

Winstone, Martin: *The Dark Heart of Hitler's Europe. Nazi Rule in Poland under the General Government*. London: I.B. Tauris 2014. ISBN: 978-1-78076-477-1; 336 S.

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Holocaust researchers have increasingly focused on the broader German occupation of Poland in order to understand the evolution of the „Final Solution.“ Martin Winstone brings much of this research together in an excellent book on German rule in the General Government, the territory created by Nazi Germany after Poland's defeat in 1939. Following the newest trends in the historiography of Nazi Germany, Winstone understands occupied Poland as the laboratory of German racial planning. At the same time, the book does much more and covers not only the Holocaust and Germanization, but the wider contexts of Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish history.

Winstone's book skillfully incorporates recent studies published in English, German, and Polish. He includes works from differing historiographical schools, notably those around Jan Tomasz Gross and Marek Jan Chodakiewicz on the Holocaust. He also makes good use of personal accounts ranging from General Governor Hans Frank to Zygmunt Klukowski, a Polish doctor in Szczeczeszyn (Lublin district) whose memoir serves as a unifying strand throughout the book. Winstone thus tells the story of the General Government from multiple angles such as German racial planners in Cracow, Lublin, and Berlin; the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Lwów/Lviv; and the Polish underground army in Warsaw. At the same time, he explains how these processes were connected but also not predetermined. He emphasizes, for example, how little Poland and Poles figured in German views of colonial or eastern expansionism (pp. 20–24).

Most of all, this approach is evident in his treatment of the Holocaust, whereby the account is essentially a functionalist one with an emphasis on the turf wars between Reich, Party, and SS officials. Events such as the defeat of France in 1940 and the expansion of

the General Government to Galicia in 1941 allowed horizons of opportunity to grow, while careerism and venality characterized the exploitation of occupied Poland. Germans enriched themselves through looting or pilfering Jewish property, and the „Gangster Gau“ serves both as a chapter title and a leitmotiv for the entire book. Yet the radical racialism and antisemitism of particular figures (e.g. Odilo Globocnik) were important in driving the Holocaust and policies towards the Poles. For example, Winstone describes in gripping detail how the Zamość „Aktion“ of 1943 resulted from the deadly intersection of Germanization plans, Ukrainian „resettlement,” Polish resistance, and Jewish extermination. As Winstone notes, the cycle of revenge killings spun out of control for both Polish resistance leaders and German authorities (pp. 197–198, 225).

Winstone's book exemplifies the recent trend of decentering the death camps by explaining the major role of the *Einsatzgruppen* and other forms of „personalized“ killing by the Germans. Moreover, he describes how Auschwitz-Birkenau, located in the territories annexed directly to the Reich, was a very different operation from the Final Solution in the General Government. The *Aktion Reinhard* camps of 1942 (Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka), for example, operated as pure murder facilities that did not have the mixed function (and higher number of survivors) that characterized Auschwitz-Birkenau. Still, the rapid creation of the Reinhard camps was chaotic, and the sheer number of victims meant that people arriving at Treblinka in its early weeks were often shot instead of being gassed (p. 166).

While Winstone is careful to note Polish suffering and admires their acts of resistance, he describes in nuanced fashion the qualitatively different dilemma that gentiles faced. The Germans made the Holocaust happen, but Winstone notes that Jewish suffering and deaths increased because of common attitudes among locals that did not see the Jews as part of their own. While he argues that only a minority of gentiles actively persecuted the Jews, he also makes clear that only a minority actively assisted the Jews. Winstone also downplays claims regarding the purported

Polish lack of agency in saving Jews in occupied Poland (pp. 181–184). As he observes, the propensity not to help was due more to human nature rather than national predilections, but the result was no less deadly: „The Holocaust was made possible at every stage by moral choices“ (p. 186). Despite brutal and deadly policies for both populations, the Nazis had in mind different fates for Jews and Slavs, and he assesses the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 in this regard. Winstone’s study shows the true face of what has been termed the bloodlands, where the impulse to kill came as much from below as from above. The legacy of the General Government, besides the annihilation of its Jews and the murder of countless others, was the increase of ill will between Poles and Ukrainians.

Winstone could have done more to examine the actions and motivations of the ethnic Germans in occupied Poland. While *Volksdeutsche* were not as numerous in the General Government as in the annexed territories, there were still some 70,000 of these former Polish citizens (p. 142), and many took part in the region’s murderous programs. As scholars such as Doris Bergen have pointed out, the construction of *Volksdeutsche* as a category needs to be explained first and not taken as a given.¹ The book’s conclusion would have benefitted from an examination and comparison of how the memory of the General Government has changed in Germany and Poland since 1945. Finally, Hitler’s Europe had many dark hearts, and a more explicit clarification of the book’s title would have been helpful.

Nonetheless, Winstone’s book is balanced and well argued overall. It is remarkable in its ability to explain the development of Nazi German racial policies and their connection to Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish fates in a mere 250 pages. His writing is empathetic and biting, and he challenges traditional narratives of the Holocaust, including myths of „Good Germans“ such as Oskar Schindler. Neatly divided into topical chapters, which does make for some repetition, the book’s format is ideal for teaching in undergraduate courses.

HistLit 2015-3-058 / Winson Chu über Winstone, Martin: *The Dark Heart of Hitler’s Eu-*

rope. Nazi Rule in Poland under the General Government. London 2014, in: H-Soz-Kult 24.07.2015.

¹ Doris L. Bergen, The Nazi Concept of ‘*Volksdeutsche*’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994), pp. 569-582, here pp. 570-571.