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## Evil Rising

By MARK MAZOWER

From the rubble of defeat, the Third Reich has re-emerged like some malign, ubiquitous phoenix. The misdeeds of Hitler, Eichmann and Goebbels fill airwaves and lecture halls, and still the public hungers for more. At the start of the 21st century, the standard bibliography on the subject listed some 37,000 works on Nazism, 12,000 of these having appeared in the previous five years alone. Will not historians at our century's end look back and scratch their heads in bemusement? The millions of victims of state violence in China or the Soviet Union rate only a fraction of this attention, the killing fields of Cambodia and Rwanda still less. Yet the Nazis keep marching on, while the Holocaust has been turned into a moral touchstone, an unparalleled example of evil that we are exhorted to keep constantly in mind. Faced with two hefty new works -- the 600-page first volume of a projected trilogy on the Third Reich, and a detailed study of the origins of the Final Solution -- one wonders what more remains to be learned.

Richard J. Evans's "Coming of the Third Reich" is an enormous work of synthesis -- knowledgeable and reliable, and playing to the author's strengths as it highlights the interconnections between politics and society. Evans, the author of several books about Nazi Germany, reminds us at the outset that we should not read too much into the activities of nasty but small anti-Semitic and nationalist extremist groups before World War I. Instead he underscores the importance of the postwar crisis, a Germany left bitterly divided between Social Democrats and Communists, an economy ravaged by unemployment and a country led astray by a political and industrial elite with no real commitment to democracy. This is a vivid although familiar account of why the Weimar Republic collapsed. Evans shows how the ingredients for Nazi triumph were assembled and what was needed to make them jell: add war and depression, cook in a turbulent political atmosphere for several years and serve hot.

There are of course many ways to bake this particular cake. Paradoxically, it suited both the Nazis and their Social Democratic opponents to claim that the Third Reich represented a radical break with pre-1933 politics, and this is the picture Evans presents too. A more European perspective might have shown Weimar in a different light. The book does not dwell much on World War I, nor, more surprisingly, does it have much to say about the effect of the Versailles peace settlement and the territorial losses this inflicted upon Germany. Hitler was not the only one to bang on about the plight of those Germans left stranded after 1918 on the wrong side of the Polish or Czech borders; his commitment to do something for them, by force if necessary, struck a chord in a country where the Association for Germanism Abroad, an influential lobbying group, had two million members and where the League of Nations was widely believed to be an organization biased in favor of Germany's enemies.

One of the merits of "The Origins of the Final Solution" is that it shows how important the question of land and minorities really was. This magisterial work does offer us something new -- an unrivaled account of how the Nazi leadership ended up with a policy of industrialized mass murder of Jews as it fought a war of territorial expansion against the threats supposedly posed by Polish nationalism and Soviet Bolshevism. Probably no one is better qualified for this task than Christopher R. Browning. His earlier works uncovered eager Foreign Office officials trying to second-guess Hitler on the Jewish question, death squads of middle-aged Hamburg policemen, soldiers executing Jews in Serbia amid an escalating partisan war. The way he told it, their actions made genocide seem like an exercise in wartime problem-solving rather than the unfolding of some grand design. Now, in this summation of more than 20 years of research, he explains how the grand design emerged as well, and points the way to a reintegration of the whole subject in a much broader history of nationalist conflict, forced population movements and colonial settlement.

The first thing he conveys is the importance of the war itself. Everything happened so fast. Forget the talk of blueprints for destruction festering in Hitler's mind over decades: genocide was the product of military success after 1939 and the political dilemmas this brought in its wake. The Nazis dreamed of reclaimed lands colonized by racially healthy bodies. As Himmler put it, "One only possesses a land when even the last inhabitant of this territory belongs to one's own people." But as so often happens, others -- in this case Catholic and Jewish Poles -- were already inconveniently living in the proposed "Garden of Eden." Hitler's advisers told him not to talk about military occupation, because they wished to circumvent the requirements of international law "to which we doubtless shall not submit." Their thinking soon became clearer: to establish the new greater Germany that was the war's main purpose, some Polish territory would be annexed and resettled by ethnic Germans repatriated from the Baltic states, South Tyrol and the Soviet Union. Houses, farms and fields would be obtained for them by expelling their non-German owners into what was left of Poland.

The Nazi solution to the Polish question aimed to unmix its intermingled populations by deporting hundreds of thousands of people. Thanks to the lethal combination of an efficient transportation system and extreme racist ideology, no more than a few months were needed to bring about acute overcrowding in the ghettos to the east, labor shortages, sabotage and economic disruption in the west. Over one million destitute Poles, Jewish and non-Jewish, were shunted into rump Poland, but only 200,000 ethnic Germans were settled in their place. It was chaos. There were too many of the wrong sort of bodies, not enough of the right ones -- the usual nationalist nightmare demographics. Browning shows in grim detail how violence created problems that more violence was then called upon to solve.

Tens of thousands of civilians were killed; priests, politicians and teachers were shot in mass executions. There was plenty of talk of "extermination," but as yet the murder of entire populations was not on the agenda. In fact, the Soviets were probably killing more people in eastern Poland than the Germans were in the west. As for its self-inflicted Jewish problem, even in 1940 Berlin hoped emigration would work: a prewar idea to turn

the French colony of Madagascar into a Jewish reservation was taken seriously, until failure to defeat the British relegated it to the scrap-heap. For a while after that, all was confusion and uncertainty; the Catholic Poles were exploited for slave labor, but no one really knew what to do with the Jews of Poland and the Reich, let alone those in the rest of the Continent.

It took three separate developments to allow the idea of systematically killing all the Jews of Europe to crystallize in Hitler's mind. One was the planning for a new kind of total war -- a war of annihilation -- with the Soviet Union. Formed in the spring of 1941, special SS death squads roamed the occupied Soviet territories after the invasion in June. At first they targeted Jewish men and Communists, two categories readily conflated in Nazi minds; but from mid-August they began to massacre Jews of all ages. Evidently their orders had changed and Soviet Jewry was to be wiped out.

At about the same time, in an unrelated development, the main euthanasia program in the Reich itself was wound down in the face of public disquiet. Run from a special office in Hitler's chancellery, this had already killed about 70,000 mentally ill patients through gassing. From September, its unemployed personnel were offering their murderous expertise in the annexed Polish territories and getting a warm response from hard-pressed officials there. In October Himmler commissioned the construction of new killing camps with gas chambers, while other SS mechanics were busy turning ordinary trucks into mobile gas vans. The same month all Jewish emigration from Europe was halted. By this point, Browning argues persuasively, Hitler had decided on "biological annihilation" as the Final Solution to the Jewish Question. The chief killing technology had been found. All that remained was implementation.

*Mark Mazower has recently completed a book on the history of Salonica. He is a professor of history at Birkbeck College, London.*