

## Introduction

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The term “total war” evokes images of violent clashes between militaries and of mass mobilization, as well as indiscriminate targeting, of civilian populations over the course of a protracted armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> The Second World War featured these characteristics on an unimaginable scale. But for much of the population of Europe and East and Southeast Asia, the most persistent and significant aspect of wartime experience was that of occupation by one or more of the Axis powers.<sup>2</sup> This was a function of the relatively quick and massive victories won early on by the principal aggressor states, starting with Japan’s 1937 onslaught on China, and continuing with Germany’s partition of Eastern Europe with the Soviet Union in 1939, the Nazis’ decisive victories in Northern and Western Europe the following year, the German advance into Southeastern Europe (as well as parts of North Africa) and its deep inroads into Soviet territory in 1941, and Japan’s sweep into Southeast Asia in 1941–42. The rest of the war was dominated by the long-drawn-out efforts of the principal Allied powers (Britain, the USSR, and the United States) to reverse these initial outcomes. In the meantime, hundreds of millions of people found themselves under one form or another of Axis control or domination.

A steady stream of archive-based monographs is constantly enriching historians’ understanding of how these occupations played out in individual countries. But there has been very little in the way of broadly comparative syntheses of this crucial aspect of the war.<sup>3</sup> This book sets out to

<sup>1</sup> See Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Fritzsche, *An Iron Wind: Europe under Hitler* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), Introduction and passim.

<sup>3</sup> As to single-authored treatments published in English, Peter Davies has written a descriptive survey of collaboration with (but not resistance to) the Nazi occupiers in wartime Europe. Peter Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War Two* (London: Longman, 2004). Mark Mazower has written a brilliant history of the Nazi occupation of Europe. Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin, 2008). István

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develop a thematically structured approach to this task. Its focus is explicitly on the political dimensions of responses to occupation, with the understanding that the political is intimately intertwined with the personal, the social, the economic, and the cultural. It is a study of the fragility and resilience of loyalties and identities under extreme conditions.

The ordeal of wartime occupation by Axis powers was shared by an extraordinarily wide array of regions and peoples across significant stretches of Europe and Asia, from the Channel Islands in the west to the Philippines in the east. The most consistent feature of the occupations was the transformative impact they had on the countries that underwent them. This was a function both of the ambitiously transformative agendas of the occupying powers and of the context of global total war in which the history of these occupations unfolded. The violent impositions, iron constraints, as well as unexpected (and sometimes unintended) opportunities created by these occupations tested the elasticity of socio-cultural and ideological norms and systems of legitimization – both preexisting ones and those introduced by occupation authorities and their local clients. The political choices made by members of occupied societies in responding to their countries' subjugation were critically important in shaping Eurasian and global history both during the Second World War and in the decades since.

There were some notable differences between German and Japanese patterns of occupation and forms of domination. The Japanese state had a more continuous history of incremental imperial expansion stretching from the 1890s to the early 1930s. Taiwan (acquired in 1895), Korea (declared a protectorate in 1905, then annexed in 1910), and Manchuria (1932) had been its major colonial acquisitions over the course of these decades, and its authority over the first two had been recognized under the international law of the time. It was the unilateral establishment of a Japanese puppet state – Manchukuo – in the northeastern Chinese region

Deák's single-authored publication on this theme is an extremely well-informed textbook that wrestles with the European occupation experience from the familiar perspective of the moral and political ambiguities of collaboration and resistance. István Deák, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution in World War II Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2015). Philip Morgan's well-written book focuses exclusively on Western European countries. Philip Morgan, *Hitler's Collaborators: Choosing between Bad and Worse in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). There is a very brief overview of Asian and European experiences of occupation by Axis powers in Sean Kennedy, *The Shock of War: Civilian Experiences, 1937–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), ch. 2. There are various edited collections of great value, but these by definition lack a cohesive authorial perspective. I am not aware of any single-authored work that brings a systematic analytical framework to bear on the comparative study of European as well as Asian responses to wartime enemy occupations.

of Manchuria that marked Japan's definitive break with liberal internationalism and led to the outbreak of a broader Sino-Japanese war in 1937. In retrospect, 1937 can be seen as the start of the Second World War in Asia, as it was the United States' attempts to coordinate the economic sanctioning of Japan in an effort to dislodge it from China that led to the December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and launch of the Pacific War. The war against China also marked the transition away from a successful, piecemeal phase of Japanese imperialism that had been marked by the effective repression of resistance, cooptation of colonial elites, and integration of economies on terms that were generally profitable to Japanese industrial and commercial enterprises. From 1937 on, the specter of a military quagmire in China and of a growing backlash from Western powers began to obscure the rays of the Rising Sun. Japan's imposition of a wartime command economy on Southeast Asia following its rapid conquest of the region in late 1941 and early 1942 was intended to maximize the utilization of the region's resources in the pursuit of victory against Japan's foes. Instead, in combination with the region's sudden isolation from its historic export markets in the West, Japan's policies served to create disincentives for production in Southeast Asia's largely agricultural- and commodity-export-dependent economies.<sup>4</sup>

Germany's history as an imperial power on the European continent was marked by dramatic pendulum swings rather than steady growth.<sup>5</sup> At the height of its success on the Eastern Front during the First World War, marked by the conclusion of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk with the Bolsheviks in March 1918, Berlin had acquired a vast area of control in the western regions of the former Russian empire, including Poland's heartland, the Baltic region, Belorussia (Belarus), and Ukraine. In parts of this sphere, the German conquerors posed as sponsors and enablers of self-determination on the part of peoples such as the Poles and Ukrainians, over whom they planned to exercise long-term dominance through the creation of puppet regimes.<sup>6</sup> But Germany's imperial triumph was abruptly reversed by its November 1918 defeat on the Western Front. In the aftermath, it lost not only its East European acquisitions and its wartime occupation of Belgium and northeastern

<sup>4</sup> Gregg Huff, *World War II and Southeast Asia: Economy and Society under Japanese Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 372.

<sup>5</sup> On continuities in German imperialism from the Second to the Third Reich, see Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Borislav Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

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Neutral  
 Allied powers  
 Major Axis powers (inc. annexed territories)  
 Axis-occupied  
 Axis allies, protectorates, and puppet regimes

ABBREVIATIONS:

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|---|--|
| <p>AD: Andorra<br/>                 AL: Albania<br/>                 BM: Bohemia and Moravia<br/>                 BE: Belgium<br/>                 CH: Switzerland<br/>                 DK: Denmark<br/>                 FM: French Morocco (Vichy France)<br/>                 Gen. Govt: General Government<br/>                 (Occupied Poland)<br/>                 HR: Croatia (nominally independent,<br/>                 but de facto divided into Italian and<br/>                 German areas of troop deployment)</p> | <p>LU: Luxembourg<br/>                 ME: Montenegro<br/>                 NL: Netherlands<br/>                 PO: Portugal<br/>                 R.K.: Reichskommissariat<br/>                 SA: Serbia<br/>                 SK: Slovakia<br/>                 SM: Spanish Morocco<br/>                 TN: Transnistria (occupied by<br/>                 Romania)<br/>                 TU: Tunisia (Vichy France)</p> |
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 Map by Geoffrey Wallace

Map 1 Alliances, regimes, and occupations in Europe, c. July 1942.



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 Map by Geoffrey Wallace

Allied powers   
  Axis-occupied   
  Major Axis powers (inc. annexed territories)  
 Neutral   
  Terr. claimed by the Republic of China

ABBREVIATIONS:

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|--|---|
| BN: Brunei (UK)  | NH: New Hebrides (UK/Free French)                                       |
| BT: Bhutan (UK)  | PT: Portuguese Timor (neutral)  |
| BU: Burma (UK)   | SG: Singapore (UK)  |
| FIC: French Indochina (Vichy France controlled, Japanese supervised) | TH: Thailand (independent and allied with Japan, but de facto occupied) |
| FMS: Federal Malay States (UK)                                       | TT: Tannu Tuva (Soviet Union-affiliated)                                |
| NP: Nepal  |   |

Map 2 Imperial Japanese territory and occupation in the Pacific, summer 1942.

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France, but also its overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific and significant portions of territory that had lain within its own national borders. Berlin resumed an expansionist path in 1938, with the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland region, justifying both seizures through the right to national self-determination of these lands' German-speaking populations. The British and French, notoriously, acquiesced to these moves, but drew a line following Hitler's dismantling of the rump Czechoslovak state in March 1939 and declared war following his invasion of Poland in September. As the Japanese were to do, Nazi Germany achieved spectacular successes in its initial series of campaigns between 1939 and 1941, which brought the bulk of the European continent under its direct or indirect control. (See Map 1.)

In Western Europe, Nazi occupation was marked initially by the cooptation rather than decapitation of national-level governments or administrations – to the extent that this was facilitated by the courses of action chosen by defeated countries' governments. These countries' economies were integrated into the Nazi empire on terms that were negotiated under duress and were disproportionately advantageous to Germany, but that still created incentives for collaboration on the part of the subjugated societies' industrial and agricultural interests and administrative institutions.<sup>7</sup> In much of Eastern Europe, by contrast, the Nazis tended to regard indigenous populations as racially unworthy of even the token forms of self-determination their predecessors had been willing to offer in 1918. Naked exploitation was the order of the day from the onset of occupation. Plans existed (largely on paper) to establish a vast zone of plantation agriculture run by German colonists in conquered areas of the Soviet Union, and local populations were seen as fit only for enslavement or reduction via mass starvation. Across the entirety of the European continent, the Nazis and their collaborators sought to systematically murder Jewish populations, among other targeted categories of people.<sup>8</sup>

Nazi Germany's preoccupation with racist ideology to the extent of allowing racial doctrines to determine the broad outlines of its occupation policies set it apart from Japan, which presented itself as the would-be liberator of fellow East Asian peoples who had long suffered under the yoke of racialized European imperialism. This contrast should not be taken too far, however. In practice, Japanese invasion and occupation forces responded to resistance with wholesale atrocities on a monstrous

<sup>7</sup> Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, ch. 9.

<sup>8</sup> On the Nazis' imperialism as the culmination of a long German historical pattern of seeking empire in the conviction that the alternative was to be subjected to the imperialism of others, see Baranowski, *Nazi Empire*, Introduction.

scale, most notoriously in China. Moreover, the talk of a shared racial and civilizational identity among East Asian peoples was undercut by propagandist rhetoric about the allegedly singular purity, and hence virtue, of Japan's "Yamato race," as well as by prejudice against other Asian populations and cultures as worthy of paternalistic condescension at best. Each nation was to have "its proper place" in the vision of a new regional and global order articulated by wartime Japan's leadership. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere that Tokyo held out as its vision for a post-imperial, post-war era was to be a stratified system with Japan at its head, rather than an association of fully equal partners. One might say of it that an empire by any other name would smell no sweeter.<sup>9</sup>

The wartime coordination of policy by Germany, Japan, Italy, and their lesser allies was haphazard. Hitler approved the 1939 German–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact at a time when armed conflict between Japanese and Soviet forces along the Mongolian–Manchurian border was culminating in Japanese defeat. Less than two years later, Japan negotiated a neutrality pact with Moscow just a few months before Germany's onslaught on the USSR. Indeed, Japan's July 1940 declaration that it was pursuing a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was motivated in part by a determination to stave off any potential German imperial intrusion into a region that Tokyo wished to secure as its own sphere of influence.<sup>10</sup> In December 1941, Hitler did follow through on his promise to declare war on the United States if Japan would take the plunge into a Pacific war.

Despite their differences, there was a strong element of convergence and mutual influence between the two regimes' conceptions of their imperial expansions. They both saw their aggressions as marking paradigm-shifting breaks from the liberal-internationalist/liberal-imperialist system, inaugurating a new world order.<sup>11</sup> Their shared vision of what Reto Hofmann has dubbed "imperial self-determination" entailed the marginalization or replacement of existing empires by their own new system of quasi-autarkic regional blocs, in which the economic and cultural deficiencies of capitalism and modernity would be countered by state-directed forms of economic development and corporatism. Universal values would be replaced by cults of national and racial

<sup>9</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), p. 9 and ch. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup> On the relationship between liberal internationalism and liberal imperialism, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012), Introduction and ch. 5.



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authenticity. The division of functions and resources among constituent elements of their freshly won empires would reflect in part each power's preconceived conceptions of racial and/or cultural hierarchies.<sup>12</sup>

The context of global total war served to enhance the similarities between Axis occupation policies. Both Germany and Japan (along with Italy) had initially embarked on expansionist juggernauts that were designed to pay for themselves and secure the basis for future prosperity amidst the dawn of a new order. But, in fact, these efforts had brought about the onset of total war against a coalition of Allied powers in the face of whose resources and capacity for coordination the Axis could not hope to prevail. The ever greater demands of fighting a total war in the face of such odds led to a functional convergence between German and Japanese approaches to imperial rule, as each power strove to exploit the human and natural resources of occupied lands ever more ruthlessly. In a word, the brutal ideologies and temperaments of the Axis and Axis-aligned regimes, combined with the material strains of globalized total war, were such that many of the occupations in question were exceptionally harsh, with drastic consequences for all aspects of life in conquered lands.

That said, the degree and nature of these transformations varied widely, as will be seen in the pages that follow. The variety of forms occupation took could create new political divisions in society, accentuate preexisting ones, and/or bridge others. It could provoke the creation of patriotic coalitions and spark the outbreak of civil wars. It could raise hitherto obscure personalities and marginalized movements to new prominence, while shattering the power of others.

Each country's, and indeed each individual's, experience was unique; yet many responses were also shaped by globally diffused conceptions of, and conflicts about, political self-determination, ethno-racial identity, and patriotic obligation, as well as by various warring visions of internationalism. The legacy of those responses and the ways in which they have been remembered and commemorated continue to shape domestic and international politics across much of Eurasia to this very day.

The classic analytical prism through which this subject has been studied is that of collaboration, resistance, and the grey zone in between.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Reto Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915–1952* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 107. On the Second World War as a clash of imperialisms, see also Richard Overy's magisterial new book, *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), esp. xiii, 32–68, 184–217.

<sup>13</sup> Variations upon this approach are particularly well developed in the historiography on Vichy France, which has (as Timothy Brook has pointed out; see note 14) – by virtue of this scholarship's pioneering role and conceptual sophistication – been



Yet the flourishing monographic, case-study literature on the histories of occupied territories in the Second World War has in recent years highlighted just how loaded, ambiguous, and problematic the contradistinction between collaboration and resistance can be. Tim Brook has suggested that an automatic identification of collaboration with treachery is based on the assumption that the nation-state is the only legitimate object of political loyalty; but, in fact, national identity is no less a social construct than any other form of group belonging.<sup>14</sup> For his part, in his controversial history of the East European borderlands in the Second World War, Timothy Snyder has highlighted how these territories' repeated changes of hands between Soviet and Nazi occupations rendered it practically impossible for any inhabitant not to have been coopted to some extent by at least one of the successive occupying powers.<sup>15</sup>

Any analytical approach has its strengths and limitations, and it is not my intention to discard the concepts of collaboration and resistance. Rather, this book takes a series of alternative analytical perspectives as its points of departure. Inspired by Brook's critique, I ask *how* were patriotic, ethno-national, and internationalist identities manipulated, exploited, reconstructed, and reinvented under the extraordinary circumstances of Axis occupations?<sup>16</sup> To what degree were behavioral choices (such as decisions to collaborate or resist) conditioned by evolving conceptions of patriotic, ethno-racial, and transnational identities or loyalties, and to what extent were they functions of short-term cost-benefit calculations, opportunism, or sheer coercion? Conversely, how were political identities or ideological rationales used to legitimize decisions to work with or against occupying powers? How did awareness

disproportionately influential on the study of responses to Second World War-era occupations in other countries. See Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972); H. R. Kedward, *Resistance in Vichy France: A Study of Ideas and Motivation in the Southern Zone, 1940–42* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer; rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). For recent approaches that question the relative neatness of some of the early typological distinctions between collaboration and resistance, see Sarah Fishman, Robert Zaretsky, and Ioannis Sinanoglu, eds., *France at War: Vichy and the Historians* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> In a very loose sense, this approach can be seen as a sequel to my earlier work on the evolution of ethno-national identities in multinational empires during the First World War and its aftermath. Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, the Middle East and Russia, 1914–1923* (London: Routledge, 2001).

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among the occupied in any given country of broader, regional, and global patterns of collaboration and resistance shape their responses to occupation? How important was the element of path dependency; that is, how deep and long-lasting an impact did political leaders' initial responses to foreign conquest have on the subsequent course of relations between occupiers and occupied? These are not questions to which there are conclusive or uniformly applicable answers. But they are among the fundamental problems that drive this book's comparative analysis.

Exploring shifting loyalties, choices, and identities under occupation can not only illuminate the impact of this wartime experience, but also contribute to a broader understanding of modern political forces such as ethno-nationalism, patriotism, and competing forms of internationalism.<sup>17</sup> The wholesale dismantling of states and redrawing of borders across wide swaths of Eurasia during the war years created a sort of laboratory of horrors for the study of political behavior, as conventional notions about law, authority, and sovereignty were suspended. Ordinary people and elites alike were compelled to make fundamental judgments about which ties of identity could maximize their chances of physical survival or (in some cases) economic and political advancement, and which loyalties should form the basis for their personal and political commitments. The very constraints imposed by enemy occupation elicited a remarkable variety of responses. By suspending the banality of ordinary political life,<sup>18</sup> wartime occupations tested conventional notions of loyalty and obligation in a way that few other circumstances could have done.

By the same token, it is important to distinguish these circumstances from longer-lasting forms of imperial rule: the sudden onset and relatively short duration of Axis conquests, along with the fact that Axis rule ran concurrently with an ever more demanding and destructive set of war efforts, made for a distinctive set of relational dynamics between occupiers and occupied, as well as among the occupied – as will be seen in the chapters that follow. Moreover, the radical violence associated with many of these occupations was exceptional, without even taking into account the Nazi effort to exterminate European Jewry and to commit mass murder on a genocidal scale against the Romani people, among other targeted groups. So, on the one hand, a study of this nature may afford some broader insights. But, on the other, a latter-day distance from the

<sup>17</sup> On ethnic and national identities as “field[s] of ... competing positions,” see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>18</sup> See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).