

## The Shoah in Eastern Europe

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Tamás Krausz. *The Soviet and Hungarian Holocausts: A Comparative Essay*. Translated from the Hungarian by Thomas J. DeKornfeld and Helen D. Hiltabidle. CHSP Hungarian Authors Series No. 4, Social Science Monographs, Boulder CO. Pp.136 + ix. ISBN 0-88033-569-6.

For many years the historiography of the Holocaust in the west has centred on the German experience; over the past three decades questions of domestic responsibility in a number of western European states, from Austria to France, and from Italy to the Netherlands, have come to the fore. Yet the issue of the Holocaust in the territories where most Jews were murdered in the early 1940s, namely in contemporary Poland, and the western territories of the former Soviet Union, remains understudied. In some of the work that has been published in recent years by English-speaking historians this “wild east” has been represented as a unique zone of violence, a place where in view of its multi-ethnic (and anti-Semitic past) Nazi violence acted as a spark which ignited a maelstrom of ethnic violence that had been ready to explode. Such work seems to this reviewer too inspired by the post-war hegemony of nationalism studies within the academic, with its post-Yugoslav inspired stress on simplified notions of ethnic cleansing, which often serve to orientalise Central and Eastern European history to a degree which is unwarranted, often clashing with a rich tradition of social and cultural history of the region in earlier periods that suggests multi-ethnic societies were viable, and apparent “ethnic hatreds,” even anti-Semitic ones were often contained. Furthermore, the anti-Communist climate of the 1990s — Arno J. Mayer’s flawed attempt to raise the question of the links between anti-Communism and anti-Semitic strategies of extermination notwithstanding — has prevented many from answering questions about the political environment in which the Holocaust occurred.

Tamás Krausz's book is terser, better focussed and more historically precise than Meyer's. Its great strength is that it raises the same set of questions; questions which are difficult to confront in the current political climate in the region. Krausz is an outstanding intellectual historian of late imperial and early Soviet Marxism, and is Hungary's best historian of the twentieth-century Soviet Union. As a resident of Hungary, a country where the memory of the Holocaust domestically and its place in the country's twentieth century tragedy has formed a central plank in the "cold civil war" between left and right since 1989, the question of political context — the issue of the link between Communism, Nazism and genocide — is crucial to him. In order to unpick this political context and to inform us historically he focuses on the Holocaust as a question in the history of the Soviet Union, setting the events of the early 1940s in a longer *durée*, and considering them in the light of Soviet policies towards Zionism and Soviet Jews both before and after. He is at his most convincing in explaining why an anti-fascist state in the late wartime, and postwar years allowed anti-Semitism in Soviet society to persist by restricting discussion of the Holocaust, where such discussion would hinder the creation of a cohesive and unified Soviet citizenry.

There are two critical points that can be made about the book; one less important, and one more so. The first point to make is that this is an historical essay rather than a polished monograph, and should be regarded as a first word, and a stimulus to debate. Perhaps if he had produced a more polished monograph Krausz might have avoided unnecessary attacks on his ideas. The second point is that he does not perhaps state the links between anti-Communism and political anti-Semitism in the inter-war period that made anti-Semitism so poisonous and so dangerous to Jews in the former Soviet Union and East-Central Europe. As we know from discussion of the right-radical ideologies which stressed "Judeo-Bolshevism," and the close linkages between the extremist anti-Semitism of the Nazis and their desire to wipe the Soviet state from the face of the earth, these notions were closely connected. Furthermore, the anti-Communism of the 1950s, especially in Western Europe, aided the conspiracy of silence about the Holocaust. In an era in which western, liberal intellectuals have come to blame the left itself for the marginalization of the Shoah in cultural and political debate in the post-war years, making this point is today very urgent.