



BOOK REVIEW

## Zaremba, Marcin. *Entangled in Fear: Everyday Terror in Poland, 1944–1947*

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Marcin Zaremba's *Entangled in Fear* is a long-awaited English translation of *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (The great fear: A popular reaction to crisis [Warsaw, 2012]), an excellent, innovative (though not uncontroversial) study on fear in postwar Poland that comprises one of the most important works of social history and a key Polish contribution to the field of the history of emotions in recent years. Published in 2012, *Wielka Trwoga* was a response to numerous myths that arose around the early years of postwar Poland (including the communist historiography of the enthusiastic construction of “New Poland”) and showed instead the immense complexity of the emotional universe of the immediate postwar years. Crucially, the book transcended academia and led to lively public discussion, including—among others—an important one on the background of postwar attacks on Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors and their exact place in the enormity of postwar violence. Ten years later, the English version of the book remains a fascinating study of emotions for a country in crisis.

Zaremba tells a story of immediate postwar Poland as an area in which the new regime had to assert its authority while confronting a myriad of political challenges that included armed opposition, foreign interference, and conflicting priorities between leaders and citizens. At the same time, new social ties were being created in the wake of mass-scale community transfers. Ethnic Poles from areas east of the River Bug were moving to postwar Polish borders; Germans were being resettled from the so-called Recovered Territories; Ukrainians and Belorussians were leaving Poland to go east; Poles were returning from concentration camps, forced labor camps, and army units abroad; people were moving from the countryside to the city; and Jewish survivors were returning to their prewar homes and then leaving again. As Zaremba writes, “From the psychosociological point of view, the great migration of peoples had the short-term effect of explosions of aggression, and it augmented collective anxiety and fear, but it also inflicted long-term scars, which left a mark on collective attitude and behaviors for many years” (180).

Wherever they were liberated, those returning found themselves in the midst of civil war, the aftermath of a multi-dimensional conflict involving the Soviets and Germans, their accomplices, and local representatives as well as different nationalist partisans and quasi-partisan groups. With the political and social chaos of the new power that was being installed, no peaceful rebuilding of lives could be guaranteed. Postwar Poland was ridden with interethnic violence, partisan warfare, and violent crimes. Another layer of uncertainty was added for Polish citizens liberated in the area annexed by the Soviet Union, a no-man's land between the new government and the guerrillas: some of them were ready to be repatriated immediately, others still considered rebuilding their lives in their hometowns.

Violence was carried out by individuals, groups of bandits, members of the Citizens Militia and Security Office, as well as by underground organizations. The impunity with which crimes were committed was linked to the weakness of the system of justice, in particular a lack of control exercised by the central authorities over the lower echelons of power. Thus, the fear expressed in testimonies quoted by Zaremba was much more than just an abstract, post-conflict anxiety: it was very much a part of

everyday, personal experience and had immense influence on the daily life of the wider population. There was no stability that would give individuals a reasonable vision of a stable future, especially as the new era into which the country was transitioning remained unclear, and it was uncertain how much longer this hazardous situation would last.

Masterfully covering the whole complexity of the postwar territories, moving through cities, the countryside, and the regained territories as well as areas with stronger social ties, Zaremba traces the evolution of fear between 1944 and 1947 in the area under political change. It was an atmosphere of constant disorientation and feelings of impermanence, one filled with both hope and anxiety and with the catastrophic predictions of another war mixed with the hope of the collapse of the Yalta order and the memory of the occupation leading to the post-defeat depression. In this important work, he carefully uncovers these various layers of fear as the reality of getting used to the new system settles upon the country.