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Donald Bloxham

To cite this article: Donald Bloxham (2010) Europe, the Final Solution and the dynamics of intent, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 44:4, 317-335, DOI: [10.1080/0031322X.2010.510711](https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2010.510711)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2010.510711>



Published online: 15 Sep 2010.



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# Europe, the Final Solution and the dynamics of intent

DONALD BLOXHAM

**ABSTRACT** The scale and scope of the ‘final solution’ of the ‘Jewish question’ were extreme even in the horrific annals of genocide. Bloxham attempts to shed light on the pattern of mass murder in its expansion and contraction by viewing the Holocaust in a set of temporally and culturally specific contexts. It places the Holocaust into a broader European framework of violent ethnopolitics and geopolitics from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. The Holocaust is depicted as an only partially discrete part of a continental process of traumatic flux, and a part, furthermore, that can itself be partially disaggregated into national and regional components. Bloxham moves from a general consideration of patterns of ethnic violence in the period to a closer causal explanation that shows the different valences of Nazi policy towards Jews in the lands directly ruled by Germany and those of Germany’s allies respectively. He shows that the peculiarly extensive ambitions of the ‘final solution’ at its most expansive can only be explained when wider geopolitical and strategic contextual terms are factored in along with consideration of Nazi ideology and the internal dynamics of some of the key institutions of the perpetrator state.

**KEYWORDS** antisemitism, Europe, ‘final solution’, genocide, geopolitics, Holocaust, modernity, Nazism, Reinhard Heydrich

One of the very finest of all of its historians, Saul Friedländer, has called for a more ‘integrated history’ of the Holocaust. He has also realized his agenda magnificently, in the sense that he brought together the history of both the machinery of perpetration and of the Nazis’ major victim group in his two-volume standard work *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.<sup>1</sup> It is not in criticism of Friedländer’s exemplary scholarship that I note that he does not thereby exhaust the potential avenues of integration—an impossibility in any case—but merely an observation on the potentialities of any piece of historical scholarship. The Holocaust is no more exempt from perspectival

I thank Tom Lawson, Dirk Moses and Dan Stone for comments on drafts of this article.

1 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 2 vols (New York: HarperCollins 1997–2007); Saul Friedländer, ‘An integrated history of the Holocaust: possibilities and challenges’, in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (eds), *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination* (London: Continuum 2010).

reframing than any other historical occurrence. Other fruitful axes of integration might include those combining the Holocaust with Nazi policies against the full range of their victim groups, or the histories of war and genocide, or the life and crimes of 'Germany', or 'fascism', 'colonialism' and so on. As we shall see, certain forms of integration paradoxically result in a partial disaggregation of the Holocaust by cutting across the spatio-temporal boundaries that historians have traditionally placed around the genocide, elongating the field of vision in some cases, narrowing it in others.

My focus is particularly on the pattern of the genocide, its expansion and contraction. One does not have to subscribe to an idea of the Holocaust's uniqueness to see that its scale and scope at its most extensive were extreme even in the horrific annals of genocide.<sup>2</sup> I hope to shed some explanatory light on these matters by viewing the Holocaust in a set of temporally and culturally specific contexts,<sup>3</sup> and to place it in a wider European framework of violent ethnopolitics and geopolitics from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. I want to ask simultaneously what light the 'final solution' sheds on European history in the period, and what light a study of the European context sheds on the 'final solution'.

My approach is informed by three simple, related observations: during the Second World War Germans killed others than Jews; others than Germans killed Jews and killed yet others besides; and, in the previous sixty years or so, there had been repeated and diverse instances of extreme inter-group violence, some of which look like antecedents of what occurred during the Second World War, whether or not they pass the bar for qualification as 'genocide'. That said, I do not prescribe a comparative approach. The focus of comparative genocide studies on the overall 'similarity' or 'difference' of the Holocaust to other genocides (a focus that is structurally replicated in the preoccupation in genocide studies with whether or not this or that event qualifies as 'genocide') sheds light primarily on outcomes, not causes. It tends towards sharp delineation of the past into *completed* 'events', carved out of

2 For my own view on the uniqueness issue, among other things, see Donald Bloxham, 'Comparative genocide', in Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Daniel Langton, *Writing the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury forthcoming 2010).

3 My reasons are similar in some respects to those outlined by the political scientist Scott Straus. Straus observes that comparative genocide studies at present has a 'no variance' character: students of genocide examine cases that have happened but not instances in which genocide might have been predicted but did not occur. The search for key variables in the onset or otherwise of genocide and other instances of mass violence necessarily involves studying both types of case. In the interests of meaningful 'testing' of variables, Straus points out that it is better to restrict comparative study to in-depth analyses of particular areas of the world that have more internally similar cultures, political systems and resource issues, rather than comparing across vast tracts of time and space where fewer variables are constant. See Scott Straus, 'Second-generation comparative research on genocide', *World Politics*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2007, 476–501. This sort of thinking has also led to my editorship, along with Mark Levene, of the monograph series *Zones of Violence* (Oxford University Press).

time and space and selected according to some rather arbitrary standard for contemplation alongside other select, crystallized events.<sup>4</sup> I hope for a more *contextual* study in which what we now call the Holocaust is depicted as an only partially discrete part of a wider European process of violent flux, and a part, furthermore, that can itself be partially disaggregated into national and regional components. I move from a general consideration of patterns of violence in the period to a closer causal explanation that shows that the peculiarly extensive geographical ambitions of the 'final solution' at its most expansive can only be explained when those contextual terms are factored in along with the internal dynamics of the Nazi state.

### The Old World at the *fin de siècle*

My geographical and chronological framework encapsulates some particular characteristics of Europe's experience of late modernity, building on the work, from their respective economic, cultural and strategic perspectives, of such divergent thinkers as Giovanni Arrighi, Arnold Toynbee and George Kennan.<sup>5</sup> To these perspectives I would add a geopolitical dimension. At the end of the nineteenth century the greater Europe that is my concern was composed of the multinational dynastic empires at its centre and to the east and southeast (the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires), more ethnically homogeneous nation-states in the north and northwest, with Great Power status applied to some of each. The broad narrative of the European crisis begins with the demise of the dynastic empires under the pressures of modernization, stemming from and exacerbating international competition. The narrative continues with the establishment in the geopolitical spaces created by imperial decline of a number of insecure new nation-states in the Balkans and in eastern and central Europe, states fearful of the greater powers to their east and west (Russia/the USSR and Germany), determined to hold on to recent territorial gains or to redress losses, and suspicious of internal minorities perceived as sources of weakness at best, treachery at worst. The next part of the narrative is the intrusion into those spaces of three new imperial forms that also often acted like Great Powers with spheres of interest and more-and-less strained and

4 For further comments to this effect, see the editors' introduction to Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010).

5 At least in terms of its earlier chronological parameter, namely, the mid-1870s. See George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1979), and Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London and New York: Verso 1994), esp. its focus on 1873. Arnold Toynbee used the term 'postmodern' to denote a break with what had gone before about 1875 in European history, in his *A Study of History*, vols 8-9 [1954] (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1963).

reciprocally manipulative relations with the lesser powers. The three new forms were Italy in its pre-Fascist and Fascist guises as it sought a Mediterranean empire, the USSR and, particularly important for present purposes, Nazi Germany. The contested spaces from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and the changing eastern and western borders of Germany and Russia, respectively, were the areas in which, for the most part, genocide happened during the Second World War. But they had also been the site of much other mass anti-civilian violence in the quest for land and supremacy over the preceding three generations.

The Ottoman empire provides my conceptual point of departure. It was the weakest link in the European system of Great Powers, the first of the older dynastic empires to crumble under the weight of industrial modernity and heightened international competition elsewhere on the continent and, relatedly, the development of nationalism among its subject peoples. The Eastern Crisis of 1875–8 is my chronological point of departure. It was the greatest single step towards the removal of the Ottoman empire from mainland Europe, and the violence of the process as new Slavic states appeared on the map foreshadowed the violence of the end of the Romanov and Habsburg empires and the contested disposition of their lands in the First and Second World Wars. Ethnic cleansing and mass murder in pursuit of land and supremacy; minorities treaties that did as much to arouse hostility and suspicion towards the minorities as to protect them; population transfers around newly established borders: all of these things occurred in the Ottoman empire's prolonged terminal phase between 1875 and the Great War, before they were generalized in the coming generations to much wider swathes of Europe.<sup>6</sup> From shortly after the Eastern Crisis, Europe began in earnest to export its Great Power competition, notably via the murderous scramble for Africa. It is the return of that competition to Europe's interior that explains the world wars.

Another value of starting with the Ottoman case and the Eastern Crisis—and here I depart from most recent analyses of European violence—is that it highlights the enduring significance of religion. This greater Europe was the meeting point of the three great monotheistic religions, and it is a frequently overlooked aspect of the period that many of the most outright murderous inter-group dynamics were superimposed on religious cleavages. (Although, by the twentieth century, religion was more significant as a marker of ethno-national identity than as a metaphysical belief system, that shift perforce did not affect religion's cultural significance, and with enduring cultural significance also endured the senses of phobia, paranoia and superiority–inferiority that had long marked inter-religious relations.)

6 See Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), ch. 1, and Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2009), chs 1–2.

This was as true for the different Christian sects in the Polish-Ukrainian and Croat-Serb conflicts as for the Muslim-Christian-Jewish dynamic. An interesting question is why the Protestant-Catholic dynamic did not prove as murderous as that between Protestants and Catholics on the one hand, and Orthodox Christians on the other. The answer may or may not lie in the history of Protestant-Catholic accommodation, however imperfect, since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, but it is true that the other ethno-religious dynamics explored here had not undergone a comparable process of enforced negotiation towards explicit equality, being characterized instead either by more-and-less grudging toleration or more-and-less coercive assimilation.

Let us briefly recount the litany. Because of relative Ottoman weakness, the greatest violence of the later nineteenth century had Muslims as its victims, as Tsarist Russia expanded its borders at the expense of the Ottomans and evicted millions of Muslims from the Caucasus, and the Christian nationalists of new Balkan states evicted Muslims associated with historic Ottoman dominance. Then it was the turn of the Ottoman Christians: during the First World War the Armenians and Assyrians suffered waves of massacres culminating in genocide. Continuing with the ethno-religious theme, Tsarist and White Russian violence against Jews in the turmoil of the First World War and the Russian civil war was a particularly pronounced feature of the general mass anti-civilian violence in the wide western marches of the Romanov empire, as was Russian repression of Muslims deemed rebellious in the Caucasus and Central Asia in 1914–15 and 1916, respectively. At the end of the First World War era, the internationally sponsored ethnic cleansing of 'Turks' and 'Greeks' (meaning Muslims and Orthodox Christians) was the last burst of such violence until the attacks on and evictions of Balkan Muslims both during the Second World War and after the Cold War. With the exception for specific reasons of Romania, the Balkan states emerging from the Ottoman empire also lacked the intensity of the antisemitism in the new states to the north, and provided less of an indigenous impetus to the genocide of the Second World War.

To the Jews, then, for, as the European crisis spread northwards from Ottomania, they were a particularly common target. Part of the reason was simple fortune, given that the majority of the continent's Jews happened to live squarely in the territory most affected by repeated war, migration, revolution and changing state boundaries: the territory in and around the Pale of Settlement. The larger part of the reason was the interaction of culture with economic and political contingencies. Like Christians in the Ottoman state, pre-existing cultural stereotypes, based particularly on commercial specialisms and transnational diasporic affiliation, provided the template into which new nationalist and racist conceptions of their exploitative or disloyal otherness could fit. Both Ottoman Christians and European Jews ultimately suffered more than they had ever done with the advent of the secularizing capitalistic modernity that first promised to empower them by increasing emancipation but ended up by inducing

accusations that they were using their new status for nefarious purposes. Such charges had clear precedents in the Jewish case, when one thinks of the heightened anti-Jewish sentiment at the time of the commercial revolution of mediaeval Europe, when Jews were held responsible for that alleged subversion of the Christian moral order.

In rural areas of eastern and east central Europe the depressions of the 1870s and 1890s drove masses of people from the land to the industrial urban areas that profitted, and Jews were a convenient target for those dislocated from their 'organic' traditional communities by forces associated with an increasingly integrated world economy. Some of the same blame associations were at work in the inter-war depression in which the industrial countries, including obviously Germany, were the primary victims, and international—'Jewish'—finance could be held responsible. Similar reactions, too, can be observed to the minorities treaties imposed on various new and older polities by the Great Powers at the end of the Eastern Crisis in 1878, and again after the First World War. The notion that Armenian Christians had broken the contract with the Muslim state by appealing to the Great Powers for the 'protection' that manifested itself in the Berlin Treaty of 1878 was a key moment in the deterioration of relations that led to the First World War genocide.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, at the height of the Holocaust in 1942, Ion Antonescu observed that his predecessor as Romanian leader, the first Ion Brătianu, had, by his acquiescence to the terms of the Berlin Treaty, granted civil rights to Jews that 'compromised the Romanian economy and the purity of our race', and that, after the First World War, the 'Yids' had conspired with Britain and the United States to dictate the treaty terms.<sup>8</sup>

By the inter-war era, against the longer-term backdrop of the French revolutionary emancipation of Jews, the Bolshevik Revolution was only the most potent recent indicator of the alleged rise to power of the Jews in modernity. Like the moral panic and conspiracy theories thrown up by the French Revolution, 1917 produced a sense of established (Christian) verities assailed by hidden forces. If Napoleon had been the anti-Christ to the rulers of the German principalities, *Zhydo-Bolshevyzm*, as the Ukrainians had it, was invoked across the Occident, and to particular effect in those places that were reconquered by the USSR after gaining brief independence from Russian rule in the civil war years or the whole inter-war period. Without the newly stoked indigenous antisemitisms that, along with other factors, prompted tens of thousands of Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and to a lesser extent Belarussians to collaborate with German forces in the Soviet territories, the 'final solution' could not have achieved the dimensions it did there. Without

7 Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, ch. 1.

8 Jean Ancel, 'German-Romanian relationship and the Final Solution', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2005, 252–75 (268–9). More generally, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2004).

the antisemitism in those independent states that had emerged uncertain into a hostile Europe from the shatter zones of the empires, Germany would not have been able to internationalize the 'final solution'. There was an element of contingency to Germany's leading the European assault on the Jews (in the rise to power there of a particularly virulent and aggressive ethno-nationalist movement), but it is much less 'surprising' that much of the continent as a whole turned upon the Jews at this time.

### **Logics of war and genocide in harmony: 1939–42**

The far-reaching impact of the Nazi agenda transcended *some* of the cultural particularities of the successor peoples of the former dynastic empires as far as influence on their anti-Jewish actions was concerned. Nazi Germany's agenda as a Great Power involved playing on ethnic fears and antagonisms as a way of fracturing the 1918 peace settlement, as in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. German antisemitism also radiated outwards, encouraging radical elements in eastern and southeastern Europe to adopt their own antisemitic legislation in the later 1930s. But Germany could only encourage what was already there, and the independent states concerned only went as far as was in their own economic and geopolitical interest. Germany was especially successful in the first instance in states that had emerged from the Great War with territorial losses. As Germany divided up eastern Europe along with the USSR in 1939–40 it was in a position to reverse a number of the post-First World War boundary awards, with Hungary and Bulgaria gaining territory at the expense of Romania, Yugoslavia and Greece. Romania also lost Bessarabia and Bukovina to the adjoining USSR.

As territory changed hands, any so-called 'foreign' populations dwelling in it were in danger from their new masters. They were in danger, first of all, because they were seen as potential grounds for future irredentist claims by the recently dispossessed state, but also because, as non-co-nationals, they were simply distrusted, and because, as the territory was only freshly acquired, there were often fewer issues of citizenship and fewer ties of integration into the non-Jewish community or even residual compassion to concern oneself with. Bulgaria followed up its acquisition of Dobruja from Romania with a population exchange of Bulgarians and Romanians between the two states, and was later prepared to allow Germany to murder Jews from the Macedonian and Thracian territories acquired from Greece and Yugoslavia. Hungary evicted into the Ukraine Jews from the areas it acquired from Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> Romania swiftly learned the lesson. The desire to

9 Frederick B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940–1944* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1972); Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel: Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 2002), 430.



regain the territory it had just lost led it to join the German alliance under a much more radical leadership. As it regained Bessarabia and Bukovina from the USSR with the German invasion of summer 1941, Romania began expelling and ultimately murdering the Jews of the two regions, using some of the personnel and demographic engineering know-how gathered during its handling of the earlier population exchange with Bulgaria over Dobruja. It was not prepared for the most part to surrender the Jews of the core lands of 'old Romania'.<sup>10</sup>

Some of Germany's allies proved less discriminating between categories of Jew. In the Slovakian case, the Tiso regime's desire to 'cleanse' the economy and ultimately the society in the name of 'Christianization' resulted in the decision of March 1942 to deliver the vast majority of its Jews to German hands, and most were ultimately murdered at Auschwitz. The Slovak government clearly did not care about the fate of these Jews, yet at the same time it did not deliver them with the express intent that they be murdered. Surrender into German hands was simply an easy way of fulfilling a social goal that might otherwise have been hindered by reluctant recipient states; despite the significant German influence over its puppet ally, the SS officers who oversaw the deportations had not imposed the design on Slovakia, they had merely nudged and facilitated. It will not do to present this episode as the imposition of a German design, but as a synergy.<sup>11</sup>

German policy influenced other states and peoples, but the process could work in reverse too. It is no coincidence that the first of the SS Einsatzgruppen to progress to the murder of Soviet Jews of all ages and both sexes (Einsatzgruppe A) did so in the context of much local collaboration in killing in the Baltic.<sup>12</sup> On 19 August 1941 Hitler not only suggested that Romanian massacres of Jews in Transnistria proved that Europe was presenting a

10 On Romanian policies, see Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941–1942: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University 2003); Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee 2000); and Martin Broszat, 'Das dritte Reich und die rumänische Judenpolitik', *Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 1, 1958, 102–83.

11 Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2003), 137–62; Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt-on-Main: Campus 1998), esp. the essays by Eduard Nižňanský, 'Die Deportation der Juden in der Zeit der autonomen Slowakei im November 1938' (20–45), and Livia Rothkirchen, 'The situation of Jews in Slovakia between 1939 and 1945' (46–70).

12 See, for example, on Lithuania, Christoph Dieckmann and Saulius Sužiedelis, *Lietuvos žydų persekiojimas ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą ir rudenį / The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius: margi raštai 2006), 95–177.

'united front' against the Jews, he also said that Romania was actually showing the way by the sheer extent of its killing, which was greater at that point than the SS murders in neighbouring Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

### Germany: 'cleansing' the empire

As to Germany, the broad outlines of the development of Nazi *Judenpolitik* are now reasonably well known. After the conquest of Poland, it was still temporarily possible for a few German Jews to flee westwards, but most of them, alongside all of the Polish Jews, were scheduled to be deported to the easternmost part of the German empire, which at that time was Lublin. Madagascar was temporarily considered as a destination for most of the continent's Jews after the defeat of France in 1940 seemed to pave the way for German domination. Ghettoization of the Jews occurred as a provisional measure as it became apparent that such mass population movement would not be logistically easy, particularly with temporary priority being given to the exchange of Poles for ethnic Germans up to the spring of 1941. With preparations for the invasion of the USSR, all population transfers were put on hold. The intention now was that, after a summary victory, Europe's Jews would be pushed over the Ural 'border' between Europe and Asia, there to perish in a generation or two in the unforgiving lands of the gulag archipelago to the north.<sup>14</sup>

The mass murder of adult male Soviet Jews began immediately on the invasion, but the intention was not to wipe out all Jews and the subsequent escalation of measures was not planned from the outset. The initial aim was decapitating the Jewish community and the 'Judaeo-Bolshevik' state and pre-empting potential resistance. Almost simultaneously, the German military authorities in occupied Serbia used Jewish and Romani men as hostages and murdered them in 'reprisal' for partisan action. This paranoid, racist security policy was intrinsically unstable and susceptible to radicalization.<sup>15</sup> In the USSR, the circle of victims rapidly expanded owing less to central orders than to the radical ethos of the SS-police forces and their open-ended remit, although SS chief Himmler frequently toured the eastern front to exhort his men to greater extremities, seizing the moment to entrench an

13 Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, part II, vol. 1 (Munich and New York: K. G. Saur 1996), 269.

14 Götz Aly, "'Jewish resettlement': reflections on the political prehistory of the Holocaust", in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York: Berghahn 2000), 53–82.

15 Christoph Dieckmann, 'The war and the killing of the Lithuanian Jews', in Herbert (ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies*, 240–75; Ralf Ogorreck, *Die Einsatzgruppen und die 'Genesis der Endlösung'* (Berlin: Metropol 1996).

SS order in the East.<sup>16</sup> The killing escalated yet further, and started to spread back westwards into civilian-controlled Poland, as the German plan for swift victory was foiled.

The idea of a Jewish 'reservation' in the East only slowly metamorphosed from a real intention to a euphemism for more-or-less immediate murder. Moves made by the occupation authorities rather than Berlin were still crucial. Autumn 1941 saw the beginning of a series of local initiatives in Poland to establish murder facilities using gas to dispose of indigenous ghettoized Jews who were too ill, young or old to work. Here, economic concerns acted in two directions: those incapable of work were murdered partly because they were seen as burdens; those capable of work were kept alive in the interests of the war economy until they were no longer physically useful. During the spring of 1942, the idea developed at both local and central levels of murdering outright western and central European Jews who were deported into the space created by these horrific 'culls'. The local authorities in Poland faced logistical problems because the ghettos were deliberately undersupplied with food, and so opted to murder any Polish Jews who could not work due to weakness or illness, thereby setting in train the dynamic of a constant sifting of the Jewish population by murder.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that a number of mid-ranking German occupation and SS officials could arrive at outright murder as an *ad hoc* local 'solution' more or less simultaneously across great distances in the months after Operation Barbarossa is much more telling than any of the moments of 'decision' invoked by various scholars in answer to the *when* question.<sup>18</sup> Jews were the target of genocide—in terms of the deliberate creation of the conditions for mass death from environment and starvation—as soon as large reservation plans were discussed. But 'genocide', like the 'final solution', is too capacious a term to convey much about the developing extent and immediacy of the destruction process. If the foregoing dynamics of radicalization are accepted, they account 'only' for the murder of Jews within Germany's expanded borders. German dominion, in its coveted eastern empire of wheat and oil, of the German diaspora, 'inferior' Slavic populations and the 'seedbed' of world Jewry—the Pale of Settlement—assumed the 'diminution' and enslavement of many millions of non-Germans and the removal of the Jews by some means or other.

16 Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten: das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2002); 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.

17 Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich: Piper Verlag 1998); and, especially, Bogdan Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement: eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin 1939–1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1999).

18 Bloxham, *The Final Solution*, ch. 5.

Murder, whether immediate or by attrition, was inherent in these designs *in a way it was not* in Germany's relationship to the Jews of Europe outside direct German control.

Owing to the tendency I mentioned at the outset to view genocide from the *ex post facto* perspective of the fully crystallized event, the temptation in the literature has been to equate the expansion of genocide from the USSR to Poland and then Germany—the latter through the deportation decisions of the autumn and winter of 1941—with the decision for a fully continental genocide. The logic seems to be that a fully continental genocide was simply a conceptual extension of genocide within the territories directly ruled by Germany (which I take to include 'greater Germany' itself and those lands annexed to it from 1938–41, as well as the Netherlands which was scheduled to be incorporated).<sup>19</sup> I disagree. As with other genocidal regimes, most perpetrators of the 'final solution' were primarily concerned with an 'inner enemy', albeit one that dwelt within a territory that was, by late 1941 and by dint of German conquest, enormous and containing a large proportion of the world's Jews. The concern with the 'inner enemy' was perhaps inevitable at the level of simple politics, given the heavy bias among regional administrators, from SS officials on the ground to the German Gauleiter and the civil administrations in the East, towards getting their own area 'free of Jews'. That spatial element of the 'final solution', writ large in the Lublin, Madagascar and Ural 'plans', remained present at a number of levels in Jewish policy and was never fully supplanted even as the policy gained a more universal and existential aspect in the nine months or so after the invasion of the USSR.

Between autumn 1941 and autumn 1943 there *had* been extensive and partially successful attempts to induce other more independent states to deport their Jewish populations. Genocide did indeed become Europeanized, but neither straightforwardly nor completely, and to explain that we need again to think contextually about European conditions, namely, the early coincidence of German antisemitic aims with those of other states: the 'multiplier factor' as it might be called. Here we come to another interaction of German and non-German aims.

### **Heydrich: drawing the European strands together**

From the end of October 1941 the Auswärtiges Amt (German Foreign Office) approached Romania, Slovakia and Croatia about the possibility of deporting their Jewish citizens who happened to be living in Germany.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Christian Gerlach, 'The Wannsee conference, the fate of German Jews, and Hitler's decision in principle to exterminate all European Jews', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 70, no. 4, 1998, 759–812.

This would help to fill deportation quotas of German Jews bound for Poland and, in retrospect, it set a precedent for later, more extensive, deportations from those states themselves. Romania, Slovakia and Croatia agreed.<sup>20</sup> This initial diplomatic success with the Balkan states explains the certainty of both Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the SS's Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA, Reich Security Head Office), and Martin Luther, the Foreign Office representative at the infamous Wannsee conference of January 1942. There, Luther claimed to foresee no difficulties in getting other countries to surrender their Jews.<sup>21</sup>

The identity of these two organizations explains something very important about the full Europeanization of the 'final solution', about why Germany ultimately sought not just to *facilitate* the destruction of other countries' Jewish populations but, after the encouragement given them by Croatia, Slovakia and Romania, to *drive* the process. The explanation pertains to the normal pressures of bureaucratic life as they played themselves out within the particular radical, racist context of the institutional centres of the Third Reich: namely, the desire for relevance and power. The two organizations were, after all, those whose interest in Jewish policy was most heavily invested in its extension beyond Germany's *imperium*. This is obviously true for the Foreign Office, but it is also true for the RSHA, despite Heydrich's earlier leadership in emigration policy and then murder policy at the outset of the invasion of the USSR.<sup>22</sup>

Far from a monolithic organization, the SS-Polizei (SS-Police) was a conglomerate of different agencies with cross-cutting remits. All SS-Police units co-operated with each other in killing, as did the civilian authorities; competition for power over Jewish policy took place within the framework of ideological collaboration, and so only accelerated the development of genocide except under particular circumstances of labour shortage. Since the early weeks of the invasion, much larger SS-Police bodies, namely, the Waffen-SS and the Ordnungspolizei (Orderpolice), had driven Jewish policy at least as murderously in the Soviet Union as had the RSHA's Einsatzgruppen, thus compromising Heydrich's leadership there. The Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer (HSSPFs, Higher SS and Police Leaders) were particularly prominent in providing a lead with regard to large-scale killing operations requiring combined forces. So influential was HSSPF Jeckeln in the developing murder process in the southern USSR, for instance, that in

20 Christopher Browning with Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2004), 379, 406.

21 Kurt Pätzold and Erika Schwarz (eds), *Tagesordnung, Judenmord: die Wannsee-Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942: eine Dokumentation zur Organisation der 'Endlösung'* (Berlin: Metropol 1992), doc. 24.

22 On the Foreign Office, see Christopher R. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland, 1940–43* (New York: Holmes and Meier 1978).

October 1941 a unit of Einsatzgruppe C, Einsatzkommando 4a, anxiously reported back to Berlin that it too had taken part in killings in the area, that they were not the achievement of the HSSPF alone.<sup>23</sup> Competitive concerns had been evident as early as 2 July 1941: Heydrich's irritation at the close relationship between Orderpolice chief Kurt Daluege, Himmler and the HSSPFs was illustrated when he complained:

Owing to the fact that the Chief of the Order Police invited to Berlin the Higher SS and Police Leaders and commissioned them to take part in Operation Barbarossa without informing me of this in time, I was unfortunately not in a position also to provide them with basic instructions for the sphere of jurisdiction of the Security Police and SD.<sup>24</sup>

This was an unsatisfactory state of affairs for a man of whom it was said by one of his most important early collaborators that, 'in the acceptance of the notorious commission for the "final solution of the Jewish question", he barely spared a hateful thought for the Jews, but only focused on the scale of his supranational task and the necessity of demonstrating his energy and his destiny'.<sup>25</sup> For leadership on the 'Jewish question', Heydrich would have to look away from the occupied East.

At the end of July 1941 Heydrich was given the opportunity to reassert his powers with regard to Jewish policy. On the last day of that month Hermann Göring signed a letter affirming Heydrich's commission 'to make all the necessary organizational, technical and material preparations for a general solution of the Jewish question throughout the German sphere of influence in Europe'.<sup>26</sup> This document was drawn up by the RSHA, possibly on the

23 Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die höheren SS- und Polizeiführer: Himmlers Vertreter im Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten* (Düsseldorf: Droste 1986), 171–2; Dieter Pohl, 'Schauplatz Ukraine', in Norbert Frei, Sybille Steinbacher and Bernd C. Wagner (eds), *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik* (Munich: K. G. Saur 2000), 135–73 (140).

24 'Extracts from guidelines by Heydrich for Higher SS and Police Leaders in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, July 2, 1941', in Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman and Abraham Margalioth (eds), *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, trans. Lea Ben Dor, 8th edn (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1999), 377. On relations between Heydrich and Daluege, see Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang 1998), 73–4.

25 Werner Best, quoted in Siegfried Matlok (ed.), *Dänemark in Hitlers Hand: der Bericht des Reichsbevollmächtigten Werner Best über seine Besatzungspolitik in Dänemark* (Husum: Husum Verlag 1988), 170. Translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

26 Letter from Hermann Göring to Reinhard Heydrich, Berlin, 31 July 1942: National Archives, Washington, D. C., Collection of World War II War Crimes Records, Nuremberg Document PS-710, NG-2586.

same day. Interestingly, on 28 July, Göring had stated that 'Jews residing in regions under German rule have no further business there'.<sup>27</sup> Within three days, his aspiration to remove Jews under *German rule* had developed into a concrete instruction to prepare for the removal of Jews living anywhere within the German *sphere of influence*: a significant step that was certainly a result of Heydrich seeking to maximize his authority by enlarging the potential scope of his responsibilities to incorporate relations with Germany's allies as well as its dominions. With the readiness of Slovakia, Croatia and Romania to hand over some of their Jewish nationals in the autumn, this potential looked set to be realized but, by the time of the Wannsee conference, Heydrich had expanded his ambitions further still.

In terms of what could actually be planned and acted upon at the time of the Wannsee conference, a better guide than the minutes themselves, with their enumeration of Jews as far afield as Britain and the Iberian peninsula, is a document submitted to Heydrich from the Foreign Office in preparation for the meeting. It suggested deporting all Reich Jews 'to the East', plus the Serbian Jews (the bereaved women and children), and putting pressure on the southeastern European states to take similar measures.<sup>28</sup> The design was an attempt to anticipate Heydrich's intentions, an attempt by the Foreign Office to ingratiate itself further with the RSHA in this vital policy field. With the exception of parts of German-influenced northern and western Europe, which it did not mention, it was also a good elucidation of Göring's 31 July 1941 commission of Heydrich to implement a 'general solution' within the 'German sphere of influence in Europe'. But Heydrich had gone one step further again, as he had when the RSHA had earlier developed a competing design to the Foreign Office's Madagascar plan. Capitalizing on the mood of the times, at Wannsee, Heydrich claimed the authority for the 'final solution of the Jewish question in *Europe*'.<sup>29</sup> If there could be competition to 'solve' the 'problem' of Jews under German rule by ever more radical and immediate means, one way of reframing the problem was expanding the scope of the whole policy. It would be wrong to read the Wannsee minutes as the expression of some all-encompassing global annihilatory project driven by a self-propelling, relentless, utopian ideology, so much as Heydrich's self-interested attempt to lay claim pre-emptively to Jewish policy in as many places as possible. The fact that the other representatives at Wannsee bowed to Heydrich's authority was a source of his jubilation after the meeting: success in unilaterally extending his remit must have doubled his satisfaction.

27 Quoted in Gerlach, 'The Wannsee conference', 777.

28 Pätzold and Schwarz (eds), *Tagesordnung, Judenmord*, doc. 14.

29 The minutes themselves are reproduced in Pätzold and Schwarz (eds), *Tagesordnung, Judenmord*.

The ideological battle against the Jewish 'threat' also presented mundane opportunities, and the RSHA, vanguard of the SS vanguard that it was, capitalized on those opportunities. The Foreign Office tried to do likewise, even though its personnel evinced lower levels of antisemitism than the average RSHA man. Christopher Browning's seminal study of the Foreign Office's 'Jewish desk' has convincingly depicted its chief Luther as an ultra-opportunistic 'amoral technician of power', supported in the main by simple careerists who nevertheless did all they could to further genocide, as for instance when trying to prevent the flight of Balkan Jewish children to Palestine in 1943.<sup>30</sup> Equally, though, it must be stressed that, whatever psychological and/or material drives underlay Heydrich's or Luther's especially aggressive expansionism on Jewish policy, their stances only made rational sense within the framework of the institutionalized German antisemitism that gave it direction—and, it might be added, within the wider framework of the European antisemitisms that seemed to be encouraging the expansion of genocide beyond the German empire.

Whatever Heydrich's and Luther's superficial certainty about expanding the genocide to a fully continental level, it did not result in anything like complete success, beyond the Slovakian case in which the RSHA men capitalized early on the antisemitic synergies of the two states. With German defeats from mid-1942, the earlier 'multiplier effect' was reversed as a burgeoning continental consensus on Jewish policy was fractured. 'Europe', it seems, could be a decelerator of genocide as well as an accelerator.

### **The collapse of the 'united front': 1942-4**

After mid-1942, which was also the time of Heydrich's death, and particularly after the German loss at Stalingrad at the close of 1942, such competition as existed between Germany's major and lesser allies was not to mimic Nazi racial laws or to supply the murder machine, but to justify their own diminishing collaboration with reference to the diminishing collaboration of others. These states became more aware of their increased leverage over Germany, and the United States, the USSR and Britain looked the likely arbiters of the peace. Jews without full citizenship status were sometimes still used as sacrificial lambs in this changing dynamic, both to rid the states concerned of a 'foreigner problem' and to placate Germany. Increasingly, though, as in France, where the non-fully-French were sometimes surrendered with positive enthusiasm, full citizens were not surrendered: later in 1942 and 1943 the mass incarceration and deportation of Jews with full French citizenship could ultimately not be forced through because of the fear

30 Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, 170-4 and *passim*.



of non-co-operation then and afterwards by French bureaucrats and police who were still concerned with their own sovereign prerogatives and with French public opinion.<sup>31</sup>

As we have heard, Romania was happy to consign the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina to their deaths in Transnistria, but very few of the Jews of 'old Romania' were surrendered to German custody. By December 1942, the German Foreign Office recognized the Romanian deportations had 'come to a standstill'; in fact, they had never started. At that point Germany increased pressure on Hungary for its own sake but also to pressure Romania indirectly. The strategy failed on both counts. The Hungarian government invoked alliance parity with Germany's major alliance partner Italy in support of its protection of most Hungarian Jews in German-controlled territory, demanding that in every facet of the 'Jewish question' it be treated according to the established diplomatic most-favoured-nation principle.<sup>32</sup> The objection was important because it illustrated the significance of *amour propre* and sovereignty issues within the alliance. The upshot was that Germany got no further at this stage on the question of 'Magyarized Jews'.<sup>33</sup> Bulgaria was not dissimilar. Happy to deport the Jews of newly acquired Macedonia and Thrace to their deaths in March 1943, it surrendered no Jews from 'old Bulgaria'.

Himmler's role is particularly important since after Heydrich's death he was the major conduit of genocidal initiatives at the very top of the regime. Though he did attempt to take up Heydrich's Europeanizing initiatives from mid-1942, when he temporarily assumed the headship of the RSHA, he himself was substantially preoccupied with driving genocide in the eastern empire as a way of consolidating the SS's role as a colonial elite. He was also prepared to acquiesce in the logic of war-time necessity, as in stopping the French deportations until further notice.

There was nothing even Hitler could do about the reluctant states, despite his exhortations to Hungary's Regent Horthy and Bulgaria's King Boris in April 1943. But Hitler's direct involvement is telling, since it was rare in the genocide. Here again it is important to conceive of Germany less as a racial state with an implacable desire for genocide on principle, and more as an utterly ruthless Great Power concerned with the control and solidity of its

31 For the relevant decisions and contexts, see Serge Klarsfeld, *La Shoah en France. Vol. 1. Vichy-Auschwitz: la 'solution finale' de la question juive en France* (Paris: Fayard 2001), 194–6, 210–20. The general dynamic described in this paragraph is detailed in Bloxham, *The Final Solution*, ch. 6.

32 Martin Luther, 'Notes on Discussion [with Hungarian Ambassador]', 6 October 1942: National Archives, Washington, D. C., Collection of World War II War Crimes Records, Nuremberg Document NG-1800.

33 Letter from Martin Luther to Foreign Minister's field quarters, Feldmark, 21 August 1942, points 5–6: National Archives, Washington, D. C., Collection of World War II War Crimes Records, Nuremberg Document NG-2586.

sphere of interest in the form of its war-time alliance. In terms of the overall German state war agenda, at least as important as the principle of genocide was using the complicity of other states in genocide as a way of binding them to the German war effort, similar to the way that information about the 'final solution' was increasingly leaked to the domestic German population in the attempt to create a 'community of fate'. As the war progressed, and Germany's fortunes were reversed, increasing diplomatic pressure was exerted on the other Axis states to deport their Jews, lest the Allies have a wedge to drive between them. On 9 January 1943, in objecting to a Romanian agreement to allow Jews to emigrate to British-controlled Palestine, the opportunist Luther compounded the standard antisemitic rationales about Jewish power (reasons it is not clear he himself believed) with a newer one more oriented to alliance policy: the transaction had to be stopped because

given the large numbers involved [the emigration] would mean not only a significant strengthening of the immediate fighting potential of the enemy, *but also a morale and propaganda... advantage to him... The enemy would inevitably try to construe this measure as indicating a lack of unity amongst the Axis Powers.*<sup>34</sup>

Despite Luther's concerns, during 1943, most such prophylactic German endeavours met with failure.

Today this picture of a deceleration of the Holocaust across the continent as a whole, even as murder continued apace in Germany's eastern empire, is qualified in a huge way by the murder of Hungarian Jewry in 1944. That campaign has done most to entrench the notion of a fully continental genocide pursued irrespective of the economic and strategic implications. But the Hungarian episode also hinged in its inception and (premature) conclusion on Europe's geopolitical dynamics and Germany's ever-changing calculus about the relationship between fighting the war and murdering the Jews.

### **Hungary: war, genocide and self-determination**

The invasion of Hungary in March 1944 opened up a hitherto closed field for the men of the RSHA. In six weeks from mid-May 1944, 438,000 Jews were deported, the majority to Auschwitz, where about three-quarters were killed instantly on arrival. The prospect of deporting Jews was not, however, a significant factor in the military's decision to go into Hungary, which was purely strategic. The Allied push into Italy the previous autumn and the

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Martin Luther to the Bucharest Embassy, 9 January 1943: National Archives, Washington, D. C., Collection of World War II War Crimes Records, Nuremberg Document NG-2200 (emphasis added).

continuing Soviet advance through the Ukraine had led the Hungarian leadership to consider Allied peace overtures. From Germany's perspective this would have meant the loss of an important ally along with its raw materials.<sup>35</sup>

The German attitude towards Hungary and its 'Jewish question' was different to that regarding, say, the French or Danish 'Jewish questions'. In those cases, local attitudes towards the Jewish issue had never been associated with defection to the other side, merely greater non-compliance among the French and Danish people. Hungary had already wobbled, and now Germany was in a position to pressure the Hungarian government into action to prove its allegiance to Germany.

The most obvious way in which German influence was channelled into the Hungarian administration was through the enforced imposition of more radically antisemitic personnel at the head of the government and gendarmerie. Germany also made it clear that the RSHA personnel would not leave Hungary until the 'Jewish question' had been resolved to their satisfaction. Accordingly, the earlier tendency to reject the surrender of Hungarian Jews because it represented an infringement of Hungarian sovereignty was strongly tempered by the fact that deporting Jews had now become a method of *restoring* an aspect of sovereignty.

But the issues of different classes of Jew, of different degrees of Hungarian concern for Jews in different places and with different levels of integration into the non-Jewish nation, did not disappear. Beyond the keenest antisemites in the new regime, the Hungarian administration was drawn into the deportation programme step by step. The country was divided into different deportation zones. The first and largest deportations to take place were from the Carpatho-Ruthenian region taken from Czechoslovakia in 1938, and from northern Transylvania, taken from Romania in 1940. The Jews there were not considered 'Magyarized', and their removal would thereby elicit less of an outcry. Nearly 290,000 of the 438,000 deportees came from those regions. The remainder came from the provinces. Of the 255,000 Jews (based on the obviously problematic 'racial' definition of Jews) who survived the Holocaust in Hungary as a result of the developments

35 Much of the narrative detail here is taken from Gerlach and Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel* and, to a lesser degree, from Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, 2 vols, revd edn (New York: Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, City University of New York and Social Science Monographs 1994). My analysis differs from Gerlach and Aly, however, particularly on the level of Hungarian enthusiasm for genocide rather than for segregation, and on their comparison with France and Denmark, where they imply there was no greater German pressure over Jewish policy than in Hungary. On Hungarian attitudes towards ghettoization, and the changes wrought by the German invasion, see Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York and London: Routledge 2003).

enumerated, some 190,000 had been citizens of Hungary within its 1920 borders.<sup>36</sup>

Why did the deportations end before Hungary was made to disgorge even these more favoured Jewish citizens? Because the balance of alliance politics was about to shift again with Romania's defection to the Allied side on 23 August 1944. Hungary immediately re-emphasized its alliance commitment because it now saw the opportunity to gain territory at Romania's expense during the war. On 25 August, now Hungary had seemingly decisively bound itself to Germany in the war effort once again, Himmler forbade further deportations, thus concluding the final major killing operation of the Holocaust. The gas chambers of Auschwitz, however, found brief continued employment in August, when all of the remaining 2,900 inhabitants of the Romani camp were murdered there. As to the Hungarian administration that had turned so many Jews over to German hands, at the war's conclusion they availed themselves of the next Great Power-sponsored opportunity to rid themselves of a 'minority problem', as they evicted their ethnic German population with Allied agreement.

**Donald Bloxham** is Professor of Modern History at Edinburgh University. He is the author of *Genocide on Trial* (Oxford University Press 2001), *The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester University Press 2005, with Tony Kushner), the Raphael Lemkin Award-winning *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford University Press 2005), and *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford University Press 2009). He is co-editor, with A. Dirk Moses, of *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford University Press 2010) and, with Mark Levene, of the Oxford University Press monograph series *Zones of Violence*.

36 For the statistics, see Cole, *Holocaust City*, and Randolph L. Braham, 'Hungarian Jews', in Michael Berenbaum and Yisrael Gutman (eds), *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Museum 1998), 456–68.