



**Marek Jan Chodakiewicz.** *Between Nazis and Soviets: A Case Study of Occupation: Politics in Poland, 1939-1947.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 497 S. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0484-2.

BETWEEN NAZIS  
AND SOVIETS



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Research on occupation policies during the Second World War era falls into three main subcategories. The most fully examined area concentrates on German wartime aggression and attempts to explain the impact of Nazi ethnic, racial, and resettlement policies on the indigenous (captured) populations of Eastern Europe. Another thoroughly mined genre tackles occupation from the viewpoint of the occupied, by focusing on the heroism of the resistance and the misdeeds of the collaborators. The postwar era comprises yet another subgroup, and helps explain how victorious Allies rebuilt the institutions of the vanquished nations. Marek Jan Chodakiewicz's volume, *Between Nazis and Soviets*, transcends these categories by attempting to treat the Nazi and Soviet administrations of Poland as different manifestations of a single occupation experience. This novel approach not only sheds new light on an important period in Polish history, it also leads scholars to consider more generalized conclusions about the nature of occupation as a distinct historical phenomenon. The result is an intriguing look at the entirety of Poland's seven years as an occupied nation, one that informs us as much about the tactics and motivations of the occupied as about the goals and strategies of the occupiers.

Potential readers should be advised from the outset that, despite the book's subtitle, this book is not a

sweeping analysis covering the entirety of Poland. Such a work remains to be written, and under any circumstances would be a daunting task. Instead, the author follows the lead of other historians such as Jan Gross and, more recently, Bogdan Musial, who have published accounts of the occupation experience at local political levels.[1] Chodakiewicz chose Janow county in the District of Lublin as the focus of his study and describes the region and its inhabitants in the first chapter. Here, Polish, Jewish, German (*Volksdeutsche*), and Ukrainian populations co-existed relatively peacefully, but the inherent linguistic and social differences separating those communities paint a picture of Janow county as a widely diverse enclave, complete with its own internecine class struggles, religious disputes, and ethnic strife. Janow county also had to contend with political factionalism that crossed ethnic lines, pitting "independentists" (i.e., anyone supporting Polish independence), agrarian Populists, Pilsudskists, Socialists, and Communists against each other. Despite all of the diversity, one common thread united the citizens of this community—poverty. Oddly, the shared experience of economic hardship tended to produce a great deal more cooperation between the various groups than might be imagined. Chodakiewicz asserts that such cooperation was even evident between Polish Christian and Jewish populations, and concludes that the antisemitic antago-

nisms were not nearly as virulent in this part of Poland as we have been led to believe for the country in general (p. 53). In fact, the most predominant manifestation of social violence was not ethnic or religious strife but common crime (p. 55). In short, Chodakiewicz's exposition on Janow county stands well by itself as a snapshot of a rural Polish community in the 1930s.

These realities changed once German troops crossed the border into Poland on September 1, 1939. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe how the county's population dealt with a new Nazi administration. Earlier works on the Nazi occupation of Poland all too often pose a false dichotomy that one was either a resistance fighter or a collaborator. Chodakiewicz maintains that these stereotypes do not accurately describe the day-to-day lives of average Poles, who neither engaged in sabotage nor actively assisted the occupying armies. Chodakiewicz describes their activities as "accommodation"—a pragmatic passivity toward the occupation that falls somewhere between the two extremes of collaboration and resistance. It accepts the reality of foreign rule and complies with reasonable demands, but unreasonable ones are met by covert resistance, done with a minimum of violence to avoid reprisals from the occupation authority.

The author's narrative vividly describes the experiences of the vast majority of Janow county's citizens during German occupation. The first few weeks of occupation brought relatively few overt changes to their daily lives. Laborers, eager to return to "normality," reported back to work in order to support their families. Political institutions continued to function and, since the occupiers preferred to use the Polish officials as intermediaries, local politicians still occupied positions of governmental power. Over time, however, the population responded to the increasing demands with quiet but deliberate subterfuge. The way local officials coped with Nazi food collection demands provides a good example of "accommodation" at work. Out of a sense of duty to protect their fellow citizens, county commissioners deliberately collected only bare minimums. When confronted with accusations that the population was guilty of hoarding, the commissioners resorted to obfuscation. "Shortfalls" were blamed on poor agricultural yields, lack of fertilizer, weather, or other such "unforeseen" or "natural" events, in an attempt to deflect criticism away from the farmers. Thus, a dynamic emerged wherein individuals understood that they could resort to subtle acts of economic resistance, knowing that their political leaders would do their best to insulate them from reprisals. Such "cheating" became the standard method for citizens to strike a

blow at the occupation and still avoid (hopefully) the draconian reprisals that became a standard part of the Nazi "terror."

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 turn the reader's attention to the Soviet military occupation of Janow county, from July 1944 to March 1947. On the surface, Soviet domination bore many similarities to Nazi rule. A qualitative difference lies in the fact that since Stalin's armies were initially welcomed as liberators, the Soviet occupation authority allowed the Poles to restore their prewar institutions without much direct intervention. Since Soviet interference was kept to a minimum, there was little Polish resistance in the initial months. As the occupation continued, however, the citizenry discovered that their Russian liberators were as demanding as their German conquerors had been. Forced labor quotas and foodstuffs requisitioning once again became *de rigueur*, destroying the popular belief that such practices would end with the German defeat. Once again, a disgruntled population turned to accommodation as a method of coping. The Soviets, in turn, eventually compelled compliance by creating a "terror" similar to the Nazi version. The primary difference between the two experiences was one of degree. Since the Soviets did not share the Nazi ideological bias that cast Poles as *Untermenschen*, they were much more willing to overlook Polish acts of accommodation, provided the subversion was not political in nature. Consequently, the Soviet occupation of Janow county was on the whole "milder" than the German one.

This book proves valuable on a number of different levels. While books on the Holocaust and population transfers abound, scholars have largely neglected to look at how Nazi policy affected local populations. Chodakiewicz provides a window into the mechanics of German ethnic and racial policy that the more expansive volumes cannot. Students of postwar Soviet history will also find this book useful, since it redresses the serious lack of scholarship on the Soviet occupation from 1944 to 1947, stemming primarily from a lack of sources and from pre-1989 self-censorship. The author's attempts to depict everyday experiences during the era of Soviet domination could easily become an example for future scholarship in this neglected area of postwar history. More important, however, are the author's conclusions concerning "accommodation." Chodakiewicz advances the intriguing argument that "successful accommodation resulted in successful resistance" (p. 337). He makes the case that the two actions were so intricately intertwined that Poles continually vacillated between the two, choosing whichever option was more feasible at any given

point in time. Passive resistance and accommodation, undertaken when the degree of terror was intense, became a springboard from which more overt and destructive resistance efforts could be launched in periods of decreased terror.

The book's most valuable contribution to scholarship may well be its attempt to understand how the Poles dealt with foreign occupation in general. In a concluding chapter, the author engages in some interesting comparative analysis. Chodakiewicz concludes that two commonalities defined what it meant to live under an occupying power. The first was the ever-present "terror," or the application of coercion and the threat of punishment on conquered populations in order to force compliance with authority. The second was the ubiquitous "cheating"—covert subterfuges, hidden under a facade of compliance, that sought to undermine the will of the occupiers. Whether they deliberately withheld grain, watered down milk supplies, or called in sick for work, Poles "cheated" so regularly as to make this action the single most common experience of the wartime and post-war years.

Chodakiewicz's exhaustive research in the primary and secondary sources is admirable. If for no other reason, this book would be a valuable contribution to scholarship simply by bringing the vast amount of information available in Polish to an English-reading audience. Over 100 pages of notes join 160 pages of maps and statistical appendices. This book is an undeniably valuable glimpse into the local manifestations of occupation in

Poland. The case study methodology, however, does beg the question: just how "typical" was the Janow county experience? Can we reliably assume that what was experienced here was similar to any other region of Poland, or for that matter in any part of occupied Eastern Europe? How valid, then, are the author's conclusions regarding the mechanics of accommodation? Chodakiewicz addresses these questions, conceding early on that "for spatial and conceptual reasons, it must be stressed that the county of Janow was not Poland in miniature" (p. 3), and he later cautions readers to "refrain from projecting the particulars of the experience of Janow county onto that of the entire nation" (p. 338). As any good historian should, he calls for additional scholarship to test how "typical" Janow county's experiences in occupation, accommodation, and resistance truly were. Although *Between Nazis and Soviets* may not reveal any universal truths, it should prod historians into thinking about the era of the Second World War and the phenomenon of occupation in new and interesting ways. It can also teach some valuable (and timely) lessons about what might be expected whenever one nation seeks to impose its will upon another.

#### Note

[1]. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Bogdan Musial, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung in Generalgouvernement: Eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin, 1939-1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999).

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