

### Gewalt und Alltag im besetzten Polen

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This edited collection of essays is based on a conference organised by the German Historical Institute Warsaw in 2009. The goal for both the conference and the present volume was to synthesize two distinct approaches to writing the history of Poland during the Second World War. As the editors state in the introduction, German historians have tended to focus on the Nazi occupation in Poland, whereas Polish historians have by and large discussed the Soviet occupation of their country between 1939 and 1941. For the first time, this volume attempts to bring those two historiographical traditions together and produce an overview of everyday life in Poland in its entirety during World War II.

In doing so, the volume presents new research and is divided into four major sections: new forms of occupation, new elites, ethnicity and everyday life, resistance and fight. Crucially, it aims to focus on the everyday experience of both the occupiers and the occupied. Mirroring recent trends in historiography, there are a number of illuminating micro-histories and contributions which use local studies to make arguments at the meso-level, "between the individual and the occupying power", as Timothy Snyder writes in his foreword (p. 11).

The volume's first section looks at the new forms of control and power as established by the Soviets and the Germans after 1939 with a particular focus on legal questions, ethnic cleansing and "Germanisierung", policing, and mass murder. The first four chapters deal with topics relating to the German and Soviet occupation in equal measure, a balance (or at least a serious attempt at a fair balance), which is one of the hallmarks of this volume. Daniel Boćkowski first turns to the Soviet jurisdiction in the occupied Polish territories after 1939. In a relatively short period of time, a number of newly established courts developed a remarkable activity, an area which has not been met with significant academic interest so far. In the next chapter, Alexa Stiller discusses violence and everyday life in Poland focussing on the radical German ethnic politics (*Volkstumspolitik*) as carried out by the Reich commissioner for the strengthening of ethnic Germans (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKF). Stiller uses the *Wartheland* as a case study and usefully argues that German ethnic politics during the war were part and parcel of its repressive occupation regime and based on the expulsion and ultimate murder of "unwanted" ethnic minorities (or even majorities as was the case in the so-called *Wartheland* where ethnic Germans remained a minority). Following on from this, Ryszard Ryś discusses the

forced recruitment of Polish men for the Soviet Red Army based on an elaborate system of registration. Not surprisingly, this activity met with a significant amount of resistance by the Polish population who in turn were closely watched by the Soviet secret service. Whereas the essays so far have largely engaged with general policies, Jochen Böhler's contribution on one particular case offers a welcome intervention. He looks at the "photo album Eduard Schmidt" which illustrates the everyday life of a German police unit in Poland. In his illuminating essay Böhler highlights the particular quality of the album as source material. On the one hand it shows the brutal reality of occupation, on the other it features pictures of relaxation and comradeship among the Gestapo officers. Underlying all this is a deep belief of superiority and of the righteousness of the actions against Jews and Poles (p. 90 and passim). The fifth and last essay in this section by Andrej Angrick deals with a topic particular to the German occupation: the Holocaust. In a chilling piece Angrick exemplifies the various methods of mass killing as discussed by the Nazi regime.

In the second section, the view turns to the occupiers and the new elites established in occupied Poland, such as the Soviet political officers, or the German civil servants in the Gau administrations in Poznan and Gdansk, or in Warsaw. Anna Zapolec argues that Polish administrative structures were decisively changed by the Soviet occupiers (p. 153). A corresponding piece on the German approach might have been illuminating here, although Peter Klein's contribution on Arthur Greiser sheds some light on German practices. Klein shows that Greiser, in his strive to turn the Warthegau into a German region, relied on civil servants who were not only experts in their respective fields but – first and foremost – devoted followers of his political course and his person (p. 203). Stephan Lehnstaedt illustrates the everyday life of Germans in the Polish capital – an often isolated existence in which comradeship among the German troops became a key point of reference (p. 228). However, when dealing with the Polish population, the German occupiers happily and aggressively flaunted their feeling of superiority.

The book's third section focuses on the importance of ethnicity, a factor which mattered in the German occupied territories more than in those occupied by the Soviets, as one of the Nazis' crucial goals was the "Germanification" of large parts of Western Poland. Felix Ackermann for instance examines Grodno, where ethnicity as a criterion for establishing order was first introduced during the early Soviet occupation. The essay retraces an almost uncanny situation in which the German and Soviet occupying forces collaborated unknowingly – the result being a steadily worsening situation for the population and increasingly draconian measures. Isabel Heinemann researches Nazi policies concerning Poles whom the Germans deemed "Germanic" and who could be turned "fully" German, and who were then sent to Germany only to find out that they were treated as second class citizens there. The three following essays discuss the occupation of Gdingen, Litzmannstadt and Lemberg. All three cities were subject to significant and lasting changes to their population structure, with Polish citizens being forced out, ethnic Germans being moved in, and tens of thousands of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. As Tarik Cyril Amar makes clear in his essay on Lemberg, however, radical shifts in the population sometimes continued well into the 1950s with a new Russian population moving in to take the place of the murdered and displaced. Occupation and violence became the everyday experience of a whole generation, but – as Amar concludes in this excellent contribution – despite these radical changes and a history of unparalleled brutality, this is not obvious in Lemberg's appearance today: a picturesque nineteenth century city of remarkable beauty (p. 329 f.). The last two essays on Soviet partisans in Ukraine (Aleksandr Gogun) and

the information politics of the Polish resistance (Adam Puławski), though informative, sit a bit oddly at the tail end of this section. What is interesting though, is the finding that both sets of resistance fighters had little time for the persecution of Jews in their spheres of influence. However, the insights gained from both pieces, and Gogun's in particular, is rather limited, and neither attempt to put their micro-historical approaches in any larger context.

The fourth section of this study is dedicated entirely to the various resistance movements in occupied Poland. First, Sara Bender turns to Białystok and concludes that, whereas the Soviet occupiers tried to destroy Jewish culture, the Germans aimed for "the total physical destruction of all Jews" (p. 394). In contrast to other towns or areas, Bender shows that until its final destruction, life in the Białystok ghetto had been comparatively tolerable. Particularly noteworthy is Bender's insightful and balanced discussion of two of the protagonists of ghetto life – Ephraim Barash, leader of the *Judenrat*, and Mordecai Tenenbaum, leader of the underground fighters – in particular vis-à-vis their differing views on armed resistance. The following two essays by Piotr Gontarczyk and Janusz Marszalec are strikingly similar as they discuss the communist resistance in Poland which, in contrast to the Polish national resistance movement, remained at the fringes and largely mistrusted. The reader is left wondering about the reasoning behind the decision to include two almost identical papers in the same volume. Grzegorz Motyka deals with the Ukrainian resistance movement and stresses their pro-Ukrainian independence and anti-Soviet stance, before Daniel Brewing turns his attention to the German fight against partisans in the General Government. He discusses the distinct radicalisation of German operations after 1942, but also makes clear that, in contrast to the General Government, the threat from partisans in Belarus had been more significant. In the final essay, Rafał Wnuk looks at the NKVD's fight against the Polish resistance, which was more effective than previously thought and underestimated by the Poles at the time.

Methodologically, the volume aims to address three distinct trends in recent historiography: everyday life, brutality, and the comparison between Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. The editors largely succeed in circumventing the danger of appearing to equate the German atrocities with the Soviet war crimes, for which they deserve credit. Many of the contributions to this volume carefully compare Soviet and German rule (even if the comparison is often implicit). The increasing brutality of their occupation, the different but sometimes overlapping practices thereof, and the resistance against the occupiers are well-documented here. One of the areas which could have received much more detailed attention, however, is everyday life under occupation. Although Stephan Lehnstaedt is correct in claiming that such a volume can never aim to present a "complete panorama" (p. 19), this aspect is underrepresented. There is, for example, no discussion of the arts, the role of theatre, film, radio or print media both for the occupiers and the occupied. There is no separate chapter on the establishment of local and regional control in city councils and regional administrations. What about the role of religious beliefs and the influence of the Catholic Church? What about schooling, work, and leisure under the occupation? What about costs of living and wider economic implications of the occupation regimes? Perhaps, one can conclude, one of the successes of this volume is that it points to much-needed further research in this area – and this is no small achievement.



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Polen, 2012, in: <https://www.pol-int.org/en/node/2300#r7235>.

<https://www.pol-int.org/en/node/2300?j5Q6rewycZ5HtUDXTWpx7UZE=1&r=7235>