

**THE WORLD OF NATIONAL SOCIALIST CAMPS:
PLACES OF EXCLUSION, DISCRIMINATION,
EXTERMINATION**

Contrary to the widely held opinion that the history of the Nazi camps has been thoroughly researched, countless blank areas of this apparatus of repression are yet to be mapped out, such as the specific organizational structures and forms this apparatus assumed, the intentions it was designed to pursue, its dimensions, and how it functioned. We do not even know how many camps of varying type existed on German soil, what their different classifications were or who their responsible authorities were.

Between 1933 and 1945 countless sites of imprisonment and terror were generally perceived as being a *KZ*, the German abbreviation for concentration camps. Although these sites did not correspond to the formal definition of a concentration camp, namely their placement under the authority of the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps and the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office, these sites nevertheless served the purpose of disciplining the detainees, depriving them of their liberty, subjugating and exploiting them, and, inevitably, exterminating human life. Thus, there existed an entire world of other camps parallel to the concentration camp system, the centrally administered component of the terror apparatus under the command of SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler. In part, these camps had similar functions to the concentration camps; some were employed in realizing Nazi racial policy, while others were established as regional initiatives and institutionalised as special forms of camp, or were developed for specific purposes, taking on a life of their own and existing for varying lengths of time. In the following I will speak exclusively of the "coercion camps," by which I mean camps where people were forced to live against their will under strict surveillance. Here, against their own free will, they were coerced into performing activities and adopting forms of behaviour which were not regulated by norms characteristic of the rule of law. The scope of this world existing in the shadow of the concentration camps ranges from the so-called "youth protection camps" to the murder sites and extermination camps. The former were *de facto* concentration camps for children and youth that emerged in three different forms, at Moringen in Lower Saxony, at Ravensbrück in the Uckermark and, with three branches, at Łódź in the "Warthegau"; the latter included camps such as Chelmno (Kulmhof), Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, which served no other purpose than murdering the deportees immediately upon their arrival.

The 400 ghettos for Jews on Polish soil were a kind of waiting room for the extermination camps where the inhabitants' labour was exploited at

the same time. On Soviet territory, ghettos like those in Kaunas and Riga were the stage directly before the concentration camps. Raul Hilberg has called the ghettos set up in the Soviet Union "a by-product of the killing operations,"¹ whereas Jürgen Matthäus has spoken of these ghettos as a "tactical alternative" that did not represent a deviation from the intention of planned genocide;² what is certain, however, is that the ghettos fulfilled a temporary double function, as an exploitation camp holding a reservoir of labour and as a collection site where extermination was already carried out. The forced labour camps for Jews served related functions.

Any exhaustive description of the National Socialist camp system, which would take as its starting point the 24 concentration camps and their some 1,000 branch or sub-camps and include all the other types of coercion camps set up, must also refer to the "gypsy camps," where Sinti and Roma were incarcerated and forced into performing hard labour. Finally, the prisoner-of-war camps must also be included, or at least those camps where soldiers of the Red Army were interned, for they were sites that were run outside the domain of international conventions, sites where abuse, torture, and murder reigned in the name of the National Socialist ideology.

LABOUR REEDUCATION CAMPS (*ARBEITSERZIEHUNGSLAGER*)

At least half a million persons were victims of "education" measures that were carried out in a type of camp especially erected for this purpose. In May 1940, only eight such camps existed. Eventually, there were some 200 labour reeducation camps, which arose without central organisation under the control of regional Gestapo offices. Instead of a central commanding authority, the local interests of labour authorities, municipal authorities, companies and the Gestapo dictated how the camps were run. The overall coordination at the uppermost governmental level was based on arrangements between the Reich Ministry of Labour and the Reich Security Main Office. After the war began, anyone who refused to meet demanded performance levels at their workplace became a target of these measures. Companies involved in armaments production pressed for police measures to be enforced so as to discipline the workforce. An independent type of camp under Gestapo jurisdiction emerged from this praxis that became a component of the general system of terror and repression. At the same time however, this type of camp was also the expression of a policing educational fervour that sought to forcibly incorporate workers into the "Volk community" and was ultimately exploited as a penal measure against foreign forced labourers.

1 G. Schwarz, *Die nationalsozialistischen Lager* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996), p. 152; R. Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Berlin, 1982), p. 244.

2 J. Matthäus, "Das Ghetto Kaunas und die „Endlösung“ in Litauen", in *Judenmord in Litauen*, ed. W. Benz and M. Neiss (Berlin, 1999), p. 103.

Although decentralised in terms of organisation and frequently improvised, the labour reeducation camps were similar to the concentration camps in many respects. Indeed, labour reeducation camps were integrated into concentration camps in six cases, namely in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Groß-Rosen, Plaszow and Stutthof. The "reeducation" prisoners were housed in their own barracks or in separate camp areas, or they were specially marked and registered.

In many cases, as of 1942 labour reeducation detention for a period of up to six weeks was also enforced directly on the grounds of private armaments companies, as a preliminary stage before the detainees were sent to a concentration camp. Reeducation prisoners were treated just as brutally as prisoners in concentration camps, and the victims were perfectly justified in regarding this type of labour camp as synonymous with the concentration camps. From 1942 onwards, the victims of this "labour reeducation" were predominantly foreign civilian labourers forced to work for the German armaments industry, the majority of whom, some 60 per cent, were "eastern workers" and Poles. As the Nazi dictatorship finally began to collapse, these camps, which had initially been hastily improvised in places such as vacated schools, factories, warehouses and garages, recalled the early concentration camps in many respects, where the prisoners had been housed in similar sites and a similar chaos had reigned. The labour reeducation camps were at once an expression of the boundless tyrannical power claimed by the conglomerate of state and war economy, of police and administration, as well as, at the end of the war, of the agonizing death throes of a collapsing dictatorial system.

The labour reeducation camps formed an autonomous cosmos in the National Socialist apparatus of persecution, one in which the prison and living conditions, and hence the chances of survival, differed only slightly from those of the concentration camps. The police provided the guard personnel, although due to the constraints of the war, mainly reservists and soldiers unfit for frontline duty were recruited. The personnel shortage ultimately forced the authorities to employ temporary staff, private guard and warden services, factory guards, janitors, and odd-job men to supervise and guard the labour reeducation prisoners.

The labour reeducation camps were also used by the Gestapo as execution sites for carrying out "special treatment." The victims were mainly Polish and Soviet civilian workers and prisoners of war who, on the basis of special penal regulations targeting these nationalities, could be executed for theft, sabotage, "plundering," and similar offences without the involvement of the judiciary.

By the end of the war, when the persecution hysteria of the authorities, the willingness of the population to inform and denounce, and the policing terror reached their peak, the labour reeducation camps as a form of "extended police prison" had long become sites where there was no clearly recognisable difference from the concentration camp system, with prisoners being tortured and shot while allegedly "trying to escape." "Special

treatment" – the execution of individual prisoners – turned into mass executions, and "reeducation through labour" became a form of persecution that served to exterminate the prisoners.

Historians have ignored the labour reeducation camps for many years. Their significance within the persecution apparatus of the Nazi state was certainly just as important as it was for the system of repression and discipline. As Gabriele Lofti has argued, "The labour reeducation camps proliferated into the Nazi terror system from below, were beyond the reach of judicial authorities and independent of the concentration camps they established themselves as the third autonomous repression level of the security police."³

POLICE CUSTODY CAMPS (*POLIZEIHAFTLAGER*)

Due to their varying forms and the differing responsible authorities, the police custody camps in the occupied territories are the most difficult of these coercion camps to classify systematically. In northern and western Europe they were in part under the control of the respective German civil administration, or, as in Belgium, were integrated into the military administration and thus under the command of the Wehrmacht, the German Armed Forces. In eastern and south-eastern Europe they were, as a rule, under the control of the respective commander of the security police and the SD (security service). Occasionally, these police custody camps also emerged out of the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile death squads of the *Sipo* (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and SD. In Croatia and Italy, the police custody camps were in part under national jurisdiction; but even in territories under the rule of German occupation forces, camps existed that were only indirectly under German command. Whatever the case may have been in terms of the commanding authority, local forces were active in the guarding of these camps.

Under the euphemistic designation "transit camp," sites were set up in areas under German occupation for the purpose of preparing deportations and ensuring that they were carried out smoothly and efficiently. Such relay stations in western Europe were the camps at Malines (Mechelen) in Belgium⁴ and Westerbork in the Netherlands,⁵ as well as the "police transit

camp Bozen" in South Tyrol, where from July/August 1944 a total of 11,116 prisoners were interned. At the peak of its activity, in Bozen 4,000 persons were crowded together into different buildings designed to accommodate 1,500. The camp in Bozen-Gries had a precursor in a camp at Fossoli di Carpi, where since December 1943 Jewish prisoners had been incarcerated in a former prisoner-of-war camp. Under German administration, this camp was under the control of the security police commander in Italy, a situation that did not change after the camp was relocated to Bozen.⁶

We also need to mention the camps Borgo S. Dalmazzo and La Risiera near Trieste, which were set up in autumn 1943 as northern Italy became German occupied territory. A prison site in Greece (Chaidari near Athens)⁷ and several in Serbia (Jarak, Petrovgrad, Šabac, Zasavica) are described in contemporary official files as "concentration camps," and at least this character was evident at the camps under Croatian (or until September 1943 under Italian) control, such as Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, Danica, Krušcica, Pag/Slano, Kraljevica, Rab, and others. In Byelorussia custody sites existed that are very difficult to classify, for instance the "civilian prisoner camp" set up by the Wehrmacht in order to take preventative measures against prospective opponents and intimidate the population in Minsk. In addition to 100,000 prisoners of war, some 40,000 civilians were interned in "transit camp 127." Here the death squads selected Jews and members of the intelligentsia for liquidation. Collaboration between the Wehrmacht and the SS was characteristic of these camps, where elements of a ghetto were combined with those of an extermination camp; under the command of the SS and the police, such sites of terror as Koldichevo, Mogilev, and Maly Trostinets, were introduced into the world of National Socialist camps.⁸

"Police custody camps" in areas under National Socialist rule have yet to be thoroughly researched. General statements on the dimensions and structures of these camps are therefore hardly possible, and for many camps the data on the establishment and ultimate closure as well as the numbers and profile of the detainees are also uncertain.⁹

GHETTOS

Ghettos were set up on Polish soil in the autumn of 1939, directly in the wake of the Polish campaign. The Jewish councils, unwilling and vicarious agents in the racist occupation policy, were exploited in concentrating

³ G. Lofti, 'Stätten des Terrors. Die „Arbeitserziehungslager“ der Gestapo,' in *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg. „Heimatfront“ und besetztes Europa*, ed. G. Paul and K.-M. Mallmann (Darmstadt, 2000), pp. 255–69, here p. 260.

⁴ M. Meckl, 'Wartesaal vor Auschwitz: Das Lager Mechelen (Malines),' in *Terror im Westen. Nationalsozialistische Lager in den Niederlanden, Belgien und Luxemburg 1940–1945*, ed. W. Benz and B. Distel (Berlin, 2004), p. 39–48.

⁵ A. Hajková, 'Das polizeiliche Durchgangslager Westerbork,' in *Terror im Westen. Nationalsozialistische Lager in den Niederlanden, Belgien und Luxemburg 1940–1945*, ed. W. Benz and B. Distel (Berlin, 2004), pp. 217–48.

⁶ J. Wetzel, 'Das Polizeidurchgangslager Bozen,' *Dachauer Hefte* 5 (1989), pp. 28–39.

⁷ T. Kornaros, 'Vor den Toren Athens: Chaidari,' *Dachauer Hefte* 5 (1989), pp. 214–22.

⁸ C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941–1945* (Hamburg, 1999), pp. 503 ff.

⁹ Übersicht bei Schwarz, *Die nationalsozialistischen Lager*, pp. 96–99; see also A. Streim, 'Konzentrationslager auf dem Gebiet der Sowjetunion,' *Dachauer Hefte* 5 (1989), pp. 174–87.

Poland's Jewish population. The forced resettlement of Polish Jews into around 400 ghettos was a concentration measure for preparing deportation to the forced labour and extermination camps, but it also served to exploit the labour force then and there. Those ghetto inhabitants categorised as unfit for work were murdered already from December 1941 at the Chelmo extermination camp, and later, beginning in the spring of 1942, in Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

By the end of 1941, two-thirds of Polish Jews lived in ghettos.¹⁰ The ghetto in Łódź (Litzmannstadt), which existed from 1940 to 1944, was the first large ghetto to be erected and the last one to be dismantled. After being hermetically sealed off on 30 April 1940, this ghetto also served as a forced labour camp and a reception site for Jews deported from the *Altreich* (i.e. territories that were part of Third Reich in 1937) and later from the *Ostmark*. Around 5,000 Sinti and Roma from the Burgenland in Austria, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and Luxembourg, as well as 20,000 German Jews were also sent to this ghetto, contributing further to its overcrowding. In May 1940, almost 164,000 Jews were living in the Łódź ghetto; in December 1942, after four waves of deportation to the extermination camps, there were 88,000. Upon being dismantled in August 1944, over 60,000 persons were deported from Łódź to Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹¹ There were slight differences between the ghettos in the *Wartheland* (i.e. the territory of Greater Poland that was annexed to the German Reich in 1939), for which Łódź was a typical example, and those in the General Government (*Generalgouvernement* – i.e. Polish territory that was occupied, but not annexed, by the Germans), exemplified by Warsaw, where 450,000 Jews were ghettoised.¹² Whereas Raul Hilberg explains such contradictions as an expression of the Nazi extermination plans, following a kind of logic intrinsic to their ideology and despotic rule, Christopher Browning draws attention to factors like regional interests and the necessities of improvisation, which meant that the ghettos existed far longer than originally planned, resulting in catastrophic living conditions: around 500,000 Jews died in the ghettos, although the “Jewish residential districts,” as they were called, were originally conceived merely as collection sites for deportation. The Jews from the “incorporated territories” like the *Wartheland* were supposed to be resettled in the General Government; however Governor General Frank was just as unwilling to receive them as Arthur Greiser, Reich Governor of the *Warthegau*, was to keep them.

The ghettos on the territory of the Soviet Union were structured differently, and their character as stations in the genocide was more obvious. The number of ghettos in the Baltic states, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Russia is unknown. In contrast to Poland, Jews on Soviet territory were mainly murdered first in pogroms and massacres, and then in planned “operations” by death squads after the Wehrmacht invasion. On 27 October 1942, Himmler issued his liquidation order for the ghettos in the Ukraine; the inhabitants of the ghettos in the Reich Commissionerhip of *Ostland* (Byelorussia and the Baltic states) were transferred to concentration camps following an order issued by Himmler on 21 June 1943, and the Riga and Kaunas ghettos were restructured into main concentration camps with affiliated sub-camps.

The Theresienstadt ghetto assumed a special position. As of November 1941, the north Bohemian fortress city was used as a site for interning Jews from the Protectorate, before becoming the “elders’ ghetto” for privileged German Jews (decorated veterans of the First World War, public figures, artists, scholars and scientists) in July 1942. As stated at the Wannsee Conference, the elders’ ghetto was a component of the “final solution” and had the living conditions and basic organizational structure of a concentration camp (it was under “Jewish self-administration” internally while guarded by Czech gendarmerie under the command of an SS officer). The camp was under the control of the Prague security police and SD commander. For 33,000 people, their stay in the ghetto meant death directly through starvation or the general deprivation of care and essential services, whereas for a further 88,000 Theresienstadt was the last station before Auschwitz or another extermination camp. From a total of 141,000 persons deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto, only some 23,000 survived.¹³ What is remarkable is the spatial proximity between the elders’ ghetto for the allegedly privileged in the military city of Theresienstadt and the police prison in the “small fortress,” which the Prague Gestapo began using in 1940, initially as branch of the overcrowded Prague prison Pankrác. The small fortress at Theresienstadt was one of the Gestapo’s largest incarceration sites and its importance went well beyond regional dimensions. The conditions here were exactly the same as those in a concentration camp, right down to the camp gate bearing the inscription “*Arbeit macht frei*,” “Work liberates”/“Work sets you free.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Schwarz, *Die nationalsozialistischen Lager*, p. 131.

¹¹ F. Freund, B. Perz and K. Stuhlpfarrer, ‘Das Getto Litzmannstadt (Łódź),’ in *„Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit“*. *Das Getto in Łódź 1940–1944*, ed. H. Loewy and G. Schoenberger (Frankfurt a. M., 1990), pp. 17–31; W. Scheffler, ‘Das Getto Łódź in der nationalsozialistischen Judenpolitik,’ in *„Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit“*. *Das Getto in Łódź 1940–1944*, ed. H. Loewy and G. Schoenberger (Frankfurt a. M., 1990), pp. 12–6.

¹² C. R. Browning, *Der Weg zur „Endlösung“*. *Entscheidungen und Täter* (Bonn, 1998), pp. 37–65.

¹³ *Theresienstadt in der Endlösung der Judenfrage*, ed. V. Blodig, M. Karna and M. Karny (Prag, 1992).

¹⁴ M. Poloncarz, ‘Das Gestapo-Polizelgefängnis Kleine Festung Theresienstadt,’ *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente*, ed. M. K. Karny et al. (Prag, 2000), pp. 11–26.

FORCED LABOUR CAMPS FOR JEWS

Beginning in December 1938, Jews in the German Reich were compelled to perform forced labour under the directorship of the Reich Labour Office.¹⁵ In the occupied territories the Wehrmacht, the German administrative departments and the SS conscripted Jews to work wherever the need arose and, at least initially, without following any formal regulations. Later, the forced labour camps set up in the General Government under the jurisdiction of the district SS and police leaders became an "integral component in the annihilation of the Jews, both in the phase of its launching as well as during its concrete execution." With the founding of the General Government, compulsory labour service was decreed for the Jewish population aged between 12 and 60 on 26 October 1939. Numerous forced labour camps were founded, with special emphasis placed on the districts of Lublin and Galicia. This development reached its peak in the years 1942 and 1943, as between 300 and 400 camps of this type existed on Polish soil, with between 50 and 60 of them capable of holding 1,000 or more prisoners. Some 120,000 Jews were imprisoned in this camp system at once, whereas the number of victims is considerably higher due to fluctuations, with probably some 200,000 persons dying.¹⁶

Under the jurisdiction of the SS police leaders, the forced labour camps continued the tradition of the work ghettos that had emerged after the ghetto inhabitants deemed unfit for work were deported and murdered. Providing primitive accommodation, under the command of an SS NCO (in larger camps the commandant held an SS officer's rank) and guarded by ethnic German SS men and *Trawniki*s (Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians recruited among Soviet prisoners of war who were willing to work for the Germans and who were trained for killing operations at the camp at Trawniki, near Lublin), these camps were improvised measures for rectifying labour shortages in the General Government.

The main difference from the concentration camps was the lack of centralisation and the larger scope for manoeuvring enjoyed by those running the camps, factors which, however, benefited the slave labourers only in extremely rare cases. The brutality of the treatment was not only the same as that inflicted in the concentration camps, but the arbitrary tyranny of the guards was given even more leeway due to the lack of camp regulations or a unified camp regimen. Individual larger complexes also arose within the world of the forced labour camps. In Lublin for example, there was at first the large Majdanek camp, which then became a concentration camp,

¹⁵ W. Gruner, *Der geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943* (Berlin, 1997).

¹⁶ D. Pohl, 'Die großen Zwangsarbeitslager der SS- und Polizeiführer für Juden im Generalgouvernement 1942-1945,' in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, ed. U. Herbert, K. Orth and C. Dieckmann (Göttingen, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 415-37.

before a giant forced labour camp was set up on the adjacent Lipowastraße that supplied the SS firm DAW (*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* - German Equipment Works), and the camp *Alter Flughafen* (old Lublin airport). In Lemberg, the camp on the Janowskastraße was not only a site of forced labour, but also one of extermination.¹⁷

As a result of rethinking labour market strategy, the *Schmelt Organisation* was founded in the Upper Silesian industrial belt at the end of October 1940. Albrecht Schmelt, an SS *Oberführer* (senior colonel) and since 1934 police chief in Breslau (in May 1941 he was then appointed district president in Oppeln), was installed as "special commissioner of the Reichsführer-SS for the labour deployment of foreigners" by Himmler, a post that gave him the authority to organise the forced labour of the 90,000 Jews in eastern Upper Silesia. The Schmelt branch office located in Sosnowitz became the central controlling authority for around 180 forced labour camps throughout Silesia and the Sudetenland.

The labour of the Jewish prisoners was hired out to private companies. The *Schmelt Organisation* was based on the concept of deportation and exploitation within a single region, an unparalleled procedure. In line with the model of the "enclosed labour deployment," which had been in place in the *Altreich* since December 1938, Jews were assigned to forced labour in three different forms, namely in roadwork construction along the Berlin-Breslau-Krakow route of the Reich autobahn, in camps affiliated with specific companies involved in the armaments industry, and in Wehrmacht manufacturing operations in Silesia's "eastern strip." The labour deployment was carried out on the premise of "extermination through work." As of mid-1943, these camps, holding a total of more than 50,000 Jews, were transformed into sub-camps of the Auschwitz and Groß-Rosen concentration camps. Other smaller camps were shut down. This regional camp system for Jewish forced labourers ended with the deportation and murder of the inmates.¹⁸

Aside from such changes in the function of the forced labour camps, mixed and special forms also existed, such as the Trawniki camp in the Lublin district, which was initially used as a site for holding Soviet prisoners of war, before it was transformed into an SS training camp for "foreign" units in late summer 1941. In this capacity, Ukrainian and other willing accomplices were trained for their deployment in the extermination camps of "Operation Reinhardt." Beginning in May 1942, Jews from the Lublin district were sent to the Trawniki camp as forced labourers, followed by Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, beginning in February 1943, and Jews from Bialystok beginning in May 1943. Finally, beginning in autumn 1943, Trawniki

¹⁷ T. Sandkühler, 'Das Zwangsarbeitslager Lemberg-Janowska 1941-1944,' in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, ed. U. Herbert, K. Orth and C. Dieckmann (Göttingen, 1998), pp. 606-35, here p. 606.

¹⁸ S. Steinbacher, *„Musterstadt“ Auschwitz. Germanisierung und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* (München, 2000), pp. 138 ff.

became a death camp when it was used as a site in *Aktion "Erntefest"* (Operation Harvest Festival).

Within the framework of the "*Otto-Programm*," Jews were forced to work on road construction projects in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union. Forced labour camps were set up along the Wehrmacht supply lines (known as the "*Rollbahn*" or "runway"). Under the direction of staff from Albert Speer's construction bureau, the *Organisation Todt* cooperated with private construction firms to build "transit road IV," a project Himmler had ordered in February 1942. This road was to extend the main route leading south-eastwards from the General Government and continue for 2,000 kilometres to Winniza, Kirovograd and Stalino, and was to be lengthened ultimately to the Caucasus with the aim of securing German colonial domination. Planning staff of the Higher SS and Police Leader for the southern Russia sector acted as the commanding authority. The guarding of the countless forced labour camps dotted along four construction segments was entrusted to police forces and sentry units made up of Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian auxiliary police. More than 25,000 Jews perished while working on "transit road IV" between 1942 and 1944. The decimation of the Jews through road construction work in the East, as proposed during the Wannsee Conference, was not a mere metaphor, but reality.¹⁹

With the exception of camps tied to a few specific companies in the armaments sector, the forced labour camps were either dismantled or, as in the case of Majdanek, incorporated into the concentration camp system by being placed under the control of the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office. (Majdanek was founded in autumn 1941 as a prisoner-of-war camp run by the Waffen SS; beginning in spring 1942 it served as a labour camp for Jewish and Polish prisoners; in early 1943 it was incorporated into the concentration camp system). Kraków-Plaszów became a concentration camp in January 1944. Beginning in early summer 1944, the remnants of the forced labour camp were removed to cover over all traces of its existence.

EXTERMINATION CAMPS

Viewed typologically, the extermination camps are very similar to the murder sites used to kill Jews chosen on an ad hoc basis by the death squads of the security police and SD and other SS units. Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kiev, where 33,771 Jews were shot on 29 and 30 September 1941, was one such site, and Ponary near Vilnius was another, where between 70,000 and 100,000 Jews were murdered from July 1941 to July 1944. Another execution

site was the Rumbuli Forest, where inhabitants of the Riga ghetto were killed. There are countless such "killing fields" across the territory of the former Soviet Union. The execution pits and other improvised sites of mass murder, some often only the scene of a single massacre while others were used over a longer period, were then superseded by official installations where the same took place – a murderous racial ideology set into action – but where the improvised and spontaneous element was eliminated. In Byelorussia the Maly Trostinets camp, established in the spring of 1942 by the security police and SD commander for Minsk, evolved from a forced labour camp to a central extermination site, where by the summer of 1944 at least 60,000 Jews, including Germans, Czechs and Austrians, as well as Soviet prisoners of war and resistance fighters, had been murdered.

The annihilation of human life was systematized in the death camps, where methods different from those of a pogrom or a massacre were utilized and the demands of logistics and efficiency dictated the procedures. Suitable sites were turned into death camps, with consideration being taken for their isolated position – in order to avoid publicity – and their proximity to transportation networks. These camps were therefore set up in Poland's east.

The Nazi regime utilized its initial experience gained in mass killing, namely in that of "undesirable" elements at home, for the technological apparatus of murder. The elimination of disabled persons, known as "euthanasia" and carried out from the autumn 1939 by a ramified and well-camouflaged organisation, was not only a model however. The personnel involved in "Operation T 4" were transferred to the East to apply the technical expertise they had acquired in the euthanasia facilities at Bernburg and Brandenburg, Grafeneck and Hadamar, Hartheim and Sonnenstein/Pirna at new sites against new victims. At these facilities and in other institutions in the German Reich and occupied Poland, the technology of killing through poison gas was tested and perfected.²⁰ In December 1941, the first camp was set up for the sole purpose of killing people in Chelmno (Kulmhof) in the Wartheland. The "special commando Herbert Lange" with its "gas vans" was stationed there to this end. Lange had gained experience in murdering the mentally ill and persons suffering other forms of disability in "Operation T 4" since the summer of 1940. At first, the victims of these sealed "gas vans" were killed by discharging carbon monoxide from bottles, until a new version, commissioned by the Reich Security Main Office and utilizing the engine exhaust fumes, was put into operation in autumn 1941. In Chelmno/Kulmhof, the gas vans drove from the "castle" to the "forest camp," five kilometres away, where the corpses of the victims killed en route were buried or later cremated. The death camp at Chelmno/Kulmhof was set up because the Łódź ghetto was overcrowded. At least 152,000 Jews

¹⁹ H. Kaleburg, *Jüdische Arbeitslager an der „Straße der SS“*, 1999. *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 1 (1996), pp. 13–39.

²⁰ H. Friedlander, *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid. Von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 450 ff.

were murdered who were either natives of Łódź or had been deported there from the *Wartheland* and the *Altreich*.

In the autumn of 1941, Himmler entrusted the SS and Police Leader in the Lublin district, Odilo Globocnik, with the task of carrying out "*Operation Reinhardt*." Behind this code-name was the plan to murder the Jews in the General Government with more effective methods than the mass shootings carried out by the death squads. The psychological burden borne by the perpetrators was one of the reasons for this shift in method, improving the secrecy of such operations another. Setting up the extermination camps was the decisive step in the evolution of genocide. If killing through mobile death squads still retained the character of a massacre, the new method of planned and rationally organized murder at fixed sites, using a specially-devised technology (the gas chamber) and trained personnel turned genocide into a crime that was carried out virtually as an industrial procedure. As such, the process of mass murder reached totally unprecedented dimensions.

Three extermination camps, Belzec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, were planned and set up in the region of Lublin with the assistance of around 100 murder specialists from "*Operation T 4*." The victims were transported to the camp by rail, forced to undress immediately upon arrival (under the pretence of undergoing a hygiene procedure for their own good) and driven to the gas chambers, into which carbon monoxide (exhaust fumes from tank engines) was then introduced. 1.75 million Jews, mainly of Polish nationality, were murdered in the course of "*Operation Reinhardt*" (named after the state secretary in the Reich Finance Ministry, because the murder was connected with the expropriation of the victims' assets). The three camps under the responsibility of the SS and Police Leader for Lublin and benefiting from the technical competence of the "euthanasia" experts were closed down in the autumn of 1943 and all obvious traces of their existence were removed.²¹

One final step towards perfecting mass murder was taken with the expansion of Auschwitz, when with the addition of the Birkenau camp the concentration camp was turned into an extermination camp. The deployment of Zyklon B (cyanide-based poison) was a method that further streamlined the efficiency of the murder (although execution squads remained active to the very end). A second concentration camp, Lublin-Majdanek, fulfilled, like Auschwitz, the double function of concentration and extermination camp beginning in autumn 1942. The thoroughly rationalised procedure, from the arriving transports, to the plundering and murder of the victims, to the removal of their corpses and the utilisation of their possessions,

21 Y. Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. The Operation Reinhardt Death Camps* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1987); R. Glazar, *Die Falle mit dem grünen Zaun. Überleben in Treblinka* (Frankfurt a. M., 1992).

is characteristic of the final phase of the holocaust that took place in the extermination camps.²²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite being placed under varying controlling authorities, the coercion camps of the National Socialist terror apparatus had many common features with the strictly and centrally organised concentration camp empire, which eventually absorbed many ghettos and numerous forced labour camps as well. Aside from the diverse array of motives, whereby camps were set up for a variety of purposes under polycratic authority, thus generating an uncontrolled proliferation of the camp world, one common characteristic was the rampant chaos that reigned, a chaos that, hand in hand with an elaborate bureaucracy, turned the world of these coercion camps into a confused and complex cosmos, exploitive, annihilating and murderous in its effects.

22 *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, ed. U. Herbert (Frankfurt a. M., 1998); W. Benz, *Der Holocaust* (München³, 2000).