
1 July 2024 | PDF: [https://hdiplo.org/to/RT25-17](https://hdiplo.org/to/RT25-17) | X: [@HDiplo](https://twitter.com/HDiplo) | BlueSky: [@h-diplo.bsky.social](https://h-diplo.bsky.social)

Editor: Diane Labrosse
Commissioning Editor: Daniel R. Hart
Production Editor: Christopher Ball
Copy Editor: Bethany Keenan

Contents

- Introduction by Sophie De Schaepdrijver, Pennsylvania State University .......................................................... 2
- Review by Jennifer L. Foray, Purdue University .................................................................................................. 6
- Review by Emil Kerenji, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum ............................................................... 9
- Review by Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, University of Tennessee ............................................................................. 14
- Review by Birgit Schneider, Independent Scholar ............................................................................................... 18
- Response by Aviel Roshwald, Georgetown University ....................................................................................... 23
Aviel Roshwald’s confident comparative study of European and Asian societies’ reactions to Axis occupation during World War II, *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945*, has garnered thoughtful praise from this roundtable’s reviewers. “With its comparative approach and extensive source base,” writes Jennifer Foray, “this book will serve as an invaluable reference for those who are interested in the global consequences of war and occupation in the 1940s and beyond.” Emil Kerenji calls *Occupied* “an essential work of comparative history on World War II [and] a sprawling landscape of insightful analysis.” Birgit Schneider praises the book as “a profound analysis of how Asian and European countries grappled with their occupation.” Vejas Liulevicius highlights how this “impressive synthesis of a large scholarship in a wide array of languages” also “draws heavily on primary sources, illustrating key conceptual points.”

Wielding what Liulevicius calls “a tremendously effective organizational strategy,” Roshwald concentrates on the political elites in eleven Asian and European occupied countries and their (shifting) reactions to occupation. This emphasis on the occupied, Schneider notes, “posits the country-case studies not as mere victims of occupation but emphasizes their agency through exploring the various responses to the occupation.” The book is organized in three parts. Part 1, “Patriotisms under Occupation,” analyzes the impact of occupation on the political elites of more-or-less-established nation-states: the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand. Part 2, “Fractured Societies and Fractal Identities,” examines tensions inside societies that experienced civil wars against the backdrop of the world war: Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China. Part 3, “Conquest in the Guise of Liberation,” studies the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine: societies ruled by colonial powers (the US, the Netherlands, and the USSR, respectively) before their military occupation by Axis hegemons.

Throughout, *Occupied* is, as Schneider writes, “suffused by the idea of nationalism”: Roshwald examines how political elites positioned themselves vis-à-vis occupation regimes through the lens of these elites’ discourses on “the concept of national community—as well as the related concepts of nationalism, national interest, and patriotism” (Kerenji). This perspective allows for the dispassionate examining of elites’ choices to collaborate with or to resist occupation regimes. Indeed, *Occupied* does not reject the collaboration-resistance dichotomy as an analytical lens; rather, the book seeks to understand political and military leaders’ choices from within, by focusing on “the ideas about the nation that they…sought to realize” (Schneider). Roshwald’s focus on the national places his nation-cases “in conversation with one another” (Foray). In part 1, the brilliantly titled chapter “The Shifting Parameters of the Patriotically Plausible” (99-126) examines how collaborationist/accommodationist elites navigated, or failed to navigate, the loss of patriotic credibility created by their choice to hitch their wagon to the occupation regime. This chapter pays ample attention to instructive differences across nation-cases. For instance, the establishment of the French Vichy regime went hand in hand with an illiberal domestic regime change (the “National Revolution”), which tied this regime to Nazi Germany’s fortunes in war; by contrast, the pliant Dutch civil service operated in a context of ostensible constitutional continuity, which, as Roshwald writes, “did not constitute a gamble on the long-term survival of German hegemony” (105).
In part 2, Roshwald shows how the fractal circumstances of civil war could generate insistent definitions of the nation. In China, for instance, the collaborationist regime of President Wang Jingwei defined itself as the true heir to Chinese Nationalism, as against Chiang Kai-shek’s alleged deviation from the right path; another collaborationist regime, by contrast, opted for “neo-Confucianist slogans” and attempted to “inculcate north China’s population with a pseudo-traditional veneration for socio-political hierarchy” (191). In Yugoslavia, the Communist partisans adhered to “what one might term inter-ethnicism” (201)—a form of civic nationalism, as against the ethnic definition of the nation favored by General Dragoljub Mihailović’s Četnik militia. (A note in passing: Kerenji remarks that Occupied could have stressed the Četniks’ ethno-national agenda more, so as to make sense of the civil war in wartime Yugoslavia, which Roshwald acknowledges in his response.)

In part 3, Roshwald shows Axis occupiers defining themselves, with varying levels of plausibility, as national liberators of colonized societies; and he demonstrates how those who collaborated with the new hegemons claimed, again with varying levels of plausibility, that they worked for a national renaissance, as did, for instance, the Philippine leadership under the Japanese when it celebrated the wartime raising of Tagalog to the status of an official language (321). As happens throughout the book, part 3 uses variations across cases to deepen the comparative analysis, asking how “different histories of subjugation and differing horizons of expectation [conditioned] these [formerly colonized] societies’ varied responses to Axis occupations” (255).

Roshwald’s focus on elites’ choices and how they were couched in patriotic discourse also allows for a nimble assessment of specific circumstances and of change. “This conceptual framing,” as Liulevicius notes, “allows Roshwald to show the deep embeddedness in specific historical moments of radically different decisions and options, to resist or collaborate.” For one, the patriotic plausibility of elites’ choices hinged on an occupying regime’s policies: the Japanese and German regimes’ introduction of forced labor, to give just one example, undermined claims by willing local elites that they were working for the nation’s uplift. Conversely, brutal tactics by national liberation forces that victimized civilian populations could alienate the latter into aiding occupation forces. This happened, for instance, in western Henan province in China in 1944, where the rural population, still reeling from the Nationalist forces’ 1938 artificial flood and the partially man-made famine of 1942–1943, attacked Nationalist units that had been beaten back by the Japanese Ichigō offensive (176).

Did (self-described) patriotic elites, regardless of their choices vis-à-vis occupation, in fact “speak for the interests and desires of an entire population”? (286, 295) Roshwald does not take their claims to do so at face value. Rather, he assesses those claims against the specific and shifting circumstances of war and occupation. As Liulevicius writes, “even as he is cautious about taking self-descriptions and avowals at face value, Roshwald also takes seriously the assertion of personal patriotism, and then delves more deeply into what it means in practice.” A related but different question, raised by Schneider with regard to Thailand, concerns the relevance of nationalist/patriotic questions to the majority of the population: Occupied might have, Schneider writes, placed “a stronger emphasis on the elitist character of [...] Thai patriotism.”
Acknowledging this in his response, Roshwald does state, wittily, that “elites are people too”—participants too, contemporaries too—and that they did play an outsize role in framing choices for wider populations. In addition, it remains to be seen whether only elites paid attention to questions of common purpose whereas “ordinary” people were concerned merely with survival. “There may have been a nationwide tendency,” Roshwald writes, “to retreat into the shell of one’s own family and narrowly defined community amidst the traumas and trials of defeat and isolation. But people still expected their political leaders to conduct themselves differently in the name of the nation” (130). Moreover, there is no reason to assume that “ordinary” people did not entertain notions of the common good, of rights and obligations, and therefore of the legitimacy of regimes: Roshwald’s response usefully refers to the work by Martin Conway and Peter Romijn on the endurance of early modern notions of legitimate rule. This is not to say that a vernacular sense of justice necessarily led to, well, justice: the popular post-liberation repudiation of occupation regimes featured appalling ritualized violence against women, as Roshwald notes in his conclusion (407).

One last issue concerns the weight of the war itself: does *Occupied* pay consistent attention to the impact of military actions? Foray notes that “Roshwald does not mention the Luftwaffe’s bombing of the city of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940,” a devastating act of war that went a long way to explain the Dutch military’s decision to stand down to prevent further civilian suffering. On the other hand, as I have noted above, *Occupied* does note the impact on Chinese civilians of the Chinese Nationalist forces’ devastating modus operandi. The more important point to be made here, and on which I would like to conclude, is that Roshwald’s conceptual choices would perfectly accommodate—*excuses le mot*—elements such as the Rotterdam bombing: far from upending a static construct, inserting them would once more put *Occupied’s* “tremendously effective organizational strategy” to work.

**Contributors:**

Aviel Roshwald is Professor of History at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, where he has taught since 1991. He obtained his PhD at Harvard University in 1987. He is the author of the following books: *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); *The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (Routledge, 2001); *Estranged Bedfellows: Britain and France in the Middle East during the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 1990). He is the co-editor, with Richard Stites, of *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). With Matthew D’Auria and Cathie Carmichael, he is a co-editor of the two-volume *Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

---

Sophie De Schaepdrijver is the Walter L. and Helen P. Ferree Professor of Modern European History at Pennsylvania State University. She is the author, most recently, of Bastion: Occupied Bruges in the First World War (Hannibal, 2014), of Gabrielle Petit: The Death and Life of a Female Spy in the First World War (Bloomsbury, 2015) and co-author with Tammy M. Proctor of An English Governess in the Great War: The Secret Diary of Mary Thorp (Oxford University Press, 2017). She is currently co-editing an international volume on the military occupations of the First World War in a region ranging from northern France to the Caucasus and writing a monograph on German, global, and local attitudes towards and experiences of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium in 1914–1918.

Jennifer L. Foray is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University, where her work focuses on modern imperialism and decolonization, particularly in the Netherlands. Her published works on these subjects include Visions of Empire in the Nazi Occupied Netherlands (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and recent articles in such journals as the Journal of Austrian-American History (2023), Itinerario (2020) and the Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies (2020). Her current book manuscript is entitled Imperial Aftershocks: War, Decolonization, and Anti-Colonial Protest, and focuses on those groups and individuals who opposed the Dutch-Indonesian conflict of 1945–1949. Her next project aims to explore the integration of Indonesian crew into Dutch shipping and leisure cruising industries.


Aviel Roshwald’s new book, *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945*, can best be described as a major accomplishment: drawing upon extensive research and detailed examinations of eleven selected case studies, *Occupied* offers an engaging and thought-provoking contribution to an already well-developed collection of comparative occupation histories. Some of the book’s merits lie with its broad geographical and conceptual scope that focuses on Axis occupation regimes in both Europe and Asia. In this regard, Roshwald’s masterful book marries the pan-European approach adopted by István Deák in his 2015 study of wartime collaboration, resistance, and retribution, with Jeremy A. Yellen’s recent examination of Japanese policies and practices concerning its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. At the same time, *Occupied* operates within a narrower scope than, say, Richard Overy’s sweeping *Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931–1945*.

This is not a history of the global war as it was waged by statesmen and generals, nor does this book portend to examine the entirety of the conflict. Rather, the importance of Roshwald’s work hinges upon the relationships and comparisons developed throughout the course of the book. This is a synthetic history, to be sure, assembling and parsing the vast body of literature, written in six different languages, on wartime Europe and Asia. In his introduction, Roshwald notes that he has also incorporated “some primary sources,” but this modest statement understates the tremendous range of materials present in this text (12). *Occupied*’s source base is both broad and deep, as is the author’s familiarity with local conditions in each of the eleven cases he examines.

Roshwald’s eleven selected case studies appear in three main sections organized by theme. Part 1, focusing on the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand, centers the idea of and practices concerning “patriotism,” with a particular emphasis upon what he terms “the ever-shifting parameters of the patriotically plausible” during the initial phases of German and Japanese occupation (127). In part 2, Roshwald examines the connections between the pre-war and wartime tensions that were evident in Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China, all of which are widely considered to have experienced civil wars fought against the backdrop of the larger global conflict. Part 3, entitled “Conquest in the Guise of Liberation,” presents the most unexpected of these groupings: the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine, all

---


of which constituted colonies or territories claimed by a larger empire or political entity in the years preceding the outbreak of global war.

As Roshwald explains, these are not intended to be airtight typologies, but ways of presenting “alternative analytical perspectives” (11). Even allowing for such maneuverability, the framework he employs here effectively allows him to put these case studies in conversation with one another. Two nations as seemingly dissimilar as Denmark and Thailand—which serve as “model” occupations for the Germans and Japanese, respectively, whose officials allowed both peoples a degree of autonomy not permitted in other locations—allow us to explore “the ever-shifting parameters of the patriotically plausible” (127) as seen over the course of the war. Meanwhile, in both Vichy France and the occupied Netherlands, initial attempts to accommodate German demands and to forge solidarity across long-standing political and sociocultural divides gave way to increasing polarization and obstructionist activities. Roshwald gives each of his case studies ample attention, with individual countries or territories typically appearing under distinct subheadings. At the same time, his prose serves as the connective tissue between these cases, pointing to comparisons, contrasts, and counterexamples, whether discussed earlier in the book or in chapters to come.

*Occupied* does not focus on the lived experiences of peoples under Axis rule as much as it foregrounds the dominant political cultures of these eleven case studies, with a particular emphasis upon the political elites who were convinced that they could dictate the pace and type of German or Japanese occupation policies. But, as Deák has repeatedly argued, collaboration remained an occupier-driven phenomenon, with local populations constantly forced into a reactive and therefore subservient position. This is not to say, however, that even the loudest and most visible collaborators recognized their own ineffectiveness, or that uncooperative political elites did not inflict significant damage upon those groups whom they deemed expendable, whether the recently-naturalized Jewish citizens of France or the large ethnic Chinese minority in Thailand. Indeed, there is no shortage of violence in *Occupied*, but this is not the central point of Roshwald’s analysis. Throughout all parts of this book, we see political leaders of all stripes and affiliations—some duly elected, some appointed by Axis powers, and some who simply stepped into a perceived power vacuum—trying to negotiate an ever-changing “set of global, regional, and local circumstances” with decidedly mixed results (404). There are no real winners here.

In his discussions of the initial occupation period and the choices available to those in the Netherlands at this time, Roshwald does not mention the *Luftwaffe*’s bombing of the city of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940, which was intended to force the Dutch military into surrendering. Targeting not only the shipping industries that were located in the port and harbor areas but the densely-populated residential and commercial center of the city, the bombing campaign killed close to nine hundred people—mostly civilians—and destroyed thousands of buildings. If the Dutch military refused to stand down, so threatened German authorities, other cities would follow in short order. Therefore, when Dutch military officers laid down their weapons the following day, they believed themselves to be saving the lives of civilians, as did those Dutch officials who attempted to govern after the Queen and her ministers had departed for London.

---

5 See, for instance, his discussion of those non-choices available to Polish Jews, whose attempts at collaboration and cooperation can best be classified as acts of survival. Deák, *Europe on Trial*, 40.
The German destruction of parts of Rotterdam thus helped set the tone for the first phase of German occupation: those secretaries-general, mayors, and civil servants who opted to remain in their positions and work with the country’s new rulers did so in the shadow of civilian deaths incurred in the collapsed buildings and fires that swept through the old city center.6

Further, while Roshwald’s skepticism towards heroic narratives of resistance valor rings true, it is not correct to note that the country’s Nazi occupiers were able to impose “their antisemitic agenda on the Dutch civil service without triggering mass resignations or any other significant form of opposition beyond initial verbal objections” (51). In October 1940, the so-called “Aryan declaration” required of all civil servants working in the Netherlands allowed the occupation government to identify Jewish university professors and lecturers, who were then slated to lose their positions. News of these pending dismissals in late November prompted large protests and strike actions in university cities such as Leiden and Delft that were led not only by students but by non-Jewish faculty members and staff. In response to these disruptions, German occupation authorities closed both universities and arrested the suspected ringleaders. The institution now known as Delft University of Technology reopened to students the following year, but Leiden remained shuttered for the duration of the five-year occupation as punishment. Obviously, such protests failed to stop the barrage of anti-Jewish laws and policies soon to follow, but this is not to say they were inconsequential or harmless; the German occupation authorities certainly did not consider them as such.7

These are admittedly minor quibbles, however, and they do not detract from Roshwald’s examination of the ways in which policy-makers—whether in the Netherlands or in the other ten case studies highlighted in this book—aimed to forge a path forward through these unprecedented conditions. With its comparative approach and extensive source base, this book will serve as an invaluable reference for those who are interested in the global consequences of war and occupation in the 1940s and beyond.

7 Jeroen Kemperman, *Oorlog in de collegebanken: Studenten in verzet 1940-1945* (Boom: Amsterdam, 2018), 53-94.
At the beginning of his impressive new work of comparative history, Aviel Roshwald sets to analyze a complex of topics which complement his earlier interest in the intersections of ethnicity and nationalism in the era of global conflagration. But while his prior comparative work focused on the nationalizing territorial rearrangements following the fall of three continental empires after World War I, Roshwald’s latest book, *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945*, examines the valence of nationalist ideology, rhetoric, and praxis on a truly global scale, during a truly global war. *Occupied* is a comparative history of the rhetorical and material strains that Axis occupations imposed on national and civic (self-) understandings in eleven different countries in Europe and Asia. “How were patriotic, ethno-national, and internationalist identities manipulated, exploited, reconstructed, and reinvented under the extraordinary circumstances of Axis occupations,” is the fundamental set of questions that animates Roshwald’s analysis (9). In other words, what avenues of rethinking the concept of national community—as well as the related concepts of nationalism, national interest, and patriotism—became closed, remained narrowly open, or were newly opened up by enemy occupation? And, relatedly, and perhaps more importantly, what courses of action did national governments, liberation movements, political parties, and even individual actors decide to take in the radical new circumstances of Axis occupation amidst a global war?

Roshwald organizes *Occupied* into three sections, each addressing themes that can broadly be labeled “patriotism,” “civil war,” and “anti-colonialism.” Under these rubrics, Roshwald presents the case studies analyzed in the book: the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand (patriotism); Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China (civil war); and the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine (anti-colonialism). With erudite command of the current theoretical, Western, and area-studies scholarship, combined with his own research on published and unpublished primary sources—the latter of which are centered around archival and rare book collections of the Washington area (the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)—Roshwald offers a self-confident, far-reaching comparison of countries and regions of profoundly different historical, cultural, and political histories and traditions.

This kind of a comparative study of occupation is much needed, given that most studies concentrate on individual countries. Writing of Thai patriotism next to the French or the Dutch one, for example, or analyzing the Chinese civil war in conjunction with the more mutually similar Balkan cases of Yugoslavia and Greece, is a bold, but fruitful and indispensable project. Comparison does not imply sameness or identical or parallel structural constraints; it thrives on understanding difference in historical contexts, contingencies, and historical developments. *Occupied* is an extensive comparative and transnational history, and the book is a much-needed addition to current scholarship on occupation, collaboration, and

---

1 Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
resistance in the context of World War II. The quality, sophistication, and thoroughness of Roshwald’s research guarantee a magisterial text that will be essential in the years to come.

The first section of the book revolves around the concept to which Roshwald refers as “patriotic plausibility” (99). In the immediate aftermath of the inception of Axis occupations, Roshwald shows, having been overpowered by both a superior military force and a radically new paradigm of domestic and international order, societies under occupation sought to define their collective and individual responses to the new reality. These responses presumably accounted for the existing and emerging interpretations of what it meant to be a patriotic subject, and these considerations shaped individual and collective action. Limits of accommodation, collaboration, and political action were thus arguably set in consideration of what was at stake nationally and individually. The French armistice was, in the Vichyite reading, the best possible outcome of the German domination over France, containing a possibility of a future French sovereignty (24-26). Dutch administrative collaboration, viewed similarly by right-wing Dutch patriots, was a way of maintaining functional national institutions while the sovereign was in exile, demonstrating the general unacceptability of the new order (39-40). But what happened when, in the course of the changing dynamic of a global conflagration, some initial choices became untenable? What happens when French Head of State Philippe Pétain openly proclaimed “collaboration” with Germany as the desirable goal, or when the Dutch public servants suddenly were required to act upon the discriminatory antisemitic laws? “The shifting parameters of the patriotically plausible” is how Roshwald describes this phenomenon, arguing that “the parameters of patriotic plausibility helped determine the locus of political legitimacy” (101).

In other words, some claims became patently untenable in light of political and historical developments, and some political power illegitimate. Pétain’s claim of protecting the possibility of a future French sovereignty went out the window with the German occupation of the southern zone in November 1942. Similar events challenged or removed a supposedly “patriotic” reasoning for collaboration elsewhere. Roshwald gives a fine-grained analysis of the trajectories of Axis occupation in Europe and Asia, providing a comparative account of how “patriotic plausibility” was forged and unraveled at the levels of rhetoric and political action. The problem with this argument—one that Roshwald is aware of and addresses preemptively—is twofold. It reifies the concept of “patriotism,” succumbing to the very rhetoric that its adherents used to construct it. Second, if “patriotism” can serve as the explicitly stated basis for both Pétain’s and French General Charles de Gaulle’s political action, which moved in opposite, radically different directions, then its semantic elasticity threatens its heuristic potential. Roshwald’s answers to these charges, that it is precisely because of the concept’s elasticity that we can analyze a wide range of actions in its name, are ultimately satisfying. Even so, this answer, it seems to me, limits the analysis to somewhat artificially construed lab conditions, namely, to the period between the technical onsets and ends of the occupations themselves (16-17).

---

While it is self-evident that one should analyze responses to an occupation by studying the period of the occupation itself, it should be as evident that political developments in the analyzed period were more than rhetorical maneuvers in response to the contingencies of the occupation; indeed, these actions were informed by much longer-term histories and ideologies. This is crucial if one is to understand a range of ideological impetuses for collaboration, primarily, but also for resistance, and even for individual choices. The questions of whether the actions of Croatian or Serbian fascists, who, in the former case, were running a Nazi satellite state, and, in the latter, served as an ideological and military recruitment base of the collaborationist state—were, or could be, plausibly construed as “patriotic,” are not enough for understanding the range of choices available to those actors, and their ultimate decisions at particular historical junctures. To be fair, Roshwald is not arguing for the exclusion of these prehistories of Axis occupations from his analysis; in this part of the book, however, they are given less attention than they deserve.

This limitation does not characterize the other two parts of the book. Precisely because the other two broad rubrics for Roshwald’s analysis (“civil war” and “decolonization”) focus on longer-term political visions, and political thinking and praxis that is often charged ideologically, political action during the occupation is difficult to explain by primarily studying tactical rearrangements and opportunistic moves in reaction to historically contingent developments of the occupation. Predictably, “civil war” as a designation is politically problematic, as it implies, and Roshwald acknowledges, that the roots of conflict and violence are endogenous, which is often misleading. Roshwald is careful to note and distance his arguments from the neo-fascist agendas of referring to the Italian armed resistance to the Salo republic as a “civil war” (160). (Similarly, there are political agendas lurking behind describing the series of the post-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s as a period of “civil war,” instead of, more pointedly, assigning political and criminal responsibility, as a Belgrade-organized campaign of creating a greater Serbian state on the ruins of Yugoslavia through expulsion and genocide.) In other words, civil wars are usually local or regional axes of conflict that are amplified, redirected, and otherwise pushed by external circumstantial triggers such as a global war, or, by extension, an occupation. As a category of analysis, however, according to Roshwald, the civil war paradigm is potentially useful in accommodating the variety of changing responses to Axis occupations, and accounting for the complexity of the contexts and of people’s motivations (136-137).

The most thought-provoking part of this section of the book is the analysis of right-wing and left-wing internationalisms before and during the war, and their trajectories during the occupation. Despite the differences of context, it should be straightforward to understand why Communist-led or Communist-dominated movements felt or expressed loyalty to the Soviet Union and were likely to resist occupation, or why ideologically far-right-wing movements and individuals (such as, for example, Dimitrije Ljotić and his political organization, Zbor, in Serbia) were likely to opt for collaboration. The key issue here is the

---

1 There is a sizeable literature on the decade of war that followed the violent break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991. While most facts, including Serbia’s direct role in funding genocidal violence, have been established by trials held before the UN-established International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague, differences of interpretation remain. For scholarly debates and bibliographies, see Catherine Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* (London: Palgrave, 2015).
question of continuum between ideologically-driven and opportunity- and contingency-driven rational actions of individuals under the extreme, unprecedented, and unpredictable circumstances of occupation. Roshwald argues that understanding the complex nexus of ideology, action, and contingency through the lens of “civil war” allows the opportunity to grasp this reality in an analytically more advantageous way than the one offered by the problematic conceptual dyad of resistance and collaboration, especially in countries under the Axis occupation.

And indeed, there is an important body of literature—about two decades old now—that seeks to explain the complexity of civil war action and violence under occupation by studying the micro level, and engaging with ideological and other grand narratives only as one of the factors framing the local issues. The paradigm of “civil war” and its literatures thus offer analytical potential in two opposite directions. They situate societies under occupation within the framework of broader, exogenous geopolitical forces that color local and regional action in an occupied country and lend a normalizing narrative of ideology. But they also draw attention to the micro level, explaining violence and political action by highly situated, rational motives that are sometimes later packaged as “ideology.” Roshwald’s analysis is rich on the former, but Occupied would profit from more inclusion of the latter. The decision to omit the micro level of analysis save for a few references makes absolute sense in a sweeping, transcontinental comparative study; but Roshwald’s citations of Stathis Kalyvas’s and Max Bergholz’s work and their inclusion in the bibliography makes this omission palpable.

One drawback of this omission is that without the lens focusing on the micro level, and theoretical tools to connect it to the macro level, one is bound to revert to the general vocabularies of ideology, collaboration, and resistance, which do not extend the understanding of the complex situation on the ground. Roshwald’s painstaking historical research into the relations between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang, for example, for all its analytical sophistication and theoretical caution, often wades into a narrative of actors who prioritized and deprioritized resistance to the Japanese occupation over internal ideological civil war (179-197). And in the case of General Dragoljub Mihailović’s četnik militia, the problems of the dyadic collaboration/resistance framing come into sharp relief. If Mihailović can be simultaneously described as “resisting” the Germans and the Italians, and as “collaborating” with them, then the language of resistance and collaboration is not very useful. A more detailed analysis of the micro level—the četnik genocidal crimes against Bosnian Muslims in eastern Bosnia in 1942 and 1943, and the relation of this timeline to the dynamic of the Communist-led partisans’ unlikely victories against the German coalition forces (including the četniks) in this period—would go a long way in explaining the dynamic of violence and incentives for “collaboration” while also taking into account the četniks’

---


5 Roshwald is careful to qualify Mihailović’s resistance by noting that he “initially [emphasis E.K.] emerged as the most promising leader of […] a resistance movement,” and describing his collaboration as “opportunistic, on-again/off-again cooperative arrangements with the Italians […] and at times […] even with the Germans” (152-154).
ideological factors and political goals (i.e., the creation of an ethnically “pure” contiguous Serbian territory adjacent to Serbia, to be annexed to a future Serbian state).

The strength of Roshwald’s comparative work lies not only in his tenacious path-breaking amidst towering diverse literatures, but also in his awareness of, and self-reflection on, the limits of his book’s analytical frameworks. “Every analytical perspective provides distinctive insights even as it suffers from unique limitations and blind spots,” he notes; and “in the interest of completing this book in my own lifetime, I have had to restrict the scope of the inquiry” (190, 254-255). One can sympathize with Roshwald’s aim, and admire his methodological and analytical ambidexterity and the wide geographical reach of the book. For this reason, reviewing the book is difficult, since addressing all of these factors requires unreasonable length. As it is, however, Occupied is an essential work of comparative history on World War II, a sprawling landscape of insightful analysis and brilliant practice of the historian’s craft.

---

*Roshwald is well-read on the issue of the četniks and the occupation, partition, and the history of World War II in Yugoslavia during the war. Jozo Tomasevich’s foundational works on these topics are cited and are in the bibliography, among other ones. See Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); and Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).*
Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945 by Aviel Roshwald is a masterwork of comparative history, featuring a recurring starring role for irony, a term that justifiably recurs with great frequency in Roshwald’s study. During the Second World War, hundreds of millions of people worldwide found themselves under Axis power domination, so that for many, “the most persistent and significant aspect of wartime experience was that of occupation by one or more of the Axis powers” (1). After a stunning initial series of battlefield successes suggested that the Axis leaders represented an invincible wave sweeping away all previous order, to be replaced by one of their brutal design, elements in all the conquered societies sought accommodations, became collaborators, or cast about for the best way to resist. Universally, they presented their actions as motivated by patriotism. Fateful decisions were made that created path-dependencies, as further twists of fate then intervened.

What seemed certain and unavoidable at the war’s outset shifted and became contingent, upsetting initial calculations on the side of both occupiers and occupied. From 1943 onwards, the dominant assumption was no longer of an Axis new order, but only a question of how and when the Axis powers would be defeated. After the Allied victories over the Axis powers in 1945, questions arose not only about the future, but how to represent and interpret the past. Those who worked with the occupation regimes or fought alongside them either faced legal reckonings, slipped into the shadows, or were able to present their actions as motivated by the aim to spare their home countries the worst of foreign rule. Across a whole range of European and Asian cases, Roshwald tracks the dynamics, parallels, similarities, contrasts, and recurring patterns, while registering ironies.

In the last decades, historians have published a whole series of studies that have deepened our understanding of the complexities of occupation during the world wars. For the case of World War II in Europe, the work of historians Mark Mazower, Timothy Snyder, and Peter Fritzsche presented sweeping overviews. This trend continues, with further valuable contributions which do much to illuminate the intentions of different occupiers in different regimes across two world wars. In an earlier book, Roshwald offered a synthetic view of the First World War era, and now he has done something similar for the Second World War, on a global scale.


3 Aviel Roshwald, Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923 (London: Routledge, 2001).
In this well-written and ably constructed study, Roshwald organizes his comparisons by engaging three larger themes: the invocation of patriotism as a motive (whether by collaborators or the resistance), the dynamics of civil war under occupation, and conquest presented as liberation (in the case of populations that were occupied by the Axis after previously being under a form of colonial rule). The author clusters national examples around each of these themes: the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand for the first; Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China for the second; and the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine for the last. Roshwald’s strategy of including an Asian case for each of the major themes yields a rich harvest of global comparisons. Throughout, ironies abound. The escape of the Dutch queen into exile allowed for a unique division of labor between a resisting monarch abroad and a Dutch bureaucracy that stayed in place and in operation. While the Nazis treated the Danes with more forbearance than other subject peoples, seeing them as racial kin, this created the conditions for one of the most striking acts of defiant resistance imprinted on historical memory, the smuggling of Denmark’s Jews to safety in Sweden (114–124).

Communist activists who were forced to retreat from urban strongholds in places as far apart as China and Yugoslavia actually positioned themselves to tap into peasant resistance and ride that force into postwar power. While Japanese officials spread propaganda of Asian unity under Japanese patronage, brutal acts by the Japanese army at the local level, like slapping of civilians who did not show proper respect to Japanese officers, undermined the credibility of any slogans (264). Across many national cases, as the war turned against the Axis, their introduction of forced labor service proved to be a breaking point, which undercut the cooptation which the occupying forces had promoted before. The very approach of defeat made Italian Fascist diehards more, not less, violent and unrestrained in the last stages of the war (221). Many more instances of irony punctuate this narrative.

Among his insights, especially striking is Roshwald’s careful, reasoned, and pragmatic assessment of human motivations, which include the possibility of self-deception or deliberate deception for public consumption. Even as he is cautious about taking self-descriptions and avowals at face value, Roshwald also takes seriously the assertion of personal patriotism, and then delves more deeply into what it means in practice, and how its intensity can shift in changing circumstances. He states, “To be sure, most people were not patriots in a heroic, romanticized manner. That is, they were not inclined to risk everything” (100). Yet on the other hand, few were entirely indifferent to calls for social solidarity or loyalty. What prevailed in practice was instead what Roshwald labels a “patriotic calculus” which “established the rough parameters of what might be termed the patriotically plausible under a given set of conditions” (100). This calculus was constantly in flux, as circumstances and perceptions shifted and prompted new dynamics. None of these happened in a vacuum. This conceptual framing allows Roshwald to show the deep embeddedness in specific historical moments of radically different decisions and options, to resist or collaborate.

At a later juncture, in dissecting the civil-war dynamics that were at play within occupied countries, and the stated motivations for them, Roshwald stresses that the moment of defeat and occupation was no “zero hour” by itself (179). Rather, prior experiences, social fissures, and preexisting tensions and vendettas could be reenergized. Among the chief ironies he notes is that observation that previously divided societies turned out to have been better at resisting foreign occupiers than some societies that had been more harmoniously
administered before defeat since they had already been pre-mobilized for conflict. In discussing how pre-existing divisions were invoked when occupied countries descended into civil war between factions that accommodated the Axis and those that resisted, Roshwald’s narrative shows a salutary skepticism. He warns, “Having noted the antecedents to occupation-era struggles, it is important to remain on guard against accepting at face value the invented continuities propagated by participants in these conflicts” (180). As he explains, this is a deliberate invocation and repurposing of the concept of “invented tradition” advanced by historians Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. The implication is that historians need to think deeply about prior experience and expectations, but also need to be critical in the face of assertions about motivations. Among the continuities that were asserted and played important roles were doctrines of Communist internationalism on the one side, and Fascist borrowings and imitations that Roshwald collectively labels “right-wing internationalism,” forming a “worldwide web of fascist discourse” (207).

Whether he is deploying the concept of the “patriotic calculus” or “invented continuities,” this emphasis on the conceptual is a trademark strength of Roshwald’s. In his earlier book on the dynamics of nationalism in the First World War era, he did something similar, describing nationalists who hatched their expansive plans for redrawing world maps in the “diplomatic cyberspace of wartime exile,” which is a perfect coinage for the special realm and state of mind in which inventing new states and dismantling empires seem plausible projects.

In general, Roshwald’s work is an impressive synthesis of a large scholarship in a wide array of languages. But it is striking that it also draws heavily on primary sources, illustrating key conceptual points. These include candid intelligence reports, histrionic speeches of collaborationist leaders, and the diaries of skeptical administrators and journalists. Photographs also invoke the fraught dynamics of occupation.

As excellent scholarship does, this work naturally prompts further questions. This is not a complaint that they should have been covered exhaustively here. As the author puts it, with both winning humor and perfect earnestness, “in the interests of completing this book in my own lifetime, I have had to restrict the scope of the inquiry” (254-255). Two larger questions present themselves for further inquiry.

First, given Roshwald’s emphasis on the internationalist dimensions of Communism and the worldwide Fascist discourse, what of transnational or international beliefs that long predated such modern ideological commitments: what overarching continuities and discontinuities connect to religious identities and traditions? Roshwald addresses the role of religion in the cases he considers. In the Danish example, the very self-concept of Danish patriotism was understood to include tolerance and religious values, and it thus motivated to resistance (121). In Ukraine, rifts between Greek Catholics and Eastern Orthodox added to other lines of fragmentation (288). In the Indonesian archipelago, relations between Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and other religious groups factored in the reality on the ground (269). A next step for research

---

5 Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires*, 131.
would be an investigation of the effects and context of religious claims in the mix of values and loyalties that are clarified or obscured as a result of the traumas of occupation.

A second natural next step is to inquire, in a similarly comparative and systematic way, about how the legacies and memories of the Second World War were handled in different contexts, in the decades after 1945. Roshwald discusses the aftermath of occupation and indicates the continuing salience of that legacy to the present. Both in the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and in Russia’s invasions of Ukraine, memories of the Second World War were instrumentalized and repeatedly invoked as well as misused.⁶

For these undertakings and many other future ventures in comparative history, Roshwald’s book presents a model that can be emulated. He has developed a tremendously effective organizational strategy that balances the thematic, chronological, and conceptual complexities of analyzing crises in human history.

The legacy of the occupation that countries endured over the course of the Second World War is still contested today, roughly eighty years later. Aviel Roshwald offers a profound analysis of how Asian and European countries grappled with their occupation by Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, respectively, in his book *Occupied: European and Asian Responses to Axis Conquest, 1937–1945*. He includes eleven countries—the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Thailand, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine (in their order of appearance in the book)—as case studies to demonstrate the fragmented, contradictory, and evolving nature of the reactions to this occupation. His approach is “broadly comparative,” focusing “explicitly on the political dimensions of responses to occupation, with the understanding that the political is intimately intertwined with the personal, the social, the economic, and the cultural. It is a study of the fragility and resilience of loyalties and identities under extreme conditions” (3). He briefly notes that the collaboration-resistance dichotomy has been criticized for being too simplistic, but does not reject it outright as an analytical lens, using it instead as a point of departure for a more complex and multi-faceted perspective, asking about the manipulation, exploitation, reconstruction, and reinvention of patriotic, ethno-national, and internationalist identities (9). Assessing shifting loyalties and the ways in which these were justified, as well as the motivations for individual political choices under the extreme situations of wartime occupation, Roshwald aims to “illuminate the impact of this wartime experience [of occupation]” and to “contribute to a broader understanding of modern political forces such as ethno-nationalism, patriotism, and competing forms of internationalism” (10).

The countries examined are grouped around three analytical themes: the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand are examined in part 1 in the light of “Patriotisms under Occupation;” Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China constitute part 2, and are analyzed in the framework of their respective civil wars and the international dimensions of these conflicts. Part 3 explores the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine as territories that were liberated by the occupation from colonialism. Each of the three parts opens and concludes with a brief section relating the case studies to each other and analyzing them jointly in the light of the part’s respective theme. Within the parts, there are usually two or three chapters, each of which is broken down into sections about the country-case studies in that part; in these, Roshwald offers first an overview (sometimes with more historical background, sometimes with less) and then explores more specifically “how to understand the political choices … from the […] perspectives [of political and military leaders] at the time” (284) over the course of the occupation.

In the opening sections of each part, Roshwald introduces sets of questions that are specifically related to the framing of the respective parts, which inform his analysis of each country-case study. These questions deal with the intersection of politics, identity, ideology, and the realities of war and occupation, and set the stage for the detailed analysis in the chapters that follow. Broadly speaking, these questions relate to the analytical framework of patriotism, internationalism, and ethno-nationalism, which Roshwald introduces in the introduction. Part 1 looks at the roles that patriotism played in the Netherlands, France, Denmark, and Thailand, where it was invoked by political leaders to justify both collaboration and resistance, and ever expanding the limits of the “patriotically plausible” (99). Part 2 analyzes the civil wars of Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, and China, and explores the shifting relationships that the pre-war political
establishment, the opposition, and guerilla forces had with the occupation. Additionally, Roshwald analyzes the international connections on which both communist and fascist movements thrived, comparing the European civil wars to each other as well as to the Spanish Civil War and the Cold War. He addresses the theme of internationalism through territorial developments (such as the parts of the Balkans that were annexed by Italy), the political ideologies guiding the various groups fighting, as well as individuals' personal connections. This part starts out by qualifying the term “civil war,” which Roshwald exposes as useful despite the fact that it is laden and simplistic (136-139); here (as in other places), his investigation of complexity, historical contingency, and the shifting of parameters over time makes for a respectful engagement with the historical players which takes seriously the very situations in which people found themselves. The brief section “Paradigm Shifts: Communist Adaptations to Transformed Environments” (192-197) considers how Communist groups were able to fill the power vacuum that prewar political leaders and the opposition had left through their inability to prevent or fight off the occupation. Unfortunately, this is the only section that offers a stringent comparison. It provides a more thorough and integrated analysis than other sections, and thus helps the reader contextualize the disparate and complex case studies.

In parts 1 and 2, the Asian examples appear as outliers. The theme of patriotism in Thailand is not conveyed convincingly. Roshwald analyzes sources from Thai political leaders and members of the intelligentsia in the same manner as he does sources from Western European countries. Yet with the vast majority of the Thai population illiterate and a fascist-leaning military man (Phibun, officially Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram), who attempted a radical modernization of Thai culture, at the head of the country’s monarchy, a stronger emphasis of the elitist character of the Thai patriotism he analyzes (in comparison to the more popular patriotism in Europe) would have been desirable. Similarly, the chapter on the Chinese civil war (meticulously explained though it is) is weaker in terms of the assessment of internationalism than those on its European counterparts. That said, even though these case studies are only loosely integrated in the analytical framework, they are immensely important in conveying the breadth of reactions to Axis occupation and the global nature of the war.

In Part 3, Roshwald analyzes how the leadership of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ukraine sought to establish their independence from previous colonization by the United States, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union, respectively. These analyses are complicated since they have many layers, which Roshwald meticulously explores by looking at historical and shifting loyalties, cultural affinities, conflicting concepts of nationhood, and common enemies. At over 140 pages in length, this part is almost one third longer than parts 1 and 2, which have around 100 pages each. The complexity of the cases and the explanations of how they fit into the paradigms of ethno-nationalism and colonial occupation justify the length of the part, but they also make it a little unwieldy. Roshwald offers useful comparisons of the Philippine and the

---

Indonesian cases, but Ukraine, given its internal differences and uniqueness, remains somewhat disconnected from the rest of the country-case studies.

The entirety of Occupied is suffused with the idea of nationalism. Roshwald has published extensively about this theme, and his writing is informed by a deep understanding of the connections between the political, cultural, social, and individual that affect concepts of the nation and nationhood. His discussion of the themes of patriotism, ethno-nationalism, and internationalism is focused on the time when these happened, without imposing hindsight or excessive judgement onto his analysis. This is meaningful because it acknowledges that the military victories of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan created a new, starkly different reality for the countries he examines, and to which the leadership of these countries needed to respond. In fact, the reality of fascism taking over Europe and Asia seemed to create “a new geopolitical reality marked by German [and Japanese] dominance” (59) with which the entire world would have to contend, and which was not entirely unwelcome to some political leaders in the late 1930s and early 1940s. With its emphasis on national unity and the people, Nazism appealed to a variety of politicians and groups, for a variety of reasons, across Europe, and Roshwald places his analysis of patriotism under occupation squarely in this context. In Parts 1 and 2, he explores questions about the character of a respective nation that political and military leaders asked in the face of defeat, as well as about location (in the case of exiled governments) and ideology. While he devotes considerable space to Communist movements, mainly in the form of resistance or guerilla formations, he only briefly touches on the competing ideologies of the interwar decades. While Roshwald notes the existence of conservative and authoritarian political movements in the countries he examines, the country-case studies lack an examination of the sheer conflict of ideologies that permeated interwar Europe and Asia, and in which authoritarianism, fascism and Communism appeared as viable alternatives to Parliamentary democracies. A discussion of the perceived viability of different ideological blueprints for large areas of the world (indeed the global competition of ideologies) would have made the significance of competing ideologies in the context of war, occupation, and nationhood more apparent. For the Asian countries in Occupied, this discussion is present: Roshwald allocates ample space to considerations of how Japanese political leaders presented their imperialism as anti-Western and hence were able to convince and coopt some of the

---

1 Among others, Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914–1923 (London: Routledge, 2005); The Endurance of Nationalism: Ancient Roots and Modern Dilemmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and with Cathie Carmichael and Matthew D’Auria, eds., The Cambridge History of Nationhood and Nationalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).


political and military leaders of China and of the independence movements in the Philippines and Indonesia. A section on Pan-Asianism explores in detail the contradictions within and the attractiveness of this concept in the face of “Western” imperialism (233-237).

Roshwald offers a high-level, abstract, political analysis of discourses about nationhood, sovereignty, power, and competing ideologies in the context of war, civil war, and occupation during the Second World War in Europe and Asia. For each country, Roshwald examines how specific persons—political or military leaders, the leaders of political movements or parties or guerilla forces, members of the intellectual or socio-political elite; with or without actual political power—rationalized, defended, opposed, and digested the occupation of their respective countries. It is important to note that he does not paint a static image of these reactions to the occupation, but rather explores how the changing fortunes of war altered these persons’ perceptions, rationalizations, and allegiances. For example, across the chapters of part 1, Roshwald traces the increasing pressure that the Nazi German leadership put on the Dutch administration to implement the persecution of the Jewish population of the Netherlands, and how this eroded the initial willingness of the administration to cooperate. In part 3, he traces how the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) initially sought to collaborate with the Nazis in order to achieve independence from Soviet, and Communist, control. After their bid for the creation of an independent Ukrainian state was put off through the creation of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, it formed a militia force that combated the advancing Soviet Red Army after the retreat of the Wehrmacht and carried out massacres of the Polish and Jewish populations of Volhynia, in an attempt to establish an ethnically homogeneous independent Ukrainian state. The resulting chapters are full of complexity, contradictions, and contrary developments, and offer little that would lend itself to broad generalizations and simple conclusions: “... the complexity of responses to German occupation serves to highlight the fact that – at least in [the Ukrainian] case – these categories do not lend themselves to the sharply delineated contradistinctions conventionally attributed to them” (383). This is history at its best, and its worst, when the sheer complexity makes it difficult to know what the lesson should be for the reader.

Occupied is, broadly speaking, comparative in its approach, even though Roshwald does not make this explicit, nor does he stringently compare the country-case studies throughout the book. This is lamentable, since such comparisons might have helped readers see connections more clearly; the sections where he compares and contrasts (always careful to avoid generalization and oversimplification, emphasizing the uniqueness of each case) provide a more effective analysis of the themes than the places where distinction and complexity dominate. Sebastian Conrad notes that the “comparative perspective ... facilitates wrestling the debate away from discourses...concerning the uniqueness of the national experience;” and Occupied would have benefited from this perspective. The sections that conclude each part, and particularly the book’s conclusion, could have been more outspoken in drawing connections and parallels, in offering a more explicit interpretation of the themes, and in guiding the reader toward an overarching comprehension of the meaning of Axis occupation.

---

What is most outstanding about *Occupied* is the nature of its geographical scope. Paired with the density and complexity of the analytical frames, and with the depth of argumentation, the countries covered constitute a remarkable perspective on Axis occupation, and indeed on the Second World War. Even though he does not ground his work in the historiography of transnational or global history, it effectively constitutes a piece of transnational history. In addition, his “pericentral perspective” avoids studying occupation through the eyes of the occupier and instead gives the occupied a voice. Roshwald relies on the work of other historians who have studied the occupation of the countries he includes, yet he weaves these countries together in a manner that takes the reader’s perspective away from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan as actors, and instead amplifies the stories of the occupied countries in their own right. This de-centering of the narrative about the Second World War contributes to a more diverse and complex story of the war. It posits the country-case studies not as mere victims of occupation but emphasizes their agency through exploring the various responses to the occupation.

Roshwald has written a book that explains the contradictory and conflicting visions of what the occupied nations could have been, and what national polities might have looked like, in countries occupied by the Axis during the Second World War. At a time when a Nazi-dominated Europe and the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere were a possibility, when a future under Communism or independence motivated people to pick up arms against the enemies of their vision, and when the occupation or the fight against it seemed to promise ways of achieving certain futures, Roshwald’s analysis of discourses on the nation opens a window into the thinking of political and military leaders and provides insights on the ideas about the nation that they then sought to realize. He understands that war and occupation were not only a time of oppression and suffering, but also contained promises for different futures and a multitude of possibilities. It is a complex and at times convoluted book that offers a history full of vision and possibilities in the midst of fighting, persecution, and death; a transnational history of war from the margins.

---


8 Roshwald’s main sources are published works on these countries (the vast majority in English) and documents written or collected by the US authorities, also in English. When he cites from speeches or publications by persons in the occupied countries, he uses mainly published translations, or quotations published in other historians’ work.

Response by Aviel Roshwald, Georgetown University

I am deeply grateful to all four reviewers, Jennifer L. Foray, Emil Kerenji, Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, Birgit Schneider, as well as to Sophie de Schaepdrijver and the editorial staff of H-Diplo, for their generosity of spirit in taking the time and trouble to create this roundtable discussion of my book. I also appreciate the thoughtful and constructive quality of the critiques the reviewers offer.

To begin with a couple of specific points raised by the reviewers, I appreciate Foray’s suggestions about additional aspects of the Dutch occupation experience that could have been covered—in particular the academic protest against Nazi-imposed antisemitic policies. This certainly represented a much braver and more inspiring response than that of many of the country’s civil servants. In the Yugoslav case, Emil Kerenji is right to argue that highlighting the ethno-nationalist agenda of Serbian Četnici would have helped make sense of some of their shifting alliance politics during the brutal conflicts of the wartime occupation era.

I agree with Schneider that the wartime state of mind of Thailand’s largely illiterate peasant population remains a matter of speculation and that the political debates we know of, about where the nation’s interests lay, were largely confined to urban elites. I do in fact make that point explicitly in the book (91-92). But I do not think that makes the case incomparable to the European examples in part 1 of the volume. Elites are people too, after all, and how they conceive of national identity, state interest, and what course of action is or is not plausibly patriotic has a disproportionately significant impact on policy, even in countries where a majority of the population is literate. Moreover, it is clear that Thailand’s political and intellectual elites were keenly attuned to the broader, global dimensions of the conflict and themselves thought in comparative terms. The parallels between Denmark’s status as a “model protectorate” in the Nazi empire and Thailand’s relatively favored position in the Japanese sphere of control struck me early on as particularly noteworthy. One of the most gratifying moments in my research came when I found that a prominent figure in Thailand’s wartime government (Pridi Banomyong, the outgoing Finance Minister who was about to be transferred to the Regency Council) had himself used that analogy to justify the concession of military-transit rights to Japanese troops. By the same token, Pridi questioned the Prime Minister and strongman Plaek Phibunsongkhram’s subsequent decision to enter into a formal alliance with Japan—the equivalent of which Denmark never did (93-94).

Having pointed to these analogies and connections, I agree that we need to avoid a reductive understanding of these diverse cases. As Kerenji stresses in his review, the point of comparative history is not just to draw analogies, but also to highlight what makes any given case distinctive.

I particularly welcome many of the reviewers’ suggestions of themes that could lend themselves to further comparative study. I share Kerenji’s curiosity about what a comparative study of the wartime occupation experience at the micro-social level would look like and how it would change our historical understanding. Liulevicius’s suggestions also point to important research agendas for future work. It is understandable that modern ideologies would dominate the study of modern political and military conflicts, but Liulevicius is wise to point us in the direction of older traditions and beliefs that have continued to shape human values and choices (and to be colored by modern conditions in turn). The role of religion in conditioning social
responses to occupation is a crucial topic that would lend itself very well indeed to comparative analysis. The work of Martin Conway and Peter Romijn has provided us with some tantalizing glimpses of how “pre-modern” affinities (e.g. for religion, local notables, monarchy) could take on new significance in occupied countries that were suddenly stripped of many of the attributes and institutions of political sovereignty and statehood.1 Much more comparative work in this field, which is best conducted on a local and micro-social level, is called for.

Both Kerenji and Schneider alert us to the significance of the longer durée of ideological and political history for understanding societies’ complex responses to Axis-power occupations. It would, in fact, be illuminating to develop a comparative synthesis on the history of the 1917–1975 era—from the Bolshevik seizure of the Winter Palace in Petrograd to the fall of Saigon—as an age of global ideological wars (loosely comparable to Europe’s religious wars of the early modern period). How these conflicts both intersected with and cut across ethno-national, patriotic, and local/micro-social identities and agendas is a subject that is rich in potential for comparative research. Among its potential payoffs would be the creation of a richer sense of context for understanding the responses of societies to the strange combinations of extreme constraints (on many) and tantalizing opportunities (for some) created by wartime occupations.

Finally, Liulevicius reminds us of the crucial role that selective historical memories of the Second World War continue to play in coloring and advancing an array of conflicting political agendas in the contemporary world. Political scientist Jelena Subotić’s recent prize-winning book on the uses and abuses of Holocaust history in the politics of Eastern Europe is an inspiring example of the kind of work that is being done in this field.2 Extending the framework for such comparisons to encompass East Asia—where cherry-picked accounts of, and glaring amnesias about, World War II history are no less politically salient—would be a welcome development. If discussion and debate about Occupied can help further stimulate such undertakings, I would be deeply gratified.

---
