General Chronology of Nazi Violence

It is difficult to begin a chronological index, a matrix – as it were – for a massive event. In fact, Nazi Germany generated several policies of planned mass killing, a practice which culminated in the attempt to completely destroy European Jewry in a planned way, which will be the focal point of this index. The beginning of these mass killing practices has been clearly identified: the first massacres took place in the context of the total ideological war against the USSR. However, the warning signs preceding these practices, without which the latter remain mostly difficult to understand, are still being discussed (Burrin, 1989; Gerlach, 1998; Browning, 1992 and 2003; Brayard, 2004). With a few rare exceptions, the factual information about these phenomena has been well documented and analyzed, which justifies attributing four stars to all of the facts and events detailed below, except when indicated otherwise.

Should one link Hitler directly to Luther, as some U.S. authors did in the 1950s? The approach chosen here will not. The first manifestations of discrimination against Jews began in Germany during the First World War, then were eclipsed on the institutional level during the Weimar Republic; afterward, they grew steadily from 1933 to 1941. However, one cannot trace a direct line from discrimination to persecution and killing.

Thus, we must begin by focusing on Germany, even though murder practices (in the strictest sense) did not take place there at the time, in order to explain a process which blazed across the whole of Europe and led to the participation of a very broad part of European societies, and the killing of over 5 million Jews from all the countries involved (Hilberg, 1961). We shall also present a detailed account of the local implementation procedures of violent impulses, which were sometimes decided locally, but were more frequently inspired by the Berlin-based decision-making centers, through a general matrix, and four geographically-based indexes. Based on the general matrix, which will concentrate on the central (i.e., German) point of view, we shall:

- show how discrimination practices were exported, radicalized and spread to the fringe of territories that were occupied early on – Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Actually, these countries initially served as laboratories for Nazi Germany’s Final Solution, and then – in the case of Poland – as a vanguard in this process.
- Observe how killing practices began differently, and followed specific procedures in Yugoslavia, and especially in Russia.
- Describe how the Nazis implemented the decision to eradicate European Jewry, which had been taken between December 1941 and the end of January 1942, and adapted it to particular local conditions in Western Europe.

1. The beginning: World War I and ethno-nationalism

This chronology begins in 1916, an important date which corresponds to the great battles of Verdun and the Somme, which were dependant on military equipment, and indicated the adaptation of European societies to industrial warfare and its consequence, mass death. Thus, this year was marked by a first climax of destruction, but also by the first open and institutional manifestation of identified German anti-Semitism.

May 1916: Census of the Jews drafted into the German armed forces, officially to put an end to rumors that they were not sent to the Front as much as other troops. The census results were not publicized; this added to the rumors, which grew after 1918 (Kruse, 1997).

1918-1924: At the end of the war, Germany experienced a series of different kinds of unrest and conflict: friction in its border areas due to inter-community clashes in Silesia and in the Posen area, several coup attempts, revolutionary movements and the Spartakist crisis in Berlin, Max Hoelz’s
Communist insurrection in Thuringia and Saxony (Schumann, 2001), as well as Kapp’s separatist coup in Bavaria. Germans experienced the occupation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr region by Franco-Belgian forces as the peak of the crisis, as this occupation was perceived as an invasion, coupled with an internal betrayal, due to the activities of the Rhinelander separatists (Krumeich, Schröder (eds.), 2004). The idea of a “World of enemies” in league with one another against Germany, which had emerged during World War I, came back to the fore at this time. The imagined conjunction of the action of internal and external enemies, some of which were seen as marked by a biological difference, constitutes a mental structure born of war culture, and of its preservation as a framework of thought by völkische activists throughout this period.

The DAP (Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or German Workers’ Party) was created in 1919 and became the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or National-Socialist German Workers’ Party) in 1920. It was just one of the many elements of the ethno-nationalist völkisch network, in which groups appeared and disappeared in a metastatic and rapid manner, in the local contexts of evolution in Germany during that period (Herbert, 1996; Kampe, 1987). Adolf Hitler, who had been active on the nationalist scene since Germany’s defeat in the war, quickly took control of the NSDAP.

In 1923-1924, the NSDAP was actually marginalized in this movement due to its wait-and-see position during the Rhineland crisis. It was criticized for not having reacted to this event, perceived by certain activists as the ultimate invasion by the world of enemies (Herbert, 1996: 101-102).

1921-1924: At the Erlangen congress, the student representatives’ organizations set up a new collegiate leadership body, and a social program comprising financial support and incentives to travel abroad, as the völkisch organizations – represented by the Deutscher Hochschulring, or DHR (a central organization of student unions) were growing more powerful. In the end, at the 1924 Würzburg congress, access to the pragmatic social program and membership in the unions was restricted to students who could prove their “Aryan ancestry” through their family tree. In local student representative bodies, the power of the ethnonationalist organizations grouped together in the DHR was confirmed as they obtained an absolute majority in elections throughout all German-speaking universities. Thus, not merely an activist minority, but a majority of German students – the future elite of the Republic – opted for an anti-republican, elitist, anti-democratic and anti-Semitic line (Herbert, 1996: 56; Kampe, 1987).

November 9, 1923: A coup organized by the NSDAP in Munich was suppressed by the police. The main Nazi leaders were arrested and jailed, or forced to flee. The party was banned throughout Germany and it seemed to have been dismantled; it appeared to have failed to gain more than a regional following in Bavaria. At the end of the February 1924 trial, Hitler was sentenced to four years in prison; however, he used the hearing as a nation-wide grandstand, in order to impose his standing among the important members of the radical right (Kershaw, 1998).

1924-27: The NSDAP and its affiliate organizations, such as the Sturmabteilung or SA (literally “Storm division”), its paramilitary organization, also known as the “Brownshirts,” were partially banned.

1925-1930: This was a period of apparent normalization of Weimar Germany. The disturbances caused by the revolutionary left and the ethno-nationalist right waned as Paul von Hindenburg took office as President of the Republic, and various centrist or left-wing, social-democratic governments were formed. Among various political leaders, Gustav Stresemann stood out for his foreign policy which allowed him to break Germany’s isolation on the international level and reschedule the payment of its war reparations, and to accelerate France and Belgium’s evacuation of the Ruhr region, while deliberately leaving the issue of the border with Poland open. Though Stresemann’s policy met with considerable success, in 1928, the right-wing nationalist opposition took advantage of the debate on the referendum on the Dawes plan for rescheduling the reparation payments, to unite.

The NSDAP, which had been authorized again the previous year, used this means to access a nation-wide audience and make itself a particular place within the so-called “national” faction. At this point, the NSDAP gave up its strategy of taking power by force, in order to play the democratic game against democracy itself, and win power through the ballot boxes...
The 1929 worldwide credit deflation crisis had a particularly momentous impact in Germany. Indeed, the country’s economy had recovered from the 1924 hyperinflation crisis thanks to an influx of foreign capital invested over the short term. Hence, in 1929, deflation spread immediately from the United States to Germany, leading to a series of bankruptcies, the collapse of the banking system, and spiralling unemployment (Peukert, 1992).

**September 1930:** In the context of the economic crisis and the dissemination of Nazi rhetoric, the German legislative elections led to a severe defeat of the democratic parties and the emergence of the NSDAP as the second political force in the country; the latter won 107 seats in parliament. It began to produce a discourse of normalization, which eschewed the use of anti-Semitism as a main theme in political campaigns.

The Weimar republic entered a period of endemic instability, as no parliamentary majority emerged to form a government. Thus began the period of the Presidential Cabinets, during which German Chancellors could only govern with the approval of President Hindenburg, who approved governmental decisions using his prerogative to issue emergency decrees and dissolve the German parliament, the Reichstag (Bracher, 1971; Mommsen, 1989).

**1931:** Reinhard Heydrich created the Sicherheitsdienst, which was the intelligence service of the SS (Schutzstaffel, an elite Nazi paramilitary organization). A discreet campaign began to recruit young literature, humanities and social science graduates; it picked up speed in the following years, peaking between 1933 and 1936. From 1933 on, the SD was used as a “Brain Trust” for all of the Third Reich’s repression policies (Aronson, 1967; Herbert, 1996; Wildt, 2002).

**July 31, 1932:** New legislative elections were held; the NSDAP received 37% of the vote. The Nazi party was by far the leading German political group. Nonetheless, Hindenburg refused to name Hitler Chancellor. In January 1933, as the conservatives found it impossible to form a stable parliamentary majority without the NSDAP, they proposed a cabinet in which the Nazis would be represented, but strictly under control of the rest of the government.

**January 30, 1933:** Hitler was nominated Chancellor. The Nazis were a minority within the government but Göring, the second most powerful member of the party leadership, was also appointed Minister-President of Prussia and thus, took charge of the executive police force of the biggest Land (federal State) of Germany. This nomination had been intended as a fool’s bargain, but it actually opened the door to an eighteen-month period during which the main political and union forces in the country were either repressed or disbanded, and ceased to exist (Broszat, 1985; Ayçoberry, 1998).

**2. The NSDAP, its practice of power, and its repressive policies**

(on all of these dates, see Frei, 1994 and Pohl, 2003)

It was not a foregone conclusion in German history that Adolf Hitler, a back-room orator of the 1920s Munich beer halls, would take power some ten years later. His nomination to the position of Chancellor on January 30, 1933, was the result of particular circumstances, but also of a miscalculation of the part of the conservatives, who thought they could use and control him. Indeed, the leaders of these conservative elites were deeply mistaken about the personality and ambition of this extraordinary, unpredictable and violent man, who quickly escaped their control.

In fact, the NSDAP proved adept at making the most of the crisis situation the country had become mired in. Voters who supported the party were mostly recruited amongst craftsmen, farmers, shopkeepers, civil servants and white-collar workers. They voted for the Nazis first and foremost because they believed the party would allow a return to order and stability.

Though Hitler did play on anti-Semitism outrageously, it is not clear, however, that this theme played a decisive role in his electoral successes. His nationalism, anti-Bolshevism and militarism are more likely to have been the factors that seduced the German people. Nonetheless, the hatred of Jews was
one of the fundamental personality traits of the Reich’s new master, and he immediately made it a cornerstone of his regime.

A talented orator, Hitler also had a remarkable ability to react and to improvise. For example, he took advantage of the massive shock to public opinion caused by the Reichstag fire on February 27, 1933, in order to obtain the promulgation of the decree on the “protection of the people and the State” – which set up the first legal basis of the Nazi dictatorship – the very next day. Changes then took place at a startling pace, from mass arrests of Communists and the creation of the first concentration camps to intern them, to the dissolution of trade unions and of all political organizations (except the Nazi party). Thus, though he took pains to appease the political elites, Hitler also used violence right from his first months in power, including against his former friends: during the “Night of the Long Knives,” (June 29-30, 1934), he had Röhm and the main leaders of the SA assassinated in order to get rid of potential political rivals. Thus, in barely eighteen months, Hitler managed to establish an absolute regime of personal dictatorship, and a general system to police the population.

**February 1, 1933**: Hitler dissolved the Reichstag after the failure of negotiations with the centrist parties.

**February 2, 1933**: Through the decree for the protection of the German people, freedom of assembly and the freedom of the press were restricted. Göring, the Interior minister of Prussia, mobilized the SA as an auxiliary police force.

**February 17, 1933**: Göring issued a decree allowing policemen to use their weapons.

**February 27, 1933**: After the Reichstag fire, the Communist party was banned by what was known as the “Reichstag fire” decree, which suspended fundamental civil rights in Germany. This edict constituted the legal framework justifying repression of all opponents to Nazism, from Communists to the conspirators of the July 20, 1944 plot (to assassinate Hitler).

**March 5, 1933**: The NSDAP won 44% of the vote in the German legislative elections. The DNVP (a right-wing, nationalist conservative party, allied to the NSDAP) received 8%. The electoral campaign had been very brief, and marred by countless violent incidents against the left-wing parties.

**March 21 (31?), 1933**: A decree called Heimtückenverordnung created special courts to judge political opponents of the regime, implementing the first judicial arsenal against members of the opposition. In the same period, the Dachau concentration camp was built on the site of a chemical factory in Munich, and that of Oranienburg in the Berlin suburbs; this signalled the emergence of extra-legal repression practices against opponents to Nazism.

**March 23, 1933**: The Reichstag, convened in Potsdam, voted to give full powers to Hitler. Members of the NSDAP formed an absolute majority of the parliamentarians present, as those from the Communist KPD had been barred from the session. Those from the SPD (the Social Democratic party) voted against the decree, but it was still adopted, thanks to the votes of those from all other parties present.

**March 31 and April 7, 1933**: Laws were voted to reorganize the Länder (federal states of Germany), reforming their governments and creating the position of Reichsstatthalter, a representative of the federal State in each Land. The latter was given the responsibility of taking the initiative to form the state government and determine the composition of the state parliament. The Länder parliaments virtually became rubber-stamp assemblies that followed orders from Berlin. In practical terms, this was the end of the Länder’s autonomy and of the German federal system (Broszat, 1985).

The “reorganization of the civil service” law voted the same day provided a legal framework for the purging of State civil servants; the main targets were political adversaries of the regime (Communists and Social Democrats), but also Jews.

**April 1, 1933**: The first boycott of Jewish-owned shops was implemented.
May 1, 1933: Trade unions were banned and the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (the “German Labour Front,” a general Nazi trade union organization) was created.

June-July 1933: Under pressure from Hitler and the NSDAP, the SPD was outlawed and the remaining parties, including Alfred Hugenberg’s ethno-nationalist DNVP, dissolved themselves. The NSDAP became the single party in Germany.

June 21-26, 1933: The SA, acting as an auxiliary police force, instigated a week of riots in Köpenick, a predominantly working-class, southeastern suburb of Berlin. Many political opponents to the regime, as well as some Jews, were kidnapped and detained in the SA sections’ premises, where they were mistreated. 23 people lost their lives. (Bessel, 1984)

July 14 (19?), 1933: A law for the prevention of hereditary illnesses was voted, allowing people to request the sterilization of persons suffering from hereditary diseases. The wording of the law mentioned cases of mental illness, “idiocy,” and “antisocial behavior.”

November 1933: New legislative elections were held with single candidates from the NSDAP.

November 24, 1933: A law on “criminals by habit” was voted, establishing the legal framework for the treatment of criminals by the police. It also served to organize the legal vacuum necessary to send criminals regarded as dangerous, repeat offenders or persons whose sentence was deemed insufficiently long by administrative officials, to concentration camps.

This was the end of a period of acute instability and of rapid expansion of the NSDAP’s power. It remained the sole party in power and found itself faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, the left-wing opposition and the democratic forces had been stifled; on the other, the conservative forces and the traditional mainstays of power aspired to a return to peace and order.

But the NSDAP’s grassroots support base, represented by Röhm’s SA, was calling for a second revolution – a socialist one this time – to follow the “national revolution” that was now finished. Against the backdrop of a public opinion crisis and an increase of right-wing criticism of Nazi policy, Hitler was faced with a double front of criticism. The internal front, inside the party, was embodied by the exceedingly powerful SA with its one million members, which regarded itself as nationalist, socialist and revolutionary; it was not hostile to Hitler, but rather to the right wing of the party and to the conservative elites. The external front was close to the government (Von Papen, the vice-Chancellor, was its leader), and defined itself as conservative.

June 30, 1934: The crisis was “resolved” by the combined elimination of both opposition forces: the SD and the SS eliminated the conservative right-wing opposition by a series of targeted assassinations, and proceeded to arrest and execute most of the SA leaders throughout Germany. The “Night of the Long Knives,” also known amongst the Nazis as “Röhm’s Putsch,” put an end to the period of instability fueled by the SA since January 1933, which probably caused the deaths of between 600 and 1,000 of the 100,000 persons detained at one point or another. The “Putsch against Röhm” of June 30, 1934 probably cost 200 lives (Frei, 1995), mostly those of Nazi cadres, whereas around ten were from the conservative opposition.

The rise of the Schutzstaffeln (SS)

The spring 1934 crisis was also a sign of the rise of the SS’s power, as well as that of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. They were implementing a strategy involving the takeover of the political police forces of the different Länder, and instrumentalization of the SD to establish their control of the repressive apparatuses. Heydrich and Himmler, who were initially only in charge of the *Bay Po Po* (Bavarian Political Police), acquired command of the Gestapo, the Prussian political police, following the “Röhm’s Putsch,” gaining *de facto* control of almost all the German political and criminal police forces. During the same period, the SS took control of all the concentration camps in Germany, and Himmler appointed the Dachau camp commander, Theodor Eicke, as Inspector of the concentration camps (Orth *et alii*, 1998). The SS then controlled the police and the concentration camps, and established itself as the main protagonist of Nazi repression policies (Frei, 1994; Herbert,
August 3, 1934: Hindenburg died and Hitler took the position of President, and the title of Führer and Chancellor of the Reich.

January 1935: As of January, circumstances became much more difficult for the Jews: they were barred from practising an increasing number of professions; the “Law for the reconstruction of the civil service” was one of the first measures in this direction. The most significant were all the legal professions, from that of tax advisor to that of lawyer or notary, but Jews were also barred from other apparently more trivial occupations such as that of swimming instructor, household servant, Church musician, art dealer, or antique dealer (Adam, 1972; Friedländer (Saul), 1997).

September 15, 1935: The “Nuremberg Laws,” also known as the “Blutschutzgesetz” (“Blood Protection Law”) were edicted (the full text is available in German at http://www.documentarchiv.de/ns/nbgesetze01.html [1]).

These laws served to define the Jews as a targeted category. The definition thus chosen, which was characteristic of the Sicherheitsdienst, left the issue of persons of mixed origin open. Any person with three Jewish grandparents out of the four was considered Jewish. The Nuremberg laws were based on the “racial and cultural expertise” of the SD sections in charge of the “Jewish question.” They indicated the growing influence of the SS and the SD on this issue. The entire Nazi policy against Jews was the result of a power struggle between Nazi anti-Semites with Socialist tendencies (Streicher and Goebbels), and the proponents of a more elitist anti-Semitism “based” on “reason” and “scientificity.” The Nuremberg laws came soon after “spontaneous” pogroms instigated by Goebbels and Streicher. These dynamics can be analyzed in terms of polycracy and the escalation of competition between different pressure groups, and are similar to those of the November 1938 events (ibid. and Wildt, 1995 and 2002).

1936: This was a relatively quiet year in the Nazi policies of repression.

The Berlin Olympic games, and the necessary preparation for them, required that unrest be kept to a minimum in Germany, and the Nazis did not undertake anything of note that year in terms of anti-Jewish policy or political repression. However, the repressive apparatus’ structures were reinforced: Himmler became head of all the German police forces and created two main departments within the SS, in charge of running the Security Police and the Security Service. The Sipo-HA (Sicherheitspolizei-Hauptamt, or Security Police headquarters) and the SDHA (headquarters of the Sicherheitsdienst, or “security department,” the Nazi Party security service, also in charge of intelligence-gathering and counter-espionage) were both managed by Heydrich, seconded by Werner Best. They implemented a systematic policy of recruitment of young völkische graduates, mostly law specialists for the Gestapo and the KRIPO (criminal police), and humanities specialists for the SD (Wildt, 2002).

However, beyond anti-Jewish policy, two other dates in 1936 are also significant:

January 3, 1936: The scope of the Nuremberg “Blood Protection Law” was extended to include Gypsies, Sinti and Roma (Zimmerman, 1989).

July 12, 1936: The construction of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp began (Orth et alii, 1998).

March 9, 1937: A massive lockup operation was directed against people who had been found guilty and sentenced for criminal offences. Several thousands were arrested throughout the Reich. They were sent to the concentration camps, where they formed the first Kapo (concentration camp guards) squads (Wagner, 1996).

July 15, 1937: The Buchenwald construction concentration camp was built in Weimar (Orth et alii, 1998).

December 14, 1937: The directive for the “preventive struggle against crime” legalized the arrests
carried out earlier in the year a posteriori, and formed the legal framework for sending multiple offender criminals to concentration camps (Wagner; 1996).

**March 12-13, 1938:** Anschluß (annexation) of Austria.

Austria was annexed; the police forces then created their first Einsatzgruppen. These were mobile groups of policemen in charge of taking control of public buildings, seizing archives and the files of the main security and State organizations, as well as carrying out arrests of political opponents or persons identified as dangerous. Barely two weeks after the invasion, the arrests carried out in Austria ranged into the thousands.

Following the annexation of Austria, new Jewish communities found themselves under Nazi domination. Their treatment was initially modeled on the repression that had gradually been implemented inside the Reich; then, Austria was used as a sort of laboratory to experiment different measures taken by the Nazis (Aly and Heim, 1991).

**13-18 June, 1938:** A wave of arrests of “antisocial persons” took place. This was a catch-all category comprising persons who had remained unemployed for a long time, misfits, individuals allegedly suffering from mental illnesses, alcoholics and drug addicts (Wagner 1996). Gypsies were also targeted in this wave of arrests (Zimmermann, 1995).

**July 6-15, 1938:** International conference at Evian.

During this conference, which had been called by the president of the United States, Roosevelt, most states expressed sympathy toward the Jews being persecuted, but nonetheless claimed that the social and economic situation in their countries prevented them from increasing immigration quotas. This conference had no concrete results, and gave the Nazi leaders new evidence that in spite of their indignant objections, these states would do nothing for the German and Austrian Jewish refugees.

**July 1938:** Austria became a laboratory for the Nazis’ anti-Jewish policies.

Adolf Eichmann, who had been put in charge of “Jewish Affairs” for the “Danube” district of the SD (Austria), created the Central Office for Jewish Emigration, a police body responsible for issuing travel documents to Jews who “wished” to emigrate.

In practice, this Office had two duties:

- * on one hand, radicalizing humiliating measures against Jews, to force them to emigrate:
- * on the other, rationalizing the emigration process by inducing Jewish elites to fund the emigration of working-class Jews.

At the same time, the procedures of “Aryanization” (expropriation of Jewish goods, in order to transfer them to non-Jews) and confiscation of Jewish property were rationalized further, and used to systematically plunder the resources of the Austrian economy and escape the constraints of the increasingly autarchic economic policy being implemented inside the Reich (Aly and Heim, 1991). Thus, 150,000 Jews emigrated “freely,” under pressure from Eichmann’s authorities (Lozowick, 2001).

**August 1938:** The Mauthausen camp was built in occupied Austria (Orth et alii, 1998).

**August 17, 1938:** A decree set up a special legal system for wartime. This was the legal basis the Nazis used to legitimize most crimes committed during the war inside the Reich, against all opponents.

**September 29, 1938:** The Munich conference was held. Germany invaded the Sudetenland (western regions of Czechoslovakia whose population was mostly composed of ethnic Germans).
October 26-28, 1938: Hearing of Polish plans to deprive Polish Jews that had emigrated to Germany of their nationality, the German police authorities arrested 17,000 Polish Jews and brutally expelled them toward the Polish border. Among them was the Grynszpan family, whose son Herschel was studying in. To avenge his family, he killed the German legate in , provoking a reaction from anti-Semitic activists (Adam, 1972).

November 9, 1938: Kristallnacht (“Night of the Broken Glass”).

With help from the Gauleitung of Franconia and its leader Julius Streicher, who was editor-in-chief of Der Stürmer newspaper, as well as from Goebbels, who was Gauleiter of Berlin and Minister of Propaganda, the SA instigated huge pogroms throughout Germany. This was the last and biggest manifestation of what has been called Radauantisemitismus (rowdy, disorderly anti-Semitism).

Around one hundred people were killed directly in the pogrom, but several hundred others committed suicide out of sheer terror. Also, 27,000 Jews were temporarily sent to concentration camps.

The German authorities used Kristallnacht to levy huge fines upon Jewish communities, and began implementing a mass emigration policy that was less and less “voluntary,” along then lines of the “Austrian” model developed by Eichmann, in parallel with an increasingly organized and complete “Aryanization” (Aly and Heim, 1991; Friedländer (Saul), 1997; Wildt, 1995).

December 8, 1938: Himmler issued orders to organize a census of the Gypsies in the Reich (Zimmerman, 1995).

January 30, 1939: During a speech before the Reichstag the day of the anniversary of his rise to power, Hitler predicted that in the event that a world war was declared, it would not lead to a “Bolshevization” of Europe, but rather to the extermination of European Jewry. All authors who have analyzed the genesis of the decision-making process of the extermination of the Jews see this prediction as a discursive source of the decisions that were taken between September and December 1941 and led to the definition of a Europe-wide program for the “final solution to the Jewish question,” during the Wannsee conference.

March 15, 1939: Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. This was the first time the Third Reich invaded territories which were not inhabited by a majority of Germans. Thus, it became an occupying power. Between 1938 and this point, it had acquired all of the territories in which the Nazi authorities were later to “test” the measures of the “final solution to the Jewish question” – a laboratory of sorts. This invasion was associated with a very large wave of arrests (Brandes, 1975).


May 15, 1939: The Ravensbrück concentration camp was built (Orth et alii, 1998).

3. Reorganization and elimination

On September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland. The Polish question was essential in the Nazi mind-set and practices. From a racial point of view, Poles were seen as a mixed race, partially German in origin; this made them dangerous. Therefore, the Nazi memory of German-Polish relations in the past was characterized by a high level of conflictuality, the last significant episode of which was the end of World War I, and the troubled period Germany experienced until 1924. The peace settlement, through which broad eastern fringes of German territory were attributed to the new Polish state, constituted a long-term threat to the “biological” and geographical integrity of the German State, in the view of the leaders of the Third Reich. Indeed, in the areas annexed in 1918 by Poland, the German population was perceived as having been put through a cultural “Polification” policy, which endangered their identity. This was behind what “motivated” the Nazi aggression of Poland. To Hitler and his entourage, the objective was both to erase one of the most painful consequences of the November 1918 defeat, and to rescue volksdeutsch communities undergoing
racial and identity dilution. It was also a further preparatory step toward the conquest of Lebensraum (literally “living space,” meaning extra space for the development of the German population and of a Greater Germany), after Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Hitler used an attack upon a radio station at Gleiwitz, on the German border (a ploy which had been fabricated by the Gestapo), as a pretext in order to attack Poland. The invasion had been carefully planned and was directed from the Reich territory and from Pomerania by two armored forces, which carried out a pincer movement in order to surround the insufficiently armed Polish troops. The German combat techniques and strategic choices made this first campaign a deadly war. Civilians were a potential target from the beginning, either through the bombing of urban and industrial centers, or though the aggressive practices of the German infantry. For example, it was in this context that the Einsatzgruppen carried out their first killings. These mobile groups were composed of policemen, as well as political police and intelligence officers and were officially in charge of “securing” the invaded territories. Jews were not the first victims of these killings, though some of them were killed at this point “for racial reasons.” However, according to Einsatzgruppen reports, most of the victims were enemy infantrymen who had been left behind due to the very fast progress of the regular German army, the Wehrmacht, as well as members of local Polish elites; they were all executed “for security reasons” (Rossino, 2003; Böhler, 2006).

In August-September 1939, a third phase of Nazi violence began. Its specificity was due to the following factors:

- The Einsatzgruppen intervened during wartime for the first time
- Experts were beginning to mention the concept of Großraumwehrwirtschaft (large-scale war economy, or imperial war economy)
- Hitler later indicated the very day of the attack on Poland as the day he gave doctors permission to euthanize the handicapped. Significantly, afterward, he also gave September 1, 1939, as the date of his “prophecy” of January 30, 1939.

Thus, eugenics, racial and geographic reorganization, and planned murder were combined to give Nazi mass violence a dimension hitherto unknown throughout history (for this interpretation, see Burrin, 1989; Aly, 1995; Browning, 2002; Brayard, 2004).

August 1939: The Vierjahresplan (economic planning over a four-year period, administered by Goering) was introduced; the concept of Großraumwehrwirtschaft (imperial war economy) was used for the first time, as data linked to economic domination were taken into account in the consideration of the German economy. The Four-Year Plan Administration was actually at the forefront of the definition – with Eichmann – of Aryanization and “economic rationalization” policies directed against Austrian Jews, and then introduced in the Reich (Aly and Heim, 1991).

September 1, 1939: On the same day Poland was invaded, Hitler retroactively gave doctors the power to euthanize persons suffering from a physical or mental handicap; newborn children had been the first targeted (from July), before adults (Aly & Heim, 1991; Friedländer (Henry), 1995).

September 21, 1939: Heydrich’s instructions to the Einsatzgruppen retroactively specified their duties, in accordance with the way they had been carried out in Austria, the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia and Poland. However, after six weeks, the Einsatzgruppen deployed in Poland had killed around 12,000 people (Krausnick, Wilhelm, 1981; Rossino, 2003).

October 1, 1939: The RSHA was created. The Reichssicherheitshauptamt was a further step in the process of centralization and rationalization of the central organizations involved in the SS repressive apparatus. The economic and personnel management services of the Kripo, Gestapo and SD were merged, while Heydrich re-defined the allocation of duties between the Gestapo and the SD. In practice, the RSHA constituted a suitable instrument to deal with Nazi imperial expansion (Widlitz, 2002).

October 6, 1939: Hitler formulated a project to reorganize European “ethnic relations” through
expulsion operations (Aly, 1995). Poland became the test case for this scheme.

**October 7, 1939:** Hitler entrusted Himmler with planning and coordinating population transfers. The RKFdV (Reichskommissariat für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, or the Reich Commission for the reinforcement of Germany) combined several pre-existing SS departments (the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, in charge of supporting the German communities outside the Reich territory, the Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt, the main Office for Race Colonization). It also created several new ones, including a planning office directed by SS Oberführer Pr. Konrad Meyer-Heitling, who was an Agronomy professor at the University of Berlin, and responsible for the geographical planning of Germanization (Aly, 1995).

**October 18-21, 1939:** The first group of Jews was deported from Vienna and Moravia to the South Lublin district (Nisko—Einsatz). Stahlecker, the Vienna BdS (regional head of the Gestapo and SD), and Adolf Eichmann, who was the operational supervisor of population transfers, and responsible for the “Jewish question,” made their first attempt at mass deportation. The operation was cut short for logistical reasons (Aly, 1995). This improvised procedure turned out to be a disaster leading to terrible suffering for the deportees, many of whom died; they were either killed by the SS or died of exhaustion, exposure or starvation (Safrian, 1995).

**October 26, 1939:** Forced labor was imposed on the Jews of Poland. The dynamics of occupation and economic exploitation were being established (Madjacyk, 1987).

**Second half of November, 1939:** The Fernplan Ost, a first attempt at long-term planning (“Fernplan”) of population issues in Eastern Europe, was composed for the RSHA Sondergruppe III ES (Dr Hans Ehlich). This first variation on the “territorial solution to the Jewish question” theme was written by the SD Referat (department) in charge of racial issues (Rössler & Schleiermacher, 1993).

**December 1, 1939:** Deportation of the Jews from the incorporated provinces (Warthegau, Silesia, Eastern Prussia) to the Government-General of Poland (Aly, 1995).

**December 19, 1939:** The Amtschefs of the RSHA held a conference about a project to create a “Jewish reservation” in Poland. On the 21st, the Gestapo’s Sonderreferat Planung IVR was established; this was one of the main organizational protagonists of deportations and the relocation of German colonists. Adolf Eichmann, who had been recalled from Austria, was put in charge of it.

**January 1940:** Aktion T4.

The gassing of persons declared “incurable” began. “Aktion T4” was the name chosen for this program, because the administration organizing it was based at Tiergartenstrasse number 4, in Berlin. This administration was answerable directly to Hitler’s Chancellery, and its staff included doctors, logisticians and policemen (Friedländer (H.), 1995).

Konrad Meyer-Heitling (RKFdV) submitted a general project for economic and human planning for the annexed territories, to Himmler: this was the first Generalplan Ost. The document proposed to Germanize the conquered Polish territories in 25 years, mostly through the expulsion of populations.

**January 1940:** The Gestapo’s Sonderreferat Planung IVR became RSHA Amt IV D—4 (and later, IV B-4). Eichmann was its logistics specialist (Aly, 1995; Safran, 1995). This was the institution in charge of the operational dimension of Germanization: it was supposed to coordinate the expulsion of non-Germans, and the settlement of Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) in the occupied territories.

**January 30, 1940:** Heydrich held a conference on the subject of the expulsion of Jews and the evacuation of populations. He faced opposition from Göring, who was responsible for the 4-year plan economic organization, and feared this might lead to economic disorganization of the Government-General of Poland.

**March 8, 1940:** Plans for a Warsaw ghetto were abandoned.

**March 21, 1940:** The Sondergruppe III ES became the RSHA Amt III B, directed by Hans Ehlich.
Within the RSHA, this group was in charge of planning population transfers. It was supposed to collaborate with Eichmann’s Amt IV-D-4, which was in charge of the operational aspect of this policy. Amt IIIb constituted the last element of the central police administration in charge of the occupied territories and of planning, and as of 1941, of deportation and extermination operations as well (Aly, 1995).

**Early April 1940**: The project to create a “Jewish reservation” in Lublin was abandoned, along with all projects for population transfers which had followed from the Fernplan Ost. This was the first failure of the Gemanization institutions. At this point, executions of Polish political opponents began in waves (Madajczyk, 1987).

**April 9, 1940**: Germany attacked Denmark and Norway.

**April 24, 1940**: The UWZ (Umwandererzentralstelle, or Central Emigration Office) was established. This was the local SD agency in charge of the expulsion of Polish populations in order to leave room for German colonists, in the framework of policies to Gemanize the occupied territories.

**April 27, 1940**: The deportation of Gypsies began inside the Government-General.

**April 30, 1940**: The Lodz Ghetto was closed and isolated.

**May 7, 1940**: New expulsion operations began, deporting people to the Government-General of Poland.

**May 10, 1940**: Germany attacked Western Europe. France [2] collapsed in a few weeks. Belgium and Holland were occupied.

**May 1940**: Bruno Streckenbach, Bds (regional head of the Gestapo and SD) for Warsaw and the Government-General, implemented the AB Aktion (“Extraordinary Pacification Operation”), which meant decimating the Polish intelligentsia. Polish social élites inside the Government-General were systematically tracked down, arrested, and shot or sent to concentration camps (Madajczyk, 1987).

At the same period, the Reich authorities had the Gypsies of western Germany deported to the Government-General of Poland (Zimmerman, 1995).

**May 19, 1940**: The first instructions were given to close the Warsaw ghetto. They were carried out by late June. Hitler agreed to the idea of a plan known as “Plan Madagascar” (for the deportation of Jews to that island). Since a territorial solution by way of deportation did not seem feasible in the eastern territories, the Nazi leaders were starting to look for a solution outside Europe.

**May 24, 1940**: Bouhler (from the Reich Chancellery and Aktion T4) and Eichmann discussed anti-Jewish policy. The points covered in this discussion involved logistics, not the killing processes. It is impossible to rule out the possibility that they discussed the issues of Polish Jews in poor health, who could not be sent to Madagascar (see Aly and Heim, 1991).

**June-August 1940**: The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the RSHA debated “Plan Madagascar.”

**June 24, 1940**: Heydrich proposed a territorial “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Question,” because it “...could not be resolved through emigration.”

**June 27, 1940**: The German authorities decided to admit the Romanian Volksdeutsche minority “back into the Motherland.”

**July 1940**: Sick Jews in German facilities were systematically assassinated, in the framework of Aktion T4.

**Late July 1940**: Bruno Streckenbach was entrusted with estimating the size of Jewish populations in the territories dominated by the Reich.
August 1940: The first talks were held in view of attacking Russia.

September 1940: The Battle of England came to a close. Germany postponed its plans for a landing in England, as it was unable to take control of that country’s air space or of the sea surrounding it. “Plan Madagascar” was abandoned, as it would have been impossible to transport the Jews to that island.

October 20, 1940: Instructions were issued to make the organization of the Warsaw Ghetto more systematic.

October 22-23, 1940: Jews from Baden were expelled from Germany and sent to southern France. Population transfers took place in Alsace-Lorraine (France).

November 13, 1940: The RKFdV’s endeavor to relocate Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) from South Tyrol and eastern Europe, whom they planned to use as colonists, proved difficult. Between October 1939 and November 1940, a total of 435,000 Volksdeutsche were repatriated to the Reich (Aly, 1995).

November 11, 1940: The expulsion of people from Alsace and Lorraine began, in the framework of projects to Germanize the “reincorporated” territories (Kettenacker, 1973).

November 15, 1940: The Warsaw Ghetto was closed and isolated.

November / December 1940: Jews from Vienna and Upper Silesia were deported toward the Government-General.

January 8, 1941: The leaders of the RSHA held a meeting during which Heydrich announced the deportation of 810,000 Jews and Poles from the incorporated western Polish territories, toward the Government-General.

January 1941: The research and preparatory work for the Germanization of the Lublin (Zamosc) district, “the SS’ special laboratory” for Germanization, began (Pohl, 1993; Conte and Essner, 1995). Heydrich submitted a plan for the “solution to the Jewish question” which Himmler and Göring had ordered.

February 28, 1941: Richard Korherr, Head Statistician of the SS, justified deportation as a means to be used toward the “solution to the Jewish question.”

March 1, 1941: Himmler inspected Auschwitz [3], a concentration camp essentially used for Polish political prisoners, and ordered its expansion.

The deportation of populations to the Government-General were organized “once and for all,” in spite of opposition from the local occupying authorities, represented by the Governor-General, Hans Frank. The SS organizations were heading toward a territorial solution to the “Jewish question.”

March - April 1941: Negotiations were held between the Wehrmacht and the RSHA on the subject of the SS’ “special duties” during the future Russian campaign. The Wehrmacht’s logistical system was set up. It was to feed itself off the occupied territories and expect no supplies from the Reich, in the view of Herbert Backe, Minister of Supplies and Eduard Wagner, who was responsible for the economic and logistical administration of the Wehrmacht. To them, this implied causing the inhabitants of the main urban centers of the Soviet Union to starve to death; implicitly, the Jews were meant to be the first victims of this act of indirect mass killing through famine. As Wagner wrote, some “tens of millions of people” were “to starve to death” (Krausnick and Wilhelm, 1981; Aly and Heim, 1991; Gerlach, 1999).

March 26, 1941: During a meeting between Heydrich and Göring, the latter gave permission to shoot all dangerous individuals in the conquered Soviet Union (Aly, 1995). Between April and July, the RSHA composed “directives for the Jewish question” planning the deportation of Soviet Jews and
their elimination through work, i.e. working them to death (Husson, 2008).

April 4, 1941: Operation 14f13 (the extermination of the mentally ill and of persons with incurable diseases, in the occupied territories of Poland and in the concentration camps) was held. A first contingent of men was sent to Poland in the framework of Aktion T4 (?) (Orth et alii, 1998).

April 6, 1941: Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece (Mazower, 1993; Manoschek, 1995). Hitler rushed to the rescue of Italian troops which had invaded the country one month earlier, but were not making much headway due to the resistance offered by Greek forces. Both countries were “conquered” in six weeks. However, the occupation had to face armed resistance movements which gradually became more and more efficient. In addition, this meant that new Jewish communities fell under German control.

April / May 1941: Famine policies were implemented in the ghettos of Poland. The decrease of food rations, along with the disorganization of production systems made the death rates in the ghettos increase dramatically (see Pohl, 1993 and Musial, 2000, both for the case of the Lublin province). The Einsatzgruppen received instruction and training (Krausnick and Wilhelm, 1981; Klein, 1997).

May 27, 1941: Pr Clauberg proposed carrying out mass sterilization campaigns.

June 3, 1941: The first massacres of Greek civilian populations took place during the invasion of Crete (Mazower, 1995).

June 6, 1941: The Kommissarbefehl was issued (the original is available in German at https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/der-zweite-weltkrieg/kriegsverlauf/ueberfall-auf-die-sowjetunion-1941.html [4]). This order confirmed that the Wehrmacht was expected to automatically execute certain population categories, in accordance with the instructions Göring had given Heydrich on March 26, 1941. These groups were defined in terms of their social or political status (civil servants, members of the Soviet Communist Party) but also, in part, in terms of racial criteria (all Jewish upper- and middle-rank civil servants were concerned, for example).

June 7, 1941: The first expulsions and deportations of populations from Slovenia took place. Between June and September 1941, 100,000 Slovenians were deported to Serbia, in the framework of the Germanization program for the Laibach (Ljubljana) region (Tomasevitch, 2001).

June 17, 1941: The RSHA held a conference about the Einsatzgruppen; Heydrich gave orders to liquidate Jewish civil servants, Partisans (members of clandestine opposition groups), agitators, etc. It is likely that the “Directives for the Jewish question” were the basis of Heydrich’s instructions (Husson, 2008).

June 21, 1941: Himmler put the RKFdV in charge of designing a new version of the GeneralplanOst.

4. Total war and mass violence

After the invasion of England failed, Hitler convinced the German High Command to prepare for the conquest of the Soviet Union. Strategic considerations, such as the appropriation of this country’s immense resources in order to use them against England, were predominant in this decision. Marching East to conquer their “living space,” the Nazis were also applying a colonial world view to eastern Europe, which led them to aspire to enslaving the Slavic populations fallen under their control. The way Operation Barbarossa was conducted by the biggest army ever constituted in Europe immediately had a huge impact on the destiny of these civilian populations. Though the invasion was a response to vital strategic considerations, it was also a political and racial war against “Judeo-Bolshevism.” German aggression against the Soviet Union allowed a fusion of the internal enemy and the external enemy within the Nazi worldview. On the military level, the Red Army soldiers paid a heavy toll to this factor, since the Wehrmacht let them starve to death by the millions. By the beginning of 1942, two million Soviet prisoners had already died (Streit, 1978).
As to the civilian populations, the Jews were the main victims: the Nazis used the war to demonize them as both an internal and an external threat. Thus, from the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Einsatzgruppen, armed groups who were specially assigned the extermination of the Jews, carried out their duties behind the German lines, in partnership with the Ordnungspolizei (regular German police), the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht. At this point, the conflict dynamics turned into those of a total war, producing mass violence at an unprecedented level on the European continent.

June 22, 1941: Operation Barbarossa began. German troops entered Russia, stunning the Soviet troops, which were completely overwhelmed. The Einsatzgruppen arrived straight afterwards; they mostly murdered men, but a minority of women were killed also.

June 24, 1941: The Wehrmacht and the SS agreed on rules for the selection and execution of Soviet prisoners of war (Krausnick, 1981; Klein, 1997).

June 28, 1941: The Einsatzgruppen carried out their first shootings (there is some doubt about the exact date: some authors – such as Kruglov, 2005 – situate this a few days earlier). Jews were the main target, but the shootings were presented as reprisal killings...

July 8-9, 1941: Himmler and Daluege (who was in charge of the Ordnungspolizei) met in Bialystok.

July 15, 1941: According to the second Generalplan Ost, 31 million men were to be transferred throughout all of conquered eastern Europe; Himmler had asked Konrad Meyer-Heitling to take the Wehrmacht’s conquests (present or future) into account. The regions of Leningrad and the Crimea were considered “Germanizable” (Rössler, Schleiermacher, 1993).

July 16, 1941: Göring, Bormann and Rosenberg met at Hitler’s headquarters. He recommended shooting “anyone who looks askance at us.”

July 17, 1941: “Selections” began in the Soviet prisoner-of-war camps; Jews, intellectuals and Communists were executed.

July 20, 1941: Himmler visited Lublin and Zamosc, and decided to have the Majdanek camp built. He gave orders to extend the Fahndung nach deutschem Blut operation (an operation consisting of the kidnapping of children holding Polish nationality, but who were considered “racially German”). This had already been started in Zamosc, in the framework of Germanization operations; at this point, it was extended to the entire Government-General (Pohl, 1993; Conte & Essner, 1995).

July 31, 1941: Göring confirmed Heydrich’s mandate concerning the organization of a “global solution to the Jewish question” (“Gesamtlösung der Judenfrage”).

Late July - early August 1941: Waffen SS units of the Stab Reichsführer SS began operations in southern Belarus and in the North of the Ukraine (Cüppers, 2005).

August 1941: Eichmann went to Auschwitz (? this may have occurred in 1942). He associated Höß to the extermination process that was being prepared for (Brayard, 2005). The first group of Lithuanian workers was sent to East Prussia (Myllyniemi, 1973).

Between August 6 and 16, 1941: The Einsatzgruppen began mass killings of women and children in the occupied USSR (Klein, 1997). At the same time, they began executing Gypsies who held Soviet citizenship (Zimmerman, 1995).

August 7, 1941: Himmler issued a decree on the selection of Gypsies from inside the Reich for deportation.

August 15, 1941: The Hungarians deported Jews from Bessarabia to Serbia; they were assassinated by the Wehrmacht in “gas trucks” (they were gassed using the exhaust fumes from these vehicles, used as mobile killing units) during the autumn (Manoschek, 1993).
August 16, 1941: For the first time, Einsatzgruppen reports mentioned the massacre of women and children. During the autumn, a report stated that the Einsatzgruppen “…could not be a quick solution to the Jewish question.” Himmler travelled to Minsk. He attended a “Special Operation” there. At this point, it is likely that orders were given to radicalize killing practices (Klein, 1997; Gerlach, 1999; Ogorreck, 1996).

August 24, 1941: Hitler ended Aktion T4, under pressure from public opinion and the Churches (Friedländer (H.), 1995).

August 26-28, 1941: The Kamenets-Podolsk massacre took place; more than 24,000 Jews were killed. Certain sources suggests that Jeckeln (the Highest SS and Police leader for the southern sector of the Russian front) used this opportunity to develop the “sardine method” for stacking the corpses of massacre victims in mass graves.

Late August 1941: Hitler promised Goebbels that the Jews of Berlin would be deported.

September and October 1941: The Einsatzgruppen annihilated entire communities (Gerlach, 1998).

September 1, 1941: German Jews over six years of age were required to wear the yellow star.

September 2-5, 1941: The Zyklon B poison gas was tested in Auschwitz on Soviet prisoners (Pressac, 1993).

September 13, 1941: Rosenberg tried to convince Hitler to carry out a reprisal operation in retaliation for Stalin’s deportation of the Volga Germans.

September 16, 1941: 900 prisoners were gassed at Auschwitz (Pressac, 1993). The OKW gave orders to shoot 50 to 100 people in retaliation for an attack on German soldiers in the occupied countries (Meyer, 2000).

September 18, 1941: Himmler announced the deportation of the Jews of the Lodz Ghetto.

September 22-24, 1941: Himmler and Heydrich received confirmation from Hitler of the necessity of deporting Jews from the Reich.

September 26, 1941: The Nazis announced that famine would be used against Leningrad.

September 27, 1941: The Nazis decided to expand Auschwitz and build the Majdanek camp.

September 29-30, 1941: In the Babi-Yar massacre, in the Ukraine, 33,371 Jews were executed by the Einsatzgruppe C-Sonderkommando 4a and the 45th Police Battalion in two days (Pohl, 1993).

Early October 1941: Mass murders began in Serbia, as well as in Galicia. Gas trucks were used for the first time at Chelmno (Manoschek, 1995).

October 4, 1941: Conflicts began to appear between the SS and the Ostministerium over the question of whose jurisdiction the “Jewish question” (Judenfrage) was.

October 10, 1941: The decision to deport German Jews to Riga and to Minsk was taken (Gerlach, 1998).

October 14, 1941: The deportation of German Jews to Kaunas began. The decision to to build the Chelmno and Belzec extermination camps was taken.

October 15, 1941: Operations against the Partisans (anti-occupation guerrilla movements) began in Serbia; the Wehrmacht’s first large-scale massacres in this context took place (Tomazevic, 2001).

October 21, 1941: The construction of new ghettos inside the Government-General was forbidden.
Food rations for the Russian prisoners-of-war were officially decreased; between June 1941 and January 1972, 6,000 of them starved to death each day, on average, in the German prisoner-of-war camps (Streit, 1978).

**October 23, 1941:** German Jews were forbidden to emigrate (Burrin, 1989; Brayard, 2004).

**October 25, 1941:** A proposal was made to build extermination camps in Riga and Minsk, but it was not implemented. The persons killed there were shot by police battalions and an *Einsatzkommando* (Gerlach, 1999).

**October 1941:** The Majdanek camp was opened in Poland (Gerlach, 1998).

**November 1941:** The deportation of German Jews to Riga and Minsk began; elderly people, women and children – who were a majority in the convoys – were immediately executed (by the police regiments and *Einsatzgruppe B*). Able-bodied men were “put to work” (Gerlach, 1998).

**November 5, 1941:** The Gypsies of Burgenland (a frontier region between Austria and Hungary) were deported to the Łódź ghetto (Zimmerman, 1995).

**November 6-25, 1941:** Groups of Polish peasants were expelled from the Zamosc district as “test cases” (Pohl, 1993).

**November 25, 1941:** Göring informed Ciano that 20 to 30 million people would starve to death in Russia over the 12 months to come (Aly and Heim, 1991).

**Late November 1941:** 100 men from *Aktion T4*’s technical staff were sent to Polish camps (Belzec, Chelmno). Thus began the conception of *Aktion Reinhard* (the Nazi plan to murder Polish Jews in the Government-General, using extermination camps). This code name was used for the operation from July 1942 on. (Brayard, 2004; Pohl, 1993).

**November 29, 1941:** Convocations were sent out for the Wannsee Conference, which was scheduled for December 9 (Brayard, 2004; Gerlach, 1998).

**December 4, 1941:** A special penal law code was introduced for Poles inside the *Reich*.

**December 5, 1941:** The first convoy of Jews was sent to Chelmno. Later on in the month, gas trucks were added to the *Einsatzgruppen*’s equipment in Russia.

**December 7, 1941:** The Japanese attack on the US base at Pearl Harbor took place. The Wannsee Conference was postponed. The OKW published the “Nach und Nebel” decree (according to which certain political prisoners were to be either executed, or arrested and deported in total secrecy).

**December 8, 1941:** The first killing took place in Chelmno using gas trucks. This was part of a regional killing program restricted to the Jews of the Lodz Ghetto (Brayard, 2004).

**December 11, 1941:** Germany declared war on the United States of America. From this point on, the war was not only total, but global as well. And in January 1939, Hitler had predicted that “if the Jews managed to throw Germany into a worldwide conflict again, then it would not lead to the Bolshevization of Europe, but to the extermination of the Jewish race” (Gerlach, 1998, 589). The time had come. Hitler perceived this declaration of war as a maneuver by American Jews, whose hostility made war with the U.S.A. inevitable; in his view, it required deciding on the principle of exterminating all of the Jews of Europe.

**December 12, 1941:** Hitler informed the *Gauleiters* of his intention to exterminate the Jews (Gerlach, 1998).

**December 16, 1941:** Hans Frank revealed the “Final Solution” through extermination planned for the Government-General, to his general staff.
December 18, 1941: During a meeting between Hitler and Himmler, the former probably authorized the Final Solution through extermination. Authors such as Christian Gerlach, Florent Brayard and Édouard Husson disagree on issues concerning dates, but what they do agree on, first and foremost, is the importance of the Hitler/Himmler/Heydrich triangle in the decision-making processes. The December 1941 decision illustrates Hitler’s role quite well. As always, his influence made anti-Jewish policy more radical, setting off impulses which the protagonists in the field transformed into action, into deadly initiatives. Regarding this decision, Hitler simply defined a principle: the change in the nature of what the Nazis called the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” which at this point, became geared toward complete extermination. The methods of implementation of this principle, its scheduling and planning were left to field protagonists at the central level – Himmler, Heydrich, but also the different protagonists of the anti-Jewish policies – and at the local level – this essentially involved occupation institutions.

November/December 1941: During this period, 500,000 Russians starved to death in the prisoner-of-war camps. Since June, the total was 2.8 million (Aly, Heim, 1989: 513; Streit, 1978).

As of January 16, 1942: The extermination of 5,000 Gypsies of the Lodz Ghetto began at Chelmno (Zimmermann, 1996).

5. A plan to exterminate the Jews throughout Europe

In this section, we shall attempt to give an all-round picture of the extermination programs set up by the Nazis. Their implementation began in winter 1941, and was extended starting in early 1942 (see preceding section). The following conclusions can be drawn from this:

First of all, since the winter of 1940 and the first six months of 1941, Nazi leaders had been considering the use of famine as a weapon to “reduce” the Jewish populations present in the occupied territories of eastern Europe. At this period, the point was not direct, but rather indirect extermination; also, the program was not geared toward total elimination of these Jewish communities.

Secondly, starting in April-May 1941, the Nazi leadership set out different programs for direct extermination:

_ A – In occupied Yugoslavia and the USSR, armed groups (who mostly belonged to the SS or to police forces) shot Jews near their places of residence; initially, most of these were adult males but from August 1941, in the USSR, all Jews were targeted, including women and children.

_ B – In the Lodz district, a non-exhaustive extermination program was designed jointly by the Chancellery and by local institutions in summer and autumn 1941, using gas trucks from Chelmno. The know-how built up in Chelmno was then spread through the USSR and Yugoslavia, though considerable technical and manpower problems appeared in the process.

_ C – In the Government-General, the main regional extermination program was designed by Odilo Globocnick, the supreme leader of the police and the SS, presumably in autumn 1941. It was based on existing extermination camps (Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, as well as Majdanek, which was built later). The program led to the near-total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland in gas chambers which used carbon monoxide. In the summer of 1942, the expansion of the extermination facilities and the adoption of Zyklon B gas technology were considered for a time, then dropped.

_ D – In Auschwitz, Rudolf Höß and Adolf Eichmann developed the last extermination program starting in September 1941, by “testing” extermination methods by Zyklon B on Soviet prisoners-of-war. This program, which was probably the only one to have been conceived on a Europe-wide scale from the start, was materialized in the setting-up of large gas chambers using Zyklon B at Birkenau. Starting in spring 1942, Auschwitz became the extermination site for the majority of victims from western and southern Europe, from Hungary, and well as from certain Polish territories.
These two modes of extermination – direct and indirect – and these four “patterns” for direct extermination programs operated on a large scale during the phase of generalization of mass murder which was instigated after the Wannsee conference.

The extermination process for Gypsies was not thought through as systematically as that which was planned for the Jews. In 1942-43, mass operations were organized to shoot Gypsies in the Government-General; regional elimination programs were also implemented.

January 20, 1942: The Wannsee Conference was held. A plan to exterminate the Jews was set up throughout Europe (Husson, 2008; Brayard, 2004; Roseman, 2002; Gerlach, 1998).

January 29, 1942: A conference was held at the Ostministerium in favor of extending the definition of a “Jew” (to include other groups) in the occupied territories. The RSHA sent out directives concerning the “treatment of the Jewish question” (Aly, 1995).

February 1942: Large-scale search operations began to track down the Partisans in Belarus. They led to the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, who constituted a majority of the victims. The pilot operation, called “Operation Bamberg,” took place in southern Belarus and ended in Polesia, in the Pripyet marshes. This area was a bastion of Partisan activity and also witnessed the early and total extermination of local Jewish communities (Gerlach, 1999; Cüppers, 2005). The deportation of Slovakian Jews began, in view of their extermination (Tönsmeyer, 2004).

February 4, 1942: The RSHA, civil servants from the German ministries, and experts discussed the Generalplan Ost and the population selection criteria across eastern Europe (Madajczyk, 1994: 38).

February 15, 1942: The first RSHA convoy, numbered IV - B4, was sent to Auschwitz and the persons aboard were gassed immediately. These victims were Jews from Silesia. This was the first convoy organized and planned by Adolf Eichmann’s services in the framework of the extermination program defined during the Wannsee Conference (Gerlach, 1998).

March 7, 1942: Goebbels mentioned Heydrich and Eichmann’s memorandum based on the Wannsee Conference (Gerlach, 1998; Browning, 2003).

March 16, 1942: The concentration camp inspection authorities were placed under the authority of the SS Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (Main Economic and Administrative Department).

March 17, 1942: Mass killings began at Belzec, using gas (Musial, 2004).

March 26, 1942: The first convoy was sent to Auschwitz from (Klarsfeld, 2001, vol. 1). The implementation of the extermination program for western Europe began (Pohl, 2003).

April 1942: The Einsatzgruppen claimed they had already eliminated 461,500 Soviet Jews. In fact, the number of victims was higher still at that point, if we take the killings carried out by other police and SS units, and their auxiliaries, into account (for the Ukraine, see Kruglov, 2005). The assassination of Soviet Jews continued throughout the conquered territories until the Red Army recaptured them.

April 27, 1942: The Generalplan Ost was debated and criticized, essentially by Erhard Wetzel, who was in charge of racial policy at the Ostministerium (Madajczyk, 1994).

May 1942: Murder began at Sobibor; the Treblinka camp (which used carbon monoxide) was built (Musial, 2004; Pohl, 1993). The Gypsies of Croatia were deported toward the Ustashi concentration camp system.

May 12, 1942: 1,500 Jews were killed in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

May 27, 1942: Mobile racial expertise commissions began work in the framework of operation Fahndung nach deutschem Blut (kidnapping of Polish children considered “racially German”).
also started to prepare for Operation Zamosc (Conte & Essner, 1995; Pohl, 1993).

**May 28, 1942:** The RKFDV’s third Generalplan Ost was issued (Rössler, Schleiermacher, 1993).

**June 4, 1942:** Reinhard Heydrich died. At his funeral, Himmler ordered his staff to implement the Final Solution through extermination in one year. A dramatic acceleration in the pace of killings ensued (Brayard, 2004). The extermination of the Jews of Poland was code-named “Aktion Reinhard,” after Reinhard Heydrich.

**June 1942:** The RSHA’s Amt III B’s Gesamtplan Ost probably dated from this period. Höß, the commander of the Auschwitz camp, met with Himmler. Mass extermination began in Auschwitz. The activities carried out at Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Majdanek by the members of T4 in the Government-General, were renamed Aktion Reinhard.

Personnel reinforcements for Aktion T4 arrived in Poland (Brayard, 2004; Musial, 2000, 2004).

A new carbon monoxysode-operated gassing complex was built in Belzec, with 6 gas chambers instead of 3.

The Blobel commando conducted experiments on the cremation of corpses at Chelmno.

Odilo Globocnik, who was in charge of the SS and police for the Lublin district – and the designer of the Aktion Reinhard plan for the extermination of the Jews of the Government-General – put forward a project for the conversion of all extermination facilities to the use of Zyklon B. The project failed for Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor.

What Raul Hilberg calls the second wave of extermination began, under cover of the struggle against the Partisans in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus (Hilberg, 1988; Dean, 2000).

The mass deportation of Russian workers began. They were often rounded up in the framework of large-scale Partisanenbekämpfung ("struggle against the Partisans") search and round-up operations, then deported to the Reich for forced labor.

The deportation of Romanian Jews to Transnistria began; it lasted until September.

**June 1942:** The formerly mobile Einsatzgruppen were given a fixed base and subordinated to the HSSPF; their leaders became BdS (regional head of the Gestapo and SD) for Ostland (Einsatzgruppe A), Belarus (Minsk – Einsatzgruppe B), the Ukraine (Einsatzgruppe C), the Crimea (Einsatzgruppe D) (Idem).

**July 3, 1942:** The German police took control of the Westerbork transit camp, in Holland. Systematic deportations began; the convoys headed to Auschwitz and Sobibor for immediate extermination, then to Teresienstadt and Bergen-Belsen (Moore, 1997).

**July 1942:** Majdanek was turned into an extermination camp; its gas chambers were built according to the same model as those in Auschwitz (using Zyklon B). The construction of the Treblinka camp (with 6 to 10 gas chambers) was completed (Brayard and Musial, 2004).

**July 16-17, 1942:** In the "Vel d’hui" round-up [5], the French police forces arrested the Jews of the area before sending them to the Drancy transit camp [6], from which they were later deported to Auschwitz (Klarsfeld, 2001).

**Early August 1942:** The Belgian Jews were deported from the Mechelen internment camp [7] (Van Doorslaer, 1994).

**August 18, 1942:** The German Ministry of Justice and the SS concluded an agreement on the transfer of delinquants being held in jail, to concentration camps.

**Autumn 1942:** A phase of construction of forced labor camps began in the Government-General.
November 9, 1942: U.S. forces landed in North Africa. The *Wehrmacht* responded by invading the "zone libre" (the "free zone" of southern France). From this point on, the Jews who had taken refuge there were hunted down and deported.

November 27, 1942: Operation Zamosc began. It consisted of the agricultural colonization of the Zamosc region by German colonists from the different German minority groups of eastern Europe. Poles and Ukrainians were expelled from the region in order to leave room for them. *Aktion Zamosc*, a test "laboratory" for Germanization policies, lasted until February 1943 (Pohl, 1993; Conte & Essner, 1995).

December 1942 – March 1943: An exhumation and incineration phase began in the camps of *Aktion Reinhard*. The Chelmno and Belzec camps were closed in December 1942. At Belzec, the cremations lasted until March (Hilberg, 1988: 845-856; Musial, 2004).

December 16, 1942: Orders were given to deport the Gypsies to Auschwitz (Zimmerman, 1996).

December 23, 1942 – February 15, 1943: The RKFdV issued its *Generalsiedlungsplan* ("General Settlement Plan"); the last, expanded version of the *Generalplan Ost* was also issued (Rössler, Schleiermacher, 1993; Madjaczyk, 1994).

January 1943: The "final" phase of extermination began in Poland. Organized resistance emerged in the Warsaw Ghetto, leading to an uprising. The German 6th Army was defeated and surrendered at Stalingrad.

Early February 1943: The RSHA organized a conference on planning for eastern Europe, attempting to coordinate the *Generalsiedlungsplan* and the *Gesamtplan Ost*. The broadest Nazi Germanization program so far was designed, taking into account the extermination of the Jews, but also projections of a dramatic numerical decrease of the Slavic populations. The deportation of Gypsies to Auschwitz began in practice.

Early February 1943: Adolf Eichmann's commandos arrived in Thessaloniki. The local Jewish community was deported and exterminated (Mazor, 1993 & 2005).

1943: Germany invaded Italy and the territories occupied by Italian forces. Later on, Jews were rounded up in these territories (particularly in western Greece and the Dodecanese Islands).

February 14, 1943: Hitler gave orders for deportations to be organized and systematic destruction to be inflicted in German-occupied areas, in the event that German troops were forced by the Allies to retreat from these territories.

Early March 1943: After the German defeat at Stalingrad, the *Wehrmacht* had to evacuate the Caucasus; this was the first case of forced population transfers in the context of German retreat.

June 27, 1943: Himmler order the construction of concentration camps in the Baltic countries.

July 1943: The *Wehrmacht* carried out its first operations involving the destruction of villages and the massacre of populations in continental Greece, in "retaliation" for the increasing level of resistance activities (Mazor, 1995).

September 7, 1943: The OKW gave instructions for the systematic destruction of territories formerly occupied by Germany, during its retreat from the USSR.

September 9, 1943: The German armed forces shot hostages for the first time in Italy (Schreiber, 1997).

October 1943: Danish Jews were saved, thanks to their evacuation to Sweden.

Autumn 1943: The Treblinka and Sobibor camps were dismantled, and the gassing of victims was
halted in Majdanek; Auschwitz remained the only “industrial” extermination center.

**November 3-5, 1943:** Operation *Erntefest* took place. Considering the resistance movements of Jewish survivors in the Vilna, Bialystok and Warsaw ghettos, Himmler ordered Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger and Jakob Sporrenberg (who were respectively Supreme Chief of the Police and SS for the Government-General, and Chief of the Police and SS for the Lublin district) to exterminate the surviving Jews in their sectors. 43,000 victims were then shot in two days (Grabitz, Scheffler, 1993; Pohl, 1993).

**From February 1944:** The Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg issued hundreds of certificates placing Jews from Budapest under the protection of Sweden.

**February 3, 1944:** The MbF (“Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich,” the German Military Commander in France) gave orders for hostages to be shot *en masse* in France. This was a way to import practices that had already been experimented on the eastern front, into the western front. It produced a distinct radicalization of the German occupation policies in France (Meyer, 2000).

**Operations against the Resistance maquis (guerrilla fighters) of Mont Mouchet began.**

**April 1944:** The convoys carrying detainees to the institutions of the Euthanasia program resumed.

**May-December 1944:** The Hungarian Jews were exterminated during this period, which was a phase of “maximal activity” for Auschwitz. During May and June, 10,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed there each day. In August 1944, 20,000 corpses were incinerated every day in Auschwitz, of which over 15,000 were cremated out in the open air (Aly & Gerlach, 2002).

**May 1944:** The Dutch Gypsies were deported to Auschwitz (Zimmerman, 1996).

**June 19-22, 1944:** The great Russian offensive in Belarus began. The *Wehrmacht*‘s Army Group Center collapsed; 200,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner in the encircled city of Minsk. From this point on, the German troops were in a desperate situation. The extermination of the Hungarian Jews continued at the fastest pace possible (Overy, 1997; Gerlach, 1999).

**July 22, 1942:** The Soviet troops took Majdanek.

**August 2-3, 1944:** The Gypsies who had been deported to Auschwitz were killed in a mass gassing operation (Zimmerman, 1995). The Warsaw uprising began, and was repressed. 200,000 civilians were killed in two months (Madajczyk, 1987; Borodziej, 2004).

**August 7, 1944:** The trial of the German military conspirators who had planned the July 20, 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler, began. The repression of this assassination attempt marked the beginning of a very severe radicalization of the Nazi repression policies against the *Reich*’s populations.

**Late August 1944:** The Slovakian army revolted. *Einsatzgruppe* H was formed, as the Nazis hunted down the last surviving Jews on German territory (Tönsmeyer, 2004).

**September 6, 1944:** The ill among the Russian forced laborers were sent to the euthanasia institutions.

**September 1944:** A German embargo on all food shipments to Holland led to a massive famine.

**November 1, 1944:** Orders came to halt the gassing of detainees in Auschwitz.

**November 19, 1944:** The principle of *Sippenhaft* ("kin liability") was introduced: The families of *Wehrmacht* and SS soldiers were virtually considered hostages who could be executed in the event that these soldiers deserted.

**January 12, 1945:** The great Soviet winter offensive began.
January 20, 1945: The death march began from the Stutthof camps (in the Dantzig/Gdansk region of Poland).

January 21, 1945: The Auschwitz gas chambers were destroyed. The death marches had begun three days earlier... These events marked the end of the industrial phase of the mass murder of the Jews. However, the last phase of their persecution began: German military setbacks generated an immense flow of detainees being evacuated westward in massive death marches. The conditions these were organized in and the vengeful rage of the guards, who could no longer ignore the impending defeat they were facing, cost the lives of thousands of detainees. To this day, we are still unable to carry out a reliable count of these victims.


January 27/28, 1945: All the detainees of the Lodz Radegast prison (Radogozcz in Polish) were massacred.

January 31, 1945: The prisoners previously held in the Stutthof camps were massacred at Palmnicken; there were 3,000 victims, most of which were women.

February 15, 1945: The German authorities ordered the establishment of summary Courts; these were mobile tribunals set up to track down deserters (or suspected deserters) and hang them.

April 6, 1945: The evacuation of the Buchenwald camp began.

April 15, 1945: Bergen-Belsen was liberated.

May 2, 1945: The Ustashi Croatian camp of Janosevac was liberated.

May 5, 1945: The Mauthausen camp was liberated.

May 8-9, 1945: Unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany.

Attempt to make a numerical estimate of the most intense phases of mass violence that Europe ever witnessed, one reaches a total of around 5.6 million Jewish victims: 3 million Polish Jews lost their lives, essentially in the mass killing centers; one million Soviet Jews were executed, often close to their homes, by armed groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania, Denmark, Luxemburg, North Africa</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>59,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>102,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>67,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Ca. 3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>260,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
<td>Ca. 1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,600,000 (minimum)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Trials: Nürenberg and After
From the moment the Atlantic Charter was signed, the Allies had decided that Nazi practices of violence would be subject to investigation and prosecution, and that Nazi ideology had to be eradicated from the German population. Thus, trials and denazification were on the Allies’ agenda as soon as Germany capitulated unconditionally on May 8, 1945.

The Allies set up an International Criminal Tribunal in Nuremberg, where the lengthy trial of fifteen Nazi leaders – among the most significant of those who had been captured – was held. In the absence of Hitler and Himmler (who had committed suicide), Hermann Goering, Joachim Ribbentrop, Hans Franck, Wilhelm Frick, Wilhelm Keitel, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Julius Streicher and Alfred Jodl were judged, sentenced to death and executed.

The United States also set up a military Tribunal, which organized twelve trials in Nuremberg, during which the main aspects and elements of Nazi criminal practices were addressed: the Einsatzgruppen, the German diplomacy, German doctors, the concentration camps, German racial policy, forced population transfers, and German industry. In each of these trials, significant, emblematic defendants received severe sentences; around fifty death sentences were issued. However, it proved impossible to incriminate all of the protagonists of these Nazi policies.

This ambition of an all-embracing repression of Nazi crimes and purge of German society led the four occupying powers, as well as every country that had been invaded by Germany, to hold a series of trials, which lasted from 1945 to 1950. Hence, in Poland, in Yugoslavia and in Czechoslovakia, the Nazi leaders responsible for the occupation policies were judged, and mostly sentenced to death and executed. Such was the case for Hermann Behrends, who had been Supreme Chief of the Serbian police and SS in Belgrade, for Kurt Daluege, who had taken over from Heydrich as Reichsprotektor of Bohemia-Moravia in Prague, for Jurgen Stroop, who was responsible for the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, and for Rudolf Höss in Poland.

In Germany, the repression of National-Socialist crimes and the purging of society led to the jailing of great numbers of suspects, but the immensity of the task, along with the constraints of reconstruction of the German polities, led the occupying powers to exercise a certain degree of leniency. Therefore, it was the Federal Republic of Germany and a new generation of prosecutors who set up a commission to centralize investigation of National-Socialist crimes as of 1958, which carried out a fundamental job in this respect, with great thoroughness and remarkable precision, even though its efforts to prosecute the former Nazi criminals under investigation often failed.

### A Brief Bibliography

1. **From Völkische ethno-nationalism to the Nazi conquest of power**


2. Before the Final Solution through extermination: the anti-Jewish policies of the Third Reich

ADAM, Uwe Dietrich, 1972, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf.


**3. The extermination of the Jews of Europe: war, occupation and mass murder**


KLARSFELD, Serge, 2001, *La Shoah en France*, : Fayard, 4 vol. :

1. *Vichy-Auschwitz : la solution finale de la question juive en France*

2. *Le Calendrier de la persécution des Juifs de France, 1940-1944: 1er juillet 1940 - 31 août 1942*

3. *Le Calendrier de la persécution des Juifs de France, 1940-1944: 1er septembre 1942-31 août 1944*

4. *Le Mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France*


MADAJCZYK, Czeslaw, 1987, *Die Okkupationspolitik Nazideutschland in Polen 1939-1945*, East Berlin:


SANDKUEHLER, Thomas, 1996, “Endlösung” in Galizien. Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die


More