

Aline Sax, *Voor Vlaanderen, volk en Führer: De motivatie van Vlaamse collaborateurs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog, 1940-1945* (Antwerpen: Manteau, 2012) [For Flandres, the People and the Führer: Flemish Collaborators and their Motives for Collaboration in the Second World War, 1940-1945].

Up until now, collaboration with the National Socialist occupier in Belgium during the Second World War was mainly considered from a top-down perspective. This book is one of the first attempts to study Flemish (Dutch-speaking Belgian) collaborators from a bottom-up perspective. The decision to leave out French-speaking Belgians seems reasonable because different collaboration movements developed along both sides of the Belgian language border.

Sax looked for an answer to three seemingly simple questions: Who were the collaborators? Why did they do what they did? What was their view of the world? She looked for answers in the post-war criminal proceedings of collaborators who have been sentenced after the war. She took a random sample of one per cent of all Flemish collaborators sentenced for collaboration, which meant 326 different case files. These are rich sources which, however, have to be read very critically by the historian. The accused had every reason to present himself to his greatest advantage, while the court searched for criminal acts, which is not the same as trying to find a (historical) explanation of the events. The author paid relatively little attention to the parallels and differences between legal and historical research. The recent research into transitional justice could undoubtedly have offered much food for reflection.

Heuristics and method are the strong points of this book in which post-war legal proceedings are explored as a historical source for the history of collaboration. The author used various methods to interpret the material. In the first place, the author performed a prosopographic study. This group portrait mainly shows young men from the lower social classes. The reason is that convictions for military collaboration are by far in the majority. Then she investigated the reasons for collaboration. For this purpose testimonies of and about collaborators during the court proceedings were analysed. A wide range of reasons are highlighted: a New Order conviction, geopolitical motives, the fight against Bolshevism, the escape from circumstances, economic and financial gain, material advantages, the escape from employment in Germany, collaboration as a medium of exchange (to obtain or avoid something else), revenge, quarrels and rebellion, familial obligations, an escape from punishment, professional ambition, power and abuse of power, and aesthetic aspects. The lack

of anti-Semitism as a motive for collaboration is remarkable. The author blames the sample for this, since the Jewish population in Flanders mainly lived in Antwerp and Brussels while the sample contained only a limited number of collaborators from these cities. Furthermore, she perceived the relative inattention for this issue on the part of the courts as a possible cause. In the third place Sax looked for coherence of the motives, for it goes without saying that various motives could occur simultaneously or that one motive might imply or trigger another. Thus she arrived at the conclusion that forty per cent of the collaborators collaborated for exclusively ideological reasons, without economic motivation playing a part. For about as many collaborators economic reasons played a part, of whom some were also ideologically motivated; consequently the total share of ideological motivation was almost sixty-five per cent. The author made a link between the two large groups of reasons – ideological and economic – and the socio-economic profile of collaborators. Not surprisingly many people from the lower classes are among the economically motivated collaborators. Money and finding work were in fact a main motive for this group. But also more than three quarters of the ideologically motivated collaborators originated from the lower social classes. Finally, the author researched the self-image of the collaborator and looked for changes in this self-image. For this purpose she subjected the collaborators' ego-documents (letters, diaries, etc.) in the case files to a discourse analysis. She distinguished seventeen topoi, which she reduced to three major themes: time, identity and performance. The main conclusion is that the national-socialist ideology was part of the identity of the average collaborator. Hitler enjoyed the untouchable status of a secular Saviour, while local leaders were more and more criticised as the war continued.

The conclusion that fascist ideology was the most important driver for the average Flemish collaborator raises the question of the attractiveness of this ideology. It links up with a new wave in international fascism research with authors such as Roger Griffin, Aristotle Kallis, Robert Paxton and Mark Mazower, who have been included in the bibliography but whose work is hardly referred to. That is regrettable, since this book deserved a comparative context, not just a Belgo-Belgian comparison, but also a wider one based on studies on collaboration movements in other countries. The NIOD<sup>1</sup> research project 'The long-lasting legacy of collaboration. The exclusion and integration of former National Socialist milieus in Dutch society' offers interesting points for comparison.<sup>2</sup> Dutch collaborators were also driven by ideological motives.

<sup>1</sup> NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

<sup>2</sup> See [www.erfenissenvancollaboratie.nl](http://www.erfenissenvancollaboratie.nl), and one of the publications emanating from it: J. Damsma and E. Schumacher, *Hier woont een NSB'er: Nationaalsocialisten in bezet Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010).

Belief in Hitler and the National Socialist image of the world were their main motives, like their Flemish 'fellow-believers,' although the anti-Semitic motive appears to have been more prominent in the Netherlands. Food for further investigation.

Bruno De Wever  
Ghent University, Belgium  
Bruno.DeWever@UGent.be