



Stephan Lehnstedt. *Occupation in the East: The Daily Lives of German Occupiers in Warsaw and Minsk, 1939-1944.* New York: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2016. 306 pp. \$130.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78533-323-1.

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Ever since Christopher Browning in 1992 opened a new path for Holocaust researchers, positing that even ordinary men can become war criminals, considerable effort has gone into study of the perpetrators. One of the most notable contributions of recent years is Stephan Lehnstaedt's *Okupation im Osten. Besatzeralltag in Warschau unter Minsk, 1939-1945* (2010), which this volume makes available in translation to English readers. Lehnstaedt's is a genuinely original take on the problem, exploring the servants of the murder machine in the East, both in a wider frame and in greater detail. A professor of Holocaust and Jewish studies at Touro College Berlin, Lehnstaedt seeks to analyze the legitimation of violence and employs social or "daily life" history (*Alltagsgeschichte*) to accomplish this. The German military personnel and civilian officials who staffed the occupation regimes in Warsaw and Minsk not only made possible the great crimes that took place there, but found in the structure of daily life a justification of their own willing participation.

Lehnstaedt's is truly an original approach to the problem. In place of a catalogue of executions and toll of the dead and biographies of the men who pulled the triggers, the author examines the conditions and experiences of daily life of the oc-

cupiers. And he focuses on the most banal of perpetrators—soldiers, police, administrators, railwaymen, switchboard operators, both military and civilian, male and female—who were on duty in the General Government of Poland and the Reich Commissariat for the East. The analysis proceeds from the proposition that these functionaries, though they did not carry out the mass killing, were nonetheless a part of the murder machine in real sense. And *Occupation in the East* is an analysis of just this part of the machinery of death. This examination of the society of the occupiers of Warsaw and Minsk might easily have become wrapped up in how individuals lived this occupation, but the author never loses sight of the purpose and outcome, as it asks the question "What were the conditions that made so many Germans active participants in the occupation, and thereby in the violence that it necessarily entailed?" (p. 7).

The society of the occupiers is first assayed in some detail. Lehnstaedt wades through the tangle of organizations expertly. He finds more than an army of occupation, but a substantial workforce, drawn from diverse agencies and all walks of life. These personnel formed a carefully constructed, separate ethnic German society transported to the East. Separate living quarters were secured, clustered in discrete German quarters. Over the

streets the Nazis hung their banners and festooned public buildings with national symbols, to create the very impression of the Reich. More importantly, special stores, clinics, schools, and cinemas catered to the German population, so that members might live separately and need have no contact with the Polish, Belorussian, or Jewish inhabitants. The depiction of Warsaw is especially rich, born of an intimate knowledge of the city from the author's years as an associate of the German Historical Institute there.

The norms of the occupation society and the attitudes of overlords are Lehnstaedt's *métier*. An alien environment and social context rendered members' previous beliefs and behaviors useless. Official duties, the structure of occupation society, and political education therefore created a framework or "habitus" for decision-making, reorientation of values, and adaptation to new realities (p. 161). At the core was maintaining German prestige, which justified the position of personnel in this environment. The need to avoid a negative public impression was quickly internalized. Toward the local population this meant adopting a "proud, but especially an irreproachable attitude" (p. 164). Prejudices, propaganda, and the press fostered a perception of Poles and Belarusians as subhumans or, at best, uncivilized peoples, which allowed the occupiers to express their arrogance unashamedly and brutally.

Most uncommon is the treatment of the violence that was part of daily life. While the soldiers and civilians who peopled organs of occupation at Warsaw and Minsk did not wield whips and pistols, their decisions and orders claimed the lives of many tens of thousands. They stood behind a structural violence which was expressed in terms of the chronic deprivation of food, forced labor, and periodic executions. None could mistake the signs of violence nor their connection to it. It even created a morbid curiosity, which servicemen satisfied by visiting the Jewish ghettos. Despite the self-censorship displayed in letters home, we

must conclude with Lehnstaedt that "overall, it must have been difficult in the East not to learn anything about the mass murders" (p. 253). The deportations from and then the liquidation of the Jewish ghettos and later the suppression of the Warsaw Rising of 1944 constituted exceptional cases, where violence transcended the "normal" day-to-day brutality. These events engaged the members of the society of occupiers as never before, provoking either denial and acceptance responses or, in a few cases, rejection. Brutality was a means of demonstrating the Nazi claim to rule and even "a habitual mode of expression" (p. 257). Participants in the violence understood themselves to be united with other occupiers, removing the burden of personal responsibility as well as easing inhibitions.

Beyond the deft use of social history and original perspective, Lehnstaedt's contribution is a model of scholarly erudition. It is scrupulous with the use of evidence and painstaking in the presentation of claims. Martin Dean's English translation is not only free of error, but smooth and concise. This is necessarily a specialized work, aimed at historians of the European War and the Holocaust. Nonspecialists will be put off by the zealous adherence to scholarly conventions, while the hefty price tag will limit it to the shelves of research libraries. Yet there is no gainsaying that this tribute to the historian's craft is a valuable contribution to the history of war and of the Holocaust.

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