Rika Benveniste, ***Αυτοί που επέζησαν: Αντίσταση, εκτόπιση, επιστροφή. Θεσσαλονικείς Εβραίοι στη δεκαετία του 1940 [Those Who Survived: Deportation, Resistance and Return of the Jews of Salonica in the 1940s]*****, Athens: Polis. 2014. Pp. 443.**

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Book Review

How can the perspectives of the few men and women who survived the Holocaust contribute to the understanding of the almost complete destruction of one of the most ancient and thriving Jewish communities of Europe? Rika Benveniste's book is a historical study on the Salonikan Jews who survived the Holocaust. It provides a deep comprehension of the choices, dilemmas, and histories not only of those who survived, but also of the vast majority who did not survive due to the extermination policies of Nazi Germany. The book attributes a name to each survivor who belonged to a specific group by following, through every possible historical source, the trajectories of the subjects of each group (namely, resistance fighters, displaced persons, and members of the Jewish Council). The circle of the relationship between the individual and the collective is constantly and skillfully enlarged through the internal connections of these individuals with the European population that was brought under Nazi rule and into the orbit of the concentration camps. The circle is further enlarged by placing the decision-making process in the restrictive framework of German policies and in relation to the non-Jewish Greek population as well as to international organizations in post-war Germany.

The account of the cataclysmic event of the destruction of the Jews of Salonika is told from the perspective of the subjects who were the victims of the Nazi persecution. It is approached through a number of crucial questions concerning the Holocaust, which are at the center of current historiographical debate. The threads that connect the histories of the Salonikan Jews to the wider experience of European Jewry are weaved through three major questions that correspond to the three parts of the book: the participation of the Jewish population in resistance organizations, the displaced persons camps, and the role of the Jewish Council of Salonika. These major issues divided the communities in the post-war era. Public memory has strengthened the myths related to the role of the Jewish Council in the Final Solution and to the alleged passivity of the Jewish population. This book offers a major service by unraveling these myths that have persistently tried to attach the blame to the victims. It provides answers to these silences and torturing questions.

The experience of the small percentage of the Jewish population of Salonika who survived the concentration camps or survived after their participation in the resistance movement is situated in the broad framework of the destruction of European Jewry. Thanks to the application of a micro-his-

torical methodology, the history of Salonikan Jews is unraveled by examining closely the trajectories of specific groups during the war and its aftermath. It is this histoire au ras du sol that connects the individual to the collective and situates him within the much broader perspective of destruction and reconstruction. The crossing and interconnection of individual and collective choices, the distinct trajectories and experiences – without losing from sight the framework of Nazi persecution – illuminate the complexity of the resistance and survival of Salonikan Jews.

The book first tackles the little researched issue of the social and political profile and familial background of those who participated in the resistance organization of the National Liberation Front (EAM). It traces the itineraries of a group comprised of nineteen young men and one woman who left Salonika to join the guerilla fighters in the mountainous areas controlled by the EAM. Important questions are raised concerning the nature of EAM's solidarity with the Jewish population in relation to the timing of the deportation of the Jews of Salonika. For the EAM, the Jewish persecution was devoid of political meaning and was approached as an issue of "humanity." Moreover, the analysis shows that Jewish resistance was not unified; there were various parameters and characteristics that affected participation in the resistance movement such as class, ideology, and intellectual or geographical background. As a result, participation cannot be exhaustively explained by the specific condition of persecution. The chapter follows the group throughout the period of the war but also during its aftermath. This enables a deep understanding of the multiplicity of itineraries, the common fate, and the diverse trajectories that the persecution determined.

Holocaust historiography is dominated by the impact of the catastrophic end. Benveniste's book does not perceive the catastrophe from its end but reveals the multiplicity of temporalities involved in each historical time. By employing a "gut-perception" of the past, as Barbara Duden calls it, Benveniste tries to "reconstruct relationships between individuals and groups, understand historical problems related to specific geographical trajectories, learn what the subjects knew at a given moment, the choices that were open to them, the means they had to follow them, [and] the result of their choices, which could not know beforehand" (16).

One of the major questions of today's historiographical debate is related to the role of the Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*). In response to the earlier approaches of Hannah Arendt and Raul Hilberg, but also with new questions in mind and a comprehensive exploration of each country and city, recent historiography has illustrated, on the one hand, the heterogeneity of the role of Jewish Councils and, on the other, how smoothly the Final Solution developed in cities where Councils refused to cooperate or were not established. Benveniste situates the role of the Council in Salonika in this debate and shows how little the fate of Jews, as it was determined by the Germans, depended on the Councils. The reader is immersed in a skillful narrative that follows step by step, and not from the perspective of the catastrophic end, the decision-making process of the members of the Council and Committee in respect to what knowledge was available to them and what strategies and possibilities were open in the extremely restricted framework that Nazi rule had imposed. By unraveling the complexity of the impossible, or better, "choiceless choices" that the Committee had to face, the author sheds light on the cultural rupture that Nazism brought about in political life by refuting foundational modes of thinking and ethical values. Any principle that was taken for granted in political negotiations, such as mutual trust or observance of agreements, was violated in a hitherto utterly unperceived manner.

The book organizes the complicated involvement of the members of the Council and Committee in the futile negotiations orchestrated by the German authorities around the story of one family that belonged to the Salonikan elite and whose head was a member of the Council. It follows the family from the beginning of the war until the return of four of its members from Bergen Belsen to Salonika after the death of Beniko Saltiel in Tröbitz. Using a vast amount of material, mainly testimonies, about the experience in the allegedly "privileged camp," Benveniste unravels the perverted logic that attributed a hierarchy of pain in the camp death machine.

The hitherto unknown story of the survivors of death camps who were classified as displaced persons in the Feldafing camp (located in a small city close to Munich) reveals the astounding experience of the people who continued to fight for their lives while immersed in the anti-Semitic and hostile environment of post-Nazi Germany and under the military governance of Allied forces. Benveniste follows the itineraries of the 79 Salonikan Jews who are listed in the Feldafing camp. These itineraries were connected with family stories, with the hopeless search for their beloved family members, and with the dilemmas surrounding migration to the US and Israel or the return to Greece. Their transitional status sheds light on transnational processes and novel post-war realities involving the establishment of international institutions, population movements, and the Zionist vision. The book reconstructs the individual trajectories of their daily and collective lives as they try to organize themselves and regain control over their existence. Benveniste describes the settling of pain and alienation in the psychic life of survivors: "They are surrounded by a disquieting sense of alienness. They feel alienated and lonely, as those who surrounded them seemed to care little about their fate. They were exiled from everything that had provided them with confidence, from everything they had faith in and from the history of their own lives" (136-7).

Benveniste's book is a breakthrough in Holocaust historiography. It does not only integrate Jewish history into national history but takes into account wider geopolitical entities. Such a breakthrough does not let the "horror disappear behind words" and cannot be achieved without renewing the historical narrative. This novel historical genre introduces a dialogue between different types of sources and weaves a new historical vocabulary through the combination of genres.

Today, the rise of nationalism and anti-Semitism co-exist with the normalization of Nazism and the obscurity of the Holocaust. In this context, Rika Benveniste's book re-establishes the genocide of the Salonikan Jews as the pivotal political phenomenon and paradigmatic expression of Nazi rule. The book shows that any understanding of National Socialism has to start from the perspective of the victims, because it is this perspective that reveals the logic or, more precisely, the anti-logic of Nazism. As Dan Diner argues, it reveals the senselessness of annihilation, which made the genocide possible; it also addresses the aporias concerning the possibilities of survival for Greek Jews. It reveals the essence and meaning of National Socialism as a break with civilization and principles of reason.