

Julia Boyd, Angelika Patel, *A Village in the Third Reich. How Ordinary Lives Were Transformed by the Rise of Fascism*, Elliott & Thompson Publishers, London, 2022

A Village in the Third Reich. How Ordinary Lives Were Transformed by the Rise of Fascism was published in May 2022 at Elliot & Thompson Publishers. Julia Boyd is a best-selling author with other works such as *Travelers in the Third Reich: The Rise of Fascism through the Eyes of Everyday People* (2017) or *A Dance with the Dragon: The Vanished World of Peking's Foreign Colony* (2012). Angelika Patel is a historian who wrote studies such as *A Village in the Mirror of its Time: Oberstdorf 1918-1952*.

The present work is spread over 505 pages which in turn encapsulate 23 chapters. The two authors try to present the influence and actions of Hitler's regime over its people by analyzing how the regime manifested in a mountain village from the Bavarian Alps, Oberstdorf.

On one hand, this book comes as a continuation of the subject Julia Boyd confronted in her previous book, *Travelers in the Third Reich*, where her goal was to present how the Nazi rose to power from the perspective of German citizens: politicians, students, diplomats, communists and so on. Angelika Patel's contribution to this volume comes as a specialist on the region of Oberstdorf. They base their work on archive material, letters, interviews and memoirs. We have similar examples of papers in which historians use a microscopic approach in order to show the bigger pictures. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* (1975) shows us how daily-life was in medieval times by analyzing the inquisition records of Jacques Fournier, Bishop of Pamiers and future Pope Benedict XII. In a similar manner, Stephen Kotkin explains Soviet society using the city of Magnitogorsk. With the help of archives and interviews, Kotkin manages to create a vivid image of the Soviet Union in his book, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (1995).

Oberstdorf is a village that lies in Swabia, a part of Bavaria, in the most Southern part of Germany, like numerous maps at the beginning of the book show us. It was an isolated village even before tourism started flourishing thanks to the mountains which allowed enthusiasts to ski starting with the end of the 19th century. No trade route, no other industry made people visit Oberstdorf. The residents used to survive on substitute farming, production of cheese and exploiting small deposits of iron ore, we are told in the introduction. But even in such circumstances, the villagers have always been passionate about keeping track of their history. Their archives became a very consistent source from which the authors were able to extract this book, managing to reveal the German society during the

Third Reich at an intimate level. We are told however that Oberstdorf, like all cities and villages during those times, was a unique case. Not all that happened there took place everywhere else and vice-versa. But as Hitler's regime spread with "German discipline" all over the country, its consistency in how it affected the German citizens allows this study to speak for the general population.

Painting the image of Nazi Germany through the eyes of an isolated village happens from the beginning of the study. We learn how after the First World War, just like everywhere else in Germany, hyperinflation affected the residents' day-to-day lives. Oberstdorf responded to this by investing in its ski resort, becoming a tourist attraction. This is why in the late '20s the NSDAP did not manage to find any "friends" in the village, the villagers being more focused on the reconstruction of their lives.

This changed of course together with the failures of the Weimar Republic and with the financial crisis of 1929-1933. Germany felt the repercussions of these even in its most remote places. This is when the villagers of Oberstdorf started to look at National Socialism like it had the potential of a better alternative or at least like it was "a lesser evil". The propaganda of the brown shirts was not very appreciated by the villagers, as they were aggressive and loud - the total opposite of the peaceful mountain life of Oberstdorf. On the other hand, however, Hitler managed to charm them like he did the rest of the country. His charisma and "vision" for the future won Oberstdorf. Soon, the National Socialist German Workers' Party won the elections of 1933. Little did they know that it was going to be the last multi-party election until 1946.

The book shows us how the loyalty towards Hitler was strong enough not to waver for a long time even in spite of the actions of their first Nazi mayor. The new administration, as per the rules of the regime, immediately started to monopolize the private lives of their citizens, to control them to the smallest detail.

Even though not abiding the Nazi sent many to the "protective custody" of the Dachau camp, many villagers remained steadfast in their trust for Hitler. They dismissed the most gruesome parts of the Reich either by ignoring it or by just considering them rumors launched by the Western propaganda. Such an example was Theodor Weissenberger, who was murdered just because he was blind. As per the "racial hygiene" that Hitler set in motion in 1939, his *imperfection* was deemed unfit for the regime in order to make the state stronger. At only nineteen he was taken to die in a gas chamber like so many other children with disabilities.

But if some people ignored the facts, we cannot generalize. The book shows us how many villagers came to understand what Hitler and his party were actually doing. The disapproval however decreased for a time, at least as long as the Germans were winning the war. After the balance changed, more and more of Oberstdorf came to disapprove of the regime. Even more so as relatives of the villagers started dying on the front.

The authors give us a tridimensional image of the years of war with the help of some unpublished diaries of a lieutenant and a sergeant who served alongside Oberstdorf's soldiers in Poland, France and the U.S.S.R. They relate the other side of the coin but, of course, in Oberstdorf there was no peace either.

The village itself was in a state of turmoil, Patel and Boyd tell us. Dachau sub-camps, foreign labor camps, a training camp for the *Waffen-SS* and a Nazi stronghold were all located on the periphery of the village. Moreover, Oberstdorf's population doubled from the number of refugees who came there trying to escape the fire.

Both authors manage to present us an objective view for multiple reasons. For example, we get to read of one mayor who, despite having his political allegiance to the Nazi party, proved himself to be a decent human being by protecting some Jewish residents of the village or by helping others who got on "the bad side" of the Reich. He was not the only one. Just the same though, there were some villagers who kept their loyalty to Hitler until the end.

Additionally, the book does not fail to talk about some of the most recurring subjects that come to mind when the Nazis are mentioned. It has chapters going over the Arian racism or over the attitude of the regime towards religion. Confessions and religions like Jehovah's Witnesses were not tolerated, but Christian belief in itself was too strongly rooted in the Germans' lives. Therefore, the Nazis tried to mold the church in the face of National Socialism.

The image of post-war Oberstdorf is just as impressive as the rest of the text. In spite of the difficulties of the new administration who had to reestablish democracy and deal with their predecessors' culpability, many Germans concentrated more on their own lives. Houses ruined, families astray - before being able to concentrate on the bigger picture, everyone had to deal with their own lives and troubles.

There are multiple ways in which the portrait of Oberstdorf is completed. First of all, we are given maps and also multiple pictures depicting Oberstdorf's life. We have portraits of the villagers together with a brochure of the ski resort and an image of the most famous hotel in the village. Pictures of the life during the Nazi regime are there too - parades,

military men, Nazi officials holding speeches and so on. Just the same, we are given a short biography of each Oberstdorf villager, a detail that offers more life to the entire story.

The bibliography is a vast one and together with an exhaustive index, historians are offered the tools necessary for easily using this book as a reference in their own research. But even so, the language is not difficult to understand. The authors chose to relate the facts like narrating a story. In accordance, the book is a great read for both scholars and those passionate about totalitarian history.

As a conclusion, Boyd and Patel create a very vivid image of a small village, managing to better our understanding of how and why the German population responded to the regime – some supported it, some tried to resist and some just tried to hold on to their daily lives.

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