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EVERYDAY LIFE DURING AN AGE OF MASS VIOLENCE – A FOREWORD

The conception of this book is brilliant and fruitful, since it simultaneously resolves major problems of the social, national, and international histories of the Second World War. Can the history of everyday life be seen as a legitimate subject of inquiry during an age of mass violence? It most certainly can, provided that the everyday life is of those who are subject to violence, and those who perpetrate it. This requires a history of the German war that is set beyond Germany, above all in eastern Europe, and in this case Poland. In these chapters dying becomes an everyday activity, and the knowledge of everyday death then informs everyday life. But once the history of everyday life ventures east, it must also include Soviet power, since Germany began the war with Soviet help, and every inch the Germans conquered in Poland was, at one time or another, also conquered by the Soviets.

Of course the Polish citizens, be they Jews, or Poles, or Belarusians, or Ukrainians, be they subject to German or to Soviet power, can only know so much about the fate that befalls them. They know less about German institutions and Soviet institutions than inhabitants of Berlin or Moscow, even as they are more at risk of deportation or death. Thus their experiences, as they are in this volume, must be complemented by those of the personnel of the relevant German or Soviet institutions. Here we find excellent institutional histories not only of the Gestapo and NKVD, but of the Reichskommissariat for the Strengthening of Germandom and the Red Army.

The use of Poland as a lens brings to the fore a particular strength of recent German and Polish historiography: the use of local studies to make arguments at the meso-level, between the individual and the occupying power. In several chapters here we see the astonishing progress that German historiography of the Holocaust has made in recent years.

The history of everyday life permits a clearer view not just of policies of mass violence but of the violent consequences of occupation itself. Crimes such as the rape of Jewish and Polish women by German occupiers

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can come into focus. The everyday experience of partisans (anti-Soviet or anti-German) has something in common with that of both the personnel of occupying institutions and that of civilians under occupation: they are both hunters and hunted. But most of the time they are survivors, and the work of anti-partisan forces (Soviet or German) consists not mainly in direct confrontation but in the effort to make partisans' survival impossible -- with all of the consequences this has for the civilians who can seen to be partisans' allies or even, in the German expression, the helpers of the helpers of the partisans.

The use of everyday history in a time of violence involves a form of time that might be called, with apologies to Braudel, the short durée. Life may be brief and cheap, but the depiction of everyday life and death permits historians to perceive, by contrast with this short durée, other forms of time. It allows some conventional narrative caesurae to be overcome, and allows some historical ideas about temporality to be tested. So for example deportation is a radical break in time for the deportees, but for the occupying power and the people who take their houses and jobs it is a kind of transition. Nationality, which is supposed to be a defining feature of individual identity, can be changed from one day to the next as a way to increase chances of survival (as when a Pole accepts *Eindeutschung* or pretends to be Ukrainian to avoid a Soviet deportation). What does that mean for people's understanding of their past and their future? It is widely thought that ideology motivates killing by the vision of a utopian future. But how do individual killers who come to see murder as part of the daily routine preserve such visions, if at all?

In one way the history of everyday life is subversive, even of the vast and varied ambitions of this marvelous volume. We separate the German and the Soviet occupations, but of course they were always contiguous in place (all that ever changed between 1939 and 1945 was the dividing line between their power) and they were always successive from the perspective of individuals (all of prewar Poland was occupied by both German and Soviet power, either in the sequence Soviet-German-Soviet in the east, or German-Soviet in the west). This means that individuals were always making comparative judgments: whether thinking about crossing a border, or awaiting a change in occupation.

There is relatively little such comparison here, except in the very fine introduction, which points the way towards comparisons that readers might make. In my opinion, the interesting question is not so much a static account of differences and similarities (although this research certainly helps), nor the issue of what the Soviets and Germans learned from each other (not much), but how they enabled and disabled each others' violent plans. But these are subjects that we will be debating for decades. In order

to debate them well, to set the full history of war and occupation in motion, we need first to have the pieces in place. This volume is an extraordinary contribution to that end.

But above all it is the merit of being an extremely valuable piece of comparative social history of war, collecting leading scholars, drawing from prodigious and fresh research.