With a notable increase in research during the 1990s, the prevailing understanding of Nazi rule in Europe during the Second World War has been focused on the regime’s ruthless extermination policies. The overall conduct of the German armed forces — not only of SS men — has been analyzed and the myth of the so-called “code of honor” allegedly maintained by the Wehrmacht, at least in Western Europe, has been dismantled, revealing the savagery of war and the slaughtering not only of Russian soldiers and European partisans but of civilians in all occupied countries. The role of the Wehrmacht in the genocide has been thoroughly documented, but there is still intense scrutiny of the extent to which individual soldiers participated in the slaughter of civilians. Only thorough studies of small territories can help us to better understand the dynamics of Wehrmacht violence. Carlo Gentile’s recent study of the Italian theater of war, for example, considers a series of contingencies, but also reintroduces a distinction between ordinary German soldiers and Nazified elite troops.

The historiography’s attention to the sins of commission has been reinforced by the media and the courts. One could notice the return of the faces of Nazi perpetrators in a series of recent war crimes trials, mostly against SS criminals but — as in the case of Italy — also against soldiers of the Waffen-SS and non-SS army soldiers. These trials have marked a shift in public sensibility in Europe. In the West German public debate the centrality of the Holocaust has been accepted since the Auschwitz Trial of the early sixties, but it was accepted precisely because the number of active perpetrators was seen to be limited to a relatively small group of several thousand people. We know that this view was strongly attacked by Daniel Goldhagen as well as by the first version of the German exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht. Contemporaries were indirectly requested to take account of their sins of commission and not to minimize them as sins of omission. Both interpretations constituted a challenge to established interpretations of Nazi institutions and anonymous structures. Historiography — in dealing with Nazi intellectuals and with Nazi violence — has been shifting from institutional responsibility...
to individual guilt, looking much more at the perpetrators and the collaborators, the spies and the informers, rather than the structures of the apparatus of repression.

Historians’ interest in the participation and shared individual responsibility of German soldiers and parts of the occupation apparatus for the Nazi extermination program has brought back to the forefront the material executors of the repression, deportation, and extermination, and has overcome the overly tidy separation between bureaucrats and criminals, those who ordered the crimes and those who carried them out. In particular, studies like those of Christopher Browning and Omer Bartov have shown how large the number of direct participants in the extermination of the Jews and of those who assisted the direct participants was. The barbarization of the Wehrmacht had an analogue in the barbarization of the non-military personnel, and in the barbarization of their intellectual planning, involvement in Nazi occupation policies and in the Holocaust.

Mark Mazower’s interpretation has a different focus: not the savagery of killing, not Nazi bloodlust, but “the Nazi vision of international order,” which swept away the League of Nations’ attempts to establish a stable and peaceful international order, and the kind of thinking that underlay Nazi violence and made possible a destructiveness of unthinkable dimensions. Mazower examines “Nazism as a critique of liberal internationalism” and as a challenge “to the principles of nineteenth-century internationalism embodied in the League of Nations.” Indeed, in the context of international governance, he argues, “one can find no more sustained critique of the dominant assumptions common to both the League and the United Nations.”

Mazower’s investigation of the Nazi search for a new international order, Nazi foreign policy, and geopolitics is meant to explain how the “rise and fall of a Nazi-dominated Europe” influenced the development of a new international order, replacing the “imperfect interwar hegemony of the British” with the “far more powerful global hegemony of the United States.” Mazower does not want to deal with the older debate on Nazi political aims or the question of a German national Sonderweg (special path), both of which have been on the historians’ agenda since the Nuremberg trial, or to discuss the German war aims. He is testing another hypothesis, focusing on the question of how Nazi ideas on shaping a New Order in Europe influenced the “visions of the management of international affairs.” In such a perspective, the “period of the Nazi New Order in Europe”
had great relevance for the development of international institutions, especially the United Nations: for “the catalyst for their emergence was world war,” as before in the case of the League of Nations. The “vocabularies of international affairs ... deployed at the time” and the new visions of the management of international affairs that arose in Berlin and in the Allied capitals are Mazower’s main concern in exploring some of the issues that the Nazis and their opponents considered central to creating a stable world order: the refugee problem created by the war and by the allegedly more “homogeneous” new nation states, the international law about nationalities and minority rights, the question (raised by the Nazis) of ethnicity and the racial state, of hegemony and spheres of influences, and the force of international law. The question is if, when, and how these ideas (proposed by lawyers, politicians, and diplomats) were translated into political action or whether some of these debates derived from a new political situation. This might be the case for “hegemony,” which reflected, according to Mazower, “the newly inegalitarian constitutional structure of the Nazi New Order.”

Mazower’s emphasis on the catalytic impact of World War II and on the question of the “Nazi New Order” is clearly related to his previous works, in particular to Hitler’s Empire (2008). In this masterpiece, which provides a comprehensive analysis of Nazi rule in Europe during the war, including the parallel occupations and violent actions of the major German allies, the two most important concepts are “Empire” and “New Order,” which are analyzed in relation to contemporary conceptions of Europe and the character of fascist violence. Quite convincingly, Mazower chose to present a global view of Nazi rule over Europe and to deal with Hitler’s allies and their parallel occupations of smaller parts of Europe as well, thus creating a measure of comparison and challenging the collective amnesia with regard to collaborationism that developed during the Cold War. What Mazower’s analysis of Nazi rule highlights is not so much the “catalytic impact of the war itself,” but the Nazi belief that “it had fallen to them to establish an empire that would elevate them to the status of a world power. ... Hitler as empire-builder: it may not be how we commonly think of the Führer.” In this, Mazower is completely right. For a long time, Nazi rule was seen much more under the aspects of destruction, denationalization, murder, and genocide than under those of self-interpretations, speeches, and strategy papers on how to shape the newly dominated areas of Europe for the sake of a Greater German Reich. Therefore Mazower’s focus on the “Nazi
“New Order,” which is at the heart of his Annual Lecture as well, is most welcome and deserves further consideration.

The so-called “New European Order” was an expression that came into widespread use primarily in the Latin and Anglo-Saxon linguistic areas during the Second World War; unlike “living space”, “race” or “national character” (Volkstum), it was not one of the key concepts of National Socialism. Rather, it was a formulation created by Nazi Germany’s allies in order to place their collaboration with the Axis Powers into context, a catch phrase that later entered the terminology of historical research on the Nazi policy of continental occupation through the political sphere. Although the term “New Order” was used in the Tripartite Pact (autumn 1940), it was not common Nazi terminology. Hitler himself does not appear to have used it. During a Ministerkonferenz on 16 September 1942, Goebbels strongly opposed its use. It was the Nazis’ European fascist and pro-fascist allies who adopted this term as part of their strategy for obtaining concrete concessions about their political future under Nazi hegemony. In this they failed, as Petain had to learn when he talked to Göring at the end of 1941 desiring to know more about German plans for “how France would fit into the New Order of Europe.” As Mazower underlines, Hitler was completely reluctant to define anything that would bind him. In order to prepare the renewal of the anti-Comintern pact in November 1941, the dictator allowed Ribbentrop to prepare the draft of a European manifesto, but when “victory was in sight, he forgot about diplomacy.”

It seems to me that, at least to some extent, the idea of a Nazi New Order as presented in Mazower’s Hitler’s Empire constitutes a return to a more Hitler-centric point of view, now combined with a global approach that includes the strategies of German allies and of collaborationist forces. Mazower gives centrality to Hitler’s speeches and other utterances on his strategies of domination and to the discussion or application of some of these arguments by major Nazi leaders. In addition, other sources on Hitler’s plans are often taken from German or foreign diplomatic papers. What Mazower’s analysis fails to address is the question of whether Hitler was able to turn his ideas into strategies and the connection of Hitler’s ideas to the internal structures of Nazi power that provided the basis for the horrible dynamics of the Nazi state, leading to aggressive expansion, radicalization, terror, and mass murder. It was precisely its “cumulative radicalization” (Hans Mommsen) that made the Nazi system so
efficient in its initial phase and much more effective than its Italian counterpart, which could not withstand the war and broke down in 1943. The fact that this cumulative radicalization led to a selection of the negative elements of Nazi ideology (as Martin Broszat put it) was not only destructive to others, but in the last analysis also self-destructive for the regime. Among other things, it rendered the Nazi system unable to reach pragmatic solutions and decisions about political priorities. After Stalingrad, for instance, not only Ribbentrop, but Goebbels and Hans Frank desired a political declaration in favor of Polish collaborationist forces in order to make the Poles work harder for German victory. But Hitler opposed any such declaration, whether in favor of the Polish collaboration or the other occidental collaborationist groups and states.

One can question whether there was any central planning from above for the “New Order.” What Hitler deliberately created was, I would suggest, not a new order, but a new disorder — based on the destruction of the state system that came out of Versailles. Saturated with feelings of revenge and violent anti-Semitism, his political program was based on expansionist war, the conquest of new space to the east, and the extermination of the peoples of Eastern Europe as a form of politics. Immediately upon the military subjugation of these states, the National Socialist concept of conquering new “living space” in the East and its cruel Germanization were translated into action, with all its racist and social-Darwinist implications. In order to do so, the Nazis employed a series of plans that involved the forced transfer of entire populations and the systematic massacre of millions of human beings in Eastern Europe. By contrast, no such analogous general plan existed for Western Europe.

Apart from a few rare above-mentioned constants in Hitlerian ideology, National Socialist policy often proceeded in a contradictory manner and was shaped by the contingencies of the war. The catalytic impact of war thus has to be stressed. A rational project of European domination was never systematically translated into reality. One therefore has to examine the contradictions of Nazi policy in every single occupied state. The Nazi occupation in Europe moved, with very different gradations, between the two poles of a policy of collaboration and one of extermination. Although the policy of collaboration was more forcefully promoted in Vichy France and the Italian “Social Republic,” even in France and Italy there were zones of more intense Nazi domination such as Alsace-Lorraine, the Alto
Adige, and Venezia Giulia, which were de facto removed from their respective local governments and made subject to special Nazi administrations and governed by Gauleiter of the neighboring regions of the Greater German Reich. After the Wehrmacht's victories in the Blitzkrieg, the Nazi leadership decided spontaneously — according to a somewhat colonial logic — what form of domination should be established in the different conquered countries.

Apart from the contextual differences between different cases, it is generally possible to distinguish three phases in the dynamics of German occupation: a formative phase, a phase of consolidation, and a phase of radicalization. Characteristic of the formative phase of Nazi domination in Europe was the geographic dismemberment — that derived at least in part from a racist notion of national character — of the structures of the occupied nation-state. The case of France is typical: while the northern départements were joined together, along with Belgium, under a military administration, Alsace and Lorraine were given civil administrations directed by Gauleiter, high functionaries of the Nazi Party even more than German state administrators. Furthermore, in the remaining part of the northern half of France, a militarily occupied zone was created under the control of a German military administration, while the southern half of the country — which was less important militarily and less attractive economically — was entrusted to the French state of Vichy. In subsequent years, the controlling German authorities engaged in a lively competitive struggle among themselves to obtain collaboration — so much so that what resulted was an entirely new model of occupation that no longer bore any resemblance to Werner Best’s model. Even occupied Yugoslavia was divided into a zone of annexation (Slovenia), a zone under military administration (Serbia), and a zone entrusted to a collaborationist government (the Croatia of the Ustaše). An analogous model was that of Italy, occupied by the Germans after 8 September 1943. This destructive reorganization of occupied countries evidently had little to do with any kind of master plan.

During the consolidation phase of Nazi domination, the continuous struggles for power in almost all the occupied territories between political officials, police agencies, and the military authorities of the occupation regime produced an institutionalized state of conflict that prevented the implementation of any coherent set of political plans for western, southern, and northern Europe. With the installation of Heinrich Himmler’s regional office-holders — the higher officers of
the SS and police — the political weight of the SS increased continuously beginning in 1942, resulting in a radicalization of occupation policy that permitted the capture, detention, and deportation of the European Jews, carried out in the West by the SS, which was given wide autonomy, including on the matter of the involvement of local collaborationist police. It is here, above all, in the system of control and of ransacking the resources of the occupied countries, that the real constant of Nazi occupation policy can be recognized. Nonetheless, the inner circle of SS radicals around Himmler never succeeded completely in setting the guiding principles of governance in occupied countries. In what is recognizable, beginning in 1943, as the third phase of German domination in Europe, the intensified exploitation of the occupied territories and the acceleration of the program of extermination brought about an ever stronger radicalization of conflicts: the growth of resistance movements and a general discussion of the policy of collaboration in all the states of western Europe.

The idea of Europe conceived and proposed by Hitler and his inner circle of decision-makers cannot be separated from the concrete occupation policies that the Nazi regime developed during the Second World War. The role that the different European nations were to play within the new European order depended not only on the ideas disseminated by the Nazi leadership, but also from the attitude of the Third Reich’s greatest ally — Fascist Italy — and on other fascist and collaborationist groups within the occupied countries. Starting in 1942, and with more force after the catastrophe of Stalingrad, the idea that something should be offered to foreign collaborationist groups, even if only for propagandistic purposes, began to spread among the highest levels of the National Socialist leadership. Thus Ribbentrop proposed to Hitler the project of a league or federation of European states (Europäischer Staatenbund) composed of the occupied countries and German satellites; this meant the exclusion of the eastern occupied states, where an extermination policy would be applied in order to gain “living space.” In 1943, both Giuseppe Bastianini of the Italian Foreign Ministry and Pierre Laval, head of the Vichy government, (vainly) put repeated pressure on Ribbentrop to convince him of the advantages for the Nazis if they made any sort of Europeanist declaration. Although they aimed at increasing the willingness to collaborate with Germany in their respective countries, they only succeeded in demonstrating the weakness of these allies in comparison with Germany’s hegemonic power. Hitler’s earlier idea of separate zones of influence for Germany and Italy vanished during the war.
Because of the strong differences between the Eastern and Western paradigms of occupation, the pressures on Nazi Germany to define a new European Order came from governments and intellectuals in western and southern Europe. In western Europe, the Germans instituted occupation regimes whose *raison d’être* did not consist in carrying out a racial war of extermination, even if later racially motivated persecutions did, in fact, take place there. The Germans wished to offer western states a subordinate place in a National Socialist Europe, an arrangement that presumed at least partial ideological adaptation to the model of Nazi domination. In many cases, this adaptation occurred in the form of collaboration on the state level (the passage of anti-Semitic laws, for example), collaboration in the war (with the creation of the Waffen-SS), and economic collaboration (in the production of armaments). In a certain sense, the administrative segregation of the Jews represented an indirect test of the collaborative capacity of local ruling groups in the occupied territories.

This collaborationist paradigm was then linked to propaganda that expressed an unspecific idea of the “West.” Thus in the West an occupation policy began to take root that was different from that used in the East, where Hitler had already announced in 1939 that he wanted to move forward massacring like Genghis Khan.

In Hitler’s mind, “Europe” and “the East” were different concepts that excluded one another. In May 1943, he told his young future soldiers that there ought to be a European living space under German leadership, for otherwise Europe would disappear leaving the place to something evident to those who knew the East. In another speech, delivered on 22 August 1939, he told his army commanders to eliminate the Polish population — men, women and children — so that the citizens of Western Europe would tremble in fear. In this way, Hitler created an “Eastern paradigm” in Nazi-ruled Europe. When SS-general Odilo Globocnik turned to Trieste after his bloody work connected to Operation Reinhard, he followed such a distinction between East and West. He organized the deportation of the Jewish population of the Trieste region to Auschwitz but did not build an extermination camp with gas chambers in Trieste. Instead he “limited” himself to the shooting and torturing mostly of communist partisans.

What about the “New Order” and the spheres of influence established in the Tripartite Treaty in September 1940? When one examines the development of Nazi policies in the areas of Europe under German domination, the “New Order” reveals itself as a fluid and divergent...
but always destructive realization of various Nazi political aims, which changed during the years of war. In my view, the expression “eine neue Ordnung der Dinge” in the official German version of the treaty (“Ziel ist, eine neue Ordnung der Dinge [in den europäischen Gebieten] zu schaffen und aufrechtzuerhalten”; “die Führung Deutschlands und Italiens bei der Schaff ung einer neuen Ordnung in Europa”) should be understood simply as a synonym for oppressive hegemony in the newly defined continental areas: “Europe” on one hand and “Greater East Asia” on the other. The Nazi leadership used a distorted interpretation of the original Monroe Doctrine in order to reinforce its concept of hegemony as unbounded domination over a huge geographical area of the world. Carl Schmitt’s use of the Monroe Doctrine (“den gesunden Kern eines völkerrechtlichen Großraumprinzips der Nichtintervention”) as a vehicle to propagate his concept of concurrent continental zones of influence was a method of eroding international law and — according to Catherina Zakravsky — to disguise his propaganda as a forecast. As Lothar Gruchmann demonstrated years ago, Carl Schmitt and Nazi officials misinterpreted the original Monroe Doctrine by referencing the Olney Corollary or the Roosevelt Corollary, which constituted imperialistic distortions of the 1823 declaration. But even during the period of American “big stick” foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine never served as a pretext for territorial annexations through armed intervention. In his declaration of July 1940, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull made clear the fundamental difference between the American and the Nazi interpretation when he underlined that the Monroe Doctrine “never has resembled … policies which appear to be arising in other geographical areas of the world, which are alleged to be similar to the Monroe Doctrine, but which … would in reality seem to be only the pretext for the carrying out of conquest by the sword, of military occupation, and of complete economic and political domination by certain powers of other free and independent peoples.” Indeed, the latter was the essence of Nazi domination over Europe including, at the end, the geographical area of Germany’s most important ally in Europe, Fascist Italy.

The case of Italy demonstrates that the Tripartite Treaty was only a stage on the road to fully unleashed German hegemony in Europe. The proclamation of the “axis” between Rome and Berlin (1936), the signing of the German-Italian Cultural Agreement (1938), and ultimately of the Pact of Steel (1939) had been stages on the way to an ever stronger political and ideological rapprochement, which by no means occurred only at the top level of party bosses and members of
government, but also happened among the masses. The exchanges organized by *Kraft durch Freude* and *Dopolavoro* groups, the multitude of German travel groups which set out for Italy, half a million Italian workers who came to Germany between 1938 and 1943 and were mostly involved in the arms industry — all of these were signs of an intensive cultural exchange that was by no means free of conflict but was a historical experience of great significance. This mass movement was preceded by a progressive rapprochement at both political and military levels, which led to the parallel Italian wars in Africa and the Mediterranean, the conquest of Ethiopia and Albania, Italy’s entry into the War in 1940 and the immediate attack on France, the surprise attack on Greece, the attack on Slovenia and Croatia, dividing up the occupied territories in Yugoslavia and Greece between the two allies, and Italian support for the German attack on the Soviet Union. All of these point to an extensive agreement to accept each other’s politics of aggression that aimed to destroy the international status quo. The politics of aggression was not, however, confined to foreign affairs. A parallel development was becoming evident in the pressure that Fascism was exerting internally: the Italian race laws of 1938, the forced Aryanization of Jewish companies, the exclusion of Italian Jews from the professions, the dismissal of Jewish soldiers and officers from the army, the setting up of Italian prison camps from 1940, in which foreign Jews and those Italians seen as politically dangerous were interned; and the deportation of thousands of Slovenians and Croatians as political prisoners, supposed saboteurs and partisans. This independent development of Italian policies of aggression, both internally and externally, ended with the German occupation in September 1943. The Tripartite definition of a common “leadership of Germany and Italy in creating a new order in Europe” was now completely swept away.

The most fatal development in the German *Sonderweg* that led to a Nazi war of extermination that was quite different from the Mediterranean blueprint of fascism derived from a radical racist understanding of mankind and of citizenship, as the Nazi Party program of 1920 already defined it. As Mark Mazower says, the consequences were: “no assimilation, racial not universal law, and therefore exclusion and expulsion not protection.” The interwar refugee problem and the expulsion and nationalization politics, unresolved on the international scene, inspired Nazi leaders to search for ever more radical “solutions” for dealing with “undesired” minorities, whereas Fascist Italy became at least temporarily a refuge for Jewish emigrants. Although
the undermining of the binding force of international law encouraged by Nazi lawyers had its effects, it could not completely undo the tradition of the Geneva Conventions. The German Wehrmacht partially abandoned the set of principles established for the treatment of prisoners of war, introducing a strong differentiation according to its own East–West paradigm. Nonetheless, during the war, as Mark Mazower puts it, “the cult of force and the racial geopolitics that the Nazis took so seriously turned into a program of extermination on a scale which had no precedent.” Instead of a “Nazi unification of Europe,” in the end a geographic fragmentation of nation-states took place. Instead of hegemony, the outcome was destruction without precedent.
