



Introduction

The Second World War destroyed the city of Warsaw. In summer 1939, it was a thriving metropolis, the “Paris of the East.” The expanding capital of a sovereign eastern European state, the Second Polish Republic, it formed the epicenter of Polish national and cultural life. By Christmas 1944 it was a mountain of rubble. Those who had built the first independent Polish state of the twentieth century and made Warsaw their home were dead, imprisoned, or exiled. They had lost their state, their city, and their home to Nazi German violence.

This book tells the story of a handful of politically conscious Poles and the world they lost under occupation, one of the most vicious in modern history.¹ It examines the intelligentsia of Warsaw and their behavior under Nazi occupation from 1939 to 1944. This elite group led responses to Nazi violence from which they were never safe. For more than five years Warsaw lived, as one Pole remembered, “under horrible terror,” as if “with a gun constantly to our heads.”² Despite enormous danger, the capital’s elite embarked on a dizzying array of initiatives to capture the Polish public’s loyalty, preserve their national heritage, keep themselves from going mad, and oust their hated occupiers. Some were disastrous failures and others remarkable successes. The Holocaust of Poland’s – and Europe’s – Jewish community unfolded simultaneously, eclipsing the persecution of the majority of non-Jewish Poles. Polish elite response to different occupation policies revealed crucial ethnic and religious fractures in the Polish national project. The final elite-led anti-occupation effort was a military uprising in summer 1944, which their occupiers crushed, razing the city that had been the center of Polish resistance since 1939.

Polish and German wartime behaviors drew on tradition. As Adolf Hitler’s Germany planned its invasion of Poland, a bold attempt to secure *Lebensraum* or racial “living space,” he worried that Warsaw’s intelligentsia – educators, doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats, journalists, priests, military officers, intellectuals,

¹ In contrast to the “good” American occupations of Germany and Japan after 1945, themselves contested. Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

² PISM A.10.4.2 (I), “Wyciąg z raportu z Kraju z dnia 5. Marca 1940 r.,” [1].

and their ilk – would undermine Germany’s ability to control Poland in the long term. Warsaw, the largest city in the region, was key to Nazi German expansion and the extraction of Slavic labor and natural resources. The city’s intelligentsia had played an integral social, cultural, and political role in interwar Poland and in Polish national tradition for generations as the Germans well knew: they were state and nation builders. If any group could mount sustained opposition, they could. They therefore became the target of a preemptive Nazi genocide at the beginning of the Second World War.

Nazi policemen killed and imprisoned the intelligentsia during their 1939 invasion of Poland, but haphazardly. Nazi planners lost track of their targets or misunderstood them; the intelligentsia were a messy tangle of individuals who embraced the Polish national project, especially when it was under threat, rather than a discrete professional or political group. In response to their first botched attempts at elite subjugation, Nazi Germany installed a draconian occupation administration in Warsaw and began an anti-intelligentsia killing campaign that continued through 1939 and 1940. This campaign filled city prisons to overflowing: “excess” victims went to concentration camps. With death tolls hovering near 100,000, Nazi killings provoked sustained military, political, and cultural resistance. By 1941, the Nazis abandoned anti-intelligentsia campaigning in favor of an unsystematic hodgepodge of retaliatory terror and bloody reprisals – a counterinsurgency campaign – that continued until the Red Army drove them out.

Early Nazi German persecution of the Warsaw intelligentsia failed and Poles concocted various ways to undermine the occupation and wrest back their state – and control over Polish society. Individuals who built the largest and most ambitious resistance projects are at the center of this argument: while many engaged in “passive resistance,” “internal exile,” or wait-and-see cooperation, turning a blind eye to Nazi violence against those outside the Polish national community, the focus is on those who took actions to inspire the wider population and undermine Nazi occupation.³ In other words, the subject of this book is those individuals who continued the intelligentsia’s nation-building mission under occupation and the task is understanding how successful they were. Information networks, including underground publishing and couriering, and the “secret” schooling system were especially effective; Catholic religious activities and military resistance were vulnerable to the volatile international situation and rockier in their achievements. Initiatives dependent on international support could not be controlled from Warsaw. Political independence was one such

³ Holocaust scholars have developed a fine-grained model for the defiance of people with little agency, including “sanctification of life,” and polemic, symbolic, and defensive resistance. Michael R. Marrus, “Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30 No. 1 (Jan. 1995), 88–90, 93.

project and thus unachievable; nation-building efforts, however, produced significant victories.⁴

This story involves a complex cast of characters, including some who will be familiar to English-language audiences and others whom they will encounter for the first time. Jan Karski, international courier and later professor at Georgetown University; Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II; and Władysław Sikorski, prime minister of the London exile government, appear alongside others unknown outside Poland, like Stefan Starzyński, the last mayor of Warsaw; Aleksander Kamiński, scout leader, insurgent, and underground publicist; Zofia Kossak, Catholic activist and Holocaust rescuer; Witold Pilecki, the army officer who snuck into Auschwitz, and Władysław Studnicki, the First World War collaborator who petitioned the Nazis to deputize him and ended up their prisoner. The intelligentsia who survived the 1939–40 killing campaigns were dynamic if frustrated people who fought against the constraints of occupation and attempted to build a better future for themselves and Poland, though they rarely agreed with one another about how to do it.

0.1 Nation-State Actors

The word “intelligentsia” is specific to eastern Europe and the development of civil society under the Russian Empire: Poles and Russians have intelligentsias and other nations generally do not.⁵ The capital of the early modern Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Warsaw, became the capital of the new independent Second Polish Republic in 1918, and it was the birthplace of the national intelligentsia during the partitions under Russian, Austrian, and Prussian (then German) imperial rule.⁶ Beginning in 1795, the territory of the enormous Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was occupied – “partitioned,” as it was described at the time – by its neighbors in a cooperative imperial

⁴ Since, as David Edelstein has argued, military occupations’ viability often turns on their relationship to local nation building, the German rejection of this project provided the Warsaw intelligentsia with a potential tool to build popular consensus. David Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4.

⁵ Chad Bryant considers that a Czech intelligentsia emerged under Habsburg rule. Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 192–3. Thanks to Daniel Pratt for emphasizing this.

⁶ Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999); Janina Żurawicka, *Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 12; Aleksander Gella, *Inteligencja polska* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo AKME, 2016); Longina Jakubowska, *Patrons of History: Nobility, Capital and Political Transitions in Poland* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Maciej Janowski and Magdalena Micińska, *History of the Intelligentsia* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

expansion they thought permanent. Because there was no independent Polish state from 1795 to 1918 and the three partitioning powers were invested in maintaining that status quo, Polish political ambition was dangerous to them. Recognizing these strictures but also chafing under them, a mixture of elites – the intelligentsia – created and maintained national traditions and debated about how to re-empower their countrymen and regain independence.

The intelligentsia were elites who identified as Polish, advocated on behalf of national causes, and maintained Polish culture under duress. In most cases, “intelligentsia” is synonymous with “elite,” but it denotes a self-conscious group motivated by a sense of national mission.⁷ Jan Karski called it “the term under which we [Poles] designate the educated class as a whole.”⁸ Jan Szczepański, sociologist of the Marxist intelligentsia, defined its early members as “those who took ideological leadership in the effort to regain independence, who maintained the cultural and social forces necessary to this purpose, who kept alive the national traditions, developed the nation’s values, [and] educated the new generations for the struggle for national goals.”⁹ Kazimierz Brandys, a Polish *intelligent* himself and one of the objects of Szczepański’s scrutiny, remarked in the 1970s that those outside eastern Europe “do not understand the nature of a country in which a hundred years ago the cause of national liberation was actively carried on by no more than a few hundred people with programs that were none too clear and had no chance for success.”¹⁰ To refer to someone as an *intelligent* meant that he – or she – felt bound to the national cause and the promotion of Polish statehood when it was absent, which it often was.

In Polish history, the growth of the intelligentsia was the product of two uncomfortable absences: that of sovereign statehood from 1795 to 1918, and that of early industrialization and its concomitant, a developing middle class.¹¹ An intelligentsia arose on Polish territory rather than a state bureaucracy or an educated bourgeoisie because there was no national state. Thus discussion of the intelligentsia is always already discussion of a Polish *Sonderweg* in European progress by which Polish national culture was built without the “normal” institutions supporting it in western Europe.¹² Historian Maciej Janowski pinpoints the group’s origins after Napoleonic defeat, with the term acquiring fixed meaning by the January Insurrection of

⁷ Gella, *Inteligencja polska*, 91.

⁸ Jan Karski, *Story of a Secret State: My Report to the World* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 56.

⁹ Jan Szczepański, “The Polish Intelligentsia: Past and Present,” *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Apr., 1962): 408.

¹⁰ Kazimierz Brandys, *A Warsaw Diary, 1978–1981* (New York: Random House, 1983), 147.

¹¹ Żurawicka, *Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku.*, 12.

¹² Andrzej Walicki, “Poland between East and West: The Controversies over Self-Definition and Modernization in Partitioned Poland” (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1994).

1863, which provoked a generation of russification efforts in Warsaw.¹³ Its formation was linked to the idea of armed insurrection to regain independence, whether with Napoleon's help or as the independent initiative of Warsaw insurgents, though there were always intelligentsia figures who rejected violence.¹⁴

Intelligentsia status turned on a nation-state mission, but members clustered in professions that came to be associated with the group. Teaching, from grammar school to university, was an intelligentsia vocation. Writers, poets, publicists, and "penmen" were included.¹⁵ Lawyers and doctors often included themselves. Religious elites – especially Catholic clergy – had a role. Not all priests were intelligentsia (or wanted to be), but those who were had crucial authority. Physicians, scientists, industrialists, and engineers were a grey area: some were in, some out. Military officers were also elites, but they wore Russian, Austrian, and German uniforms until 1918 and contemporaries suspected their patriotism. After 1918 many opted in, and reserve officers – men with military training and civilian careers – were vital.

A nineteenth-century intelligentsia arose after the dispossession of the *szlachta*, the Polish gentry, by partitioning powers keen to reduce the economic influence of the old Commonwealth's wealthiest inhabitants.¹⁶ Some *szlachta* and their descendants – especially those without significant holdings – made their way into partition-era bureaucracies.¹⁷ These new bureaucrats, when they agitated for Polish causes, became intelligentsia. Intelligentsia clout, however, had no necessary relationship to wealth, and material resources ranged from significant means to utter pennilessness. They had, as Pierre Bourdieu would have it, cultural rather than financial capital.¹⁸

¹³ An intelligentsia formed in the 1860s "with the obligation and privilege to act as the national avant-garde." Janowski, *Birth of the Intelligentsia*, 12. Bronislaw Trentowski first used the term in 1844. Gella, *Inteligencja Polska*, 21; Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 251.

¹⁴ Slavic insurgency should not be assumed: as John Connelly's argues, only Poles and Serbs had substantive armed insurrection traditions. See John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 130–154.

¹⁵ Writers have a privileged position here, for the same reason Poshek Fu centers them in his study of Japanese-occupied Shanghai, since they were "thinking individuals with a conscious grasp of their historical situation." Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993), *xii*.

¹⁶ Jakubowska notes the gentry retained a monopoly on "the historic role of defining Polish identity." Jakubowska, *Patrons of History*, 6.

¹⁷ Aleksander Matejko, "Status Incongruence in the Polish Intelligentsia," *Social Research*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter 1966): 611–638, 612.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 260. Thanks to Mattie Fitch for noting this.

Much of the intelligentsia was Roman Catholic but religious orthodoxy was optional, however much this rankled the Catholic Church.¹⁹ A strain of Polish nationalist thinking understood Polishness and Catholicism as intertwined and defined nationality religiously.²⁰ The crucial question was the relationship to Judaism (or Jewishness): could someone “of Mosaic faith” be welcome in the Polish nation? Among its intelligentsia leadership? The answer was yes and no. Intellectual historian Jerzy Jedlicki notes that “assimilated Jews were welcomed by the Polish educated classes” who embraced civic nationalism. Unassimilated Jews were another matter: one of the defining characteristics of Polish territory was the presence of religious Jews in towns and cities, including Warsaw, many of whom spoke Polish as a second language if at all. Their “welcome” changed when some Polish nationalists came to see Jews as competitors for territory and political influence rather than co-victims of partitioning oppression after 1918. The co-victimhood debate would have many afterlives: antisemitism and the assertion that Jews were not or never could be Polish – ethnic nationalism – constituted a formidable strand of intelligentsia thinking at the dawn of the twentieth century.²¹

Education was a marker of intelligentsia status. However, tertiary schooling was not always available to Poles, and the partitioning powers associated students (rightly) with radical patriotic politics. Universities were pawns of the partitioning powers, who appreciated their influence and used them to control the behavior – and the production of – Polish elites. This meant that an educated Pole had a more complicated CV than his western European peers. Warsaw University became the maternity ward of the capital’s intelligentsia after its 1816 founding, but its output waxed and waned. Russian Tsar Alexander I opened it to train staff for his imperial outpost. Faculty and students thanked him by participating in the November Uprising of 1830 against his rule, and he closed it. Another tsarist thaw reopened it, and the university threw itself into the January Uprising of 1863.²² During the 1905 Revolutions, students joined workers on the barricades, to St. Petersburg’s

¹⁹ Pope Gregory XVI’s encyclical *Cum Primum* (On Civil Disobedience) in 1832 condemned uprising; Archbishop Zygmunt Feliński was anti-insurrection. Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–161.

²⁰ Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 328–359.

²¹ Jerzy Jedlicki, “Resisting the Wave: Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the ‘Polish Kingdom,’” *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 61; Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering A Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 50.

²² “The great majority of educated people were engaged in the resistance movement, though obviously to varying degree.” Stefan Kieniewicz, *Trzy powstania narodowe: kościuszkowe, listopadowe, styczniowe*. (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1994), 354–357; 387–391; Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 85–89.

fury. In 1914, students filled Piłsudski's Legions and fought the Russian army. In 1918, as the flagship university of a newly independent state, Warsaw University flourished. In 1939, the Nazis closed it, and the faculty reassembled it, underground.

0.2 Competing Visions

A distinct Polish elite with a national independence mission emerged from more than a century of partition, progress, and insurrection. The failure of the last substantial attempt, the January Insurrection of 1863, defined the Warsaw intelligentsia's future. For some, the romantics, the only way to gain independence was in arms – either on Polish lands or abroad.²³ For others, particularly victims of brutal Russian repression, insurrection squandered human capital and national resources. They adopted Enlightenment ideals, emphasizing education, developing infrastructure, and promoting everything from public health to women's emancipation. Such 'Warsaw Positivists' favored gradual "organic work" over rebellion.²⁴ Most elites were not pure romantics or positivists, but tempered idealism with pragmatism, as they would again during the Second World War.

Two men born just after the January Uprising embodied the divide between the positivist and romantic paradigms of intelligentsia nation building, inspiring the elites who would suffer under Nazi occupation. The elder was Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), born outside Warsaw in 1864 and an *intelligent* courtesy of his Warsaw University studies and lifelong political agitation. The younger was Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), born to an impoverished gentry family in what is now Lithuania to a January Uprising veteran. Piłsudski was not much of a student, but he was a fanatical patriot from his youth.²⁵ The two men traveled in the same circles and were even friends in the 1890s, but their hopes for the future ran afoul of one another. They articulated the main strands of Polish national thinking, the conflict between which would define a century.²⁶ In rough outline, Piłsudski was a romantic and insurrectionary; Dmowski a pragmatist who thought violence foolish. Piłsudski thought the main impediment to future Polish independence was Russia; Dmowski thought Germany. Both were nominally Catholic, and Dmowski drew the

²³ Soldiers campaigned under the slogan "for your freedom and ours." Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 26.

²⁴ Magdalena Micińska, *At the Crossroads: 1865–1918. A History of the Polish Intelligentsia*, Part 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 89–106; Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 278–279.

²⁵ Andrzej Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski, 1867–1935* (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995), 2–4, 28, 40.

²⁶ Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995), 25.

Church into his camp.²⁷ Piłsudski joined the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and pushed it in a nationalist direction; Dmowski founded the National Democratic Party (ND), or *Endecja*. Piłsudski imagined a large, federal state including Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, and Jews; Dmowski wanted an ethnically homogenous Poland and became a rabid antisemite.²⁸ Piłsudski was a civic nationalist, Dmowski an ethnic one. Both assumed the intelligentsia – their people – would lead any future sovereign Poland.

Each made allies. Dmowski spent time abroad; Piłsudski spent time in prison, including in the Tenth Pavilion of Warsaw's Citadel and in Siberian exile.²⁹ Both were overtaken by workers' rebellions launched outside Warsaw's All Saints Church on Grzybowski Square in November 1904 and continued into 1905.³⁰ In this moment, intelligentsia-led political movements were confronted with the specter of mass politics and forced to respond to urban crowds. Dmowski's *Endecja* weathered the moment better. After creating a trade union, *Endecja* cracked down on strikers, compromising with industry. When 1905 did not provide the base for an all-Polish uprising, Piłsudski revealed himself to be more nationalist than socialist. His Polish Socialist Party split between those committed to proletarian struggle and those committed to independence.

The Warsaw intelligentsia entered the twentieth century dedicated to independence, but with no consensus on what kind, where, or for whom. The international situation overtook those questions when two partitioning powers – Austria and Germany – went to war against the third, Russia, in 1914. Piłsudski raised an army, forming Polish Legions to fight Russia. Almost 21,000 men volunteered by 1917 – more than 30% students – but the Central Powers found Piłsudski and his recruits intractable. The stalwart revolutionary, Piłsudski was the example *par excellence* of the “Pandora's box opened by the national mobilization at the war's start.”³¹ Piłsudski's Legions became a Polish Auxiliary Corps in 1916, but shrank in 1917 when their commander refused to swear loyalty to the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II. The stunt got Piłsudski imprisoned in Saxony to wait out the First World War.³²

Dmowski, horrified by Piłsudski's anti-Russian rebellion, spent the conflict in western Europe, negotiating.³³ Aided by his friend the pianist Ignacy Jan

²⁷ Neither was pious, though both used religion. Porter-Szücs, *Faith and Fatherland*, 181.

²⁸ Walicki, “Poland between East and West,” 46–55; Feliks Gross, “Tolerance and Intolerance in Poland: The Two Political Traditions,” *The Polish Review* Vol. 20, No. 1 (1975), 65–69.

²⁹ Garlicki, *Piłsudski*, 33–34.

³⁰ Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 41, 190–210.

³¹ Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 97–99.

³² Garlicki, *Piłsudski*, 85–87.

³³ Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 84–85.

Paderewski (1860–1941), Dmowski gave lectures, shook hands, and promoted his vision for Poland among Britons, Americans, and the French.³⁴ In August 1917 his efforts created the Polish National Committee (Polski Komitet Narodowy), a skeleton government. Neither man mastered the war-time situation, but Dmowski's influence got him invited to the Paris Peace Conference and meant that it was his signature – not Piłsudski's – on the Treaty of Versailles.

Warsaw beheld two of her floundering imperial masters as First World War occupiers: first the Russians, then the Germans. Russia retreated in July 1915. Departing Russians looted the city, ingratiating themselves with no one. A brutal German occupation then exploited Varsovians.³⁵ Hans Hartwig von Beseler, the Imperial German General Governor, ruled Warsaw with a “mix of condescension and fondness.” Beseler was no Polonophile but he granted whatever self-governance spared him personnel and did not interfere with the German war effort. He reopened Warsaw University, supported Piłsudski's Legions, and formed a provisional Regency Council. Germany, however, lost the war and none of its concessions to Poland materialized, while all the wartime hardships did.³⁶

Russia fell into revolution after February 1917, and in March 1918 the Peace of Brest-Litovsk pulled it from the war and out of Polish territory.³⁷ By October 1918, the Central Powers were also on their last legs. At the beginning of November, Austria signed an armistice with the Triple Entente and collapsed. On November 8, 1918, Germany released Piłsudski. On November 11, 1918, it signed an armistice with the victorious Entente in western Europe. The same day, Warsaw's Regency Council put Piłsudski in command of Polish soldiers, and he declared an independent Polish state. Dmowski was in Paris. Germany, Austria, and Russia were in shambles; Warsaw was in worse shape. Poland was back.

For romantics, 1918 was the end of a century-long insurrection in which the final rebellion crowned partition intelligentsia conspiracies with success. This story was simple and bloody. Approximately every generation, Warsaw intelligentsia rebelled against foreign domination, usually gunning hardest for the

³⁴ Connelly, *Peoples into Nations*, 332.

³⁵ Material conditions for non-Jewish Varsovians were worse in 1915–18 than 1939–44. Robert Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse: Warsaw during the First World War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 52, 10.

³⁶ German conservatives thought he pandered to Poles, and Polish nationalists thought he swindled them. He inspired Władysław Studnicki. The Germans, notably, were not exactly planning an independent Poland. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125, 196–198; Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*, 44, 59, 84–85, quotation 36; Watson, *Ring of Steel*, 393.

³⁷ Connelly, *Peoples into Nations*, 327–330; Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914–1921* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 491, 494.

Russians. Each rebellion failed. But in 1918, due to the agglomeration of effort *and* the political-military collapse of *all three* of the empires partitioning the Commonwealth, a newly independent Poland re-emerged, blinking, onto the European map.

0.3 Intelligentsia in Power: 1918–1939

Thus the Polish intelligentsia took the helm of a modern state in 1918. Piłsudski, who was popular with the masses but had a revolutionary's unorthodox approach to politics, held the reins of government. He staffed the state with Legionnaires and fellow socialist agitators.³⁸ Much of society filled out similarly, with elites choosing peers to begin the work of state-making. This is not to accuse the Second Polish Republic of nepotism, but to draw attention to its newness. The consequences of an absence of nineteenth-century statehood cannot be underestimated. The newly instated elite worked feverishly to inspire aristocrats, the peasantry, workers, and minorities with their political visions.³⁹ To the Warsaw intelligentsia the Second Polish Republic was the fulfillment of their dreams, but to Ukrainians and Germans it was an oppressive imperial state.⁴⁰

Unsurprisingly, the intelligentsia disagreed on how to run Poland. How did their national mission democratize itself? What role would Piłsudski, “the George Washington of Poland,” play?⁴¹ State-builders were unsure, since among them numbered those who upheld a civic concept of Polishness that embraced Jews, Catholics, Ukrainians, Belarussians, and “ethnic” Poles who wished to live *po polsku* – *à la* Piłsudski.⁴² There were also those in power who defined Polishness in ethno-linguistic or religious terms (excluding non-Catholics, but sometimes including converts) – *à la* Dmowski. This camp was “disassimilationist” and treated minorities differently than “true Poles.”⁴³ The

³⁸ Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from A Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 23–24.

³⁹ The Polishness of peasants and workers should not be assumed. Padraic Kenney claims “one could not speak of a single Polish working class in 1918 because regional identity was more powerful than national identity.” Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 12.

⁴⁰ Janusz Żarnowski, *Listopad 1918* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1982), 151–157; Winson Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63–113.

⁴¹ USHMM RG-50.030.0769, Accession Number (AN): 2014.238.1, “Oral History Interview with Julian Kulski,” 24:45–24:55.

⁴² Paul Brykczynski calls this the “defeat of the civic nation.” *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 131.

⁴³ Rogers Brubaker proposed the assimilationist–disassimilationist model noting that “ethnicity” is itself “deeply ambiguous.” Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard

first independent Polish constitution, with weak executive powers keeping Piłsudski in check, was finalized in the shadow of these debates in 1921.

The Versailles Treaty that ended the First World War delineated Poland's western border, but this state creation method made it the target of its neighbors' revanchist jealousies. International Minorities Treaties also recognized "others" within Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Greece. New states had to recognize minority rights but older ones (including Weimar Germany) did not. The minority situation was exacerbated, ironically, by one of Piłsudski's first successes: contestation of the spreading Russian Revolution in the Polish–Soviet War (1919–20), which concluded with a Polish victory. That victory yielded territorial spoils for the Second Polish Republic: the acquisition of lands whose inhabitants were primarily Ukrainian and Belarussian speaking. This meant cool Polish–Soviet relations and potentially restive Slavic minorities.⁴⁴ Germans to the west were yet more hostile, as their 1918 defeat ushered in what Helmut Walser Smith calls a "nationalist age."⁴⁵ The Nazi *Führer*, Adolf Hitler, who became chancellor in 1933, regarded the Second Polish Republic's very existence as an affront to Germany. He called to overturn Versailles and railed about "protecting" the ethnic German minority in Poland.⁴⁶

Internationally and domestically, the question of who was Polish resisted settlement. Polish Jews were part of cultural, intellectual, and political life in the new state and were, by law, citizens, though some religious Jews lived entirely separate lives.⁴⁷ Polish-Jewish politicians found a home in the Minorities Bloc, where they joined Germans, Belarussians, and Ukrainians.⁴⁸ Bloc success backfired: the first democratically elected president, Gabriel Narutowicz (1865–1922), was assassinated in December 1922.⁴⁹ Dmowski's

University Press, 2004), 132–146, quotation 136; Chu, *German Minority in Interwar Poland*, 63–64.

⁴⁴ Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 504–509.

⁴⁵ Helmut Walser Smith, *Germany, A Nation In Its Time: Before, During, and After Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton/Liveright, 2020), 292, 294.

⁴⁶ "Abuses [of the German minority in Poland were] often wildly exaggerated." Doris L. Bergen, "Instrumentalization of 'Volksdeutschen' in German Propaganda in 1939: Replacing/Erasing Poles, Jews, and Other Victims," *German Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (2008): 447; "Poland's Position on Minorities," *World Affairs* 97, no. 4 (1934): 204–205.

⁴⁷ Barbara Engelking, "Żydowskie wspólnoty w przededniu wybuchu wojny" in *Prowincja noc: Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystryckie warszawskim* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2007), 26–29.

⁴⁸ Zionist founder Yitzhak Gruenbaum studied medicine and law at Warsaw University. Hava Eshkoli-Wagman, "Yishuv Zionism: Its Attitude to Nazism and the Third Reich Reconsidered," *Modern Judaism* 19, no. 1 (1999): 21–40.

⁴⁹ Narutowicz was not Jewish. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs and accepted the 1922 nomination; bloc support during a stalemate led to his election. He was seen therefore as a minority candidate and assassinated by an *Endek*. Brykczynski, *Primed for Violence*, 31, 100–103.

Endecja mob was enraged that minorities had not only voted – political participation they thought illegitimate – but helped elect the president.⁵⁰ This was not an auspicious start to twentieth-century Polish democracy.

Three presidents led Poland between 1918 and 1939, but politics floundered. A large number of prime ministers and coalition cabinets indicated “chronic” instability.⁵¹ After Narutowicz’s murder, Maciej Rataj of the Polish People’s Party (Piast) acted as president before the election of socialist Stanisław Wojciechowski (1869–1953), who served for four years. Wojciechowski’s administration was overshadowed by economic difficulties. Piłsudski ended the eight-year democratic experiment with a May 1926 coup. With “the enthusiastic approval of the political and social forces of the Polish Left,” this provided a top-down solution to festering problems – but undemocratically and at the cost of human lives.⁵² Piłsudski kept a president, Ignacy Mościcki (1867–1946), who stayed in the post until the Second World War. The coup did not save the economy, as the aging Piłsudski had little interest in finance. His philosemitism stabilized Polish-Jewish relations: since he favored a heavy state hand, it was possible to enforce his more tolerant views.⁵³ Piłsudski ruled the country as a benevolent authoritarian, allowing many aspects of the state created in 1918 to continue but without parliamentary institutions, which he rejected as “degraded” and “harmful.”⁵⁴ Piłsudski’s coup coddled the army and divided the country between his supporters and opponents, splitting and refashioning both the left and right.

The international situation brought the Second Polish Republic difficulties it did not need. Stalin’s Soviet Union was still hostile, despite a 1932 non-aggression agreement. Hitler also negotiated a non-aggression pact with Poland but then placed Nazi Germany on an expansionist course, returning to military conscription in 1935. Piłsudski died of liver cancer months later.

⁵⁰ The Bloc’s controversial nature had a zombie afterlife: the wartime exile government’s National Council contained representatives of the major political parties but *not* the Bloc; a Jewish representative was eventually added. Anita J. Prazmowska, *Civil War in Poland, 1942–1948* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.

⁵¹ Joseph Rothschild, *Piłsudski’s Coup d’Etat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 48.

⁵² Casualty numbers vary. Rothschild, *Piłsudski’s Coup d’Etat*, vii; Robert Forczyk, *Case White: The Invasion of Poland 1939* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2019), 34: 1,299 lives. Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 385: 379 lives.

⁵³ Peter Hetherington, *Unvanquished: Joseph Piłsudski, Resurrected Poland, and the Struggle for Eastern Europe* (Houston: Pingora Press, 2012), 187; Kopstein and Wittenberg show that Jews voted with the government post-coup, and for minorities parties beforehand. Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, “Who Voted Communist? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2003), 101–103; Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 40–41.

⁵⁴ Garlicki, *Piłsudski*, 137.

There was a massive outpouring of grief across Warsaw. Piłsudski left a country in turmoil, with aggressive western and eastern neighbors, and no obvious successor. That fall, Germany decreed its infamous Nuremberg Laws, stripping legal protections from 350,000 German Jews.⁵⁵ The precedent made antisemitism elsewhere sharper. Nazi virulence frightened the Polish-Jewish community and made them see mistreatment at home as the top of a slippery slope of Nazi-style discrimination.⁵⁶ The late 1930s were filled with ominous signs of future instability.

A “colonels’ regime” of unelected leaders called *Sanacja* ran Poland from Warsaw after Piłsudski’s death; they included President Mościcki and Edward Śmigły-Rydz (1886–1941), a Legionnaire who served as commander in chief. The colonels, unsurprisingly, modernized and re-equipped the army.⁵⁷ The economy lagged. Simultaneously, debates about Jews in Polish life came to a head with the introduction of “ghetto benches” segregating Polish-Jewish students, including at Warsaw University.⁵⁸ Polish universities had an increasingly antisemitic climate in the late 1930s.⁵⁹ Some Christian students protested in solidarity with their Jewish classmates, but Jewish student numbers declined.⁶⁰ University students and other youth were ready recruits for radical politics.⁶¹ Ghetto benching was part of a wider nervousness about education and national political life. In a young and foundering society in economic straits, who deserved the dwindling available privileges, like spots at the top university?⁶²

⁵⁵ Diemut Majer, *“Non-Germans” under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe, with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 101–103.

⁵⁶ Szymon Rudnicki, “Anti-Jewish Legislation in Interwar Poland,” in *Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 148, 153, 157.

⁵⁷ Forczyk claims Piłsudski stymied military reform and blames weapons obsolescence on economic difficulties, though the doctrine was updated by 1939. Forczyk, *Case White*, 55–73; Roger Moorhouse, *Poland 1939: The Outbreak of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 56–59.

⁵⁸ Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, ‘paragraf aryjski.’ Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim, 1931–1939* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny IN-B, 1999), 141–160. See also Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood: Jews, Pogroms, and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 103–105.

⁵⁹ Natkowska, *Numerus clausus*, 160, 177.

⁶⁰ Jewish student numbers fell below 10% in 1937–1938. Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 28.

⁶¹ Endecja All-Poland Youth were part. Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in 20th-Century Poland – The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 11. Restrictions were introduced in April 1933 in Germany. Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29.

⁶² There were numerous antisemitic restrictions. The post-Piłsudski Camp of National Unity (*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, or “OZoN”) proposed Jewish emigration in 1938. Natkowska, *Numerus clausus*, 167.

Though the new country was vulnerable in a Europe – and a world – fraught with economic, political, and cultural uncertainty, the view from Warsaw itself, where thorny interwar questions often found local, intimate solutions, was rosier. Warsaw housed the national government, the headquarters of the Polish army, the seat of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, and was a center of industry, finance, and culture. It was also the center of intelligentsia life and employment. A follower of Piłsudski, a soldier-turned-economist named Stefan Starzyński (1893–1939?) was the capital's last mayor, and an icon of the city's interwar transformation and the intelligentsia's multifaceted power. His biography indicates how the intelligentsia managed the Second Polish Republic and what the war took from them. Starzyński was born in Warsaw's Powiśle neighborhood into an impoverished gentry family.⁶³ The First World War made him a soldier, scattered his family, killed his father, got him imprisoned, and built his postwar career. Starzyński's politics were above all Piłsudski's, and he never quite put his insurgency years behind him.⁶⁴ Piłsudski got Starzyński his first civilian job at the Treasury Ministry, and Piłsudski's 1926 coup was good for his protégé.⁶⁵ In August 1934 the City Council appointed Starzyński mayor with enhanced executive powers.⁶⁶ He was an expert: a fixer. He accumulated advisers, enlarging Warsaw bureaucracy.⁶⁷ "Nobody," remembered his deputy Julian Kulski (1892–1976), "had any doubt that Starzyński was a man 'of the regime.'"⁶⁸

Warsaw had spent the partitions as a provincial city in other states' peripheries, and the First World War under punishing occupations.⁶⁹ It was

⁶³ Drozdowski, *Stefan Starzyński*, 10–11; Marian Marek Drozdowski, "Stefan Starzyński – Żołnierz, Działacz Państwowy, Prezydent Warszawy" in *Wspomnienia o Stefanie Starzyńskim* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982), 8–12.

⁶⁴ Drozdowski, *Stefan Starzyński*, 10–12; Aleksander Ivank, "Żołnierz Dobra i Honoru Polski," 80–85.

⁶⁵ The Left had little use for Starzyński, whom they saw as an establishment figure (he was), a militarist (he was), and tied to Piłsudski (he was). Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972); Piotr Janus, *W Nurcu Polskiego Etatyzmu: Stefan Starzyński i Pierwsza Brygada Gospodarcza, 1926–1932* (Kraków: Wyd. Avalon, 2009), 113–114; Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Starzyński: Legionista, Polityk, Gospodarcza, Prezydent Warszawy* (Warsaw: Wyd. Iskry, 2006), 18–19; 32.

⁶⁶ Roman Tomczak and Zdzisław Jan Targowski, *Wspomnienia o Stefanie Starzyńskim*, 47; 94–95; 171–175.

⁶⁷ Warsaw bureaucracy was a "boys' club" of Legionnaires. Snyder, *Sketches from A Secret War*, 23–27.

⁶⁸ Julian Kulski, *Stefan Starzyński w mojej pamięci* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wyd. Naukowe, 1990), 69; Jacek Majchrowski, *Silni – zwarci – gotowi: Myśl polityczna Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wyd. Naukowe, 1985).

⁶⁹ Main studies: Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance*; Lech Królikowski and Krzysztof Oktabiński, *Warszawa 1914–1920: Warszawa i okolice w latach walk o niepodległość i granice Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Wyd. Akademickie i Profesjonalne,

hopelessly outdated; Starzyński dragged it into the twentieth century.⁷⁰ He formed councils of technocrats, investors, economists, city planners, architects, artists, writers, and sculptors – Warsaw’s intelligentsia.⁷¹ He launched public works projects *à la* Franklin Roosevelt’s concurrent “New Deal” in the United States.⁷² His modernization efforts earned him re-election in 1938.⁷³ All this took Starzyński and his colleagues five years. In 1939 German military might would destroy it in four weeks before their eyes.

Operating in a space with profound linguistic, religious, and ethno-national diversity, the Warsaw elite wrestled for twenty years with the privileges and responsibilities of modern statehood. They ran aground against the central quandary of modern central European societies: states in this space could either be ethno-national projects *or* they could be large enough to achieve continental significance, but they could not be *both*. Polish intelligentsia attempted to square this circle. National minorities and radicals were the have-nots of this experiment: the international situation indicated they might not remain on the margins. In the center, though, were the profiteers: the intelligentsia, mellowing into statehood, expanding Polish arts and letters, absorbing and educating ambitious peasants and workers who joined them in leading Poland, and counting on their state’s existence as a source of income, power, and influence.⁷⁴

The Polish thinking classes became the Polish governing classes in 1918, explaining so many hyphenated careers. Interwar Warsaw was home to those whose lives had been happily interrupted by Polish statehood and who were rewarded with service on the government payroll.⁷⁵ There were thus a disproportionate number of minister-poets, painter-surgeons, student-activists, and Legionnaires-turned-bureaucrats. Polish cultural and social power and the Polish state were thus, as Nazi Germany observed, concentrated in a more or less coherent group. These people’s lives would again be interrupted by the Nazi German invasion in 1939 and many would rehyphenate their lives, living both legal “above ground” existences and embracing forbidden “underground” opposition. The Nazi invaders viewed the Warsaw

2007); Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Warszawa w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1974).

⁷⁰ He put 75% of the 1936 budget into transit and the riverfront, secured 1,462 new classrooms, revitalized parks, brought sewage, water, electricity, and gas to all districts and expanded hospitals, museums, and theaters. Kulski, *Stefan Starzyński*, 59; 73–82.

⁷¹ Kulski, *Stefan Starzyński*, 59–60; 64.

⁷² Unclear if FDR inspired Starzyński. Barbara Blumberg, *The New Deal and the Unemployed: The View from New York City* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979).

⁷³ Grażyna Wojsznis-Terlikowska, *Wczoraj, dziś, jutro Warszawy* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1950); Kulski, *Stefan Starzyński*, 64–65; Julian Kulski, *Z minionych lat życia, 1892–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), 215; Norbert Konwinski, *The Mayor* (Posen, MI: Diversified Enterprises, 1978), 76.

⁷⁴ Żarnowski, *Listopad 1918*, 175.

⁷⁵ USHMM RG-50.030.0769, AN: 2014.238.1, “Interview with Julian Kulski,” 10:27–11:06.

intelligentsia's twenty-year national sovereignty experiment as an impediment to German eastward expansion. The intelligentsia viewed the invasion as the theft of their state and attempted to reclaim it.

0.4 Approach and Methodology

The Warsaw intelligentsia profited uniquely from Polish independence and suffered uniquely from its destruction.⁷⁶ As the targets of early Nazi genocide, and because they were self-conscious victims capable of articulating their own experiences, what happened to them can illuminate much about human response to persecution and its effect on national communities and state projects. They have nevertheless not been the subject of their own study.⁷⁷ This work highlights the behavior of influential Polish Christians or “ethnic Poles” – no phrase is satisfactory in occupied Warsaw's complex mix – and a handful of others. Poland was the first wartime imperial conquest of Nazi Germany and Warsaw's occupation was similar to and different from others, both precedent and warning for occupiers and occupied.⁷⁸ Nazi persecution of Polish elites inspired but then departed from the Holocaust. The intelligentsia's city, Warsaw, remained within a single administrative entity, District Warsaw (*Dystrykt Warszawski*), under the exclusive control of Nazi Germany from its capitulation in late September 1939 until the last uprising's defeat in late 1944.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ For many – especially peasants – national-political attachments were fluid and loyalty local. On borderlands: Winson Chu, *German Minority in Interwar Poland*, James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), Kate Brown, *Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). On national commitments: Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) and Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ These studies are the foundation: Tomasz Szarota's *Okupowanej Warszawy Dzień Powszedni* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988) and Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz's *Warszawa w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984). Dunin-Wąsowicz was an AB-Aktion orphan, a survivor-analyst. The third is Jan Gross's *Polish Society under German Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁷⁸ Ronald Rosbottom, *When Paris Went Dark: The City of Light under German Occupation, 1940–1944* (Boston: Back Bay, 2014), Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), and James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁹ For the General Government: Martin Winstone, *The Dark Heart of Hitler's Europe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015) and Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*.

These nationally conscious elites produced most of the sources undergirding this study. This is both problem and opportunity. Many were “participant-analysts” of events they described (another hyphenated role).⁸⁰ The difficulties of differentiating historical memory from history are exacerbated by the predominance of participants among Polish historians. Indeed, participant-analyst status is the hallmark of the Polish *inteligent*, whose social role was both to participate in politics and culture and interpret them. Elite survivors of the war and occupation created the material by which they and their society might be understood; they filtered events through their own hopes and prejudices. Interwar Poland was a young state and its franchise small, but stories of genocide and atrocity are always written as this one has been, by those who witnessed and survived it. Tales of heroism and cowardice, escapes, rescues, patriotism: uncorroborated anecdotes fill intelligentsia writings, impossible to verify. Some may be true to the letter, others might faithfully report fears and rumors, giving a flavor of the time.⁸¹

The intelligentsia were myopic about their own behavior – what group is not? Their comments on the peasantry and working classes are parsimonious.⁸² Most were antisemites of one kind or another with few exceptions. Their understanding of what was happening outside Warsaw varied. Their sense of how much the world cared about their concerns was massively inflated. Achieving comfortable social, financial, and cultural positions during the Second Polish Republic, they were the profiteers of Polish independence. They were therefore predisposed to favor the resurrection of the Republic and the resumption of those privileges. Considering that, they were remarkably open with their criticisms of that state and creative in their reimagining of the Polish future.

There is no hard-and-fast schema for determining who engaged in what wartime behavior among the intelligentsia: widely utilized scales of collaboration and resistance or tripartite models including passivity or bystandership fit awkwardly onto Warsaw circumstances or onto the best analyses of Nazi imperialism.⁸³ Full-throated collaboration (sometimes called collaborationism),

Gross’s thesis on how the viciousness of German exploitation prevented Polish collaboration is the enduring model; this explains its effects on the Warsaw elite.

⁸⁰ Like Władysław Bartoszewski’s and Regina Hulewicz-Domańska’s work; Tadeusz Manteuffel’s history of the university *Uniwersytet Warszawski w latach wojny i okupacji: Kronika 1939/40–1944/45* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski Imprint, 1948), and Tadeusz (Bór) Komorowski’s *Armia Podziemna* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Bellona, 1994).

⁸¹ Cf. Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2014), 177–178.

⁸² Jan Karski basically confined patriotism to intelligentsia circles, considering that the same sentiment “in the lower classes became chauvinism.” USHMM RG-50.012.0044, AN: 1989.67.44, “Interview with Jan Karski,” Part 2, 6:00–6:30.

⁸³ Poshek Fu’s division of Shanghainese intellectuals into “passivists,” resisters, and collaborators asks whether this “tripartite mode of response” might be a useful “point of

as Philippe Pétain advocated a year after this story begins, was adopted to avoid the violence in Poland, which French leaders wanted to spare their own people: the French collaborated to *avoid* Warsaw's fate; they deliberately embraced an attitude contrary to the Polish one.⁸⁴ The targeting of the intelligentsia, their economic and political marginalization, and the comprehensive economic exploitation of the wider Polish population made "passivity" or internal exile dangerous and complicated when it was possible. Moreover, such a retreat from public engagement was precisely an abandonment of the intelligentsia mission and those who attempted it of necessity depart this story.

Resistance – regarding the Nazi occupation as incompatible with their interests and rejecting, combatting, and undermining its initiatives and personnel – is therefore the category into which much intelligentsia behavior eventually fell of necessity. Nevertheless, the term is unhelpfully imprecise and laden with moral baggage. The umbrella of "resistance" covers Polish behaviors from insurgency, sabotage, and assassination to writing nostalgic poetry, and describes wildly varied levels of personal risk and much cooperation and accommodation of occupier preferences, sometimes for the moment, and sometimes for the *longue durée* in a world in which the future was uncertain. It cannot be completely avoided here because Varsovians themselves used the term, often intermingled with equally imprecise locutions like understanding themselves as "in the movement" (*w ruchu*) or "in the army" (*w armii*). In this study, the less fraught term "opposition" will be the default over "resistance" and the general Polish term "conspiracy" will be used for elite projects launched to deliberately undermine Nazi occupation.

Nazi German imperial policy, even Nazi policy in Warsaw, is impossible to conceive of in the singular: the best work on Nazi rule emphasizes its plurality, inconsistency, and ad hoc nature across Europe. The one clear consensus is on

reference" for occupied Europe. The model, which does not extend to armed resistance – a behavior Poles embraced – and in which the collaboration of intellectuals was actively sought and financed by Japanese authorities, does not apply in Warsaw. Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration*, 162. Analyses of "bystandership" often focus on German and Austrian populations; Austrian and German relationships to Nazi persecution are dramatically different than Polish ones: if Germans are "bystanders" to the Holocaust, Poles need another category. Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 9–13.

⁸⁴ On the part of both occupier and occupied, as the Nazis demurred about "bringing Polish methods" to western or central Europe. Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 103. See also: Peter Fritzsche, *An Iron Wind: Europe under Hitler* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), xvi–xvii; Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 357; Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 62; Sandra Ott, *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration, and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940–1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71; Brandys, *Warsaw Diary*, 147.

the brutality of Nazi behavior in Poland: the Third Reich was, paraphrasing Susan Carruthers, a singularly vicious overlord.⁸⁵ Peter Fritzsche writes of the experience of being buffeted by Nazi power as like that of walking into an “iron wind” that scattered those who endured it rather than uniting them.⁸⁶ Shelley Baranowski, considering the Nazi empire against earlier German ambitions, writes of “tensions,” “debates,” and infighting in defining occupation priorities.⁸⁷ Mark Mazower, bringing together the far-flung conquests of the Third Reich, acknowledges that “no positive vision” joined them and that “no single system of terror” dominated, the entire collection defined by an “almost limitless escalation in the use of force and a constant revision of rules and norms.”⁸⁸ If one is to invoke the ideas of collaboration with or resistance to Nazi occupation, then, one must always qualify: collaboration *with what aspect* and *with which personnel* of that regime, *when?* Resistance to *what particular policy*, on *what timeline?* Indeed, oversimplifications of Nazi Germany’s war-time behavior highlight its enormous war of conquest and the Holocaust against the Jewish people. For Varsovians, those “obvious” characteristics of Nazism were harder to see: in Poland’s once and future capital the key thing the Nazi presence meant was defeat and persecution; what was at stake above all was Polish independence. This understanding was not wrong but powerfully right in local context. When Warsaw’s elite wrangled with the question of what Nazi takeover meant and how they should respond, the question they were asking and answering was what Nazi takeover meant *for them*.

In interrogating Polish behavior, then, this work does not ask whether initiatives were motivated by acceptance or support of Nazi goals (collaboration) or rejection of them (resistance). Instead, it asks what individual Polish elites were doing, what they thought they were accomplishing in terms of the Polish nation-state project, and how their own peers responded; how Nazi occupation leadership, the wider Polish community, and Polish Jews reacted to these efforts provides context and occasionally clarification.

No one criterion predetermined intelligentsia engagement or its effectiveness. Age, gender, military service, wealth, and political and religious affiliation mattered.⁸⁹ Though many elite projects were deeply gendered, men and women often cooperated.⁹⁰ Intimate communities of trust mattered above

⁸⁵ Carruthers, *Good Occupation*, 1; Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, 49–50.

⁸⁶ Fritzsche, *Iron Wind*, xi.

⁸⁷ Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 238, 5, 259, 4.

⁸⁸ Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire*, 6, 11.

⁸⁹ Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, 38.

⁹⁰ See: Ewa Bukowska, *Łączność, sabotaż, dywersja: Kobiety w Armii Krajowej* (London: Zarząd Główny Armii Krajowej, 1985); Wanda Sadurska, *Kobiety w łączności Komendy Głównej i Okręgu Warszawskiego ZWZ-AK* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Comandor, 2002); Anna Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk, *Kobiety w obronie Warszawy: Ochotnicza Legia*

all, as conspiracies were born amidst deadly persecution. Loyalty was necessary for survival. This intimacy requirement sustained community but not rigorous ideological purity. This study, in other words, examines Varsovians *qua intelligentsia*, reassembling Polish national-cultural life and creating the conditions for the resurrection of statehood under duress. Paraphrasing Chad Bryant's analysis of occupied Prague, this study examines Varsovian intelligentsia acting *hyper-nationally*.⁹¹ Building off the insights of Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius' examination of German occupation in the East in the First World War, which reshaped German nationalism and identity, this study argues that the reverse was also true in the next war: the experience of *being occupied* by Germans and responding to it shaped the Polish national project.⁹²

0.5 Organization

This story unfolds with four chapters on how Nazi Germany and its various personnel targeted the Warsaw intelligentsia in order to dismantle the Polish state and nation long term: Chapter 1 describes the September 1939 siege, which revealed German military brutality and provoked a Polish governance crisis. Chapter 2, "The Killing Years," explains the two-wave Nazi police genocide against the intelligentsia in 1939–1940 and its fallout. Chapter 3 places a spotlight on the main institution used to control intelligentsia behavior, Pawiak prison, and how it both symbolized but also channeled Polish elite opposition to Nazi rule. Chapter 4 considers the Warsaw Ghetto and how, when (and whether) Polish elites grappled with distinct Jewish victimhood in their midst.

The last five chapters consider how the intelligentsia responded to Nazi occupation, maintaining national and state traditions. Chapter 5, "Information Wars," is the opening case study of intelligentsia-built opposition, examining how clandestinely trafficked information sustained other conspiracies. Chapter 6 considers the other great success: underground education. Chapter 7 analyzes the Roman Catholic Church. "Matters of Faith" asks how Catholics behaved and why. It argues that a leadership crisis undermined the Church-wide response, but individual priests and lay Catholics were motivated by faith to significant activity. Chapter 8 begins a two-part examination of violence. This discussion is deliberately postponed, as much of the existing literature focuses on military activity and insurgency as a shorthand for resistance as a whole, which it was not: armed opposition projects remained fractured and hamstrung by Nazi reprisals until

Kobiet (1918–1922) i Wojskowa Służba Kobiet ZWZ-AK (1939–1945) (Warsaw: IPN, 2016).

⁹¹ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 4–6.

⁹² Liulevicius focuses on *Ober Ost* but the point stands. See Liulevicius, *War Land*.

1942. Chapter 9, “Home Army on the Offensive,” dissects mature insurgency in 1943–1944.

This study argues that the Nazi attack on the Polish nation-state project was a formidable one, but that the intelligentsia were able to contest and undermine parts of it. Polish nation-building endeavors focused on the intelligentsia mission narrowly thrived, those that focused on enfranchising a larger Polish community (generally excepting Polish Jews) sometimes succeeded but statehood, which required external support, was not achievable. Though many Polish elite ambitions were thwarted, the occupation of Warsaw was also a failure for Nazi Germany, which never pacified it thanks to the sustained – if varied – opposition of the intelligentsia.

Atrocities abounded during the Second World War. Warsaw hosted a number of the most dramatic, and its population endured persecutions that most twentieth-century peoples could not imagine let alone survive. The cumulative effect was traumatic and numbing, especially regarding the suffering of “others.” City elites nevertheless believed that their experiences were vital to preserving a Polish nation state, infusing their behavior with purpose and performance.

What happened in Warsaw *was* special, and it was exceptional in Poland and exceptional in Europe. There are parallels with other places at other moments, and Varsovians were deeply conscious – even obsessed – with historical precedent. Though Leningrad was besieged longer, London and Belgrade bombarded by more *Luftwaffe* aircraft, Stalingrad and Moscow and Kiev the site of larger pitched battles, the accumulation of traumas in Warsaw, the length of Nazi occupation, and the sustained opposition despite the severity of repression, was unique even in the depths of twentieth-century violence.⁹³ What happened in Warsaw was also, peculiarly, never just about Warsaw, a mid-size city in the middle of a continent, the capital of a state that flickered in and out of existence. In a strange consensus, the Warsaw intelligentsia, the Nazi German occupation, and even the Soviet Union, which would claim the city at war’s end, agreed that Warsaw was crucial to the control of east central Europe. Varsovians saw their conduct as important on a much larger stage. They may have been wrong on an individual level, but they behaved as if their actions were of grave historical moment, as if lives hung in the balance. They turned out to be right.

⁹³ Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations*, 450, 441. (Japanese-occupied Shanghai was held longer but its most intense phase of occupation began in 1941).