

Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. 458 pp.

Stefan Zweig was the first of many who used the game of chess to think through the dynamics of the Nazi regime. In *The Royal Game* (*Schachnovelle*, 1941), Zweig juxtaposes different styles of playing chess as personified by Mirko Czentovic, a semiliterate yet ambitious world chess champion on the one hand, and Dr. B., a man who had studied a book of chess combinations to survive while he was held in solitary confinement by the Nazi regime on the other. Widely seen as the portrayal of the workings of trauma (B.'s pain is triggered by Czentovic's cold, computed approach, and he can protect himself against it only by avoiding exposure to his past experiences in the very form of a chess game), the novella also advances Zweig's analysis of fascism as an ideology that rewards callous, calculated, and pragmatic behavior. Chess, in other words, functions to explore the psychology of social actors and relationships of power, as well as agency.

In choosing a title that references two perceived poles of power—the King representing the most powerful and the Pawn the least powerful players in the game—Rein suggests that the issue of collaboration during the German occupation of what is now the Republic of Belarus can be analyzed in these two opposing terms. His study remains one of very few to attend to local responses to, and participation in, occupation policies and violence. Despite its age and some internal problems, the monograph offers important insights that ought to motivate further inquiries. In particular, the supposedly clear division between those in power and those who are not, which Rein himself questions to some extent, requires more scholarly attention.

Overall, the monograph makes for a very slow read; its wealth of detail and the author's attempt to be as thorough as possible are at once a strength and a weakness. As a result, the author does not address the subject of the book until chapter 4. The book begins with three chapters offering a theoretical overview of studies of collaboration in Europe, the historical background of Belarusian pre-war history, and a summary of German policies in the occupied

BSSR. Chapters are very uneven, ranging in length from anywhere between 26 and 72 pages, and most of them would have benefited from streamlining the argument and a sharper focus.

Most disappointing is chapter 1; the discussion of existing scholarship on collaboration falls far short of providing a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis. The chapter draws on often outdated analyses of mostly Western European societies, and it is at times contradictory. For instance, on p. 29 Rein recites Bertram Gordon's 1968 assessment that the Vichy government opposed ideological collaboration, only to state on p. 41 that "the anti-Semitic course of the Vichy regime was pursued without any pressure from the German side." Furthermore, Rein's application of the concept of economic collaboration to the work performed by foreign workers "for various German projects both within and outside Western Europe" (p. 36) is quite problematic. He includes here the labor provided by Dutch, Belgian, and French workers, the recruitment of whom "*initially at least*, proceeded on a voluntary basis" (*ibid.*; my emphasis). Where other scholars have placed this phenomenon in the framework of the exploitation of foreign, often forced labor for the German war economy, Rein's assessment denies that many Western European workers also suffered from exploitation, humiliation, and violence. The lack of nuance invites accusations against those who were often forcibly recruited for labor in the service of German companies, farms, or private households and which ruined their lives for years after the war, notably in the former Soviet Union.

In addition to these inconsistencies, the purpose of the chapter remains somewhat unclear. As the author admits, "[i]t is indeed difficult, if not senseless, to provide what purports to be an exact and all-encompassing definition of the term collaboration ... It occurred in virtually all spheres of life and was not relegated to any particular country. It affected all the countries that found themselves under Nazi rule during World War II" (p. 18). The difficulty to offer a clear definition of "collaboration" is reflected in the fact that the chapter has no conclusion and Rein does not use the overview to develop a working definition of collaboration that guides his analysis.

In some ways, this gap reflects the complexity of the situation and the difficulty to define agency in a situation of intense violence. As Rein emphasizes, why or how people collaborate with a foreign power is always dependent on concrete circumstances, overall agendas of both occupiers and occupied, and potential benefits. He therefore tries to capture the phenomenon by focusing initially on particular organizations and institutions that would seem to have clearly identifiable goals that would allow an assessment according to these categories: one chapter focuses on efforts to “build” a state through self-help and youth organizations that reflect the aims of the national movements of the 1920s; the following chapter on the relationship of the Belorussian Orthodox Church to the occupation authorities; and another on the role of the “official” Belorussian press.

Only the last two chapters before the conclusion turn to the participation of individuals in institutions and organizations created by the occupation regime: people who volunteered or were recruited for local police battalions, which, among others, participated in the mass murder of Jews, or others who contributed to the German military effort. In relative terms—compared, for instance, to Lithuanian or Latvian responses of this kind—few local non-Jews participated. In part, and as Rein argues, this reflects the German view of Belarusians as racially inferior beings who were incapable of helping to implement the New European Order prescribed by Nazi ideology. Other scholars suggest that the lack of a strong Belarusian national movement limited the number of those who may have hoped to use the German occupation regime to fulfill anti-Soviet or nationalist aspirations (which was ill-fated elsewhere too but did motivate organizations such as the UPA). The brutality of German violence against Jews and non-Jewish residents seems to have further limited enthusiasm among locals to join, and local lore continues to describe the choices people had as either joining the police or being transported to forced labor. In essence, both the scale and the motivation to join the occupying forces in, for instance, the implementation of the Holocaust remain unclear and require further research.

Rein relies in his analysis of German occupation policy and Belorussian collaboration on literature published before early 2002,

as well as on German and Belorussian documentation that was available to him in the form of copies stored at Yad Vashem Archives. The book's scope is therefore somewhat limited and offers little to trace the perspective of those considered collaborators themselves or to illuminate how or why locals responded in particular ways. Scholars like Tanja Pentter, Franziska Exeler, and Alana Holland are using archival material based on Soviet war crime trials and a number of other sources to access these elements. Similarly, oral histories and other research conducted by scholars based in Belarus since the late 1990s promise further insight into the concrete local and personal dynamics of collaboration and will help untangle the web of different responses.

Again, Rein delivers important insights drawing on a limited source base and his work ought to be seen as a stimulant for further research. He rejects the idea that collaboration should be viewed as either amoral opportunism or the expression of ideological affinity with the Nazis. His résumé of the impact of dekulakization, collectivization, and Stalinist repression in the 1930s as facilitators of a "new type of individual ... who would turn against anyone designated by the authorities as the enemy" (p. 68) may lead the way in understanding, why some were willing to turn against their neighbors, why others were not, and which other factors triggered particular decisions or actions. Furthermore, studying collaboration in the territories of the German-occupied BSSR must conjoin with analyses of its counterpart, the Soviet-led partisan movement. In many cases, locals faced local police staff attempting to enforce German rule by day and partisans requesting support for their cause at night, a conundrum that drove individuals to allegiances with either not because they chose to, but because they were forced to do so literally at gunpoint. The role of other national groups' participation in the campaigns led by occupation authorities ought to be considered as well. Latvian and Lithuanian involvement in, for instance, so-called punitive or anti-partisan operations that often enough ended in the death of hundreds, if not thousands of Belarusians, certainly shine a light on both German and Belarusian agency.

Pointing to dynamics on the chess board to summarize the problem of collaboration in Belarus may not be the best choice if the

suggestive metaphor is not used to full capacity. The King is powerful and able to move into any direction, but, just like the Pawn, only one step at a time. Focusing on the Pawn's powerlessness, in turn, might foreclose the search for conditions or instances in which the Pawn assumes the position of a Queen, potentially defeating the King, or for explanations as to why these conditions were never fulfilled. The Pawn kills at an angle, but not forward, and must not go backwards. Does the motive of "once you're in, you're in" really hold true in a situation of occupation violence that triggered other violence as well? The many members of the police who defected to the partisans in 1943 prove otherwise. Nonetheless, considering the neither horizontal, nor vertical direction the Pawns' action may take might reveal an important aspect to further probe in assessing relevant agency and power relations under occupation.

Finally, the chess board houses many pieces and multiple parties, but none of them are the players. An understanding of why some local residents sided with occupation authorities must be open to considering that decisions under duress often have short-term goals in mind, rather than following a fully planned strategy. Just as the German occupiers regularly adjusted their use of "collaborators," the latter made choices that may require us to devise a new vocabulary to understand and represent local responses to the occupation regime.

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Andrea Graziosi and Frank E. Sysyn (eds.), *Communism and Hunger: The Ukrainian, Kazakh, and Soviet Famines in Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2016. 158 pp.

Famine is never a wholly natural disaster; it always has a man-made dimension. Andrea Graziosi and Frank E. Sysyn, the editors of the multi-dimensional and thought-provoking *Communism and Hunger: The Ukrainian, Kazakh, and Soviet Famines in Comparative*