Nico Wouters en Frank Seberechts (red.), ***Stad in verzet. Antwerpen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*** (Tielt: Lannoo, 2024, 336 pp., ISBN 9789401498289).

Antwerp's history during the Second World War is often understood through the lens of local collaboration and complicity in the persecution of Jews, which has come to dominate the historiography on the topic. This line of interpretation is most clearly developed in the work of Lieven Saerens, whose landmark study *Vreemdelingen in een wereldstad. Een geschiedenis van Antwerpen en zijn joodse bevolking (1880-1944)* (2000) examines the relatively high number of Jews deported from the city – often referred to as the 'Antwerp specificity'. Within this historiographical context, the edited volume *Stad in verzet. Antwerpen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* is an important addition to the literature that shifts attention toward the dynamics of resistance, thus broadening our understanding of the city's wartime experience.

The book offers a detailed and empirically strong reconstruction of resistance in Antwerp, examining a wide range of actors, networks, and activities from clandestine press and armed groups to more everyday forms of opposition. It is structured in two distinct parts. The first, written by Nico Wouters, provides a synthetic introductory section that occupies roughly half of the book. The second part consists of a series of thematic chapters addressing specific dimensions of resistance, including the operations of British intelligence (Jan Laplasse), Jewish resistance (Janiv Stamberger and Dorien Styven), the role of the police (Herman Van Goethem), and resistance activities linked to the Antwerp harbour in the final phase of the occupation (Frank Seberechts). Taken together, these contributions offer a comprehensive and multi-layered account of the structures and dynamics of dissent in the city.

A striking feature of the book is its reliance on a relatively classical definition of resistance. As Wouters notes in the opening section, resistance is understood as 'all systematic clandestine activities by individuals or groups directed against the presence of the German occupier, specific measures of the occupier, or collaborationist policies, with the ultimate aim of liberating the country' (16). This definition reflects an older, goal-oriented, and more restrictive conceptualisation, centred on organised and frequently armed forms of opposition. While this framework remains analytically useful, it sits somewhat uneasily with more recent historiographical developments, which have broadened the concept of resistance to encompass less formalised and more ambiguous practices. This book does not explicitly engage with this

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expanded conceptual field, even though different chapters implicitly employ varying understandings of what constitutes resistance.

For example, in the discussion of women's demonstrations and forms of opposition, Michèle Corthals adopts a broader and more inclusive definition of the concept, describing it as 'activities directed against the objectives of the German occupier prohibited by the occupier and therefore involving real risk for those who carry them out' (169). A similar conceptual tension emerges in the chapter by Stamberger and Styven which critically examines the category of 'Jewish resistance' and rightly questions whether actions can be classified as such solely because they were carried out by Jewish individuals, even when these activities were primarily shaped by communist ideology rather than by Jewish identity or specifically Jewish frameworks. The authors adopt a broader interpretative framework than other contributions by also incorporating forms of 'soft resistance,' including Dora Ingber-Kornitzer's request to the Antwerp mayor on 5 October 1941 to ensure that at least one park remained accessible to Jews following their exclusion from these public spaces (238). In this respect, their approach aligns with international scholarship that has expanded the concept of 'Jewish resistance', including notions such as 'spiritual resistance,' which refers to efforts to maintain humanity in the face of Nazi dehumanisation. A more explicit engagement with existing scholarship – particularly in the introductory section of the book – would have clarified the book's position within these ongoing scholarly discussions. This limited conceptual consolidation appears in part to reflect the book's structure, which fragments its analytical focus. The absence of a concluding epilogue reinforces this, as it foregoes an opportunity to synthesise the individual contributions into a more integrated whole.

A major strength of the book lies in its focus on Greater Antwerp, understood as the de facto administrative amalgamation of the city of Antwerp with several surrounding municipalities by the German authorities. While this approach aligns with broader historiographical trends toward local history and microhistorical perspectives, the book also makes a more fundamental contribution: it demonstrates that resistance was, by its very nature, deeply embedded in local contexts. Neighbourhood networks, professional ties, and preexisting social relations played a decisive role in opportunities for action. The detailed reconstruction of the various forms of resistance in Antwerp, drawing on extensive use of primary sources including interviews, diaries, memoirs, police records, and post-war trial records, challenges the often-repeated assumption that the history of opposition to the Nazis is inherently difficult to study precisely due to a lack of sources. The richness of the material presented here shows that, while such sources may be complex and fragmented, they are not absent. The book thus sets an important methodological example for future research.

The focus on Antwerp also facilitates a renewed engagement with the question of the city's specificity within the broader Belgian context. The

book suggests that resistance activities in the city displayed several distinctive features. For instance, it identifies a relatively high number of individuals holding broadly liberal views, which is explained through a *longue durée* perspective: these groups had reached the limits of their social advancement and influence before the war and were therefore more inclined, after 1940, to engage in alternative organisational structures (122-123). In addition, the book argues that resistance in Antwerp was characterised by a fragmented 'patchwork' of small organisations, which relied heavily on local networks rather than centralised coordination from London. Interestingly, Belgian resistance actors themselves perceived Antwerp as a particularly dangerous environment in which to operate, which reinforced the notion of an 'Antwerp specificity'.

Even though the book is not comparative in nature, it nevertheless confirms patterns identified in neighbouring countries. One important example is chronology: consistent with developments elsewhere in Western Europe and with earlier scholarship on resistance in Belgium more broadly, it shows that resistance activity in Antwerp only gained significant momentum after the introduction of compulsory labour in Germany in October 1942. Moreover, as in other countries, resistance organisations paid little attention to the persecution of Jews prior to the summer of 1942; only with the onset of mass deportations did this issue assume a more central place within resistance activities in Antwerp.

One of the most innovative contributions of the book concerns the discussion of the role of women in the resistance by Corthals. It offers a nuanced and original perspective on female participation, particularly by highlighting early activities such as looting – especially within communist circles. This is significant not only because it foregrounds women's agency, but also because it situates such actions within the broader context of economic exploitation during Nazi occupation. The analysis furthermore shows that these forms of resistance emerged during the complex early phase of the occupation when communist actors were constrained by the non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – a theme also addressed in other contributions.

In sum, *Stad in verzet* offers an empirically rich and detailed reconstruction of resistance in Antwerp. While not explicitly engaging with the historiography, the book nevertheless aligns in many respects with contemporary historiographical approaches, emphasising local contexts, networks, and ambiguity in people's behaviour. Its main contribution lies in illuminating the complex, locally embedded nature of resistance, even if its theoretical positioning remains somewhat underdeveloped. This nevertheless opens important avenues for future research.

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