical report by Doctor Pierre Clerc of St. Egrève, 14 October 1943. ADI, 20U3, dossier no. 4/44.

[58] Antisemitism will be discussed in the fourth case.

[59] Letter stamped with arrival number 10.021. AN, AJ38, 3618.

[60] Memo with reference OV/YM 10514, AN, AJ38, 3618. The italics added to emphasize the euphemism.

erbated by the recent death of their fourth child.[61] The inspector of the CGQJ concluded it "unlikely" that a family in "almost miserable" living conditions could partake in the black market.[62] Deveze's regional director emphasized the spouses' good character and stressed Mr. Sellam's years of military service to the Third Republic. He closed the affair with the a declaration of "*sans suite*."[63]

This fourth case contains a bundle of items common to other denunciations and highlights some of the difficulties. First, not all letters of denunciations met with "success", if we define the word in terms of arrest of the *dénoncé*. The delator did succeed in arousing suspicion and in opening an investigation of this Jewish family. Second, according to several police reports for the Lyon region, suspected black market activity during the time of restrictions commonly elicited denunciation. In a letter summarizing the findings of the economic police and dated mid-August 1941, the prefect of the Isère assures the direction of the National Police and Minister Pucheu that black market activities and clandestine transports of rationed merchandise were under heavy surveillance. Furthermore, he informs that during such dearth, jealousy and vengeance commonly appear as themes in denunciations of suspected black market activity – but are "most of the time unfounded".[64]

Third, the Sellam case points to an important motivating factor: antisemitism. Because of their availability, the bulk of the letters to which I have had access were addressed to and found in the archive of the CGQJ. By drawing on the *archives départementales*, I have attempted in this paper to provide a more even picture of *potential* sources. In fact, many of the letters to the CGQJ embody the civil denunciation. The writers denounce Jew after Jew for an array of infractions: failure to wear their yellow star, failure to register themselves as Jews, failure to complete the Aryanization process, residing in their own apartment, and so on. Charged antisemitic remarks like 'dirty Jew', 'undesirable Israelites' appear in letter after letter and leave little doubt that antisemitism flourished in some sectors of the French population. Others employ more neutral language. Or, in one case, a Jewish merchant inquired as to why a Jewish-owned oriental carpet store could remain open with its *jüdisches Geschäft- entreprise juive* sign.

In the Sellam case, it is interesting to note not only the language of the original denunciation but also that in the French police report. The inspectors noted the squalid living conditions but not in antisemitic terms. Furthermore, his superior purposely emphasized the couple's good character, of which Mr.

---

[61] Two-page report, number 486, dated 26 October 1942. AN, AJ38, 3618. Here, p. 1.

[62] Ibid., p. 2.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Letter from the prefect to the General Direction of the National Police et al. August 5, 1941. ADI, 52M136/1.

Sellam's military service was emblematic. Whereas an Eastern European Jew, with his obviously different lifestyle and language, might not arouse an act of kindness, an assimilated, French-speaking, foreign-born Jew who had taken up arms to serve the Republic, well, he deserved status approximating French citizen, *compatriote*.[65]

5. Mechanisms of Denunciation: Following the Paper Trail

Vichy official Pucheu explained to the prefects his vision of the administrative response – the mechanism – to denunciation: "The authors of slanderous and anonymous denunciations will expose themselves, henceforth, to extremely serious sanctions; the anonymous letters addressed to the Administrative Authorities will be the object of a police investigation and eventually of an appraisal and fingerprinting ....".[66]

We do not know for certain how all the French police forces reacted to denunciations. From the Sellam case we can reconstruct one paper trail. An anonymous letter, presumably addressed to the CGQJ, led to a memo being sent to the chief of the *Commissariat*'s police arm calling for an investigation. The local inspector of the investigation reported back to the regional director (Lyon), who added his final conclusions before sending the final report to Vichy.

Noël Sergent, the *Commissaire sous-Chef de la Sûreté* in Lyon at the war's outbreak, offers a policeman's perspective of the mechanism, albeit from after the war.[67] Sergent's testimony seems accurate at least in confirming the restrictions and the daily "street spectacle" that they spawned: unbearably long lines in front of the food shops, where, inevitably, disputes arose. According to him, these disputes necessitated frequent police intervention.[68] Sergent also notes a "mania of anonymous letters" of which "a certain number" arrived at his commissariat.[69] Here he explains his *modus operandi*: "From the beginning, after a

---

[65] 76,000 Jews were deported from France, of whom 97% died. Meticulously researched, Tal Bruttmann's *mémoire de maîtrise* provides insight into the ratio of French Jews [JF] to foreign-born Jews [JE] in Rhône and Isère as of March 1942. Rhône: 7313JF: 4389JE (11,702 total); Isère: 1322 JF: 900JE (2222 total). In Isère this marked a drop in the number of French Jews (9) and an increase of 181 foreign Jews since August 1941. See idem, Les persécutions raciales en Isère sous l'occupation allemande (septembre 1943 - août 1944), dissertation under the direction of Jean-Claude Lescure, Grenoble II 1999, pp. 8, 17, 18.

[66] Circular no. 1, 2 January 1942. ADI, 52M144.

[67] Testimony entitled "Moments vécus sous l'Occupation nazie," 14 April 1953. AN, 72AJ180, A.II.4.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid. Other evidence points to a deluge. In his provisionary report on the Resistance at Lyon, 22 May 1962, Mr. Lebossé states that in March 1943, "in response to arrests by denuncia-

rapid investigation, I did not delay in convincing myself that they were only motivated by jealousy or for reasons of political order. Also, I took the habit of throwing them in the wastepaper basket with a few rare exceptions, where an investigation was justified ... We were equally very occupied by other anonymous letters that the higher authority (administrative or judicial) sent us for an investigation. ... There, too, the author [was] anonymous, in a number of cases, it must have been for political reasons or simply for meanness ... From where did the denunciations flow? Certain new authorities, moreover, made little effort to stop them. They [the authorities] seemed to bask in this *atmosphere of délation*."[70]

Later, Sergent emphasizes the importance of *délation* directed to the German authorities in rounding up members of the Resistance: "[B]y *délation* and by infiltration, means widespread to the maximum, they [the authorities] could proceed to more and more numerous arrests, followed by almost immediate executions."[71] Post-war testimony should be taken with a grain of salt, however. Sergent is ambiguous as to the content of these letters and to what 'justified' an investigation. Is his post-war self-portrayal accurate? Nevertheless, he shows to what extent many agencies received letters and that 'certain' authorities enjoyed the potential for social control and repression in the unabated 'atmosphere of delation'.

6. Conclusions

Délation in France during German occupation could benefit greatly from a series of regional studies before drawing (or revising) any broader conclusions for the entire nation. This paper represents a mere introduction to the study of *délation* in one region and has hopefully shed some light on what Sheila Fitzpatrick has called "a phenomenon of everyday life".[72]

Perhaps future research will uncover a larger portion of the purported 'mania' and allow better documentation of the mechanisms of denunciation, i.e., the paper trails between the administrative, judicial, and executive authorities, both French and Nazi, mentioned by Commissaire Sergent. Qualitative and textual analysis may offer a better understanding of the political, social, and anthropological aspects of, to paraphrase Gellately, this crucial but under-

---

tion, a supplementary German bureau was opened in Lyon. It does not seem all the denunciations were followed." AN, 72AJ180, A.I.6.

[70] Sergent, "Moments", n.p. AN, 72AJ180, A.II.4. Emphasis added.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Fitzpatrick, Signals, p. 86.

studied nexus between individual citizens and the Vichy and occupying authorities, without forgetting the role of resistance groups.[73]

While only hinted at here, *délation* touches upon juridic problems, too. Under French law, *dénonciation* of a crime is legal obligation - and *délation* could be considered such a crime. Both acts were considered crimes at the *épuration*.[74] Future work will thus focus on *délation* during the war before re-placing it into the broader narrative of French history.

Strangely enough, the antisemitic *délation* seems easier to explain historically than the non-antisemitic. Robert Paxton and Michael Marrus among others paint a persuasive portrait of the French variety of Jew hatred and antisemitism. Most of the letters denouncing Jews build upon a long cultural tradition in western civilization of Jew-hatred, one marked by episodic violence particularly in times of economic distress.[75]

While not complete, the sketch on economic restrictions in the Lyon region paints a rather bleak picture – and the public opinion reports suggest a direct link between economic hardship and the outbreak of wholesale denunciations of the 'haves' by the 'have-nots'. But what are the implications of sexually, economically, or personally motivated denunciations both in cases that do and do not involve Jews?

Surely *délation* in France under Vichy and German control constitutes a despicable behavior demonstrated on the part of one individual against another, but its implications are fundamental and larger. To what extent did delation function as a form of self-policing social control or as a form of repression? Did divisive repression undermine the consensus-oriented National Revolution? Was there continuity in between the pre-war, war, and post-war periods? These are some of the questions that future research on denunciation in France must answer.

In the context of an international conference on comparative aspects of denunciatory practices, however, perhaps we need to ask, does *délation* transcend petty hatreds and notions of civic duty, transcend economics, transcend time and place, and point to an individualistic will to live or survival instinct?

---

[73] Fitzpatrick and Gellately, Introduction, p. 752.

[74] See Rousso, L'épuration.

[75] This notion borrows heavily from Richard S. Levy, Antisemitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts, Lexington 1991.