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The Greater German Reich and the Jews

Nazi Persecution Policies in the Annexed Territories 1935–1945

Edited by

Wolf Gruner and Jörg Osterloh

Translated by Bernard Heise
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In 2012 the German edition of this volume, which appeared in 2010 in the Fritz Bauer Institute’s *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* (academic series), received a prize awarded by the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers & Booksellers Association) to support the “translation of outstanding publications in the humanities and social sciences,” making this English edition possible.

In preparation for the translation, the articles and editorial contributions have all been updated, in some cases with additional content as well. The editors would like to thank the authors not only for their contributions, but also for their patience and understanding in light of our numerous queries, and for revising, updating, and sometimes even expanding their texts for the English translation; Sabine Lachmann for producing the maps; Gerd Fischer and Sabine Grimm for carefully copy editing the German version; Volker Zimmermann for his knowledgeable comments on a number of selected chapters; the members of the German Historical Studies Group in Los Angeles for their stimulating discussion of an early version of the introduction; and also Christoph Dieckmann and Michael Wildt for their helpful criticism of a later version of the introduction to the German edition.

The editors would like to thank Omer Bartov, Marion Berghahn, and Dirk Moses for including the volume in the War and Genocide series published by Berghahn Books in New York, the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions, which have influenced the English edition, Bernard Heise for his very circumspect translation, and also Ann Przyzycki DeVita and Adam Capitanio for masterfully supervising the project on behalf of the publisher.
In early 2005 the President of the EU Commission, José Manuel Barroso, referred in an essay to “Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland” but failed to mention Nazi Germany’s responsibility for the camp, sparking fierce protests in Poland.\(^1\) Polish reactions looked very much the same when the President of the United States, Barack Obama, in a speech honoring Jan Karski in May 2012, described Auschwitz as a “Polish death camp.”\(^2\) Of course, Barroso and Obama can hardly be suspected of harboring revisionist tendencies; even so, these examples reveal how references to the extermination camp have been beset by increasingly common and gravely misleading linguistic imprecisions, reflecting the steadily fading public awareness of the dimensions attained by the “Greater German Reich” during the Second World War. At its height, the “Greater German Reich” included the border regions of France and Belgium, all of Luxembourg and Austria, the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, western Poland, and the northern Slovenian territories. To be sure, from today’s perspective, the town of Oświęcim—named Auschwitz\(^3\) during the Nazi period—correctly lies in Poland; but from fall 1939 to early 1945, the National Socialist state had appropriated and annexed the region of East Upper Silesia, including the town. Thus the SS established the Auschwitz concentration—and later extermination—camp on the territory of the Third Reich.

The influence of the German Reich’s territorial expansion on the persecution of the Jews—that is, on the policies of the perpetrators,
the situation of the respective Jewish populations, and the behavior of the other inhabitants—has thus far hardly been systematically explored. Yet more or less each time the German Reich annexed another territory, the various architects of the Nazi regime’s policies of racial persecution confronted new questions. While between 1933 and 1938, the Nazis had managed to reduce the number of Jewish Germans in the “Old Reich” from 520,000 to 240,000 by expelling them or inducing them to flee, in 1938/39 the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland respectively brought an additional 190,000 and 29,000 religious Jews into the Reich, and the founding of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia further increased their number by 118,000. The conquest of large parts of Poland created an entirely new situation; now more than 2 million Polish Jews found themselves under German dominion, 600,000 of them living in regions directly incorporated by the Reich. By comparison, only a few Jews lived in the territories annexed in the West in 1940.

Updated and expanded for the English version, this volume for the first time systematically assembles the most important facts regarding the persecution of Jewish populations in the context of Nazi occupation policy with respect to the territories “annexed” or “incorporated” by Germany. Each chapter is organized into three sections. The first section focuses on the situation prior to the territory’s annexation, assessing the situation of both the Jews and non-Jews and elucidating the social, demographic, economic, political, and governmental circumstances after the First World War. The second section addresses the immediate German military occupation, the persecutions during the first weeks, and the initial constitutional measures implemented under Nazi rule. The authors investigate—among others—the following questions: Did violent actions occur during the first phase? What German and/or indigenous institutions initiated persecutory measures? What role did local ethnic Germans play in the respective region? How did the non-German/non-Jewish parts of the population behave? The third section deals with the territory’s integration into the German Reich, the establishment of its most important administrative institutions, and the anti-Jewish policies implemented in the region until the end of the Nazi regime. The key questions for this section include: Which individuals and institutions advanced anti-Jewish policies in the annexed territory? When did jurisdictional competencies emerge, and what kind of breaks and shifts can be identified? What impact did Nazi ethnic policies—toward ethnic Germans, but also toward Czechs, Poles, and the French, for example—have on the persecution of the
Jews? In light of the demographic realities—for example in Poland—to what extent did the Nazis successfully create a National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft in the annexed territories?

The authors have all approached these questions on the basis of the most recent scholarship and—in most cases—their own primary research. In a few instances, the lack of adequate sources or an insufficient level of preexisting research has led authors to adjust their focus. Whereas Andreas Schulz and Ruth Leiserowitz primarily elucidate the prehistory of the annexations in the Regierungsbezirk (government district) of Zichenau (Ciechanów) and the Memel Territories (Klaipėda Region), respectively, Ingo Loose and Sybille Steinbacher, in their respective chapters about the Warthegau and East Upper Silesia, concentrate on the history of the occupation. Most of the chapters, however, foreground the period until 1941, since afterward—except for the Warthegau, East Upper Silesia, Austria, and the Protectorate—few Jewish inhabitants remained in the annexed regions, due to the expulsions and deportations.

For a long time historians in Germany and in the countries affected by the Nazi annexations almost unanimously assumed that, as a rule, German occupying authorities simply transferred existing anti-Jewish policies as developed at the time of each respective annexation from Germany to the annexed territory. Exemplifying this view, Eva Schmidt-Hartmann’s thesis regarding the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia maintains that the Protectorate featured “similar and basically the same arrangements” that obtained “in all of the other countries occupied by Germany.” The chapters presented here, however, show that certain measures were introduced in various territories at very different times (in some cases they were not even implemented at all) and adjusted in accordance with regional circumstances, the international situation, and Germany’s changing interests.

Previous scholarship has almost completely ignored questions regarding the possibility that the persecution of the Jews underwent independent developments in the annexed territories, whether at the hands of occupying Germans or indigenous neighbors. At the same time it is obvious that the population’s complex constellation—Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants, resident ethnic Germans, newly arriving Reich Germans—in most of the annexed territories must have had consequences. An analysis of the occupation, the competent authorities, and the individuals they employed reveals as untenable any assumption that Berlin or even the NSDAP solely determined the lines of action in the annexed regions. In March 1939, for example, Hitler
Wolf Gruner and Jörg Osterloh decided to leave the development of anti-Jewish policy in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to the Czech government. Indeed, local and regional conditions, constellations, institutions, and players shaped anti-Jewish policies—and thus at the same also their impact on the respective Jewish populations—far more pervasively than previously assumed.\(^{11}\)

As the book will show, the persecution of the Jews did not continuously become more radical from one annexation to the next—from Austria through the Protectorate and Poland, to the territories in the West.\(^{12}\) Anti-Jewish policy did not, in fact, result solely from ideological directives centrally issued from Berlin: rather, local players—Germans and non-Germans—reacted to specific economic, social, demographic, and political constellations. Thus in Vienna the “Aryanization” of Jewish property degenerated into a race among Nazi party members for personal enrichment; in response, Austrian Minister Hans Fischböck developed government expropriation plans for Austria, which were subsequently adapted by Göring for the entire Reich.\(^{13}\) In our opinion, the key to understanding the intensification of anti-Jewish policy in the course of the Nazi regime’s annexations, on the one hand, and the inconsistency of regional measures, on the other, lies precisely in these mutual actions between local, regional, and central persecutory measures.

Twentieth-century Europe was marked by shifting boundaries, transitions of power, changing political systems, and the creation of new states. For countless numbers of people this meant forced emigrations, the loss of homelands, and changing national citizenships. After the First World War, the peace negotiations in Paris and the resulting “Paris Peace Treaties” of 1919/20 fundamentally reconfigured the political map of Central and Eastern Europe, and as such they are considered one of the twentieth century’s key events. As a result of the Versailles Treaty of 28 June 1919, the German Reich had to cede extensive territories in the North, West, and especially in the East, as well as acquiesce to restrictions of its sovereignty and pay reparations. Concluded on 10 September 1919, the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye prohibited the Austrian Republic, which emerged from the remains of the Habsburg Danubian Monarchy, from unifying with Germany; Austria also had to acknowledge the now independent states of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia and concede the associated territorial losses.\(^{14}\)

The National Socialists made the revision of these treaties—which they referred to as the “shameful peace”—one of their major objectives.
Already in its “Twenty-Five Point Program” of 1920, the NSDAP prominently called for “the consolidation of all Germans into a Greater Germany on the basis of the peoples’ [Völker] right to self-determination,” demanding “equal rights of the German Reich vis-à-vis the other nations and the repeal of the Treaties of Versailles and St. Germain.”

In making such demands, the NSDAP in Germany—and Austria—did not stand alone; rather, these demands reflected widespread sentiments within the population.

Two years after the National Socialists assumed power in the Reich in 1933, the opportunity arose for the first time to revise borders and repatriate Germans (see map 0.1). A plebiscite was supposed to help resolve the future of the Saar region, which, in accordance with the Versailles Treaty, stood under the League of Nations’ supervision for fifteen years. In 1935, Germany—and thus the Nazi regime—emerged from the plebiscite as the triumphant victor and took over the territory. Two years later in November 1937, Hitler instructed the Wehrmacht to
prepare for an invasion of Austria and Czechoslovakia. In the process, he was pursuing long-term goals: along with strategic gains of space and resources, millions of people were supposed to be expelled and the territories slated for annexation were to be extensively Germanized.16

The “Greater German Reich”—de facto and in terms of self-perception, but by no means de jure—emerged in 1938 as a result of the annexations of Austria in the spring and the Sudetenland in the fall, both carried out “peacefully” in the end. For Hitler, however, the Munich Agreement signed on 30 September 1938, through which Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany forced Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland, also involved bitter disappointment, for he had been counting on a military destruction of the ČSR. On 15 March 1939, the Wehrmacht finally marched into the Resttschechei (Nazi jargon for the rump Czech state) and Hitler proclaimed the newly created Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to be a part of the Reich. In so doing, the Third Reich for the first time raised a claim to a territory where most of the population did not consist of Germans.17 Just one week later, Lithuania had to surrender the Memel Territory, an event largely overlooked due to the developments in Prague. These constituted the last “peaceful” conquests of the German Reich, although in all of these cases—with the exception of the Saar—Berlin had exerted immense political pressure and threatened the deployment of military means.

The Nazi regime created the preconditions for territorial expansion by force of arms with the surprising German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 23 August 1939 and the associated additional secret protocol.18 Only a few days later, on 1 September, with its invasion of Poland, the German Reich began pursuing its further territorial objectives through violence. After the Polish military’s quick defeat, Hitler dismembered the conquered country. The Reich annexed West Prussia, the “Free City” of Danzig (which had been under the protection and supervision of the League of Nations), the Wartheland, and East Upper Silesia, and also parts of Northern Mazovia as the Regierungsbezirk of Zichenau. Starting on 17 September, the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland within days, and on 28 September the two conquering states agreed on the course of their new common border in Poland.19 The Nazi regime consolidated the rest of the former Polish state under its control into the General Government for the Occupied Polish Territories (Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete), which neither de facto nor in terms of constitutional or international law belonged to the German Reich.20 This is why this book does not deal with the districts in the General Government, even though many of the authors refer
in their chapters to the numerous connections between the annexed regions and the other Polish territories.

The next annexations would expand the German Reich westward. After the Wehrmacht conquered the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and large parts of France within a span of only a few weeks in May/June 1940, the Nazi state annexed—de jure or de facto—Eupen-Malmedy, Luxembourg, and Alsace and Lorraine. The last annexations occurred in 1941. Within just a few days after the German attack on Yugoslavia and Greece on 6 April 1941, northeastern Slovenia came under German administration. On 26 April, Hitler directed Maribor (Marburg an der Drau) to “make [the country] German again.” However, by the end of the war the planned constitutional integration into the German Reich had still not taken place. After the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Nazis formed the Bezirk (district) of Białystok from parts of the former Polish territory.

After the tide turned against the Germans in the Second World War, the Allies began reconquering the annexed regions from the German Reich. First, American and British troops liberated the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in fall 1944, as well as Alsace-Lorraine and Eupen-Malmedy, which were reintegrated into the French and Belgian states, respectively. In the East, the Red Army captured the town of Memel (Klaipėda) in early 1945 and in the following weeks quickly overran the annexed regions of western Poland and the eastern parts of Germany. In the beginning of May 1945, only Prague (Prag, Praha), along with parts of the Protectorate and the Sudetengau, still remained in the hands of the German occupiers, who soon officially capitulated.

Scholarship in both parts of Germany as well as in the countries affected by the Nazi annexations has neglected most of the regions assimilated by the Reich, along with the history of their annexations. Smaller annexations in particular, such as those of the Memel Territory or Eupen-Malmedy, have receded from view as a result of the focus on the Wehrmacht’s military campaigns in the East. In a striking contrast to these scholarly omissions, in 1944 Raphael Lemkin developed his still influential definition of genocide as a punishable international crime on the basis of an analysis of the history of Nazi occupation and persecution in both the eastern and western parts of the German Reich. Referring to the Nazi state’s long-term interest in systematically Germanizing these territories, Lemkin soberly maintained that it had destroyed the local and/or national institutions and traditions in the annexed regions, introducing German administrative structures in their stead. He noted that in western Poland the population had to
abandon its homes to make room for Germans from the Baltic, other parts of Poland, Bessarabia, and last but not least from the Reich itself; in Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg, on the other hand, persecution policies developed along different lines, since the Nazis viewed Luxembourgers as people with “related” blood.25

Even more than a modern comparative history of Nazi occupations,26 we still today lack comparative studies of persecution and extermination in the “annexed” territories. In fact, studies on this topic are not even available for all the individual territories. While more or less comprehensive studies exist for Austria, the Sudetenland, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, East Upper Silesia, and the Warthegau, gaps still remain above all for the annexed regions in the West and Southeast.27 During the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, these developments still garnered attention, particularly from the respective governments in exile and Jewish organizations in the United States. Along with Lemkin’s study, other books also appeared that first documented Nazi persecution in individual annexed countries and throughout Europe, concentrating either on anti-Jewish policies or on “racial policy” as an element in “greater German” expansion and Germanization.28

After the Second World War, in the individual countries that had been occupied by the German Reich, interest focused more on the fate of the majority population and its resistance, in order to stabilize societies shaken by the war and occupation. Remarkably, in this respect it is difficult to distinguish between the policies of (non)commemoration in Western states—for example, Austria, France, and Belgium—and in Socialist countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia. The same applies to the cultivation of national victimhood myths.29 While scholarship in each respective nation joined to unanimously condemn Germany as an occupying power, it ignored the participation of indigenous persons in the persecution of the Jewish minority—this against its better judgment, for in the first postwar phase, most countries had implemented proceedings against collaborators, which often ended with drastic sentences. Thus the first to tread the minefield-riddled terrain of persecution and collaboration were often the survivors of the mass murder themselves.30 In the 1990s, however, this situation finally changed in almost all of these countries.31 Within a decade the research landscapes in the formerly occupied countries had dramatically altered, transformed by a new generation of frequently multilingual historians (insufficient language skills had also previously hindered the international reception of national scholarship), the opening of
archives in the states of the former “Eastern Bloc,” international discussions about restitution and compensation for the victims of Nazi rule in Europe, and changing political and academic interests. The transformation occurred against a background largely formed by the redefinition of many former Socialist countries after the end of the Cold War, the rising importance of the European Union in the West and the fundamental efforts by scholarly communities to find a place for their own nations within an integrating Europe. In this connection, the Holocaust acquired a major role in European commemoration policies, which strongly influenced most national historiographies.32

The systematic and comparative survey offered in this volume—in numerous cases, given the absence of preliminary work, made possible only as a result of the authors’ own primary research—for the first time provides insights into the similarities and differences between anti-Jewish policies in the various regions of the “Greater German Reich” that were annexed or incorporated by the Nazi regime. In the conclusion that follows the chapters, the editors discuss and weigh these new findings. In addition, they analyze the continuities and discontinuities, as well as the social, political, and economic conditions of the surprisingly frequent autonomous local, regional, and national developments. They assess the interactions between the annexed territories and the previously often overlooked influence of these regional initiatives on the overall policies of the regime in Berlin, the transfer and development of persecutory knowledge by individual persons and institutions from one annexation to the next, as well as the establishment of regional authorities. Finally, the editors identify unresolved questions and outline key issues and areas for future research into anti-Jewish policy and its impact on the persecuted groups and overall societies in the annexed regions of the “Greater German Reich.”

Los Angeles/Frankfurt, August 2014

Notes

3. The chapters in this anthology will initially refer to places commonly referenced in English—Prague, for example—by their English names, followed by their German and indigenous names enclosed in parentheses. When first mentioned, all other
places will generally be referred to by their names prior to the occupation and then their German name in parentheses. In other respects, depending on the context, the text usually uses the English or German name.


5. The introduction and the individual chapters frequently use generalized terms such as Germans, Jews, Poles, Czechs, the French, and Austrians. The editors and authors are very much aware of the problems associated with such usage but see no practical alternatives, even though these collectives were usually very heterogeneous and moreover often resorted to using religion, nationality, native language, and state citizenship merely as ethnic features. For the National Socialists the term “Pole,” for example, usually referred to state citizenship during the initial occupation phase; only later did it refer increasingly to the racial categories of the Deutsche Volksliste (German People’s List); in contrast, within the borders of the Reich, the designation “Jew” was based on the Nuremberg Race Laws. Thus when the following texts refer to Jews, the authors consequently always mean those people who fell under these laws, regardless of whether they viewed themselves as Jews or not.


7. The terms “annexation,” “incorporation,” and “integration” are used synonymously throughout this volume. They refer to the constitutional integration of the respective occupied territories into the German Reich through the introduction and application of Reich laws and the establishment of an administrative structure identical to the Reich’s. This occurred as a process and was implemented in the individual regions in various forms and periods, but was basically distinguished from the “mere” occupation of territories like France, which remained under military administration, and the creation of the Generalgouvernement, which had its own specific administration and where the laws of the German Reich did not apply. When the following texts refer to “annexed” regions, they therefore mean both territories that de jure became Reich territory as well those that the Reich de facto annexed.

8. A survey of the current state of research with respect to individual countries and territories can be found at the end of the volume.


10. As, for example, with Diemut Majer, “Non-Germans” under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939–1945 (Baltimore, 2003) (German original: Boppard am Rhein, 1981).

11. The existence of significant local and regional differences in the development of Jewish policy within the Old Reich has since been sufficiently proven. Frank Bajohr has impressively demonstrated how foreign-trade concerns in Hamburg for a long time mitigated local “Aryanizations.” Frank Bajohr, “Aryanisation” in *Hamburg: The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2002) (German original: Hamburg, 1997). And Wolf Gruner has demonstrated that the degree of pressure on Jewish populations depended on the initiative of the municipalities. Idem, *Öffentliche Wohlfahrt und Judenverfolgung: Wechselwirkung lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat (1933–1942)* (Munich, 2002).

12. On this, see the chapters in this volume.


17. Thus rendering obsolete the legitimation of the annexations by the right of the Germans to self-determination as invoked by Hitler; Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, 53.


19. Through an exchange of territories, Germany subsequently acquired the district of Suwałki (as of 1939, Suwalken; as of 1941, Sudauen), integrating it into the East Prussian Regierungsbezirk of Gumbinnen. Unfortunately, a chapter on this region could not be acquired for this volume.

20. According to Martin Broszat, the Generalgouvernement was an “ad hoc constructed German ‘Nebenland’ [Nazi term for a directly dependent land], lacking the quality of a state, [and] with stateless inhabitants of Polish ethnicity.” On the status of the Generalgouvernement, see Martin Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939–1945* (Stuttgart, 1961), 68–70, quote on 70.


22. Unfortunately, chapters on the regions of Lower Styria (Untersteiermark), Upper Carniola (German: Oberkrain; Slovene: Gorenjska), and Białystok could not be recruited for this volume.

23. After the war, the occupied Polish regions were allocated to the Polish state, which at Stalin’s behest was shifted substantially westward and now integrated former German regions. The Sudeten regions as well as Bohemia and Moravia were returned to Czechoslovakia. In 1948, the Memel Territory was constitutionally integrated into the Lithuanian Soviet Republic.


26. The most recent general overview on this topic, Mark Mazower’s *Hitler’s Empire*, likewise fails to offer any systematic comparison of the occupation regimes.

27. On the research situation with respect to the individual regions, see the literature review at the end of the volume.


31. On the historiographical developments in the respective countries, see the literature review at the end of this volume.

32. On this, see Eckel and Moisel, *Universalisierung des Holocaust?*