

Eradicating Differences

Eradicating Differences:
The Treatment of Minorities
in Nazi-Dominated Europe

Edited by

Anton Weiss-Wendt

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Published in Association with the Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities,
Oslo, Norway

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2368-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2368-5

To Stephanie Rosenblatt and Martin Cosand

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FOREWORD

The present volume is a substantial, wholly new, contribution to Holocaust scholarship. Each of the essays in this collection adds substantively and substantially to our ever-expanding understanding of the murder of European Jewry during the Second World War. All of the pieces are thoughtful and learned, and encourage both deeper reflection and a re-examination of present understandings of a wide variety of elemental historical aspects related to the racial and political policies of the Third Reich. Each in its own way—by focusing on specific ethnic, religious, and national groups and a variety of important, yet often neglected, geographical locations—helps us to piece together more fully and adequately the overall narrative of what happened across Nazi-occupied Europe. One is particularly struck by the wide range of geographical locations taken up and analyzed by the contributors, all of whom possess a deep knowledge of the local history of the state or region being reviewed. Moreover, these local histories reveal how the common ideological and political policies emanating from the center of the Reich in Berlin were significantly affected by factors that one might fairly describe as indigenous.

The opening two essays, by Dr. Hans-Hermann Dirksen and Dr. Geoffrey J. Giles, focus their attention, respectively, on the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and of Homosexuals outside of Germany. The former rightly stresses the fact that in the Nazi state the religious belief of the Witnesses put them in a necessarily adversarial position vis-à-vis the ruling authorities, and he reminds us of the oft-forgotten fact that Nazi authorities persecuted Witnesses throughout occupied Europe. On his statistics, 10,700 individuals who were members of the group throughout Europe, "suffered under the Nazi Terror in Europe," and of these, 1,500 died as a result of the persecutions. Thus the Witnesses' truly heroic defense of, and fidelity to, their religious beliefs came at a significant price. At the same time, however, the important data and analysis provided by Dirksen suggests that there was a certain lack of consistency on the part of the Nazi state vis-à-vis this theologically defined community.

A second minority persecuted by the Third Reich, homosexuals, is dealt with knowledgeably by Dr. Giles' study. It raises the important question as to whether the Third Reich treated homosexuals outside of

Germany in the same way as those inside of Germany. Drawing on a very broad and little known array of sources regarding the pattern of persecutions in France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Prague, and Budapest, Giles concludes, with a certain degree of methodological speculation, that the answer to this question is essentially, "yes." That is to say, "from the evidence presented...it does not appear that the German authorities showed much greater toleration toward non-Germans." Given the evidentiary foundation on which this conclusion is based, other scholars who are experts on this subject will want to rigorously re-examine the question. But whether they agree or disagree with Giles' conclusion they will owe him a debt for his provocative and suggestive work and for raising the essential questions he has asked.

The next two essays deal knowledgeably with Nazi racial policy toward Slavs in Czech lands and in Poland, and with the *Goralenvolk*, a little known minority community of so-called Aryans in southern Poland. In the first of these contributions, Dr. Richard Weikart evaluates fundamental aspects of Hitler's anti-Slavic program as this was incarnated vis-à-vis Czechs and Poles. In the course of working through the relevant materials on this matter Weikart advances two repercussive conclusions. First, the Nazis were not seeking to annihilate Slavs but, rather, intended to subjugate them and, as necessary, deport them from territory controlled by and designated for Aryans only. Second, the Third Reich truly believed in its racial dogmas. There was nothing opportunistic or merely instrumental about this commitment. These claims will be interrogated and questioned by some readers but I believe Dr. Weikart is absolutely correct with regard to both of them.

Complementing the discussion of Slavic policy is Katarzyna Szurmiak's well conceived essay on the unusual subject of the *Goralenvolk*, a small group that resided in Poland and that was identified by the Third Reich as being of Aryan descent. Through her investigations of this community Szurmiak shows, from a very novel angle, how Nazi racial policy was at the core of its political activities. Thus her essay reinforces, in its own distinctive way, the centrality accorded racial principles by the Hitler state, already emphasized by Weikart, and challenges, on the basis of yet another interesting example, those who would minimize the role that racial beliefs played in the world of National Socialism. In addition, the exploration of the practical effects of Nazi racial policy in this arena reveals that while it managed to create a breach in the local community among the Goralian population it had little real success politically or militarily, even in this distinctive community.

Next follow four impressive studies on, respectively, the Crimea and the Caucasus, the western borderlands of the Soviet Union, the persecution of Jews and Roma in wartime Croatia, and the persecution of different groups in Slovenia. In the first of these essays, Dr. Kiril Feferman illuminates Nazi policy toward specific, local, Muslim groups. In the Crimea, the Wehrmacht befriended the Tartars, who welcomed the German forces as liberators, while in the North Caucasus, other Muslim groups sided with the Nazi invaders for their own political reasons and were, in turn, treated as “semi allies” by them. The Crimean Tartars, in fact, went so far as to form military units that fought alongside Einsatzgruppe D in the region. In addition, this examination again visits the unusual situation in which marginal Jewish groups in these regions, for example, the Karaites in the Crimea and the mountain Jews in the Caucasus, were defined as racially non-Jewish and were therefore spared annihilation. This benign outcome is to be compared to, for example, the fate of the Krimchakes, who Himmler decided were racially Jewish and were therefore murdered by Einsatzgruppe D under the command of Otto Ohlendorf. Feferman’s rich analysis also has two larger significant implications. First, it broadens our understanding of Nazi foreign policy as it actually unfolded in different locations and in relationship to diverse ethnic and religious populations. Second, it prompts us to consider the broader links between the Hitler regime and the Muslim world, of which the policy in the Crimea and the North Caucasus was only one manifestation.

The essay, “The Civil Wars in the Soviet Western Borderlands, 1941-1945,” by Dr. Alexander Prusin deconstructs the Ukrainian-Polish conflict over territory and the Polish-Lithuanian dispute over Vilnius. He does a thorough job of explaining both how these regional conflicts were played out through partisan and related activity during the war years and how these antagonisms influenced the larger course of events. This is “thick description,” done with unusual erudition and control of the political and military details of the two civil wars under review.

The third essay in this group deciphers the nature and meaning of the notorious Ustaša violence in newly independent Croatia during the war. Croatia, energized by a primitive, barbaric, nationalism was, as is well known, a truly terrible place during the war for its 40,000 Jews, its 30,000 Roma, and its Serbs—some 315,000 Serbs were killed and another half million were deported or converted to Catholicism. Dr. Alexander Korb helps us to better understand why. He correctly points both to the influence of local political rivalries, as well as to rivalries between foreign states such as Italy and Germany interested in Croatian affairs. In doing so

he extends our understanding of Ustaša ethno-nationalist aims and actions through a multi-dimensional, decipherment that properly emphasizes, despite outside pressures, the significance of local Ustaša initiatives and agency.

The last piece in this set of four, by Dr. Andrej Pančur, centers on the similarities and differences between Jewish and Slovenian victims of Nazi persecution. The Nazi agenda in Slovenia, following the conquest of that country in mid-April 1941, was “Germanization” and the integration of the territory with the Greater Reich. This involved, as Dr. Pančur describes in helpful detail, the expulsion of that part of the local population—Jewish, Slovene, Sinti and Roma—considered racially alien and beyond the possibility of Germanization. In consequence, a segment of the Jewish population of Slovenia was exiled and later murdered in the new lands (or camps) to which they had been forcibly removed. Alternatively, in Slovenia itself there was little shedding of Jewish (or Sinti and Roma) blood. Because of this odd turn of fate, 80 percent of the small Jewish Slovenian population survived the war. This surprising outcome shows once again, in a most concrete way, how consequential local conditions and events were in affecting the overall Nazi genocidal project.

The final two contributions in this collection raise still other, quite different, questions of real interest and value. In the first of these essays, Dr. Agata Katarzyna Dąbrowska explores the racial caricature of the Jew in anti-Semitic propaganda in Polish cultural life during the late 1930s and 1940s. In developing her presentation Dr. Dąbrowska does a good job of showing, through the citation of concrete examples, how Nazi officials sought to inculcate and popularize the anti-Semitic canard that emphasized the linkage of “Jews–lice–typhus” in mainstream Polish culture by emphasizing it in theatrical productions and the arts. To ensure that Poles in large numbers would come to view such theatrical productions, Nazi officials and their Polish allies offered theater seats at unusually low prices. This occurred, for example, in connection with the 1942 play *Quarantine*, written by the Polish playwright Halina Rapacka. But, and this is striking, the Polish public responded in two diametrically opposite ways to this play and its ugly message. The official press and public greeted it with enthusiasm and applause; in contrast, the community of anti-collaborationist Polish theater critics, newspapers, and intellectuals, consciously boycotted this, and other, anti-Semitic productions. In calling attention to this not trivial fact, Dąbrowska reminds us, against much common “wisdom,” that the Polish reaction to the persecution of the Jews was neither monolithic, that is, uniformly unsympathetic, nor was it simple.

Finally, Dr. Diana Dumitru reflects on Jewish-Gentile relations in Bessarabia and Transnistria. In doing so she moves us to Romania and concentrates her, and our, attention on the actions of the peasants in these two regions. “Why,” she intelligently asks, “did some peasants help Jews while others harmed them?” In answering this difficult question she first makes the case, based on material she has assiduously collected, that in Bessarabia the peasantry was, “more likely to commit abusive actions against Jews (e.g., beatings, theft, murder, rape),” while in Transnistria the peasantry was, “both less likely to commit abuse and more likely to behave in a cooperative manner.” She then argues that this crucial difference was due to dissimilar pre-war, state educational models regarding minorities in these two regions. In setting out her claims and conclusions she makes a strong and impressive case. Other scholars will want to pay close attention to this study

In sum, considered both in terms of its individual contributions as well as the lasting impression it makes as a whole, this is a weighty volume of considerable significance. It will repay close study and provide all scholars with much of consequence to reflect on and to debate.

Before concluding these introductory remarks a word needs to be said about the sponsorship and organization of the conference at which the papers appearing here were first given. The idea for the conference came from discussions around the table of the Academic Working Group (AWG) of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF). Given the AWG’s mandate it was felt by members of the Working Group that it should directly involve itself in sponsoring and supporting original research. To do this it decided, beginning in 2008, to sponsor a yearly academic conference and to locate it in the country that served, according to an agreed rotation, as the Chair of the ITF for the year. This meant that the first conference took place in Norway in 2009 during Norway’s chairmanship of the ITF. In addition, the decision was made, in consultation with Professor Odd-Bjørn Fure, the Norwegian representative to the AWG and the Director of the Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities (HL-senteret) in Oslo, to hold the first conference at this venue in the days preceding the June 2009 ITF Plenary meeting. Professor Fure, in turn, created a committee of both local and international members of the AWG, and the program grew into reality. The conference was jointly financed by the ITF, the HL-senteret, and the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. During the

conference itself, the staff of the Oslo Center showed themselves to be a very welcoming and efficient group, and the AWG is deeply in their debt. The members of the AWG would like to express their gratitude to Professor Fure, Dr. Anton Weiss-Wendt, head of the research department at the Oslo Center and the editor of the present volume, Ann-Elisabeth Mellbye, administrative coordinator at the Oslo Center, and everyone else who made the event so successful. In addition, the AWG would like to publicly thank Ambassador Tom Vraalsen, Head of the Norwegian delegation and Chairman of the ITF in 2009, for providing both encouragement and financial support. Thanks are also due to all the many scholars who participated in the conversation, and especially to those whose papers defined the event and made it so memorable.

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INTRODUCTION:
TOWARD AN INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE
ON THE NAZI POLICIES OF MASS MURDER

ANTON WEISS-WENDT

There is barely a subject in twentieth-century history that has received more scholarly attention than the Nazi campaign of mass murder. The extent and consistency of the Nazi effort to build the Thousand-Year Reich by means of eradicating the designated enemy groups have fascinated historians ever since. Despite the quantity of scholarship, synthetic works looking at Nazi policies of destruction as a whole, without focusing on specific victim groups, remain few. Today we still have two different narratives, that of the Holocaust and the rest. Since early on, scholars have had difficulties defining “the rest,” calling them “non-Jewish victims,” “other victims,” or simply “forgotten victims.” Without getting into the realm of memory politics, historians proved less than enthusiastic about venturing into the uncharted territory beyond the narrative of the Holocaust. This collection of essays seeks to challenge this trend by offering an integrated perspective on Nazi policies of mass murder.

Detlev Peukert was among the first German historians who looked at the Nazi persecution of minorities from a comparative perspective. In his analysis of the plight of the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the so-called asocial, he emphasized racism as a leading principle of Nazi social policy.¹ Two decades earlier, Martin Broszat provided the first comprehensive analysis of Nazi terror against the Polish population.² The importance of the TV miniseries *Holocaust* for opening up the debate is hard to overestimate. Broadcast throughout Europe in early 1979, the documentary has sparked a broad public discussion that in turn triggered a civil rights movement among the minority groups that were persecuted under Nazis. Homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, people with disabilities—these and other minorities suddenly realized that their story has not been properly told in the context of Nazi crimes.³ Some of them felt uneasy about occasional references in academic literature to Jews as “the chosen victims of the Holocaust.”⁴ The assertion of the uniqueness, or singularity, of the

Holocaust has had an unfortunate effect, by driving the opponents of this thesis into militancy.

Scholars seeking to highlight the plight of the “forgotten victims” of the Nazis have not been consistent in their argumentation. Rather often, the authors use the Nazi persecution as a counter-reference for advancing minorities’ rights today. This was the tenor of a collection of essays published in 1988 in Hamburg, for example. In the introduction to the volume, Detlef Garbe noted the poor state of research on the victim groups dubbed by the Nazis “asocial,” “socially alienated,” and/or “socially harmful.” Those who fail to pay attention to the plurality of victims barred from the *Volksgemeinschaft* (racial community), warned Garbe, risk sharing in Nazi cynicism. To exclude them from consideration, according to Garbe, would amount to perpetuating the Nazi divide-and-rule policy, used in concentration camps to set various groups of prisoners against each other.⁵ Where scholars like Garbe may be right, however, is that reinforcing hierarchies not only impoverishes historical analysis but also violates professional ethics—a kind of Hippocratic Oath of History.

For the first time, an attempt to integrate the experience of other victim groups into the history of the Holocaust was made in the late 1987. During the heated debates on the content of the proposed United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a group of scholars from ten different countries gathered in Washington, DC, to discuss in an academic setting the link between the Final Solution of the Jewish Question and Nazi policies toward other ethnic and religious groups. Many of the conference speakers represented the victim groups they spoke about. The outcome of the conference was a collection of essays edited by Michael Berenbaum, then project director of the museum. The volume appeared in 1990, one year before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the East European archives. The book’s title, *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, betrays the unease with which the historical mainstream has approached this subject.⁶

In retrospect, the 1980s were not conducive to extensive research on Nazi policies of mass murder. The expanded edition of Raul Hilberg’s monumental *The Destruction of the European Jews* was only published in 1985, while the history of the Holocaust had essentially been taught according to Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The War Against the Jews*, which had appeared in print ten years earlier.⁷ The campaign to identify and deport alleged war criminals from the United States that led to the establishment of a special unit within the U.S. Department of Justice in 1979 turned public opinion against Americans of East European descent. An overwhelming majority of defendants in the denaturalization trials, which

continued into the mid-1990s, originally came from Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, and Romania. It appeared almost unnatural therefore to advance a comprehensive analysis of victimizers and victims under the same heading. On the other side of the spectrum were found émigré activists who staunchly defended their national group's record during the Second World War and claimed for it a victim status at the same time.⁸ The end of the Cold War prompted a shift toward empirical research unconfined to an ideological explanation. This trend is a necessary part of what I refer to as an integrated approach to the study of Nazi mass murder.

Until then, the narrative closely followed the opinion of Elie Wiesel voiced in the 1979 U.S. President's Commission on the Holocaust. "While not all victims were Jews," wrote Wiesel, "all Jews were victims destined for annihilation solely because they were born Jewish."⁹ At the same time, as Irving Louis Horowitz has reasoned, "To emphasize distinctions between peoples by arguing for the uniqueness of anti-Semitism is a profound mistake; it reduces any possibility of a unified political and human posture on the meaning of genocide or the Holocaust."¹⁰

The slow progress in integrating the experiences of various victim groups into the context of Nazi policies of annihilation caused a backlash. One after another, minority groups that had suffered at the hands of the Nazis introduced a separate narrative framed as the "forgotten victims." Each of the groups (and individual scholars who claimed to represent their interests) singled out unique characteristics that would match their suffering with that experienced by the Jews. For many, the status of a victim of genocide represents a symbolic badge of honor, in the words of William Schabas. Ironically, the increased attention paid to the UN Genocide Convention in that context contributed very little to our understanding of the phenomenon of genocide. Rather, it resulted in what some authors started referring to as comparative victimization. While the common denominator of collective suffering does make sense when it comes to justice, restitution, and indemnification, its ability to advance the historical analysis is rather limited.

To write an account of Nazi atrocities exclusively from the perspective of the victims or the perpetrators (and thus inevitably cause the wrath of the opposite camp), however, is equally fallacious.¹¹ By focusing on the central decision-making process, historians may unwittingly overlook how the process had translated into individual policies affecting countless population groups under Nazi control. An analysis limited to subject populations, however, runs the danger of ignoring the context. There is no simple answer to a complex problem, and so to reduce Hitler's regime to an absolute evil is not enough to explain it. The modernity discourse¹²

cannot conceal the fact that at times—and definitely more often than scholars have been willing to concede—the Third Reich practiced the time-honored policy of divide-and-rule vis-à-vis the subjugated populations. Nazi policies were influenced by racism, anticommunism, and chauvinism on the one hand, and by the conventional pursuit of territory, cheap workforce, and natural resources on the other.

For too long, the mass murder of Jews has been examined in isolation from the general developments at the front and the long-term Nazi plans for Europe. Although the intense debate between the so-called Functionalists and Intentionalists did move scholarship forward, it also had a certain divisive effect on the historians' community. Otherwise, those scholars who have advanced the Hitler-thesis—depicting the Holocaust as a programmatic, linear event—rarely agreed with the proponents of a structural explanation—who sometimes have gone to the opposite extreme by rejecting personal initiative as a contributing factor. A similar explanation separated local case studies from analyses of decision making at the top of the Nazi hierarchy. Fortunately, historians have superseded that divide by now. An anthology published by Ulrich Herbert in 1998 set the standard for a symbolic reconciliation of what for some time has appeared as mutually exclusive positions.¹³ Although Ian Kershaw's maxim, "No Hitler, no Holocaust," still stays true, we now have a much better knowledge about agency: a majority of the German population, which had acquiesced to and sometimes directly benefited from the Nazi murderous policies.¹⁴ An array of case studies that have been published using the new sources from the former Soviet and East European archives emphasizes the lack of contradiction between central decisions and local initiatives. Indeed, they reinforced each other in a spiraling quest for racial purity and national glory, career advancement, and economic progress.¹⁵

There are barely any historians left today who would steadfastly stick to the thesis of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The Holocaust has been more or less successfully integrated into the field of comparative genocide studies.¹⁶ One can even argue that such integration is the only way forward. Of all historians, Donald Bloxham has done it most consistently. Simultaneously, Bloxham effectively applied the methodology elaborated in the field of Holocaust studies to other instances of genocide, specifically the Armenian genocide.¹⁷ However, the field cross-fertilization has not yet reached the level that would provide a viable interpretation of multiple aspects of the Nazi policy of annihilation and its ultimate goals. This volume seeks to accomplish just that.

The Nazi state was predicated on the close connection between racial policy and the developments on the front, between the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* (racial community) and that of *Lebensraum* (living space). Hitler envisaged a homogeneous German people cleansed of “asocial elements,” ideological and biological enemies. For him, the coming war was both the expression of the people’s will and a means of securing the nation’s future. Since survival of the German race was contingent on military victory, politics and strategy became one. The new kind of warfare erased the distinction between the home front and the combat zone, between national and racial enemies within and outside the Reich. As a mixture of ideology, economic thought, and international politics, the concept of *Lebensraum* heralded a radical restructuring of European society.

Among the factors that determined the future of any given group in Hitler’s “New Europe” was political affiliation, national origins, or behavior of the group members. Jews, Gypsies (Sinti and Roma), and the handicapped were defined in biological terms, which prefigured a systematic policy of extermination against those groups by the Nazi regime. In the 1930s, the regime moved to exclude the handicapped, Jews, and Gypsies from “the universe of human obligation,” as Helen Fein has memorably dubbed it. A sequence of discriminatory laws—starting with the Law for the Restitution of the Professional Civil Service (April 1933), the Law to Prevent Offspring with Hereditary Diseases (July 1933), and the Law Against Dangerous Habitual Criminals (November 1933)—set in motion a consistent policy of exclusion. As Henry Friedlander has observed, “Any system that categorizes all members of a group as anti-social is obviously establishing a racial definition based on heredity.” The cover of war enabled the Nazis to implement the most radical type of exclusion: mass killing. Along with selective executions of Polish intelligentsia, the so-called euthanasia killing operation was the first to be carried out. Henry Friedlander considers the mass killing of the handicapped, which began in the winter of 1939–40, as a precursor to the Final Solution. He indicates several links that bind these murderous enterprises, including decision making, personnel, and technique. In October 1939, Hitler signed an authorization to launch the so-called T4 Program under Victor Brack. The reverse order of August 1941 only applied to the T4 killing centers and thus did not end the euthanasia killings. In fact, more people with disabilities perished after that. With the invasion of the Soviet Union the locus of mass murder shifted to the East. The T4 staff assisted the *Einsatzgruppen* leadership in determining the feasibility of using poisonous gas and explosives against prisoners. They

participated in construction and operation of gassing facilities at Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. The assembly-line killing method used in death camps had been developed and tested earlier in euthanasia centers such as Hartheim.¹⁸

The war against Poland was meant to destroy its human potential with the purpose of gaining the territory for the resettlement of ethnic Germans. The main target of the Einsatzgruppen was the Polish intelligentsia, as a carrier of national spirit and a source of armed resistance. The German army took part in mass executions of prisoners of war and in indiscriminate shootings of civilians, including Jews. As the saying went, “the life of a non-Aryan was worth very little.” The amnesty granted by Hitler in October 1939 to all military and police personnel who had violated the rules of military conduct further encouraged the spread of terror. Jürgen Förster has observed that the brutalization of warfare, as described by Omer Bartov in connection with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, had begun already in Poland. Commander of the 18th Army Georg von Küchler, who had originally disapproved of criminal orders, in July 1940 issued a decree endorsing SS policy toward “the final ethnic solution of the *Volkstumskampf* [racial struggle] that has been raging for centuries along the eastern front.”¹⁹

The outbreak of war radicalized the Nazi regime’s policies toward minority groups. Thus a conference on racial policy convened in Berlin on September 21, 1939, and chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), discussed the removal of 30,000 German and Austrian Gypsies to General Government (a part of Poland under German military occupation), along with the deportation of Jews.²⁰ The first deportation of some 2,330 Gypsies from Germany proper in May 1940 was carried out within the framework of the systematic expulsion of Jews and Poles. Some of the 5,000 Austrian Gypsies deported in November 1941 to Łódź ghetto died of typhus and the rest were gassed at Chełmno. That murder, wrote Michael Zimmermann, had already taken place in the context of the Nazi extermination of the Jews.²¹ In 1941, Heydrich suggested expanding the T4 Program by including the so-called asocial elements, including most likely the Gypsies.²²

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 was conceived of as a *Vernichtungskrieg* (war of destruction), not as a conventional war. The lead principle of Lebensraum prefigured military strategy, which became undistinguishable from racial policies. Whether it had to do with the tactical planning, rear area security, or economic exploitation, the acquisition of living space was conditional upon extermination of so-called Judeo-Bolshevism. According to Hitler, it was a clash of ideologies

and civilizations rather than a conflict between nation-states and their armies. As a struggle between two different races, the war in the east was to be ruthlessly executed. Nonetheless, in order to bring the Wehrmacht into the fold of racial ideology, Nazi authorities sought out a justification for their murderous policies; the reprisal policy was informed by ideology but was explained by military necessity.²³

It is reasonable to surmise that the Third Reich would not have pursued a genocidal policy, at least not to the actual extent, had it not invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Operation Barbarossa not only set the stage for the Final Solution but also molded the mentality of the individual by creating a psychological environment conducive to crimes that would have been impossible otherwise. From the perspective of the Wehrmacht rank and file, argued Omer Bartov, it was just another aspect of a brutal war. Since murder was the norm at the front, they saw no reason why the regime's enemies should be treated differently back home. As the causes for the brutalization of warfare, Bartov listed the scale of the fighting, the massive losses, the harsh climatic conditions, and the ideological preconceptions. These factors enhanced the sense among the troops that they were engaged in a terminal confrontation in which the legal and moral traditions no longer applied. Civilians and military men they encountered on the Eastern Front fit neatly into the preconceived image of the enemy. Jews, Gypsies, Soviet POWs, Slavic peoples—all of them appeared savage and uncivilized. If they were somehow less human than the invading German forces, then to object to mass killings and all other forms of maltreatment was unreasonable. The ideological indoctrination helped to carry this message home.²⁴

Echoing Christopher Browning, Christian Gerlach thus wrote,

Had the Nazi regime in May 1941 found a sudden end, it would have been held accountable for the murder of 70,000 physically and mentally disabled in the so-called Euthanasia Program, of several tens of thousands of Jews and Poles, and of several thousand concentration camp inmates in the Third Reich. By the end of 1941, the number of victims of the German policy of violence has grown to three million people (without counting the Red Army losses), including some 900,000 Jews—nine-tenths of them in the occupied Soviet territories—and approximately two million Soviet prisoners of war. It was then first in the course of 1942 that Europe's Jewish population became the biggest group of victims of the German policy of extermination.²⁵

A series of draft documents collectively known as *Generalplan Ost* (Master Plan East) mapped the future East Europe swept clear of non-Aryan peoples. In the words of Czeslaw Madajczik, Master Plan East was

the culmination of the German *Drang nach Osten* (Drive to the East). Outlined in 1941–43, Master Plan East proposed pushing the ethnic boundaries of the Third Reich about one thousand kilometers eastward, conditioned upon the expulsion of thirty-one million people who lived in these territories. A draft prepared by the Reich Security Main Office provided for the uprooting of some 85 percent of the population from Poland; 75 percent from Belorussia; 67 percent from the western Ukraine; and 50 percent from the Baltic States. The rest were slated for Germanization. The blueprint for colonization of the East was worked out in anticipation of the *Blitzkrieg*, to be realized within twenty years after the war. As the hopes for quick victory evaporated, Master Plan East was recast into *Generalsiedlungsplan* (Master Settlement Plan) and the estimates for the number of people fit for Germanization were recalculated upward. The resettlement of ethnic Poles from the Zamość district in the General Government between November 1942 and August 1943 convinced the Poles that once the Jews were destroyed, the Nazis would use the same method toward them. Remarkably, the Master Plan East contained only few references to Jews, whose annihilation had been an established fact by the time the RSHA draft was released, shortly before the Wannsee Conference. By then, the fear of “Jewish contamination” had been replaced by apprehension about ten times the number of Slavs residing within the new Reich borders. Czesław Madajczyk, the foremost expert on Master Plan East, thus concluded,

If we also take into consideration the plans for expansion of the Third Reich eastward, together with the whole range of its genocidal undertakings, we cannot help but realize that if the war had run a different course, the fate of the Jewish people in Europe could have marked the beginning of a terrible fate lying in store for all of East Central Europe, as spelled out in the variants of *Generalplan Ost*. In fact, it would have amounted to the final solution of the *Mitteleuropa* question.²⁶

The Nazi plans from early 1941 to murder several million Soviet citizens through a deliberately orchestrated famine marked the beginning of the carefully crafted policy of extermination.²⁷ The intention to reduce the population of the Soviet Union by thirty-something million can indeed be regarded as the most extensive plan of mass murder in human history. Prior to the attack on the Soviet Union, however, deportation to the East (*Abscheiben nach Osten*) appeared an ingenious solution for all the “unwanted” ethnic groups. This concept, for example, comes across in army plans concerning the expulsion of the survivors of Leningrad and Moscow in anticipation of the cities’ instant fall.²⁸

The fact that Soviet POWs were the biggest victim group in 1941, but came to be replaced by Jews in the following years, suggests a certain link and simultaneously a paradigm shift. What until late summer–early fall 1941 had remained on a level of ideas—a dystopia—now was translated into a purposeful program of mass murder. As Christian Streit, Ulrich Herbert, and Christian Gerlach have demonstrated in their research, mass starvation of Soviet POWs in the fall and winter of 1941 was intentional. It was a deliberate policy informed by economic considerations and racism. Slavs and so-called Asiatics among the Soviet POWs were ranked very low in the Nazi pecking order, just above Jews. Labeled “subhuman,” they were regarded as “worthless eaters,” much as the disabled in the Third Reich were regarded earlier. Because they allegedly belonged to an inferior race—so the twisted logic—they also required less food to survive. One less work-unfit POW alive, the greater was the estimated benefit to the German people. By consuming calories that otherwise would be “wasted on the lower races,” the Germanic nation was expected to fulfill its predestined mission. To save railway cars for the transportation of troops and ammunition, prisoners of war were left to rot in makeshift camps or were marched hundreds of kilometers on foot.²⁹ A Ukrainian witness described the Soviet POWs marching through the city of Vinnitsa (Vinnitsia) as “ghosts who barely resembled human beings.”³⁰

According to Gerlach, the following three factors signaled the transition to a full-scale mass murder in the fall of 1941: the expansion of the victim category to include Jewish women, children, and the elderly; the intensification of antipartisan warfare; and the dramatic reduction of POW food rations. The minimum food rations allocated to Soviet POWs—sometimes as little as 20 grams of fat and 100 grams of bread per day—caused a certain death by starvation within a matter of weeks. As a result, during the first seven months of the Russo-German war, an average of 6,000 POWs died each day. Simultaneously, the German authorities drastically cut the food rations for the local civilian population. Despite the shortage of manpower, the Nazi leadership refused to consider bringing Soviet laborers to the Third Reich, for they were supposedly imbued with Bolshevism and racial defects.³¹ Writing back home, German soldiers consistently described the Russians as barbaric and criminal, filthy and dull, uneducated and fanatic. “They are scoundrels, the scum of the earth!” wrote one soldier. “Russia is like pigsty...You cannot find a trace of culture anywhere,” added another. “I believe it is the most depraved and filthiest people living on God’s earth,” noted one officer. The following sentence, from a letter of a German noncommissioned officer, sums up the Nazi attitude toward the so-called Eastern peoples: “The Russians are no

longer human beings, but wild hordes and beasts who have been bred by Bolshevism during the last twenty years.”³² Some scholars see certain similarities between the death marches endured by Soviet POWs in 1941 and those by Jewish prisoners in 1945.

Only those POWs deemed work-fit were granted a (slim) chance to survive by laboring on behalf of the master race. Even when this deadly policy was reversed in November 1941, the machine of destruction once set in motion kept consuming lives. Weakened by low calorie intake, disease, torture, and harsh weather conditions, Soviet POWs continued dying en masse. In fact, the highest mortality rates in POW camps were registered in November and December 1941 (38 percent and 46 percent respectively). Out of the total of approximately 5.7 million Soviet soldiers and officers taken prisoner by the Germans, no more than 2.2 million survived the war.³³ The first “sweep” in the Government General was supposedly carried out in accordance with the same principle, that is, the first Jews to be murdered were those classified as work-unfit. After the Wannsee Conference, however, this differentiation was all but impossible. Throughout 1942, the Wehrmacht units, SS detachments, and police battalions murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews in Belorussia and Ukraine regardless of their status. The mass recruitment of “Eastern workers” provided Nazis with the much-needed manpower and consequently accelerated their plans to destroy the Jews of Europe.³⁴

The Nazi treatment of Soviet POWs, who had been taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau for execution from July 1941 onward, involved an industrial method of mass murder. The rail connection built at the Birkenau camp was originally intended for 100,000 Soviet POWs who had been allocated by Himmler as slave laborers. Six hundred POWs and another 250 camp inmates were the first to be gassed with a pesticide, Zyklon B, at Auschwitz in early September. Two more convoys of Soviet POWs were subjected to “test gassing” before it was extended to Jewish victims in January and February 1942. Ironically, the designation of a certain segment of the Soviet POWs as slave laborers did not increase their chances of survival. The appalling conditions in the camps and the desire to destroy “Bolshevism” made economic aims obsolete. Remarkably, in the concentration camp file system the euthanasia killings had a code number “14 f 13” and the murder of the “politically unreliable” Soviet POWs “14 f 14.”³⁵

In the final analysis, the Soviet POWs and the disabled were the only two groups subjected to the deliberate policy of starvation during the Second World War. Economic expediency forced the Nazis to relax that policy vis-à-vis the Soviet POWs toward the end of the war; unable to

raise any revenues on account of the mentally ill patients, the Nazis disposed of them methodically by means of reducing their food rations to a minimum. Soviet POWs were among the first victims gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau, but they were also among the first camp guards to be trained at Trawniki camp in Poland; they were recruited from the POW camps on the promise of food.³⁶

Gerlach has convincingly demonstrated the connection, as well as the tension, between Nazi economic and racial policies. The conventional wisdom that the Nazis had waged a racial war in the East should not conceal the fact, according to Gerlach, that they also sought to control the markets and natural resources, to feed the German population, and to govern over the conquered peoples. Economic pragmatism and racist thought walked hand in hand, with no contradictions in sight. What Hans Mommsen has described as cumulative radicalization of Nazi policies was shaped by that parallel development. The German occupation authorities exercised a broad consensus concerning the extermination policies. Whenever disagreement occurred, it was about the methods, not the practice. Execution by bullet evoked emotions of hatred and resentment; murder through enforced starvation evoked pragmatism informed by racism. As Martin Holler observed with regard to the mass murder of Gypsies in the occupied Soviet territories, local military commanders de facto approved of it, even if de jure they were supposed to spare sedentary Gypsies.³⁷

What Gerlach has argued on the basis of painstaking research into specific regions such as Belorussia, West Ukraine, and the Government General, Götz Aly expanded to the entire Third Reich. Through exploitation of slave labor, enforced starvation, and mass murder, the Nazis managed to lift the living standards of the German population, or at least to maintain them on an acceptable level that would ensure compliancy and prevent unrest. The Nazis used property and liquid assets confiscated from the Jews to finance the war and subsidize social programs at home. Indirectly, the entire German population benefited from the Nazi anti-Jewish policies. When their pensions and food rations went up, ordinary Germans did not ask where the money came from. Preoccupied with everyday problems, a majority of the German people continuously supported Hitler's regime, willing to overlook the suffering of the Jews and other persecuted groups. While some Germans accepted the Nazi measures, a majority of the population remained silent in the face of persecution.³⁸

Even with regard to the Final Solution of the Jewish Question, the Nazis were willing to pose when the very existence of the Third Reich, pounded by the Allied armies, came into question. Christopher Browning

and Wolf Gruner have argued that the exploitation of Jewish slave labor in the Third Reich preempted any Nazi plans to destroy Jews as a group. In many cases, “segregated labor deployment” (*der geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz*) of Jews had continued well until mid-1943, that is, much longer than scholars have presumed. Browning maintained that although a sporadic use of Jewish forced labor in Poland in 1942 and 1943 did not supersede the ultimate ideological goals of the Nazis, it meant life for some of the inmates. The starkest opponent of the continuous use of Jewish slave labor was Heinrich Himmler, who had sought even greater control over the still-living Jewish armament workers and their eventual death. The Warsaw ghetto uprising influenced Himmler’s decision to liquidate the remaining “work ghettos” in the East. Yet by November 1943, according to Browning, Himmler had relaxed his obsessive campaign to rid continental Europe of Jews. The acute shortage of manpower proved a decisive factor in prolonging the existence of a handful of work camps and ghettos.³⁹

Gruner painted a larger picture, examining the dynamics of Jewish forced labor in Germany, Austria, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and Poland. He insisted that “segregated labor deployment” of Jews was possible due to the limited role of the SS in planning and running forced labor. The interest groups emphasizing the needs of the war economy, armaments in particular, included German state agencies and private enterprises. At the end of 1942, about 400,000 Jewish forced laborers were still living in Germany and Poland. The total number of work camps and ghettos outside of the concentration camp system in existence between 1938 and 1943 could have been as high as 1,300.⁴⁰ When the survival of the Third Reich was at stake, ideology, if only temporarily, gave way to pragmatism. Yet Gruner might have gone too far when he concluded that “[f]orced labor in the Third Reich cannot in any case be considered part of the Nazi murder program.” In the end, ideology and contingency were complementary rather than mutually exclusive in the Nazi drive to destroy the Jews.⁴¹ This conclusion reinforces the earlier argument of Browning, who contended that the broader pattern of Nazi racism was at the same time programmatic and evolutionary, dogmatic and flexible.⁴²

The Nazi self-perception of racial superiority proved not enough to win the conventional war. Unable to capture Moscow and strategic areas rich in mineral resources, the Nazi leadership had to reconsider their short-term objectives. The agricultural surplus resulting from the decimation of the civilian population—written down by policy makers and ideologists as unnecessary ballast—was less than anticipated. At the same time, the Nazis could not afford doing away with Soviet POWs as a potential source

of slave labor. As far as the Jewish Question was concerned, the military disposition provided for a correction, which proved fatal to the Jews. The limited territorial gains forestalled the earlier Nazi plans to dump European Jews deep into Russia proper. As seen by some racial experts, the only way out of the impasse was the Final Solution—that is, mass murder.

In the Independent State of Croatia, for example, the Germans came to realize as early as summer 1941 that the Ustaša terror against the Serbs was counterproductive, playing into the hands of Tito Partisans and thus exacerbating the security situation. Thus an enraged Wehrmacht officer protested to his Croatian counterpart against driving the masses of refugees over the border to Serbia: “As far as I am concerned, the Ustaša, as well as your authorities who have done this, are of even lower standing than the Bolsheviks. A country that allows this has lost the reason and right to exist and has to be erased from the map of Europe.”⁴³ What is also remarkable about this particular quotation is that the German officer without a hitch explained away a strategic blunder by the lower level of development of the Croats.

As far as the phenomenon of collaboration is concerned, Martin Dean, who has done extensive research on Belorussia, argued that mass murder of Jews and antipartisan warfare reinforced brutalization of the local policemen. The increase in partisan activity from summer 1942 onward was met with reprisals. In one such incident in the Myr district, Belorussian policemen savagely murdered about sixty members of partisan families, including women and children. Anywhere between three hundred and five hundred non-Jewish civilians were killed in reprisals, often burned alive, in that particular district during the German occupation. Dean observed that the same personnel who were prominent in the anti-Jewish actions also played an active role in the reprisals against partisan families. He concluded that “neighbors did not only kill Jews.”⁴⁴

* * *

The new evidence presented in this volume draws a line under the Functionalist-Intentionalist debate. The articles emphasize the ideological aspect of Nazi policies of mass murder. The anticipation of a quick military victory over Soviet Russia on the one hand and brutalization of warfare on the other reinforced the ideological worldview. If it had not been for the debacle on the Eastern Front, the Nazis would have definitely gone all the way to implement their racial dystopia. At the same time, the articles printed in this volume demonstrate that pragmatic considerations

based on a realistic assessment of the situation on the ground sometimes overran the racial dogma. Faced with what they saw as a temporary military setback, the Nazis were willing to renegotiate their murderous policies, granting certain concessions to certain groups otherwise slated for destruction. However, this compromise was always a question of tactics, a short-term policy adopted under circumstantial pressure. At most, it offered a temporary reprieve for most victim groups. Radical ideology and expediency were not mutually exclusive elements of the Nazi policy of mass murder. Rather, pragmatism often filled in whenever ideology did not deliver. In the long run, however, the ideology of racial exclusiveness preached by the Nazis was never abandoned, contributing to their ultimate defeat.

Another thesis advanced in this volume concerns the complex ethnopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe that came under Nazi domination. Intense ethnic rivalries and grievances, which go back into the times of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires and beyond, flared with full force under Nazi occupation. German occupation authorities were only too happy to ignite the flames of ethnic hatred that had simmered under the surface. The Hobbesian war of all against all that broke out in the former Yugoslavia and the western Soviet borderlands, and ethnic tensions that tore apart the satellite states, made the application of a divide-and-rule policy by the Nazis all too easy. It also provided a fertile ground for collaboration, specifically in the mass murder of Jews. In their dealing with “lesser races,” the Nazis proved more flexible and less single-minded than has been conventionally believed. But they never relinquished their final say; neither did they discard the racial ideology. The atrocities committed in the occupied territories by non-Germans had been carried out under the Nazis’ watchful eyes.

Geoffrey J. Giles and Hans-Hermann Dirksen deal in their articles with the victim groups that had been singled out on the basis of their sexual and religious orientation, respectively. Giles challenges the conventional view, according to which men accused of homosexuality in Germany proper were treated differently from those residing elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe. Basing his analysis on the careful reading of documents, Giles sees a correlation between the “racial quality” of any given European nation (as determined by the Nazis) and the severity of punishment. Nationals of the countries with a higher proportion of the Aryan racial type as a rule received harsher sentences, contends Giles. The prosecution of homosexuals continued late into the war but was at times moderated by diplomatic considerations. The circumstantial evidence suggests that the

Nazis would have implemented a more coherent antihomosexual policy if they had emerged victorious out of the war.

Dirksen pinpoints the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses was the first religious group in Nazi Germany subjected to persecution. The only religious minority to take a consistent stance against Hitler's regime, the Witnesses found themselves under attack throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Accused of supporting so-called Judeo-Bolshevism, Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Germany beginning in April 1933. The issues of conformity and loyalty lay at the core of persecution of Witnesses. They were instantly released from concentration camps upon renouncing their faith. This renunciation, however, occurred only infrequently, Dirksen observes.

Richard Weikart sets out to overcome the ideology-opportunism dichotomy in his analysis of Nazi treatment of two particular Slavic peoples, the Poles and the Czechs. Nazis subdued their concerns about race and space every time they ran into problems of implementation. In fact, they did not universally view Slavs as worthless subhumans, but were willing to make some exceptions along the way. Unlike the Jews, they regarded the Poles and the Czechs as a linguistic rather than a racial group. Weikart observes no contradiction between Nazi long-term and short-term policies, insisting that the eradication of Slavs from German "living space" was next on their agenda.

Katarzyna Szurmiak treats a lesser known case of collaboration in her article on Górale. German occupation authorities sought to destroy Poland's national unity by deliberately promoting nationalism among this Slavic minority. Nineteenth-century romanticism and Nazi pseudoscientific research helped to establish the notion of the Górale as a distinct ethnic group. However, this concept was not enough to secure the support of a majority of the Goralian population. The self-proclaimed leaders of Goralenvolk (the Górale nation) enjoyed little respect among the Górale and alienated the Polish majority. Szurmiak provides a nuanced description of local Górale elite who had been corrupted by power and yet to a degree believed in their self-imposed mission. Although the project to create a separate Górale nation ultimately failed, Szurmiak concludes, the ethnic strife incited by the Nazis carried over into the postwar period.

Kiril Feferman observes the divergence of Nazi population policies in the case of the Crimea and North Caucasus—the only areas with a sizeable Muslim population within the occupied Soviet territories. In an attempt to secure the potential support of the Islamic world, and specifically Turkey, the Germans extended certain privileges to the Crimean Tartars and Muslim peoples in North Caucasus. In line with the proclaimed racial

doctrine, the occupation authorities subjected the local Slav population to the policy of terror. The Russian-speaking Cossacks, at the same time, proved among the most active Nazi collaborators. The Germans were caught in their own pseudoscientific discourse, persecuting some minorities related to Jews and Judaism but exempting others. The only minority group that had been systematically destroyed, regardless of the variations in local policies, was the Jews.

The western Soviet borderlands, which Alexander Prusin examines in his article, became the site of vicious multiparty civil war under German occupation. In his analysis of the Polish-Lithuanian clash in the Vilnius region and the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Galicia and Volhynia, Prusin emphasizes the constant shift of political and military allegiances. The Hobbesian war of all against all saw the breakdown of social norms of civilized behavior. Ethnic enmities flared up and multiplied, locking the warring sides in the circle of violence, with the Germans as one of the possible allies. According to Prusin, Germans played only a secondary role in the ensuing interethnic conflict, whereas the ultimate winner in the many civil wars proved the Soviet Union.

Alexander Korb rejects the narrative of ethnic hatred that supposedly goes back centuries in the Balkans. Instead, he points out the multiple causes of mass violence and the negative synergy that emanated from the tripartite relations between fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Independent State of Croatia. He argues against treating the Ustaša as a marginal, terroristic movement, demonstrating that certain forms of violence not only stabilized the regime but also drew substantial support of the Croatian population. At the same time, Korb emphasizes that the campaign of violence unleashed by the Ustaša against the local Serbs had been carried out independently, notwithstanding random protests of the German military. Hostility against Serbs provided a justification for mass murder of Jews who had been arrested as agents of the Serbs. Otherwise, traditional anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism played a minor role in Ustaša ideology. According to Korb, it was the mounting Serb uprising and the German pressure that made Ustaša reconsider its violent policies.

Andrej Pančur paints a complex picture of interethnic relations in interwar Slovenia. According to Pančur, the Germans assigned a low priority to the Final Solution due to the insignificant numbers of Jews and Roma in Slovenia. Consequently, they decided to treat Jews and Roma like the Slovenes, that is, to expel them. Following a thorough racial and political screening, roughly one-third of the Slovenian population—the intellectual elites, recent immigrants, and all those deemed “unwanted”—was slated for deportation. By the fall of 1941, practically all Jews and