

avant-garde positioned itself within Central Europe and in broader geographical contexts.¹ The book's bypassing of challenges to the exclusive framing of Central European avant-garde groups such as Devětsil, the Má circle, and the Blok group is also striking. While it is undoubtedly necessary to delimit material in a project spanning barely connected groups in three countries, the question remains as to what wider impact the Constructivist ideas these artists developed had on their broader environment. And, more importantly still, the question persists of how this revisiting of Constructivism in the region can challenge, rather than affirm, established narratives.

In this sense, the book offers a detailed reconsideration of Constructivism in Central Europe with an astonishing use of primary sources in different languages—a remarkable achievement in itself given that they have all been put together by a single author. However, the book continues to follow the established paradigm of writing the history of the avant-garde as an exclusive and almost exclusively male group of artists and its close focus leaves little room for grounding the analysis in the social and political realities of the day. The book thus primarily functions on a theoretical level as a history of ideas from different avant-garde groups in the region. As it makes little reference to more recent critical debates about art history in the region, *Constructivism in Central Europe* represents an impressive overview of constructivist ideas, but its readers will need extensive knowledge to succeed in situating these debates within a wider critical framework.

Brno

Julia Secklehner

¹ BEÁTA HOCK, JONATHAN OWEN et al. (eds.): *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, London 2019; PIOTR PIOTROWSKI: *On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History*, in: *Umeni/Art* 56 (2008), 5, pp. 378–383; MATTHEW RAMPLEY: *Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe*, in: *Umění/Art* 69 (2021), 2, pp. 145–162.

If This Is a Woman. *Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust.* Hrsg. von Denisa Nešřáková, Katja Grosse-Sommer, Borbála Klacsmann und Jakob Drábik. Academic Studies Press. Boston 2021. XX, 271 S., Ill. ISBN 978-1-64469-710-8. (\$ 119,-.)

In June 1942, Emanuel Ringelblum, founder of the Oyneg Shabes archive established in the Warsaw Ghetto, noted, that “the historian of the future will have to devote a fitting chapter to the role of Jewish women during the war. It is thanks to the courage and endurance of our women that thousands of families have been able to endure these bitter times.” Quoting him, Hannah Wilson, a contributor to *If This Is a Woman*, reminds the reader that attention to female experiences and a greater understanding of gender dynamics more broadly have been all but a given in both Holocaust scholarship and memory. The volume is therefore a welcome and useful reminder of the necessity and value of a gender-sensitive approach to the study of the Holocaust. Nearly 40 years after the spat about Joan Ringelheim's article discussing a feminist approach, it is time to take stock of scholarly achievements in the by now identifiable field, and *If This Is a Woman* does a great job doing so.¹

The volume results from contributions to the 2019 “XX. Century Conference: If This Is a Woman” at Comenius University Bratislava. Unlike many other conference volumes, the book is coherent; it offers a focused investigation of various dimensions of the Holocaust and World War II. As the editors note in the Introduction, both the conference and book are a response to the assault on democratic value and rights, including reproductive rights and the rights of the LGBTQ community, in several Eastern and Central European countries that prominently targets individual scholars and institutions dedicated to the study of gender. Critically exploring the experience of females, gender relations, representation and

¹ JOAN RINGELHEIM: *Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research*, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10 (1985), 4, pp. 741–761.

politics, as well as sexuality and sexual violence under the Nazi regime, the editors hope, will offer a toolbox for the struggle against the conservative and authoritarian regimes in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and elsewhere. Refreshing is the reminder that feminist perspectives must not only shape our methodologies, but ought to also encourage us to intervene in institutionalized exclusionary academic practices by creating spaces of constructive critique benefiting junior and female scholars (p. XII). Lastly, the volume puts forth the work of scholars from, and studies of the Holocaust in the region and thus adds an important perspective on gender ideologies as well as victim experiences under German occupation and in camps and ghettos.

The six parts of the volume attend to questions and themes that have emerged as crucial to gender-sensitive scholarship on war and genocide. All chapters are concise and well argued, some minor editing flaws regarding syntax and punctuation can easily be addressed in reprints to enhance the reading experience. Especially students and newcomers to the field will appreciate the sections on sources or methodologies that nearly all chapters include.

The most senior scholars represented in the volume, Dalia Ofer and Natalia Aleksion, contribute reviews of central insights regarding gender-sensitive scholarship on war and genocide. Ofer's note that "tragedy, hunger, pain, and want did not make people kinder and more compassionate," but that people responded to them according to their personality, social class, and cultural background (pp. 16–17), proposes an agenda. It asks us to look precisely for these factors—which include perceptions and expectations regarding gender roles and performance and sexuality—to gain a better understanding of the implications and effects of systematic and genocidal violence. Presenting short portraits of several women's actions, Ofer spells out how looking for the mundane and the heroic as well as how individuals thought about the future, including their vision for women's roles after the war, illuminates much more than individual and gendered experiences. Aleksion follows suit by arguing that greater attention to the fate and role of familial structures also reveals a bigger picture. She demonstrates that the contributions of feminist scholars, a gender studies approach, as well as the greater recognition of testimonies as a valuable source for Holocaust research have helped establish a family lens on to the genocide. This lens, which survivor-scholars had already called for immediately after the war, reveals the fragmentation of social units and relationships as well as the limited agency available to Jews (and, one might add, other victims) and therefore affirms the all-encompassing nature of genocide to destroy human bodies as well as cultural certainties.

Several chapters provide not only well-researched and argued studies of individual aspects, they also chart paths for future research. Agnes Laba, in her study of masculinities under occupation, goes somewhat beyond the purview of the volume to study "Women and Gender in the Holocaust." Micro-historical studies of social dynamics in occupied societies more broadly are a recent addition to the field and strive to understand power relations both between occupiers and occupied as well as within the occupied society. Especially Laba's insights that the common differentiation between militarized male and civil female sphere does not only collapse under occupation, but that this collapse also played out in drastically different ways across occupied Europe, are food for thought for those grappling with how locals participated in the occupation regime's campaigns against Jews, Roma, or other groups deemed racially inferior. Denisa Nešťáková's analysis of testimonies by child survivors shows that children evaluated their mothers' actions in internment camps based on patriarchal understandings of gender roles that they had adopted prior to war and occupation. The impact of this lens on testimonial accounts of motherhood, female experience, and the world more generally has yet to be fully appreciated and the author's call on scholar to do so is well-founded. Laurien Vastenhout reveals how the focus of historians on the male-dominated leadership of Jewish Councils marginalizes not only the women who often worked in the larger Council structures. She also shows how women's work within these institutions in the occupied Netherlands and France made

use of these administrative bodies' veneer of legality to aid Jews in escaping persecution and deportation. The experiences of Jewish female partisans remain at the margins of studies of Jewish armed resistance, as Modiane Zerdoun-Daniel argues, though a growing body of scholarship is rectifying this omission. Nevertheless, her analysis of testimonies and memoirs by primarily Lithuanian Jewish fighters elucidates the double burden of these then young women to prove themselves as fighters and simultaneously to take care of logistics such as preparing food or washing and mending clothes, do secretarial work, stand night watch, and clean weapons. Fighting against antisemitism and misogyny in the partisan units, Zerdoun-Daniel writes, impacted social interactions and the women's self-perception, but it also increased their commitment to fight—an important insight considering the dangers of partisan warfare.

The final part of the book includes Marta Havryshko's contribution on the role of Jewish survivor testimonies in Soviet war crimes trials persecuting, among others, sexual violence committed by locals against Jewish women, and Fabian Zabransky's study of male Jewish teenage sexuality in Nazi Germany. Havryshko makes use of a broad set of feminist scholarship on the study and persecution of sexual violence to argue that postwar justice for victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence was marred by competing and politically motivated agendas regarding the treatment of collaboration more broadly as well as Soviet rape culture.

Zabransky brings a queer studies lens to the table and implicitly gestures toward an expansion of the field that hopefully will be represented more strongly in upcoming volumes that try to take stock of gender-sensitive and feminist analyses of the Holocaust. The task will consist in being more open to non-binary understandings of gender and sexuality, the role of (gender) performativity for shaping survivor narratives, and a focus on subjectivity and practices rather than presumably solidified identities. Queer approaches can then facilitate nuanced analyses of agency, intimacy, and power relations within communities, families, and institutions and continue the important work done by scholars of gender and sexuality in the context of the Holocaust.

St. Louis

Anika Walke

Irena Protassewicz: A Polish Woman's Experience in World War II. Conflict, Deportation and Exile. Hrsg. von Hubert Zawadzki und Meg Knott. Bloomsbury Academic. London u. a. 2019. XXXV, 257 S. ISBN 978-1-3500-7992-2. (£ 90,-)

Hubert Zawadzki beleuchtet das ereignisreiche Leben seiner Mutter Irena Protassewicz (1910–1994) durch die Übersetzung, Veröffentlichung, Kontextualisierung und Kommentierung eines Teils ihrer Selbstzeugnisse. Mit der Herausgabe dieser Erinnerungen präsentiert der Historiker die Geschichte seiner Familie einer breiten Öffentlichkeit und deckt bisher unbekannt Details über den Alltag des aus dem polnisch-litauischen-belarusischen Grenzgebiet des Russländischen Reichs (*Kresy*) stammenden polnischen Landadels Anfang/Mitte des 20. Jh. auf. Besonders reizvoll hieran ist, dass erstmals eine Frau, und somit eine noch immer äußerst seltene weibliche Perspektive aus jener Zeit, zu Wort kommt. Z. hat dieses Alleinstellungsmerkmal erkannt (S. XXXV) und spricht im Prolog darüber hinaus von einer moralischen Verantwortung, die als Motor für die Publikation gedient habe. Er selbst habe nach Abschluss seines Geschichtsstudiums in Oxford im Jahr 1968 die Mutter davon überzeugt, ihre Memoiren niederzuschreiben (S. XXIV). Aus dem Epilog geht hervor, dass Z.s mehrmonatiger Forschungsaufenthalt in Polen für Irena den Ausschlag gab, ihre Erlebnisse aus den letzten beinahe 60 Jahren für die Nachwelt festzuhalten (S. 200). Dabei richtet sie sich dezidiert an ihren Sohn Hubert, genannt Wacio. Ihm schreibt sie assoziativ über ihre Kindheit und Jugend sowie den engeren Familien- und weiteren Freundeskreis, während sie ihr Martyrium von 1939 bis 1945 weitgehend chronologisch, jedoch weniger detailreich wiedergibt. Ganz offensichtlich diente