

## 6 Famines and Imperialism: For a Different History of World War II

I hold the following. World War II was not a fight between good and evil, and good has not won. It was an imperialist war from all sides, a war for economic zones of influence, spheres for capital investment, resources and strategic territories. And virtually all powers committed mass violence against non-combatants, often in connection with the scramble for resources, their redistribution and resource denial to some, that is, by creating conditions of violence. The Allies killed at least ten million non-combatants. The violence also had to do with the fact that it was a racist war from all sides due to imperialism. By maintaining that this was a fight between good and evil, the dominant historiography is a continuation of the war with other means, and because of its Eurocentrism and systematic construction of non-combatant victims of different importance and value, which includes ignoring or marginalizing certain large victim groups (especially those with a darker skin tone), the mainstream historiography itself is racist.

A reminder of the war's dimensions might be useful here. There were more refugees in World War II than soldiers. At about 140 million at least, the number of refugees, including domestic refugees and evacuees, surpassed that of the 100–120 million in the military (out of which about 30 million died and 35 million were taken prisoner).<sup>1</sup> The majority of the refugees were from China.<sup>2</sup> Approxi-

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1 For the number of soldiers, see Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War, 1931–1945* (London: Allan Lane, 2021), ix, 377, 381–382. The estimate of the number of POWs is from S. P. MacKenzie, “The treatment of prisoners of war in World War II”, *Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), 487.

2 For the number of Chinese refugees, see Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 175–176; Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937–1945* (London et al.: Penguin, 2013), 6, 117–118; Overy, *Blood*, 833; Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 250; R. Keith Schoppa, *In a Sea of Bitterness: Refugees during the Sino-Japanese War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).- For refugees from other countries, see Rebecca Manley, “The Perils of Displacement: The Soviet Evacuee between Refugee and Deportee”, *Contemporary European History* 16, 4 (2007): 495 (USSR); Overy, *Blood*, 829–832 (German, Japanese and Italian refugees 1945–1946 from lost territories, foreign countries and colonies); Robert Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 45 (Britain); Srinath Raghavan, *India's War* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 265–270 and Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005), 167 (at least one million refugees from Indian cities between December 1941 and April 1942 plus 600,000 from British-Burma); Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine, Riots, and the End of Empire*

mately 70 million people (including civilians) died,<sup>3</sup> and half of them were Asians. Displacement and the misery it entailed belonged to the core experiences of the war; the total number of displaced was considerably higher than 140 million and included POWs, camp inmates, resettlers and those deported to forced labor, internment or death.

Three percent of the world's population died and nearly ten percent may have been displaced – but occupation was an even more common experience, with about 800 million affected from 1937 to 1947, constituting more than one-third of humanity.<sup>4</sup> Together with nearly 600 million living in colonies that were not occupied by another power, the majority of mankind lived for some time under foreign rule in the 1940s.<sup>5</sup> To continuously reside in one's own independent state was atypical. Existence under foreign domination, too, brought misery and deprivation. A lot of the violence in that war was indirect. These facts underscore

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1939–1946, Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011, 63–64, 118. Among other people, ten million French fleeing the advance of German troops in 1940, about that many Germans relocated for protection from aerial warfare and eight million Japanese under similar circumstances need to be added. Overy, *Blood*, 679. For expulsions of 18 million ethnic German and Japanese civilians in 1944–1947, see below. For example, the number of 140 million does not include the refugees from partition in South Asia.

3 Daniel Hedinger, *Die Achse: Berlin – Tokio – Rom 1919–1946* (Munich: Beck, 2021), speaks of 30 million war dead in Asia (but omits, for example, Allied-occupied Iran). Insecurity concerning the worldwide estimate is primarily about Soviet War losses (mostly given as between 20 and 27 million) and those of China that were between 14 million and 35 million, with Chinese president Xi Jinping presenting figures at the upper end. Mitter, *China's War*, 6; John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 296; Collingham, *Taste*, 257; Overy, *Blood*, 784; Evan Mawdsley, "World War II: A Global Perspective", Simo Laakkonen et al., eds., *The Long Shadows: A Global Environmental History of the Second World War* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2017), 38; Xi Jinping, "Remember the Past and Our Martyrs, Cherish Peace, and Build a New Future", September 3, 2015, Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol. II (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2017), 485. In a global perspective, population losses in occupied areas and among POWs should be added.

4 More than 300 million non-Japanese came under Japanese rule; Hedinger speaks of 350 to 500 million: Hedinger, *Achse*, 354. The number of 160 million that Overy, *Blood*, 785 gives is far too low; 160 million was about the size of the Chinese population under Japanese rule. See Collingham, *Taste*, 250. 250 million non-Germans came under German rule: Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 194. Add to this Allied-occupied Germany, Japan and Korea, the British occupied areas in West Asia (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and large parts of Iran) and Africa, the Soviet ones in Eastern European countries that the Germans had not occupied (like Romania), the Italian ones in Africa, U.S. occupations in the Pacific, Romanian, Finnish, Thai occupations, etc.

5 According to Laakkonen et al., World War II "engulfed" 1.7 billion people (out of a world population of 2.3 billion). Simo Laakkonen et al., "The Long Shadows", Laakkonen et al., *The Long Shadows*, 7.

why a social history of the war and the violence is needed and why the concept of conditions of violence may be useful here.

Thus, I try to substantiate the initial claims by outlining some basic tendencies in the existing historiography, most importantly its omissions, and scrutinizing the kind of mass violence that the Allies committed against non-combatants, as well as their rationales at the time. The centerpiece of this chapter consists of a survey of World War II famines. Famine is not just an arbitrary issue in this context. As Lizzie Collingham argued, 20 million people died from hunger and related diseases in World War II and “the Allied powers made their own substantial contribution to wartime hunger, malnutrition and starvation”, as did Axis countries.<sup>6</sup> My own account lists more famines than Collingham’s did, as hunger crises occurred in almost all regions of the world, especially in occupied countries or colonies. The genesis and causes of these famines show how deadly conditions of violence were created, for whom, and why – as a contribution to the history of World War II as well as to exemplify how conditions of violence come about in general and what they lead to.

Shocking as my general argument may appear to some, the facts it rests on are not entirely novel. This chapter is based on published research, and I draw from many studies of a general character, national histories as well as specialized historical analyses, including those about colonies during the war. This is also to say, substantial parts of scholarship cannot be addressed as racist. In addition to published studies, I also refer sporadically to survivor and witness accounts.

In constructing my argument, I can build on efforts by other authors, such as Martin Thomas’ concept of World War II as a “resource war”,<sup>7</sup> although I attempt to draw global consequences from it. Aimé Césaire’s dictum that what the “Christian bourgeois” “cannot forgive Hitler” for is not “the crime against man as such, it is the crime against the white man”,<sup>8</sup> remains another valuable point of reference. However, it should be used as a point of departure for a broader insight: ‘Christian bourgeois’ condemn imperialism within Europe but not against non-whites, at least not if this was (and is) imperialism by liberal powers. Although attempts to conceptualize World War II as an imperialist war do exist and are very important, such as those by Ernest Mandel and Richard Overy, they have

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<sup>6</sup> Collingham, *Taste*, 1, 12 (quote).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Thomas, “Resource War, Civil War, Rights War: Factoring Empire into French North Africa’s Second World War”, *War in History* 18, 2 (2011): 225–248.

<sup>8</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14.

been qualified, conditional and partial.<sup>9</sup> My impression is that such an understanding of World War II should be consistent, but this is still missing.<sup>10</sup>

All of this means that I attempt to combine global and social history, a formidable task, and bring more of the ‘world’ into World War II history. In the context of noting that the history of the world wars “has largely not been written as global history”, Heike Liebau et al. have already called for a “global social history”.<sup>11</sup>

I start with a survey of the existing historiography and draw some conclusions, followed by a brief analysis of Allied violence. Afterwards, I present an account of World War II famines as well as the imperialist redistribution and denial of resources and de facto unpaid labor at their core, and then I try to relate this to Allied justifications for their violence, before I offer a conclusion.

This chapter concentrates primarily on mass violence committed by the Allies, much of which is understudied and underacknowledged. By doing so, I do not say or mean to say that the Axis was ‘good’. Given that in the past, I have published four monographs and dozens of articles and book chapters on Axis violence, I do not need to cover it here in detail once again to ‘prove’ that I am critical of it.

## The Existing Historiography

The historiography of World War II is often normative, Manichean, Eurocentric and racist.<sup>12</sup> According to the dominant narrative of World War II, it was fought between two alliances, the Axis and the Allies, who were fundamentally different.

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9 See Ernest Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: ISP, 1991), 10–15, 43–44 and recently Overy, *Blood*, who speaks of an “imperial war”.

10 By saying that this was an imperialist war from all sides, I also argue that the Soviet Union was imperialist. As the Soviet Union was a socialist state, this is in contradiction to Marxist teachings. The fact that the Soviet Union was an imperialist power in World War II is evident, in political terms, from its many annexations in the war’s course (including territories that had never been Soviet or part of the Russian empire, such as Carpatho-Ruthenia and northern East Prussia) and the creation of a strategic glacis, and, in economic terms, from the control the Soviet Union gained of natural resources (such as East German and Czechoslovak Uranium), industrial capital (later organized in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, although this was not merely a Soviet creation) and human resources (for instance, foreign physicists needed for developing nuclear arms). All of this served the cause of world communism but also, more specifically, to secure and stabilize socialism in the USSR.

11 Heike Liebau et al., “Introduction”, Heike Liebau et al., eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 1, 19, 23. See also Andrew Buchanan, “Globalizing the Second World War”, *Past & Present* 258 (2023): 246–281.

12 For a brief discussion of my own previous work on mass violence in World War II and beyond, see chapter 1 of this volume.

The Allies defended themselves against the Axis aggressors and their imperial ambitions.<sup>13</sup> They won because of their superior political system(s), moral superiority, economic supremacy and better organization.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Allies, Axis politicians were deeply racist and, thus, committed many crimes, killing millions, purportedly senselessly. As one German scholar succinctly summarized this view, “The Second World War was [. . .] an imperialist war for the redivision of the world but from the beginning with qualitatively opposite aims: the fascist powers were positioned against enlightenment, democracy and human dignity, which were defended by their adversaries.”<sup>15</sup>

As a result of this depiction, and to draw political ‘lessons’ from the war, which all sorts of people claim to do all the time,<sup>16</sup> World War II histories concentrate, aside from military history, on political history, with an emphasis on the history of political ideas. Usually, World War II is characterized as a victory of liberalism (and sometimes, socialism) over fascism, although this epistemic imperialism is not always and everywhere successful.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the social history of the war is underdeveloped, in contrast to that of World War I, and not accidentally so. With this approach, scholars studiously avoid the topic of the methods and social costs, i.e. the human costs, of Allied warfare. All of this is being done with the claim to represent universal and humanistic values.

In light of this claim and the fact that approximately half of the war’s victims died in Asia, the geography in the war’s historiography is strange. Usually it deals with Europe and, in addition, the USA and Japan, although the rhetoric of global dimensions has become common in the titles of publications.<sup>18</sup> In Martin Gilbert’s

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13 Overy, *Blood*, x; Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013), first published in 1987.

14 For example, see Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1996).

15 “Der Zweite Weltkrieg war seinem Charakter nach zunächst ein imperialistischer Krieg um die Neuaufteilung der Welt, doch von Anfang mit qualitativ gegensätzlichen Zielen: Die faschistischen Mächte standen gegen Aufklärung, Demokratie und Menschenwürde, ihre Gegner verteidigten diese.” Mario Kessler, “Postkolonialismus und Internationalismus”, Susan Neiman and Michael Wildt, eds., *Historiker streiten* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2023), 155–170, 169.

16 My Google search for “World War II ‘lessons’” on April 2, 2024 led to 69.4 million hits.

17 For this and competing narratives of national liberation in Southeast Asia, see Diana Wong, “Memory Suppression and Memory Production: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore”, T. Fujitani et al. (eds.), *Perilous Memories: Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 218–238.

18 Symptomatic is Gerhard Weinberg, “Total War: The Global Dimensions of Conflict”, Roger Chickering et al., eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19–31, and that volume overall. As a side note, the German historiography is even more Eurocentric. As one example, Rolf-Dieter

atlas of the conflict, according to my count, 160 maps depict Europe; 34 Asia, the Pacific and Australia; five Africa; one Latin America; and 32 are either global in character or deal with at least two continents – often in relation to naval warfare, reflecting British interests.<sup>19</sup> Overviews of the war by Martin Gilbert and Gerhard Weinberg have been criticized for omitting Subsaharan Africa.<sup>20</sup> Scholars' lack of attention to Africa was, it has been argued, "due in part to the imperial powers' explicit efforts to downplay and obscure the extent to which they relied on their African subjects to fight and win the war".<sup>21</sup> The omission of Africa indicates a disregard for the colonies in general. As Srinath Raghavan stated, "the story of India's war is only dimly remembered",<sup>22</sup> and Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal called the Bengal famine "one of the most catastrophic, though least publicized, holocausts of the Second World War".<sup>23</sup> "Analyses of the social economic and political impact" of the war on India are also often "relegated to the footnotes in the history of modern India", while nationalist and interreligious struggles, military measures and mobilization are central.<sup>24</sup>

More elaborate surveys add a bit of Asian, African and global history as a result of the humanities being under pressure in the age of 'globalization'.<sup>25</sup> Out of the 50 chapters in a recent book on World War II by Antony Beevor, 32 deal with Europe, ten with Asia and the Pacific, four-and-a-half with Africa (mostly, North Africa) and the Atlantic, and three-and-a-half deal with the United Nations or the global framework.<sup>26</sup> However, the main revision was the addition of China, which had been neglected until the 2000s, and taking China into account could in turn

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Müller, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015), overwhelmingly treats Axis and Allies in Europe with the exception of bits on their fight in North Africa and a dozen pages that cover Japan and the Pacific (110–120, 151–153).

19 Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Second World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). For the neglect of Latin America in mainstream surveys of the war, see Buchanan, "Globalizing", 254–255.

20 Judith Byfield, "Preface", Judith Byfield et al., eds., *Africa and World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xviii.

21 Timothy Parsons, "The Military Experiences of Ordinary Africans in World War II", Byfield et al., *Africa*, 3.

22 Raghavan, *India's War*, 2.

23 Quoted in Indivar Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939–1945", *Past & Present* 176 (2002): 2. See also Buchanan, "Globalizing", 257.

24 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 216.

25 For the general trend, see Sebastian Conrad, "Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter", *Merkur* 75, 867 (2021): 5–17.

26 Antony Beevor, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 2014).

spark more interest for the British empire in Asia during the war.<sup>27</sup> But the claim to see “World War II as a global whole” has sometimes been exhausted with this addition of China.<sup>28</sup> At times, one wonders whether what Euro-Americans describe as World War II would not be more appropriately called White War II.

One of the most influential early postwar depictions of World War II was Winston Churchill’s multi-volume account. Even though Britain had sucked resources and labor out of India virtually without wartime payment, which caused the death of at least three million Indians especially in the Bengal famine, and recruited two million soldiers from British-India who were deployed to all war theatres, Churchill wrote: “No great portion of the world population was so effectively protected from the horrors and perils of the World War as were the peoples of Hindustan. They were carried through the struggle on the shoulders of our small island.”<sup>29</sup> In 1953, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature for this work. By July 1943 (during the Bengal famine), he had already made the baselessly assertion that Britain had “suffered a greater drop in the standard of living than India”, rejecting aid deliveries.<sup>30</sup> World War II historiography has changed in recent decades, but it has not cut off its roots.

Most studies on the war condemn illiberal imperialism but include little to no discussion of liberal imperialism.<sup>31</sup> Few see parallels between, for example, British and Japanese imperialism and the collapse of both empires in and after World War II.<sup>32</sup> In the same vein, nationalism in Allied countries is played down or glossed over.

Some recent, broader studies have compared Axis countries, or countries occupied by the Axis, with each other and discussed the entanglements between them. With their assertion that the Axis was profoundly unlike the Allies, their lack of theoretical reflection of the comparative approach, their emphasis on po-

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27 Mawdsley, “World War II”, 38–39. However, Thomas Zeiler, *Annihilation: A Global Military History of World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) mentions China only on 30 of 418 pages of text, according to the index, not much more (relatively speaking) than the 51 out of 920 pages in Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

28 Evan Mawdsley, *World War II: A New History* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5 and in general.

29 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. IV: *The Hinge of Fate* (London et al.: Cassell, 1951), 181. Also quoted in Madusree Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), ix.

30 Quoted *ibid.*, 141.

31 Overy, *Blood*, xi, 597, 601–602 but see 607.

32 But see Aaron William Moore, *Bombing the City: Civilian Accounts of the Air War in Britain and Japan, 1939–1945* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 6–11.



litical history (and mostly elite politics and political ideas) and their disinterest in social history they worked to consolidate the warped mainstream narrative.<sup>33</sup>

Several works with more of a social history outlook do make comparisons across the alliance systems and have found striking similarities by examining populations' experience of aerial warfare, the treatment of children fathered by occupation forces or famines.<sup>34</sup> When comparing U.S. and Japanese warfare, John Dower already found many parallels between them, although with fewer elements of social history, concluding, inter alia, "[a]part from the genocide of the Jews, racism remains one of the great neglected subjects of World War Two".<sup>35</sup>

According to the mainstream narrative, World War II was a war between good and evil where, splendidly, the good emerged victorious. "[O]ften it gets boiled down to simplistic retellings of the massive forces battling; good and evil, Axis and Allies." This is also true for general historical studies of the war, which usually concentrate on a few fronts.<sup>36</sup> The vast majority of studies carry the good vs. bad narrative explicitly or implicitly. The national histories and school lessons in the USA, Britain, Russia/the Soviet Union and China also say so, with the USA and Britain dominating the world market in history books. The image of the "good war" has been systematically constructed and cultivated by a huge entertainment industry during and after the conflict.<sup>37</sup> On top of films, documentaries

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33 See Aviel Roshwald, *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Hedinger, *Achse*. Hedinger subsumes Japan under the concept of fascism.

34 See Moore, *Bombing*; Florian Armingeon, *Organisationen von Besatzungskindern des Zweiten Weltkrieges im Vergleich*, Master's thesis, University of Bern, 2023; less explicit about parallels that are nonetheless obvious from their work are Sugata Bose, "Starvation amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan and Tonkin, 1942–45", *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 4 (1990): 699–727; Lance Brennan et al., "War and Famine around the Indian Ocean during the Second World War", *Ethics of the Global South* 18 (2017): 5–70.

35 Dower, *War* (quote 4).

36 The insights and quote are from Chris Murray, "Introduction: Forgotten fronts", Chris Murray, ed., *Unknown Conflicts of the Second World War: Forgotten Fronts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 1.

37 For the USA, see Philip Beidler, *The Good War's Greatest Hits: World War II and American Remembering* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1998) and Sebastian Haak, *The Making of The Good War: Hollywood, das Pentagon und die amerikanische Deutung des Zweiten Weltkriegs 1945–1962* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013); for the People's Republic of China, see Rana Mitter, *China's Good War: How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (Cambridge and London: Belknap, 2020) and Lu Xun, "Wartime collaborations in rural North China", Murray, *Unknown Conflicts*, 171. See also Moore, *Bombing the City*, 203.



and novels, this is also being done in the world of computer games.<sup>38</sup> In 2015, China's president Xi Jinping called World War II “a decisive battle between justice and evil, between light and darkness, and between progress and reaction”, and there is no reason to believe that he has changed his mind since.<sup>39</sup> Strong notions of good and evil were even inherited and not only a matter of states and propaganda but also shared in the populace. This becomes visible in the everyday post-war experience of ostracization that children fathered by soldiers from various occupying powers have been going through. Many of these children internalized this Manichean view.<sup>40</sup>

Some, however, have questioned this Manichean perspective by pointing to the fact that, for example, the Soviet Union, the brutal dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and South Africa were among the Allies, devaluing “the Allies’ stock phrases praising freedom and international solidarity”.<sup>41</sup> As Mark Mazower added, Jan Smuts, one of the forefathers of apartheid in South Africa and the man who drafted the preamble of the UN charter, said in late 1940, as Prime Minister of racist South Africa, that the Allied fight against Nazism was one of “civilization”, “progress” and “enlightenment” against “racial domination”,<sup>42</sup> and Chris Murray pointed to the “ugly truth of brutality displayed by participants on all sides”.<sup>43</sup> However, occasionally there is ambiguity in statements of this kind, such as in Thomas Zeiler's assessment that this was a “war of annihilation” from both sides but there was “no moral equivalence” between Axis and Allies: “No doubt the Allies crossed moral thresholds – Dresden, Hiroshima, taking human war trophies on Pacific islands, shooting German and Italian prisoners, and a host of Soviet atrocities – but they did so to speed an end of the war.”<sup>44</sup> Essentially, in this justification of mass killing – and he was not alone in doing so – there was good violence and bad, de-

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<sup>38</sup> See remarks by Chris Kempshall in Adam Chapman and Chris Kempshall, “Battlefield 1: Can The Great War Be a Great Game?”, *The Ontological Geek*, 16 February 2017, [ontologicalgeek.com/battlefield-1-can-the-great-war-be-a-great-game/](http://ontologicalgeek.com/battlefield-1-can-the-great-war-be-a-great-game/) (accessed August 16, 2023) (I am grateful to Dario Gomes Caliendo for pointing me to this); Murray, “Introduction”, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Xi, “Remember”, 484.

<sup>40</sup> I take this from Armingeon, *Organisationen*.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Paul Roorda, “The Dominican Republic: The Axis, the Allies, and the Trujillo Dictatorship”, Thomas Leonard and John Bratzel, eds., *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham et al.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 89–90, making the point about the Dominican Republic.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 28–65, quotes 57.

<sup>43</sup> Murray, “Introduction”, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Zeiler, *War*, 2. Zeiler goes on by saying that the Soviets “sought to annihilate whole populations as the purpose of the war itself” in the end of the conflict, namely Germans (*ibid.*). It is hard to see more than fiction in this statement.

pending on the purpose they served. (One also wonders whether the Axis did *not* want to “speed an end of the war” and how exactly “taking human war trophies” sped up the end of the war.)

One notable part of the narrative is the demonization of the Axis, which is built on war propaganda covered in another section of this chapter. For example, Ernest Mandel called German crimes “monstrous”.<sup>45</sup> Films about the war made in the People’s Republic of China frequently speak of “Japanese devils”.<sup>46</sup> There was even self-demonization: despite of their elaborate postwar re-education in Chinese detention as a way to have them face their personal responsibility, or because of it, some Japanese who had committed murders argued that they had become demons.<sup>47</sup>

Criticism of the good-against-evil narrative, if it occurred at all, has often been within limits, immanent and could, thus, be coopted into the mainstream. Although the Trotskyist Ernest Mandel called World War II an imperialist war from all sides and argued that Germany was not principally different from other imperialist powers, he insisted that many just wars were fought in it – a just Soviet “war of self-defense”, an anti-imperialist war by the Chinese people, an anti-imperialist war by Asian peoples against colonialists and national liberation wars by occupied European countries (by which he, of course, meant only those occupied by the Axis).<sup>48</sup> Others also maintained the good-against-evil narrative even if they were incriminating Allied colonialism, Richard Overy by finding a “moral inversion” in Axis states but not saying the same about the Allies.<sup>49</sup> An observer as thoughtful as Charlotte Wiedemann stated: “Hundreds of thousands of Black Americans also fought for our freedom without being free themselves.”<sup>50</sup> This raises some questions: did they actually fight to liberate the enemy, and who is ‘we’ here? Although Michael Adams came up with a sarcastic title for his book *The Best War Ever*, he mainly referred to the brutal battles and nervous break-

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45 Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 35.

46 Timothy Tsu et al., “The Second World War in postwar Chinese and Japanese film”, King-fai Tam et al., eds., *Chinese and Japanese Films on the Second World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 5.

47 Accounts by Ken Yuasa and Shozo Tominaga, Haroku Taya Cook and Theodore Cook, eds., *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: New Press, 1992), 43, 147, 463–467.

48 Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 10–15, 26, 43–44, quote 43.

49 See Overy, *Blood*, quote 598; the volume Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “*Unsere Opfer zählen nicht*”: *Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin and Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2005), esp. 13–24.

50 “Für unsere Freiheit kämpften, ohne selbst frei zu sein, gleichfalls Hunderttausende Schwarze Amerikaner.” Charlotte Wiedemann, *Den Schmerz der anderen begreifen: Holocaust und Weltgedächtnis* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2022), 18.

downs among U.S. troops, U.S. propaganda and censorship, the discrimination of African American soldiers and venereal diseases, demonstrating that he had little interest in anybody other than the ‘Americans’.<sup>51</sup>

Few have taken the step to fully deny the Manichean image. Aaron William Moore, who found many strong parallels between the experiences of the British and Japanese population in aerial attacks, criticized the customary “simple categorization of Japan and Britain into ‘good’ and ‘evil’ powers”, stating in the end: “The Second World War was never a ‘good war’”.<sup>52</sup> He did so as a consequence of a study of social, rather than political, history.

However timid and limited, studies that take more of a global perspective are greatly appreciated, so are comparative studies and is overcoming the Manichean world view. Other positive signs can be found in the scholarly recognitions of World War II as a conglomerate of multiple and manifold conflicts. Aside from the struggle between two coalitions of states, it included several bilateral interstate wars and occupations and was “a mosaic of overlapping conflicts, civil wars, and revolutions”.<sup>53</sup> Other such views included the one that “the conflict needs to be redefined as a number of different kinds of war” and another, according to which there were many “different [. . .] wartime conflicts”: interstate war, civil wars and “civilian wars” of resistance.<sup>54</sup> This has important implications, especially as an acknowledgment of how deeply and in which complicated ways civilians were affected or involved, as well as regarding the causes of the war. For example, Yugoslavia was a “fractured society with deep class, religious and ethnic divisions”.<sup>55</sup> I agree with Ernest Mandel that World War II should be viewed as a “union of activities of a broad spectrum of nations, social classes and strata, political parties and smaller coteries (financial, industrial, military and political) across the whole world”.<sup>56</sup>

These changes would imply a turn toward a social history outlook. “Those whose gaze is fixed more squarely on the war itself”, Martin Thomas bemoaned, overlook “trade disruption” and “food shortages” (although he did not quantify

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51 Michael Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

52 Moore, *Bombing*, 16, 214.

53 Murray, “Introduction”, 2, citing Antony Beevor.

54 Overy, *Blood*, x-xi, 690.

55 Murray, “Introduction”, 5.

56 Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 33 (“Verbindung von Aktionen eines breiten Spektrums von Nationen, gesellschaftlichen Klassen und Schichten, politischen Parteien und engeren Cliquen (finanziellen, industriellen, militärischen und politischen) über die ganze Welt”). Mandel’s study bore many contradictions, but its chapter on the direct causes of the war is indeed global (*ibid.*, 20–32).

how many historians did so).<sup>57</sup> Historians of Africa noted relatively early what has been called colonial reform or the second colonial occupation, exploitation and the “coercion of African manpower for labour or military purposes” by colonial – such as British – officials, though concentrating on the military recruitment, front experience and the political impact of returned veterans on decolonization movements.<sup>58</sup> Richard Overy’s recent study is important because it has more infusions of social history than some of his previous works, but the fact remains that in his study’s section on female (and male) labor, the population of the colonies does not appear.<sup>59</sup> The relationship between interstate war and conflicts within societies is not always clear; therefore, more remains to be done.

This wider understanding of what war is feeds into reflections about the duration of the war. With struggles between ethnicities and social classes, for and against communism, for and against monarchies and for and against feudalism intermeshed and many conflicts beyond the war against Germany and Japan enduring, it is no wonder that much of the violence did not stop in 1945 and expulsions, selective starvation, mass revenge, purification urges and civil wars did not end.<sup>60</sup> This implies that World War II had no clear dates marking its beginning and end.<sup>61</sup>

Some specialists of World War I now prefer to date this global conflict from 1911 or 1912 to 1923 (called the “Greater War”).<sup>62</sup> World wars are not defined, and their periodization becomes quite arbitrary as a result. Given that the Chinese-Japanese front, one of the two major fronts of World War II, was established in July 1937, I, for the purposes of this chapter, set the beginning of the war at that point (as do others<sup>63</sup>), rather than the Eurocentric version of September 1939 (thus, I side with Stalin against Churchill, Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler<sup>64</sup>).

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, “Resource War”, 228.

<sup>58</sup> Ashley Jackson, *Botswana 1939–1945: An African Country at War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 4–7.

<sup>59</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 416–430. The same can be said about Mandel’s chapters about war economies and logistic; see Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 46–53, 71–76.

<sup>60</sup> See Keith Lowe, *Der wilde Kontinent: Europa in den Jahren der Anarchie 1943–1950* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2014), esp. 444.

<sup>61</sup> Hedinger, *Achse*, 72–73 makes the same point.

<sup>62</sup> See Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, *Empires at War, 1911–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 16, and *The Greater War* book series (general editor: Robert Gerwarth).

<sup>63</sup> Mawdsley, “World War II”, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Stalin stated that the second “imperialist war” had started in 1937 (obviously with the Japanese attack on China), Churchill propagated September 1939 as the beginning, and Göring declared that the world war had begun in December 1941. For Stalin, see Tobias Privitelli, *Irredentism, Expansion and the Liberation of the European Proletariat: Stalin’s Considerations on how to Bring Communism to the Western Neighbors of the Soviet Union, 1920–1941*, Ph.D dissertation, University of Bern, 2008, 252–253, 276; for Churchill, see Winston Churchill, *The Second*

One could also have it begin in 1935 with the Italian attack on Ethiopia, in 1936 with the soon-internationalized Spanish Civil War, or in the early 1930s because of the Sino-Japanese conflict and the Japanese conquest of Manchuria.<sup>65</sup> Some would perhaps see the end of the war in 1949 (the Chinese revolution, Indonesia's independence and the foundation of two German states). In this chapter, I assume that the end was in 1947, when several large famines ended, although slowly.

In addition to all of this, the mainstream historiography has steep hierarchies between the war's victims, despite claims to universalism in memory. These hierarchies are reflected in the amount of attention paid to different groups in scholarship and public, but they have also been made quite explicit through certain historical constructs.<sup>66</sup> Germans annihilated six million Jews and three million Soviet POWs, but while there are innumerable books in English exclusively about the murder of the Jews (thousands at least), there is not a single one in English exclusively about the destruction of Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>67</sup> This shows how 'universal' and 'humanist' such scholarship is. Although many of its proponents insist on empathy for the victims, the circle of persons for which empathy is reserved is strictly limited. Jews have more importance than others in the literature; within that group, Western European Jews are given more importance than those from Eastern Europe and bourgeois, highly educated city Jews more than lower-class small-town Jews. This is not all there is to hierarchies: white lives count more than dark, literates more than illiterates and Western Europeans more than Eastern Europeans in general. For example, there are many more publications about the forced labor of British, U.S. and Australian POWs in Japanese hands than that of Southeast Asians in Japanese hands (although the Asian's death figures and death rates were higher).<sup>68</sup> To be sure, these

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*World War: The Gathering Storm* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1948); for Göring and Hitler, see Christian Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews, and Hitler's Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews", *Journal of Modern History* 70, 4 (1998): 784–785. The 1939 version is still in Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 26 and Weinberg, "Total War".

65 Overly, *Blood*, x pleads for the latter version. Buchanan, "Globalizing", 254 sees an "extended series of regional wars" from 1931–1953 and a "central paroxysm" from December 1941 to September 1945.

66 Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 17 points to consequences of the concept of "genocide" in this context.

67 For an example of evolving local knowledge and (non-)memory about the fate of Soviet POWs in Germany, see Wiedemann, *Den Schmerz*, 95–115.

68 See Paul Kratoska, "Introduction", Paul Kratoska, ed., *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), xvi. Kratoska's observation is still accurate. For the death figures and rates of the Southeast Asians employed, see Nakahara Michiko, "Malayan Labor on the Thailand-Burma Railway", Kratoska, *Asian Labor*, 252; see also Neil MacPherson, "Death Railway Movements", n.d., [http://www.mansell.com/pow\\_resources/camplists/death\\_rr/movements\\_1.html](http://www.mansell.com/pow_resources/camplists/death_rr/movements_1.html).

practices have developed over time (they seem to have intensified in and after the 1980s), were multicausal, and they do not apply everywhere because of national differences in memory and scholarship. Still, assigning a higher value to the loss of life of certain groups of people than to others based on distinctions of race, ethnicity or skin color is racist.

One construct that postulates victims of different value is the thesis of the singularity of the murder of the Jews. Michael Rothberg, among others, has concluded that the uniqueness thesis “potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering”, that its advocates de-historicize the extermination of the Jews, reject “all attempts to compare or analogize the Holocaust” and call all doubts about its uniqueness a “relativization” that ought to be condemned.<sup>69</sup> This is not only about maintaining that these were persecutions of a different *kind* but also about believing that they were of a different *value*.<sup>70</sup> Advocates of the singularity thesis find it particularly “problematic” if comparisons are made or parallels are drawn to the suffering of Jews, especially if this is for “upgrading a victimization experience”,<sup>71</sup> an “uplift

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7, 9; see also Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1997), esp. 125. The singularity or uniqueness thesis is based on the nonsensical interpretation of the crime having been irrational and, thus, non-instrumental, unlike any other, and also more total than any other mass murder (although comparable proportions, about 80 percent of the Tutsi in Rwanda 1994 and of the Armenians within the reach of the Ottoman authorities in 1915–1918, were killed in other cases).

Those who call the murder of the Jews ‘Holocaust’ (i.e., burnt sacrifice) indicate by doing so that they take part in systematic mystification. The term obscures the event (most Jewish victims did not die through fire, and burning the dead was common in large parts of the world in World War II, instead of being specific for the fate of Jews), it explains nothing and gives that annihilation a quasi-sacral aura, which is irreconcilable with an effort at scholarly analysis. Against this backdrop, it is characteristic that ‘Holocaust’ has become the most widely used term for the murder of the Jews in scholarship and public opinion. Helen Fein conceded as much in 1975 as to say that “some” scholars found the annihilation of the Jews “non-explicable” and a “mystifying or transcendent event” and was harshly criticized for it. Quoted in Moses, *Problems*, 442.

<sup>70</sup> This becomes obvious one way or another. Dan Diner assures readers that he rejects to “qualify [different] suffering as ethically different and, thus, disparage [some of it]”, only to add immediately that the “Holocaust” is more significant than other mass murders because only it causes a “cognitive horror” and was a “rupture of civilization”. Dan Diner, “Über kognitives Entsetzen”, in Saul Friedländer et al., *Ein Verbrechen ohne Namen: Anmerkungen zum neuen Streit über den Holocaust* (Munich: Beck, 2022), 79 (“das jeweils erlittene Leid als ethisch verschieden zu qualifizieren und damit herabzusetzen”; “kognitive Entsetzen”; “Zivilisationsbruchs”).

<sup>71</sup> Monique Eckmann and Gottfried Kössler, “Polarisierungen verweigern: Spannungsfelder in der pädagogischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Antisemitismus”, in Matthias Böckmann et al., eds., *Jenseits von Mbembe: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Solidarität* (Berlin: Metropol, 2022), 125–140, 137 (“zum Aufwerten einer Opfererfahrung”).

comparison”, according to this view, is “always [ . . . ] a derision of the victims of the Shoah”.<sup>72</sup> This means that proponents of this thesis want to keep other experiences of victimization and mass murder in a lower rank. By always insisting on the singularity of the ‘Holocaust’, that it should be talked about more than any other mass crime and that those who died in the ‘Holocaust’ are in another league of victimhood and by insisting that this one – large – victim group must be put at the center of mass violence in World War II – or even World War II as a whole or history as a whole<sup>73</sup> – they are constantly devaluing and demoting all other victim groups.<sup>74</sup> This, too, is racist, but it is just one example.

## Mass Violence by the Allies

Many cases of Allied mass violence are well known, others are much less familiar. This mass violence was committed by Soviets as well as British, Chinese, U.S. Americans, French, Belgians, Poles, Czechoslovaks, Yugoslavs and citizens of other Allied countries.

One part of World War II Allied violence directed against enemy civilians consisted of the British and U.S. fire bombings of German and Japanese cities, which killed at least one million people, including the U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>75</sup> These attacks were not only fueled by ruthless propaganda but

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72 Erik Petry, “Die erkenntnistheoretische falsche Frage: Was ist Antisemitismus?” in Böckmann et al., *Jenseits*, 107–116, 116 (“immer ist es aber eine Verhöhnung der Opfer der Shoah durch einen Erhebungsvergleich”).

73 It is such a tendency that Achille Mbembe criticizes in statements made by Alain Finkielkraut. See Achille Mbembe, *Ausgang aus langer Nacht: Versuch über ein entkolonialisiertes Afrika* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2016), 202–203.

74 See also Chaumont, *Concurrence*, 9–10, 52.

75 For accounts of survivors of these bombings in general, see Siegfried Schaarschmidt, ed., *Schrei nach Frieden: Japanische Zeugnisse gegen den Krieg* (Düsseldorf and Vienna: Econ, 1984), 15–57; Erhard Klöss, ed., *Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 1939–1945* (Munich: dtv, 1964), 60–122 and medical reports 122–172. For Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see accounts in *Kinder von Hiroshima* (Frankfurt a.M.: Röderberg, 1981 (fourth edition)); Hermann Vinke, ed., *Als die erste Atombombe fiel . . . : Kinder aus Hiroshima berichten* (Ravensburg: Otto Maier, 1982); *Pika-don über Japan* (Cologne: Maximilian, 1955); Schaarschmidt, *Schrei*, 187–264; Tatsuichiro Akizuki, *Nagasaki 1945* (London et al.: Quartet, 1981); Shuntaro Hida, *Der Tag, an dem Hiroshima verschwand: Erinnerungen eines japanischen Militärarztes* (Bremen: Donat, 1986); Michihiko Hachiya, *Hiroshima Diary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985 (10th ed.)); Paul Takashi Nagai, *Die Glocken von Nagasaki* (Luzern: Schweizer Volk-Buchgemeinde, 1955 (fourth ed.)); Toyofumi Ogura, *Letters from the End of the World* (Tokio et.al.: Kodamsha International, 2001); Narihiko Ito et.al., eds., *Seit jenem Tag: Hiroshima und Nagasaki in der japanischen Literatur* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer,



also by mass sentiments. British and U.S. air forces also killed tens of thousands of civilians in France, Italy, Romania, Hungary and China.<sup>76</sup> In a December 1945 survey for *Fortune* magazine, 22.7 percent of U.S. residents regretted that the USA had not dropped more Atomic bombs on Japan.<sup>77</sup>

Enemy population was also targeted in the mass death of prisoners of war, which was mainly caused by starvation, exhaustion and cold due to undersupply and hard labor. This did not concern all groups of prisoners. While the treatment of European POWs in U.S., British and French hands did not lead to elevated mortality, between 0.5 million and 1.5 million prisoners in Soviet hands died, which in absolute numbers were mainly Germans and Japanese, but those with the highest mortality rates were Italians and Romanians.<sup>78</sup> Many Japanese also appear to have died in British captivity in 1945.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, Soviet troops killed an unknown but very high number of German (and probably also Italian) troops who surrendered to them (though their number was lower than that of Soviet troops killed upon surrender by the Germans). Troops from the USA and Britain often either did the same to Japanese soldiers and sailors or refused to rescue those who were shipwrecked due to unrestrained submarine warfare. Often, these were hate crimes, committed out of conviction, initiated by individual soldiers or middle to high ranking officers and, in the U.S. case, based on popular racism against the Japanese.<sup>80</sup> U.S. troops also extracted gold teeth from the mouths of Japanese soldiers they had killed.<sup>81</sup> They killed many tens of thousands of civilians on the Japanese island of Okinawa.<sup>82</sup> The attitude prevail-

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1984), 14–33; Helmut Erlinghagen, *Hiroshima und wir* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1982), 13–22, 31–48; P.T. Siemes, “The Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima: An Eye-Witness Account”, *The Irish Monthly* 74, 873 (1946): 93–104 and 74, 874 (1946): 148–154.

76 See Overy, *Blood*, 673–674, 678, 791–793; Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Der Bombenkrieg 1939–1945* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2004), 8; Moore, *Bombing*, 13; Studs Terkel, “*The Good War*”: *An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). A formidable study of the effects of nuclear bombing is Susan Southard, *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War* (New York: Viking, 2015).

77 Dower, *War*, 54.

78 Overy, *Blood*, 777, 780; Gerlach, *Extermination*, 235–238.

79 Accounts by Masatsugu Ogawa and Shogo Iitoyo in Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 276, 414–415; account by Maskatsu Nomura in Schaarschmidt, *Schrei*, 80.

80 Overy, *Blood*, 773–774; Christian Gerlach and Nicolas Werth, “State Violence – Violent Societies”, in Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 167; Adams, *The Best War*, 61, 111–112; Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 175–176.

81 Dower, *War*, 63–68; account by E.B. Sledge in Terkel, “*Good War*”, 62.

82 Dower, *War*, 218; Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 367; see survivor accounts in Schaarschmidt, *Schrei*, 121–182.

ing in the U.S. military toward the Japanese was much less friendly than toward Germans or Italians. Commenting on the reasons for the fact that postwar U.S. military courts had only three German military officers executed compared to about 1,000 Japanese ones, Telford Taylor, U.S. chief prosecutor during the Nuremberg Trials of War Criminals, later suggested: "I suppose it was race."<sup>83</sup>

In addition, there were collective expulsions of 18 million German and Japanese civilians from Eastern Europe, China and Korea in 1944–1947. Germans were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Yugoslavia and other countries. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians were expelled from Czechoslovakia and Romania. An estimated half a million Germans and at least 200,000 Japanese died in the process due to massacres, killings and deprivation.<sup>84</sup> The UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) excluded the over 3.5 million children of ethnic Germans who were expelled from Eastern Europe from their aid.<sup>85</sup> Soviet authorities deported more than 200,000 individuals from Eastern Europe shortly after the war for forced labor in the Soviet Union. Most of these men and women were (ethnic) Germans. Over 20 percent of them died before repatriation in this scheme of "reparation through [providing] labor force".<sup>86</sup>

There are only vague estimates regarding the number of women raped by Soviet troops in Germany, Poland, Hungary, Manchuria and elsewhere; by U.S., British and French soldiers in Germany and elsewhere; and by U.S. troops in Japan. This would have hardly been less than one million.<sup>87</sup> Not all women and

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<sup>83</sup> Terkel, "Good War", 461. For racial discrimination of African Americans, Hispanics and Italian Americans in the U.S. military, see *ibid.*, 146–185.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Bessel, "Unnatural deaths", Richard Overy, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 336; Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 403; Collingham, *Taste*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Katherine Rossy, "The UN search for stolen and hidden Polish children (1944–47)", in Murray, *Unknown Conflicts*, 226.

<sup>86</sup> See Pavel Poljan, "Westarbeiter: Reparation durch Arbeitskraft: Deutsche Häftlinge in der UdSSR", Dittmar Dahlmann and Gerhard Hirschfeld, eds., *Lager, Zwangsarbeiter, Vertreibung und Deportation: Dimensionen der Massenverbrechen in der Sowjetunion und in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945* (Essen: Klartext, 1999), 337–367.

<sup>87</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 809–810, 814; see also Mark Edele, *Stalinism at War: The Soviet Union in World War II* (London et al.: Bloomsbury, 2021), 167; Lilly, *Taken*, 12, 30–31; Miriam Gebhardt, "Eine Frage des Schweigens? Forschungsthemen zur Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen nach Kriegsende," Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Slike Satjukow, eds., *Besatzungskinder: Die Nachkommen alliierter Soldaten in Österreich und Deutschland* (Vienna et al.: Böhlau, 2015), 68–69. For Manchuria, see accounts by Teruko Nishioka and Matsuko Fukomoto and for Okinawa, Japan, Sumi Tonouchi, in Schaar-schmidt, *Schrei*, 90, 109, 159.

Many analysts have rationalized the Soviet mass rapes with Soviet soldiers' bitterness about the earlier German atrocities, but this hardly explains the rapes in Poland and Manchuria.

girls survived these assaults. British military in India also sexually exploited women in labor camps and established at least one brothel.<sup>88</sup> Rape and individually shooting prisoners or enemy soldiers who had surrendered were participatory practices of violence.

However, much Allied violence was also directed against their own citizens or colonial subjects. The citizens were particularly targeted in the USSR and China.

In the Soviet camp system called Gulag, the number of prisoners reached a high level during World War II and 974,000 inmates died in these camps, usually as a result of starvation, cold and hard labor.<sup>89</sup> Many of them were social outsiders, petty criminals or violators of work discipline and, in increasing numbers, women and ethnic minorities. This is not counting the many civilians who died under famine conditions during the war, particularly in 1942–1943.

‘Preventive’ or ‘punitive’ mass resettlement of entire ethnicities from western areas of the USSR during World War II affected Poles in 1939–1941, Germans in 1941–1942, and Chechens, Ingush, Karachays, Kalmycks and Crimean Tatars in 1943–1944. About three million people of these minorities were deported from their homelands and more than half a million died from hunger, exhaustion and cold during transport or due to inadequate shelter.<sup>90</sup> It is often said that these forced resettlers, the Gulag inmates and foreign POWs just suffered from hunger like the rest of the Soviet population did, but this is evidently not true when one looks at the death rates.

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<sup>88</sup> Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 158, 184.

<sup>89</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 785; Edele, *Stalinism*, 126–128 suggests somewhat lower figures. See also Donald Filtzer, “Starvation Mortality in Soviet Home-Front Industrial Regions during World War II”, in Wendy Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds., *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 330, 307 note 52.

<sup>90</sup> Ethnic minorities and foreign groups were also deported and interned in other Allied countries. U.S. authorities deported and interned close to 150,000 citizens and residents of Japanese extraction 1942–1945, though they were held under better conditions with no elevated mortality. French governments of the Third and Fourth Republics 1938–1940 and 1944–1946 incarcerated more people in internment camps than Vichy France did in 1940–1944, especially foreign (mostly Spanish) citizens, nomads (above all, Roma), communists, Jews and persons affiliated to the Vichy regime. See Denis Peschanski, *La France des camps: L'internement 1938–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), esp. 475. For Soviet policies, see the remarks by Nicolas Werth in Gerlach and Werth, “State Violence”, 158–161; Edele, *Stalinism*, 62–64, 171; Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Michael Schwartz, “Ethnische ‘Säuberung’ als Kriegsfolge”, in Rolf-Dieter Müller, ed., *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 10/2: *Der Zusammenbruch des Deutschen Reiches 1945 und die Folgen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, sub-volume 2: *Die Auflösung der Wehrmacht und die Auswirkungen des Krieges* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2008), 573.

The Chinese government acted with similar recklessness but in different ways. The most striking case was the Yellow River flood of 1938, where Chinese troops destroyed a dyke to induce intentional flooding to block an offensive by Japanese troops. Although no Japanese were killed in this and the fall of Wuhan to the Japanese was only briefly delayed, 70,000 sq. kilometers were submerged, between 400,000 and 900,000 Chinese died, and the flooding caused three to nine million domestic refugees.<sup>91</sup> The worst among many other manifestations of Chinese scorched-earth policy was when the Guomindang state's military burned down the city of Changsha and killed 20,000 Chinese in November 1938. It acted similarly in Guilin in the fall of 1944.<sup>92</sup> Chinese airplanes strafed the International Settlement in Shanghai on August 14, 1941, killing over one thousand people, mostly Chinese.<sup>93</sup> Guomindang-led Nationalist China used terror and torture against its citizens in punitive camps and elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> But the Chinese military also treated its own recruits with utter contempt. It is estimated that 1.4 million of them – often mobilized by force – died in the army due to diseases, hunger and mistreatment before even reaching their front units.<sup>95</sup> This ruthlessness against its own people during the war (in combination with corruption) caused a fundamental loss of confidence in the population for the Guomindang regime and contributed heavily to the latter's defeat in the Civil War of 1945–1949. For example, parts of the areas of the Yellow River flood became communist strongholds before 1945 and remained under their control from 1946 to 1949.<sup>96</sup>

In suppressing a major anti-colonial and anti-war movement in British-India, British colonial authorities arrested 25,000 Indians until 1941 and another 60,000 in the months from August 1942 and killed at least a thousand. To crush the 1942 Quit India movement, British colonialists bombed crowds of Indians from airplanes at least five times, using incendiary bombs and machine guns, not to dwell on mis-

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91 Diana Lary, "Drowned Earth: The Strategic Breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938", *War in History* 8, 2 (2001): 191–207; Kathryn Jean Edgerton-Tarpley, "From 'Nourish the People' to 'Sacrifice for the Nation': Changing Responses to Disaster in Late Imperial and Modern China", *Journal of Asian Studies* 73, 2 (2014): 448, 457–458; Micah Muscolino, "Violence Against People and the Land: The Environment and Refugee Migration from China's Henan Province, 1938–1945", *Environment and History* 17 (2011): 295; Mitter, *China's War*, 161.

92 Lary, *Chinese People*, 46, 49, 62–64, 153; Mitter, *China's War*, 204; Schoppa, *Sea*, 239–260.

93 Mitter, *China's War*, 94.

94 Mitter, *China's War*, 283–289.

95 Overly, *Blood*, 383.

96 Bose, "Starvation", 726; Lary, "Drowned Earth", 204.

treatments and pillaging.<sup>97</sup> These were the actions of a ‘democratic’ power intended to suppress an anti-colonial uprising in a colony, in the name of which colonial officers alone had declared war in Germany. Quit India, in which millions participated, was in part also an anti-war movement, by far the biggest worldwide during the war; against this backdrop, it is remarkable that a British author wrote: “Pacifism in the democracies did not suffer direct persecution”.<sup>98</sup> British and U.S. troops in Burma and Australian troops in Japanese-occupied East Timor (a Portuguese colony) exploited colonial subjects for all sorts of services, including fighting, but were quick to kill locals if they were suspected of cooperating with the Japanese.<sup>99</sup> Based on the racism among the British, Australian, French and sometimes U.S. troops, similar things happened in the western Pacific.<sup>100</sup>

Along with the many famines under Allied rule, the number of victims of Allied policies and activities surpassed ten million people, and probably so by far. There were famines in China (in Henan and other provinces) and British-India; in the British colonies of Nigeria, Kenya, Tanganyika and others; in Allied-occupied Iran (a neutral country), Germany, Japan and Austria; in French-Algeria and French-Tunisia and in the Belgian colonies of contemporary Burundi and Rwanda. These famines were caused by conditions of violence created by the ruthless exploitation of these countries, including colonial forced labor programs in Africa and the Pacific. The next section will examine this in more detail.

This brief survey allows for several conclusions to be drawn. These were not marginal or freak events. Hiroshima, the Gulag, the Bengal famine and the Yellow River flood were defining parts of Allied behavior. And one who kills ten million non-combatants cannot be considered ‘good’ except for what would be a very peculiar meaning of the word.

But there is more to the Allied record of conduct. Axis countries primarily killed enemy populations (and if these were non-combatants, usually in occupied countries). But most victims of Allied action against non-combatants were *not*

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97 Francis Hutchins, *India's Revolution: Gandhi and the Quit India Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 230–232; S.K. Sharma, ed., *Quit India Movement* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2009), esp. 91, 97; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 20, 85; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 104.

98 Overy, *Blood*, 649. See *ibid.*, 645–660 on pacifism (which for Overy is mostly Christian pacifism).

99 Michele Turner, *Telling: East Timor: Personal Memories, 1942–1992* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 2003), 6, 26–32; account by Henry Hatfield, Terkel, “Good War”, 376.

100 Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey White, “War Stories”, in Geoffrey White and Lamont Lindstrom, eds., *The Pacific Theatre: Island Representations of World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 8–13; see account by Masatsugu Ogawa in Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 273.

from the enemy side. The majority were actually their own citizens or colonial subjects: in the Gulag and ethnic resettlements, among Chinese peasants and recruits, and in Bengal and Burundi. Given these facts, the Allied phrases about their fight for freedom, democracy, anti-racism and freedom from want do not only sound hollow, they were a brutal mockery that continues until today.

The celebrated economist John Kenneth Galbraith once said about the USA in World War II: “Never in the history of human conflict has there been so much talk of sacrifice and so little sacrifice.”<sup>101</sup> Worse, there was a great deal of sacrifice on the Allied side, but why was so much of it made by people with dark skin or by rural dwellers and ethnic minorities that the ruling classes of their own countries regarded as inferior?<sup>102</sup>

The Allied war effort was inherently racist. Regarding that, it was similar to the Axis. However, one should not stop at a denunciatory statement. The point is, why was all this racism there? The answer is, of course, complex; in this chapter, I would like to point to certain racist *practices* and explain why so many people killed by the Allies died of a lack of resources, and hunger in particular. One part of the explanation lies in conditions of violence constituted by labor relations, value extraction and resource distribution in combination with disenfranchisement, restrictions of movement and convenient racial hierarchies during the war, as I will show in the next section.

As a side note, to assert that Soviet policies and actions were not racist would be ridiculous. The whole Soviet population suffered terribly from the war, that is, from the invasion by Germany and other Axis countries, from fighting, exhaustion and the lack of resources, but disproportionate suffering was meted out against certain groups that were apparently deemed worthy only of especially scarce resources and died in great numbers due to their lack: Gulag inmates, foreign prisoners of war and ethnic minorities; and the latter two were ethnically defined.<sup>103</sup> And so were the foreign women targeted in mass rapes, the prisoners who were not taken, and populations expelled. This violent factual racism was directed against both foreigners and compatriots, and while some of it was built into a system with a complex division of labor (in the Gulag and POW camps), other parts were the product of popular racism and individual action *en masse*

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**101** Galbraith's account in Terkel, “*Good War*”, 323.

**102** For peasants, see also Collingham, *Taste*, 263.

**103** Another example of disproportionate suffering is the fact that the German siege of Leningrad killed between 600,000 and 1,000,000 civilians, one-fifth to one-third of the initial population, whereas most of the prison inmates starved to death. Jörg Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad 1941–1944* (Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 2005, 238–239, 279–280, 293).

(rapes, taking no prisoners or killing them before they reached the camps). This, too, requires an explanation.

## Conditions of Violence: Why Were There So Many Famines in World War II?

Hunger was a part of many people's experiences of World War II. People noted their loss of weight in their diaries. They turned to substitute foods and new cooking recipes. Mothers desperately tried to pull their children through. In some families, there were squabbles about food, theft and denial of help to outsiders in need were regular occurrences. People turned to black market activities or to other illegal action as a remedy, gleaned fields after harvest and commuted to relatives or friends in the countryside. It was also a time of food phantasies and digestive problems – which could become fatal. Around 1945, clothes would hang loosely from many people's meagre bodies. People lacked everything: calories, fat and diverse micronutrients.<sup>104</sup>

The war was a time of scarcity of almost every good, especially consumer goods outside the military. In general, food production decreased because of a lack of inputs such as fertilizer, machinery, fuel, draught animals, and in particular human workforce, in combination with a lack of economic production incentives, new regulations and disrupted economic relations.<sup>105</sup> However, it was not only food availability decline and governmental mismanagement that caused hunger. Factors such as the exploitation of colonies, colonial subjects and occupied areas; official and private looting; mass detention of people regarded as undesirable; political and other hierarchies in rationing systems, and exclusion thereof; food denial for certain groups; sieges and naval blockades; the redistribution of resources; inflationary processes; hoarding and speculation; and struggles related to land ownership all contributed to mass suffering which had, thus, political, military, economic and social aspects. Often this led to famine, in several cases in connection with drought.<sup>106</sup>

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**104** This section draws substantially from an earlier book chapter of mine: Christian Gerlach, "Hunger in den besetzten Gebieten im Zweiten Weltkrieg – deutsch und global", Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württembergs, ed., *Hunger: Zur Geschichte einer existenziellen Bedrohung* (Ubstadt-Weiher: Verlag Regionalkultur, 2019), 151–164.

**105** See, for example, Brennan et al., "War", 61–64.

**106** Many of these aspects are also noted in *ibid.*, 5–70.



The magnitude and reach of the famines become clear in Table 6.1.<sup>107</sup>

**107** For Spain, see Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco and Peter Anderson, “Introduction: Famine, not hunger?”, Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco and Peter Anderson, eds., *Franco's Famine: Malnutrition, Disease and Starvation in Post-Civil War Spain* (London et al.: Bloomsbury, 2022), 5–6, 10. For Greece, see Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941–1944* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 2, 158. For Poland, see Mariusz Jastrzab, “Rationierungspolitik in Polen zwischen 1945 und 1953”, Matthias Middell and Felix Wemheuer, eds., *Hunger, Ernährung und Rationierungssysteme unter dem Staatssozialismus (1917–2006)* (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2011), 183–211 and own estimates. For the Soviet Union in 1942–1943 (or, broader, in 1941–1945), see Filtzer, “Starvation Mortality”, 265–338, esp. 269–270, 275, 279; Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946–47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6. For Leningrad, see Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad*, esp. 238–239. For foreign POWs in the Soviet Union, see note 78 of this chapter. For Cyprus, see E.M.H. Lloyd, *Food and Inflation in the Middle East 1940–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 189, 328, 356 (Lloyd does not say that there was a famine, but British military spending in Cyprus was high, the island had a disastrous harvest in 1941 and the infant mortality rose to 50 percent above peacetime levels in 1942). For the Netherlands, see Henri van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland 1944–5* (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse, 1982); Nicki Hart, “Famine Maternal Nutrition and Infant Mortality: A Re-Examination of the Dutch Hunger Winter”, *Population Studies*, 47, 1 (1993): 27–46. For Germany, see Alexander Häusser and Gordon Maugg, *Hungerwinter: Deutschlands humanitäre Katastrophe 1946/47* (Berlin: List, 2009); estimate based on data in James Bacque, *Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians under Allied Occupation, 1944–1950* (Toronto: Little, Brown & Co, 1997), 123, 128, 211 (despite its tendentious character). For Austria, see Hildegard Hemetsberger-Koller, “Unternehmen Bergius “Nahrung aus Holz”: Prestigeprojekt der Hungerjahre 1945/46”, *Zeitgeschichte* 26, 2 (1999): 108. For the Soviet Union in 1946–1947, see: Ganson, *Soviet Famine*; Donald Filtzer, “Die Auswirkungen der sowjetischen Hungersnot im Jahr 1947 auf die Industriearbeiter”, Middell and Wemheuer, *Hunger*, 59–85.

For Burma, see Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 167, 182–183, 186–187. For Travancore, the Madras and Bombay areas, Cochin and Orissa, see Mark Tauger, “The Indian Famine Crises of World War II”, *British Scholar* 1, 2 (2009): 188–192; Raghavan, *India's War*, 353–355; Benjamin Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 28 note 22; Henry Knight, *Food Administration in India 1939–1947* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 114, 201–202. For Bengal, see Mohiuddin Alamgir, *Famine in South Asia* (Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain, 1980), 77–92; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 267–272; Collingham, *Taste*, 1, 142. For China in general, see Anthony Garnaut, “A Quantitative Description of the Henan Famine of 1942”, *Modern Asian Studies* 47, 6 (2013): 2007–2045, esp. 2032–2036, 2042, who shows convincingly that famine deaths in Henan province can hardly have surpassed one million, but also that there were very many additional deaths in Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong and Zhejiang provinces (largely under Japanese rule) and Hubei province (under Guomindang rule). For Shandong, see also Lary, *Chinese People*, 129. For Henan, see Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”; Bose, “Starvation”; Lary, *Chinese People*, 124–126. For Hongkong, see Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “*Unsere Opfer*”, 238. For East Timor, see James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Gladesville et al.: Jacaranda Press, 1983), 22–26; Turner, *Telling*, iv; Douglas Kamen, *Three Centuries of Conflict in East Timor* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 110. For Iran, see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Iran under Allied Occupation in World War*

*II* (Lanham et al.: University Press of America, 2016), esp. 527–562, 689; Mohammad Gholi Majd, “The Three Famines and the Makings of a Malthusian Catastrophe in Iran (1869–1944)”, *Quarterly Journal of the Iranian Islamic Period History* 12, 27 (2021): 80, 97–100 (Gholi Majd’s calculations, which are entirely based on demographic data and projections, appear inflated); Lloyd, *Food*, 157–169; Stephen McFarland, “Anatomy of an Iranian Political Crowd: The Tehran Bread Riot of December 1942”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, 1 (1985): 51–65. For Iraqi Kurdistan, see W.G. Elphinston, “The Kurdish Question”, *International Affairs* 22, 1 (1946): 99; David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London et al.: I.B. Tauris, 2021, fourth edition), 294. For Singapore, see note 307 in this chapter. For Yemen, see Mary Fletcher, “Famine in Arabia, 1943–1947”, <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/faminearabia/htm> (last accessed August 31, 2023); Lloyd, *Food*, 20, 65, 353. For various of the Caroline islands, see Lin Poyer, “Micronesian Experiences of the War in the Pacific”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 85–86; Suzanne Falgout, “From Passive Pawns to Political Strategists: Wartime Lessons for the People of Pohnpei”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 287–288; Collingham, *Taste*, 298–299. For Vietnam, see Geoffrey Gunn, *Rice Wars in Colonial Vietnam: The Great Famine and The Viet Minh Road to Power* (Lanham et al.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014); Bùi Minh Dũng, “Japan’s Role in the Vietnamese Starvation of 1944–1945”, *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995): 573–618; Gregg Huff, “The Great Second World War Vietnam and Java Famines”, *Modern Asian Studies* 54, 2 (2020): 621; David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1995), 104–105. For Hunan in 1944–1945 and 1946, see Overy, *Blood*, 866; see also Dower, *War*, 295. For the Philippines, see Collingham, *Taste*, 303; Ricardo Jose, “The Rice Shortage and Countermeasures during the Occupation”, Setsuho Ikehata and Ricardo Troba Jose, eds., *The Philippines under Japan: Occupation Policy and Reaction* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1999), 213. For Java, see Pierre van der Eng, *Food Supply in Java During War and Decolonization, 1940–1950* (no place, 2008), <http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/8852/> (last accessed November 20, 2014), esp. 38; Huff, “Great”, 622; Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London: Sage and PRIO, 1991), 293. For Nauru (473 of 800 Nauruans whom the Japanese deported to Truk died there), see Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey White, *Island Encounters: Black and White Memories of the Pacific War* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 57; Nancy Pollock, “Nauruans during World War II”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 91–107 (she offers different figures and mentions also hunger deaths by Nauruans on Nauru itself); Rheinisches JournalInnenbüro, “*Unsere Opfer*”, 384–387. For Palau, see Karen Nero, “Time of Famine, Time of Transformation: Hell in the Pacific, Palau”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 120, 122, 127, 130. For Japan, see Collingham, *Taste*, 467; for the decline in the consumption of staples, see Takafusa Nakamura, “The Age of Turbulence: 1937–54”, Takafusa Nakamura and Kônôsuke Odaka, eds., *The Economic History of Japan: 1600–1990, vol. 3: Economic History of Japan 1914–1955: A Dual Structure* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2003), 71. For India in 1946, see Knight, *Food Administration*, 148, 190, 248–262. For Indonesia in 1946–1948, see below in this chapter.

For Cape Verde in 1940–1943, see Malyn Newitt, “The Portuguese African Colonies during the Second World War” in Byfield et al., *Africa*, 233–235; Gervase Clarence-Smith, “The Impact of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War on Portuguese and Spanish Africa”, *Journal of African History* 26, 4 (1985): 319; Cormac O’Grada, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22; Collingham, *Taste*, 124. For Nigeria, see Michael Watts, *Silent*

**Table 6.1:** Famines in World War II, 1941–1947.

Country	Colonial power or occupier	Time	Number of victims (estimates)
<u>Europe</u>			
Spain		1941–1942	200,000
Greece	Germany, Italy, Bulgaria	1941–1944	300,000
Poland	Germany (1939–1945)	1941–1947	
Jews starved in Ghettos and camps	Germany	1940–1944	300,000
Soviet Union	Germany	1941–1944	
Leningrad	German siege	1941–1943	>600,000
Soviet POWs	Germany	1941–1944	2.5 million
Soviet Union		1942–1943	1.5 million

*Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1987), 326–336. For Niger, see Boureima Alpha Gado, *Une histoire des famines au Sahel* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), 184. For Burundi, see Gaëtan Feltz and Jean-Étienne Bidou, “La famine Manori au Burundi 1943–1944”, *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 81, 304 (1994): 265–304; Christian Thibon, *Histoire démographique du Burundi* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), 83–122. For Rwanda, see Dantès Singiza, *La famine Ruzagayura (Rwanda, 1943–1944)* (Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 2011), esp. 92–97, [http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/research/publications/rmca/online/famineruzagayura\\_singa.pdf](http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/research/publications/rmca/online/famineruzagayura_singa.pdf) (last accessed April 25, 2018); Collingham, *Taste*, 124. For Algeria, see Jacques Cantier, *L'Algérie sous le régime de Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), 111, 173, 179; Thomas, “Resource War”, 240, 248; Mohamed Khenouf and Michael Brett, “Algerian Nationalism and the Allied Military Strategy and Propaganda during the Second World War”, David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), 261, 272–273; Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 24, 41. For Tanganyika, see Nicholas Westcott, “The Impact of the Second World War on Tanganyika, 1939–49”, Killingray and Rathbone, *Africa*, 145–148; Gregory Maddox, “Food Disruption and Agricultural Policy in Tanganyika”, Laakkonen et al., *Long Shadows*, 239–240, 244; Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 206. For South Africa (Limpopo province), see Louis Grundlingh, “The Military, Race and Resistance: The Conundrums of Recruiting Black South African Men during the Second World War”, Byfield et al., *Africa*, 87. For Kenya, see Ian Spencer, “Settler Dominance, Agricultural Production and the Second World War in Kenya”, *Journal of African History* 21, 4 (1980): 505–508; Jackson, *British Empire*, 199. For Botswana, see Jackson, *Botswana*, 156, 183–186. For Tunisia, see Latifa Hénia, “Les grandes sécheresses en Tunisie au cours de la dernière période séculaire”, Paul Arnould and Micheline Hotyat, eds., *Eau et environnement: Tunisie et milieux méditerranéens* (Lyon: ENS, 2003), 25–36, <http://books.openedition.org/enseditions/863?lang=fr> (last accessed April 25, 2018). For Cape Verde in 1946–1948, see O'Grada, *Famine*, 22.

Table 6.1 (continued)

Country	Colonial power or occupier	Time	Number of victims (estimates)
Foreign POWs in Soviet hands	Soviet Union	1942–1946	0.5–1.5 million
Cyprus	Britain	1942	
Netherlands	Germany	1944–1945	22,000
Germany	Soviet Union, Britain, France, USA	1945–1947	1 million?
Austria	same	1945–1947	
Spain		1946	
Soviet Union		1946–1947	1–1.5 million
<u>Asia and Oceania</u>			
Burma	Britain	1941–1942	80,000
India	Britain	1941–1944	
Travancore	Britain	1941–1943	
Cochin	Britain	1942–1943	
Madras area	Britain	1942–1943	
Bombay area	Britain	1942–1943	
Orissa	Britain	1942–1943	
Bengal	Britain	1942–1943	3 million
China	parts occ. by Japan	1940–1944	>3 million
Shandong	Japan	1940–1944	>100,000
Henan		1942–1943	1 million
Hunan		1944–1945	2–3 million?
Hongkong	Japan	1944–1945	
East Timor	Japan	1942–1943	40–60,000 (10–15% of population)
Iran	Britain, Soviet Union, USA	1942–1943	up to 3 million (?)
Singapore	Japan	1942–1945	40,000
Iraq (Kurdistan)	Britain	1943	
Yemen	Britain	1943–1944	>10,000 (1.5% of population)
Caroline islands	Japan	1943–1945	

**Table 6.1** (continued)

Country	Colonial power or occupier	Time	Number of victims (estimates)
Tonkin (Vietnam)	Vichy France, Japan	1944–1945	0.7–2 million
Philippines	Japan	1944–1945	400,000
Java	Japan	1944–1945	2.4 million
Nauru	Japan	1944–1945	>473 (12% of population)
Palau	Japan	1944–1945	>5,000
Japan	USA	1945–1946	>100,000
China (Hunan)		1946	4 million?
India (southern)	Britain	1946	
Indonesia	Netherlands et al.	1946–1948	
<u>Africa</u>			
Cape Verde	Portugal	1940–1943	25,000 (16% of population)
Algeria	Vichy/Gaullist France	1941–1945	>120,000
South Africa (northern Transvaal)		1941–1943	
Tanganyika (Central Province)	Britain	1941–1943	
Kenya (Central province)	Britain	1942–1943	
Nigeria (northern)	Britain	1942–1943	
Burundi	Belgium	1943–1944	up to 160,000 (8% of population)
Rwanda	Belgium	1943–1944	36,000–300,000
Niger	France	1943–1944	
Botswana	Britain	1944–1945	
Tunisia	France	1945–1947	
Cape Verde	Portugal	1946–1948	30,000 (18% of population)

Many conclusions can be drawn from this table, which lists famines that claimed the lives of somewhere between 15 million and 27 million people.<sup>108</sup> The fundamental observation is that almost all these cases occurred in occupied countries or colonies where many disenfranchised people died. Famines did not only take place near the frontlines, and the fact that some happened very far away from any fighting, for example in Cape Verde, Burundi or Botswana, points to the near global, deadly imperialist grip on resources. Hunger was an everyday reality in large parts of the world. Most people perished in Asia, but those in Europe, Africa and Oceania were also gravely affected, relative to their population sizes. The colonial and occupation powers, which were responsible for the well-being and certainly for the survival of these populations, included, in terms of their alliance status, Axis, Allies and a neutral power (Portugal). All major Allied powers were involved. In terms of political system, the countries that had the responsibility included bourgeois democracies, fascist regimes, authoritarian one-party states and a state ruled by communists. In terms of socioeconomic system, they included capitalist and socialist states. No system was immune to acting this way, and there was no principal difference between the Axis and the Allies or between fascism and liberal imperialism.

Where famine struck the citizens of an independent, unoccupied state, parts of the population were either treated similarly to colonial subjects (like rural dwellers in the unoccupied parts of China) or 'enemized' (i.e., declared to be enemies), partially in combination with ethnic discrimination (in the unoccupied, annexed or reconquered parts of the Soviet Union).

Table 6.1 does not cover all instances of famine during World War II as a result of problems of definition, insufficient documentation, my lack of knowledge of non-European languages and, probably, my ignorance. Collingham spoke of another famine in northern Burma (contemporary Myanmar) in 1945, when the front cut the region off from the surpluses in the south of the country,<sup>109</sup> and, using a very doubtful reference, one in Guangdong province caused by the Chinese army that purportedly killed 1.5 million in 1944–1945.<sup>110</sup> Out of 220,000 Japanese civilians living in Manchuria in 1945, 67,000 reportedly starved to

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**108** It is notoriously difficult to determine how many people die in a famine. Among the reasons are many officially unregistered deaths (with no medically certified cause of death), the unwillingness or inability of authorities to count famine deaths or the reinterpretation of their cause of death, the impossibility to distinguish between death from hunger, from related and from unrelated diseases and the widespread mobility of the population. See David Grigg, *The World Food Problem* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 5–30.

**109** Collingham, *Taste*, 237.

**110** Collingham, *Taste*, 256.

death.<sup>111</sup> Famine, especially in mountainous areas where the landless and poor lacked grain and some ate grass for long periods, was reported from three parts of Kurdistan: in British-occupied Iraq, Turkey and British-occupied French-Syria.<sup>112</sup> Hunger and malnutrition were also raging in Thailand in 1943.<sup>113</sup> Although scholars do not think that there was a wartime famine in British-Palestine, food rations were down to 1356 to 1550 calories per adult, and many Arab families, along with some Jewish ones, could not pay the necessary food expenses, as a result of which many Arab children were malnourished.<sup>114</sup> Likewise, food shortages were reported from British-Ceylon (contemporary Sri Lanka), but no famine.<sup>115</sup>

This continues in the African countries. In parts of Mozambique, such as Quelimane province, famine seems to have occurred because the Portuguese colonialists enforced an expansion of cotton production, replacing food crops.<sup>116</sup> Many people went hungry in French Somaliland (Djibouti) in 1941–1942 as a consequence of a British naval blockade that prevented imports from French-Madagascar. Locals suffered from starvation, scurvy and also political terror.<sup>117</sup> Scholars disagree about whether to call a similar situation in the Gaullist French colony of Réunion 1942–1944 a famine.<sup>118</sup> Jackson argued that “crisis” (famine) was prevented in British-Mauritius by some food imports in 1943 but mentions a high mortality level in

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111 Collingham, *Taste*, 62; see survivor accounts in Schaarschmidt, *Schrei*; 86–115.

112 For the area of Mardin, Turkey, see Jordi Tejel, “The Kurds and World War II: Some Considerations for a Social History Perspective”, *Kultüri Studia* 21 (2), 2023: 11–13; Ramazan Aras, *The Wall: The Making and Unmaking of the Turkish-Syrian Border* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 70–71. For Iraqi Kurdistan, see Elphinston, “The Kurdish Question”, 99; McDowell, *A Modern History*, 294. For the area of Afrin, Syrian Kurdistan, see Katharina Lange, “Peripheral Experiences: Everyday Life in Kurd Dagh (Northern Syria) During the Allied Occupation in the Second World War”, Liebau et al., *World*, 417–418, and for Syria more generally, Elizabeth Thompson, “The Climax and Crisis of the Colonial Welfare State in Syria and Lebanon during World War II”, Steven Heydemann, ed., *War, Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 2000), 74 and 96 note 26.

113 Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “*Unsere Opfer*”, 246.

114 Sherene Seikaly, “A Nutritional Economy: The Calorie, Development and War in Mandate Palestine”, Mark Crowley and Sandra Trudgen Dawson, eds., *Home Fronts: Britain and the Empire at War, 1939–1945* (Rochester: Boydell, 2017), 47, 52, 54.

115 Ashley Jackson, “Ceylon’s Home Front during the Second World War”, Crowley and Trudgen Dawson, *Home Fronts*, 111–129; for a greatly decreasing rice supply, see Jackson, *British Empire*, 323.

116 Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 321–322; Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: A Study of Quelimane District* (London: Heineman, 1980), 295–299; Byfield, “Producing”, 38.

117 Oliver Coates, “The Indian Ocean”, Murray, *Unknown Conflicts*, 80, 87.

118 Coates, “The Indian Ocean”, 81 speaks of a greatly elevated mortality rate, especially for infants, but Hervé Le Joubioux, “L’île de la Réunion dans le Seconde Guerre mondiale”, *Revue historique des armées* 263 (2011): 8, 13 note 47 offers much different figures.



1942, partially caused by malaria.<sup>119</sup> Edward Lloyd admitted that “famine conditions” prevailed in British-Somalia in early 1944.<sup>120</sup> Further, David Killingray and Richard Rathbone noted cases of “acute food shortage” in many parts of British Africa, including South Rhodesia (contemporary Zimbabwe), and famine in parts of British-Uganda in 1944.<sup>121</sup> British-Tanganyika (contemporary Tanzania) experienced “food shortage” or “famine” again in 1946.<sup>122</sup> In Egypt, which contributed many workers and great amounts of grain, sugar, oil and shipping space to Britain’s war effort, most analyses found no graver situation than wartime shortages.<sup>123</sup> With a bit of exaggeration, one could wonder exactly which part of the British empire was *not* affected by famine, except for the British Isles.

However, hunger-induced mortality even increased markedly in Western European industrial countries under German occupation, such as France, the Netherlands and Belgium in 1940–1944, along with unoccupied, fascist Italy in 1941–1943.<sup>124</sup> All of this just underscores how widespread the phenomenon was and how important it is to pay attention to it.

Some examples must suffice to illustrate the complex imperialist character of these hunger crises.

German administrations and forces tried to systematically extract foodstuffs and other resources from occupied countries in Europe. Together with worker exploitation, different forms of occupation tributes, food blockades and disrupted agricultural input and other trade, this affected approximately 200 million people, bringing misery to many and causing outright famines in Greece 1941–1944, parts of the German-occupied Soviet territories in 1941–1943 and the Netherlands in 1944–1945. This exploitative occupation forced people in droves into illegalized economic activities and made many farmers and consumers subject to repression. On top of undersupply by providing insufficient food rations which hit interned people hard (including millions of forced workers), the Germans also tried to exclude some population groups largely or entirely from food supply and killed them through hunger, among them Soviet POWs (but no other POWs), disabled people and concentration camp inmates. The murder of large parts of European

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119 Jackson, *War*, 167, 170.

120 Lloyd, *Food*, 58.

121 Killingray and Rathbone, “Introduction”, 79.

122 Westcott, “Impact”, 149.

123 See Lloyd, *Food and Inflation*; Collingham, *Taste*, 131. But Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “*Unsere Opfer*”, 190 mention what they call hunger revolts. For the contributions, see Emad Ahmed Helal, “Egypt’s Overlooked Contribution to World War II”, Liebau et al., *World*, 231–238; Robert Vitalis and Steven Heydemann, “War, Keynesianism, and Colonialism”, Heydemann, *War*, 131.

124 See Gerlach, *Extermination*, 216. See also Collingham, *Taste*, 171–172.

Jewry that came under German assault was fueled in part by the weighty argument of Jews as ‘useless eaters’, especially if they were assessed to be unfit for work, and food policy contributed to the great acceleration of the mass murders of Soviet and Polish Jews in 1941–1942. This culminated when one-third of all the murdered Jews were killed within only four months, from July to October 1942.<sup>125</sup> Thus, their mass annihilation should not be left out of a history of World War II or separated from it but was an intrinsic part of it, a part of imperialist warfare built on the denial of resources to certain population groups.

Under Japanese occupation, attrition left the population of the Dutch East Indies (then emerging Indonesia) miserable in 1944–1945. Reduced production of goods, disturbed transportation networks, initial exports of goods, Japanese financing of the occupation through the printing press and their misguided attempt to reorganize and steer the food economy (including a ban on inter-regency trade), but to a lesser extent direct requisitions by the relatively small occupation force, led to strong inflation, smuggling and black marketeering. People were dressed in rags, while cases of dysentery doubled each year. A large part of the hundreds of thousands of forced laborers outside the colony, as well as many forced workers who remained within Java, perished from privation. Due to a lack of labor force, cattle, transportation capacity and economic incentives, the harvested area and per capita calory supply decreased drastically, especially in 1944–1946, as did production, particularly rice production in Central Java in 1944. In 1945, many poor rural dwellers of Java succumbed to hunger, with the best estimate suggesting 2.4 million deaths.<sup>126</sup> Unlike many urban dwellers, the rural population was not protected by rations.<sup>127</sup>

The modus operandi of the small Japanese occupation forces in Vietnam, who were in cooperation with France’s colonial authorities, was similar. Producing alcohol out of rice (while the production of industrial crops instead of rice

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125 Gerlach, *Extermination*, 100, 215–260.

126 See Huff, “Great”, 627, 634–637, 640–643; van der Eng, *Food*, 20–24, 30, 38; Pierre van der Eng, “Regulation and Control: Explaining the Reduction of Food Production in Java, 1940–6”, Paul Kratoska, ed., *Food Supplies and the Japanese Occupation in South-East Asia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 191–194; William Frederick, *Visions and Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), 127 note 134; Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 11–13; Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java and the Japanese Occupation 1942–1945* (Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1984), emphasizing bad Japanese administration; Ethan Mark, *Japan’s Occupation of Java in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 263–270; Kratoska, *Asian Labor*, 129–234; “The Problem of Rice: Stenographic Notes on the Fourth Session of the Sanyo Kaigi, January 8, 2605, 10:00 A.M.”, *Indonesia* 2 (October 1966): 86, 100–101.

127 Van der Eng, *Food*, 9, 33, 35.

had a lesser impact), forced procurement of rice and Japanese rice removal from Vietnam, a sizable French land tax, temporarily banning the storage of rice, high occupation tributes and money creation by the printing press, interrupted transportation lines due to Allied attacks and a lack of relief efforts (with inter-provincial rice trade suspended for some time) contributed to inflation and hunger, which may have killed between one and two million inhabitants.<sup>128</sup>

The case of Algeria shows an almost seamless exploitation and starvation across political systems. Under Vichy France, it had to deliver a substantial part of its agricultural products to the colonial power and imports of foodstuffs, mineral oil and raw materials dropped steeply, both of which contributed to inflation. Workers' remittances from France also decreased. Very bad harvests in 1940 and 1942 (including that of fruit) left the Muslim population hungry, while the outbreak of typhus resulted in many victims. Mortality due to hunger and disease from 1939 to 1942 almost doubled for the Muslim population and increased by about 50 percent for the European settlers. The famine continued under the Gaullist regime in 1943–1945, when the colony still received few imports, and contributed to motivating the anticolonial uprising in Sétif, which started with a Muslim nationalist demonstration on victory day (May 8, 1945).<sup>129</sup> Several comparative studies have also shown striking similarities between famines in a number of Axis and Allied-occupied areas, colonies or similar regions.<sup>130</sup>

The Allied war economy reached for British-Tanganyika's sisal, rubber, pyrethrum, food and other materials, but Britain did not deem Africans worth much in return, cutting imports to the colony by half until 1942–1943 and deferring payments to it in part so that Tanganyika accumulated a substantial balance of payments surplus. A large percentage of adult men was brought to plantations, farms and mines owned by Europeans. Thus, rural families lacked manpower while relief measures were limited after drought hit in 1942 and 1943.<sup>131</sup> Locals called this "Europe's famine".<sup>132</sup> The situation was similar in neighboring British-Kenya, where European settlers, promising to deliver products to the state (at high pri-

128 See Geoffrey Gunn, "The Great Vietnamese Famine of 1944–45 Revisited", *Asia-Pacific Journal*, no date [2011], [japanfocus.org/geoffrey-gunn/3483/article.html](http://japanfocus.org/geoffrey-gunn/3483/article.html) (accessed November 20, 2014); Huff, "Great", 630–633, 644–646; Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution*, 294–295; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 31 note 53, 33, 98, 100, 126–127.

129 Cantier, *L'Algérie*, 11, 173, 179; Thomas, "Resource War", 232, 240, 248; Christine Levisse-Touzé, *L'Afrique du nord dans la guerre 1939–1945* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 139; Khenouf and Brett, "Algerian Nationalism", 261, 272–273; Jean-Louis Planche, *Sétif 1945: Histoire d'un massacre annoncé* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), esp. 49–52, 72–73, 99–100, 105.

130 Brennan et al., "War"; Bose, "Starvation"; Collingham, *Taste*.

131 Maddox, "Food Disruption", 231–249; Westcott, "Impact", 145–148; Jackson, *British Empire*, 206.

132 Collingham, *Taste*, 136.

ces), became very influential. Many Africans were conscripted to work on their farms and, as a result, were missing from home to plant emergency foods when cold and drought struck in 1942–1943. Because Africans were offered only low procurement prices for their products, including grain, many had planted relatively little, on top of which European farmers had bought much of it as they received higher prices from British authorities than Africans, and there were livestock requisitions as well. This brought about a famine in rural areas in Central Province in 1943, and the settlers had to send many African workers temporarily home to take care of their families. Civil labor conscription was reinstalled in response to settlers' demands in June 1943.<sup>133</sup>

In Iran, the impact of economic exploitation was even more indirect and complex. British and Soviet troops occupied Iran in August 1941, violating the country's neutrality, and were later joined by some U.S. forces. Over 75,000 Allied soldiers were stationed in Iran, and the USSR alone used 85,000 tons of Iranian grain. The British, who controlled Iran's foreign trade, employed 75,000 Iranians, paying them wages without adjusting for inflation, for, among other things, building north-south road connections.<sup>134</sup> The Allies took control of Iran's railways, using much of their capacity as well as half of all trucks. This practice, while facilitating the delivery of five million tons of lend-lease goods from the USA to the Soviet Union (making Iran the second most important delivery corridor), left few means of transportation to ship grain to needy areas within the country.<sup>135</sup> This means that the Allies had high expenditures in Iran from using labor and means of transportation but hardly provided any goods or hard currency payments in return, paying for workers and services in rial provided by the National Bank, which caused inflation that left poor wage earners at risk and gave businesspeople incentives to hoard grain and other goods.<sup>136</sup> In 1942, Allied military expenditure explained almost all of the increase in the circulation of banknotes.<sup>137</sup> According to a U.S. diplomat, Allied monthly expenditure was 300 million rials for the British occupants, 100 million for the Soviet oc-

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133 See Spencer, "Settler Dominance", 504–511; John Lonsdale, "The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya", Killingray and Rathbone, *Africa*, 122–123; Jackson, *British Empire*, 199; Brennan et al., "War", 10–18.

134 McFarland, "Anatomy", 52, 55, 57; Lloyd, *Food*, 162.

135 Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 1; McFarland, "Anatomy", 52.

136 Lloyd, *Food*, 157–169, 179–193, 196–197, 209

137 Lloyd, *Food*, 162–163.

cupants and 15 million for the U.S. occupants.<sup>138</sup> Iranian grain production sank to low levels in 1940–1942, especially in 1941.<sup>139</sup>

All of this led to famine in various provinces amid rampant inflation and low actual food rations (for urban dwellers).<sup>140</sup> In this context, up to 400,000 Iranians died from typhus in 1942–1943, after the British rejected or ignored Iranian pleas for one million doses of vaccine.<sup>141</sup> A high estimate of the number of famine deaths in Iran put it at up to three million. British, Soviet and U.S. representatives and the Iranian public all knew about the famine.<sup>142</sup> Collingham, who did not mention the famine in Iran, praised instead Britain's "Middle East Supply Centre" (inter alia, in charge of Iran) as a "success", "preventing food shortages from sparking off civil unrest" and "cushioning the indigenous population from the impact of the war".<sup>143</sup> In reality, the British, using delaying tactics, sent many words to Iran instead of goods.<sup>144</sup>

An estimated three million people died in the Bengal famine of 1943–1944. Starvation deaths peaked in 1943 and those due to starvation-related diseases in 1944.<sup>145</sup> The case illustrates how colonial exploitation, merciless war measures, the impact of weather, political and administrative incompetence on different levels, reckless profiteering in a class society and ethnoreligious factionalism interacted. Like elsewhere, it also stands for a combination of state dirigisme and market mechanisms. Years of wartime colonial exploitation had driven inflation up and real wages down, especially those of rural workers. Defence measures made high demands on labor and buildings. Besides, many refugees were streaming in.<sup>146</sup> The colonial authorities had encouraged jute cultivation, which reduced rice growing to an extent.<sup>147</sup> When Japanese troops conquered most of Burma in 1942, the British, apprehensive of the Japanese army moving into Bengal, adopted a so-called denial policy, which meant concentrating rice stocks in defensible pla-

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138 Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 294, citing a telegram by Dreyfus, October 12, 1942. Although Soviet troops used Iranian resources and sent 50,000 tons of agricultural goods from Iran to the USSR and were first viewed by Iranians as "exploiters and savages", they consequently acquired a reputation as disciplined and benevolent. *Ibid.*, 432 (quote), 434, 446.

139 Lloyd, *Food*, 356.

140 Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 283, 460, 468, 527–562.

141 See Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 145, 535, 563–577.

142 See in extenso Gholi Majd, *Iran*.

143 Collingham, *Taste*, 123, 131; see the comment by Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 3.

144 See Gholi Majd, *Iran*.

145 Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 55; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 280.

146 Sen, *Poverty*, 75; Knight, *Food Administration*, 72.

147 Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 107.

ces and confiscating or destroying all ships and boats in their reach; consequently, 19,471 boats were removed, 26,675 destroyed and about 20,000 not found. This interrupted transportation that was vital to life in Bengal, a river delta region, it stripped many fishermen of their income and the population of significant amounts of protein.<sup>148</sup> The usual rice imports from Burma (normally constituting six percent of the demand) were cut off by the Japanese advance.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, some harvests in 1942 turned out bad.<sup>150</sup> After the food trade had first been deregulated in 1942, aiding industrialists' hoarding, the grain trade between Indian provinces was banned. The British government rejected providing food imports to India and in particular shipping space to transport relief goods there as a waste, and, for the most part, it also prevented or delayed U.S., Australian and Canadian aid shipments, because "[t]he thing was to win the war".<sup>151</sup> In early 1943, British shipping space in the Indian Ocean had been reduced by 60 percent and moved to the Atlantic, which seemed more important.<sup>152</sup> Not much was done in terms of relief. In August 1943, "an order was passed barring any private organization from feeding more than 50 people in Calcutta".<sup>153</sup> Hope alias Linlithgow, the British viceroy, was well aware of how many people died.<sup>154</sup>

Those who were pushed into the abyss in this situation were largely certain groups of the Bengali rural poor: the families of fishermen, transportation workers, paddy huskers, agricultural laborers and craftsmen, as well as small peasants whose income had dropped greatly.<sup>155</sup> Hoarding and speculation by wealthy farmers and traders added much to their misery by driving up food prices.<sup>156</sup> Notoriously, there were record numbers of land sales because wealthy ruralites took advantage of peasants in distress.<sup>157</sup> The preferential and subsidized supply of over one million workers in Calcutta pulled grain out from the countryside in the interests of greedy industrialists, such as those from the armament and textile

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148 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 82–93; Brennan et al., "War", 43; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 64–66; Knight, *Food Administration*, 75.

149 Knight, *Food Administration*, 26, 43.

150 There are three major harvesting seasons in Bengal.

151 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 79, 214; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 199 (quote); Sen, *Poverty*, 77. Once Churchill also argued that Greeks (formerly starved by him) were more deserving of food aid than Indians: Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 195.

152 Collingham, *Taste*, 125, 151; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 110.

153 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 189.

154 *Ibid.*, 213.

155 Sen, *Poverty*, 63–73.

156 Sen, *Poverty*, 76.

157 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 263, 279.

sector, both British and Indian.<sup>158</sup> What was most strongly publicized at the time was the death and suffering of hunger refugees streaming into Calcutta, but the bulk of the mass death happened in the villages.<sup>159</sup> The local press denounced the reckless behavior of the colonialists.

However, in Henan, it was the Chinese nationalist government that behaved like an occupation army in their own country. It lived off the land, heavy taxes and grain levies served to supply between 300,000 and a million Chinese soldiers in the province, grain and oxen requisitioning continued during the disaster and forced labor of civilians for the troops contributed to the calamity. Moreover, relief was little and late.<sup>160</sup> During the famine, the Chinese government asked Washington for arms, not food.<sup>161</sup> The rural population lost out in a conflict over resource appropriation.<sup>162</sup> The earlier artificial flood had greatly damaged agriculture, followed by drought and heat in 1941–1942, lessening grain production substantially, especially the summer crop of 1942, which was important for local consumption. The same was true in neighboring provinces. Grain stocks were low; consequently, famine set in in 1942–1943.<sup>163</sup> The Chinese regime did not favor inter-provincial grain trade, and the front cut off some potential grain delivery routes and also stripped Henan of its eastern markets for soybeans and cotton to earn cash.<sup>164</sup> At that time, millions affected by the Yellow River flood who still lived as refugees in several provinces including Henan were particularly vulnerable.<sup>165</sup> Others fled now, sold their land, or they sold their relatives, particularly girls, into servitude or prostitution.<sup>166</sup> Millions perished. The communists, by contrast, though not free of blame, behaved in a less exploitative manner toward the peasants.<sup>167</sup> Many locals started to support the Japanese as the lesser threat, hoping for their conquest of Henan. Locals disarmed about 50,000 Chinese troops in 1944 and slaughtered about 10,000 of them, and they repaired some roads that the Chinese army had destroyed to

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158 Sen, *Poverty*, 56, 77; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 8, 13, 46, 143, 162 note 192, 175, 190.

159 See Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 195–199; Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 151–167 with gruesome details.

160 Collingham, *Taste*, 254; Edgerton-Tarpley, “From ‘Nourish the People’”, 459; Edgerton-Tarpley, “Between”, 111–113; Lary, *Chinese People*, 124–126; Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2023–2026; Bose, “Starvation”, 719.

161 Bose, “Starvation”, 720.

162 Micah Muscolino, “Conceptualizing Wartime Flood and Famine in China”, Laakkonen et al., *Long Shadows*, 105–107.

163 Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2012–2032, 2035 note 48; Muscolino, “Violence”, 300.

164 Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2023, 2026–2027, 2044.

165 Muscolino, “Violence”, 300, 302.

166 Lary, *Chinese People*, 125; Edgerton-Tarpley, “Between”, 106.

167 Collingham, *Taste*, 257–260.



block the Japanese advance.<sup>168</sup> Soon after, the area became a communist stronghold.<sup>169</sup> It has to be added that demographic figures indicate that the famine also struck neighboring provinces such as Hubei, Shanxi, Hebei and Shandong hard, with the latter three largely being under Japanese control.<sup>170</sup>

The famines that occurred in different parts of the world shortly after 1945 were in connection with imperialism and under conditions similar to the preceding war years. Contemporaries, also in the United Nations, spoke of a world food crisis until 1948,<sup>171</sup> in which food was distributed very unevenly. Allied-occupied Germany and Austria were not only starved of food (Germany through the foreign annexation of important staple food surplus areas and both countries through the lack of food imports) but also starved of industrial assets and income by occupation powers creating and enforcing new borders, dismantling and removing some of the machinery (according to plans to systematically reduce German industrial production) and restricting German foreign trade by denying it many licenses for importing industrial raw material necessary for production.<sup>172</sup> Among the causes of the Soviet famine of 1946–1947 were sizable grain exports to secure the newly won Soviet zone of influence (Poland and Czechoslovakia), the halting of U.S. controlled UNRRA deliveries to the USSR in 1947 and the disruption caused by the introduction of a new economic system in Soviet-annexed territories, i.e., the collectivization of agriculture (Moldavia, Western Ukraine), against the backdrop of war-related impoverishment, mass homelessness and a drought.<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile, many people in

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168 Collingham, *Taste*, 257; Mitter, *China's War*, 325–326; Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2008.

169 Edgerton-Tarpley, “Between”, 113; Bose, “Starvation”, 726.

170 See Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2042.

171 See Charles Coe, *Food for now or coffins for later; the meaning of the world food crisis* (New York: Farm Research, 1946); “Mitteilungen über die Welternährungswirtschaft der Verwaltung für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten des Vereinigten Wirtschaftsgebietes, Abt. VI Planung und Statistik”, no. 2, 15 August 1949, German Federal Archive, B 116/1856. In this document, the West German authorities complained (incorrectly) that grain “rice deficit countries” of Asia had imported grain after 1945 “and thus aggravated the lack of bread in Europe”.

172 A classical account of West Germany's economic situation is Werner Abelshauser, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980). The situation in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany was not much different.

173 Ganson also cites too high state procurement quotas to favor industrial workers as a reason, but half of the deaths occurred among urban dwellers in a country where urbanites were far less than half of the population. This relativizes Ellman's argument that those who died were primarily those without entitlements, unprotected by the Soviet state. See Ganson, *Soviet Famine*, 95–105, 114; I. M. Volkov, “The Drought and Famine 1946–47”, *Russian Studies in History* 31, 2 (1992): 31–60, esp. 45–46; Michael Ellman, “The 1947 Soviet famine and the entitlement approach to famine”, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24 (2000): 603–630, esp. 606, 612–613, 621.

Spain, and political prisoners in particular, were starving in part because of the country's international isolation, or self-isolation, its policy of autarky and the subsequent lack of agricultural inputs.<sup>174</sup>

The British War Cabinet did not permit the colonial Government of India to apply for UNRRA support for the starving colony. Instead, it donated US\$ 30 million of India's wartime earnings to UNRRA, making India the sixth largest donor of that organization.<sup>175</sup> Deliveries to Europe again became the priority after the official end of the war, and countries like India and Vietnam received little or nothing, through UNRRA or otherwise.<sup>176</sup> In anticipation of this, the Deputy Governor of the Dutch East Indies, Charles van der Plas, who was residing in Australia, wrote the following on March 17, 1945, during the devastating famine in Java and five months before the Japanese surrender:

Absolute world shortage of food, textiles should indeed make us refrain from any promises. We can say, however, that, from the day of liberation on, all goods the country so amply produces shall be properly distributed [. . .].

I have instructed our people, since there is no hope that the United Nations will be able to cope with the terrible food and textile shortage in the Netherlands East Indies, especially Java, to refrain from any promises and to begin preparing the people for the idea the Japanese destructiveness will be the cause of hardships even after liberation.<sup>177</sup>

This attitude was not only irresponsible, it was murderous. On the same day, van der Plas told Dutch collaborators that a part of the Indonesian elite were enemies (but also that the colony needed to be treated with caution so as to not lose it).<sup>178</sup>

The case of Indonesia during its war of decolonization (1945–1949) is illustrative of the immediate postwar period in several ways. Partly as a result of very

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174 See del Arco Blanco and Anderson, "Introduction", 5–6; Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, "The famine that 'never' existed: Causes of the Spanish famine", in del Arco Blanco and Anderson, *Franco's Famine*, 19–35.

175 Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 208.

176 Knight, *Food Administration*, 257–262; Benjamin Zachariah, "The Creativity of Destruction: Wartime Imaginings of Development and Social Policy, c. 1942–1946", Liebau et al., *World*, 574–577; for the famine in Vietnam, see David Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 2013), 327; by contrast, for UNRRA deliveries to Greece, see Michael Palairot, *The Four Ends of the Greek Hyperinflation of 1941–1946* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 72; Charles Shrader, *The Withered Vine: Logistics and the Communist Insurgency in Greece, 1945–1949* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1999), 48.

177 National Archive of Australia, 403/2/1/1, 23, Netherlands East Indies Government, Brisbane, van der Plas to Stokes, Australian Department of External Affairs, 17 March 1945 (copy).

178 See William Frederick, "The Man Who Knew Too Much: Ch.O. van der Plas and the Future of Indonesia, 1927–1950", Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson, eds., *Imperial Policies and Southeast Asian Nationalism 1930–1957* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), 53.

small food imports, acute food crises were reported in 1946–1948 from various parts of Java, often with high mortality,<sup>179</sup> and from several other Indonesian islands, both under Dutch and Republican control.<sup>180</sup> In Surabaya, the death rate rose to 91.9 per thousand in late 1946, a level not even found in any rural area on Java during the 1944–1945 famine. From Surabaya and Semarang, horrendous death rates of 3 to 6 percent per month were reported in early 1947, and food rations (for those who received a ration at all) were at only 600 to 900 calories.<sup>181</sup> In November 1945, an Australian observer commented on calculations about a rice deficit in the six months to come: “I feel that it is very likely that Java faces a famine which may easily mean death through starvation to at least 1 million persons”. According to his report, Indonesian leaders did not see the situation as so grave but anticipated “very difficult times” for coastal towns.<sup>182</sup>

Both sides in the Indonesian war of independence (1945–1949) used food as a weapon. The Dutch blocked the supply of food, and of industrial products such as textiles, to Madura in 1946 and to Republican territories in 1948–1949 and, for instance, did not supply food to people who refused to cooperate with their administration in Yogyakarta in 1949, which was the great majority – in this case, in an area under Dutch control. This policy is likely to have caused deaths.<sup>183</sup> An ob-

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179 Frederick, *Visions*, 280 (Surabaya area, late 1946, under Dutch control); van der Eng, *Food*, 45 (Priangan, West Java, 1946), 54–55 (Surabaya, Semarang and Jakarta), 59 (Mojokerto and elsewhere in East Java), 62–63 (various areas of Java, 1946–1949); Shigeru Sato, “Economic life in villages and towns”, in Peter Post et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 277 (Sukabumi, early 1946); Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution 1945–1950* (Westport: Greenwood, 1974), 126 (Yogyakarta, 1947–48, under Republican control); George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003 [first 1952]), 396 (Yogyakarta, 1948); Frances Gouda with Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism, 1920–1949* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 33 (De langgu region, Central Java, rural area under Republican control).

180 NAA 402/4/1/1, part 1, 210, handwritten note, 29 October 1946 (East Borneo, under Dutch control); *ibid.*, 215, “Extract from Far Eastern Intelligence and Information Report No. 74” up and until 13 October 1946 (Madura, under Republican control); NAA 404/1/1/1, part 1, 63, “[Radio] Djogjakarta”, 18 September 1946 (Borneo and Celebes, under Dutch control); *ibid.*, 64, “[Radio] Djogjakarta”, 23 September 1946 (handwritten note) (Moluccas and South Celebes, under Dutch control); *ibid.*, 79, “Radio Makassar”, 14 August 1946 (Flores, under Republican control); van der Eng, *Food*, 45 (parts of Sumatra, 1946), 59 (Madura, 1947, and North Sumatra, 1948).

181 Frederick, *Visions*, 280; van der Eng, *Food*, 54–55.

182 NAA 404/1/1/1, part 1, 158, memo W. Macmahon Bell to Dr. Burton, 26 November 1945, containing a report by J.E. Isaac, “The Food Situation in Java”. For warnings by Dutch and British officials since late 1945, see van der Eng, *Food*, 44.

183 For Yogyakarta, see Kahin, *Nationalism*, 396–397 and in general 250–252. For Madura, see NAA 402/4/1/1, part 1, 215, “Extract from Far Eastern Intelligence and Information Report”, no. 74,

server linked the communist uprising in Madiun against Republican rule in late 1948 with a steep rise of food prices in an area with a food deficit even at normal times, exacerbated by the Dutch blockade, one million refugees in the region and rural-urban tensions.<sup>184</sup> The Republic practiced food embargos against cities under Dutch control and local food boycotts against Europeans, forcing the Dutch to bring in food especially in 1945–1947.<sup>185</sup> Those who suffered in particular from high prices on the black markets were Indonesian and ethnic Chinese urbanites without Dutch employment, who were not entitled to receive Dutch rations. Organized smuggling to these cities, or trade across the fronts on licenses, became a source of making great profits and amassing wealth, although individual peasant women also carried food there.<sup>186</sup>

Like in Indonesia (and Henan, as mentioned before), mass hunger inspired populations under foreign rule in many countries such as Greece and colonies such as Vietnam and India to organize anti-colonial and in many instances communist political mobilization, as they often refused to stay passive victims.<sup>187</sup> A

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13 October 1946. In general, see Kahin, *Nationalism*, 250–252; van der Eng, *Food*, 56–57, 59–60. In 1947, Dutch authorities painted their occupation of Madura as necessitated by a humanitarian emergency, unconvincing to U.S. and Australian observers: Gouda, *American Visions*, 208–209.

184 George McT. Kahin, “The Crisis and Its Aftermath”, *Far Eastern Survey* 17, 22 (17 November 1948): 262; see also Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1989), 41, 79–80.

185 Van der Eng, *Food*, 48, 53, 56; Frederick, *Visions*, 280; NAA 404/1/1/1, part 1, 139, “Statement of N.E.I. Government on Food Position in Java [ . . . ]”, 25 April 1946 and *ibid.*, 146, W.A.M. Doll, Currency Adviser, “Financial Situation of Java” (travel report, January 1946).

186 See Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution 1945–1949* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991), 42, 77–78, 82; John Smail, *Bandung in the Early Revolution 1945–1946: A Study in the Social History of the Indonesian Revolution* (Singapore: Equinox, 2009 [first 1964]), 155; Tuong Vu, “Of rice and revolution: The politics of provisioning and state-society relations on Java, 1945–49”, *South-East Asia Research* 11 (3), 2003: 253–254; van der Eng, *Food*, 41–43. For peasant women, see T. B. Simatupang, *Report from Banaran: Experiences During the People’s War* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1972), 63.

187 For Henan, see note 96 in this chapter. For Vietnam, see Gunn, *Rice Wars*, 4, 229, 268; Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution*, 294, 335–336, 342, 348–349; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 207–209, 375, 393, 402–425, 550; Marr, *Vietnam*, 320–321; Gunn, *Rice Wars*, 4, 229, 237, 268; Huff, “Great”, 651–653. For Greece, see Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 108–114, 124–125; Hionidou, *Famine*, 96; Violetta Hionidou, “Relief and Politics in Occupied Greece, 1941–4”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 48 (2013): 773–774. For Bengal, see Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 21–49; Joanna Simonow, “Der Hungertod in Bildern: Fotografie in der öffentlichen Debatte um Hungerhilfe in Bengalen 1943”, *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 18 (2021): 346–362. For the acquiescing political language of the nationalists in Indonesia, see Tuong, “Of rice”, especially 256–259; see also Cribb, *Gangsters*, 26, 28; Sato, *War*, 144–148.

graphic expression of this was found in the numerous political graffiti all over these countries, often including the countryside.<sup>188</sup>

## Famines: Inflation and Labor Extraction

However, it is important to understand that the famines in World War II were not only, and not necessarily, caused by a lack of food and the extraction of food. Two other aspects were crucial: the redistribution and exploitation of labor as well as the extraction of resources generally, which led to inflation. Above all, the tributes of the colonies and occupied areas were paid in labor, not food.

Forced labor was an important element in this. The coercion indicated the will to strip countries from resources without pay as well as a strong will to exploit the workforce. All colonial powers in Africa stepped up labor conscription during World War II, including Italy (and Germany), Vichy France, Gaullist France, Britain, Belgium, Portugal and Spain.<sup>189</sup> As David Killingray stated long ago, “conscription of non-combatant labour occurred in every British African territory”.<sup>190</sup> Contrary to the pompous promises made by Gaullist France (which may have been a “Free” France for whites), forced labor in French West Africa and Madagascar continued because European settlers demanded so, it was not officially abolished until 1946, and the last workers were released in 1950. There were many ‘desertions’.<sup>191</sup> Numerous Guineans responded to forced labor for the railways, for road construction, on plantations and for colonial officials (which affected 20,000 in 1943) by fleeing to Liberia and Senegal.<sup>192</sup> The Australian colonial administration recruited forced

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**188** For Greece, see Mazower, *Inside*, 91–92, 113, 116, 278; for northern Vietnam, see Marr, Vietnam 1945, 207; John Kleinen, *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese village* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1999), 76; for Indonesia, see Gouda, *American Visions*, 48, 55.

**189** David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, “Introduction”, in Killingray and Rathbone, *Africa*, 15. They assert, contrary to facts, that Britain “acted more carefully”. See also David Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation in British Colonial Africa for the War Effort, 1939–1946”, Killingray and Rathbone, *Africa*, 70, 78; Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 309–326; for Belgium, see Singiza, *Famine*, 37–44.

**190** Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation”, 78. See also Jackson, *British Empire*, 45.

**191** Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 77; Coates, “The Indian Ocean”, 80; Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique occidentale française (1900–1945)* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 271, 276–277; Catherine Bogosian Ash, “Free to Coerce: Forced Labour during and after the Vichy Years in French West Africa”, Byfield et al., *Africa*, 126.

**192** Elizabeth Schmidt, “Popular Resistance and Anticolonial Mobilization: The War Effort in French Guinea”, Byfield et al., *Africa*, 451.

labor in New Guinea (contemporary Papua New Guinea), where the Allies employed a total of 49,500 people, who had to work 54 hours per week.<sup>193</sup> In the famine year of 1943, 400,000–500,000 people were forced to do work on dykes in Henan province, China, where some died from exhaustion and hunger.<sup>194</sup>

Much of the forced labor was done for private entrepreneurs who aspired to become war profiteers and were, in many cases, successful at that. 84,500 Africans were conscripted in British-Tanganyika for work on private estates, especially Sisal plantations, where food rations were low and conditions miserable. Many estate workers “grew thin” and fell ill.<sup>195</sup> Forced labor increased in British-Kenya in 1941–1942, often to serve European settlers.<sup>196</sup> Much of this also occurred in the British colonies of South Rhodesia (contemporary Zimbabwe), North Rhodesia (Zambia), Tanganyika (Tanzania) and Nigeria, where European estate holders tried to raise their profits.<sup>197</sup> In Vichy-French West Africa, forced labor was reduced for public works but hardly for private (European) employers. The majority of absentee employment in April 1941 was for private employers. In the French colony of Madagascar too, there was an increase in coerced labor.<sup>198</sup> In Portuguese and Spanish Africa, forced labor was also increased because entrepreneurs wanted cheap labor in the wartime boom and the state needed to generate foreign exchange.<sup>199</sup>

Colonial subjects were often also recruited to the military by force, for example in British-Mauritius.<sup>200</sup> “Quotas and round-ups, it would seem, occurred in all parts of Africa” for this purpose.<sup>201</sup> There were manhunts for this in southern British-

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193 Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “Unsere Opfer”, 321; Lamont Lindstrom, “Working Encounters: Oral Histories of World War II Labor Corps from Tanna, Vanuatu”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 398–400.

194 Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, “Between War and Water: Farmer, City, and State in China’s Yellow River Flood of 1938–1947”, *Agricultural History* 90, 1 (2016): 112–113.

195 Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation”, 86; Westcott, “Impact”, 147 (quote). For British Subsaharan Africa more generally, see Jackson, *British Empire*, 45.

196 Spencer, “Settler Dominance”, 504–505.

197 Alfred Tembo, *The Impact of the Second World War on Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1939–1953*, Ph.D dissertation, Bloemfontein: University of the Free State, 2015, 18–20, 206–213.

198 Ginio, *French Colonialism*, 76–89, esp. 78–79; Fall, *Travail forcé*, 249; Eric Jennings, *Vichy sous les tropiques: La Révolution nationale à Madagascar, en Guadeloupe, en Indochine 1940–1944* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2004), 100–105; Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, “Unsere Opfer”, 104. For Upper Volta (today’s Burkina Faso), see Brigitte Reinwald, “Zwischen Imperium und Nation: Westafrikanische Veteranen der französischen Armee am Beispiel des spätkolonialen Obervolta”, Gerhard Höpp and Brigitte Reinwald, eds., *Fremdeinsätze: Afrikaner und Asiaten in europäischen Kriegen, 1914–1945* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), 237.

199 Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 310.

200 Jackson, *War*, 83.

201 See Jackson, *Botswana*, 12 and for some qualifications, 31–56.

Tanganyika (Tanzania) and in Basutoland (contemporary Lesotho), and some men escaped to toil as mine workers to avoid military conscription.<sup>202</sup> British recruitment often worked through local chiefs, which permitted the colonialists to state that they used no coercion.<sup>203</sup> During the famine in Central Province, British-Tanganyika, military recruitment was suspended from February to April 1943.<sup>204</sup> In all of British-Africa, over half a million male African soldiers were recruited for the military, with a preference for men from what the British perceived as “martial races”.<sup>205</sup> The same applied to colonial India, where the British recruited over two million men, technically as volunteers, especially from rural lower classes and preferably from Punjab and the Northwestern Frontier Province and among Muslims, peaking in 1942.<sup>206</sup> The about 15,000 men that Britain recruited in North Rhodesia (contemporary Zambia) for the military “served in Kenya, Somaliland, Madagascar, Ceylon, Burma, Palestine and India”; it was similar with those from contemporary Malawi.<sup>207</sup> Of course, sovereign states also conscripted military personnel by force, like the Guomindang army in Henan, China, in the famine year of 1943, where some who were trying to escape were shot.<sup>208</sup>

However, forced labor did not only increase in countries under control of the Allies and the Axis. Forced labor impositions in neutral Portugal’s colonies of Mozambique and Angola were stepped up dramatically, although less so in Portuguese-Guinea (contemporary Guinea Bissau). The conditions of such labor were especially tragic in São Tomé.<sup>209</sup> As an official measure to combat famine, 1,700 Cape Verdeans were shipped to São Tomé and Príncipe to toil on cocoa plantations, which lacked workers.<sup>210</sup>

Elsewhere, workers were not recruited by force; nevertheless, their work in the interest of the Allies (or Axis, in other cases) meant the extraction of resources from the country and an increase in the food demand by non-self suppliers, as it was in occupied Iran, where 70,000 workers and an additional 100,000 oil work-

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202 Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation”, 77, 79.

203 Overy, *Blood*, 390.

204 Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation”, 79.

205 Disu Oleyemisi Abayomi and Raheem Oluwafunmini, “Fighting for Britain: Examining British Recruitment Strategies in Nigeria”, Murray, *Unknown Conflicts*, 12–18; Tembo, *Impact*, 70–72; Overy, *Blood*, 389.

206 Kamtekar, “Different War Dance”, 193–194; Raghavan, *India’s War*, 65, 74.

207 Tembo, *Impact*, 3–4; for Malawi, see Timothy Lovering, “Military Service, Nationalism and Race: The Experience of Malawians in the Second World War”, Liebau et al., *World*, 111.

208 Edgerton-Tarpley, “Between”, 111.

209 Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 320–323.

210 Newitt, “Portuguese African Colonies”, 234; Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 319.



ers received a special food supply in 1941–1942.<sup>211</sup> In Pacific island colonies, Allied forces (Australians, U.S. and British) used locals under various forms of employment between forced and voluntary wage labor.<sup>212</sup>

The link to famine was that the absence of many adult men led to a situation where not enough labor was available on farms when crops failed (usually because of drought), which, in turn, led to hunger among the residue families. In British-Kenya's Central Province, 40 percent of adult males were employed outside their province in the famine year of 1943, not counting those in military service.<sup>213</sup> In British-Tanganyika, the African work force employed by Europeans grew from 240,000 to 340,000 during the war, and in the famine year of 1943, it was estimated that 45 percent of the men were absent from their homes.<sup>214</sup> Elsewhere, similar rates of absence of about 30 percent of men in the countryside, including in North Rhodesia (contemporary Zambia) and parts of Bechuanaland (Botswana), led to reduced food production. Meanwhile, the population of towns, and especially mining areas, increased, and so did the demand by non-self suppliers of food.<sup>215</sup> In French New Caledonia and British Fiji, the U.S. military employed five percent of the total population each (a dimension similar to the British in Tanganyika).<sup>216</sup> Usually, it was not the forced workers who suffered from famine, but those in northern Nigeria (inter alia, toiling in tin mines) were in fact afflicted with lack of food, bad housing conditions and lack of medical treatment, which led to high death rates among them in 1943. However, the rural population was more strongly affected.<sup>217</sup>

One can assume that similar mechanisms as the ones that Ulrich Herbert has pinpointed for the German forced labor program in World War II prevented those who organized this forced labor, profiteered from it or witnessed it among the power-holding population from the understanding that this was criminal.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 85.

<sup>212</sup> Lindstrom and White, "War Stories", 32; Robert Franco, "Samoan Representations of World War II and Military Work: The Emergence of International Movement Networks", White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 382, 384.

<sup>213</sup> Spencer, "Settler Dominance", 512; see also Brennan et al. "War", 11, 16.

<sup>214</sup> Westcott, "Impact", 147; see also Brennan et al., "War", 20–21.

<sup>215</sup> Tembo, *Impact*, 77–78, 203–204; Brian Mokopagosi III., "The Impact of the Second World War: the Case of Kareneng in the then Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1939–1950", Killingray and Rathbone, *Africa*, 160, 167.

<sup>216</sup> Lindstrom and White, "War Stories", 32.

<sup>217</sup> Rheinisches JournalistInnenbüro, "*Unsere Opfer*", 139; Carolyn Brown, "African Labor in the Making of World War II", Byfield et al., *Africa*, 44; Buchanan, "Globalizing", 263–264 estimates that 10,000 of the tin miners died.

<sup>218</sup> See Ulrich Herbert, "Arbeiterschaft im 'Dritten Reich': Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15, 1989: 352.

In a similar vein, Lizzie Collingham spoke of the “quiet and unobtrusive nature of death” in World War II famines.<sup>219</sup> Creating conditions of violence or abetting them allowed people to pretend that there was no violence.

While discussing the famines in Greece, Bengal, Henan and Tonkin, Richard Overy stated that “the food deficit was artificially created by military seizures, the greed of middlemen and incompetence or indifference of authorities”.<sup>220</sup> This list is important but incomplete. Overy himself pointed in addition to market distortion, rising food demand, the large-scale movement of people and the dispossession of some, the role of naval sieges and the denial of shipping space for food deliveries, making the following more comprehensive argument: “Famine was the ultimate consequence of wartime disruption in both Europe and Asia.”<sup>221</sup> Not only was the food trade disrupted, but, most importantly, so were general economies. As Richard Bessel aptly summarized, those who died from World War II famines were “victims not just of the misguided, incompetent, or willful policies of regimes concerned more with fighting a war than with safeguarding the welfare of civilians, they were also victims of economic conditions created by the war, in particular inflation [ . . . ] leading to soaring grain prices that put basic foodstuffs beyond the reach of vulnerable social groups” and the impact of other “economic imbalances”.<sup>222</sup> One needs to add, these economic conditions and imbalances were made not by ‘the war’, but by people, and those who suffered were especially disenfranchised due to the color of their skin, their legal status or their geographic location (such as rural dwellers).

Thus, food was not even the most important item the extraction (or blockade) of which led to famine. The main issue was the drain of all sorts of resources, including monetary tributes, goods and services, which caused shortages and inflation. There have been some incomplete attempts to quantify these. For instance, both Germany and Britain “relied on substantial contributions from [ . . . ] imperial or occupied territories” – according to one estimate, Reichsmark 115 billion for the former and £3.4 billion for the latter for unpaid goods from the colonies.<sup>223</sup> On the German side, this included the use of different techniques, such as occupied countries’ official payments for occupation costs, currency manipulations, bloated clear-

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<sup>219</sup> Collingham, *Taste*, 1.

<sup>220</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 416.

<sup>221</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 414–416, quote 414; Richard Overy, “Frontline II: Civilians at War”, in Overy, *Oxford Illustrated History*, 306.

<sup>222</sup> Bessel, “Unnatural Deaths”, 338.

<sup>223</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 400. At the rate of 1941, £3.4 billion were the equivalent of about RM 40 billion, based on figures in Bank für Internationalen Zahlungsausgleich, *Zwölfter Jahresbericht*, 1. April 1941 bis 31. März 1942, 28 and 36.

ing accounts, requisitions, individual plunder, Germans buying cheaply on black markets in occupied countries in an unequal exchange and appropriating part of the property of foreign Jews.<sup>224</sup>

Similar things applied to other colonizers and occupants. Take the example of British-India, where industrial and agricultural production rose only slightly during the war, except for a few sectors like the railroads even though they were forced to give 10 percent of their material (tracks, locomotives and railroad cars) to other parts of the British Empire.<sup>225</sup> Britain let the colony pay officially for half of her expenses in India and deferred payments for the other half, and goods for £1.3 billion, to a period after the war through a “forced loan”. India’s sterling balances saw their greatest growth in 1943 and 1944.<sup>226</sup> Distorting what had happened, Churchill spoke in cabinet of “the monstrous idea that we should spend millions about millions in the defence of India, then be told to clear out, and on top of it all we owe India vast sums incurred on her behalf” and was assisted in 1944 by John Maynard Keynes, who proposed to repudiate Britain’s debt to India.<sup>227</sup> Britain had exploited Indians greatly, but one should keep in mind that others benefitted from India as well: the USA emerged as India’s biggest trade partner during World War II.<sup>228</sup> This profiteering may explain in part the U.S. government’s reluctance to mitigate the Bengal famine.<sup>229</sup> The Bengal famine and “Argentina’s sudden wealth” were both the interconnected result of a warped “world market” during the global conflict, as Ernest Mandel argued.<sup>230</sup>

Research on colonial Africa has done much to illuminate the mechanisms involved. It demonstrated, as Ashley Jackson summarized, a “tightening of the colonial grip on African economies” and an intensification of the “imperial extraction of resources”.<sup>231</sup> “Europe’s war-time relation with Africa is essentially one of increased economic exploitation”, concluded David Killingray and David Rathbone, stating that trade was reduced and redirected, some manpower was lost, goods and financial gifts were sent to the colonial powers and consumer goods lacking because production for local consumption did not rise and shipping space for outside

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224 See Götz Aly, *Hitlers Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

225 Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance”, 195; Raghavan, *India’s War*, 326–329, 332–334, 338.

226 Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance”, 197–198 (quote 197); Raghavan, *India’s War*, 339; Overy, *Blood*, 913; Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War*, 45.

227 Raghavan, *India’s War*, 340–341 (quote 340).

228 Raghavan, *India’s War*, 219–220.

229 See M. S. Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine of 1943: The American Response* (Delhi et al.: Vikas, 1973); Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 287.

230 Mandel, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 76.

231 Jackson, *Botswana*, 8, 9.

deliveries was denied.<sup>232</sup> Referencing Tom Stoppard's dictum that "war is capitalism with the gloves off", Nicholas Westcott stated that in World War II "Tanganyika experienced colonialism with the gloves off".<sup>233</sup> In July 1939, before Britain even entered the war, British colonialists developed secret plans to restrict imports to Nigeria and commercial exports to extract resources from that colony.<sup>234</sup> In British Africa, the colonial governments became monopoly purchasers of agricultural products, paying farmers less than world market prices.<sup>235</sup> The District Commissioner in Maun, British-Bechuanaland (Botswana), outlined the results in May 1945 thus: "The African is being drained of his wealth at an alarming rate and the country is becoming poorer."<sup>236</sup> From October 1940 to October 1941, French North Africa shipped over one-quarter of their fruit, vegetables and grain to France, along with large amounts of phosphate ore.<sup>237</sup> Imperialists in the Second World War claimed the 'right' to appropriate all resources of the world for themselves.

Inflation was the result. In British-India, banknote circulation rose sevenfold from 1938/1939 to 1945 (while real GDP increased just by 10.6 percent), and the steepest inflation occurred in early 1943, precisely when the famine in Bengal and some other regions built up.<sup>238</sup> Even the price of *rationed* food rose by 300 percent, as compared to 18 percent in Britain.<sup>239</sup> Increased British spending in India and cash availability, primarily in cities, worked in such a way that food was sucked out of rural areas into cities.<sup>240</sup> In British Northern Rhodesia (contemporary Zambia), there were two separate cost of living indices within one territory: the one for Europeans showed an increase of 36 percent and the one for Africans showed 90 percent.<sup>241</sup> Worse, from 1941 to 1945, the price index in the Japanese-occupied Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) rose 66-fold, and, as elsewhere, farmers were offered next to no consumer goods in exchange for agricultural products.<sup>242</sup> Edward Lloyd, a leading British food administrator before and during the war, in hindsight regarded inflation as key to the danger of famine and identified the fact as decisive that colonies and occupied countries were affected by heavy Allied expenditure

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232 Killingray and Rathbone, "Introduction", 8–9, quote 9.

233 Westcott, "Impact", 143.

234 Abayomi and Oluwafunmiyi, "Fighting", 9–10.

235 Tembo, *Impact*, 4.

236 Jackson, *Botswana*, 123.

237 Levisse-Touzé, *L'Afrique*, 139.

238 Raghavan, *India's War*, 326, 347; Knight, *Food*, 61. Different data but with the same tendency are in Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance", 198 note 41.

239 Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance", 201.

240 Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 46.

241 Tembo, *Impact*, 155.

242 Huff, "Great", 642–643.

without a matching influx of goods, and indeed facing the extraction of goods.<sup>243</sup> In the parts of China under Guomindang control, money circulation was fabi 1.4 billion in 1937 and 462.3 billion in 1945. Although hyperinflation seems to have hit Henan only in 1943–1944, food prices rose beyond reach for the poor already during the famine in 1942–1943.<sup>244</sup> In Greece, hyperinflation occurred in no less than four phases in 1941–1946, after which inflation was by no means over.<sup>245</sup> Japan did not extract huge amounts of goods from Southeast Asia, but it did extract a great amount of labor, often paying nothing or with scrip. Except for Thailand and French-Indochina, inflation in Japan's zone of influence in Southeast Asia rose much higher than the increase in currency supply, and three countries suffered from hyperinflation – Burma, Malaya and, late in the war, the Philippines.<sup>246</sup>

These are just examples. To my knowledge, there was not a single occupied country or colony where there was no substantial inflation during World War II. Those who suffered most from it and from shortages in Asia and Africa were in the final effect rural, and not urban, dwellers. The former were not protected by (even meager) food rations or political agency, were disenfranchised and marginalized. These included landless workers and those who became dependent on food purchases when their crops failed, as well as rural refugees starving to death on city streets as strangers.<sup>247</sup> Building on Sugata Bose, Anthony Garnaut spoke of “similar agrarian systems and a wartime political economy that conspired to deprive landless labourers of their customary food entitlements”.<sup>248</sup>

The literature reports no wartime famines from Latin America but its citizens suffered from inflation and shortages of goods and transportation because their countries delivered relevant materials to the USA at fixed, unfavorable prices. All governments had joined the economic warfare against the Axis, although most refrained from sending troops and six South American countries did not declare war on Axis countries before 1945.<sup>249</sup> A notable case is Bolivia, which lost at least US\$670 million in tin exports to the USA at artificially low prices (not counting other

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243 Lloyd, *Food*, 179–193, 196–197, 209. Lloyd's main point of reference was occupied Iran.

244 Overy, *Blood*, 401; Bose, “Starvation”, 714, 718.

245 Palairot, *Four Ends*, (for 1946–1951, see 95).

246 See Gregg Huff and Shinobu Majima, “Financing Japan's World War II Occupation of South-east Asia”, *Journal of Economic History* 73, 4 (2013): 937–977, esp. 938, 953–954.

247 For example, see Huff, “Great”, 639–641 on Vietnam and Indonesia; Kamtekar, “A Different War Dance”, 218, on Bengal. This is contrary to the statement in Jackson, *Botswana*, 11.

248 Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2011.

249 See the contributions in Thomas Leonard and John Bratzel, eds., *Latin American during World War II* (Lanham et al.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), esp. 10, 44.

resources), which contributed to inflation.<sup>250</sup> Wherever they were capable and found it necessary, the Allies occupied countries to exploit them, as it was with British and U.S. troops being deployed to Congo, violating the neutrality that Belgian colonial authorities had declared, helping to take out copper, tin and uranium.<sup>251</sup>

Given the hectic economic activity and growth in some sectors of the economy and the rise of public demand for all sorts of resources, Amartya Sen has called the Bengal famine a “boom famine”, and Sugata Bose has extended this judgment to the famines in northern Vietnam and Henan (China).<sup>252</sup> This points to the great role of states in victimizing primarily rural dwellers and great socioeconomic imbalances.

In the final analysis, what imperialist powers extracted from colonies and occupied countries can be expressed as labor value. (But it can also be conceptualized as energy flows enforced from constantly enlarged rear areas of the war<sup>253</sup>).

Economic warfare is a weapon of choice of dominant, established powers. During World War II, Germany and Japan were targeted this way, but to overcome the strains and difficulties this created and in consonance with their ambitions, these two countries also practiced economic warfare against the population of large territories that they conquered precisely to appropriate their resources. In other words, they tried to deflect Allied economic warfare at the cost of dozens of millions, who were condemned to misery through resource denial, as a result of which millions perished, including many little children. With unmistakable clarity, Hermann Göring said in reference to the German-occupied territories in a radio speech on 4 October 1942: “If people go hungry, certainly not in Germany!”<sup>254</sup> Secret service surveillance reports show that many Germans wanted Soviet prisoners of war to starve to death or die otherwise to make food available for Germans.<sup>255</sup> They thought so as a matter of course.

One example is particularly telling. As corrupt as Iran’s members of parliament and other political elites were, at one point they balked at the idea of allowing the British larger expenses within Iran (actually to be financed by the Iranian government). The minister of the USA in Tehran, Louis Dreyfus, commented

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250 See Jürgen Lieser, *“Unser Reichtum hat immer unsere Armut hervorgebracht”: Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart wirtschaftlicher Abhängigkeit und politischer Unterdrückung in Bolivien* (Bonn and Trier: Informationsstelle Lateinamerika und Bolivienhilfe, 1982, second edition), 203–204, 236.

251 See Overy, *Blood*, 110, and Byfield, “Producing”, 33–34.

252 Sen, *Poverty*, 75; Bose, “Starvation”, 703.

253 For energy flows, see Muscolino, “Conceptualizing”, 97–115, esp. 110.

254 “Wenn gehungert wird, in Deutschland auf keinen Fall!” The speech is in Götz Aly, ed., *Volkes Stimme: Skepsis und Führervertrauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2006), 149–194, quote 155.

255 See Gerlach, *Extermination*, 234.

on October 24, 1942: “Deputies fail to understand Iran’s basic monetary questions or to comprehend the urgent and overriding nature of [the] Allied problem in Iran. They are so obsessed with the dangers of inflation and starvation that they cannot see conditions in [a] realistic or practical light.”<sup>256</sup> In plain words, Allies came first, whites mattered, and having all Iranians survive was impractical – how could anybody not understand this? Already in April 1942, Maurice Peterson, assistant undersecretary in the British Foreign Ministry, had commented on Iran by stating that Britain had “no desire to bully the Iranians, but sometimes it is useful to have a bit of bullying in the air”.<sup>257</sup> Blackmailed by the British, who denied food deliveries to Iran and generally used “these situations [of food scarcity] as a lever to obtain their desires”, Iran’s parliament gave in on November 19, 1942 in exchange for nothing more than a vague Allied declaration of intent that, although feeding Iranians was the responsibility of the Iranian state, the Allies would do everything possible to help (which, for the most part, remained empty words).<sup>258</sup> As a result, Iranians starved to death in droves, just as the members of parliament had apprehended. It was foreseeable, and it was foreseen, not only in this case. Besides, it could be foreseen all the more in this case since the British-Russian occupation of Iran in the First World War had already led to famine and disease, which claimed up to *nine* million lives.<sup>259</sup>

Despite it all, it is important to realize that World War II had an “only limited environmental impact”.<sup>260</sup> By no means was imperialism almighty. In most cases, the imperialist powers were unable to increase the *production* of ‘natural resources’ through mining, agriculture and forestry (some examples of this would be the German-occupied Soviet territories and British-India, as well as the wartime story of rubber<sup>261</sup>). Their power to mobilize nature turned out to be limited, putting the concept of ‘anthropocene’ into question. It was precisely because they were incapable of taking possession of the entire planet ecologically that imperi-

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256 Quoted in Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 300. This document puts a big question mark behind Gholi Majd’s interpretation according to which Dreyfus was a positive exception among imperialist politicians in occupied Iran.

257 Quoted in Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 103.

258 See Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 293, 389 (the quote is from a Dreyfus report of 24 February 1943). The Allies hardly delivered any food but the British sold some gold in Iran in 1943–1944, which in substance meant that they paid for some of the Iranian services they had received. See also Lloyd, *Food*, 164–165, 211–212.

259 See Gholi Majd, “Three Famines”, 93–97 with a high-end estimate.

260 Mawdsley, “World War II”, 42. In my view, this statement is corroborated by the entire volume of Laakkonen et al., *Long Shadows* devoted to the environmental history of the war.

261 For the latter see William G. Clarence-Smith, *The Battle for Rubber in the Second World War: Cooperation and Resistance*, working paper (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009).



alist powers turned to fiercer, murderous exploitation of humans and the exclusion of some groups from consumption through resource denial.

Generally, World War II famines had complex mechanisms and were based on a drain of all kinds of resources. Although this is also true for British-Bengal and the German-occupied Soviet territories, a different sort of calculation is striking: Bengal imported 296,000 tons of grain in 1941 but exported 185,000 tons in 1942, a difference of about 480,000 tons or the consumption of 2.4 million people at 200 kilograms per capita and year, and about three million died in the famine (and British-India exported 360,000 tons of grain from April 1, 1942 to March 31, 1943, in comparison to imports of over one million tons before the war, the difference equalizing the consumption of seven million people; but the British army's demand of 450,000 tons in 1943 explains the difference only in part).<sup>262</sup> As for the Germans, they extracted 2.1 million tons of grain annually from the occupied Soviet territories in 1941–1944, sufficient to feed 10.5 million people, and killed or let die 7–9 million people.<sup>263</sup> Thus, the direct extraction of food did matter, of course.

Racism was an integral part of the structures and practices during the war. The utilitarian justifications of violence, including 'sacrifices', were racist if the lives of *some* should be sacrificed for higher values; this is obvious if one sees *who* was sacrificed. In German-occupied Europe, official food rations differed widely on a hierarchy based on the construct of race and ethnicity, but also a country's degree of industrialization and its alliance status with Germany. Those with lower rations were also exposed to greater insecurity and less dignity, since they had to turn to illegalized economic activities.<sup>264</sup> According to Lizzie Collingham, "even in the more benign sphere of the Allies, race was still a deciding factor in determining who was well fed, who went hungry and who starved".<sup>265</sup> White settlers in British-Kenya in 1941–1942 received about double the price for their corn than what African farmers were paid.<sup>266</sup> In the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (contemporary Zambia), butter rations were only for white people. Moreover, officials distinguished between

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262 For data and some considerations, see Knight, *Food*, 19, 48, 74, 76, 229, 249, and Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 67, 130. See also Raghavan, *India's War*, 338; Brennan et al., "War", 44. Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 77 talks of exports of 232,000 tons of grain from January to April 1942. However, according to Sen, *Poverty*, 60–61, 200,000 tons of grain were imported to Bengal in the following year of 1943.

263 For food procurement, see Rolf-Dieter Müller, ed., *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten: Der Abschlussbericht des Wirtschaftsstabes Ost und Aufzeichnungen eines Angehörigen des Wirtschaftskommandos Kiew* (Boppard: Harald Boldt, 1991), 98.

264 See already Boris Shub, *Starvation over Europe (Made in Germany)* (n.p. [New York]: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1943); Gerlach, *Extermination*, 215–260.

265 Collingham, *Taste*, 263.

266 Judith Byfield, "Producing for the War", Byfield et al., *Africa*, 36–37.

two different cost of living indices, one for Europeans and one for Africans, and the latter rose much steeper than the former in 1939–1946. Further, among returning military veterans in British African colonies, whites received land whereas Africans did not.<sup>267</sup> The racist rationing system was similar to Dakar, Senegal, under the rule of Vichy France, where under circumstances of food scarcity, bread was for whites only. It was the same in Vietnam under French rule since December 1944.<sup>268</sup> In the British-occupied parts of Iran, Polish refugees – who in Euro-American accounts are often depicted as deprived – received in 1942 much more food per capita than famished Iranians.<sup>269</sup> In the British military, whites received higher food rations than colonial subjects.<sup>270</sup> African British colonial soldiers in conquered Ethiopia in 1941 “angrily noted that Italian POWs lived better than they did”,<sup>271</sup> and in neighboring Eritrea, another former Italian colony, anti-Jewish racial laws were abolished under the British but anti-African ones were not.<sup>272</sup> Regardless, during World War II, marriages between Africans and Europeans were still banned in British-Kenya,<sup>273</sup> and the “racist use of the term ‘monkey’ to describe Africans appears to have been a universal complaint” of Malawians (colonial subjects from British-Nyasaland) who reported about their service in the British military during World War II.<sup>274</sup>

## Famines: Other Factors in Conditions of Violence

Ruthless economic warfare killed millions, but not only colonial rulers or foreign occupiers bore the responsibility for this. Economic warfare was also about blockades and sieges, which came from all sides.<sup>275</sup> In this context, Churchill was already known in France for his World War I policies as “the famisher”.<sup>276</sup> The German

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<sup>267</sup> See Tembo, *Impact*, 147, 155, 234.

<sup>268</sup> Ginio, *French Colonialism*, 62; Gunn, *Rice Wars*, 240.

<sup>269</sup> Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 223.

<sup>270</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 398.

<sup>271</sup> Parsons, “Military Experiences”, 7. African American and Mexican workers on U.S. farms made the same experience in comparison with German POWs working there: Buchanan, “Globalizing”, 263.

<sup>272</sup> Giulia Barrea, “Wrestling with Race at the Eve of Human Rights: The British Management of the Color Line in Post-Fascist Eritrea”, Byfield et al. *Africa*, 259–275.

<sup>273</sup> Bethwell Ogot, “Mau Mau and Nationhood: The untold story”, in: E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale, eds., *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority & Narration* (Oxford et al.: Ohio University Press 2003), 27.

<sup>274</sup> Lovering, “Military Service”, 116.

<sup>275</sup> O’Grada, *Famine*, 229.

<sup>276</sup> Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 33.

siege of Leningrad is the most obvious example in the context of World War II, during which 600,000 to one million of the three million Soviet inhabitants died due to cold and hunger (whereas comparatively few died of bombardments).<sup>277</sup> Germany occupied areas that normally produced a large part of Soviet food and other goods, a loss that greatly contributed to famine on the Soviet side in 1942–1943, and Japan conquered areas that produced much of Chinese food, causing a similar effect in unoccupied China.<sup>278</sup> Allied operations also cut off economic relations. Since August 1940, a British naval blockade interrupted overseas imports to continental Europe via the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.<sup>279</sup> There was also an Allied blockade against Axis transports in the Indian Ocean.<sup>280</sup> With this, they also prevented food deliveries to Axis-occupied countries deliberately and systematically. This is why historians have accused Britain of bearing part of the responsibility for the Greek famine (which was also caused by Italian and German resource and labor extraction and occupation costs, the Bulgarian annexation of Greece's north, local hoarding and speculation).<sup>281</sup> Likewise, Gopal Haridas, a physician who had treated many cases of beriberi in children in Singapore during the Japanese occupation, many of which died, explained in 1947 the wartime “shortage of essential food-stuffs” there in part by “the stranglehold exerted by the Allies on Japanese communications”.<sup>282</sup> This is to say, many people died of interlocking, competing regimes of resource extraction and denial. Here, the word “regime” means an order created by not only states, but also myriad individuals.

The Allies even largely prevented food aid deliveries out of their countries to Jews and other camp prisoners in Axis countries until 1944 – except for sending many millions of parcels to Allied prisoners of war in Axis hands.<sup>283</sup> With its naval blockades, Britain also contributed to one of the deadliest famines of the war in relative terms in the Portuguese colony of Cape Verde.<sup>284</sup> The famines or famine-

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277 Ganzenmüller, *Das belagerte Leningrad*, esp. 238–239.

278 For China, see Collingham, *Taste*, 250.

279 Collingham, *Taste*, 66.

280 For its efficiency, see the figures in Henri Labrousse, *L'Océan Indien dans la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: Economica, 2007), 75–78, 81–88.

281 See Hagen Fleischer, *Im Kreuzschatten der Mächte: Griechenland 1941–1944* (Frankfurt a.M. et al.: Peter Lang, 1986), 116, 122, 125; Overy, “Front Line II”, 305.

282 G.[opal] Haridas, “Infantile Beri-beri in Singapore in the Latter Part of the Japanese Occupation”, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 22, 1947: 26.

283 See Jan Láníček and Jan Lambertz, eds., *More Than Parcels: Wartime Aid for Jews in Nazi-Era Camps and Ghettos* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2022).

284 Collingham, *Taste*, 124. The Portuguese responded with small corn deliveries from their colony of Angola, a ban on sugar cultivation (for rum production) and with shipping laborers to other colonies: Clarence-Smith, “Impact”, 319.

like situations in Vichy French colonies at or in the Indian Ocean (French Somaliland, Réunion) and, to an extent, in French-Algeria, as well as the famines in the Japanese colonies in the West Pacific were due to U.S., British and Australian attacks by sea, submarine warfare and air. These actions aimed to prevent any transportation activity and, in the Pacific, starve the Japanese troops.<sup>285</sup> In part, they succeeded, also because of the surprising fact that some Japanese would rather starve than rob Micronesians, who called them “walking ‘stick men’” (which was unlike Japanese actions in Thailand).<sup>286</sup> U.S. sea mining, bombing and submarine warfare against shipping and the railways also played a major role in the lack of transport from south to north in French Indochina, which helped cause the Tonkin famine that probably killed more than one million people – and the U.S. military was aware of their impact.<sup>287</sup> It was not by accident that the U.S. bombing campaign against Japan in 1944–1945 was called “Operation Starvation”.<sup>288</sup>

Lizzie Collingham defended the U.S. use of atomic bombs against Japan in August 1945 with the amazing argument that this allegedly saved many Japanese from famine, disregarding the fact that, as she herself mentioned in another part of her book, 100,000 Japanese starved to death in Tokyo alone from August to November 1945 under U.S. occupation. Similar conditions also prevailed in other parts of Japan.<sup>289</sup> It is perhaps indicative of the magnitude of the problem of hunger that Nagasaki Medical College, the precursor of Nagasaki University, was inoperative for one month after the nuclear explosion in August 1945 (many professors and students were absent from the city, survived and started to work again on an outside campus), whereas in Tokyo, the university was closed down for two months in late 1945 because of the famine.<sup>290</sup>

Portuguese East Timor (contemporary Timor Leste) is a case of yet another type of imposed famine. After Australian troops violated Portuguese neutrality first, it was occupied by Japanese troops in 1942. The Australians continued fighting there until December 1942, after which they left small commandos behind, harassing the Japanese with the help of local aides. The Japanese troops, who also

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285 For the Pacific, see, for example, Nero, “Time”, 120–127; Lin Poyer, “Micronesian Experiences of the War in the Pacific”, White and Lindstrom, *Pacific Theatre*, 85–86. For French Somaliland, Réunion and Algeria, see the literature mentioned in notes 117, 118 and 129 in this chapter.

286 For example, see Suzanne Falgout, “Lessons from Wartime Pohnpei”, Geoffrey White, ed., *Remembering the Pacific War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991), 126; for Thailand, see account by Kihei Matsuhara, Schaarschmidt, *Schrei*, 74.

287 See Huff, “Great”, 646–649; see also Tønnesson, *Vietnamese Revolution*, 294 and 303 note 113.

288 O’Grada, *Famine*, 230.

289 Collingham, *Taste*, 313–316, 467; see also Hedinger, Achse, 379.

290 For Tokyo, see account by Akira Miuri, Terkel, “*Good War*”, 206. For Nagasaki, see “Nagasaki University”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagasaki\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagasaki_University) (last accessed August 31, 2023).

found local allies, reacted by destroying many villages, food stores and trees needed for food production, preventing one planting season, and with arrests, torture, rape and executions. All of this forced the rural population into the bush, where many died of hunger and disease. Estimates about deaths range from 40,000 to 60,000 victims, including ethnic Chinese whom the Japanese herded in camps and some East Timorese who died from Australian aerial attacks. The Australian press celebrated the fact that their troops forced Japan to keep a full division on the island that could not be used elsewhere, but some troops felt upon their retreat that they had betrayed the East Timorese “and brought nothing but misery to these poor people”.<sup>291</sup> This case shows that the prime responsibility was with the Japanese, but the Australians were involved, as were locals in a fratricidal conflict, all co-producing conditions of violence.

More generally, conditions creating deadly famines were not only imposed by foreign rulers. In part, it was compatriots who created such conditions in social struggles for rapid redistribution. Surplus farmers and traders, including black marketeers, benefitted from the scarcity in African colonies. In the shadow of rich white settlers, some wealthy Kenyan peasants also made good business in the time of the famine, as in other parts of Eastern Africa under British colonialism.<sup>292</sup> It was the same for some African farmers and traders in British-Bechuanaland (contemporary Botswana) at a time when shops became the main source of food for many.<sup>293</sup> In Mauritius, where there were at least food problems, owners of sugar plantations and black marketeers became richer.<sup>294</sup> Widespread atomization and lack of solidarity are captured in the name that people in Niger, then a French colony, gave the famine of 1942: “withdraw and separate from the wife”.<sup>295</sup>

In a pioneering article, Indivar Kamtekar has painted a more comprehensive picture of social developments in British-India during the war. Aside from regional disparities (“Punjab prospered, Bengal suffered”), he argued that the British penetration into the Indian economy was not even that strong; that the war with its public demand orders, the colonial pricing system, hoarding and high profit rates gave a boost to Indian industrialists and other businessmen; that surplus farmers managed to get rid of their debts; that the situation for Indian civil servants was

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<sup>291</sup> See Turner, *Telling*, iv, 1–6 and the accounts by Lance Bomford, John Keneally and Paulo Quintao in the same volume, 11, 18 (quote), 23–24; Dunn, *Timor*, 22–26; Kammen, *Three Centuries*, 110.

<sup>292</sup> See Spencer, “Settler Dominance”, 497–514; Collingham, *Taste*, 132–138.

<sup>293</sup> Mokopakgosi III., “Impact”, 170–172.

<sup>294</sup> Ashley Jackson, *War and Empire in Mauritius and the Indian Ocean* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 161, 163–168.

<sup>295</sup> Thurston Clarke, *The Last Caravan* (New York: Putnam, 1978), 167.

ambiguous with more jobs available but dropping real income; that urban workers saw a steep decline of their real wages; and that agricultural workers suffered greatly from skyrocketing food prices. 1943 was simultaneously the year of the famine, the lowest real wages and the highest profits.<sup>296</sup> During the Bengal famine, the journalist Vasudha Chakravarty summed up the complexity of the situation thus: “Who is the enemy of the people? [ . . . ] Is it the foreigner? Is it the nature? [ . . . ] The imperialist, the fascist, the profiteer, the corrupt official – or all together?”<sup>297</sup>

Hoarders and corrupt officials were also accused by the leftist press (and British propagandists) of causing suffering to the people in Allied-occupied, famine-stricken Iran.<sup>298</sup> The dozens of millions of domestic refugees in China were ruthlessly cheated on by merchants and exploited as cheap labor by entrepreneurs.<sup>299</sup> Because of the bad tenancy conditions, tenants in Henan had only one-third of the prewar amount of grain available to their families in 1942, and the starving landless laborers were even worse off.<sup>300</sup> The situation was similar in the Tonkin famine of 1944–1945, where haunting episodes of the abandoned poor were reported especially about the half of the population that was landless.<sup>301</sup> In Greece, stricken by famine and hyperinflation, surplus farmers and some traders benefitted, and private owners accumulated more than seven tons of gold 1941–1946 and another five tons in the five hungry years that followed.<sup>302</sup> When the Greek government fled into exile in April 1941, it took the country’s existing gold reserves with it, and the “banknote printing plates as well”.<sup>303</sup>

Social mechanisms as described in the previous three paragraphs could also work the other way, for example in networks of kin and mine workers sending remittances to family members in Northern Rhodesia (contemporary Zambia).<sup>304</sup> Domestic mass migration into cities marked another kind of attempt to escape

296 Kamtekar, “Different War Dance”, 201–212, quote 216; see also Raghavan, *India’s War*, 330.

297 Quoted in Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 25.

298 Gholi Majd, *Iran*, 284–285, 434–435.

299 See Schoppa, *In a Sea*.

300 Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2029–2030.

301 See Ngô Vĩnh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants under the French* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 [first 1973]), 22, 24, 219–276; Gunn, *Rice Wars*, 273; Motoo Furuta, “A Survey of Village Conditions during the 1945 Famine in Vietnam”, *Kratoska, Food Supplies*, 231, 233.

302 Palairot, *Four Ends*, 104; Hionidou, *Famine*, 223–234. Palairot argues against the widespread narrative that ruthless greed by businessowners caused misery for the masses in wartime Greece but many facts mentioned by him do not quite support his interpretation (see Palairot, *Four Ends*, 48, 76, 84).

303 Palairot, *Four Ends*, 25.

304 See Tembo, *Impact*, 77–78.

the threatening conditions in the countryside and also indicated social mobility, whether in India or many areas of Southeast Asia.<sup>305</sup> However, migrating to cities was by no means a safeguard against starving to death, as could be seen in the streets of Calcutta and on the roads to it.

The case of Singapore illustrates how the socially conflictual character of hunger crises can lead to their denial. Public memory and most scholars agree that there was no wartime famine in Singapore.<sup>306</sup> In fact, this is incorrect. According to available contemporary statistics, the city experienced an excess mortality of over 60,000 if one compares the years of 1942–1945 with prewar levels. A large part of these additional deaths, which primarily hit in 1942, 1944 and 1945, were from beriberi and dysentery, which can be linked to malnutrition, and another large portion of the deaths were caused by pneumonia and tuberculosis, which can be indirectly linked to malnutrition. The number of children who died due to beriberi kept rising.<sup>307</sup> If one takes into consideration that Singapore's population had increased through refugees arriving in late 1941 and early 1942 by about one-third (approximately 250,000 people<sup>308</sup>), to reach about 900,000 to one million, the adjusted excess mortality was between 40,000 and 50,000, or 4–5

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**305** For India, see Raghavan, *India's War*, 459; for various Asian countries, see Gregg Huff and Gillian Huff, "Urban growth and change in 1940s Southeast Asia", *Economic History Review* 68, 2 (2015): 522–547.

**306** For example, see Wong Hong Suen, *Wartime Kitchen: Food and Eating in Singapore 1942–1950* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet and National Museum of Singapore, 2009), 78, 89; Paul Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore: A Social and Economic History* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018, second edition), 250; Huff and Huff, "Urban growth", 536; Gregg Huff and Gillian Huff, "The Second World War Japanese Occupation of Singapore", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, 1–2 (2020): 250, 253; Lucius Nicholls, "The State of Nutrition in Singapore before, during and after the Japanese Occupation", Supplement to the *British Medical Journal*, March 6, 1948: 37. Mary Turnbull wrote: "Many people were dying of malnutrition", though without using the word famine. C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 219.

**307** See data in Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 280 (other frequently recorded causes of death were "[i]nfantile convulsions", "[f]ever" and malaria); beriberi and dysentery combined caused c. 21,000 excess deaths. See also data in Shimizu Hiroshi and Hirakawa Hitoshi, *Japan and Singapore in the World Economy: Japan's Advance into Singapore 1870–1965* (London: Routledge, 1999), 129; Huff and Huff, "The Second World War Japanese Occupation", 264, 267; Haridas, "Infantile Beri-beri", 23–33. Lucius Nicholls argued that the excess mortality was more than 71,000, including 51,000 excess deaths of males. Nicholls, "State", 38–39.

**308** Huff and Huff, "The Second World War Japanese Occupation": 250; Takuma Melber, *Zwischen Kollaboration und Widerstand: Die japanische Besatzung in Malaya und Singapur (1942–1945)* (Frankfurt a.M. and New York: Campus, 2017), 331–332, note 168; Gregg Huff and Shinobu Majima, eds., *World War II Singapore: The Chosabu Reports on Syonan* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 135–138; Huff and Huff, "Urban growth", 546.



percent of the population.<sup>309</sup> In view of the most frequent causes of death, this indicates a famine, in combination with bad housing conditions to which the frequent fatalities from respiratory diseases point. Thus, it appears reasonable to assume that the excess deaths were of the city's poor and the refugees who had not found proper shelter. This means that they point to conflict within the population between classes, between ethnicities, and between locals and refugees amidst inflation, profiteering in shady business and frantic black-marketeering in a city where virtually all cats and dogs were eaten.<sup>310</sup> These conflicts may well be part of the story of why the history of the occupation period has a reputation among Singaporeans, and Singaporean politicians in particular, of being divisive and detrimental to nation-building, which has led to tendencies to keep silent about it.<sup>311</sup> However, such social conflicts were not unique to Singapore.

Finally, it is no wonder that most of the famines occurred in 1942–1943 and 1945. The year 1942, when the war was on the razor's edge, was also a year with an intensified imperialist grip on the reachable resources and a globalization of economic warfare. The “world market [. . .] changed dramatically” in 1942, and eastern Africa, for instance, became a strategic supply base for the British war effort and the Indian Ocean area strongly contested.<sup>312</sup> I have made a similar argument for German-occupied Europa.<sup>313</sup> In 1945, many social groups were worn down by the long deprivation and new populations came under occupation.

In conclusion, wartime destruction played a lesser role than one might think in these famines, and the same is true for the direct requisition or plunder of food in famine-affected areas. Much more important were economic disruption through sieges and lack of means of transportation, new borders and administrative restrictions to the flow of food, but also other goods. Usually, food production decreased due to a lack of inputs, particularly labor and, in some cases, also draught animals and farmyard manure, fertilizer, machinery and fuel, all of which were in high mil-

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309 Apparently, these losses do not include the Japanese massacres of 1942. Singapore's population losses place it among the more seriously affected countries in World War II.

310 For social developments in Singapore, see Huff and Majima, *World War II Singapore*, 129–154; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation*, 161–210; for “mushroom millionaires”, see Huff and Huff, “Urban growth”, 539, and for cats and dogs *ibid.*, 534. See also Huff and Huff, “The Second World War Japanese Occupation”, 267 for differences in infant mortality rates between the main ethnic groups in Singapore and 266–267 pointing to particularly harsh conditions for refugees of Indian extraction.

311 One account of the politics of memory is Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda Yeoh, *Contested Memories: The Politics of Second World War Commemoration in Singapore* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

312 See Lonsdale, “Depression”, 120–121; Westcott, “Impact”, 146 (quote).

313 See Gerlach, *Extermination*, 9–10.

itary demand. This shattered national economies into small local pieces.<sup>314</sup> Economic imbalances were great, meaning that some regions and economic sectors boomed, contributing to urbanization in Asia and Africa,<sup>315</sup> while others were in a deep crisis, small-scale agriculture being among them. Since peasants received few goods in exchange for their products, had to sell at artificially low prices and lost traditional markets, they produced fewer surpluses and sold products on the black market. On top they were burdened by enforced labor conscription of different kinds and, sometimes, impositions to grow industrial crops. The enforced restructuring of economic links led to a scarcity of consumer goods and inflation, and authorities' attempts to regulate the food economy often added to the problems and did not protect rural dwellers anyway, such as through food rationing. Racist hierarchies dominated the distribution of food, and political hierarchies disadvantaged certain groups in internment. Those on the lower ends were given low priority. Il-liberal and liberal imperialists alike, old and new imperialists, exploited colonial and occupied areas ruthlessly on four continents, including Europe. Yet, the conditions of violence they imposed also strengthened anticolonial and communist movements to the point that many were successful in the mid-to-late 1940s. These also responded to intra-societal conflicts between urbanites and ruralites and a desolidarization through which some tried to make fortunes on the back of others.

The kind of exploitation that prevailed in a country determined where hunger was concentrated. Since large parts of Europe were quite urbanized, it was primarily urbanites who went hungry.<sup>316</sup> In other parts of the world, above all, rural dwellers were the most exploited and affected, especially landless laborers and tenants who were unprotected by entitlements through rationing, insurance and property, along with being considered politically irrelevant and cannon fodder at best, often illiterate, and scorned.

Those who created these conditions of violence included politicians and strategists, commanders, officers and troops (benefitting, confiscating and sometimes looting on their own), administrators, political and paramilitary organizations, industrialists, merchants, black marketeers, wealthy farmers and a host of other groups in complex interaction.

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**314** For disturbances of domestic transportation, see, for example, Aiko Kurasawa, "Transportation and Rice Distribution in South-East Asia during the Second World War", Kratoska, *Food Supplies*, 44–48; Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 31, 100; Gunn, "Great Vietnamese Famine"; Mazower, *Inside*, 46–48.

**315** For World War II urbanization in Asia, see note 305 in this chapter; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 323.

**316** In the semi-urbanized countries Greece and the Soviet Union, the famines affected in part urban and rural populations. See Hionnidou, *Famine*; Filtzer, "Starvation Mortality"; Ganson, *Soviet Famine*, 95–105, 114.

Notably, this chapter's focus on famines means to concentrate on medium-term effects of imperialism during the war but not on imperialists' long-term war aims such as the lasting control, and exploitation, of foreign economies in India, Africa, Latin America or Eastern Europe and their effects long after 1945.

## Rationales of Allied Mass Violence

In August 1947, when the so-called Nuremberg Code against involuntary human experiments was issued by a U.S. military tribunal, the U.S. military just conducted arguably what was the biggest human experiment in history, which was on the medical effects of the atomic bomb attacks on survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while Japanese publications on the issue were forbidden, including medical ones, to suppress the Japanese narrative.<sup>317</sup> In October 1946, Fritz Sauckel was hanged in Nuremberg for having organized Germany's forced labor deportation program, but in World War II, all colonial powers had expanded their forced labor programs in Africa, including, as shown, Britain, "Free" France and Belgium on the Allied side. The Atlantic Charter of August 1941, soon adopted by all Allied governments, promised "freedom [. . .] from want", and yet at least five million people died in wartime famines in Allied countries and colonies.<sup>318</sup>

As far as rationales for violence are concerned, Nazis, Young Turks and Hutu power advocates are easy targets, but why not, for once, inquire into justifications of mass violence that were widely successful? To reflect on rationales behind mass violence can deepen our understanding of the process that war is. In this process, justifications are not only explanations, but can become causes of action. Moreover, justifications are often quite revealing about the ideas of those who use them.

The basic justification for the Allies' war was that they defended themselves against Axis aggression. That the Germans and Japanese were aggressors was the main point of indictment in the postwar Nuremberg and Tokyo trials.<sup>319</sup> This is also standard fare in almost any war propaganda (from any ever) and the foundation for the claim to a just war.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Monica Braw, *The Atomic Bomb Suppressed: American Censorship in Occupied Japan* (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1991).

<sup>318</sup> "Atlantic Charter", August 14, 1941, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> (last accessed August 21, 2023).

<sup>319</sup> Overy, *Blood*, 609.

<sup>320</sup> See Anne Morelli, *Die Prinzipien der Kriegspropaganda* (Springe: zu Klampen, 2021, third edition; French 2004). This is also true for wars fought by Muslims. See Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "On philosophy in Islam and on the question of a 'West African Islam'", Souleymane Bachir Di-

Hand in hand with the trope of aggression went the claim that the Axis sought expansion, whereas the Allies did not. The latter point was enshrined in the Atlantic Charter signed by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on August 14, 1941, adopted by all Allied countries by early 1942, which stated in its first clause that “their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other”.<sup>321</sup>

This was also a lie, like so many things in the Atlantic Charter (including the proclamation of all peoples’ right to self-determination), which the United Nations regard to this day as one of their foundational documents.<sup>322</sup> In World War II, virtually all main Allied powers annexed territory. The Soviet Union acquired areas of nine different countries: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Japan, not to count Tuva.<sup>323</sup> The USA acquired colonies in the western Pacific such as the Marshall Islands, the Caroline Islands and Palau from Japan (and with them, millions of square kilometers of territorial waters), some of which are still under U.S. rule, like the Northern Mariana Islands. China acquired Taiwan from Japan.<sup>324</sup> Moreover, Britain took over Libya, Italian-Somaliland and Eritrea as colonies from Italy; Poland annexed large parts of eastern Germany; Yugoslavia acquired parts of Istria from Italy; and Greece took Corfu and the Dodecanese from Italy, although this fell far short of Greek elites’ plans for expansion.<sup>325</sup> These facts do not keep historians from calling Britain, the Soviet Union and the USA a “satisfied power” or a “status quo power”,<sup>326</sup> thereby denying, obscuring or concealing their imperialist character.<sup>327</sup> And the same historians do little to examine these countries’ policies in their already existing colonies.

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agne and Jean-Loup Amselle, *In Search of Africa(s): Universalism and Decolonial Thought* (Cambridge and Medford: Polity, 2020), 85.

321 See the text of the Atlantic Charter, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> (last accessed August 21, 2023).

322 “Preparatory Years: UN Charter History”, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un/preparatory-years> (last accessed August 21, 2023).

323 For the state of Tuva, which repeatedly asked for joining the USSR in 1939–1944, see Timeo Antognini, *Geschichte der Tuwinischen Volksrepublik*, Master’s thesis, University of Bern, 2022, 54.

324 For the conquest of Japanese-annexed Taiwan as a Chinese war aim, see Mitter, *China’s Good War*, 45.

325 Fleischer, *Kreuzschatten*, 269.

326 Mawdsley, *World War II*, 15, 19, 21. Overy, *Blood*, is similar; see inter alia 597, 601–602, although he does say more about the colonies.

327 Some, as Hannah Arendt, who began to do so in 1945, went so far as to justify Euro-American imperialism by making a distinction between good “imperialism” and bad “conquest”. Moses, *Problems*, 407–409.

The Atlantic Charter proves that not only the Axis but also the Allies wanted a new world order.<sup>328</sup> The flowery humanitarian language – also used at the 1943 UN Conference on Food and Agriculture in Hot Springs<sup>329</sup> – and “universalizing language of freedom and rights” could also be understood as “a veil masking the consolidation of a great power directorate that was not as different from the Axis powers”.<sup>330</sup> The Charter, among its “principles [. . .] for a better future of the world”, also listed that all states enjoy “access, on equal terms, to the trade and raw materials of the world” and “all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance”,<sup>331</sup> but, in reality, established naval blockades, the denial of resources and a net of economic ‘sanctions’ before and after World War II, all of which are relevant to this chapter.

One main Allied propaganda line that emerged was “that the Allies were saving civilization and humanity from the barbarity” of the Axis.<sup>332</sup> Upon Britain’s declaration of war against Germany, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain said in a radio address on 3 September 1939 that Britain was fighting “evil things”.<sup>333</sup> On the same day in another radio speech, Victor Hope, alias Linlithgow, the British colonial viceroy of India, announced his deliberation that India declare war on Germany (no Indian had been involved in the decision), saying, “India will make her contribution on the side of human freedom as against the rule of force”.<sup>334</sup> In 1940, when Indian Congress politician Jawarlal Nehru

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**328** Overy, *Blood*, 134 (about the Tripartite Pact in 1940); for Japan’s ambitions, see Iriye, *Origins*, 156; account by Shigeo Hatanaka, Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 66; see also Tony Palomo, “Island in Agony: The War in Guam”, White, *Remembering*, 135. The Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference in Tokyo, November 6, 1943, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Joint\\_Declaration\\_of\\_the\\_Greater\\_East\\_Asia\\_Conference](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Joint_Declaration_of_the_Greater_East_Asia_Conference), made similar promises like the Atlantic Charter plus that of anti-racism.

**329** The records of the Hot Springs Conference are at the FAO Archive, Record Group 3. Axis observers accused the USA, Britain (with Canada) and the Soviet Union that they wanted to construct a new international grain economy that would hold particularly Europe in dependence, “a formidable weapon against all the other peoples”, as an Italian report put it. See Italian foreign office, D.A.T. – III, “Appunto per l’Eccellenza Acerbo: Conferenza Alimentare di Hot Springs”, June 11, 1943, FAO archive, Record Group 1, N 370. Similar arguments were then made in the German press and, from a neutral country, in Ernst Laur, “Die Beschlüsse der Internationalen Lebensmittel- und Agrarkonferenz der Vereinigten Nationen in Hot Springs (U.S.A.)”, in Ernst Laur, *Beiträge zum Ausbau der schweizerischen Wirtschaft* (Brugg: Verlag des Schweizerischen Bauernsekretariats, 1943), 74–83, 77–78, 80.

**330** Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 7, 10.

**331** “Atlantic Charter”, August 14, 1941, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp> (last accessed August 21, 2023).

**332** Overy, *Blood*, 605.

**333** Quoted in Overy, *Blood*, 604.

**334** Quoted in Raghavan, *India’s War*, 1.

pointed out in his speeches that India had been coerced into the war “in the name of freedom and self-determination and democracy”, he was arrested.<sup>335</sup>

Britain did not stand alone. In 1942, U.S. President Roosevelt said that the war against the Axis was to “cleanse the world of ancient evils”. According to his statement in January 1942, there could be no “compromise between good and evil”.<sup>336</sup> Guomindang China’s wartime narrative was that China fought for the righteous cause of uncompromised sovereignty.<sup>337</sup> During his visit of Calcutta in 1942, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) said : “The present struggle is one between Freedom and Slavery, between Light and Darkness, between Good and Evil, between Resistance and Aggression”.<sup>338</sup> So, he was disappointed about a meeting with Gandhi on that trip, concluding that the Indians only cared about themselves and that non-violence was an illusion.<sup>339</sup> A total of 18 well-known Chinese intellectuals, including Ding Ling and Mao Dun, wrote an open letter to the writer Zhou Zuoren because of his cooperation with the Japanese occupants, calling him a “traitor” showing “evil behavior” in the fight between “civilisation” and “savagery”.<sup>340</sup> The perception of a fight between good and evil was also accepted, believed and promoted by many ordinary people. The visitors’ books in Soviet war museums are an example of this.<sup>341</sup>

To be sure, the Allies were not alone in their good-against-evil perspective. All sides in the war found their effort justified.<sup>342</sup> At the Tokyo summit of the Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in November 1943, Subhas Chandra Bose, Commander of the Indian National Army, stated that the East stood “for light and guidance . . . in the creation of a new, free and prosperous world”.<sup>343</sup> Japan maintained such a narrative to the end, with the emperor’s declaration of August 14, 1945 that it had been “far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark on territorial aggrandizement”.<sup>344</sup>

Genocide scholars, and experts on the murder of the Jews in particular, stress the important role that the dehumanization of the victims plays. In 1941, Stalin

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335 Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War*, 20.

336 Quoted in Overy, *Blood*, 605, 609.

337 Mitter, *China’s Good War*, 46.

338 Quoted in Darbara Singh, “1942”, in Sharma, *Quit India*, 24.

339 See Raghavan, *India’s War*, 227.

340 Quoted in Lary, *Chinese People*, 75–76 (quote 76).

341 Anne Hasselmann, *Wie der Krieg ins Museum kam: Akteure der Erinnerung in Moskau, Minsk und Tscheljabinsk, 1941–1956* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022), 329–351.

342 Overy, *Blood*, 596.

343 Quoted in Mitter, *China’s War*, 307 (ommission by Mitter).

344 Quoted in Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 401. In reality, to my knowledge, Japan occupied many countries in World War II, but, unlike after earlier conquests, it did not annex any.

stated that the Germans were on the level of “wild beasts”.<sup>345</sup> In 1937, Jiang Jieshi in his diary called the Japanese “dwarfs” and “dwarf bandits”.<sup>346</sup> Officially, he spoke in 1943 of Japan as a “demon”, the fight against whom was worth making sacrifices.<sup>347</sup> The wartime Soviet press spoke of Germans as vermin, including snails, scorpions, rats, dogs and bacteria.<sup>348</sup> As one film critic stated, U.S. movies during the war “robbed the enemy of any humanity and individuality”.<sup>349</sup> Other intellectuals also drove the dehumanization forward. A.A. Milne called Hitler “the Devil” in 1940, and for U.S. theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, the Axis was “evil”.<sup>350</sup> Adebajo Adedeji, then a schoolboy in British-Nigeria, remembered from the war: “We were not taught what Hitler did. We were taught to believe that he was the devil incarnate, and we had all sorts of school songs and plays that demonized Hitler.”<sup>351</sup> On the other side, German propaganda, of course, dehumanized the enemy, especially if it was Soviet or Jewish.<sup>352</sup> Japanese newspapers and teachers portrayed U.S. Americans during the war as “demons” and “monsters”.<sup>353</sup>

Again, people believed this themselves. Chinese used these words in their diaries, while Chinese prisoners held by the Japanese carved inscriptions about Japanese “devils” in the prison walls.<sup>354</sup> U.S. soldiers regarded their Japanese enemies as monkeys, apes, rats or dogs and the Germans as vampires,<sup>355</sup> and British bomber crews flew their missions targeting German and other cities “against an enemy now demonized as barbaric”.<sup>356</sup> Marnie Seymour, the wife of a scientist employed in the Manhattan Project, remembered that the Japanese “were always evil in the movies [. . .]. You start to think of them not as human beings but as little yellow things to be eradicated.”<sup>357</sup>

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345 Overy, *Blood*, 605. For demonization in war propaganda in general, see Morelli, *Prinzipien*, 35–44.

346 Mitter, *China's War*, 84.

347 Edgerton-Tarpley, “From ‘Nourish the People’”, 462.

348 Lowe, *Der Wilde Kontinent*, 155.

349 Account by Pauline Kael, Terkel, “*Good War*”, 123.

350 Overy, *Blood*, 605.

351 Interview with Adebajo Adedeji, 6 March 2001, found on the CD United Nations Intellectual History Project, *The Complete Oral History Transcripts from UN Voices* (New York: City University of New York, 2007), 2.

352 For example, see posters in Johannes Schlötz, ed., *Deutsche Propaganda in Weissrussland 1941–1944* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1996).

353 Account by Hideo Sato, Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 239. See also Dower, *War*, 68.

354 Schoppa, *In a Sea*, 100, 309; account by Shozo Tominaga, Cook and Cook, *Japan*, 466.

355 Dower, *War*, 67–68.

356 Overy, *Blood*, 791.

357 Seymour's account is in Terkel, “*Good War*”, 520.



A fight with the devil meant, of course, that God was on the Allies' side, even if they murdered hundreds of thousands of civilians. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and other elites propagated this view,<sup>358</sup> and one day after the dropping of the Atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Roosevelt's successor Harry Truman said in a filmed statement on August 10, 1945: "It is an awful responsibility which has come to us. We thank God that it has come to us, instead of to our enemies, and we pray that He may guide us to use it in His ways and for His purposes."<sup>359</sup> However, the divine being was also invoked from an unlikely side, the Soviet Union, governed by communists. What they conceptualized as the country's "Great Patriotic War" they also called a holy war, among other things, in the most popular Soviet war song.<sup>360</sup>

The enemies of the Allies were often dehumanized and portrayed as diabolical, their reign was called hell, they were considered fascist beasts, or, in the case of the Japanese, racially inferior, and so depicted in official documents, films, books and comics. Thus, the war was necessary and everything needed for it was justified. For enemy prisoners and civilians, this meant that they deserved punishment collectively, as it was meted out with fire bombings, killings at the front even after surrendering, hard labor, rape and expulsion. A member of the U.S. prosecution team at the Nuremberg tribunal interrogating German mass murderer Otto Ohlendorf openly stated that "people resisting your tyranny stand on a higher moral level when they resort to the same horrible cruelties which you initiated in order to destroy your tyranny" in an exchange that involved references to Allied aerial attacks.<sup>361</sup> But what did these justifications of mass violence against non-combatants mean for people in Allied countries, Allied colonies and neutral countries occupied by the Allies, that is, the majority of those killed by the Allies?

It is significant that Allied leaders (and many citizens) did not reserve dehumanization for the enemy. As Churchill once confided to Leopold Amery, "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion."<sup>362</sup> Nehru's arrest, Churchill's eruption and Jiang Jieshi's reference to sacrifices mentioned in this section are all important in this context.

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358 Morelli, *Prinzipien*, 115–116.

359 Excerpts of Truman's speech are in the 1982 documentary film *The Atomic Cafe* (directors: Kevin Lafferty et al.), min. 6:29–6:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9xQTJ-kbUk> (last accessed August 21, 2023). Also quoted in Southard, *Nagasaki*, 66.

360 See Hasselmann, *Wie der Krieg*, 170; Isabelle de Keghel, "Glaube, Schuld und Erlösung: Religion im neuen russischen Kriegsfilm", *Osteuropa* 59, 1 (2009): 99.

361 James Heath during the examination of Otto Ohlendorf, October 8–15, 1947, in: *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10*, vol. IV (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 357. See Moses, *Problems*, 235. Thanks to Alexa Stiller for help concerning this document.

362 Quoted in Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 78.

Concerning Allied mass violence *not* directed at enemies but their own citizens and colonial subjects, another aspect was crucial than those emphasized so far. It was that the Allies were posing as inherently good. This was a “good war” from a U.S., Soviet, Chinese and British perspective. Seeing oneself as good was needed as a counter-image to an evil enemy, but the implications went much further. In a good and necessary war, the military effort had to be prioritized, sacrifices could be demanded from the population, and those demanded from colonial subjects, illiterate peasants and ethnic minorities were especially great. Resistance against such efforts was declared criminal, as in the British suppression of the “Quit India!” movement. To stay in power, colonialists also smeared anti-colonial movements from Algeria to Indonesia as Axis collaborators.

In African colonies, this logic of rightful sacrifice led to conditions of violence characterized by the expansion of forced labor, enlarging war-related production and services, the growth of urban places and mining towns along with a rising demand for food and other materials, higher delivery quotas for peasants, white entrepreneurs making big profits, general inflation, and labor-deprived rural families exposed to famine with little to no help (because the war effort could not be compromised). Allied policies in Asia and the Pacific were not much different, leading to the death of millions in Bengal. Probably an equal number died in the famines in China, largely caused by Guomindang policies of forced recruitment, a high tax burden, confiscating grain and tardy, small relief efforts, all in the name of the war effort, just as the Yellow River flood was.

In this section, I have argued that the main point about Allied mass violence was not their perception that the enemy was evil. One has to go beyond this fairly conventional way of thinking as the main problem was that the Allies saw themselves as ‘good’. It was this what made the Allies kill the greatest number of people, and they did so by imposing conditions of violence on certain groups.

It was not that all these events were denied completely, but they were marginalized in public memory, and little research was done about most of them. Marginalization was not possible for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which, however, was said to have saved many U.S. soldiers’ lives (at the cost of Japanese civilians), a post-war propaganda line. But marginalization was possible for mass expulsions or, outside India, for the Bengal famine, and Hiroshima has been largely written out of genocide studies.<sup>363</sup> To be sure, initially harsh censorship applied to both, the Indian press in the Bengal famine (through the British colonial government) and Japanese publication attempts in the first years after Hiroshima

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363 See Moses, *Problems*, 457–460.

(through the U.S. military occupation administration in Japan).<sup>364</sup> This is another proof that the Allies wanted to marginalize their violence in public opinion. In the longer run, creating conditions of violence allowed for obscuring Allied mass violence, while posing as good allowed for marginalizing it; so, it was not even necessary to fully deny it.

Allied and Axis rationales for violence did not differ much. Both sides claimed to fight for civilization – Japan also for anti-racism – and fostered nationalism. It was not only the USA that aspired toward a world of nominally independent nation-states (then fostered by the post 1945 United Nations) – the Soviet Union did so, too, moving to the idea of a world system of independent socialist states, instead of merely incorporating states into the USSR; and so did Japan, resulting in six states being established under its occupation: Manchuria, Nanking-China, Burma, the Philippines, India and, belatedly, Indonesia. Even Germany supported the foundation of some states (Slovakia, Croatia and Albania), although it denied other nations statehood.

To this day, scholarship still treats substantial parts of Allied war propaganda as known truths. It also still uses their euphemistic terminology (for example, ‘strategic bombing’). This tendency includes emphasizing the Axis having been the aggressors. This is like a sandbox kind of argument among little boys who are dragged away from a fight by their parents: ‘But he started it . . . ! (and this is supposed to justify all that happened afterwards)’. If civilians have rights, then all of them do, regardless of whether they are from an ‘aggressor’ nation and a different skin color. Otherwise, these are not rights but privileges.

Those who might argue that they prefer the Allies over the Axis because the former killed fewer non-combatants than the latter echo Allied propaganda that the victory of the ‘good’ was necessary and required sacrifices. The widespread childish desire to identify with one side can move oneself close to justifying violence.

The fact that much of the existing historiography still argues that World War II was a fight between good and evil (represented by the Allies and the Axis, respectively) is closely connected with many liberal historians’ lacking or deficient discussion of the war aims of Allied countries, except based on their propagandistic self-styling. A large part of the historiography of World War II, parroting wartime propaganda narratives, is a continuation of World War II with other means and, therefore, no critical scholarship.

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364 See Siegel, *Hungry Nation*, 28–34; Collingham, *Taste*, 149; Braw, *Atomic Bomb Suppressed*.

## Conclusion

World War II was an imperialist war from all sides. It was not just a binary conflict between two alliance systems and not a mere interstate war. Rather, there were multiple identifiable conflicts between men and women; capital and labor; urban and rural dwellers; among the leading classes; and between different ethno-racial groups. In many cases, these conflicts led to lethal conditions of violence that claimed the lives of millions belonging to identifiable groups. A different history of World War II should not stop at the fatalistic view that somehow all sides have skeletons in their cupboard.

The Allied treatment of colonies (and occupied countries such as Iran) and the reasons for it were not much different from the Axis countries' treatment of occupied countries. All imperialist countries involved extracted food and other resources from them with next to no regard for the survival of the local population, and many tried to block enemy countries' access to such resources. Usually, authorities and individuals in these countries (including Japan<sup>365</sup>) had no elaborate plans to starve populations to death, except for Germany and, to a degree, Romania.<sup>366</sup> But all of them were responsible for the population under their rule and its survival. Moreover, in all cases, famine was foreseeable, and there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that it was foreseen in the political circles of the powers involved.<sup>367</sup> A lesser degree of intentionality does not absolve those who created conditions of violence and, thus, caused premature mass death.

Jonathan Glover rates naval blockades and the systematic bombing of civilians as "killing at a distance", combined with a "fragmentation of responsibility".<sup>368</sup> Both mechanisms – being preferred ways of killing by liberal countries to this day – may help historical actors obscure things, deny that they kill, or make denialist historians maintain that nobody was killing in such situations. However, such specious reasoning is belied by arguments of inevitability at the time, that is, that sacrifices were necessary and the starvation or death of certain people could not be helped, if one takes the time to look at the manifest premises made –

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<sup>365</sup> For Japan, see Collingham, *Taste*, 247.

<sup>366</sup> See Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord: Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998); Gerlach, *Extermination*, 215–260.

<sup>367</sup> On top of the examples mentioned before, Linlithgow, the British viceroy in India, told his successor Wavell in October 1943 that he had assumed for a long time that the Bengal famine would kill at least 1.5 million people. Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 213.

<sup>368</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 64–112. In particular, Glover exemplified this with the British blockade of Germany in World War I (including food) and the Allied bombing of Germany and Japan in World War II.

which are often such that the supply of this or that group or groups *had* to have priority over those who died in the end, i.e., that there were people of lesser importance.

Again, nobody would deny that Jews who starved to death in the ghettos of Warsaw and Lodz or concentration camps were victims of violence, but so were Soviet and other POWs who died in masses and rural dwellers in Bengal and Henan. Forced labor and famines in Africa were mostly forgotten and are rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature, and the Henan famine was even systematically forgotten in China for decades until the 2000s. Like the Bengal famine by the British, the Guomindang had subjected it to an early postwar whitewashing exercise by an inquiry commission, which praised the sense of sacrifice of the people of Henan.<sup>369</sup>

There is no such thing as considerate imperialism, or imperialism without racism and exploitation. The Allies killed at least ten million non-combatants in World War II. Assertions that the Allies mainly took the lives of enemy soldiers, instead of civilians (and thus contrary to the Axis),<sup>370</sup> are false and need revision. Moreover, most non-combatants killed by Allied countries were *not even from the enemy side*. They were from their *own* side, being citizens or colonial subjects (and a sizable number also from neutral countries such as Iran). As philosopher Judith Butler has argued, “war is precisely an effort to minimize precariousness for some and maximize it for others”, and “contemporary conditions of war” are characterized by a sense of belonging to one population group and identifying another population group “as a direct threat to my life”, which leads to them being considered as having no life at all, as “ungrievable lives”.<sup>371</sup> These are astute thoughts that also capture a sense of resource denial, but they seem to be based on the assumption that the violence is directed against people viewed as enemies. What can they possibly mean if this is not the case? Given that the bulk of Allied violence struck people on their own side, and considering who these victims were, how can one construct the argument that Allied violence was ‘good’? The imaginable point that sacrifice was necessary for the victory of freedom and civilization is peculiar if most of those who were sacrificed happened to have dark skin.

One day encapsulates the story of World War II. Three things happened on May 8, 1945. In the Allied countries, Germany’s capitulation was celebrated

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369 See Famine Inquiry Commission, *Report on Bengal* (n.p., 1945); Knight, *Food Administration*, 104; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 289–294; Garnaut, “Quantitative Description”, 2012, 2044.

370 A recent example of this is Hedinger, *Achse*, 361–362.

371 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 54 (first quote), 42 (second and third quotes), 43 (fourth quote). In a similar vein, see also Schoppa, *In a Sea*, 5.

with great rallies and parties, as is well known. During one of these rallies in Sétif, French-Algeria, Algerian nationalists waved Algerian (rather than French) flags, protesting colonial rule, were shot at, and the ensuing violence and counter-violence left thousands dead after a few days, most of them Algerians, as some know. On the very same day – May 8, 1945 – the British colonial authorities released their inquiry commission's report on the famine in Bengal which basically cleared the British authorities of responsibility, blaming it on Indian politicians, administrators and individuals, intentionally on that day to have little publicity – as very few know.<sup>372</sup> Victory, colonial oppression, exploitation, famine and lies were closely related.

This means that telling a different history of World War II is necessary. The existing historiography with its mainstream narratives, points of emphasis, marginalizations and omissions reflects, at least, a racist practice. A non-racist history of this war is needed. I will not write that history. This chapter only offers a research perspective. A different history of World War II should also include social history more broadly, explore the life of ordinary people in their own right and social changes through the war, whether they were temporary or long-lasting,<sup>373</sup> beyond single nations. Any research – and research programs, because a collective effort is necessary – would probably have to be designed and done by researchers from other parts of the world. One way or another, scholars from there will produce studies with more precision and a more complex understanding than the cursory treatment that this chapter can provide while also correcting possible racial-ethno-cultural biases that it may still contain. In comparison with those who have created the mainstream narratives of today and those who add ever new studies confirming their audiences' expectations again, producing for a market of white people who like to believe in the old good-against-evil stories (there is much money in this), these other scholars will produce for new markets. Moreover, by overcoming the logic of the enemy prevailing among contemporaries, historians could for once actually fulfill a mission of peace.

This chapter has several wider implications. First, recent historiographical debates about the comparison and relationship between the murder of the European Jews and colonialism have mainly referred to certain episodes of colonialism. They were primarily about older phases of colonialism (in particular, settler colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and secondarily about later decol-

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<sup>372</sup> See Planche, *Sétif*; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 299.

<sup>373</sup> One example for this is Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), fourth ed., esp. 18–56.

onization conflicts (Vietnam, Algeria and others).<sup>374</sup> But those who insist that colonial violence should not be forgotten, not be placed below the ‘Holocaust’ in terms of importance and/or that the latter had links to the former, have, for the most part, avoided pointing to colonial mass violence that happened *simultaneously* with gas chambers and mass shootings against Jews, during World War II. Writing and talking about the ‘Holocaust’ in particular – but not only that – often produces legitimacy ideology for liberal imperialism. However, there is no such thing as better imperialism.

Second, this chapter allows for insights concerning the current large international conflict. It is important to understand that the deeper exploitation that was so deadly during the Second World War was a near-worldwide system run by different states of various political models. In the current international conflict, imperialists will, as is already visible, try again to ruthlessly appropriate all the world’s resources, claiming that they *are* mankind. Their reckless economic warfare will again harm not only the enemy side, but anybody who stands in the way of a certain side’s victory. Again, both larger sides ‘justify’ their acts with the fight for a new world order. But at this point, more countries have been able to stay outside the war, also economically speaking (and so far, it is primarily an economic war). It remains to be seen how far and in which ways these countries, and societies, can protect themselves against this destructive imperialism in the years to come, including against liberal imperialism.

Third, the world order after 1945 was at no point legitimate and cannot draw legitimacy from World War II. The UN’s one-sided condemnation of (alleged) wars of aggression, instead of war in general, founded on Allied propaganda in World War II, is a major part of the problem.<sup>375</sup> This international order has led to the most critical current international situation. A stronger interest in the so-called global south during World War II is timely in a situation when it is primarily white-dominated countries that have chosen confrontation, which creates a whole array of dangers for all of mankind, including imminent nuclear warfare.

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374 See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 101–107; Böckmann et al., *Jenseits*; Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Erinnerungskämpfe: Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2022); Neiman and Wildt, *Historiker streiten*; Friedländer et al., *Ein Verbrechen*.

German and Israeli views on this topic are self-serving and not very illuminating but I refer to them here because they are indicative of certain ways of thinking and because they are being aggressively exported through channels like the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

375 I am grateful to Alexa Stiller for sharing her insights on this with me. Moses, *Problems*, 20 argues that the fight against alleged wars of aggression stayed the centerpiece of Euro-American imperialism “not for long” after the Nuremberg Trials. I disagree.



This chapter has depicted conditions of violence, created by a near-global system of different competing imperialist and nationalist forces, leading to millions of deaths of non-combatants in World War II. However, given its macro-perspective and the strong involvement of governments at wartime, it could do relatively little to examine how ordinary individuals contributed to producing conditions of violence. This is what I attempt to do in the next chapter.