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Beyond the 'Auschwitz syndrome': Holocaust historiography after the Cold War

DAN STONE

ABSTRACT The end of the Cold war has seen an explosion in Holocaust history, and some significant changes in the main historiographical explanations. The 'return of ideology' that began displacing the 'functionalist' or 'structuralist' dominance of the 1980s remains strong. But it is being supplemented by very detailed regional and local studies, by analyses of different experiences of ghettoization in different places, and by a focus on the widespread plunder and corruption that accompanied the killing process. This enormous attention to detail reveals that the Holocaust unfolded differently in different places; but it also demonstrates the existence of an overall framework in which all the operations took place, what we might call an 'antisemitic consensus'. Simultaneously, historians have broadened the discussion of the Holocaust, situating it into a transnational or world-historical context of imperialism and colonialism. Stone outlines in broad brush some of these themes, and asks what effects they have had and will continue to have on Europeans' self-understanding in an age in which the post-war anti-fascist consensus has been dismantled while Holocaust-consciousness is officially enshrined into European identity.

KEYWORDS antisemitism, collaboration, colonialism, empire, Europe, genocide, historiography, Holocaust, ideology, memory, plunder

Lev Rozhetsky was a schoolboy when the Romanian army, the Wehrmacht's largest ally, occupied southwestern Ukraine. His memoir, recently published in English translation in the important collection *The Unknown Black Book*, is full of terrible stories: girls being tossed into latrines, Jews being tormented, tortured and shot, dogs growing 'fat as rams' on the bodies. The perpetrators in this region, usually led by a thin layer of German commanders, included Romanian gendarmerie and local *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans). What Rozhetsky also observed was the involvement of locals, not always in the murder process itself, but in the looting that accompanied it: 'Having caught the scent of booty, all sorts of dirty

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scoundrels came running from every direction', as he put it.[1] Another survivor, the student Sara Gleykh from Mariupol in Ukraine, wrote: 'The neighbours waited like vultures for us to leave the apartment.' The same neighbours then 'quarrelled over things before my eyes, snatching things out of each others' hands and dragging off pillows, pots and pans, quilts'.[2] As historian Joshua Rubenstein notes, in the Baltic region and western Ukraine especially, but generally throughout eastern Europe, 'it was as if the population understood, without much prodding by the Germans, that there were no limits on what they could do to their Jewish neighbours'.[3] From Horyngrad-Krypa in Volhynia, where Ukrainians armed with axes, knives and boards spiked with nails murdered thirty local Jews, to Kaunas, where the famous 'death dealer' of the city was photographed clubbing Jews to death with an iron bar, there is no shortage of evidence to back up Rubenstein's claim.

Apart from adding to the store of horror, what these memoirs reveal, from a historian's point of view, is that the dominant historiographical explanations of the Holocaust need to be rethought. Historical scholarship on the Holocaust has been, until fairly recently, under the sway of an analysis that sees the murder of the Jews as an 'industrial genocide'—implemented on the basis of a eugenic world-view that regarded Jews as an inferior 'race'—that came into being in an *ad hoc*, or reactive, fashion, as changing circumstances in the war narrowed the Nazi regime's horizons, necessitating the urgent execution of a programme that might have looked very different had Germany won the war.

More recent, micro-historical studies are beginning to reshape this picture. For some time, historians have put an emphasis on Nazi 'ideology', especially antisemitism, as opposed to 'structure', with the aim of proving the importance of agency, and showing that the Third Reich's leaders believed what they said.[4] But newer studies add nuance to this picture, which appears too neat. Replacing 'structure' with 'intention', even if one talks of a 'modified intentionalism',[5] offers perhaps too coherent an image of the Third Reich and how it functioned.[6] If the historiographical consensus

1 Lev Rozhetsky, 'My life in a fascist prison', in Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman (eds), *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, trans. from the Russian by Christopher Morris and Joshua Rubenstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008), 128.

2 Sara Gleykh, 'The destruction of the Jews of Mariupol', in ibid., 216.

3 Joshua Rubenstein, 'The war and the Final Solution on the Russian front', in ibid., 13.

4 Dalia Ofer, 'Holocaust historiography: the return of antisemitism and ethnic stereotypes as major themes', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1999, 87–106.

5 Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2006).

6 As noted by Alon Confino, 'A world without Jews: interpreting the Holocaust', *German History*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2009, 540–1. And see the essays in Mark Roseman, Devin Pendas and Richard Wetzell (eds), *Beyond the Racial State* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press forthcoming 2011).

now seems to suggest that centre–periphery relations were key to the decision-making process, and that Jewish policy was made on the hoof but always in the context of the perpetrators' broadly shared antisemitic consensus, it has also become clear that, below the highest leadership stratum, participation in the killing process itself and its bureaucracy cannot be put down simply to antisemitism. The pursuit of plunder and economic gain has resurfaced as a factor after decades, although, as we will see, in a different way from the interpretations of the 1960s. And the murder of the Jews, while still retaining its significance as the most urgent and most complete of the Nazis' genocidal projects, is increasingly seen as but one of several interlocking and inseparable projects of genocide.[7] This insight in turn leads historians to see the Holocaust in the context of Nazi empire-building, and to ask whether this history might be connected to earlier histories of European overseas colonialism. On the one hand, then, the picture is messier—with a wider range of perpetrators participating for a variety of reasons—and broader—with the Holocaust situated in the context of more extensive Nazi demographic schemes as well as the context of world history—but without, one hopes, losing a sense of the ideological basis of the whole project that the Third Reich's leaders insisted upon and that gave it coherence. In what follows, I will pick up these themes and show how, since the end of the Cold War, the 'discovery' of eastern Europe at the heart of the genocidal process is reshaping our understanding of the Holocaust.

Contextualizing Auschwitz

In western Europe, our image of the Holocaust centres on Auschwitz-Birkenau, the infamous death camp that has become an icon of evil. The notoriety is justified: after all, Auschwitz was, as one historian puts it, the 'capital of the Holocaust', where Jews and Roma from all over Europe were sent to be killed.[8] With its numerous auxiliary camps spread around the area of Upper Silesia, Auschwitz was also a major centre for slave-labour-based industry (which, economically speaking, achieved little but

7 Robert Gellately, 'The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and visions of serial genocide', in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (eds), *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2003), 241–63; Christopher R. Browning, 'The Nazi empire', in Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 407–25.

8 Peter Hayes, 'Auschwitz, capital of the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, 330–50.

caused unfathomable misery and pain to many tens of thousands of inmates).[9] Yet Auschwitz is not synonymous with the Holocaust *per se*, which was a Europe-wide phenomenon, much of which appears more akin to colonial massacres than to the iconic image of the death camp. Rather, an aptly named 'Auschwitz syndrome', which has kept us fascinated by the apparent paradox of modern technology being employed in the service of mass murder, has stopped us from seeing other aspects of the Holocaust.[10] If one really wants to look into the heart of darkness, then the relatively unknown Aktion Reinhard camps come quickly to mind. Along with Chełmno in the Warthegau (part of western Poland incorporated into the Reich), where Jews were first murdered using gas vans, the small Aktion Reinhard camps (named after Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) murdered by Czech partisans in 1942) of Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka were responsible, in the short period of their operation—all were dismantled by the end of 1943—for the deaths of more than 1.5 million Jews.[11] Established by Odilo Globocnik, the SS- und Polizeiführer (SS and Police Leader) in Lublin, these were 'pure' death camps, serving no purpose other than murder. And the process was unpleasant beyond belief. For too long we have talked about the 'modernity' of the killing process, shielding the reality from ourselves with talk of 'industrial genocide', as if it were a clean, smooth, technical matter. In fact, the motor engines that produced the carbon monoxide (Zyklon B was used only at Auschwitz and Majdanek) often broke down, causing an excruciatingly slow death. Besides, these sites were brutal and violent; situated in the 'wild east', the guards—again, a thin layer of German officers and then mostly Ukrainians (former Soviet POWs)—were often drunk, and an undisciplined atmosphere prevailed, as the wealth

9 Jan Erik Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS. Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933–1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh 2001); Michael Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2002); Jan Erik Schulte, 'Zwangsarbeit für die SS: Juden in der Ostindustrie GmbH', and Bernd C. Wagner, 'Gerüchte, Wissen, Verdrängung: die IG Auschwitz und das Vernichtungslager Birkenau', both in Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher and Bernd C. Wagner (eds), *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik* (Munich: K. G. Saur 2000), 43–74 and 231–48.

10 Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, 'Introduction', in Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (eds), *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008), 6.

11 Shmuel Krakowski, *Das Todeslager Chelmno/Kulmhof: der Beginn der Endlösung* (Göttingen: Wallstein 2007); Yitzhak Arad, *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1987); Bogdan Musial (ed.), *'Aktion Reinhardt': der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernement 1941–1944* (Osnabrück: Fibre 2004).

that accumulated from the transports attracted prostitutes and bounty-hunters.[12]

But fewer than half of the victims of the Holocaust were killed in camps and, of those that were, some 1.2 million died in concentration camps proper, that is, those camps run by the SS's Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Concentration Camps Inspectorate) and the Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (Main Economic and Administrative Office), and not the 'pure' death camps.[13] Before the Nazis set up death camps in occupied Poland in 1942, about 1.5 million Jews were shot in face-to-face massacres. Some historians have observed that a 'festive' or 'carnivalesque' atmosphere dominated at the mass shootings that took place in the first sweep through eastern Poland and the Soviet Union in 1941–2.[14] Photographs depicting laughing perpetrators at forest clearings and cheering locals in German and eastern European towns are not hard to find. Auschwitz remains central to our understanding, but the history of the Holocaust has become much more complex, as historians discover more about the other death camps, about perpetrators other than the SS—for example, the German Ordnungspolizei (Order Police), the Wehrmacht, local gendarmerie and auxiliary police (more than 100,000 men served in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine's police force)—about the role played by concentration and forced labour camps (as opposed to death camps), about the almost inexplicable death marches,[15] and about motivations for local participation beyond the catch-all of antisemitism, such as greed. As Timothy Snyder points out, although Auschwitz is located in Poland, actually very few Polish or Soviet Jews

12 See, for example, the descriptions in Jules Schelvis, *Sobibor: A History of a Nazi Death Camp*, trans. from the Dutch by Karin Dixon (Oxford: Berg 2007); Witold Chrostowski, *Extermination Camp Treblinka* (London: Vallentine Mitchell 2004); Jacek Andrzej Młynarczyk, 'Treblinka—ein Todeslager der "Aktion Reinhard"', in Musial (ed.), *'Aktion Reinhardt'*; Michael Wildt, 'Die Lager im Osten: kommentierende Bemerkungen', in Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth and Christoph Dieckmann (eds), *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, 2 vols (Frankfurt on Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 2002), i.508–20.

13 Dieter Pohl, 'The Holocaust and the concentration camps', in Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (eds), *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (London and New York: Routledge 2010), 149.

14 Omer Bartov, 'Eastern Europe as the site of genocide', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2008, 576; Frank Bajohr, 'The "folk community" and the persecution of the Jews: German society under National Socialist dictatorship, 1933–45', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2006, 195; Konrad Kwiet, 'Perpetrators and the Final Solution', in Stephanie McMahon-Kaye (ed.), *The Memory of the Holocaust in the 21st Century: The Challenge for Education* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2001), 79.

15 On which the historiography is sparse. See Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little, Brown 1996), chs 13 and 14, and, especially, works by Daniel Blatman: 'The death marches and the final phase of Nazi genocide', in Caplan and Wachsmann (eds), *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany*, 167–85, and *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, trans. from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011).

were killed there; thus the largest victim groups—religiously orthodox Jews from eastern Europe—are excluded from the most famous symbol of the Holocaust.[16] Historians such as Snyder and Omer Bartov have also begun to investigate local ethnic relations before the war in the complex societies of the eastern European borderlands, whose ethnic homogeneity today (a result of the Communists finishing off in the immediate post-war years what the Nazis had begun) is a far cry from the melange of populations that existed before 1939. They show that, before the war, many regions that had been places of relative ethnic harmony had, like western Volhynia in 1943, become 'the battlefield of a multi-sided civil war', 'with Soviet Ukrainian partisans, Ukrainian nationalist partisans, Polish self-defense outposts, and the German police all engaged'.[17]

Antisemitism and the return of the economic

The renewed emphasis on plunder and looting as motivating factors is applicable not only to individuals but at the macro level too. In the 1960s, there was a fashion for the Marxist-inspired idea that Nazism was a creature of big business, that is, that Hitler was bankrolled by capitalists who unleashed fascism to protect their interests and to prevent the increasingly militant masses from recognizing theirs. In the wake of the emphasis on 'race' and ideology of the last twenty years or so, that paradigm virtually disappeared. It became clear that the Nazi regime controlled big business, not the other way round, and that its leaders believed in their ideology, especially in what Saul Friedländer calls 'redemptive antisemitism'.[18] In recent years, however, historians have once again started talking of the Third Reich as a 'gangster regime' or as a 'kleptocracy', albeit this time round without giving top priority to economic motives. Jonathan Petropoulos, for example, remarks that 'the Nazis were not only the most notorious murderers in history but also the greatest thieves'.[19] At all levels, individual,

16 Timothy Snyder, 'Holocaust: the ignored reality', *New York Review of Books*, 16 July 2009.

17 Timothy Snyder, 'The life and death of Western Volhynian Jewry, 1921–1945', in Brandon and Lower (eds), *The Shoah in Ukraine*, 102. See also Bartov, 'Eastern Europe as the site of genocide'; Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007); Yehuda Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2010).

18 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution 1933–1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1997), ch. 3. For discussion, see Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (eds), *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedländer and the Future of Holocaust Studies* (London: Continuum 2010).

19 Jonathan Petropoulos, 'The Nazi kleptocracy: reflections on avarice and the Holocaust', in Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2006), 34.

institutional, state-led and Europe-wide, the killing process was accompanied by plunder on a fantastic scale.[20]

The Holocaust was not driven by economics, but it is clear that the possibility of financial gain was a motivating factor. The Nazis carefully calculated the value of the goods taken from Jews at death camps, and they fleeced occupied countries such as the Netherlands in a remarkably thorough way. Agencies such as the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg were set up to co-ordinate the theft of artworks across Europe, and the German population was rendered complicit in the murders by the distribution of clothes from dead Jews through the 'Winter Help' charity or at 'Jew markets', like the one that took place in Hamburg.[21] Studies of perpetrators have revealed that they were not all dyed-in-the-wool antisemites, but took part in killing operations for many reasons, including peer pressure, the influence of alcohol, and the expectations of their comrades and superiors.[22] And neither were locals across eastern Europe simply antisemites who killed their neighbours at the first opportunity, but people who, in a desperately poor region, saw the 'elimination' of the Jews as a chance to acquire some material goods. Extermination and enrichment went hand in hand as, all across Europe, at individual, agency and state levels, greed, corruption and plunder proved inseparable from the process of murder.[23]

Antisemitism remains key because it was the regime's driving force, that is, the framework that permitted various actors with different motives to come together. But the complexities of real life mean that we should not be satisfied with antisemitism as an explanation. Antisemitism had long existed, and one needs an explanation as to what generated genocide at this particular point in time, in a region where Jews and Gentiles had co-existed for centuries. One reason, of course, is that the regime and thus the state believed in the paranoid conspiracy theory that the Jews were colonizing Germany and were a threat to world stability; previously, antisemitism had remained at the social level. But that explanation concerns only the core of the Nazi regime, and does not account for the continent-wide participation in the killing process. There are cases of people, such as Metropolitan Sheptytsky, head of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine,

20 Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2008).

21 Frank Bajohr, *'Aryanization' in Hamburg: The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of Their Property in Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2002).

22 See the survey in Gerhard Paul, 'Von Psychopathen, Technokraten und "ganz gewöhnlichen" Deutschen: die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung', in Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein 2002), 13–90.

23 Frank Bajohr, 'The Holocaust and corruption', in Gerald D. Feldman and Wolfgang Seibel (eds), *Networks of Nazi Persecution: Bureaucracy, Business and the Organization of the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2005), 118–38.

who both condemned and condoned the Nazis at different junctures. One helpful approach is to think of an 'antisemitic consensus': whatever the actual motives of perpetrators, whether greed or envy or hatred, they knew that the regime was fighting a 'war against the Jews' and that they could get away with just about anything as long as they paid lip-service to that project.[24] As Wolfgang Seibel, one of the foremost historians of the polycratic organization of the Holocaust, observes:

> Utilitarian motivation of institutional actors was, presumably, the main source of radicalization. Anti-Semitism and state coercion, nonetheless, remained the constitutive basis of persecution ... anti-Semitism represented a kind of convertible currency. Whatever the personal *Weltanschauung*, as soon as peripheral actors had something to offer the 'center' that fitted the anti-Semitic agenda they could expect advantages in exchange.[25]

Investigations into motivation do not seek to exculpate, but to provide answers to the question of how antisemitism could be activated and radicalized at a certain moment. If we do not ask this and other questions, we end up with the 'lachrymose narrative' of Jewish history that is unable to distinguish the Holocaust from a nineteenth-century pogrom. For the Jews who were killed, of course, the result was the same: the motivating factors and the backgrounds of the perpetrators may have been heterogeneous, but the murderous effect was strikingly homogeneous.[26]

'Discovering' eastern Europe

But to ask after perpetrator motivation leads one ultimately to a dead end: the individual psychology of perpetrators cannot be isolated from more important social factors. That is why so much research has been done on the conditions under which the murder process took place. However, although

24 On the 'antisemitic consensus', see Mark Roseman, 'Ideas, contexts, and the pursuit of genocide', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2003, 83; Michael Wildt, 'Gewalt als Partizipation: der Nationalsozialismus als Ermächtigungsregime', in Alf Lüdtke and Michael Wildt (eds), *Staats-Gewalt: Ausnahmezustand und Sicherheitsregimes. Historische Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein 2008), 236–8; Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Massenmord und schlechtes Gewissen: die deutsche Bevölkerung, die NS-Führung und der Holocaust* (Frankfurt on Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 2008), 10.

25 Wolfgang Seibel, 'A market for mass crime? Inter-institutional competition and the initiation of the Holocaust in France, 1940–1942', *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, vol. 5, no. 3–4, 2002, 236.

26 As is explained in, for example, Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2003), 450; Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2000), 169.

the vast majority of Jews murdered in the Holocaust came from and were murdered in eastern Europe, we know far more about the Holocaust in western Europe. We know about survival rates, resistance, opportunities for hiding, rescue attempts, the role of local police forces and bureaucracies in listing, rounding up and deporting Jews, and we have very precise lists of deportations, especially for France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The stories of rescue in Denmark and Italy have been told many times, even if the temptingly pleasing notion of Italians as *brava gente* has come in for something of a battering recently, with historians arguing that the Italians' refusal to deport Jews (until the chaotic and brutal final stages of the war under the Salò Republic) owed more to a desire to establish their sovereignty *vis-à-vis* Nazi Germany than to altruism pure and simple.[27] Again, for the Jews concerned, whatever the case, the result was the same. Where Jews survived it tended, paradoxically, to be in Axis countries whose regimes sought to assert their independence from German authority, as in the case of Italy, Finland and Bulgaria (excluding Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia), or places where the German occupation was thin on the ground and the power of the SS to urge on the local police was therefore relatively weak, as in France, where 75 per cent of the Jews survived the war.[28]

But, for eastern Europe, it is only since the 1990s that historians have been able to produce detailed studies of places such as Serbia, Belarus, Galicia, Lithuania, Estonia or Transnistria, as previously inaccessible archives were opened, at least for long enough for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to acquire copies of most of the documents. Histories of the ghettos, for example, especially ghettos about which almost nothing was known, such as short-lived examples in the Soviet Union, are now being written.[29] They confirm, on the one hand, the apparently 'functionalist' argument that there was no single ghettoization policy or experience, and that local conditions led to varying outcomes. On the other hand, it is clear that, as Sara Bender writes, for all their differences, 'all the ghettos had one thing in

27 Davide Rodogno, '*Italiani brava gente*? Fascist Italy's policy towards the Jews in the Balkans, April 1941–July 1943', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2005, 213–40; Guri Schwarz, 'On myth making and nation building: the genesis of the "myth of the good Italian", 1943–1947', *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2008, 111–43; MacGregor Knox, 'Die faschistische Italien und die "Endlösung" 1942/43', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2007, 53–92.

28 Renée Poznanski, *Jews in France during World War II*, trans. from the French by Nathan Bracher (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England 2001); Ahlrich Meyer, *Täter im Verhör: die 'Endlösung der Judenfrage' in Frankreich 1940–1944* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2005).

29 Geoffrey P. Megargee (ed.), *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933–1945*, 7 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2009-); Guy Miron (ed.), *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust*, 2 vols (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2009).

common: they were all doomed to extinction.'[30] Ghettoization may not have been undertaken with a view to deporting Jews to death camps, but it marked a significant milestone on the road to genocide, and was itself genocidal.[31] Once again, the existence of an antisemitic consensus among the perpetrators seems clear: debates between so-called 'attritionists' and 'productionists' (who wanted to keep Jews temporarily alive for labour) show that, ultimately, both were in accord about the eventual outcome.[32]

To give another example, where very little was known about the Holocaust in Romania, now there are numerous studies that show in great detail something that Nicolai Ceauşescu's 'national Stalinist' regime wanted to hide: namely, that Romania undertook to solve the 'Jewish question' in 'the Romanian way'. That is to say, the Jews of Romania (not including Northern Transylvania, which was ceded to Hungary in 1940) and of Transnistria were mostly killed not by Germans but by Romanians. Ion Antonescu, Romania's ruler, did not have to be bullied by Hitler into deporting the Jews. Nor was Hitler able to prevent Antonescu from ordering plans to deport the Jews of the Regat— the 'old kingdom' of Moldavia and Wallachia—to be halted as the fortunes of war began to turn against the Germans, which is why most of the Jews of Bucharest survived the war.[33] In Antonescu's understanding of the world, as in that of Himmler who entertained negotiations with Jewish groups on the same basis in the war's late stages, the Jews were omnipotent; thus, protecting the Jews of the Regat would, he believed, win him some sympathy from the Jewish-controlled Allies.[34]

Romania is exceptional since, although it was firmly within the Germans' orbit, it remained a sovereign state and was never occupied by the Wehrmacht. But other countries, such as the Independent State of Croatia

30 Sara Bender, *The Jews of Białystok during World War II and the Holocaust*, trans. from the Hebrew by Yaffa Murciano (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England 2009), 293.

31 Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust*, trans. from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).

32 Christopher R. Browning, 'Before the "final solution": Nazi ghettoization policy in Poland (1940–1941)', in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, *Ghettos 1939–1945: New Research and Perspectives on Definition, Daily Life and Survival, Symposium Presentations* (Washington, D.C.: USHMM 2005), 1–13.

33 Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee 2000); Jean Ancel, 'The German-Romanian relationship and the Final Solution', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2005, 252–75; Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940–1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2006); Mihail E. Ionescu and Liviu Rotman (eds), *The Holocaust and Romania: History and Contemporary Significance* (Bucharest: Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History 2003).

34 Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1994).

(Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH), often referred to inaccurately as a 'puppet state', and Slovakia, under the rule of clerico-fascist Jozef Tiso, also to some extent forced the pace of Jewish policy. With regard to German-occupied eastern Europe, especially Poland, and the lands of the western Soviet Union, including the Baltic states, Ukraine and Belarus, historians can now show in great detail how the 'final solution' developed in different places at different times as a result of interaction between local commanders and central directives from Berlin. They can also show that, although the Holocaust was a German-led plan, there should be no surprise that throughout Europe it proved possible to mobilize large numbers in the project of killing Jews.[35] The pace of killing was quickened, especially when 'centre' and 'periphery' met, as when Himmler visited his men in the field in Ukraine or Lithuania.[36] Although it is now clear, as 'functionalist' historians long maintained, that there was no single, simple plan to murder the Jews of Europe, and that policy developed reactively and in an *ad hoc* manner, on the basis of considerable competition between different Nazi agencies, it is equally clear that the various perpetrator groups shared the objective of eliminating the Jews. As historians have analysed in detail the complex reality on the ground in a series of 'regional studies',[37] so they have begun to describe the occupation and population policies the Germans undertook there as akin to overseas colonialism.

The Holocaust as 'colonial genocide'

Indeed, few historical debates have been as controversial as that concerning the applicability of the term 'colonialism' to the occupation of eastern Europe, or of 'colonial genocide' to the treatment of the Slavs and, especially, the Jews. With the rise of world and transnational history, historians have increasingly been tempted to understand the Holocaust as one case of genocide among many. Genocide studies as a discipline has itself undergone considerable change in the last decade, mainly thanks to a renewed focus on

35 See Donald Bloxham, 'Europe, the Final Solution and the dynamics of intent', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2010, 317–35; and Donald Bloxham, 'The Holocaust and European history', in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books forthcoming 2011).

36 Wendy Lower, '"Anticipatory obedience" and the Nazi implementation of the Holocaust in the Ukraine: a case study of central and peripheral forces in the Generalbezirk Zhytomyr, 1941–1944', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2002, 1–22; Jürgen Matthäus, 'Controlled escalation: Himmler's men in the summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2007, 218–42; Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: Biographie* (Munich: Siedler 2008).

37 See Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2000).

the work of Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term 'genocide' in his 1944 classic work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.[38] Lemkin argued that the destruction of a people that he termed 'genocide' was not synonymous with mass killing. Rather, the process 'has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.' Lemkin's stress on the interaction of two groups and the ultimate overcoming of the one by the other sounds, as historians have noticed, much like a description of colonialism. Can the Holocaust be understood as a 'colonial genocide'?[39]

First, such an understanding requires finessing the commonly held definition of 'genocide' as state-led mass murder. If genocide occurred in the European overseas colonies, such as in North America or Australia, it usually did so without explicit orders from the colonial authorities, even if the colonial project as such implicitly authorized the process. But the Holocaust was a state-led crime. Furthermore, attacks on indigenous people in overseas colonies were carried out in order to acquire their land. But the Jews in Europe were for the most part not landowners, and they were a minority population across the continent (albeit a substantial one in Poland, the western Soviet Union and a few major cities and regions). So, where the occupation of eastern Europe and the treatment of the local populations, especially in Ukraine and Poland, can be seen as akin to the colonial treatment of 'natives'—forcing them to live in very poor conditions, eliminating leadership and educated strata, denying cultural expression and restricting food supply—the way in which the Nazis dealt with the Jews was altogether different and much more radically straightforward. Jews simply had no place in the Nazi universe.[40] Although we now know that surprisingly large numbers of Jews survived in forced labour camps that were outside the SS-run camp system, there can be little doubt that their deaths were merely being deferred.[41]

These important differences between the treatment of Jews and Slavs notwithstanding, many historians have found the vocabulary of colonialism

38 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1944); Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds), *The Origins of Genocide: Raphael Lemkin as a Historian of Mass Violence* (London: Routledge 2009). On genocide studies as a discipline, see Bloxham and Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*; Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2008).

39 A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone (eds), *Colonialism and Genocide* (London: Routledge 2007); Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Kolonialer Genozid? Vom Nutzen und Nachteil einer historischen Kategorie für eine Globalgeschichte', in Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz:Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster: LIT 2009), 131–50.

40 John Connelly, 'Nazis and Slavs: from racial theory to racist practice', *Central European History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1999, 1–33.

41 Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2006).

and imperialism fruitful for thinking about Nazi rule in Europe. From tracing lines of continuity (in personnel, military practices or ideas about cultural superiority) from the German colonies, especially Southwest Africa, where the Herero and Nama people were victims of genocide in the war of 1904–8, to analysing Hitler's admiration for British rule in India or westward expansion in the United States, the Holocaust is increasingly set within a world-historical framework. Although some fear that this process will lead to the Holocaust losing its supposed 'uniqueness', the cohort of historians that has done the most to advance comparative genocide studies in recent years—including Jürgen Zimmerer, Donald Bloxham, Dirk Moses, Scott Straus *et al.* —is careful to stress that, even if one can establish broad frameworks for understanding, this need not come at the expense of the specificity of any particular event. The argument about colonialism is meant to supplement, not replace, other sources for understanding the forces that drove the Holocaust. The discussion of the Holocaust in the context of comparative genocide is not undertaken with the aim of 'downplaying' the Holocaust, whatever that might mean in the context of other terrible atrocities.[42]

After the brutal stability of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War and the opening of archives in the former Communist countries has helped to reignite interest in the explosive issues of slave labour reparations, Nazi gold, victims' bank accounts and looted art, now combined with a sophisticated methodological approach to Nazi perpetrators drawn from management theory, with its vocabulary of 'networks', 'competencies' and 'inter-agency competition'.[43] German firms have also opened their archives, and detailed studies of business during the Third Reich now exist, ranging from company histories (such as those of Volkswagen or Deutsche Bank) to analyses of the insurance and banking systems. All make clear the extent to which the 'ordinary' institutions of a modern capitalist society functioned, in the Third Reich, as agents of theft, impoverishment and, ultimately, murder.[44] One other consequence of the end of the Cold War has been an increasing awareness that the Holocaust

42 Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz*; A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2008).

43 Feldman and Seibel (eds), *Networks of Nazi Persecution*.

44 Christopher Kobrak and Andrea H. Schneider, 'Big business and the Third Reich: an appraisal of the historical arguments', in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2004), 141–72; Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener (eds), *Business and Industry in Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2004); Martin Dean, Constantin Goeschler and Philipp Ther (eds), *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books 2007).

was a transnational phenomenon involving almost every state in Europe. Hence, countries from Portugal to Latvia have established national commissions to enquire into their role in the Holocaust and, hence, the decision at the Stockholm Forum in 2000 to make 27 January Holocaust Memorial Day. This is by no means an uncontested decision: as historians expose the continent-wide dimension of the genocide, so the caricature of Nazism as the product of 'evil' that has nothing to do with 'us' dissipates and so the resentment at what many regard as the tarnishing of national honour increases. Nowhere is this process clearer than in post-Communist eastern Europe, where struggles over memory have resurfaced after the suppression of the Cold War, and where the meaning of the Second World War is inseparable from the 'second dictatorship' of post-1945 Communist rule.

Remarkably, the further we get from the Second World War, the more fierce the battle over its meaning grows.[45] The end of the Cold War's brutal stability means that views that were previously marginal or even lunatic have resurfaced, and the anti-fascist consensus on which post-war Europe was built has been radically challenged. In many countries, that consensus has been more or less totally dismantled. In Silvio Berlusconi's Italy, for example, the so-called 'post-fascist' narrative that all Italians were victims has become the norm. It is no coincidence that anti-immigrant violence and the politics of celebrity are notable features of the current Italian scene.[46] In Russia, by contrast, the anti-fascist narrative that provided moral legitimacy to the Communist regimes, sustaining them for longer than might otherwise have been possible, has been reinforced, albeit in caricatured form. The Great Patriotic War (the Russian term for the Second World War of 1941–5) was a source of great pride in the Soviet Union, and it is thus hardly surprising that Putin and his successors have tried to maintain its presence, at the forefront of Russian minds, as a source of national pride.[47]

In that context, the Holocaust is certainly abused, but it is also brought to the fore in ways and in places where it was previously unknown or massively bowdlerized. For example, in museums from Budapest to Tallinn, the murder of the Jews is often presented as little more than a sideshow compared with the 'second Holocaust' of the Hungarian or Estonian people. Here, memory of the Holocaust is placed at the service of an anti-Communist narrative, and national heroes are drawn from the pantheon

45 Adam Krzeminski, 'As many wars as nations: the myths and truths of World War II', trans. from the Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, *signandsight.com* (online), 6 April 2005, available at www.signandsight.com/features/96.html (viewed 9 September 2010).

46 Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri (eds), *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe* (London: Routledge 2010).

47 Gregory Carleton, 'Victory in death: annihilation narratives in Russia today', *History & Memory*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, 135–68; Thomas C. Wolfe, 'Past as present, myth, or history? Discourses of time and the Great Fatherland War', in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (eds), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2006), 249–83.

of interwar nationalists, antisemites and fascists.[48] On the other hand, the countries of eastern Europe also place new emphasis on the Holocaust because the European Union has enshrined Holocaust memory in its mission. At the same time as eastern European history books and museums challenge what they perceive as 'smug' western narratives about the defeat of Nazism—in countries where there was no subsequent experience of Communism—they also promote Holocaust memory as a way of proving that they are 'on board' with the mainstream European understanding of the past.[49] By bringing out the massive complexity of the event, new narratives of the Holocaust also contribute to new contests in Europe's ongoing memory wars. The way in which they are resolved will be an important barometer of the state of European civilization.[50]

Dan Stone is Professor of Modern History at Royal Holloway, University of London. His most recent book is *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press 2010).

48 James Mark, 'Containing fascism: history in post-Communist Baltic occupation and genocide museums', in Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (eds), *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press 2008), 335–69.

49 Maria Mälksoo, 'The memory politics of becoming European: the East European subalterns and the collective memory of Europe', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2009, 653–80. See also Claus Leggewie, 'A tour of the battleground: the seven circles of pan-European memory', *Social Research*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2008, 217–34; Robert Bideleux, 'Rethinking the eastward extension of the EU civil order and the nature of Europe's new east–west divide', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2009, 118–6.

50 For more detail, see my 'Memory wars in the "new Europe"', in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press forthcoming 2011).

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