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Introduction by Norman M. Naimark

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Introduction by Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University

Timothy Snyder is Housum Professor of History at Yale and a prolific author and frequent commentator in public interest journals. His oeuvre, primarily centered on the history of East Central Europe and Ukraine, has had a profound and even singular impact on the field of East European studies and on the informed public in general. Especially his last two books, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (2010) and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (2015), the latter of which is the subject of discussion here, have evoked great interest and controversy.¹ Both books make powerful and provocative arguments that intentionally jolt the reader from familiar patterns of thinking about the history of the twentieth century. Both have been translated into dozens of languages and have had an impact far beyond the Anglo-American scholarly community. Both have engendered mixed praise and criticism, represented in part by the views expressed in this forum.

Black Earth is in many ways a response to the discussion provoked by *Bloodlands*; it is Snyder's answer to some of the objections raised to his ways of looking at the Holocaust as it was carried out in Eastern Europe. But typically – and to his credit – Snyder attempts to use *Black Earth* to expand his own and our understanding of the Holocaust and to analyze its importance for the contemporary world. A fascinating characteristic of his work and thinking in general is that Snyder typically responds to criticisms by digging more deeply into the meaning of his work and exploring even more broadly its implications for scholarly inquiry. He does the same in the following, where his answer to the three reviews, but particularly to Eric Weitz's criticisms, not only restates and defends, but amplifies his ideas about the sources of the Holocaust. It is apparent that Snyder has been thinking about the critique of his ideas about the destruction of the state in the east and the coming of the Holocaust that have appeared in a number of reviews by German and Holocaust historians.

Black Earth has several distinct yet interlocking parts. First there is an explication of German dictator Adolf Hitler's worldview, his anti-Semitism, which was linked to anti-Bolshevism, and his fierce desire to conquer *Lebensraum* for the Germans. Second, Snyder explores elements of the history of eastern Poland (western Belarus and western Ukraine) and the Baltic states that he believes are essential for our understanding of the Final Solution: the linkages between Polish Zionism and the Polish government's efforts to be rid of the Jews by sending them to Palestine; the effects of the 'double occupation' (Soviet and then Nazi) and state destruction on the dynamics of collaboration and mass murder in the region; and the efforts of some Polish (and other) underground groups and individuals to aid the Jews. The final part of Snyder's argument – the conclusion – broaches, in an unusual exhortation, the ways in which Snyder believes the Holocaust teaches us lessons about the threats represented by global warming and environmental catastrophe.

Some reviewers of *Black Earth*, the CUNY historian Eric Weitz is one, believe the book has too many moving parts. Weitz complains in particular about the inclusion of issues having to do with the development of cooperation between Revisionist Zionists and some Polish political figures. Snyder responds that understanding the Polish backdrop to the Final Solution is essential in coming to terms with the importance of the destruction of the Polish state in the mass murder of the Polish Jews.

¹ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

Weitz also criticizes Snyder's incorporation of the "ecology" topos for understanding Hitler; he thinks this is little more than a jazzy update of a well-known set of concepts applied in the earlier historiography to the Third Reich. Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard historian of science, takes Snyder's ecological "warnings" very seriously. She points out, as does Snyder, that Hitler used and abused science as a way to rationalize his expansionist aims and murderous policies, ignoring the real possibilities that legitimate science offered to solve Germany's resource and food problems. She agrees with Snyder's reading of "environmental anxiety" built into the Holocaust and worries, as does he, that future climate change contains the potentiality of producing scapegoats and demands for victims. She also finds compelling his emphasis on the importance of the state and state structures for protecting individuals, like the Jews, during the war. She is ready to transfer that argument to the present, as is he, and underlines the potentially critical role of the state in protecting human life, property, and prosperity against the destructive results of climate change.

Serhy Yekelchuk, a Ukrainian-Canadian historian of Ukraine, appreciates Snyder's emphasis on a "political argument" for understanding the extent of local collaboration with the Holocaust in eastern Poland (western Ukraine and western Belarus) and the Baltic states by focusing on the dynamics of the double occupation. That some Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, *et al.* participated both in pogroms against the Jews immediately following the Soviet occupation and then in the mass executions by the Nazis that began in earnest in the late summer of 1941, was not a product of "traditional anti-Semitism and [a] proclivity for communal violence," writes Yekelchuk, but the result of the double-occupation, whereby especially local former Soviet collaborators wanted to prove their bonafides to the Nazis by killing Jews. Snyder's argument on this question, originally articulated by Jan Tomasz Gross in his work, is hard to prove statistically.² But it no doubt rings true in some cases, that of the Latvian commando chief and collaborator, Viktors Arājs, one of the most prominent. Yet, as Yekelchuk points out, in areas of the Soviet Union that were not independent before the war and therefore were not subject to double occupation, the bulk of Ukraine and Belarus as prime examples, locals did not seem any less disposed to participating in the Holocaust than in those regions that were doubly occupied. The most deadly massacre associated with the Holocaust, Babyn Yar (Babi Yar), took place almost seventy-five years ago (September 29 and 30, 1941), costing the lives of some 34,000 Jews. The killing was carried out, as was usually the case, by the Germans, their SS leadership, and their police firing squads. But local Ukrainians sometimes sympathized with the Nazi actions against the Jews and participated in auxiliary police battalions that were involved, if not directly in executing Jews, then in maintaining order and collecting clothes and valuables from the victims.

There is still interesting and important work to be done about the character of wartime collaboration, especially in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union. Weitz and Snyder get into an exchange below on the numbers of Polish Jews who were saved by leaving for the Soviet Union during the war. But it also should be mentioned that hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews survived as a result of the evacuation. In Kyiv, as an important example for the rest of Soviet territory, many more than the roughly 60,000 who died at Babyn Yar from September 1941 to the fall of 1943 would have lost their lives had tens of thousands of Kyiv Jews not been mobilized or evacuated to the east by the Soviet government.

The most salient issue that is discussed by the reviewers and that pervades Snyder's response is the role of the destruction of the state in the emergence of the idea and reality of the Holocaust. In Snyder's reading, state

² Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

power and sovereignty, not to mention norms of social interaction and behavior, were obliterated in the areas of eastern Poland occupied first by the Soviets and then by the Germans after Barbarossa (June 22, 1941). Nazi experiments with mass murder in this territory won local support and could be carried out with alacrity, encouraging the Nazi SS chieftains to continue and expand the audacious work of the Final Solution. This may be the most consequential discussion in *Black Earth*: that the Holocaust originated in the SS experiments in this newly occupied territory taken over from the Soviet Union in 1941. Naomi Oreskes finds Snyder's arguments about the destruction of the state compelling and "terrifying." Both of them see the positive role of the state – as Oreskes puts it, as critical in "preserving liberty" and preventing genocide. Oreskes's emphasis on the "*appropriate* forms of state authority" (my italics) is surely significant. States can serve all kinds of destructive purposes as well as positive ones. Snyder argues, on the other hand, that the violence done by 'party states' (China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia) is essentially the product of the party usurping state power. As for the anti-Semitic atrocities committed by "new states" during the war (Slovakia and Croatia, as examples), they cannot be included in his paradigm because they do not qualify as established states and therefore are exceptions to the rule.

Eric Weitz "and some of his Germanist colleagues" and those in "Holocaust studies" – to use Snyder's characterizations – think the explanation for the mass murder of the Jews by focusing on the destruction of the state is both insufficient and inappropriate. In their view, it minimizes the overwhelming destructive force of Nazi ideology and its resonance among the occupied peoples of Europe. Of course, Snyder does not leave anti-Semitic ideology out of his narrative. No one can. He writes in his response that the "combination of ideological hostility, territorial purpose, and political chaos" gave rise to the Holocaust after 1941. The question is, then, what is the appropriate mix of these factors. To summarize Weitz's review: the issue is much less the destruction or not of the states in Europe as it is the intent and capabilities of the Third Reich to carry out its goal of eliminating European Jewry. For Weitz, the occupied (or doubly occupied) territories of the east were part of Hitler's realm, meaning that they were subjected to Nazi state power. The bureaucracy, army, police, and political apparatus of the Third Reich were brought to bear to eliminate the Jews. This is not the absence of the state, but the domination of an imperial order over an occupied region. Snyder counters by parsing the cases of the Holocaust in Europe as a whole. Why were the Danish Jews saved: because the Danish state and government remained intact. Why did the Dutch Jews suffer so badly: because the SS took over the functioning of the Dutch state, essentially destroying its capabilities of protecting its Jewish citizens. For the most part, the Hungarians were able to keep their Jewish citizens out of Nazi hands because of the stance of the Admiral Horthy's Hungarian state. Once the Nazis took over control of Hungary in March 1944 and the Hungarian government no longer controlled the state, Hungarian Jews were subjected to deportation to Auschwitz.

Despite the edgy tone of their arguments, both Snyder and Weitz credibly want to widen the debates about the Holocaust to include the insights gleaned from other disciplines and the study of other genocides. Snyder believes that Holocaust studies rely too narrowly on German sources and pay insufficient attention to both Jewish testimony and the local scholarly literature from the region of Eastern Europe where most of the European Jews lived and died. He also calls for historians to incorporate the findings of social science about the relative significance of the role of the state in genocide and ethnic cleansing and to engage in comparative studies. Weitz is the author of *A Century of Genocide*, one of the pioneering studies of comparative genocide,

and urges Snyder to incorporate the findings of studies of other genocides into his warnings about the future.³ Both call for us to dig deeper when writing about the Holocaust; all of the commentators on *Black Earth*, as well Snyder himself, give us examples of how to do so.

Participants:

Timothy Snyder is the Housum Professor of History at Yale University, where he serves as the academic advisor for the Fortunoff Archive of Holocaust Testimonies. He is the author of a half-dozen scholarly studies in central and east European history as well as numerous works of intellectual history and contemporary politics. The book under discussion in this forum received a number of distinctions, including the annual award from the Dutch Auschwitz Committee and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising medal from the Association of Jewish Veterans in Poland. Snyder is at work on a long essay on the decline of contemporary political order as well as a family history of European nationalism and a number of other projects.

Norman M. Naimark is presently Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor of East European Studies in the History Department at Stanford University, and is Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman-Spogli Institute. He also serves as Sakurako and William Fisher Director of Stanford's Global Studies Division. A selection of his books include *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement under Alexander III* (Harvard, 1981); *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Germany* (Harvard, 1995); *Fires of Hatred; Ethnic Cleansing in 20th Century Europe* (Harvard, 2001); and *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton, 2010). He completed *Genocide: A World History* for Oxford, which is due out in November 2016, and is presently working on a book project, "Stalin and Europe, 1945-1953."

Naomi Oreskes is Professor of the History of Science and Affiliated Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Harvard University. Her most recent books are *Merchants of Doubt* (Bloomsbury, 2010), released as a documentary film by the same name in 2015, and *The Collapse of Western Civilization* (Columbia University Press, 2014), both co-authored with Erik M. Conway. She is also the co-editor of *Science and Technology in the Global Cold War* (MIT Press, 2014), and the author of the Introduction to the Melville House edition of the Papal Encyclical on climate change and inequality. Her current project is *Science on a Mission: American Oceanography from the Cold War to Climate Change*, to be published by the University of Chicago Press.

Eric D. Weitz is Distinguished Professor of History at The City College of New York. Trained in modern European and German history, his work in recent years has extended to the history and politics of international human rights and crimes against humanity. He received his Ph.D. from Boston University in 1983. His most recent publication is, "Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right," in the *American Historical Review* (April 2015). His major books include *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (2007; second expanded edition 2013), *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (2003; reprint with new forward, 2015), and *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* (1997), all with Princeton University Press. He is currently writing, "A World Divided: Nations and Human Rights from the Age of Revolution to the Present."

³ Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

A native of Ukraine, **Serhy Yekelchuk** received his Ph.D. from the University of Alberta in 2000. He has taught at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) before accepting a permanent position at the University of Victoria. A Full Professor since 2014, Dr. Yekelchuk currently serves as president of the Canadian Association of Ukrainian Studies. He has published six books on Ukrainian history and Ukrainian-Russian relations, including *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2007), which was translated into five languages. His most recent book is *The Conflict in Ukraine* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Review by Naomi Oreskes, Harvard University

Like any academic book addressing a major topic, Timothy Snyder's *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* covers ground that scholars will find familiar, but it also introduces important new perspectives. Snyder's two main arguments, as I read them, are the significance of the concept *Lebensraum* ['living space'] in German Chancellor Adolf Hitler's thinking, and the role of 'double destruction' in paving the way to the Final Solution. The first seeks to explain why Hitler sought to do what he did, the second to explain how he did it.

Snyder argues that Hitler's anxiety over land on which to farm and feed a growing German population—literally, room to live—was an urgent driver of his deadly imperialist ambitions. This perceived Malthusian imperative drove him to invade the east for its fertile agricultural ground. But Hitler misunderstood his own situation, Snyder suggests, insofar as he failed to understand how science and technology could enable societies to increase their productive capacity and escape the arithmetic that Thomas Malthus had insisted was inescapable. Had Hitler paid more attention to science, and particularly to emerging agricultural technologies—not as something to be subsumed into his *Weltanschauung* but as something that “possesses and enables a certain autonomy”—he might have realized that the territorial imperatives were less urgent than he believed (321). Had “Hitler not begun a world war that led to his suicide, he would have lived to see the day when Europe's problem was not food shortages but surpluses. Science provided food so quickly and bountifully that Hitlerian ideas of struggle lost a good deal of their resonance” (322). This is true.

The difficulty with this argument, however, is that Hitler paid a good deal of attention to science when it affirmed his racist and anti-Semitic beliefs. As Robert Jay Lifton and Robert Proctor have stressed, biology and biomedicine played a central role in Nazi ideology; Jews were variously understood in medical terms as a virus, a cancer, and an impurity in German blood. Accepting German cancer research, the Nazis launched anti-smoking campaigns and Hitler prohibited smoking in his presence.¹ German research on occupational health motivated a number of important laws that protected (Aryan) workers.² Scholars have also shown how Nazi racial laws were modelled in part on American eugenics, which, at the time, was generally viewed as scientific.³

Like politicians before and after, Hitler embraced scientific findings that suited him and rejected those that did not. Yes, there were scientific theories and data available to suggest other ways of thinking, but Hitler was scarcely unique in picking and choosing the ones that suited him. Our ideologies and understandings are not the product of simple availability heuristics: we all, even scientists, accept some evidence and lines of

¹ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

² Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³ Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1995); Stefan Kuhl, *Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

argumentation and not others. How and why this happens is an important unanswered question. *Black Earth* invites us to re-consider it in this uniquely important context.

In addressing the inevitable post-Holocaust questions—Could it happen again? How might it happen *here*?—Snyder suggests we should pay particular heed to the ways in which Malthusian imperatives are re-surfacing in the context of anthropogenic climate change and could easily drive resurgent racially-rationalized violence. His evidence regarding the role of environmental anxiety in the Holocaust—not much emphasized by previous scholars—offers a potent and frightening warning for our day. As he notes, “climate change as a local problem can produce local conflicts; climate change as a global crisis might generate the demand for global victims” (327).

As a historian of earth and environmental science, I might be expected to have much to say on this point. Certainly others have.⁴ But what strikes me as most pertinent to our current situation as we face climate disruption is Snyder’s argument about double destruction. It is this second point—the claim that the destruction of civil society and governance paved the way to genocide—that I found most original, important, and, indeed, terrifying.

Snyder argues that Nazis were able to destroy people as living beings most effectively where they had already been destroyed as citizens. The Nazis were able to implement genocide in occupied eastern lands because the instruments of civic governance and society had already been damaged, if not destroyed, during the years of Soviet occupation. That is to say, the conditions that permitted ready territorial conquests in the east were the same as those that permitted mass murder: the destruction of the institutions of governance and civil society. This occurred first and most extensively in areas where these institutions had been already badly damaged by Soviet occupation. The first step towards the Final Solution was to deny Jews the basic rights of citizenship, and this was most readily achieved where state authority had already been undermined. Snyder explains:

The double assault on state institutions in the Baltic states and eastern Poland, at first by the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940 and then by Nazi Germany in 1941, created the special field of experimentation where ideas of a Final Solution because the practice of mass murder. [In contrast], where political structures held, they provided support and means to people who wished to help Jews (320).

Jews were killed across Europe, but murder rates were far higher in eastern lands where civic institutions and the rule of law had already been undermined and could now be entirely destroyed: “the German murder of five and a half million Jews, more than three million Soviet prisoners of war, and about a million civilians in so-called anti-partisan operations all took place in stateless zones (337).

Snyder rejects the idea that citizens in the east of Europe were inherently more anti-Semitic than those in the west, pointing to ample evidence of virulent anti-Semitism in France and other western European countries,

⁴ For example, Paul Gilding, 2010. *The Great Disruption: Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring On the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World* or Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism v. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015). My book with Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), is an attempt to imagine some of the troubles that will arise if governments fail to take adequate measures to mitigate climate change. Also relevant is Roy Scranton’s *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights Open Media, 2015).

and noting that Jews had lived well in many Eastern European cities. But when things began to break down, and Germans began to murder Jews, others quickly joined in. In France, Belgium, Denmark and elsewhere, despite German occupation, many survived, but in “the dark zones of statelessness” few did (323).

The key point is that murder in Eastern Europe was not so much the consequence of inherent anti-Semitism among the populations there, but of a set of conditions that fostered and facilitated violence. Conversely, there were individuals, both east and west, who acted to save Jews (and other victims) but the outcomes tended to be scant unless they had institutional support of some kind.

The Holocaust and Climate Change

As anthropogenic climate change unfolds around the globe, and agricultural productivity is threatened while the population continues to increase, demands for land, food and water can only grow. The Malthusian threat that was staved off by the Green Revolution of the mid-twentieth century may return with a vengeance. This may lead many people to conclude that the solution to climate change will be found in technology. But Snyder’s narrative suggests a different conclusion. The compelling suggestion of *Black Earth* is that what will protect us, going forward, will not be science or technology, or at least, not science or technology by themselves. Science was available in the 1930s to reject Hitler’s vision; technology was already available to increase agricultural yields. And we have the science to understand the threat of climate change (at least in its broad outlines if not in all detail) and we have the technology we need to convert our energy systems.⁵ But to respond to the scientific information and implement the required technological solutions will require good governance and strong civic institutions.

Elsewhere I have argued that the greatest threat to our capacity to act on climate change is not scientific illiteracy, but the demonization of ‘big government’ that has dominated U.S. politics over the past three decades, a rejection that builds upon the long-standing American belief that the government that governs best governs least.⁶ This has become an urgent problem because the remedies needed to address climate change involve substantial doses of governance—a fact that the right wing has long understood, and underpins their campaigns to cast doubt on climate science. Those who wish to prevent or postpone efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions make common cause with corporate CEOs who defend laissez-faire economics, and libertarian think-tanks that promote a naïve and cultist theory of individual liberty.

In the current American political climate, it is difficult to argue for the importance of governance in our lives, and it is even more difficult to point out the need for mundane forms of it, such as the ordinary bureaucracies that maintain civic order and legal authority. Who among us is prepared to insist that among our pressing

⁵ There is substantial work to suggest that we can dramatically reduce carbon emissions and meet our energy needs with existing technologies. For one example, see Alexander MacDonald *et al.*, 2015 “Future cost-competitive electricity systems and their impact on US CO₂ emissions”, *Nature Climate Change*, 2015, published online on 25 January 2016, DOI: 10.1038/NCLIMATE2921, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/NCLIMATE2921>.

⁶ Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Naomi Oreskes, “Without Government the Market Will Not Solve Climate Change,” 2015, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/without-government-the-marketplace-will-not-solve-climate-change/>

needs is a better office to process passport applications or a better-functioning Internal Revenue Service?⁷ Several presidential candidates have argued that we should eliminate government agencies, but who among them has argued to make them stronger, much less create new one (the exception that proves the rule being the Department of Homeland Security)?

Nor is it only the right-wing that discredits governance. As Snyder notes, the left has had its own fascinations with unrestrained individualism and “rudderless revolutions.” He reminds us that “both the Left and the Right tend to fear order rather than its destruction or absence. The common ideological reflex has been post-modernity: a preference for the small over the large, the fragment over the structure, the glimpse over the view, the feeling over the fact” (337).

After reading *Black Earth*, it is hard not to conclude that the quotidian functions of governance are crucial to the answer of how to prevent ‘it’ from happening here. Snyder reminds us that “most people in Europe and North America live in functional states, taking for granted the basic elements of sovereignty that preserved the lives of Jews and others during the war: foreign policy, citizenship, and bureaucracy” (323). A rallying cry of ‘Protect and defend bureaucracy!’ would be more likely to appear in the U.S. on a satirical television show than in a serious political document, but it is telling that when George W. Bush rejected a major report on climate change developed by his own administration, he dismissed it condescendingly as “a report put out by the bureaucracy.”⁸

In his conclusion, Snyder reminds us that “a common American error is to believe that freedom is the absence of state authority.” That error that has been on full display in the past half century: from the left in the 1960s and ‘70s, and from the right from the 1980s through the present day. *Black Earth* demonstrates that appropriate forms of state authority are essential to preserving liberty. To that argument I would add the additional point that as destructive climate change unfolds—threatening our health, our property, and our prosperity—they may well be essential to preserving life and the pursuit of happiness as well.⁹ For if we return to the question of the conditions under which Jews (and other victims) survived or were saved in the midst of chaos and devastation, Snyder’s conclusion is that what made the difference was the persistence of at least

⁷ Allegra Kirkland, “Oops: Ted Cruz Can Only Name 4 Of 5 Fed Agencies He Would Cut,” *Talking Points Memo (TPM)*, 10 November 2015, <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/cruz-eliminate-federal-agencies>, accessed 30 August 2016.

It is telling that both Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Texas Governor Rick Perry, as Presidential candidates, infamously forgot in public debate which particular agencies they wanted to eliminate. I would suggest this is because the specifics do not matter to them; what matters is to reduce governmental authority in general. Cruz forgot the Department of Education, but it could have easily been Health and Human Services; Perry forgot the EPA but it could easily have been the Department of Interior or the National Parks Service.

⁸ Katharine Q. Seelye, “President Distances Himself From Global Warming Report,” 5 June 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/05/politics/05CLIM.html>, accessed 30 August 2016.

⁹ For an expanded version of this argument, see Naomi Oreskes, *Without Government*, note 15. On climate change and human health, see George Luber and Jay Lemery, eds., *Global Climate Change and Human Health: From Science to Practice* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2015).

some degree of the rule of law. Law binds us together as fellow citizens functioning under relations of reciprocity and empowers us to stand up when those relations are threatened:

German occupation destroyed the institutions that made ideas of reciprocity seem plausible or normal. Where Germans obliterated conventional states, or annihilated Soviet institutions that had just destroyed conventional states, they created the abyss where racism and politics pulled together towards nothingness. In this black hole, Jews were murdered. When Jews were saved, it was often thanks to people who could act on behalf of a state or by institutions that could function like a state. (319-320)

Snyder thus concludes, "If we are serious about emulating the rescuers, we should build in advance the structures that make it more likely that we would do so." In other words, we should take seriously the importance of governance, human rights, and the basic structures of normal daily life. We should preserve, protect, and defend the rule of law, and as necessary develop new ones. It is not a glamorous or romantic conclusion, but it seems to be a justified one.

Review by Eric D. Weitz, City College of New York

Do we need another general history of the Holocaust? This difficult question must be posed, especially when the author claims to present a bold and original thesis, one that purportedly sweeps aside all previous efforts at explanation.

Efforts to explain and understand the Holocaust reach back to 1942, when the first reports about the mass killing of Jews reached Western governments and civic leaders. In the immediate aftermath of War World II, intellectual luminaries like Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and so many others entered the fray. The intellectual, artistic, and political outpouring has never ceased, not even in the 1950s, when, some people claim – wrongly, I would argue – that the Holocaust had basically been ignored and deliberately forgotten in the public realm until the Eichmann trial in Israel and the Auschwitz trial in Germany dramatically changed the public, political, and theological engagement with the greatest tragedy in Jewish history. Again, one has to ask: what does a new book, self-consciously positioned as a new explanation, add to our knowledge and understanding?

The question arises also because the Holocaust must rank as one of the most deeply researched historical topics that exists. This was not always the case, to be sure, and one can still summon the historical and political science works of the 1950s and 1960s that dealt deeply with the Third Reich yet had precious little to say about the persecution of the Jews. Karl Dietrich Bracher's *The German Dictatorship* is the standard-bearer here, one based on his pathbreaking studies in the 1950s on the dissolution of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi seizure of power.¹ In the standard and largely accurate account, Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, first published in 1961, marks the real beginning of scholarly publications on the Holocaust.²

Since the 1970s, historical research on the Holocaust has become a literal floodtide. In the 1990s, the opening of Soviet and East European archives provided new resources, and many historians were able to fill in substantial gaps in our knowledge about the initiation and mechanism of the Holocaust. By now, we know a huge amount about what the Nazis thought and the policies they pursued to gather and annihilate all of Europe's Jews. We also know far more than before about the reactions of Jewish communities all across the continent, and how various non-Jewish communities aided and abetted the Nazi regime in its pursuit of Jews. We also have learned far more about the individuals who sometimes protected Jews and the wide variety of motives in play when they risked their lives in this fashion.

A new history has to be able to move us beyond the deep fund of knowledge that we already have about the Holocaust, or it has to provide us with a new and compelling interpretation of the event. Those are high bars,

¹ Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), German original 1969; idem, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Ring-Verlag, 1955); Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftsystems in Deutschland 1933/34* (Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960).

² Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961).

to be sure, but they have been set by generations of philosophers, theologians, artists, historians, and many others who have plumbed the history and meaning of the Holocaust.

Timothy Snyder's strongly argued and gracefully written book begins with an effective exposition of the Nazi world view. It describes the Adolf Hitler we know: the grandiose and self-aggrandizing, megalomaniacal claims; the primacy of race; the Social Darwinism; the unrelenting requirement of living space in order for Germans to thrive; the Judeo-bolshevik conspiracy; the Jews as the cosmic enemy who had to be destroyed. The new element that Snyder introduces to the analysis is the word 'ecology.' The resources of the planet were finite, in Adolf Hitler's understanding. Germans needed room for their ecology; Jews had to be displaced and annihilated. "In Hitler's ecology," Snyder writes, "the planet was despoiled by the presence of the Jews, who defied the laws of nature by introducing corrupting ideas. The solution was to expose Jews to a purified nature, a place where bloody struggle . . . mattered, where Jews could not manipulate others with their ideas" (28). That statement, however, tells us what we already know. 'Ecology' updates the language we use to describe the Third Reich; it connects today's historical writing with contemporary popular culture. But it offers no additional insight into the nature of Nazi ideology and Hitler's worldview and psychology.

Snyder then moves on to a history that plays out essentially in East and East-Central Europe. The author spends quite a lot of time on Polish politics in the 1930s and the dealings between Revisionist Zionists and leading Polish political figures. It is not entirely clear what all this has to do with the history and interpretation of the Holocaust. As Snyder shows in chapter 3, the Revisionists were deeply influenced by their Polish upbringing, and that some of the worst excesses of Polish nationalism have carried over to Likud in modern Israel.

But all that is really a sideshow. After ecology, the central, driving argument of Snyder's book is the 'double occupation' – Nazi and Soviet – of East and East-Central Europe and the 'statelessness' that ensued. In Snyder's rendering of the history, the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact was the critical moment in the unleashing of the Holocaust. Between August 1939 and June 1941 both dictatorial powers carved up Poland and the Soviets seized the Baltic states. Together, the Nazis and Soviets actively destroyed state and society in the region through brutal policies of persecution. Snyder tracks the actions by the Nazis and the Soviets effectively. So thorough were their actions, he argues, that they rendered the entire region – the true site of the Holocaust, the focus of Snyder's previous book, *Bloodlands* -- stateless.³ Jews could only survive when a state existed to protect them. Even if they were discriminated against, considered second-class citizens, robbed of their dignity, they could at least survive under the state. Without that umbrella, the path to annihilation, the utter destruction of Jewish life in Europe, was free and clear.

However, the region that Snyder's takes in view was never, in fact, stateless. Preexisting states were destroyed. New states came in. During the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact, each dictatorship implemented its own form of rule. As Jan Tomasz Gross delineates in his great book, *Revolution from Abroad* – a book Snyder draws on but misinterprets – in their areas of occupation, eastern Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, the Soviets implemented revolution in its specifically Stalinist version.⁴ While their policies aroused great resentment and

³ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁴ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

the Soviets certainly unleashed their own violence, repression, and turmoil, they transformed existing and established new state structures and they even had some locals to help them. When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, they created the sole state structures over the entire region. How could the Wehrmacht possibly have prosecuted war, how could the SS [*Schutzstaffel*] and all its ancillary institutions have implemented the immense task of genocide if the region were ‘stateless’?

Never once does Snyder offer an analysis of that very powerful state that dominated East Central Europe -- again, the site of the Holocaust -- and much of the rest of Europe besides, namely, the Third Reich. The argument about statelessness is odd in the extreme. Snyder’s book, in fact, seeks to make the Soviet Union co-responsible for the Holocaust, although Snyder does not make an explicit argument to this end. I wish he had. We could then have a more open debate about the effects of Soviet policy on the lands the Soviets conquered in 1939 and again in 1944 and 1945 as the Red Army, in conjunction with the western Allies, destroyed Nazi Germany. Soviet policies were brutal and repressive. That goes without saying. But Soviet politics were not Nazi politics. The Holocaust was made in Berlin, not Moscow. There was no “double occupation” in August 1941, the title of one of the maps published in the book (141). By then, the Wehrmacht and SS were deep into Soviet territory and the Holocaust was well underway. There was only one occupation, and it was the German one, in Eastern and Western Europe.

Notably, when Snyder writes later in the book -- quite movingly, in fact -- about individuals who rescued Jews, never once does he note that the largest proportion of European Jews who survived the Third Reich did so because they were in exile in the Soviet Union. The Jews who, in 1945 and 1946, came back to their home towns in Poland and elsewhere were not, by and large, those who had managed to outlast the Nazis at Auschwitz and the other death camps and the killing fields. They were the Jews who had fled to the Soviet Union, by some estimates 2 million in all.

Who could possibly disagree with the subtitle of the book, the Holocaust as “warning”? Of course it is, as people have been writing, arguing, and discussing since the 1940s. The Holocaust stands for the annihilationist possibilities that exist in human society, the dangers of harnessing modern technology to human destruction, the insidious character of antisemitism, the sheer terror of a state that can act without any restraints, the allure of racial violence, and much else besides.

But is the Holocaust *the* warning, as Snyder presents the case? Without stating the point explicitly, he retreats to the argument about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and avoids the scholarship of the last twenty years on genocides around the globe and over various historical epochs. The Holocaust was a “civilizational rupture,” to use Dan Diner’s poignant phrase.⁵ But so was the annihilation of the Herero and Nama by the German military in 1907-1908, the Armenian Genocide, and the genocides of the Hutu in Burundi in 1973 and of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. And so is the carpet bombing of the Nuba people in Sudan today. Timothy Snyder has taken the genocide that is the most well-known, most researched, most memorialized, and made it into the singular example that we ignore at our peril. But what about all the other cases? Not only the annihilation of the Jews should serve as the clarion warning cry.

⁵ Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Despite the overwrought claims for *Black Earth*, we have a book that provides neither a compelling, new interpretation of the Holocaust nor an effective historical account of its implementation.

Review by Serhy Yekelchyk, University of Victoria

The historian Henry Abramson called his 1999 book about the Ukrainian-Jewish relations during the revolutionary era of 1917-1920 *A Prayer for the Government*.¹ He analyzed the wave of bloody pogroms that claimed an estimated 50,000 Jewish lives as communal violence unleashed by imperial collapse and the failure of new Ukrainian state institutions. The state and its institutions are also central to Timothy Snyder's magisterial new reading of the Holocaust, but his argument is very different. He shows that what made the Holocaust possible was the destruction of European states that viewed Jews as their citizens. He also explains why the Final Solution took shape on the Eastern Front, in the area where indigenous statehood had been destroyed by the Soviets in 1939-1940 and then by the Nazis in 1941. Far from relying on the familiar assumptions of the East European nations' traditional anti-Semitism and proclivity for communal violence, Snyder advances a political argument. It is rather complex but definitely worth following.

According to him, the Soviet conquest in 1939 and 1940 did not simply destroy state institutions and civil codes, but also created a "political resource" (130) for the Nazis in the form of local nationalists eager to avenge the destruction of their nation-state (or national institutions in the case of a stateless nation, such as Ukrainians in Poland). When the "German entrepreneurs of violence" (143) arrived in 1941, they began mobilizing this political resource for pogroms, which they filmed as evidence of locals rebelling against Judeo-Bolshevism. Yet the Nazi optic was a faulty one, argues Snyder. By equating Jews with Communism and Communism with Jews, they offered Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and others an easy way of proving their political loyalty to the new regime. A number of former Soviet collaborators, including some former People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs [NKVD] officers and Communist Party members, joined in to distance themselves from the Bolsheviks by attacking the Jews. The pogroms in the summer of 1941 established the "scenography" (158) of de-Sovietization and also served as a recruitment tool for collaborators. The subsequent transition to mass murder also had a political background.

Snyder connects the transition in policy to the wholesale extermination of the Jews in August 1941 to the failure of Adolf Hitler's original war plan. When the Soviet Union—to Hitler, the incarnation of Jewish power—did not collapse like a house of cards following initial German military successes, the Nazis turned to the total elimination of Jews on the territories already under their control. The practice of shooting Jewish women and children together with men developed in the zone of 'double occupation,' in particular, in Lithuania and Latvia beginning in July 1941. By August, SS [Schutzstaffel] leader Heinrich Himmler was recommending this model on his tour of the occupied territories in the east. By shooting the Jews, the Germans and their local collaborators, each in their own way, were "performing the undoing of Soviet power" (153). In Latvia, the *Kommando* (auxiliary police unit) of Viktors Arājs shot some 22,000 Jews on its own and assisted the Germans with the killing of another 28,000. Just before the German occupation, Arājs had received his law degree, which included course work on the Stalin constitution (170-171). In the city of Stalino (now Donetsk), the Germans installed a local administration headed by a long-time Communist Party member; the local police, which also included a fair share of former Communists, set about assisting the Germans in murdering the city's Jews because of the latter's alleged Communism (186).

¹ Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

The city of Stalino, however, was not located in the ‘double occupation’ zone. This was the Soviet hinterland, an industrial region that had provided popular support and cadres for the Bolsheviks in 1917. Local Bolsheviks such as Nikita Khrushchev and Kliment Voroshilov went on to distinguished careers in the Kremlin. It is paramount, therefore, to consider the nature of the Soviet state in the light of Snyder’s scheme. On the one hand, it considered the Jews as equal citizens, while the Nazis saw the Soviet Union’s destruction as the central component of their crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism. On the other, he seems to be putting both Stalin’s Soviet Union and Hitler’s Third Reich in the category of party-states, which differed markedly from other European states of the time in subordinating the law to party ideology. If anything, the Soviet party-state seems to have prepared the masses for accepting the Final Solution and helping to carry it out. Karel Berkhoff has shown in his *Harvest of Despair*² how the German administration in occupied Ukraine quickly became overwhelmed by a flood of denunciations—a phenomenon that Snyder brings up as well. He writes that in Kyiv, the Gestapo took over the NKVD headquarters, so the denunciations were being delivered to a familiar address (181).

Yet, the history of the Communist movement elsewhere in occupied Eastern Europe—Communism as distinct from the Stalinist state with its Great Terror and obligatory identification of ethnicity—usually increased the chances of survival for local Jews (278). One might think that being part of the same political organization made them members of the same ‘imaginary community’ of citizens, but perhaps a different logic was also in play here. Snyder argues that mainstream Christian churches in occupied Europe suffered a “moral catastrophe” (279) by ignoring the Holocaust or engaging in anti-Semitic rhetoric. However, churches that were alienated from the state before the war did more to save the Jews. For example, close-knit Baptist communities in the former Soviet Ukraine helped Jews because their members trusted each other and put their religion before the state. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the former Polish territories identified with the disadvantaged ethnoreligious minority, and therefore its head, Archbishop Major Andrei Sheptytsky, condemned the killings and personally hid Jews. If these and other stories of saving Jewish neighbors seem to undermine Snyder’s emphasis on the state and citizenship, it is only because we approach these categories too dogmatically. Political communities and practices of citizenship come in many shapes, which may or may not be linked to the European polities that Hitler was destroying.

² Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 54-55.

Author's Response by Timothy Snyder, Yale University

Nazi Germany, State Destruction, and the Holocaust

The question of the state is a vexing one in Holocaust studies, and I am grateful to my three colleagues and to the editors of H-Diplo for granting me this opportunity to make the case that transnational history can help resolve some of the field's traditional difficulties.

If the state is held as a constant, and the only one contemplated is German, then the Holocaust cannot be adequately characterized—let alone interpreted and understood. The phenomenon to be explained is the mass murder of more than five million Jews as a consequence of a German policy to exterminate all Jews under German control. At first glance we might suppose, as Eric Weitz and some of his Germanist colleagues do, that attention to German sources and German Jews is therefore methodologically sufficient. The moment we begin to specify the phenomenon of the Holocaust in the most basic historical dimensions, in time and space, we apprehend the inadequacy of this traditional approach.

Time: Adolf Hitler ruled Germany for eight years (1933-1941) before the Holocaust began. No mass killing of Jews took place in interwar Germany. The nazified German state and its policies of discrimination do not supply a sufficient explanation of the Holocaust. Even had the German state killed its Jewish population in the 1930s, such an appalling crime would not have been the Holocaust that we have in mind, because German Jews were not very numerous. The Holocaust that in fact took place began after eight years of Nazi rule, three years of war, and during the attack on the USSR of 1941.

Place: 97% of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust lived beyond Germany before the war. If we consider Europe rather than simply Germany, and Jews rather than simply German Jews, we begin to suspect that a German national framework, and the exclusive use of German sources, will not be sufficient. When we remember that Germans (and other Europeans) killed Jews almost exclusively beyond prewar Germany, and that even German Jews, with very few exceptions, could only be killed when sent beyond its boundaries, this skepticism is confirmed. Jews died, and Germans killed them, almost entirely on east European territories where German policy was to destroy states and build racial colonies.

In a transnational history, the state need not be reified as the backdrop to the narrative nor presumed to be the single actor. More than one state can act; states can change, or take on a character that is not usually associated with statehood; they can also influence, penetrate, alter or even destroy other states; and societies can outwit states or participate in their actions in a way that is only clear by reference to their experience with other states. Some conception of state destruction, rather than simply rule or empire or occupation or administration, is required to explain the chronology and topology of mass killing. That Nazi Germany as a state was unable to kill Jews on its own territory,

whereas Nazi Germany as a racial colonizer on foreign territory was, is the primary indication. Every other European perspective suggests the importance of a concept of state destruction.

Germany occupied, for example, both Denmark and Estonia—and so in Weitz’s terms “implemented its own form of rule” in both places. But in Denmark 99% of the Jews survived, and in Estonia 99% were killed. The difference between the two is not that German policy was different: there were explicit orders to render both countries ‘Judenrein.’ It was not that Hitler’s intentions were clearer in Estonia than in Denmark: the opposite was the case. The difference is that the two countries experienced the extremes of the experience of occupation during the Second World War. Denmark experienced a conventional occupation after the German invasion of 1940, in which the government and head of state remained, civil society functioned, and democratic elections took place. Estonia, by contrast, suffered two cumulatively violent episodes of state destruction within a single year: first its state apparatus and its political elites were destroyed in 1940 by the Soviet Union, then the Soviet apparatus was dismantled by the Germans in 1941. As we shall see, and as I describe at length in the book, this opened the way for modes of experimentation and politics that were not possible in Denmark. The point is a crucial one, since the Holocaust as such began in the double-occupied zone, and it was in the doubly-occupied zone that Jews die in the highest numbers.

Every comparison, familiar and unfamiliar, in eastern Europe or western Europe or between eastern and western Europe, suggests the importance of state destruction. Why did most of the Jews whom the Germans intended for Auschwitz survive, whereas almost all of the Jews intended for the eastern shooting pits and death factories die? Because Auschwitz was in general used to kill Jews who had to first be extracted from sovereign states, whereas the pits and the carbon monoxide death facilities were used to murder Soviet, Baltic, and Polish Jews whose states had been destroyed. (In the end, most of the Jews who were murdered at Auschwitz came from a state whose sovereignty had been compromised by German invasion, Hungary, and a state that had been destroyed, Poland -- which in another way confirms the same point). Why were the Jews who were citizens of Germany’s allies more likely to survive than the Jews who were citizens of states that resisted? Because defeat meant compromise and sometimes even the destruction of statehood, whereas alliance meant accommodation. Both were deadly to Jews, but the former was far more dangerous than the latter. Why did Germany’s allies kill Jews (or, more often, cooperate in the process of their killing) almost exclusively on territories that change hands? Because these Jews (and their neighbors) floated free of state protection during local regime change and are therefore acceptable to the German masters of death. Why (for example) did practically all the Jews in prewar Bulgaria survive, whereas practically all the Jews on territories Bulgaria gained during the war die? Because the second group lost citizenship, and therefore could be taken by the Germans and gassed. Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi deportation expert, asked for specific assurances that only stateless Jews were being transported from Greater Bulgaria. Why in cases of defeat is there so much variation? Why did 75% of the Dutch and Greek Jews die whereas 75% of the French Jews survived? Because in the Netherlands and in Greece the nature of the occupation involved the destruction of more elements of sovereignty, whereas France was a more conventional military occupation.

Why were more *Polish Jews in France* killed in the *French Holocaust* than *French Jews*? Because Polish Jews lacked state protection, whereas French Jews had to first be separated from the state. Consider the predicament of Polish Jews in France from beginning to end. After Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland in September 1939, Polish Jews in Paris who hailed from eastern Poland went to the Soviet consulate. Why? Because they understood, as citizens of the former Poland said at the time, that ‘the passport keeps body and soul together.’ So long as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were allies, these papers did indeed preserve these Jews. But when Nazi Germany betrayed its ally and attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, these papers lost all value, and France could deport these Jews as well. Germany only accepted Jews from France who hailed from states that Nazi Germany explicitly sought to destroy, or from states which explicitly excluded their protection from their Jewish citizens.

The vast majority of the victims of the Holocaust, well over eighty percent, fell into the first category. It was state destruction, rather than discrimination by the state of which they were citizens, which was the standard route to mass murder. Indeed, even the Jews who suffered discrimination could only be killed in large numbers because (and after) there was a stateless zone where they could be sent to die. Both the death pits and the death factories were thinkable in a situation where the Soviet and Polish states suffered wars of extermination. In that sense essentially all victims of the Holocaust were victims of state destruction.

Hannah Arendt was right: for a Jew to be killed he or she had to be separated from the state. The Nazis and the victims understood this. The most effective way to separate Jews from the state was to destroy the state. Indeed, only when the state was doubly destroyed, first by the USSR in 1939 or 1940 and then by Nazi Germany in 1941, could the mass killing of Jews begin. Thereafter, Jews could only be killed at rates of 90% or higher in zones where the state had been destroyed. Elsewhere in Europe Jewish survival rates correlated very strongly to the degree of sovereignty preserved by the states of which they were citizens.

The resistance of some scholars in the Holocaust field to the notion of state destruction is surprising, and not just in the face of the contemporary understanding of perpetrators, victims, and for that matter also rescuers. The wisdom of Babylonian Talmud (“Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear thereof, men would swallow each other alive”) is central to the history of Jewish political thought. In more contemporary terms, if the Holocaust is to make contact with the larger scholarly discussion of mass killing, as Weitz rightly thinks it should, then an explanation of the Holocaust must confront the findings of fields of history beyond Germany and our neighboring disciplines, which taken together are very suggestive.

The social scientific scholarship in genocide studies, applying statistical methods to a large number of cases, has drawn the conclusion that it is state failure that most strongly correlates with ethnic cleansing and mass killing. In the historical scholarship of ethnic cleansing and mass killing, we find a few, but very significant, exceptions to the general rule proposed by the social scientists: states that kill their citizens in large numbers in peacetime and without fragmenting, such as Cambodia, the

People's Republic of China, the USSR. All of these states are party states, places where the basic relationship between the individual and power is not with the state but with the ruling single party.

As I show in *Black Earth*, the very special case of Nazi Germany allows us to bring together these two major streams of scholarship. Nazi Germany, in practice, was a *party state* that artificially induced *state failure* in its neighbors, thereby creating zones where mass murder became possible. Because Nazi Germany unites the two causal frameworks that dominate the main disciplinary approaches, it should be a subject of general, comparative, and interdisciplinary discussion rather than by the endless recycling of familiar questions that are unanswerable within a model of national history.

Here I would register, as a note of optimism, that scholars in neighboring fields (in our discussion Serhy Yekelchuk in Soviet history and Naomi Oreskes in the history of science) easily follow the argument of the book, relate it to their own concerns, and indeed extend its application. Holocaust studies sometimes struggles with isolation from other fields, which, in combination with hostility to Jewish and east European sources in languages other than German, legitimates a certain complacency about explanation. When explanation is abandoned, then the shift to the study of memory and discourse seems natural and easy: one can make incantatory gestures, as Weitz does, to an imagined consensus among hallowed authorities, and then move to criticizing colleagues for violating discursive taboos.

If one relies upon German sources only, one ends up where Weitz does in his essay: simplistic assertions that Nazi ideology and the German state matter, which no one doubts, but a floundering helplessness about their relationship one to the other and therefore about the causes of the Holocaust. The relationship between ideas and power can only be answered by considering both where, in theory and practice, they were most destructive of Jews and others: in the lands beyond prewar Germany. This does not mean that the German state of 1933-1941 does not matter, but rather that we must inquire about its significance in ways that harmonize with what we know of the Holocaust in its time and place. We must be able to make our way from Hitlerian ideology through the interwar German state to the killing fields.

Weitz endorses my summary of Hitler's worldview, though he then dismisses its significance with the remark that he already understood Hitler. Perhaps: but let us venture to ask what happens when that ideology, rather than being bracketed, is joined to the questions Weitz thinks are important, about the German state, as well as to questions that Weitz and some of his colleagues dismiss, about politics and societies beyond Germany.

Hitler saw the planet as a supply of limited resources for competing races. Races should struggle for land and food, propagating themselves and starving others. Any hesitation to fully embrace racial solidarity and racial enmity, arises, said Hitler, from Jewish mystifications. All notions of reciprocity and solidarity, from Christianity to communism, were Jewish inventions, and therefore fundamentally the same. Hitler makes clear in *Mein Kampf* that the state is not the goal of the race, that the racial struggle will wash away existing state boundaries, and that what Germans should want

is racial struggle for the agrarian resources of Ukraine. The return to a bloody state of nature is linked to the commencement of the extermination of the Jews, since only their destruction can lift their mystifications, which in Hitler's view restrain the strong. Once Hitler defined the USSR as a Jewish state, he could then claim that a German war of extermination there would commence the racial struggle (for food from Ukrainians and other Slavs) and the struggle to exterminate the Jews. This meant that the war, as Hitler understood it, would be fought on the lands where most European Jews lived; that this eastern campaign or campaigns would be fought as a war of state destruction, even when other campaigns (in western Europe) would not be; and that the war against the USSR, when it came, would likely involve, as it did in fact, a simultaneous attack on Jews. That combination of ideological hostility, territorial purpose, and political chaos would indeed permit a Holocaust after 1941.

In 1933, the zoological anarchist who held these views took power in perhaps the world's most functional state. The transformation of the German state that followed, as I try to demonstrate in chapter two and then throughout the rest of the book, was not an end in itself, but a preparation for a revolution that had to take place abroad.

Hitler, once in power, had to find a way to reconcile the existence of a conventional German state with the vision of eternal racial war. The first element of the solution was the standard fascist transgression of the Weberian definition of the state. According to Weber, the state is the institution that aspires to a monopoly on legitimate violence.¹ In fascism the instruments used to seize power, the fascist party and its paramilitaries, were preserved as a separate source of violence. Thus the SS and the SA, rather than being suppressed or incorporated into the state after 1933, remained distinct, non-state, anti-political, racial sources of violence and instantiations of the Hitlerian ideology.

Another element of the solution, which Hitler was quite explicit about in his *Second Book*, was to use existing German political forces, such as the state and German nationalism, to begin a conflict that would then take on a racial form. In other words, the German state was a kind of means to an end. Its solidity mattered not because Hitler valued a solid state but because a hammer used to destroy other objects must be solid. After a while the hammer itself begins to warp from the blows, but this was also the point: Germany and Germans could only be restored from their decadence by launching a racial war that relatively few people actually wanted.

Hitler was both an ideologist and a technician of power. He simultaneously was true to his ideology and flexible in exploiting given political moments, often accidents and surprises or even his own mistakes. This meant, as is often noted, adapting his message to the Great Depression in order to win power, but it also meant delaying the Nazi revolution after he had won power.

¹ See Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (1919) in *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, Translated and Edited by Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA, was perfectly justified in 1934 to interpret *Mein Kampf* to mean that Germany, after Hitler's seizure of power, should undergo a 'second revolution,' which racial organizations supplanting state ones, Röhm's SA supplanting the army, and so forth. That is the plain meaning of the text, and so in a sense Röhm was truer to Hitler than Hitler was to himself. What he did not see, but which the rival SS did, was that the 'second revolution' had to be carried out abroad, and that the German state had to be transformed, but not wrecked, so that this project could be completed. Thus the Night of the Long Knives, the victory of the SS over the SA, was also the victory of one attitude towards a shared ideology over another.

Hitler did not wish to cast the German state into confusion, but rather to gather its forces and hurl them eastward to begin a racial struggle. This meant funding and coopting rather than dismantling the army, that most conventional of state institutions. It meant centralizing and penetrating the various police forces. It meant not supplanting the police and army with SA, but rather complementing both with the SS. The central task of the SS would be to destroy political institutions after the Wehrmacht had destroyed military ones. Beyond Germany, in stateless zones, the police could behave, as the SS leaders Heinrich Himmler wished, as racial warriors. When and where such cooperation was achieved, in the years to come, a Holocaust could be perpetrated.

The leadership of the SS and indeed its officers took seriously both the ideology of zoological anarchism and the political requirement that the great liberating blow should be prepared at home directed abroad. Thus the SS in the 1930s (by contrast to, for example, the NKVD in the USSR at the same time) was not a major instrument of local repression. Its concentration camps, which were a rather small system in the 1930s (no bigger than the German imperial system four decades before, and two orders of magnitude smaller than the contemporary Soviet one), were significant mainly as a template for later actions. The concentration camps were, quite literally, stateless zones, places where the SS could punish Germans outside the restraints of the law. After the war began, the principle of suspending conventional law and applying racial norms could be applied by Himmler and his most important deputy Reinhard Heydrich on the scale of countries, as in occupied Poland and the occupied Soviet Union. Only under such conditions could the Holocaust take the form of the murder of the vast majority of local Jews. It was in the east, precisely, where the SS would dominate what we are accustomed to calling the occupation regime.

Yet 'occupation,' although I have no choice but to use it here and in the book, is not really the correct term, since occupation means one state temporarily administering some of the territory of another during hostilities; and the SS was not a state but a racial institution, and its task was the permanent destruction of other states as a means to creating a world of racial conflict without Jews.

Hitler did not know in advance, and indeed was sometimes mistaken about, which states would first be destroyed, and which states would be allies, neutrals, and enemies, when the war would start, and so on. But once Germany gained enough traction in the European system to begin to undo neighboring polities, experience was gained, and the idea of a Final Solution took on ever more practical forms.

Hitler did not know, for example, that the disappearance of Austria as a state, which in effect took place from the night of 10-11 March 1938, would lead to violence and the humiliation of Austrian Jews that far exceeded anything in contemporary Nazi Germany. It might seem ironic that the level of violence against Austrian Jews had to be tempered so that Austria could formally join Nazi Germany—but this is exactly what we should expect. It is the moment of regime change which makes all things possible, and the politics of transition that allows one group to be blamed for the past. When Nazi authorities (Joseph Goebbels with Hitler's approval) organized a national pogrom in Germany on the Austrian model later that year, they quickly learned that lesson again: anarchy that is destructive of Jewish life contravened the necessary stability of the German state. *Kristallnacht* was the worst suffering experienced by German Jews before the war; its 200 deaths, though horrifying by the standards of the time, cannot be seen as a Holocaust.

When Czechoslovakia was fully destroyed, one year after Austria, much more was possible. Again, it might seem ironic that the Jews who inhabited the Czech lands that were then incorporated in Nazi Germany were at the lowest immediate risk of death, but such was the case. In greater immediate danger were Jews who inhabited Slovakia, which as a new state could easily deprive Jews of rights, create an artificial 'Jewish problem,' and then deport Jews to Auschwitz. These Slovak Jews were in fact the first large group transported to Auschwitz. At still greater immediate risk were Jews of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Jews in these eastern reaches of dismantled Czechoslovakia found themselves in an expanded Hungary that generally did not grant them citizenship. In 1941, Hungary deported many of them eastward, into the Soviet Union, into the path of the advancing Wehrmacht. Their deportation prompted the first mass shooting (in the sense of ten thousands of more victims at once) of the Holocaust. At Kamianets' Podil's'kyi in August 1941 some 23,600 Jews were murdered, more than half them Jews who had been expelled from Hungary as stateless, many of these former Czechoslovak citizens.

This whole history is one of the German state—even if it is not the version that Weitz would prefer, of a defined German 'form of rule' where German institutions were 'the sole state structures.' To follow the path from Hitler's rise to power through that first mass shooting at Kamianet's Podil's'kyi, we must understand statehood as a plural variable rather than as a singular source of narrative magic, summoned with all of its associations of clarity and force wherever evidence and argument fail. Nazi Germany was a very unconventional state before the war, with two distinct organs of violence (the state and the SS), one of which was specifically tasked to destroy other states; the period 1938-1941 was a moment of the dismantling of a previous order, which enabled escalation and experimentation to a degree not possible in Germany; the invasion of the USSR in 1941 was meant to destroy the Soviet state, and thus the SS was killing Jews (identified as the Soviet polity) from the beginning. Yet what happened in 1941 was conditioned both by the accumulation of potential and by the destruction of order.

The author of the mass murder at Kamianets' Podil's'kyi, Friedrich Jeckeln, was a Higher SS- and Police Commander. This office, meant to unite state and racial functions in a single chain of command, was all but meaningless in prewar Germany. Only during the invasion of the USSR, in

conditions of state destruction, could someone like Jeckeln assert his authority. The Jews who were first killed in the Holocaust were of not German Jews, but Jews on the territory of the Soviet Union. Many of them, in this crucial case of Kamianets' Podil'skyi, were refugees, or rather deportees, whose statelessness and condition generally only make sense in the light of the moment when the European order was dismantled. The history of the Holocaust is transnational, and requires us to see that states can alter themselves, alter others, and sometimes seek to destroy others.

Weitz, like other colleagues, is puzzled that I discuss the Polish state. His confusion helps us to frame an important question about how narrative of the destruction of Jews usually proceeds. The German state is discussed, in a first part or volume of a study, and then Germany invades other countries, about which the reader has often been told nothing (and sometimes less). Now, if we are to sensibly elucidate the issue of why Jews in those other countries die, we first need to know how Jews in those other countries lived. This is in some measure a matter of the justice of presentation, since the number of Jews beyond Germany so vastly outnumbers the number of Jews in Germany. Most of the Jews who die in the Holocaust had been citizens of Poland. Yet even if we were only concerned about German Jews, we could not understand their fate without first grasping the character and following the demise of the Polish state.

If we cling to German sources and German history, we see the Jews of Łódź as part of the mute backdrop to the fate of the German Jews who were deported to the Łódź ghetto to die. In fact, the truth is closer to the opposite: if we had to choose between the two variants, the death of the German Jews deported to the Łódź ghetto, and thence to Auschwitz, is better seen as part of the history of the mass murder of the Jews of Poland. When Germany invaded Poland, there were about as many Jews in Łódź alone as in all of Germany. For German Jews to be deported to Łódź, Poland had to be invaded, the Polish state had to be destroyed, the Polish civil code had to be annulled, the city had to be annexed to Germany on terms that allowed Nazi party leaders and the SS far greater authority than in prewar Germany. All of this had to happen for a major site of Jewish civilization to become a ghetto. By the same token, for those Jews to be sent to Auschwitz, a Polish military base had to become a German death facility.

These are just two indications of a larger point: if we want to understand why Jews died in occupied Poland, we need some sense of how Jews lived in prewar Poland. Indeed, if we want to understand how the Jews of Europe could have been killed, we must have some sense of the (various) political arrangements that allowed them to live. We skip important analytical steps when we blink from an implicit image of an omnipotent German state to the photographs of death pits or trains. For mass murder to be implemented, Jews had to first be separated from their polities, and how and whether this could take place, in what circumstances and with what specific consequences, can only be understood if the reader has some sense of how those states functioned before the war.

This is a matter of analysis, not nostalgia. It would be foolish to impose on a historical argument the rose-colored glasses of retrospective fantasy, and see prewar Jewish life in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic states, or the USSR as without challenges, difficulties, and repressions. The claim

is not that the absolute evil of Nazi Germany somehow rehabilitated the imperfect prewar systems that it overcame. The claim is rather that the existence of imperfect states was much better for Jews than their destruction. Indeed, even authoritarian states pursuing official policies of antisemitism—such as Poland after 1935—were better for Jews than the destruction of such states. So long as Poland was an independent state, its Jews might be subject to organized pogroms, discrimination at universities, and countless other forms of harassment, but nothing like a Holocaust was possible or even conceivable.

A discussion of Poland's prewar Jewish policies also helps to elucidate, both by contrast and at moments of German-Polish contact, the specific content of the Hitlerian worldview. The Polish government was facing an opposition party (the National Democrats) as well as large elements of society that believed that Polish Jews should leave the country. It made an alliance with right-wing Zionists, whom it supported financially and militarily in the hopes that British rule of Palestine could be broken and a State of Israel could arise. Now, although this policy arose from popular antisemitism (among some other sources), it does provide valuable perspectives on Hitlerian visions of extermination. The Polish design to displace Jews to Palestine (or to some other colony) was not anarchical and it did not envision a racial war in Europe. For almost all of the time that Hitler was in power, he presumed that Poland would be an ally or a benign neutral in the coming war of extermination and colonization in the USSR.

One of the reasons that a German-Polish alliance could not be reached in 1938 was precisely German-Polish differences on the Jewish question. Polish diplomats, who opposed the invasion of the USSR in any event, believed that such a war could only disrupt what they assumed were German hopes to deport Jews to some colonial zone. In other words, the circumstances of the beginning of the Second World War had something to do with Polish choices, a fact which, even in isolation from these other crucial issues, is sufficient to qualify Poland as a legitimate subject in a book about the Holocaust. (These arguments are uncontroversial for the small minority of scholars who read both the German and Polish diplomatic sources; the dominant accounts, which rely mainly on German sources, not unsurprisingly overlook these rather significant issues.)

One advantage of anarchism is that it is very forgiving of mistakes. It was only in spring 1939 that Hitler decided to make war upon Poland (rather than with Poland against the USSR). Goebbels was able to shift from pro-Polish to anti-Polish propaganda, as Germans were persuaded by the idea that German territorial claims and the protection of ethnic Germans demanded a German invasion of Poland. Poland's defiance allowed Hitler to use, as he had always said he would, German nationalism and apparent German state interests to mobilize Germans for a war that was ostensibly about German minorities in Poland but was in fact about something else entirely. Hitler instructed his generals that the goal was the demolition of the Polish state and Polish political society. It was thus in Poland in 1939 that the SS had its unexpected first chance to destroy a state under the cover of war. Its task forces (*Einsatzgruppen*) followed the Wehrmacht into Poland, under express orders to murder the Polish political class.

The German assault on the Polish state was almost total. German legal doctrine was that the Polish state had never in fact existed and that German forces were simply entering a kind of undefined zone. Germany immediately declared that the Polish civil code no longer applied. Everyone under German occupation lost citizenship and was redefined in racial terms. The end of the Polish civil code meant the end of property rights, which for Jews meant ghettoization. The end of the Polish central authorities meant the end of legal Jewish communal autonomy. The Jewish men who had run the local communal authorities under Poland generally then became the head of the *Judenräte*—the Jewish councils—that ran the ghettos under German authority. The end of the Polish ministries meant that the Polish police was joined to Himmler's SS empire, and was soon guarding those ghettos.

The shattering of the Polish state left sharp fragments, suggestive of the Holocaust to come. And yet it is worth remembering that the mass murder of Polish Jews began in winter 1941/1942, more than two years after the German invasion, and more than a year after the establishment of the main ghettos. Indeed, the destruction of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in 1938-1939, although it allowed far more extensive repression of Jews than the nazification of Germany, was still not sufficient for a Holocaust. The mass killing would begin still later, and still further to the east.

To see how mass killing could begin, we must attend to the one respect in which the German campaign to destroy the Polish state was not total: in territory. Between September 1939 and June 1941 Germany controlled about half the territory of prewar Poland; the rest was ruled from Moscow. After Hitler realized that Poland would not ally with Germany against the USSR, he approached the USSR to fight a war against Poland. As a result of the German-Soviet alliance, codified in two agreements of August and September 1939, Poland was split between the two powers and destroyed as a state. The Soviet Union also destroyed three other states the following year: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Because Germany, consistent with Hitler's main objective from the beginning, invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, and because the invasion began with precisely the territories where the USSR had just destroyed the state, and because it was in this zone of double state destruction and nowhere else that the Holocaust began, we are right to consider how Soviet policies might have set the conditions for German escalations. The Holocaust as we understand it began precisely in doubly-occupied Lithuania and Latvia, the only states entirely destroyed by Soviet power which were home to significant number of Jews.

What Germans expected in summer 1941 was that east Europeans whom they regarded as brutes would rise up against Jews whom they regarded as Communists. Germany did succeed in organizing or prompting dozens of horrifying pogroms, in which thousands of locals took bloody part, in these doubly-occupied lands. In Germany, pogroms had to stop because they threatened the integrity of the German state. In the doubly-occupied zone, where local law had been annulled by Soviet power and then Soviet power by German invasion, it was easy to contemplate some chaos. What the Germans soon understood was that the political energies made available by the total destruction of states, as in the Baltics, could be turned to their own purposes. Thus, to take one important example (of many that I describe in the book), many and quite possibly most of the local Balts who joined in

the killing of Jews were double collaborators, people who had just taken part in the Soviet regime. Hitler's global antisemitism, and in particular his idea that Communists were Jews and Jews Communists, found for the first time true political salience, not because it was true but because it was a lie. People who had themselves taken part in the Soviet regime could blame Jews for their own collaboration, and 'prove' their case by killing Jews.

Thus for example Viktor Arājs, the Latvian collaborator whose commando unit was responsible for the murder of most of the Jews of Latvia, was a Communist who had just finished his dissertation on the Stalin constitution of 1936. The Arājs case is of course well known, since he was the single most murderous German collaborator anywhere in Europe. Attention to the Jewish sources reveals just how widespread the phenomenon of double collaboration was. It was precisely the Jews, writing in Polish or Russian or Yiddish or other languages that are generally absent from Holocaust history, who could see and record how their neighbors first joined with the Soviets and then joined with the Germans, enabling the second collaboration by blaming the first on the Jews. Because this very typical form of local politics involved supposed subhumans outwitting German conquerors, it rarely figures in the German sources.

Serhy Yekelchuk is right that confluences of this type require "political analysis"—right to the end, right to the bottom. If we imagine German or Soviet states simply imposing their own methods of rule, we lose the levels of analysis that we would take for granted if we were attending to west European history, such as the prior experiences and political attitudes of the local population. Omitting such information, precisely at the spectacular juncture where Soviet methods of state destruction gave way to German, precisely where and when the Holocaust began, seems ill-advised.

Friedrich Jeckeln, the Higher SS- and Police Leader who organized the industrial killing at Kamianets' Podil'skyi in August 1941, was transferred north to Riga that October. In November and December, with the help of the Arājs Commando unit, he and his SS organized the mass shooting of 28,000 Latvian Jews and about a thousand German Jews outside the city. The technique of mass shooting, led by the SS but including the German police, army, and civilian authorities, and exploiting local militias or commandos or 'self-defense' forces, demonstrated that the general notion of a Final Solution could be realized as mass murder, as what we now call a Holocaust.

This method was extended east as far as German power extended, into the prewar Soviet Union. In Kyiv, Minsk, Stalino, Smolensk, and everywhere else German power extended in prewar Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus, and Soviet Russia, the ideological equivalence of Jews and Communists served the political purpose of morally separating Jews from others, and the local populations provided enough collaborators so that the Germans could arrange, with the use of relatively little of their own manpower, mass shootings. Here as in the doubly-occupied zone, the Hitlerian idea of Judeocommunism could justify political action, if perhaps for slightly different reasons. Much less important was the national shame and humiliation arising from the recent experience of Soviet destruction; just as important, if not more so, was the alibi that the equivalence of Jews and

communism provided to Soviet citizens and indeed communists. When the local collaborators of the Kharkiv municipal authority called for ‘the final and utter defeat of the Jew-Bolshevik gangsters’ it was expressing both the interest of the Germans in pretending that they were conquering communism and that of Soviet citizens in pretending that they had never had anything to do with it. In every city of the occupied Soviet Union Soviet citizens could be found in sufficient numbers to arrange the mass shooting of Jews (and others).

The mass murder of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union in 1941 demonstrated that a notion of a Final Solution could become the fact of what we now term the Holocaust. In 1942, in Poland and elsewhere in Europe, the German leadership, indeed the SS leadership, sought to reduce the number of direct German participants further still by the use of gas rather than bullets as the main killing agent. In Poland, where the state had been destroyed and where most Jews were already in ghettos, transport to nearby gassing facilities and mass murder proved relatively easy. Only in occupied Poland would death rates come close to matching those in the occupied USSR. Elsewhere in Europe, political factors would hinder the general aim of total killing.

Weitz claims, as though it were somehow suspicious, that I do not mention that “two million” Jews fled to safety in the Soviet Union. I do not have any trouble with the fact that Jews who lived, or the small number who managed to flee, east of the line of German power were in no danger from German power. This is discussed at some length in chapter eight. In providing the figure “two million,” however, Weitz must have been thinking about something else.

Perhaps he has in mind the two million Jews who lost Polish citizenship after the German invasion in 1939 that the Soviet Union refused to take when asked by German authorities? In 1940 Eichmann asked Stalin if Stalin would take the two million Polish Jews then under German control; this was one of the very few cases when Moscow disappointed Berlin during the period of their alliance. The Soviet Union might have prevented the Holocaust by taking millions of Jews, but this was no more likely than that the U.S. or the UK might have done such a thing.

Perhaps what Weitz has in mind are the 1.7 million or so Jews who fell under Soviet control when the Soviet Union occupied eastern Poland and then the Baltic States in 1939 and 1940? These people were citizens of eastern Poland or of the three Baltic states that the USSR destroyed. Almost all of them were murdered in the Holocaust. In some measure this was due to the fact that the Soviet press, during the period of the Soviet-German alliance, did not publicize German antisemitic policies. In general, the fact that their chances of survival were lower than Jewish inhabitants of any other region, has a good deal to do with prior Soviet policies of state destruction.

There were perhaps a quarter million Jews from western Poland who fled the German invasion in September 1939, only to find themselves under Soviet power when the Red Army invaded Poland from the east that same month. Within this group there is indeed a story of survival that involves Soviet power. After the USSR forcibly annexed eastern Poland, all locals, including local Jews were automatically granted Soviet citizenship—but refugees from western Poland, including Jewish

refugees, were not. When asked if they would take Soviet papers, many Jews declined; as a result they were deported to Soviet special settlements in Soviet Kazakhstan. The death rate in this deportation was about 15%; nevertheless, the number of Jews who survived this passage was in the high tens of thousands. This was, tragically, the largest group of Polish Jews who survived the war.

A second significant group of Polish-Jewish survivors were those roughly eight thousand Jews who, having fled the German invasion in 1939, then fled Soviet deportations in 1940, and found their way to the Japanese consul Chiune Sugihara, in Kaunas in what was then still independent Lithuania. Sugihara, at the time working with two Polish intelligence officers on a plan to get valuable Polish citizens out of German- and Soviet-occupied Poland, provided (along with his Polish colleagues) papers that allowed these Jewish double refugees (first from German invasion, then from Soviet deportation) papers that allowed them safe passage.

This event, which I discuss in chapter 10, confirms in two ways the general point about the presence or absence of state authority: (1) a few weeks later, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania and destroyed the state, after which point there were no diplomats with accreditation in Lithuania who could act on behalf of refugees and (2) not just in Lithuania but throughout Europe, diplomats like Sugihara were the main rescuers of the Holocaust, because they could provide state recognition to people who would otherwise lose it, and die. Almost all of the Jews who remained in the lands annexed by the USSR in 1939 and 1940 were murdered after Germany invaded in 1941.

Perhaps Weitz has in mind the million or so Soviet Jews who inhabited the parts of the prewar Soviet Union that were attained by German power? Almost all of those who were present when German power arrived were murdered, very often with the assistance of their Soviet neighbors. The death rate for Jews in the prewar Soviet Union was the same as the death rate for Jews from prewar Poland, c. 95%. And only in the occupied Soviet Union (the Baltic states, incorporated in 1940, western Ukraine, incorporated in 1939, but also in prewar Soviet Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine) did the Germans massively recruit local people for help in the shooting actions. These are the subjects of chapters five through seven.

I mention that Soviet Jews beyond the reach of German power survived, and for a very simple reason: there was no Holocaust in places where German (or German-allied) power did not extend. In the chapter entitled “The Auschwitz Paradox” I actually belabor this point, as part of an exercise of describing the range of German (or German allies’) disruption of state sovereignty that defined and predicted the death of Jews during the war.

Jews in the USSR who lived east of the zone controlled by Germany were essentially unaffected by the radical German policy of uprooting Soviet state institutions and commencing racial conflict and empire, and were therefore in a situation essentially similar to that of other Jews in other countries not touched by German power. This is one end of the spectrum.

In countries that were allied to Germany but not occupied by Germany, and in countries that experienced more conventional occupations, and in Nazi Germany itself, the death rates for Jews were, on average, about 50%. In this book I describe each case, with its local specificities, that defines this average. The greater the compromise of sovereignty, the greater percentage of Jews died. Thus the occupation of the Netherlands, uniquely in western Europe run by the SS, three quarters of local Jews are killed. Far more dangerous for Jews were places like Slovakia and Croatia, new states created under Nazi tutelage. This was because the act of creating a state involved a prior act of destroying one (Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia, in these cases), which meant that Jews lost state protection and could be quickly and easily denied citizenship or defined as citizens of a second category. Such measures were easier in new states than in, for example, Nazi Germany itself; and accordingly a significantly greater percentage of Jews died.

And then of course the riskiest place for Jews were the colonies where Nazi Germany explicitly aspired to destroy a prewar state, such as Poland and the Soviet Union. It was nearly impossible for Jews to survive where the German goal was state destruction and German power actually extended. It is noteworthy that this spectrum can only be expressed in terms of a political argument; none of the ethnic stereotypes (positive and negative) that can still be found (implicitly or explicitly) in national narratives can account for the basic facts of the mass murder of the European Jews. Beginning from basic statistics and simple comparisons might allow scholars to shift from safe moralizing poses to a productive confrontation with the course of events. But this of course requires an argument rather than a narrative.

To summarize my own argument: The Hitlerian desire to exterminate Jews, expressed in the 1920s, was total and durable; Germany after 1933 was an incubator of murderous potential; Jews after 1938 could be more easily repressed in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland than in prewar Germany once German power dismantled those states; Germans proceeded to a Holocaust in 1941 where there was double state destruction; after 1942 German policy of the total extermination of Jews could be realized insofar as conventional state sovereignty had been previously been weakened or destroyed.