Building the New Order: 1938-1945

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"As they now run, the frontiers of the new Central European states are arbitrary and uneconomic. But they have a more serious aspect still. Their injustice is a standing danger to the peace of Europe."

-British Journalist Lord Rothermere, 1927[1]

Introduction

European borders during World War II were in flux. In a grand moment for fascism, the map of Europe changed considerably, following the agendas of revisionist countries and threatening to exterminate entire populations. Of the countries directly involved in the war, only Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway survived the struggle with their borders intact.

Because borders changed dramatically from 1938-1945, it is best to understand them dynamically. Although static maps are great resources for representing borders at specific points in time, they fail to capture change over time. A comprehensive database of WWII boundaries does not exist. This project seeks to represent WWII boundaries through an animation that demonstrates how borders changed over time. Through the use of ArcGIS and Flash animation, WWII borders can be presented dynamically and in greater depth than static mediums.
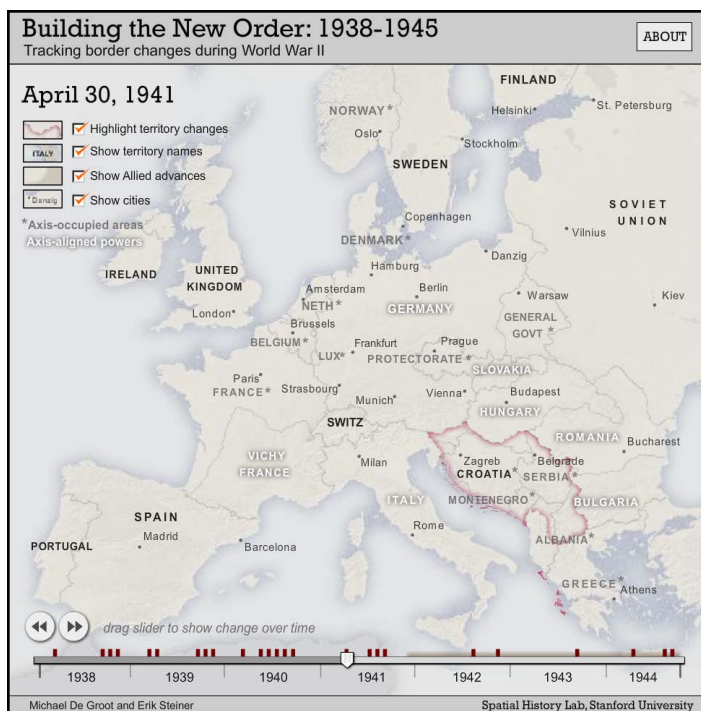

Figure 1. Building the New Order: 1938-1945. **Tracking border changes during World War II.**

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Historical Context

Dissatisfaction with interwar boundaries drove border changes during WWII. The interwar years, the period between the end of World War I and the beginning of WWII, was characterized by irredentism. Revisionist states, states which sought to erase the WWI settlement, included Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and the Soviet Union. Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, as losers of WWI, sought to reclaim land that had been stripped from them in their respective peace treaties. Bulgaria, a loser in the Balkan Wars, also wanted to regain territory it lost after the Second Balkan War. Italy, the lone revisionist state that had been a victor during the Great War, believed that it had not been amply compensated territorially for its WWI sacrifices and set out to build a modern Roman Empire.[2]

Irredentism dominated the foreign policies of revisionist states and must be understood to study boundary changes during WWII. After the Treaty of Trianon, for example, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory. This led to "the reduction of Hungary's population by half, confiscation of two-thirds of her railway, road and canal networks, together with about 80% of her forests and mines, and... the transfer of over three million ethnic Magyars to Czechoslovak, Romanian, Yugoslav, or Austrian rule."[3] The day the treaty was signed, June 4, 1920, became a day of national mourning: stores and schools were closed, and Budapest was draped in black.[4] Hungarian flags on government buildings were lowered to half-mast until 1938. Although Hungarian land had been taken away, Greater Hungary continued to exist in the Magyar imagination.[5] Crowds rallied in support of reclaiming the lost territories and responded to questions about whether they would accept their losses with a resounding "*nem, nem, soha*!" (no, no, never!).[6] In 1933, Count István Bethlen, the former Hungarian Prime Minister and member of Parliament, told a London crowd that

> "It is owing to [Trianon] that fully one-third of the Hungarians who had lived for ten centuries in Hungary found themselves outside the new borders of this country and under the domination of Czechs, Romanians and Serbs...our national grief and pain on this account is, as you well imagine, immeasurable. For this very reason, among others, the Hungarian nation never can and never will acquiesce definitely and of its own accord in the Peace Treaty of Trianon."[7]

Magyars also expressed their resentment through maps: cartographers titled maps of their country *Csonka Magyarország*, or "Mutilated Hungary."[8] Hungarian irredentism during the interwar years was not without justification. After the Paris Peace Conference, even with the Wilsonian notion of self-determination

as the peacemakers' assumed guiding principle, over three million Magyars found themselves under foreign rule.

Revisionist states made varying levels of claims. Germany would annex not only territory it had lost through the Treaty of Versailles, but also land which Nazi officials claimed had belonged to ancient Germans, land which was no longer home to a sizable ethnic German population.[9] Bulgaria, in contrast, was content to annex only territories it had lost after the Balkan Wars and WWI.[10] Although the belligerents had different motivations for wanting to eliminate the interwar system, all Axis powers were united in their rejection of interwar borders. Not all Axis powers could support Germany's sweeping racial agenda. They could, however, support the German bid to reorder Europe.
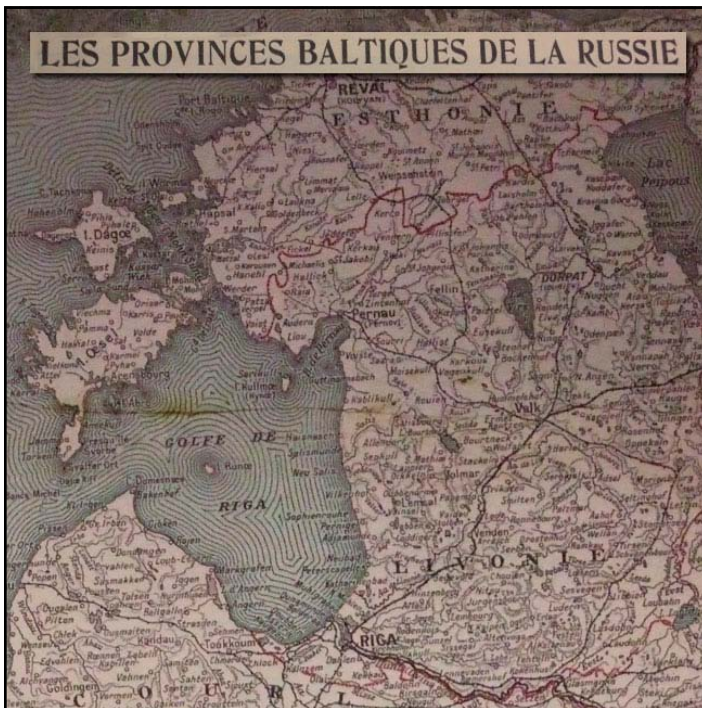

Figure 2. Baltic Provinces of Russia, 1914. **A French map, *Les Provinces Baltiques de le Russie* (1914), showing the Baltic States in Russia at the outbreak of WWI. After Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia declared independence during the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union sought to reclaim them. In June 1940, the Soviet Union, in accordance with the August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, forcibly reincorporated Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.[11]**

Signaling the end of the interwar system, Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, an event known as the *Anschluss*. Eighteenth months later, the *Wehrmacht*, the German army, overran Poland, and for almost six years Axis armies set Europe on fire. As Axis armies pushed across the battlefields of Europe, Hitler created a New Order, one which would reverse the settlements of the Great War. Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, countries which had been created by the Paris Peace Conference, were wiped from the map. The treaties of the WWI settlement were abrogated, and land was returned to the old Central Powers through both intimidation and force. At the height of the New Order in 1942, the area under Axis control extended from the Atlantic coast of France to the

outskirts of Moscow and Stalingrad.

Europe ceased to be a continent of sovereign nation-states and morphed into a confusing blend of sovereign states, occupied territories, and everything in between. The interwar international system was replaced with the New Order, facilitated by Germany largely for its own benefit. In addition to annexing territory, the Axis powers also established protectorates, designated for eventual incorporation into the mother country. These protectorates cannot neatly be categorized as occupied or annexed territories. In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, German Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich pushed for immediate deportation of undesirables and German colonization. The Nazis did enact Germanization in the Protectorate, using their "racial science" to determine the racially acceptable Czechs and bring them into German society.[12] It was clear that Bohemia and Moravia would one day become part of Germany. In a visualization showing borders during WWII, should the Protectorate be considered part of Germany?

This project attempts to structure the disorder. What is the best way to visualize the evolution of the New Order? How can visualizations provide insight about the nature of the war that is not as clear through text alone?

Methodology

To visualize borders during WWII, a database was created that organized borders by month. The borders were tracked with maps drawn during WWII and georectified with ArcGIS software. Once the maps were given spatial data, the borders were digitized into the database.

In a project which studies the nature of boundaries, defining what constitutes a boundary change is a critical issue. The first task was to classify conquered territories as annexed or occupied. Boundaries would only change because of annexations, both *de jure* and *de facto*. The definition used was one which categorized territories by administration type: Axis civil administration, civil administration, and military administration.[13] Territories which were classified as "under Axis civil administration" were considered annexed and warranted a change in boundaries. This category includes territories that were formally annexed (i.e. Wartheland), and those which were "increasingly treated as parts of the Reich, but had not yet been formally incorporated" (i.e. Białystok).[14] Territories which were occupied and not incorporated or established as new entities did not have borders changed.[15]

The database tracks border changes by month. The first month is February 1938, one month before the *Anschluss*. Because the *Anschluss* is widely seen as the first WWII event, February 1938 represents the interwar system. The goal of the project is to create accurate borders at the continental scale, roughly 1:10,000,000. For most regions, using a 1:350,000 scale during the digitization process was sufficient to accomplish this. For certain smaller regions, including Danzig and Prekmurje, it was necessary to use a smaller scale, 1:150,000.

France, Girard and Barrère, Paris 1942

Grossdeutsches Reich, Freytag and Berndt, Vienna 1944

Figure 3. Alsace-Lorraine or Elsaß-Lothringen?

The best sources for digitizing boundaries during WWII are historic maps. When using maps as sources, however, it is important to analyze potential biases of the publisher. In an era with borders as complex and contentious as WWII, publishers presented Europe quite differently, reflecting national prejudices and the confusion of the period. In order to portray the situation on the ground and avoid national biases, maps for this project were used with caution. Since the Axis orchestrated and facilitated border changes, Axis maps, especially German, often depicted the changing situation in Europe most accurately.

Challenges

Relying on historical maps for the project poses several challenges. The fact that Hungarians labeled their maps *Csonka Magyarország* (Mutilated Hungary) demonstrates that maps can be partial. The greater difficulty, however, is when cartographers use borders to show prejudice. Cartographers from occupied countries could use maps as propaganda, showing that forcible territorial annexations were both unpopular and unaccepted.[16]

A good example of national prejudice in maps is German and French depictions of Alsace-Lorraine (Elsaß-Lothringen) (Figure 3). The region, located in France at the time of the German invasion in May 1940, had traded hands twice in the previous seventy years, to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, and back to France in WWI. The legitimacy of French rule over Alsace-Lorraine during the interwar years was hotly contested, and annexing the region was a German war aim during the invasion of France. After the fall of France, Alsace-Lorraine was reattached to Germany, the French business names and street signs were translated into German, and men of fighting age were conscripted into the *Wehrmacht*.[17] German maps portrayed Alsace-Lorraine in the Reich thereafter. In the *Grossdeutsches Reich*, for example, drawn by the Viennese publishing house Freytag and Berndt in 1944, Alsace-Lorraine

is shown to be within Greater Germany. In contrast, French cartographers continued to depict Alsace-Lorraine in France. The Parisian publishing house Girard and Barrère, for example, printed its 1942 map of France with the region still in France. Here the maps are used as nationalist propaganda. The Girard and Barrère map is a good source for presenting the French perspective about the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, but is not a good source for reflecting the situation on the ground.

Classifying territories was a challenge because the difference between annexed and occupied land was not always obvious. It was clear that revisionist states would annex territory where it had an ethnic majority. In Yugoslav Macedonia, for example, the Bulgarian government treated the population, mainly Bulgarian, "as a liberated extension of Bulgaria-legislatively, administratively, militarily, educationally, linguistically, and ecclesiastically."[18] The population in Yugoslav Macedonia welcomed the annexation, bringing ethnic Bulgarians under control of Sofia and ending two decades of Serbianization.[19]

In territories in which the revisionists did not have an ethnic majority, however, the distinction between occupied and annexed territory was not nearly as clear. Białystok (Belostok) is one such territory. Located in prewar Poland, it fell into German hands after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Two months later, Białystok was attached to East Prussia in an effort to link the Reich to Ukraine.[20] Although under the German civil administration, it was not formally incorporated into the Reich.[21] Territories like Białystok do not fall neatly into either of the "annexed" or "occupied" categories, but must to be classified nonetheless.

The animations jump from September 1944 to the postwar period. The reason for this was because there was no frontline data for October 1944-May 1945. Ideally the animations would have included borders until May 1945.

3

Discussion

The database unifies the motivations of the Axis powers. Although each differed on racial policies and had varying levels of ambition, all could agree on border revisionism. As confirmed by the literature published on the subject, this visualization demonstrates that WWII was primarily an Eastern European experience. Historians often point to death tolls to show this. Tony Judt documents that one in five Poles was killed during the war, one in eight Yugoslavs, one in eleven Soviets, and one in fourteen Greeks. In contrast, Western Europeans suffered deaths at a much lower rate, as France lost 1 in 77 and Britain 1 in 125.[22] Border revisions also suggest that WWII was an Eastern European experience. 94% of the land Germany annexed, for example, was in Eastern Europe. In addition, it also shows that they occurred at the beginning of the war, and by 1942 the New Order had been firmly established. Although Italy occupied land in Western Europe (southwest regions of France), it only annexed territory in Yugoslavia and Greece. Because of geography, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Soviet Union also only annexed land in Eastern Europe. It is also clear that border revisions were closely associated with fronts.

Please see page 5 for select static views of Figure 4.

Not only were Eastern European borders changed at a much higher rate than Western European, but many regions in the East were annexed multiple times (Figure 5). Vilnius (Wilno), long disputed among Lithuanians, Poles, and Russians, actually changed hands four times during the war.[23] Teschen (Cieszyn, Těšín), a region located in prewar Czechoslovakia, was transferred to Poland in October 1938 and was later annexed by Germany after the fall of Poland. Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia shuffled between Romania and the Soviet Union in a tug-of-war match, finally landing with the Soviet Union in summer 1944. The Baltic States also experienced multiple annexations, going from being independent to becoming integrated into the Soviet Union in summer 1940, then to the Reichskommissariat Ostland one year later, and finally back to the Soviet Union after being liberated (or conquered, depending on perspective). The visualization suggests that the territories which changed hands the most clustered in the eastern half of prewar Poland and the Baltic States. This is unsurprising because these regions were coveted by two major powers (Germany and the Soviet Union), as well as nationalist movements (Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian). This is in striking comparison to Western Europe. The visualization demonstrates that only one Western European territory, southern France, changed government more than once. And this part of France was even under French (albeit Vichy French) jurisdiction for two years.

Although revisionist countries attempted to reclaim lands lost during WWI, they had varying levels of success (Figure 6). Germany, with its far-reaching goals for the war, easily surpassed its land total for WWI. At the height of the New Order in 1942, Germany had added over 270,000 square kilometers, a landmass almost the size of prewar Romania. Bulgaria, too, was successful in
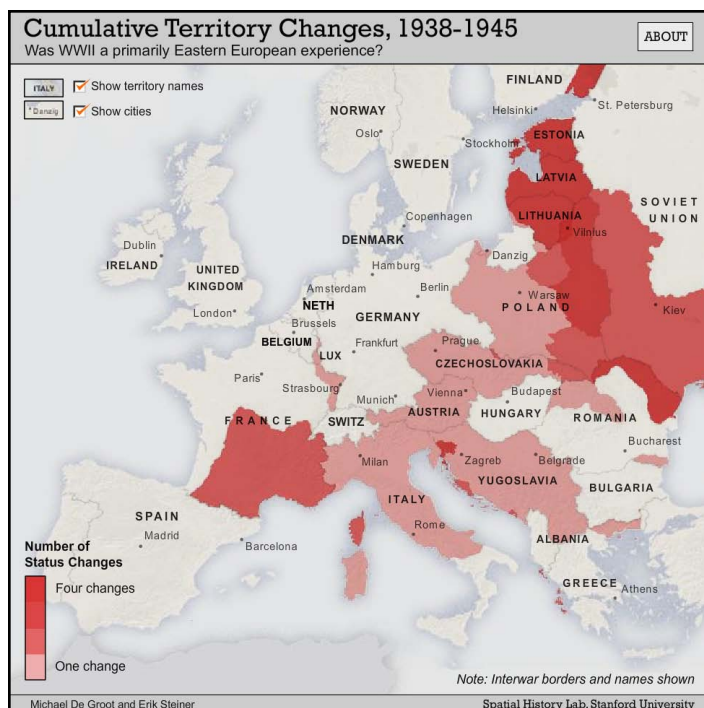

Figure 5. Cumulative Territory Changes, 1938-1945.

exceeding its WWI status, adding about 52,000 square kilometers. Of the three Central Powers, only Hungary did not exceed its WWI total (though it did increase in size by about 85%). Romania, often seen as the big winner of the WWI settlement, was naturally the big loser at the zenith of the New Order. Both Hungary and the Soviet Union took back large chunks of territory from Romania's WWI gains.

Please see page 6 for select static views of Figure 6.

The land totals for the postwar period reveal some interesting trends. The fact that the Soviet Union gained 476,000 square kilometers (a landmass bigger than prewar Germany) is expected because the Soviet Union was an occupying power after the war and had the leverage to impose its will in Eastern Europe. Also, it should be expected that Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Romania lost land because they were Axis powers. What is striking, however, is the fact that Bulgaria, a marginal Axis power, actually *gained* land: it had to return the Greek and Yugoslav land it had seized, but was allowed to keep Southern Dobruja from Romania. The Soviets never acted on any territorial ambitions in Bulgaria; this can be attributed to the close relationship between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

European borders have largely remained static since the end of WWII. Although the American and Soviet influences during the Cold War and the rise of the European Union have played major roles in ensuring border stability, some credit needs to be given to
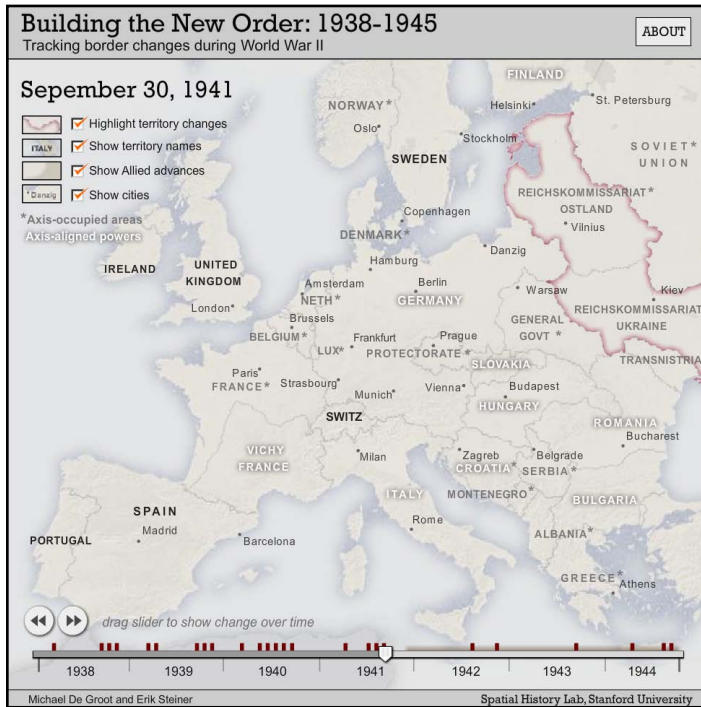
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Figure 4. Building the New Order: 1938-1945. **Click here to access the interactive online version of this visualization.**
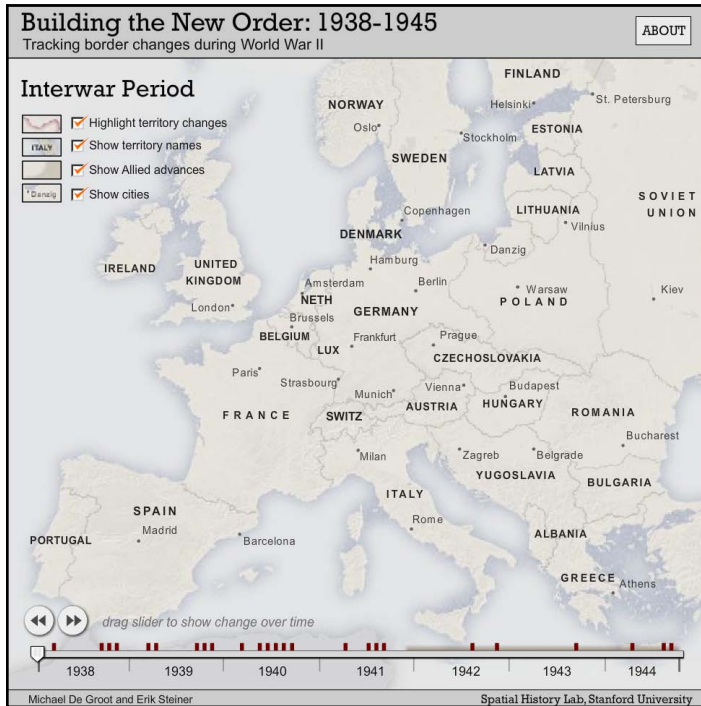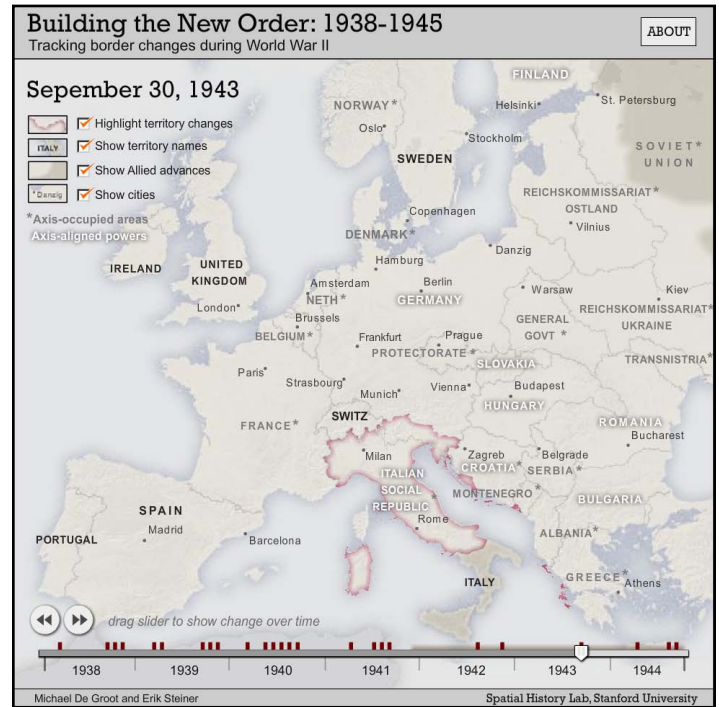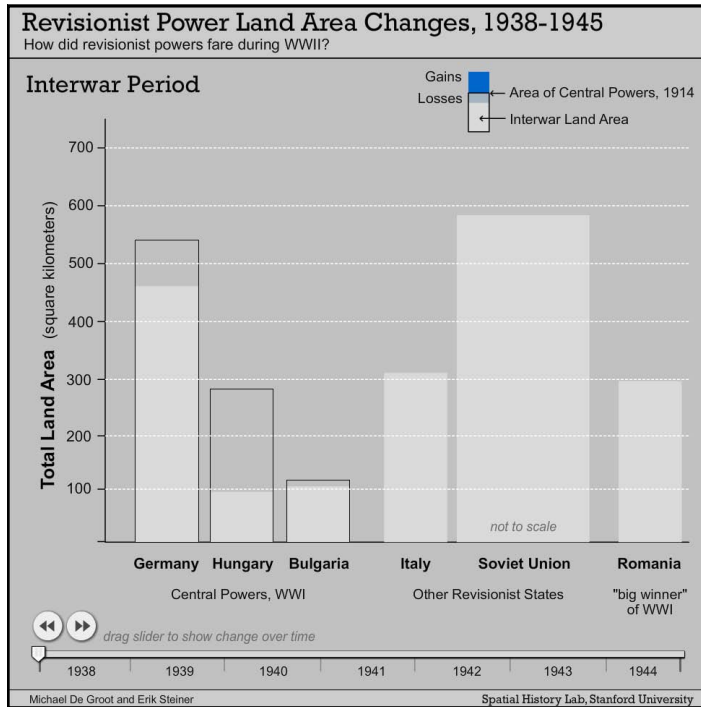

The Interwar Period.
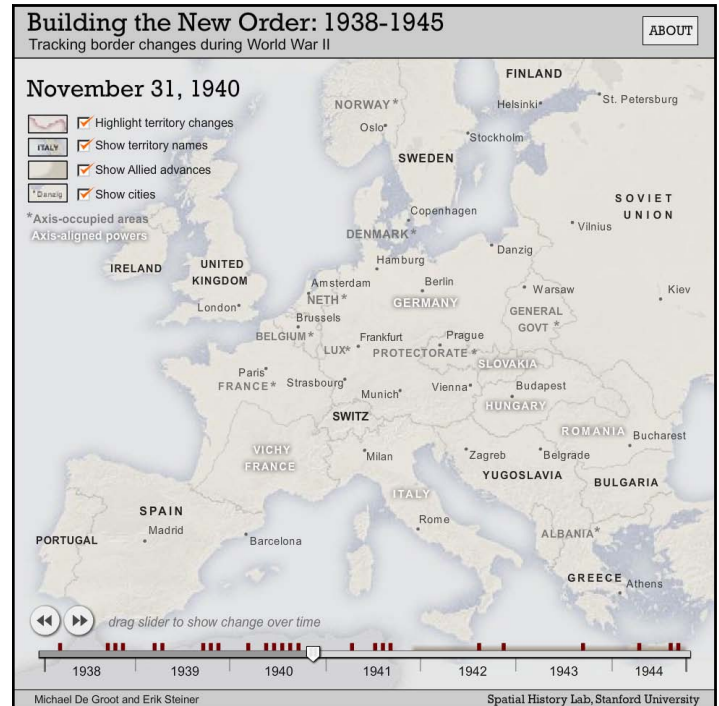
November 1940: The axis expands to six member countries.

September 1941: The establishment of German administration in the Soviet Union.


September 1943: Peace with Italy and the birth of the Italian Social Republic.

Figure 6. Revisionist Power Land Area Changes, 1938-1945. **Click here** to access the interactive online version of this visualization.

Interwar Period.

September 1941.

the fact that European countries have become relatively ethnically homogenous. This was done through a wave of deportations and population exchanges at the end of WWII. Almost three million ethnic Germans were expelled from the Sudetenland to Germany.[24] In February 1946 Czechoslovakia and Hungary agreed to transfer 120,000 Slovaks living in Hungary to Czechoslovakia, and 120,000 Hungarians in Slovakia were transferred to Hungary.[25] Although the Potsdam Declaration dictated that transfers "should be effected in an orderly and humane manner," the transfers were violent.[26] The exchanges, while undertaken with considerable hostility and death tolls, led to ethnically homogenous states by 1947, with the exceptions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. After the mass expulsions, less than 3% of Europe was considered a national minority.[27] As Judt argues, "a new, 'tidier' Europe was being born."[28] Czechoslovakia too followed the trend, and Czechoslovakia divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in January 1993.[29] Yugoslavia has been engulfed in civil war, still unable to solve the conflicts that first became violent during WWII. The trend is that homogenous states, something Europe certainly did not have during WWII, facilitate peace. It is no coincidence that the former Yugoslavia, the most ethnically heterogeneous region in Europe, has seen the most violence on the European continent since WWII.

One of the major causes of WWII was discontent with interwar borders. Revisionist states sought to protect their national minorities abroad. Although the League of Nations was committed to protecting the rights of minorities during the interwar years, revisionist states could not accept anything less than border modifications. This was no small issue: after all, 32,000,000
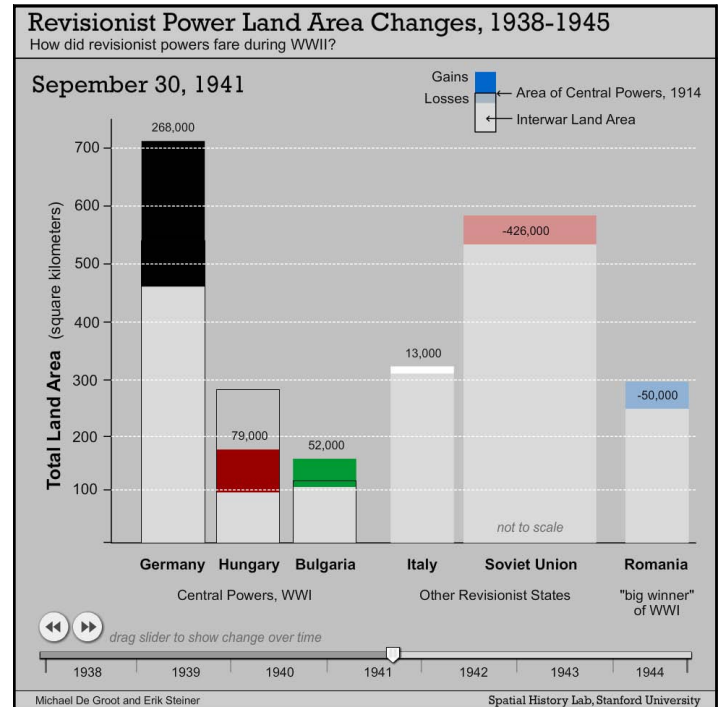
Europeans were classified as "minorities" during the interwar years.[30] The Axis powers sought to eliminate the minority issue and bring their own people under their own control. Although the Allies prevailed, the result of WWII was the establishment of homogeneous states. The revisionist powers' goal was achieved.

End Notes

1.   Mihály Károlyi and István Bethlen, *The Peace Conferences of 1919-1923 and their Aftermath: Hungary* (London: Haus Publishing Ltd, 2009), 125.

2.   Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 6.

3.   Károlyi and Bethlen, *The Peace Conferences of 1919-1923*, 76.

4.   Ibid, 111.

5.   "The term 'Hungarian' embraces all inhabitants of the Hungarian state....The term 'Magyar' relates to those Hungarians whose first language is Magyar and who think of themselves as descendants, however remote, of the original progenitors of the Hungarian nation." Károlyi and Bethlen, The Peace Conferences of 1919-1923, 6.

6.   Ibid, 111.

7.   Ibid, 129.

8.   *Csonka Magyarország*, Map, Honvéd Térkepészeti Intézet, 1939.

9.   Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 81.

10. Ibid, 327.

11. James E. McSherry, *Stalin, Hitler, and Europe: The Imbalance of Power 1939-1941 v. 2* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1970), 90-92.

12. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 187.

13. I.C.B Dear, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 465.

14. Ibid, 465.

15. Changes in government were reflected in the database attribute scheme. The attribute scheme for countries includes categories for head of state, foreign policy, and government-in-exile. This system allows users to differentiate between sovereign states and occupied states.

16. Pavel Illyin, Speech, Annual Meeting of Association of American Geographers, Boston, 2008.

17. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 200.

18. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 82.

19. Ibid, 83.

20. Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Politics* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1981), 90.

21. Dear, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 465.

22. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 18.

23. *Map of the Boundaries of Lithuania*, Map, Arch Slapelio, 1941.

24. Judt, *Postwar*, 26.

25. Ibid, 25.

26. Ibid, 26.

27. Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2001), 497.

28. Judt, *Postwar*, 29.

29. Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, 3rd Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 274.

30. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 33.

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