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Sandra Ott, *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xviii + 362 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. \$29.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1316630877.

Review by Keith Rathbone, Macquarie University.

In the summer of 1940, the German Army arrived in the French Basque country and began its occupation of the many villages and towns that dotted the region. For the next four years, German officers and soldiers, Basque and Béarnais peasants, and Belgian and Spanish refugees mixed in restaurants, bars, businesses, sporting clubs, public buildings, and private homes. These interactions forced ordinary people to make difficult choices with unclear implications and, at the end of the war, many people who made the wrong choices faced harsh justice. The Pau Purge Court executed Pierre Robles for denouncing Henri Magens and for economic collaboration. His crimes were terrible, but he suffered such a harsh punishment largely because he was caught in the midst of the extirpative bloodletting that followed shortly after the Liberation.

In her book *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-1948*, Sandra Ott investigates these fraught interactions between French civilians and German soldiers in their local contexts in order to better understand how collaboration and resistance emerged in the region and how those phenomena became politicized during and after the war. She asks questions about why some Basque and Béarnais people welcomed Germans into their homes or businesses, how ordinary people entered into resistance or collaborationist organizations, and in what circumstances Germans and French people engaged in sexual relationships. Through a close reading of nine court cases from the Pau Purge Court, she unpacks the activities of several ordinary Basque and Béarnais during and after the war who stood accused of “establishing relations with the enemy, endangering the lives of French citizens, having anti-national sentiments, and posing a threat to national security” (p. 6). She outlines their personal histories—tracing out their ambiguity, complexity, and shades of gray—to paint a full picture of their lived experiences in the southwest of France and the justice or injustice of their treatment before the purge court. Her anthropologically rich work is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of collaboration, resistance, and justice during the occupation and postwar and will be a useful reference for historians interested in the unique history of the Basque country.

Professor Ott’s work sits at the intersection of the history of everyday life during the German occupation of France and the legal histories of the postwar period. She investigates how the theoretical frameworks popularized by other Vichy historians including cohabitation (Robert Gildea), accommodation (Philippe Burrin), and double-talk and fence sitting (Pierre Laborie) worked in the specific context of the Basque country. She uncovers a complicated picture of French and Germans alike driven by a variety of conflicting agendas and emotions: “folly, uncertainty, ambiguity, ambivalence, desire, vengeance, duplicity, greed, self-interest opportunism, and betrayal” led ordinary people to acts of accommodation, collaboration, and resistance (p. 6). Through her examination of the criminal case file, she illustrates that the inconsistent postwar purge court system that examined these acts of collaboration also saw these cases as layered and the court applied punishments unevenly depending on

the facts of the case as well as the date of the trial and the identity of the accused.

*Living with the Enemy* has a unique organization. It is divided into two distinct sections: the first half of the book gives a broad overview of the occupation in the Basque country, the emergence of resistance and collaborationist organizations, and the activities of the local postwar purge courts. The second section is a close reading of the court documents of cases heard before the Pau Purge Court. The organization of the books thus highlights Ott's familiarity with both anthropological and historical modes of research. The second section in particular illustrates her interdisciplinary approach to evidence which opens up new ways for her to unpack the lived wartime and postwar experiences of her Basque and Béarnais subjects. Her long anthropological trips enabled her to build relationships with her interviewees and her deep ethnographic knowledge allows her to read against the grain of court documents and to draw conclusions that other scholars might miss.

The first half of *Living with the Enemy* is richest when Ott goes into detail about the specific features of Basque culture and history. Her first chapter illustrates the particular way of life, values, and traditions of the Basque. Her discussion of Basque households shows how families and family property played "a key role in shaping an individual's social and spiritual identity and in demarcating the boundaries between the private and the public, the personal and the social" (p. 35). These boundaries explain the reactions of many in the countryside to their occupation by the Germans. Her analysis of Pierre Althape's fight over his family home makes his collaboration comprehensible, if not less reprehensible, when one understands that Basque inheritance codes meant that he was deeply in debt and essentially homeless. He moved in with his son's wife's family and shortly thereafter an anonymous denunciation of these relatives meant that the family farm fell into Althape's hands.

Most of the first part of the book covers information well known to experts in the field. In her discussion of the Resistance, for instance, Ott addresses the rivalries between Communist and non-Communist resistance organizations and notes that most French people "simply resigned themselves to France's disastrous defeat and did not involve themselves in any activities that either favored or opposed the Vichy and Nazi regimes" (p. 79). These details of the French Resistance are widely recognized by anyone with a familiarity of the field.

Historians interested in the Second World War will find more to grapple with in the second half of the book, where Ott delves deeply into a series of nine court cases, each specifically selected to allow her to engage with questions pertinent to scholars of the period, including the notion of collaboration, accommodation, and resistance. The cases also provide a balance of men, women, Basque, Béarnais and refugee subjects. The comprehensiveness of the nine court cases does not necessarily imply that these individual people's experiences were ordinary and representative: the accommodations of Ott's nine alleged collaborationists stand out against the more mundane choices examined in works by Burrin, Gildea, and even Sweets.

The most interesting of these cases highlight the complicated and often fraught relationships that ordinary Basque or Béarnais people developed with the occupiers. For example, the cases of Henri Lasserre and Jean de Chappotin show how two very different adolescents could fall under the sway of the Germans, drawn in by the allure of power, money, and access to luxury goods and by family relationships and absent fathers. Through the case of Loulou Larrieu, we see how Larrieu, Marie Marinelli, and Jeanette Arbel engaged in various quasi-sexual relationships with Germans that encompassed everything from epistolary flirtation to acrobatic sex. These diverse cases—extensively documented—allow scholars interested in the German occupation of France to delve more deeply into the individual experiences of ordinary French people than is typically possible in a monograph.

Ott's use of sources sets her work apart from other scholarship on Vichy France and she should be applauded for her use of sources inaccessible to others. Few other historians are able to combine the tenacity necessary to file more than 300 *dérogations* with deep anthropological knowledge of a region, its

unique modes of living, and language skills in the Basque and Béarnais dialects. She draws most her evidence from three places: the archival records of the region, the extensive classified trial dossiers from the Pau Purge Court, and her own interviews with a large number of Basque and Béarnais people. Throughout *Living with the Enemy*, she triangulates between these sources, which allows her to use anthropological, ethnographic, and historical research methods.

Throughout, Ott emphasizes the things that make the Basque country unique. She notes that more than any other region in France, the Basque country experienced the war transnationally. Currents of French refugees, Spanish communists, Allied airmen, and German soldiers buffeted the Basque countryside and made the region an important location for Allied, French, and German intelligence and military operations. The Basque country also did not suffer the food privations so common in other regions, especially neighboring regions and big cities. At the same time, the micro-historical nature of Ott's accounts raises questions about how much she sees her work as speaking to France as a whole during the occupation. What broader conclusions about other parts of occupied France or even other occupations can we draw from her work? Many of her conclusions are specific to the Basque and Béarn regions, but at other times she emphasizes the universality of her account. For example, she uses her nine court cases to note the importance of commensality and gift-giving in relationships between French civilians and German soldiers. It seems likely that sharing food and wine and gift exchanges probably always underpin the relationship between occupier and occupied.

She occasionally overstates the uniqueness of her Basque and Béarnais subjects. In noting the importance of insiders and outsiders in the southwest of France, she writes "The distinction between insiders and outsiders was an important one in traditional Basque and Béarnais culture....it was not uncommon for members of the same community to conceal wartime wrongdoing of their fellow citizens from external authorities. Insiders typically wished to handle such matters themselves....Outsiders to the moral community did not usually receive the same protection" (p. 327). This seems like a truism across the hexagon. In *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France: Foreigners, Undesirables, and Strangers*, Shannon Fogg shows the importance of insider and outsider status in other parts of the country and with non-Basque people.

Ott writes with and against notions like cohabitation and accommodation, but it remains unclear whether she sees her work as fundamentally challenging or expanding upon the theories set up in the historiography of the field, especially work by Robert Gildea and Philippe Burrin. For instance, she notes that Pierre Laborie's conception of a "dual man" does not fully explain the actions of Angel López, a Spanish refugee who acted as a *porteur* and an informer, a man who wore "a multiplicity of faces," but she never really says whether she thinks all French people mobilized different "faces" or whether the Spanish republican López was unusual in his assemblage of identities (p. 190).

Ott sees many of her subjects as moving along Burrin's resistance-accommodation-collaboration continuum as patriotic French people were corrupted by the muddiness of regional politics. She labels the case of Jean Laborde "duplicitous accommodation," but it is clear from her account of his activities that Laborde moved back and forth between identities. He engaged in resistance in the Alliance Group, accommodated local Germans he invited to his brother's restaurant, and also denounced French people and gave Germans information about resistance operations. The continuum of resistance-accommodation-collaboration seems like a poor metaphor to explain a man who did all these things at once. At times, she also notes that clear definitions of resistance, accommodation, and collaboration only solidified after the war ended and in the context of the extra-legal and legal purges.

A few minor quibbles: Since many of these ethnographic chapters came from previous articles, there are some significant repetitions, including the reintroduction of characters, locations and concepts. I also question Ott's choice to defend the identity of some collaborators. In one case, she provides a wealthy playboy collaborator with a pseudonym Maurice Pineau. She also declined to cite specific issues of newspapers she used to explain his case in order to preserve his anonymity. I am unclear as to why she

opted to protect his identity but not her juvenile delinquents. I also note that the non-citation of sources makes it difficult for future scholars to investigate the same case. The facts of the case make it ever more inexplicable because Pineau seemingly suffered little hardship after his postwar conviction, returning to the life of “a bon vivant. He entertained lavishly in Paris and Monte Carlo” (p. 313). The decision to anonymize some, but not all collaborators needs to be explained.

Overall *Living with the Enemy* is an engaging work that adds to Sandra Ott’s already extensive writing on the unique features of the southwest of France and further burnishes her reputation as a leading expert on Basque history and the Second World War. The second section is especially rich in detail and Ott uses her deep connections in the region to explain what she (quoting Rod Kedward) has called the “‘thickets of compromise, uncertainty, and ambivalence’ that represented ‘the very stuff of the occupation experience’” (p. 245). In doing so, her work does not fundamentally alter our understanding of everyday life in Occupied France or of the postwar purge but does deepen it through a clear illustration how those pressures worked for several fascinating people.

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