

**Sandra Ott.** *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-1948.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 374 pp. \$29.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-316-63087-7.

**Reviewed by** John W. Weigel

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Was there something unique about the German occupation of the French Basque and Béarnais country from 1940 to 1944 and about the postwar purge trials of suspected collaborators? In *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-1948*, Sandra Ott argues yes. Examining the rural department of Basses-Pyrénées, she applies an ethnographical approach that takes into account the special Basque-Béarnais emphasis on mutual exchange, “commensality” (eating together), and hospitality. There is also the department’s location on the Spanish border, which made it a thoroughfare for refugee flows into France toward the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 and would-be escapees from France during World War II, including Allied pilots being smuggled out by Resistance groups.

Ott is certainly the right scholar for such a study. By her own account, she has interviewed residents in the department since 1976 and has authored an impressive list of publications that include two earlier books on the Basque country and at least seven journal articles. The more recent book *War, Judgment and Memory in the Basque Borderlands, 1914-1945* (2008) also covers the German occupation as experienced by four

communities in the former province of Xiberoa (or Soule) in Basses-Pyrénées.

The present book applies a case method relying heavily on post-liberation trial dossiers at the department’s official archives. As Ott explains in chapters 3 through 5, the people of France—Basques and Béarnais included—responded to military occupation with collaboration, opportunism, indifference, or resistance, and as soon as the Germans left, the new French authorities established courts to investigate and try suspected collaborators. More than 100,000 faced trial in the whole country and nearly 600 in Basses-Pyrénées, not including those handled in absentia. About 1,500 were executed in France, 3 of them in this department. From the local dossiers, Ott has selected nine cases as having particular interest for her approach, with an eye to finding relationships among them. For example, there are two chapters on a small youth gang in the department capital of Pau, one centered on Henri Lasserre and the other on Jean de Chappotin. While Lasserre never moved beyond local hooliganism and offering the Germans information on local resisters, de Chappotin joined the Waffen-SS Charlemagne Division and served on the eastern front in early 1945. One chapter deals with the irascible Pierre Althape, suspected of informing on his daughter-in-law.

His son Bernard smuggled fugitives into Spain but also allegedly gave information to the Germans, as did Bernard's colleague and Spanish expatriate Angel López, the subject of another chapter. By the way, Ott provides pseudonyms for most names to protect privacy.

By narrating the details of each case, Ott brings out several interesting themes with the aid of prior scholarship by Robert Gildea, Philippe Burrin, and Pierre Laborie. She shows the importance of money, goods, and sex to collaborative relationships with Germans. In the most extreme example, shopkeeper Loulou Larrieu in Pau, a supporter of the Pétain regime and of Germany, provided SS Lieutenant André Müller with access to other women while he was stationed in Basses-Pyrénées and after he moved away readily lent him money and sent him parcels of textile goods on request. Furthermore, occupation forced on the French a kind of "double-think" in which they posed as obedient to the authorities while quietly breaking the law or they sometimes acted as collaborationists yet at other times as resisters. This duality was especially pronounced in the case of certain informers and double agents. The same Angel López who allegedly betrayed some Spain-bound fugitives helped others to escape without telling the Germans, provoking the latter to deport him. Upon a request from Édouard Kauffmann of the anti-Communist intelligence network Alliance, Jean Laborde began working with the Germans while continuing to feed information to Alliance. After the war, he admitted to informing on certain individuals but insisted they were "already burned," that is, the Germans already knew about them. Finally, the postwar search for truth and justice sometimes went astray. Authorities in the cases here relied heavily on captured German police officials and translators to incriminate the collaborators who worked with them during the occupation, giving these men a new power over the communities they had controlled. Furthermore, punishments were inconsistent in their severity. Black market bicycle vendor Pierre Rob-

les suffered execution while others who cooperated more obviously with the Germans only went to prison or—like Vichy police official Pierre Mignard—did not even have to face trial. Those who drew long prison terms soon benefited from a postwar mood of forgiveness that inspired courts to reduce sentences and release prisoners and legislators to grant amnesty. By the late 1940s or early 1950s, Basses-Pyrénées convicts other than the unfortunate Robles were free.

Unfortunately, Ott's ethnographical approach works well in only one case and not in the others. Basque inheritance practice, which makes one male or female sole legatee, helps explain the bitter quarrels within the Althape family that may have led one or more members to turn informer. The notion, however, that a special culture of reciprocity, including dining and hospitality, moved other French Basques to work with the Germans is unconvincing. First, several of Ott's cases deal with people living and acting in Pau, where, as she herself points out in chapter 1, traditional ties did not exist. Second, it is hard to believe that Basques and Béarnais countryfolk were especially prone to reciprocity in a way that peasants in other parts of France were not. She makes an implicit comparison that the book does not support. In addition, one would expect collaboration with the occupying power in any region or country to involve mutual exchange and sometimes a shared social life.

There are also problems in the narrative. Ott's retelling of her subjects is sometimes overly detailed, especially when it comes to the post-liberation judicial process. A small reduction of facts and an increase in analysis would have been welcome. In a few places there are unnecessary digressions into incidents marginally or not at all related to the person she is discussing. Many paragraphs lack topic sentences, making it hard for the reader to see where the text is going.

Even with these difficulties, however, Ott's hard work has enriched the study of Germany's

World War II occupation of France and the purge that followed it. Other scholars in the field will find it quite useful.

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