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R E C E N Z J E

Jadwiga Biskupska, *Survivors: Warsaw under Nazi Occupation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2022, pp. 329.

This book explores the Warsaw intelligentsia's experience under Nazi occupation during World War II. Organized thematically, it covers persecution, the Warsaw Ghetto, underground activities, and resistance, drawing on extensive international archival research from archives in six countries to offer fresh insights for both Polish and WWII scholars.

At the outset, Biskupska defines the intelligentsia as essentially elites who form "a self-conscious group motivated by a sense of national mission" (p. 4). With few exceptions, they are religiously and culturally Catholic Poles; the few Jews that can be counted among them were completely assimilated. In the introduction, she reaches back a few generations to tell us why and how the Polish intelligentsia developed in the first place. Accordingly, she claims that this overeducated and underemployed milieu developed because they could not be a part of an administrative or political elite. It was the intelligentsia that emerged as leaders, "rather than a state bureaucracy or educated bourgeoisie" (p. 4). These origins made them somewhat more radical than their counterparts in Western countries since Poland's intelligentsia came to see a complete overturn of the status quo as more useful than a conservative wait-and-see approach. This attitude came to define their understanding of Nazi occupation. Namely, there was no reason to eke out concessions or take the Germans at their word. New structures had to be created away from the watchful eyes of the occupier.

Since the intelligentsia is the subject of this study, they are also its main sources. This creates a potential issue for source criticism, since the protagonists are "participant-analysts" (p. 17), recording their activities as they assess the situation around them.

Resistance and collaboration are defined broadly in this book. At the same time, Biskupska is looking for complexity in our understanding of what resistance means and how we assign meaning to activities that sometimes have none. Resistance covers a wide range of activities, such as praying for German defeat in a closely watched Catholic parish, making purchases on the black market, or laying bombs on train tracks. Collaboration, too, can be counted among an equally wide range of actions and attitudes. Nonetheless, Biskupska encourages us to think more deeply about these concepts. Since these labels can be applied in too many situations, they start to lose analytical usefulness. She writes, "If one is to invoke the ideas of collaboration with or resistance to Nazi occupation, then one must always qualify: collaboration *with what aspect* and

with which personnel of that regime, *when*? Resistance to *what particular policy*, on *what timeline*?" (p. 19). Answering these questions in any given situation could be extremely difficult; in 99% of cases, we don't have the sources to enter the mindset of collaborators and resisters. However, that does not mean that we should not try.

The milieu at the center of this book is ideologically diverse, though some disagreements could be put aside in the face of an existential threat. But there was something that ideologically united nearly all the intelligentsia: elitism. They looked down upon the masses and understood their role as *the* leaders of the Polish national spirit. But this was a double-edged sword. As Biskupska writes in the introduction, "The Warsaw intelligentsia profited uniquely from Polish independence and suffered uniquely from its destruction" (p. 16). The characters who appear most often will be familiar to readers of this journal: Tadeusz Manteuffel, Władysław Bartoszewski, Regina Hulewicz-Domańska, Tadeusz Komorowski-Bór, Jan Kozielewski-Karski, Witold Pilecki, Aleksander Kamiński, Ludwik Landau, Julian Kulski, Zofia Kossak, and Jerzy Braun. Others appear briefly, such as Czesław Miłosz as a young man or Stefan Starzyński, who did not survive long enough to be among the titular "Survivors", but he is a main character in the first chapter.

That section of the book is focused on the 1939 Siege of Warsaw as a starting point for organization. But it is also a story of complete collapse. The central government evacuated (or instead fled) to Romania. Starzyński, Warsaw's mayor at the time, stayed to lead the defense. And as Biskupska notes, the Siege was when the city transformed from a quotidian European metropolis into a militarized zone where the line between civilian and soldier became permanently blurred. Weapons flooded the streets, and average citizens participated in defense; hundreds of thousands had taken courses before the war to prepare them for this eventuality. But of course, it was not enough. Starzyński ultimately made the difficult choice to surrender to the Wehrmacht. A choice that cost him his life and nearly six more years of suffering for his city.

The next chapter addresses Nazi Germany's attempt (and failure) to eradicate the Polish intelligentsia through Operation Tannenberg and AB-Aktion. The thinking, boosted mainly by ideologues such as Hans Frank and Heinrich Himmler, was that to ensure the durability of the occupation, Polish elites had to be eliminated. This strategy differed widely from occupation in, say, the Netherlands or France, where elites were co-opted into the Nazi empire rather than excluded or murdered. Here, we are given a sense of the General Government regime, its main characters, and functions. In essence, Biskupska shows us the Nazi intelligentsia – such as Hans Frank, Ludwig Fischer, and Franz Kutschera – attempting to kill off their Polish counterparts. But that does not mean that all Poles became targets. First, the Volksdeutsche – those willing to claim German heritage – were an exception to the rule that Poles could not be integrated into the new administration. Secondly, there were the Blue Police (*Policja granatowa*): Polish state policemen reformulated into a German-led institution. The Blue Police have been a source of controversy with detractors

and defenders. Some scholars in Poland tend to emphasize the "forced" nature of their collaboration, i.e., they had no other choice than to continue serving German power after the Polish state collapsed.[1] On the other hand, scholars of the Holocaust have shown in excruciating detail how the Blue Police actively and zealously participated in the murder of Polish Jewry.[2] They played perhaps the largest role outside of cities, where German presence was sparse, if not non-existent.[3] However, much the same could be said for Warsaw. As Biskupska reminds us, there were very few German police (between 500 and 700 men) covering a city with over 1 million inhabitants and a penchant for rising against occupiers. The Blue Police, on the other hand, numbered over 3000 men. And they did the "dirty work" that Germans balked at conducting (p. 65). Of course, there is more complexity here, as the massive literature on the subject has shown. Marian Kozielewski, Jan Karski's older brother, was a Blue policeman and attempted to promote conspiratorial resistance inside the police, but the Gestapo eventually caught and killed him for his service to the Polish cause.

Biskupska's chapter on Pawiak Prison, a key tool of oppression against Warsaw's intelligentsia, is exceptionally vivid despite limited sources. The Germans destroyed records, the prison itself, and few survived to tell their stories. While researchers often become desensitized to suffering, Biskupska's account

[1] Among many others: A. Hempel, *Pogrobowcy klęski. Rzecz o policji 'granatowej' w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie, 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1990; M. Mączyński, "Polskie formacje policyjne w stolicy Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1945", *Rocznik Krakowski*, 59, 1993, pp. 153–159; P. Majer, "Policja Polska w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie. Kolaboracja z obowiązku i tego konsekwencje", in: *Między irredentą a kolaboracją. Postawy społeczeństwa polskiego w latach niewoli – „W obcym mundurze"*, ed. L. Michalska-Bracha, M. Korybut-Marciniak, Warszawa, 2013, pp. 301–313; J.A. Młynarczyk, "Pomiędzy współpracą a zdradą. Problem kolaboracji w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie – próba syntezy", *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 14, 2009, pp. 103–132; *Policja granatowa w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945*, ed. T. Domański, E. Majcher-Ociesa, Kielce–Warszawa, 2019.

[2] J. Grabowski, *Na posterunku. Udział polskiej policji granatowej i kryminalnej w zagładzie Żydów*, Wołowiec, 2020; D. Libionka, "ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich", in: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warszawa, 2006, pp. 89–91; D. Libionka, A. Żbikowski, "Antysemityzm, szmalcownictwo, współpraca z Niemcami a stosunki polsko-żydowskie pod okupacją hitlerowską", in: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką…*, pp. 455–464; J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Przedziały śmierci: O książce Jana Grabowskiego *Na posterunku. Udział polskiej policji granatowej i kryminalnej w zagładzie Żydów* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2020, 431 s.)", *Holocaust: Studies & Materials*, 16, 2020, pp. 685–699; J. Connelly, "Why the poles collaborated so little – And why that is no reason for nationalist hubris", *Slavic Review*, 64, 2005, no. 4, pp. 771–781.

[3] *Dalej jest noc: Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vols 1–2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa, 2018. Also available in an abridged English version: *Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*, ed. J. Grabowski, Bloomington, 2022.

is haunting. Pawiak, a symbol of both Nazi brutality and Polish resilience, saw many imprisoned and ultimately sent to Auschwitz or death. Despite the horrors, "community and conspiracy developed inside" (p. 84).

Pawiak was, as Biskupska notes, a prison within a prison because it was located inside the Warsaw Ghetto. The Ghetto loomed large for elite Poles, either as a moral conundrum or a welcome sight to solve a pesky problem. Biskupska devotes a chapter to the Ghetto and the Holocaust, while giving us a sense of how elite Poles responded first to mass killing and then to the Ghetto Uprising in April 1943. Despite the proximity of the suffering and much better access to information than even Warsaw's Jews had, the intelligentsia underestimated the ruthlessness of the German extermination plan. Rumors and reporting displayed a clear trajectory, but most Poles did not react until it was far too late. The Council for Aid to the Jews (*Żegota*) only formed in December 1942, when most of Poland's Jews were already dead.

The most stark confrontation for the milieu under scrutiny came during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. As she notes, this even coincided with the Germans uncovering the massacre of Polish officers at Katyń. A scandal that Germans utilized for propaganda effect, claiming that the "Jewish" Bolsheviks murdered Poles in cold blood and would continue their campaign if allowed to succeed. This is often cited as a reason that Poles did not materially (or spiritually) support the Ghetto Uprising, a line of argument that Biskupska repeats. The reasons for this, though, can be manifold, of course, but ultimately "Jewish suffering was suffering that was happening *in Poland* and thus worth reporting to the exiles to build international sympathy – but it was not suffering that was happening *to Poles*" (p. 138). In essence, the arrival of a common enemy (Germans) did not change the calculation of Polish elites that Jews could not be a part of their national community. They were racial "others" who belonged elsewhere. Even Zofia Kossak, a moral leader who encouraged her compatriots to help Jews, did not fundamentally believe that Jews had a future in Poland after the cessation of conflict.

This topic is enormous and Biskupska only scratches the surface here, but lays out a clear position within the literature while also adding some new sources to the conversation. While weighing the various sides, she lands on the side of the "realists" (as opposed to "apologists"), who say that aid to Jews was difficult, unprofitable, and outside the scope of resistance as the intelligentsia understood it. One often hears the refrain that helping Jews carried a death sentence in the eastern lands, and that's why help was sparse. True enough, but death sentences were also handed out freely for black market activity, reading banned newspapers, pillaging Jewish property, or dozens of other things that Poles engaged in liberally during the occupation.

This discussion of (in)action in response to the Holocaust flows naturally into the question of who knew what and when. For that reason, we move to a thorough exploration of the "information war," and one of the most active elements of resistance, broadly defined. This is an area where we can safely say that the pre-war organizations and networks continued to function effectively, providing

the city with alternate sources of information. As she shows in great detail, the underground press was easily accessible. And this was made possible through people who took enormous risks by acting as couriers, illegally printing brochures, leaflets, and newspapers, and by surreptitiously listening to radio broadcasts from abroad. Citizens of Warsaw – as everywhere else – were badly in need of information, but reliable news was hard to come by and even harder to confirm independently. The intelligentsia was reading the secret press religiously and knew well they could not trust the "reptile" or official press. It's nearly impossible to ascertain what the wider population believed, but they certainly had access to underground news sources as well, thanks to the work of conspiratorial networks.

Another aspect of successful resistance highlighted in the book is education. Polish secondary and higher education served no purpose for the German occupier and was summarily cut off. Professors and other educators were early targets of the anti-intelligentsia campaigns in 1939–1940. Even still, networks of the "flying university" managed to train hundreds of students, while up to 8000 people received their *matura* – a high school finishing exam – from underground schools (p. 178). The scale of schooling was quite impressive, especially given the dangers faced by teachers and students. It also managed to create an entire class of people who were ideologically dedicated to the Polish cause, a type of training that served them later when the time came to fight.

Resistance often arose out of convictions of faith, but leadership could not always be found within the Catholic Church. The German attitude toward the official Church was ambivalent and inconsistent. At times, Nazi officials aggressively pursued bishops and priests; at times, they showed them deference that was lacking in nearly every other situation. Parish churches continued to operate, but were closely watched. And doubtless, even as some Church leaders ended up in prisons or camps, parish priests and laymen tended to step in. Catholicism was – and is – hugely important for Poles, but it produced some questionable responses to the Nazi occupation. As Biskupska writes, "Polish antisemitism, anti-communism and anti-Nazism were all deeply intertwined with Catholic Culture" (p. 193). In this section, Zofia Kossak and Jerzy Braun serve to represent the Catholic intelligentsia. They provided two roads toward Christian resistance against Nazism, but while Kossak saw helping Jews as a religious imperative, Braun preferred to wash his hands à la Pontius Pilate.

The two final full-length chapters focus on a heavily researched aspect of this history: armed resistance. Picking up a weapon to face the occupier was the least common form of resistance, but it has garnered by far the most attention. As Biskupska shows, there was little unity at the outset of the war on how to oppose Germany's invasion actively. Aside from rag-tag units formed out of the disbanded Polish army, there were also far-right (Secret Polish Army – *Tajna Armia Polska*, TAP) and far-left paramilitaries (Polish People's Action for Independence – *Polska Ludowa Akcja Niepodległościowa*, PLAN; Polish People's Army – *Polska Armia Ludowa*, PAL; Peasant Battalions – *Bataliony Chłopskie*, BCh) along with dozens of other small groups. Each of these military groups

resulted from "Warsaw intelligentsia projects" (p. 253). Conspiracy mentality provided for defensiveness and violence internally. Over approximately four years, however, the government-in-exile backed Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK) managed to swallow up much of its competition. In the winter of 1942–1943, recruiters received a boost as Poles became convinced that Germany's downfall was just over the horizon. But German battlefield defeats tended to coincide with more violence in their occupation zones, which, ironically, served as another motivator for those willing to take up arms. "As aboveground life got more dangerous, underground life, even insurgency, seemed less risky" (p. 250).

All this provides needed context for understanding the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. Biskupska, with her focus on the intelligentsia leadership, sees the double loss of Stefan Grot-Rowecki and Władysław Sikorski at practically the same time in summer 1943 as key to understanding why the Uprising took place at all. This loss placed Kazimierz Sosnkowski as the exile leader of the military and Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski as the Home Army commander. Komorowski believed that the Wehrmacht was too weak to hold onto the city and that the Soviet Union might lend support. All this narration leads us to a vivid depiction of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, positing it as an intelligentsia-led event that had been long in the making through all the other aspects covered in the previous chapters: propaganda, education, the Church, and so on. But despite its successes in some areas, at this final stage, the intelligentsia failed. Biskupska shows how the Uprising unveiled the Polish elite's naiveté and inflated sense of Poland's importance on the global stage. They did not understand how American and British leaders thought (or didn't think) about them.

Violence was not the alpha and omega of resistance, Biskupska tells us. This was just one response among many and not always the most effective, partly because violence bred more violence in the form of repression and reprisal killings, or in the case of the Warsaw Uprising, the destruction of the capital as such. Among the intelligentsia's many undertakings, their most successful project was underground higher education (p. 284). In the book's final pages, the author undertakes a deeper reflection on how we categorize responses to occupation. There is space here for further comparison between the case of Warsaw and many other major cities or regions under Nazi occupation. There are sprinkles of contrast throughout the book (Serbia,[4] Prague,[5] Sarajevo,[6] southern France[7]), but these take place solely in the footnotes. We are left instead with a general statement that: "Occupied Western Europeans possessed *more* agency and endured *less* coercion than Eastern Europeans. Still,

[4] A. Prusin, *Serbia Under the Swastika: A World War II Occupation*, Champlain, 2017.

[5] Ch. Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*, Cambridge, 2009.

[6] E. Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Hitler's Europe*, Ithaca, 2011.

[7] S. Ott, *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940–1948*, Cambridge, 2017.

Poles – especially Warsaw intelligentsia – possessed *some* agency and did quite a lot with it" (p. 290).

This is a minor quibble with an otherwise enormous achievement. Throughout the book's arc, a milieu unfolds along with various narratives and perspectives on the occupation. Biskupska does not shy away from the most difficult questions – such as the intelligentsia's antisemitism or the wisdom of armed resistance – and instead faces them head-on. She is also an excellent guide through this harrowing history with a penchant for pithy summaries that give the reader something to hold onto without overgeneralizing. And despite the topic, Biskupska managed to put a smile on my face more than once with lines like, "The German in Warsaw was threatening, but he was also ridiculous" (p. 155). The Warsaw wartime intelligentsia finally has its milieu biography and a fearless biographer.

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