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Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire
Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World

The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the
Modern World, 1700-2000

The Pity of War

The House of Rothschild

NIALL FERGUSON

The War of the World

*Twentieth-Century Conflict and
the Descent of the West*

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GENE POOLS

Not without reason, Hermann Göring explicitly called the Second World War 'the great racial war'. That was indeed how many contemporaries experienced it. The importance then attached to notions of racial difference now seems rather strange. The science of modern genetics has revealed that human beings are remarkably alike. In terms of our DNA we are, without a shadow of a doubt, one species, whose origins can be traced back to Africa between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago, and who began to spread into new continents only as recently as 60,000 years ago – in evolutionary terms, the proverbial blink of an eye. The differences we associate with racial identities are superficial: pigmentation (which is darker in the melanocytes of peoples whose ancestors lived close to the equator), physiognomy (which makes eyes narrower and noses shorter at the eastern end of the great Eurasian landmass) and hair type. Beneath the skin, we are all quite similar. That is a reflection of our shared origins.* To be sure, geographical dispersion meant that humans formed groups which became physically quite distinct over time. That explains why the Chinese look quite different from, say, the Scots. However, outright 'speciation' – to be precise, the development of 'isolating barriers' that would have made interbreeding impossible – did not have time to subdivide the species *Homo sapiens*. Indeed, the genetic record makes it clear that, despite their outward differences and despite the obstacles of distance and mutual incomprehension, the different 'races' have been interbreeding since the very earliest times. Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and his collaborators have shown that most Europeans are descended from farmers who migrated northwards and westwards from the Middle East. The DNA record suggests that there were successive waves of such migration, attended always by some mingling of the incomers with indigenous nomads. The great *Völkerwanderung* ('wandering of the peoples') of the late Roman Empire left a similar

* All the human mitochondrial DNA sequences that exist today are descended from that of one African woman, just as all the Y chromosomes can be traced back to that of one man. Indeed, it has been estimated that all the human DNA in existence today originated with as few as 86,000 individuals.

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genetic legacy. Most striking of all have been the consequences of the modern migrations associated with the European discovery of the New World in the late fifteenth century and the subsequent era of conquest, colonization and concubinage. Biologists today call the process 'demic diffusion'. Nineteenth-century racists spoke of 'miscegenation'; Noël Coward simply called it 'the urge to merge'. But the phenomenon was already a familiar one when Shakespeare wrote *Othello* (whose mixed marriage is doomed more by his credulity than his colour) and *The Merchant of Venice* (which also touches on the issue, notably when Portia tests her suitors).

The results are plainly legible to those who study the human genome today. Between a fifth and a quarter of the DNA of most African-Americans can be traced back to Europeans. At least half of the inhabitants of Hawaii are of 'mixed' ancestry. Likewise, the DNA of today's Japanese population indicates that there was intermarriage between early settlers from Korea and the indigenous Jomone people. Most of the Y chromosomes found in Jewish males are the same as those found among other Middle Eastern men; for all their bitter enmity, Palestinians and Israelis are genetically not so very different. The evolutionist Richard Lewontin famously calculated that around 85 per cent of the total amount of genetic variation in humans occurs among individuals in an average population; only 6 per cent occurs among races. The genetic variants that affect skin colour, hair type and facial features involve an insignificant amount of the billions of nucleotides in an individual's DNA. To some biologists, this means that, strictly speaking, human races do not exist.

Others might prefer to say that they are in the process of ceasing to exist. A generation of American social scientists working during and after the 1960s documented the rise of interracial marriage in the post-war United States, portraying it as the most important measure of assimilation in American life. Though 'multi-culturalism' has done much to challenge the idea that assimilation should always and everywhere be the goal of ethnic minorities, a rising rate of intermarriage is still widely regarded as a key indicator of diminishing racial prejudice or conflict. In the words of two leading American sociologists, 'rates of intermarriage . . . are particularly good indications of the acceptability of different groups and of social integration'. The US

census currently distinguishes between four 'racial' categories: 'black', 'white', 'Native American' and 'Asian or Pacific Islander'. On this basis, one in twenty children in the United States is of mixed origin, in that their parents do not both belong to the same racial category. The number of such mixed-race couples quadrupled between 1990 and 2000, to roughly 1.5 million.

And yet throughout the twentieth century men repeatedly thought and acted as if the physically distinctive 'races' were separate species, categorizing this group or that group as somehow 'subhuman'. While 'demic diffusion' has occurred peacefully and even imperceptibly in some settings, in others interracial relationships have been viewed as deeply dangerous. How, then, are we to explain this central puzzle: the willingness of groups of men to identify one another as aliens when they are all biologically so very similar? For it was this willingness that lay at the root of much of the twentieth century's worst violence. How could Göring's 'great racial war' happen if there were no races?

Two evolutionary constraints help to explain the shallowness but also the persistence of racial differences. The first is that when men were few and far between – when life was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', as it was for 99 per cent of the time our species has existed – the overriding imperatives were to hunt or gather sufficient food and to reproduce. Men formed small groups because cooperation improved the individual's chances of doing both. However, tribes that came into contact with one another were inevitably in competition for scarce resources. Hence, conflict could take the form of plunder – the seizure by violence of another tribe's means of subsistence – and downright murder of unrelated strangers to get rid of potential sexual rivals. Man, so some neo-Darwinians argue, is programmed by his genes to protect his kin and to fight 'the Other'. To be sure, a warrior tribe that succeeded in defeating a rival tribe would not necessarily act rationally if it killed all its members. Given the importance of reproduction, it would make more sense to appropriate the rival tribe's fertile females as well as its food. In that sense, even the evolutionary logic that produces tribal violence also promotes interbreeding, as captured womenfolk become the victors' sexual partners.

Nevertheless there may be a biological check on this impulse to

rape alien females. For there is evidence from the behaviour of both humans and other species that nature does not necessarily favour breeding between genetically very different members of the same species. No doubt there are sound biological reasons for the more or less universal taboos on incest in human societies, since inbreeding with siblings increases the risk that a genetic abnormality may manifest itself in offspring. On the other hand, a preference for distant relatives or complete strangers as mates would have been a handicap in prehistoric times. A species of hunter-gatherers that could only reproduce successfully with genetically (and geographically) distant individuals would not have lasted long. Sure enough, there is strong empirical evidence to suggest that 'optimal outbreeding' is achieved with a surprisingly small degree of genealogical separation. A first cousin may actually be biologically preferable as a mate to a wholly unrelated stranger. The very high levels of cousin-marriage that used to be common among Jews and still prevail among the highly endogamous Samaritans have resulted in remarkably few genetic abnormalities. Conversely, when a Chinese woman marries a European man, the chances are relatively high that their blood groups may be incompatible, so that only the first child they conceive will be viable. Finally, it must be significant in its own right that separate human populations so quickly developed such distinctive facial characteristics. Some evolutionary biologists argue that this was a result not just of 'genetic drift' but of 'sexual selection' – in other words, a culturally triggered and somewhat arbitrary preference for eye-folds in Asia or long noses in Europe quite rapidly accentuated precisely those characteristics in populations that were isolated from one another. Like attracted and continues to attract like; those who are drawn to 'the Other' may in fact be atypical in their sexual predilections.

A further possible barrier to interbreeding is that races may have a 'sociobiological' function as extended kinship groups, practising a diffuse kind of nepotism that stems from our innate desire to reproduce our genes not only directly through sex but also indirectly by protecting our cousins and other relatives. Human beings do seem predisposed to trust members of their own race as traditionally defined (in terms of skin colour, hair type and physiognomy) more than members of other races – though how far this can be explained in

evolutionary terms and how far in terms of inculcated cultural prejudice is clearly open to question. Taken together, these factors may help to explain why races seem to be dissolving rather slowly, despite the unprecedented mobility and interaction of the modern era. Recent work on 'microsatellite markers' has challenged the view that in strictly biological terms races do not really exist, showing that American ethnic groups identifying themselves as, variously, white, African-American, East Asian and Hispanic *are* in some respects genetically distinguishable. The key point to grasp is the fundamental tension between our inherent capacity for interbreeding and the persistence of discernible genetic differences. Racial differences may be genetically few, but human beings seem to be designed to attach importance to them.

It may be objected that the historian, especially the modern historian, has no business dabbling in evolutionary biology. Is not his proper concern the activity of civilized man, not primitive man? 'Civilization' is, of course, the name we give to forms of human organization superior to the hunter-gathering tribe. With the advent of systematic agriculture between 4,000 and 10,000 years ago, people became less mobile; at the same time, more reliable supplies of food meant that their tribes could become much larger. Divisions of labour developed between cultivators, warriors, priests and rulers. Yet civilized settlements were always vulnerable to raids by unreconstructed tribes, who were hardly likely to leave undisturbed such concentrations of the nutritious and the nubile. And even when – as happened gradually over time – most human beings opted for the pleasures of the settled life, there was no guarantee that settled societies would coexist peacefully. Civilizations geographically distant from one another might trade amicably with one another, allowing the gradual emergence of an international division of labour. But it was just as possible for one civilization to make war on another, for the same base motives that had actuated man in prehistoric times: to expropriate nutritional and reproductive resources. Historians, it is true, can study only those human organizations sophisticated enough to keep enduring records. But no matter how complex the administrative structure we study, we should not lose sight of the basic instincts buried within even the most civilized men. These instincts were to be unleashed time and again

after 1900. They were a large part of what made the Second World War so ferocious.

DIASPORAS AND PALES

'Two peoples never meet,' the American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits once wrote, 'but they mingle their blood.' Mingling, however, is only one of a range of options when two diverse human populations meet. The minority group may remain distinct for breeding purposes but become integrated into the majority group in all or some other respects (language, religious belief, dress, lifestyle). Alternatively, interbreeding can go on, at least for a time, but one or both of the two groups may nevertheless preserve or even adopt distinct cultural or ethnic identities. Here is an important distinction. Whereas 'race' is a matter of inherited physical characteristics, transmitted from parents to children in DNA, 'ethnicity' is a combination of language, custom and ritual, inculcated in the home, the school and the temple. It is perfectly possible for a genetically intermixed population to split into two or more biologically indistinguishable but culturally differentiated ethnic groups. The process may be voluntary, but it may also be based on coercion – notably where major changes of religious belief are concerned. One or both groups may even opt for residential and other forms of segregation; the majority may insist that the minority lives in a clearly delineated space, or the minority may choose to do so for its own reasons. The two groups may cordially ignore one another, or there may be friction, perhaps leading to civil strife or one-sided massacres. The groups may fight one another or one group may submit to expulsion by the other. Genocide is the extreme case, in which one group attempts to annihilate the other.

Why, if minorities face such risks by not assimilating, do ethnic identities persist, even in cases where no biological distinction exists? There are, to be sure, fewer ethnic groups in the world today than there were a century ago; witness the decline in the number of living languages. Yet despite the best efforts of the global market and the nation state to impose cultural uniformity, many minority cultures have proved remarkably resilient. Indeed, persecution has sometimes

tended to strengthen the self-consciousness of the persecuted. Passing on an inherited culture may simply be gratifying in its own right; we enjoy hearing our children singing the songs our parents taught us. A more functional interpretation is that ethnic groups can provide valuable networks of trust in nascent markets. The obvious cost of such networks is, of course, that their very success may arouse the antagonism of other ethnic groups. Some 'market-dominant minorities' are especially vulnerable to discrimination and even expropriation; their tightly knit communities are economically strong but politically weak. While this may be true of the Chinese diaspora* in parts of Asia today, it also has applicability to the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire before the First World War or the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe before the Second. However, because exceptions suggest themselves (the Scots were unquestionably a 'market-dominant minority' throughout the British Empire, but aroused minimal hostility), two qualifications need to be added. The first is that the economic dominance of a vulnerable minority may matter less than its political lack of dominance. It is not only wealthy minorities that are persecuted; by no means all the European Jews were rich, and the Sinti and Roma were among Europe's poorest people when the Nazis condemned them to annihilation. The crucial factor may have been their lack of formal and informal political representation. The second qualification is that, if an ethnic group is to be deprived of its rights, property or existence, it cannot be too well armed. Where there are two ethnic groups, both of which have weapons, civil war is more likely than genocide.

Of considerably less importance is the relative size of an ethnic minority. There are, indeed, cases when a majority population was the victim of violent persecution by a minority, counter-intuitive though that may be. As the people of predominantly Jewish cities in the Pale of Settlement discovered repeatedly in the first half of the

* The term 'diaspora' was originally used to refer to all the Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity. It is also a useful term for other emigrant communities that have nevertheless retained their original ethnicity.

+ The term 'Pale', in the sense of a territory with clearly determined boundaries and/or subject to a distinct jurisdiction, was also used to refer to the area of eastern Ireland under English jurisdiction between the late 12th and the 16th centuries and to territory

twentieth century, numbers do not always mean safety. Also relatively insignificant as a predictor of ethnic conflict is the degree of assimilation between two populations. It might be thought that a high level of social integration would discourage conflict, if only because of the difficulty of identifying and isolating a highly assimilated minority. Paradoxically, however, a sharp rise in assimilation (measured, for example, by rates of intermarriage) may actually be the prelude to ethnic conflict.

Assimilation, to give perhaps the most important of all examples, was in fact quite far advanced in Central and Eastern Europe by the 1920s. In many places of mixed settlement, rates of intermarriage across ethnic barriers rose to unprecedented heights. By the later 1920s, nearly one in every three marriages involving a German Jew was to a Gentile. The rate rose as high as one in two in some big cities. The trend was similar, with only minor degrees of variation, in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, parts of Poland, Romania and Russia (see Table I.1). This could, of course, be interpreted as an indicator of successful assimilation and integration. Yet it was in precisely these places that some of the worst ethnic violence occurred in the 1940s. One hypothesis explored below is that there was some kind of backlash against assimilation, and particularly against miscegenation, in the mid-twentieth century.

This possibility should disturb but not surprise us. We have, after all, seen instances of such backlashes in our own time. Horrific violence between Tutsis and Hutus occurred in Rwanda in the 1990s, even though intermarriage between Tutsi men and Hutu women used to be quite common. Ethnic conflict also exploded in Bosnia, despite high rates of inter-ethnic marriage in previous decades. These episodes also serve to remind us that there is no linear spectrum of inter-ethnic behaviour, with peaceful mingling at one end and bloody genocide at the other. The most murderous racial violence can have a sexual dimension to it, as in 1992, when Serbian forces were accused of a

in northern France under English jurisdiction between the mid-14th and mid-16th centuries. The Russian *cherta osetlosti* (literally 'boundary of settlement'), to which the Jews of the Tsarist empire were confined after 1791, had a somewhat different character. As in the case of the term 'diaspora', the word has a more general applicability to any territory associated with settlement by a particular ethnic group.

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Table I.1. Mixed marriages as a percentage of all marriages involving one or two Jewish partners, selected European countries, regions and cities in the 1920s

	Percentage of mixed marriages per 100 couples	Percentage of mixed marriages per 100 couples
Luxembourg	15.5	Slovakia 7.9
Basel	16.1	Carpatho-Russia 1.3
Strasbourg	21.2	Hungary 20.5
Germany	35.1	Budapest 28.5
Prussia	35.9	Trieste 59.2
Bavaria	35.9	Poland 0.2
Hessen	19.9	Posen/Poznań 39.2
Württemberg	38.1	Breslau/Wrocław 23.8
Baden	26.4	Lemberg/Lwów 0.5
Saxony	43.5	Bucharest 10.9
Berlin	42.7	Soviet Union (European) 12.7
Magdeburg	58.4	Russia (European) 34.7
Munich	47.3	Leningrad 32.1
Frankfurt am Main	30.4	Kirovograd 8.8
Hamburg	49.1	Ukraine 9.6
Austria	20.9	Byelorussia 6.1
Vienna	19.8	Larvia 3.3
Czechoslovakia	17.2	Lithuania 0.2
Bohemia	36.3	Estonia 13.5
Moravia-Silesia	27.6	Vilna 1.2

Note: All data are for the period 1926 to 1929 or 1930 except Trieste (1921-1927), Poland (1927), Lemberg/Lwów (1922-1923), Soviet Union (1924-1926), Russia (1926), Leningrad (1919-1920), Kirovograd (1921-1924), Ukraine (1926), Byelorussia (1926), Lithuania (1928-1930), Estonia (1923) and Vilna (1929-1931).

systematic campaign of rape directed against Bosnian Muslim women, with the aim of forcing them to conceive and give birth to 'Little Četniks'. Was this merely one of many forms of violence designed to terrorize Muslim families into fleeing from their homes? Or was it perhaps a manifestation of the primitive impulse described above – to eradicate 'the Other' by impregnating females as well as murdering males? It would certainly be simplistic to regard raping women as a form of violence indistinguishable in its intent from shooting men. Sexual violence directed against members of ethnic minorities has often been inspired by erotic, albeit sadistic, fantasies as much as by 'eliminationist' racism. The key point to grasp from the outset is that

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the 'hated' so often blamed for ethnic conflict is not a straightforward emotion. Rather, we encounter time and again that volatile ambivalence, that mixture of aversion and attraction, which has for so long characterized relations between white Americans and African-Americans. In calling the period from 1904 to 1953 the Age of Hatred, I hope to draw attention to the very complexity of that most dangerous of human emotions.

THE RACE MEME

If it can plausibly be argued that 'race' is not a genetically meaningful concept, the question the historian must address is why it has nevertheless been such a powerful and violent preoccupation of modern times. An answer that suggests itself – also, as it happens, from the literature on evolutionary biology – is that racism, in the sense of a strongly articulated sense of racial differentiation, is one of those 'memes' characterized by Richard Dawkins as behaving in the realm of ideas the way genes behave in the natural world. The *idea* of biologically distinct races, ironically, has been able to reproduce itself and retain its integrity far more successfully than the races it claims to identify.

In the ancient and medieval worlds, no identity was wholly indelible. It was possible to become a Roman citizen, even if one had been born a Gaul. It was possible to become a Christian, even – at first especially – if one had been born a Jew. At the same time, blood feuds could run for years, even centuries, between ethnically indistinguishable but irreconcilably hostile clans. The notion of immutable racial identity came late to human history. The Spanish expulsion of the Jews in 1492 was very unusual in defining Jewishness according to blood rather than belief. Even in the eighteenth-century Portuguese Empire, it was possible for a mulatto to acquire the legal rights and privileges of a white through the payment of a standard fee to the crown. As is well known, the first ostensibly scientific attempt to subdivide the human species into biologically distinct races was by the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl von Linné). In his *Systema Naturae* (1758), he identified four races: *Homo sapiens americanus*, *Homo sapiens asiaticus*, *Homo sapiens afer* and *Homo sapiens europaeus*.

aens. Linnaeus, like all his many imitators, ranked the various races according to their appearance, temperament and intelligence, putting European man at the top of the evolutionary tree, followed (in Linnaeus's case) by American man ('ill-tempered... obstinate, contented, free'), Asian man ('severe, haughty, desirous') and – invariably at the bottom – African man ('crafty, slow, foolish'). Whereas European man was 'ruled by customs', Linnaeus argued, African man was ruled by 'caprice'. Already by the time of the American Revolution, this way of thinking was astonishingly widespread; the only real debate was whether racial differences reflected gradual divergence from a common origin or, as polygenists insisted, the lack of such a common origin. By the end of the nineteenth century, racial theorists had devised more elaborate methods of categorization, most commonly based on skull size and shape, but the basic ranking never changed. In his *Hereditary Genius* (1869), the English polymath Francis Galton devised a sixteen-point scale of racial intelligence, which put ancient Athenians at the top and the Australian aborigines at the bottom.

This was a profound transformation in the way people thought. Previously, men had tended to believe that it was power, privilege and property that were inheritable, as well, no doubt, as the social obligations that went with them. The royal dynasties who still ruled so much of the world in 1900 were the embodiments of this principle. Even the republics that occasionally arose in the modern period – in the Netherlands, North America and France – tended to retain the hereditary principle with respect to wealth, if not to office and status. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries new political doctrines arose. One theory asserted that power should not be a hereditary attribute, and that leaders should be selected by popular acclamation. Another called for the demolition of the edifice of inherited privilege; all men should instead be equal before the law. A third argued that property should not be monopolized by an elite of wealthy families, but should be redistributed according to individual needs. Yet even as democrats, liberals and socialists advanced these arguments, racists asserted that the hereditary principle should nevertheless apply in every other field of human activity. Racial theorists claimed that not only colour and physiognomy but also intelligence, aptitude, character

and even morals and criminality were passed on in the blood from generation to generation. This was another central paradox of the modern era. Even as the hereditary principle ceased to govern the allocation of office and ownership, so it gained ground as a presumed determinant of capability and conduct. Men ceased to be able to inherit their father's jobs; in some countries during the twentieth century they even ceased to be able to inherit their estates. But they could inherit their traits, as legacies of their parents' racial origins.

The crucial normative question, however, was how far the manifest ability of the different races to interbreed ought to be tolerated. To some, 'miscegenation' seemed simply to be inevitable. A number of thinkers even came to regard it as desirable – that, at any rate, was a strong implication of early anthropological theories about 'exogamy', as well as the developing understanding of hereditary illness and the somewhat exaggerated perils of cousin-marriage. However, an increasingly frequent reaction to the phenomenon was condemnation. In his *History of Jamaica* (1774), for example, Edward Long found 'the Europeans [there]... too easily led aside to give a loose to every kind of sensual delight: on this account some black or yellow *quasheba* is sought for, by whom a tawney [sic] breed is produced'. Arthur, comte de Gobineau, in his *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1853–55), echoed Linnaeus in identifying three archetypal races, of which the Aryan (white) was supreme and, as usual, responsible for all the great achievements of history. But Gobineau introduced a new idea: that the decline of a civilization tended to come when its Aryan blood had been diluted by intermarriage. He, too, regarded the fusion of the intellectually superior white race and more emotional dark and yellow races as inevitable, since the former was essentially masculine, the latter essentially feminine. Yet that did not make miscegenation any less repellent to him: 'The more this product reproduces itself and crosses its blood, the more the confusion increases. It reaches infinity, when the people is too numerous for any equilibrium to have a chance of being established... Such a people is merely an awful example of racial anarchy.'

In its most extreme forms, hostility to 'racial anarchy' produced discrimination, segregation, persecution, expulsion and, ultimately, attempted annihilation. For many years it seemed to be incumbent

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on historians to deny the existence of such a continuum of racial discrimination and to treat one particular event – the National Socialist 'Final Solution' to the 'Jewish Question' – as *swi generis*, a unique 'Holocaust', without precedent or parallel. A central hypothesis of this present book, however, is that German anti-Semitism in the mid-twentieth century was an extreme case of a general (though by no means universal) phenomenon. In claiming that Jews were systematically trying to 'pollute the blood' of the German *Volk*, Hitler and the other National Socialist ideologues were, as we shall see, saying nothing novel. Nor was it unique that such ideas became the basis not just for segregation and expulsion but ultimately for systematic genocide. The principal distinguishing feature of what became known as the Holocaust was not its goal of racial annihilation but the fact that it was carried out by a regime which had at its disposal all the resources of an industrialized economy and an educated society.

This is not to say that all the perpetrators of the Holocaust were actuated by fears of miscegenation, though there is compelling evidence that this was indeed a strong motivation among many leading Nazis. Many of those who actively contributed towards genocide were motivated by crude material greed. Others were little more than morally blinkered cogs in a bureaucratic machine whose 'cumulative radicalization' they did not individually will. Some perpetrators were merely ordinary men acting under peer-group pressure or systematic military brutalization; others were amoral technocrats obsessed with their own pseudo-scientific theories; still others were brainwashed youths in the grip of an immoral secular religion. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that the racial world view was fundamental to the Third Reich and that this was rooted in a particular conception of human biology – a singularly successful 'meme' that had already replicated itself all over the world by the start of the twentieth century. It could be transmitted even to quite remote and seemingly unpropitious locations. In the late nineteenth century, Argentina was widely regarded as an ideal destination for Jewish emigrants from Europe precisely because of the absence of anti-Semitism. Yet by the early 1900s writers like Juan Alsina and Arturo Reynal O'Connor were warning that the Jews posed a mortal threat to Argentine culture.

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'Only a few years ago,' lamented the Labour Zionist journal *Brot und Ehre* in 1910,

we could speak about Argentina as a new *Eretz Israel*, a land that opened generously its door for us, where we enjoyed the same freedom the Republic gives all its inhabitants, without distinction of nationalities or beliefs. And now? The whole atmosphere around us is filled with hatred of Jews, eyes hostile to Jews are staring from all corners; they lie in wait in all directions, awaiting an opportunity to attack... All are against us... And this is not simply a hatred of Jews; it is a sign of a future movement, which is long known [elsewhere] under the name of anti-Semitism.

BLOOD BORDERS

Why did large-scale ethnic conflict occur in some places and not in others? Why in Central and Eastern Europe more than in South America? One answer to that question is that in certain parts of the world there was an exceptional mismatch between ethnic identities and political structures. The ethnic map of Central and Eastern Europe, to take the most obvious example, was a true patchwork (Figure 1.2). In the north – to name only the largest groups – there were Lithuanians, Latvians, Byelorussians and Russians, all linguistically distinct; in the middle, Czechs, Slovaks and Poles; in the south, Italians, Slovenes, Magyars, Romanians and, in the Balkans, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians, Greeks and Turks. Scattered all over the region were German-speaking communities. Language was only one of the ways the different ethnic groups could be distinguished. Some of those who spoke German dialects were Protestants, some Catholics and some Jews. Some of those who spoke Serbo-Croat were Catholics (Croats), some Orthodox (Serbs and Macedonians) and some Muslims (Bosniaks). Some Bulgarians were Orthodox; others (the Pomaks) were Muslim. Most Turkic-speakers were Muslims; a few (the Gagauz) were Orthodox.

The political geography of Central and Eastern Europe before the nineteenth century had been consistent with this exceptionally heterogeneous pattern of settlement. The region had been divided between

of Transylvania and the Orthodox Christians of the Romanian heartland, the Regat. Yugoslavia – initially known as 'The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes', which named only three of the country's seventeen or more ethnic groups – was another hodgepodge. The Serbs had dreamed of a South Slav kingdom that they would dominate; as if to make that point, the new state's constitution was promulgated on June 28, 1921, the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo and of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand's assassination. In reality, Yugoslavia was an uneasy amalgam not just of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, but also of Albanians, Bosnian Muslims, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Turks – not to mention Czechs, Germans, Gypsies, Hungarians, Italians, Jews, Romanians, Russians, Slovaks and Ukrainians. Bulgaria and Hungary both retained sizeable minorities – accounting for, respectively, 19 and 13 per cent of their populations, despite having lost territory under the peace treaties. In these five countries alone, around twenty-four million people were living in states that regarded ~~these~~ ^{these} members of minority groups.

It is sometimes said that the Paris Peace settlement was flawed because the United States Senate refused to ratify it; or because it imposed such stiff economic reparations on Germany; or because its vision of an international system of collective security based on the League of Nations was not realistic. Yet the single most important reason for the fragility of peace in Europe was the fundamental contradiction between self-determination and the existence of these minorities. It was, of course, theoretically possible that all the different ethnic groups in a new state would agree to sublimate their differences in a new collective identity. But more often than not what happened was that a majority group claimed to be the sole proprietor of the nation state and its assets. In theory, there was supposed to be protection of the rights of minorities. But in practice the new governments could not resist discriminating against them.

As for the new era of peace supposedly ushered in by the Paris treaty, it was over in the blink of an eye. The borders of the new Polish state were themselves determined as much by violence as by voting or international arbitration. Between 1918 and 1921, the Poles fought small wars against the Ukraine, Germany, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia and Russia; the upshot was that Poland extended much

further east than the peacemakers had planned. In Eastern Poland, Ukrainians were excluded from government employment; so hostile were they to the new Polish state that Ukrainian terrorist organizations were soon active, in turn provoking brutal pacification expeditions by the Polish authorities into the chronically unquiet *kresy*, the borderlands. Yet it would be too harsh to blame all this on President Wilson. It was not he who had called nationalism into being in Central and Eastern Europe; it had torn the Habsburg Empire apart even before he got to Paris. Moreover, as we have seen, Wilson had envisaged a strong League of Nations with the power to intervene and arbitrate in border disputes. It was hardly his fault that the US Senate refused to endorse this permanent 'entanglement' of the United States in the affairs of strife-torn Europe; hardly his fault that his efforts to sell the League to the American public precipitated a stroke which all but paralysed him for the last sixteen months of his presidency.

Two groups felt especially vulnerable in the new post-war order. The Germans, who had once been the dominant people in so much of Central and Eastern Europe, feared reprisals from the new masters of the successor states. And with good reason. German communities came under attack by Polish mobs in Bydgoszcz (formerly Bromberg) and Ostrowo (formerly Ostrow). In Czechoslovakia the Germans were effectively excluded from the 1919 elections; in clashes with Czech gendarmes and troops – the so-called massacre of Kaaden of March 14, 1919 – fifty-two Germans were killed and eighty-four wounded. Not that the Germans were in every case innocent victims. In many of the territories that were ceded by Germany and Austria they formed belligerent and often armed self-defence groups. The mood of the Germans in Bukovina was not untypical. Gregor von Rezzori had grown up near Czernowitz (now Cernăuți) as the self-confidently German-speaking son of an Austrian official. He was bewildered by the transformation of his hometown when, along with the rest of Bukovina, it became a part of Romania. As he later recalled, a thin foil of civilization appeared to have been superimposed on an untidily assorted ethnic conglomerate from which it could be peeled off all too readily. ... The Romanians holding important government posts established them-

selves as the new masters under the aegis of the Romanian military establishment, which flaunted the brassy glitter of its fresh victory, and they remained largely isolated from those who spoke other languages and now were the minorities . . . the Jews in caftans . . . the rabbis and solid ethnic-German burghers in their stiff shirt-collars worn, according to local tradition, with wide knickerbockers and Tyrolean hats.

Rezzori's family withdrew into a kind of inner exile; they had, as he put it, 'ended up in a colony deserted by its colonial masters'. They were 'no longer masters of anything, taken over by another class to which we deemed ourselves superior but which, in fact, treated us as second-rate citizens because of the odium attached to an ethnic minority'. Romania was 'part of the East', whereas the Rezzoris 'felt definitely and consciously that we were "Occidentals"'. Of course, the Germans had never been anything other than a minority in the Bukovina. Around 38 per cent of the population were Ukrainians and 34 per cent were Romanians; a mere 9 per cent were Germans, though that proportion rose to 38 per cent in Czernowitz itself. Yet with its Habsburg bureaucracy and German university, Czernowitz had once seemed to be the gateway from 'Half-Asia' to 'Germandom'. Cernați, by contrast, was more of a German ghetto than a gateway – a place where Romanian students could with impunity storm the German Theatre to disrupt a performance of Schiller's *Die Räuber*. From mastery to minority represented a precipitous fall.

As the German case illustrates, it was not always violent persecution that the minorities suffered; it was more that as the economic role of the state expanded in the 1920s – most obviously when 'land reform' (meaning selective expropriation and redistribution) was attempted or industries nationalized – so the opportunities for real and imagined discrimination also grew. German schools were closed down by the Czech authorities, while new Czech schools were built even in towns where only a few Czech families lived. Similar things went on in Poland, though the discrimination against Ukrainian and Byelorussian schools was more severe. Literally not one secondary school existed for ethnic minorities in inter-war Hungary, though there were 467 German primary schools. The Romanian authorities drove German-speaking teachers out of Bukovina if their grasp of Romanian was

insufficient; one effect was to cripple the German literature department of Czernowitz's once renowned university. German civil servants in Czechoslovakia were obliged to pass an examination in Czech; the effect was to halve the proportion of Germans in the civil service. The Polish post office refused to deliver letters addressed to the old German place names in West Prussia and Posen. In the same spirit, the Italian authorities forced the Germans of the Tyrol to learn Italian, while at the same time offering incentives to Italians to settle in the province. Political organization by German minorities was also hampered. In 1923, for example, the Polish government banned the Bydgoszcz-based German League (*Deutschbundsbund*). Small wonder so many Germans opted to leave the so-called 'lost territories' and resettle in the reduced Reich. By 1926 some 85 per cent of the Germans in the towns of West Prussia and the formerly Prussian province of Posen had left. Those who remained were mostly isolated farmers or defiant landowners like the family of Oda Goerdeler, whose East Prussian estate became part of Działdowo county. As she recalled, the German community to which she belonged was 'haunted by feelings of superiority, which had previously been taken for granted'. After 1919 they simply 'sealed [themselves] off from the Polish element'.

Yet the most vulnerable minority in Central and Eastern Europe were – as in the Russian civil war – not the Germans but the Jews. The very moment of national independence in many countries was marred by outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence. In the Slovakian town of Holesov, for example, two Jews were killed and virtually the entire Jewish quarter was gutted. In Łódź Polish troops ran amok in Jewish neighbourhoods, incensed by Jewish protestations of neutrality in the contest for the city between Poles and Ukrainians. A program at Chżanów in November 1918 saw widespread looting and pillaging of Jewish homes and businesses; in Warsaw synagogues were burned. Further east, there were also pogroms in Vilnius and Pińsk – where Polish troops shot thirty-five people for the offence of distributing charitable donations from the United States – while in Hungary there was an anti-Semitic 'White Terror' following the suppression of the Jewish socialist Béla Kun's short-lived soviet regime in Budapest. The revolutionary movement cut through these and other Jewish

communities like a double-edged sword. Sometimes they were accused of having sided with the Germans during the war; sometimes they were accused of siding with the Bolsheviks during the Revolution.

Violence gave way to discrimination during the 1920s, despite the fine words of the Minorities Treaties. In Poland Sunday became a compulsory day of rest for all. Jews who could not prove pre-war residence were denied Polish citizenship. It was difficult for a Jew to become a schoolteacher; to become a university professor was next to impossible. State assistance was made available to Polish schools only, not to Jewish schools. The number of Jewish students at Polish universities fell by half between 1923 and 1937. As one Polish politician put it, the Jewish community was 'a foreign body, dispersed in our organism so that it produces a pathological deformation. In this state of affairs it is impossible to find a way out other than the removal of the alien body, harmful through both its numbers and its uniqueness.' The leader of the Nationalist Party, Roman Dwomski, spoke in similar terms. Not untypical of the post-war mood was the poem that appeared in *Przegląd powszechny* in December 1922:

Jewry is contaminating Poland thoroughly:
It scandalizes the young, destroys the unity of the common people.
By means of the atheistic press it poisons the spirit,
Incites to evil, provokes, divides . . .
A terrible gangrene has infiltrated our body
And we . . . are blind!
The Jews have gained control of Polish business,
As though we were imbeciles,
And they cheat, extort, and steal,
While we feed on fantasies,
Our indolence grows in strength and size,
And we . . . are blind!

Things were not a great deal better in Romania. Jews were not given full citizenship unless they had served in the Romanian army or been born of two parents both of whom had also been born in Romania. Jewish enrolment in universities was restricted. In Bukovina the introduction of a Romanian school-leaving examination in 1926

caused all but two out of ninety-four Jewish candidates to fail. Only through bribery could non-Romanian candidates hope to pass.

There were three possible responses to such discrimination. The first was to leave. Yet despite the importance of Zionism in Polish-Jewish politics, only a small proportion of Polish Jews drew the conclusion that they would be better off trying to find a Jewish state in the new 'home' their people had been granted in what was now the British 'mandate' in Palestine. Even in the 1930s just 82,000 Polish Jews emigrated there, though as we shall see this also reflected British nervousness about the effect of continued Jewish immigration on Palestine's internal stability. In fact, only a minority of Polish Zionists were committed to systematic colonization of the Holy Land; the majority were just as interested in what could be achieved in Poland itself. It was easier in more ways than one for a West Prussian to leave Poland for neighbouring Germany than for a Jew to leave Poland for the more distant Holy Land.

A second possibility was to withdraw into a more or less segregated Jewish society within a society. This came quite naturally to the relatively poor Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim of the Galician *shtetl*, the majority of whom still cleaved to Orthodox observance and attire and would probably have chosen segregation under any circumstances. But segregation was not unique to them. Itzik Manger, the leading Yiddish poet, spoke no Polish despite having lived in Warsaw for years. In Antoni Słonimski's words, there was an 'ethnic border which ran through the town somewhere around Bielska Street, separating Srodimescie from the Jewish district'. 'The ghetto district of Craców', remarked the British author Hugh Seton-Watson, 'is little less different from the Christian quarter than is an Arab town from the west end of London.' Segregation was more than a residential phenomenon. Typically, there was a Polish socialist party and two Jewish socialist parties, the *Bund* and Zionist *Poale Zion*. There was a thriving Yiddish and Hebrew press and a proliferation of Yiddish and Hebrew schools. Rich Jews went to different holiday resorts from rich Poles. They might deal with Poles when it came to business, but their relations went no further. In Poland Judaism was not just a religion; it was also a national identity. Clear majorities of those who

described themselves as Jewish by religion – 74 per cent in the census of 1921 – also described themselves as Jewish by nationality.

The third possibility was assimilation. In Brańsk, for example, Jewish and Polish children played together in a band that performed at parties and weddings. In Kołomyja friendships between Poles and Jews were so common that it was said 'every Jew has his Pole'. Even on the edge of Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of Kraków, it was possible to live 'in a sort of isolation from Polish society' while at the same time 'absorbing Polish culture, Polish poetry, or Polish music and art in the depths of [one's] being'. To the generation of Polish Jews who grew up in the 1920s this was a widely shared experience; a majority of them attended Polish language schools. Yet even those Jews who had long sought assimilation, like the Magyarized Jews of Budapest, the Romanized Jews of Bucharest or the Germanized Jews of Prague, found they were viewed with only slightly less suspicion than the Orthodox Jews of the *shtetls*. Trudi Levi, both of whose parents were atheists, grew up on the Hungarian-Austrian border speaking both Magyar and German with equal fluency; but the Hungarian authorities insisted that all Jews learn Hebrew even if, like the Levis, they had abandoned religious observance. Elizabeth Wiskemann was shocked to find Sudeten Germans boycotting Jewish shops by the early 1930s, not something that would have happened in pre-war Bohemia. Many Prague Jews became conscious of their Jewish origins only when they encountered such anti-Semitism. Abraham Rotfarb, a Jew born and raised in Warsaw, expressed the acute, agonizing vulnerability that so many assimilated Jews came to feel in the inter-war years:

I am a poor assimilated soul. I am a Jew and a Pole, or rather I was a Jew, but gradually under the influence of my environment, under the influence of the place where I lived, and under the influence of the language, the culture, and the literature, I have also become a Pole. I loved Poland. Its language, its culture, and most of all the fact of its liberation and the heroism of its independent struggle, all pluck at my heartstrings and fire my feelings and enthusiasm. But I do not love that Poland which, for no apparent reason, hates me, that Poland which tears at my heart and soul, which drives me into a state of apathy, melancholy, and dark depression. Poland has taken away

my happiness, it has turned me into a dog who, not having any ambitions of his own, asks only not to be abandoned in the wasteland of culture but to be drawn along the road of Polish cultural life. Poland has brought me up as a Pole, but brands me a Jew who has to be driven out. I want to be a Pole, you have not let me; I want to be a Jew, but I don't know how, I have become alienated from Jewishness. (I do not like myself as a Jew.) I am already lost

The two minorities with the most to lose under the new post-war dispensation might conceivably have made common cause. In cities like Prague, after all, the relationship between Germans and Jews had long been characterized by symbiosis more than conflict. Throughout the 1920s Jews in Czechoslovakia were far more likely to send their children to German-speaking than to Czech-speaking schools. When riots broke out in Prague in November 1920, following reports that a Czech school had been forcibly closed down in Cheb, both Germans and Jews were attacked. The Latvian Thunder Cross pledged to 'eradicate with sword and fire every German, Jew, Pole and even Latvian who threatens Latvian independence and welfare'. Indeed, there were Jews, like Yitzhak Gruenbaum, the Polish Zionist leader, who sincerely hoped for a united front of German and Jewish minorities. Yet far from uniting in their common adversity, insecure Germans turned against even more insecure Jews. In 1920 and again in 1923 demonstrations in favour of keeping Upper Silesia German escalated into pogrom-like attacks on Jewish property. As early as 1925, doctors in Breslau founded a medical association that excluded Jews and began campaigning for a boycott of Jewish doctors. Gregor von Rezzori described how Romanians and Germans alike could agree on one thing: their contempt for Jews. An encounter between a Romanian youth 'wearing the well-known costume of short, sleeveless and colourfully embroidered sheepskin jacket, and coarse linen shirt over linen trousers tightly belted in blue-yellow-and-red' and a German student, dressed in the uniform of one of the German duelling fraternities ('stiff collar, kepi worn at a snappy angle, fraternity colours displayed across the chest on a broad ribbon') might have come to blows. But on this occasion

both are distracted by the appearance of a Hasidic rabbi in black caftan, with the pale skin of a bookworm and long corkscrew side-locks under a fox-pelt

THE GREAT TRAIN CRASH

hat, an apparition that forthwith unites the former opponents in the happy recognition that the newcomer is the natural target of their aggression.

As Rezzori recalled, all the other groups in Cernaúti 'despised the Jews, notwithstanding that Jews not only played an economically decisive role but, in cultural matters, were the group who nurtured traditional values as well as newly developing ones'. This was not a traditional attitude but something new. As we have seen, prior to Bukovina's incorporation in Romania, Germans and Jews had attended the same schools and been members of the same cultural associations. Between the wars this harmony gradually vanished. Few towns in Eastern Europe had seen a more advanced German-Jewish symbiosis. But here, as elsewhere in East Central Europe, there was to be no solidarity between the minorities; quite the reverse.

THE DEATH THROES OF EMPIRE

It was not just East Central Europe that posed a challenge for the peacemakers, however. In the erstwhile territory of the Ottoman Empire the fate of other multi-ethnic societies also had to be decided. These were not European societies, so naturally the West European powers assumed that they represented potential additions to their overseas empires. In 1916 the British and French agreed between themselves to carve up large tracts of the Ottoman territory, the former claiming what was to become Palestine, Jordan and the greater part of Iraq (then known as Mesopotamia), the latter Syria and the rest of Iraq. Under the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres these arrangements were confirmed and extended to satisfy the territorial cravings of other victorious powers. The Italians were given the Dodecanese Islands, including Rhodes and the Anatolian port of Kastellorizzo. The Greeks were to have Thrace and Western Anatolia, including the port of Smyrna (today Izmir). Armenia, Assyria and the Hejaz (now part of Saudi Arabia) were to be independent. Plebiscites were to decide the fate of Kurdistan and the area around Smyrna. Sèvres was to do for the Ottoman Empire what St Germain-en-Laye had done for the Habsburg Empire: to sheer it right down to the bone, but on the basis

GRAVES OF NATIONS

of imperialism rather than nationalism – though the British and French acquisitions were labelled 'mandates' rather than colonies, in deference to American and Arab sensibilities.

Yet all this presupposed that the Middle East could be treated as the passive object of traditional imperial designs. In reality, the same nationalist aspirations and ethnic conflicts that were creating such upheaval in Central and Eastern Europe were also at work on the other side of the Black Sea straits. The difference was that in Europe these forces worked slowly. It took nearly two decades to nullify the terms of the Treaty of St Germain-en-Laye. The Treaty of Sèvres, by contrast, was a dead letter within a matter of months.

Even before the outbreak of the First World War, Turkey had been evolving from an empire into a nation state, inspired by the teachings of Ziya Gökalp, the prophet of a homogeneous Turkey with a uniform national culture (*hars millet*). In 1908 the Young Turks – a group of intellectuals like Gökalp and army officers like Ismail Enver – had emerged as the dominant force in Ottoman politics. Their Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) aimed at modernizing the Empire lest it become simply another Asian subsidiary of the West or suffer a lingering death by a thousand territorial cuts. By 1913 they were in control in Constantinople. Like the Japanese before them, the Young Turks had taken the Germans as their role models. Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz acted as a military adviser to the Sultan between 1883 and 1895, though his influence was largely confined to officer training. In January 1914 another German general, Otto Liman von Sanders, was appointed the army's Inspector General; meanwhile German bankers were coaxed by their government into financing the extension of the Berlin–Constantinople railway line as far as Baghdad. The Young Turks' subsequent decision to join in the war on the side of Germany followed more or less logically from these initiatives. Nor was it strategically irrational, given the secret promises the British government had made to hand the Black Sea straits to Russia in the event of a swift Entente victory, and their own designs on the oilfields of Mesopotamia.

For all their modernizing rhetoric, however, the Young Turks had suffered only reverses since coming to power. Bulgaria had declared independence and Austria had annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina. The