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Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire*. London: Palgrave, 2017. xx + 205 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$28.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-137-38534-5.

Review by Perry Biddiscombe, University of Victoria.

Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire is the product of two seasoned South Australian historians, Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, who have written extensively about western, central and east/central Europe during World War Two and the immediate postwar period. Drapac was a Rhodes Scholar who studied under Richard Cobb, and visitors to the H-France site will know her from her controversial study of Catholics in wartime Paris (*War and Religion*, 1998) and from continuing commentary on French contemporary history and culture. Paired with Pritchard, a specialist in German history, the two have the bona fides they need to draw Europe-wide conclusions about resistance and collaboration, and they announce early in their book that examination of themes in this broad scope is one of their objectives. They also proclaim an intention to reframe familiar time periods and to use an awareness of gender as an analytical tool, not only to explore how women shared broad wartime reactions to the Nazis, but to critique the way that public intellectuals and politicians have gendered the resistance/collaboration dichotomy as a male/female binary. Most of all, Drapac and Pritchard want to challenge the very idea of the resistance/collaboration dichotomy, a task juxtaposing oddly with the title of the volume.

The authors feel that historians have customarily set European responses to the Nazis upon a spectrum of behaviours that put resistance and collaboration at opposite poles. Like many historical revisionists, they claim an acceptance of the basic legitimacy of their target—that is, the oppositional categorization of resistance and collaboration—but they argue that there are severe limitations to the existing paradigm and that “any form of organising knowledge about the past” (p. 188) conceals as much as it exposes, in this case behaviours that had previously escaped inclusion in the two categories (especially in the “resistance” bracket). The authors admit that the process of the Holocaust “raised the stakes in describing people’s actions as resistance or collaboration” (p. 105), since relevant behaviours such as action, inaction or collusion had results that could be measured in a huge number of human lives. Nonetheless, they blame historians for judging people in wartime Europe as having made “good” or “bad” choices, which Drapac and Pritchard see as “a false dichotomy” (p. 98), and they also complain that this approach is teleological because it is informed by an awareness of how the war turned out. The result, they aver, is an overly simplistic historiography that has, ever since World War Two, lent itself to instrumental exploitation by various political interests. The authors have already explored such themes in their earlier work, separately or together in an article in the *Journal of Social History*, but this study is written for undergraduates, and while it advances the authors’ agenda, it is also intended to serve as a basic review of relevant debates in the historical literature and the wider politico-cultural environment.[1] The main research base is comprised of secondary sources, but the authors occasionally add nuggets of data from the archives.

Drapac and Pritchard start with a brief review of the history that unfolded in wartime Europe, focusing

on the German control of four kinds of territories (annexed lands, occupied countries under direct rule, client states, and allies), and they use the now-familiar notion of polycracy to interpret the nature of Nazi rule in both Germany and German-occupied regions. Surprisingly, they then introduce European responses to Nazi military occupation by using the resistance/collaboration spectrum that they criticize, later calling the model “inflexible” (p. 22) and blaming Robert Paxton for including a great range of behaviours under the rubric of “functional collaboration” (p. 18). In the following chapter, they trace the etymologies of “resistance” and “collaboration” as modern political terms, arguing that in Western Europe there was an evolution of thinking that originally celebrated “resistance” as a broad public phenomena, although later revaluations—under the impact of sixties counterculture and anti-establishmentarianism—suggested that it was actually a minority experience and that broad swaths of wartime opinion had been open to forms of collaboration, especially in turning a blind eye to the Holocaust. In the communist East and the Balkans, “resistance” was conceived in unidimensional and relatively static terms as “anti-fascism,” which had supposedly united workers, peasants and bourgeois liberals in a communist-led struggle against Hitlerism, although the polarity of this dynamic was reversed by East European writers in the diaspora, who saw Partisans as pro-Soviet traitors and collaborators as heroes who had worked with the Germans as a strategic necessity in order to ward off the threat of communism. This latter approach has—according to Drapac and Pritchard—influenced post-communist historiographies and political cultures in Eastern European countries. Echoing Pieter Lagrou, the authors also note that in both Western and Eastern Europe, definitions of “resistance” and “collaboration” became the source of a wide-scale system of postwar rewards and punishments, although they contend—not unreasonably—that both concepts had definitional inadequacies that neither historians nor politicians ever thoroughly resolved.

In the middle part of *Resistance and Collaboration*, Drapac and Pritchard explore the “war of armed bands” that pitted hundreds of thousands of armed resisters against roughly equal numbers of armed collaborators, and they portray this struggle as not just a minor-league version of the larger antagonism between the great-power belligerents, but as a distinctive “cycle of paramilitary violence which began in the 1930s and... lasted until the later 1940s” (p. 50). “Paramilitarisation,” in this sense, suggests a dog-eat-dog struggle between militias characterized more by their similarities than by their differences. This conflict raged especially in areas that already suffered from the absence of a stable civil society, but it got worse as the war dragged on and the Nazi regime was increasingly able only to dominate occupied territory, not fully govern it or retain the state’s monopoly on the means of violence. Some of the armed bands—on both sides—were caught up as much in a struggle for survival as in the desire to make themselves useful militarily. Drapac and Pritchard point out that some armed groups, such as the Ukrainian Partisan Army or the Yugoslav Chetniks, could be regarded either as resisters *or* collaborators, depending on application of the criteria behind those definitional categories, and that the remnants of such organizations kept fighting even after the end of World War Two.

Drapac and Pritchard also resent the fact that postwar historians were long focused on studying the armed bands of the wartime period while they virtually ignored non-combatant or “civil” forms of resistance or collaboration. Even when the historians of the 1960s belatedly launched themselves into researching this type of phenomena, they were—according to Drapac and Pritchard—hemmed in by the existing resistance/collaboration dichotomy or they functioned under the influence of historiographical trends such as totalitarianism theory, *Alltagsgeschichte* microhistory (which often uncovered popular complicity with authoritarianism), or analytical models suggesting that Nazism was a medium for social levelling or for the subsuming of class attachments within a new racial identity. Although the authors are themselves inspired by elements of the “totalitarianism” interpretation, they relativize these vast bodies of work as passing fancies of the moment, contending that they should “never [be] taken at face value” (p. 135). Despite the fact that they deride previous research projects as having failed to deal with the multidimensional complexities of everyday existence during wartime, Drapac and Pritchard readily to charge into the field, pledging to discard outmoded definitions and categories by replacing them with alternate means of understanding, such as the Catholic concept of a “politics of presence” (p. 147). Because the National Socialists wanted to impose a top-down sense of *Volksgemeinschaft* or create a Germanized

version of Mussolini's "fascist person," Drapac and Pritchard see individuals who hesitated in aligning themselves with this racialized utopian framework as out of sync with the New Order (if not "resistant"). Similarly, if the inhabitants of Hitler's empire were not totally discombobulated by the threat of terror, then Drapac and Pritchard see them as foiling a Nazi objective. If people privately conserved pre-Nazi routines or value systems, then they remained outside the totalitarian field of gravity and should be recognized as having occupied such a position. So for instance, if German women had already—before 1933—demonstrated a declining rate of fertility, and they then still limited their propensity to have children despite contrary demands by the National Socialist state, they were rejecting a system of power relations imposed by the Nazis. Drapac and Pritchard imply that such thoughts and behaviors were more pervasive than any supposedly general sense of complicity with the New Order. They even question why people who disliked National Socialism but never got a chance to resist should be forgotten or ignored by historians.

Throughout much of *Resistance and Collaboration*, Drapac and Pritchard review material and interpretations that will be familiar to scholars of the period, but in chapter six they arrive at the nub of their analysis, which is the notion of a "social history of politics." This approach, they argue, favours "empirical research" and supposedly offers a deliverance from existing "interpretive paradigms" that have not provided a uniform standard for describing wartime behaviours. Adapting a Nietzscheanism, they talk of going "beyond resistance and collaboration." They proclaim support for interdisciplinarity and the primacy of social history, suggesting that scholars should devote their main attention to an investigation of people's individual lives and local communities as a means of addressing the wartime period: "To understand why people behaved as they did, we must be able to see the situation as they saw it, in light of their own lived experiences and the knowledge that was available to them at the time" (p. 190).

While one could quibble with some of the minor assertions or characterizations in the book, perhaps we should conclude by making two fundamental observations. First, we should address Drapac and Pritchard's main theme, which is to subsume politics within social history. It is true that politics forms part of a greater complex of human relations that we could describe as "social," but it is a distinguishable sub-category because it involves the conduct and distribution of power *in government* (of which the army and police are extensions). Most definitions of "politics" still carry this connotation; "family politics," "office politics," or "sexual politics" are colloquial applications of the term that require an adjective to adjust their meaning. Given this general understanding of what the term "politics" denotes, "collaboration" could be defined as support of Nazi dominion over the mechanisms of administrative and military power—whether done for ideological or self-interested reasons—and pursued as far as an historical actor had opportunities to exercise such influence; "resistance" was opposition to Nazi governmental and military domination, inspired again mainly by ideological or self-interested motives, and subject to the same conditions of operational opportunity. Observant Catholics who retained a commitment to their faith, engaged in private acts of piety or did volunteer work for the St. Vincent de Paul Society cannot be described as "resisters." Drapac and Pritchard implicitly concede this point in observing that Bavarian Catholics were not trying "to bring down the regime" (p. 155), even when they sympathized with the plight of local Polish forced labourers and included them in ceremonies of Catholic collective worship. But the authors want to have their cake and eat it too. They reject—semantically—the terms of "resistance" and "collaboration," while at the same time sympathetically portraying considerable numbers of people in Nazi-dominated Europe whom they claim felt a general repugnance toward Nazism. And the authors obviously want these people credited in current culture: why, they ask, do contemporary films about wartime Europe tell us so little "about what propelled believers or of the importance of faith in their lives" (p. 181)? The Drapac-Pritchard approach comes close to reframing the old conservative/Christian critique of "totalitarianism," albeit refocused at a popular—rather than elite or intellectual—level, and updated by attention to gender and the voices of women.

Drapac and Pritchard also complain that ideas about "resistance" and "collaboration" have become politicized, but that process occurred precisely because they were political phenomena and their legacies

were “up for grabs” as the politico-military coalition of forces pitted against the Germans bifurcated after World War Two. Indeed, all the main concepts associated with the war—appeasement, the Holocaust, collective guilt and liberation—were political in nature and have since been contested on such grounds, so it would be a surprise if “resistance” and “collaboration” were not part of this list.

Second, we should also note that the Drapac-Pritchard argument about the desire of Nazi rulers to permeate the individual existence of their subjects is an observation that applies more properly to Greater Germany, and its German inhabitants, than to large parts of occupied Europe, although the authors nonetheless use it as a general predicate for the “politics of presence.” Given the fact that the nature of Nazi goals within Germany—and therefore the special nature of “resistance” and “collaboration” within the Greater Reich—were *different* from external examples, it might have been a good idea to leave Germany out of the discussion, treating it as an imperial centre with limited relevance to conditions in the periphery of the empire. It is for this reason that many existing studies treating “resistance” and “collaboration” as Europe-wide phenomena make little or no mention of Germany itself.^[2] Drapac and Pritchard are right in contending that the invasive nature of the Nazi system was partly replicated by local regimes in parts of Europe that the authors define as “client states,” but throughout large areas of occupied Europe, especially in the East, the Nazis cared little if supposed racial inferiors accepted their ideology, as long as these subordinated peoples stayed quiet, kept working and avoided using their religious faiths—Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox—as social bulwarks that might inhibit the new masters in exploiting their underlings. In these cases, “the politics of presence” can be defined, at best, as a means of surviving “the ordeal” rather than ideologically or even spiritually contesting Nazi influence.

Whether or not one agrees with the approach advanced by Drapac and Pritchard, most readers will appreciate their insistence that easy answers are hard to come by. And there is no doubt that *Resistance and Collaboration* is well worth perusing. The authors write in a lucid style and the book is superbly organized. For students and the reading public, it provides a comprehensively researched summary of both the topic and its historiographical legacy, albeit framed in terms of the authors’ bias against existing understandings of “resistance” and “collaboration.”

NOTES

[1] Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, “Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Towards a Social History of Politics in Hitler’s Empire,” *Journal of Social History* 48 (2015): 865–891.

[2] See, for instance, Werner Brockdorff, *Kollaboration oder Widerstand* (Wels: Weslsermühl, 1968); Jorgen Haestrup, *Europe Ablaze: An Analysis of the History of the European Resistance Movements, 1939–1945* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1978); Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler’s Europe* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982); Rab Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika: Moral Dilemmas of Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler’s Europe* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999); and Olivier Wieviorka and Jacek Rebinka, “Resisters: From Everyday Life to Counter-state,” in Robert Gildea, Olivier Wieviorka and Anette Warring, eds., *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: Daily Life in Occupied Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 153–176. In a recent book, István Deák briefly mentions German resistance, but only after debating whether or not it belongs in his study of the range of behaviors demonstrated by Europeans under Nazi rule. *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II* (Boulder: Westview, 2015), pp. 183–184.

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