

overmastered an aim to convert” (149). Bureaucrats learned to “speak Fascism” (160) without changing their worldviews. Peasant life went on as if “Fascism might never have existed” (167). Meanwhile, living standards for ordinary Italians steadily declined with the failure of the regime’s corporatist and autarchic schemes, and with its constant and costly wars.

Mussolini’s wars in Africa and Spain were brutal, but Bosworth discerns little revolutionary intent here. While uncomfortable with their tendency to whitewash Italian colonial violence, Bosworth largely sides with Italian revisionist historians in rehabilitating a De Felicean interpretation of Mussolini as a traditional “realist” (63) statesman whose foreign policy was guided more by opportunism than by ideology. Mussolini’s foreign ambitions were “old-fashioned” (236), and his planning for aggressive war always was “more verbal than real, more populist than actual” (235). The alliance with Hitler was not due to a sense of common destiny or ideological affinity but the result of “frightened realism” (238) following the *Anschluss*. Bosworth downplays the existence of knowledge transfers between the two regimes and suggests that the influence of the Italian model on other fascist movements (including Hitler’s) has been overstated in recent scholarship. The relationship between Italian Fascism and German Nazism was based more on competition and jealousy. By September 1939, Mussolini’s brand of fascism was “in full eclipse” (246).

Perhaps the most interesting parts of the book trace the transformation of foreign impressions of Mussolini’s dictatorship during the 1930s. Drawing on newspapers, journals, diaries, and memoirs (mainly but not exclusively representing the English-speaking world), Bosworth shows how until the middle of the decade establishment politicians, bureaucrats, financiers, and media lauded Mussolini as a “good dictator” whose style of rule was well-suited to the Italian people. It was Mussolini’s “populist war” (187) of aggression against Ethiopia, along with press reports on Fascist atrocities and use of poison gas, that permanently transformed him into “the worst of the dictators” (202) in the world’s eyes.

There is something here for all readers. The book provides generalists and Europeanists with an argumentative yet accessible narrative of the Italian state during the 1930s, filled with amusing anecdotes and biographical sketches of some of the regime’s major and minor characters. Those interested in fascism and totalitarianism as generic historical and political concepts with applicability to the present-day rise of right-wing populist movements will be challenged by Bosworth’s observations. Italianists too will find plenty that is new here. While this work is unlikely to change minds in the interminable debate over how seriously we ought to take Fascist words, rituals, and intentions, Bosworth’s cautionary notes demand consideration and engagement, as always.

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Jewish Childhood in Kraków: A Microhistory of the Holocaust

By Joanna Sliwa. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021. Pp. 218. Paperback \$29.29. ISBN: 978-1978822931.

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“Early in the German occupation, Kraków Jews understood they had to present themselves as economically advantageous to the Germans. They removed children from the Germans’ sight

to the extent possible. Children absorbed that message.” (2) On this striking premise, Joanna Sliwa builds her monograph on Jewish children in wartime Kraków. This first study of childhood Holocaust experience in one locality is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the experiences of the still under-researched population of those children who, under the euthanasia program, were the first victims of Nazism.

Since Debórah Dwork’s groundbreaking *Children with the Jewish Star* (1991), the research on children during the Holocaust has been steadily expanding. Apart from the published memoirs and diaries of Holocaust children, topics discussed include the circumstances of hiding and eventual rescue (e.g., Ewa Kurek’s *Your Life Is Worth Mine* [1997] and Nahum Bogner’s *At the Mercy of Strangers* [2009]), the difficulties in effecting the postwar recovery of hidden children (e.g., Emunah Nahmani Gafni’s *Dividing Hearts* [2009]), and traumatic childhood experiences under the various stages of Nazi persecution and murder (e.g., Beverly Chalmers’s *Betrayed* [2020]). Following a “testimonial turn” in Holocaust scholarship, there are also works discussing and utilizing children’s ego documents as a source manifesting their agency in the face of atrocity (e.g., Nicholas Stargardt’s *Witnesses of War* [2005] and Joanna Beata Michlic’s *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland* [2008]).

The relative lateness and paucity of the research on children during the Holocaust is nevertheless indicative of an insufficient primary source base. Even as the personal testimonies by minor children are scarce, their scarcity is further augmented by their “limited” perspective. This disadvantage has contributed to what is sometimes known as the “granddaddy issue” in childhood history, namely, the deficiency of children’s voices.

Sliwa overcomes this difficulty by supplementing the meager primary sources with a careful reconstruction of the daily experiences of the Jewish community and of the effects that shifting historical circumstances had on Jewish children. She synthesizes a depiction of wartime Kraków from relevant Polish and German documents, as well as from a secondary literature that might be less available to an English-speaking audience (including certain arcane histories of religious orders in the region). By succinctly depicting the activities of the main actors in the story (German occupiers, Polish and Jewish administration, communal and welfare organizations, and ordinary citizens, both Polish and Jewish), Sliwa creates a kind of *mise-en-scène*, against which she interposes the children’s voices gleaned from several vital collections of Holocaust testimonies and published diaries.

Although the Kraków ghetto has become better known, thanks to Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, it has not been the subject of as many studies as the two largest ghettos in occupied Europe, Warsaw and Lodz. Kraków’s Jewish community, the fourth largest in Poland, numbering about 56,000 in 1931 (more than 25% of the population), was a “spiritual and cultural center for Jews – the ‘Jerusalem of Galicia’” (4). The city’s role as the capital of the Nazi General Government created particular circumstances for the Jewish community; its role as a German industrial base further forced children to “employ a strategy of concealment, semi-legality, and deception” (1).

The book opens with a thorough description of the situation of the Jews of Kraków at the beginning of the occupation and presents a complex, multifaceted picture of the relationships between Poles, Germans, and an increasingly oppressed Jewish community. It is illustrated with personal testimonies about the new experiences of Jewish children encountering unprecedented upheavals. Their accounts, registering a caesura in their lives, sometimes reflect the paradoxical impressions of sudden changes on immature actors, such as the joy experienced upon hearing that the war had begun in the mind of children with with a romantic vision of history. Such surprising depictions argue convincingly for the necessity of studying such “non-traditional” (non-adult) historical subjects, who contextualize, even challenge, an adult perspective.

In the second chapter, Sliwa depicts events surrounding the relatively late (March 1941) creation of the Kraków ghetto. She focuses on presenting and analyzing children’s coping

strategies in the face of the new reality, for example, the way they attempted to practice the normal childhood activities of play, education, religious observance, and friendship. Sliwa does not shy away from a frank portrayal of the emotional and moral disintegration that afflicted some families due to the deprivations of ghetto existence, with its overcrowding, hunger, disease, and terror. The testimonies poignantly illustrate the increasingly limiting and limited existence of the youngest ghetto inhabitants.

The third chapter presents a panoramic view of clandestine efforts including smuggling, hiding, rescue attempts, and other activities. As only Jews with work permits were allowed to move to the ghetto, parents often employed immense resources and ingenuity to “change” the age of their children to fit into the category of workers. Through such manifold means, the young members of the Jewish community sometimes succeeded not only in saving themselves but also in providing their families with additional food, income, and other necessities. Sliwa’s emphasis here is on the children’s agency, resistance, and humanity in defying “German efforts to destroy Jewish life” (49).

In chapter 4, Sliwa analyzes difficulties faced by child-welfare organizations and activists. In their efforts to save and feed orphaned children, they realized that any concentration of children would inevitably attract the Germans’ attention, provoking the Germans to target their charges for destruction. Working under such impossible conditions, they reacted to the rumors of what could happen and devoted all their efforts to rescue. Ultimately, as the tragic story of a children’s asylum on Plac Zgody demonstrates, such attempts were futile and resulted in children being murdered.

The fifth chapter discusses the little-known subject of children’s experiences in the Plaszow labor camp and killing center, where children under fourteen were strictly forbidden but occasionally tolerated. Due to a lacuna in the secondary literature, this section is based almost exclusively on children’s testimonies. Sliwa aptly illustrates the circumscribed world of the little prisoners, who, as Debórah Dwork reports, were thinking and reacting in terms of the next moment, the next hour, rather than concocting any grand plans of surviving Hitler. Although the entire book is challenging because of the difficulty of its subject, this chapter is especially hard to read, given the children’s eyewitness testimonies of brutal selections and killings.

In the last chapter, Sliwa describes instances of Jewish survival through hiding and flight, expounding especially effectively on the escape routes leading through Hungary to Palestine. The book concludes with an epilogue that briefly discusses the postwar experiences of anti-semitism, flight to Palestine, and return to a reclaimed Jewishness in the Kazimierz district of Kraków.

Joanna Sliwa narrates the story with sensitivity and balance, navigating skillfully the especially problematic aspect of Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation. Avoiding easy generalizations, she documents acts of hostility, betrayal, and violence by non-Jewish Poles, who were, for the most part, satisfied with the removal and disappearance of their Jewish neighbors. Against the background of antisemitic attitudes, the actions and words of Poles sympathetic to the Jews, sometimes their rescuers, stand out as rare exceptions.

Thanks to the author’s expert weaving together of the history of consecutive stages of the Nazi persecutions of the Kraków Jews with moving passages from personal accounts, the book is an excellent realization of the kind of integrated history proposed by Saul Friedländer in his definitive and authoritative *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997). In fact, it could be called an exemplary integrated microhistory.