

OXFORD



VISIONS OF
COMMUNITY IN **NAZI**
GERMANY

SOCIAL ENGINEERING & PRIVATE LIVES

EDITED BY **MARTINA STEBER & BERNHARD GOTTO**

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and
BERNHARD GOTTO

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Foreword

In 1941 a German letter-writing manual advised its readers in the name of the new *Volksgemeinschaft* to stop the old practice of using subaltern and sycophantic addresses when corresponding with state officials and adopt a more self-confident style.¹ Another manual, dating from 1937, gave similar advice, stressing that ‘our new state is a state of the *Volksgemeinschaft*’ and therefore ‘the workman is just as important a member of the whole as the professor or minister’.² The term *Volksgemeinschaft* permeated official Nazi state propaganda and all levels and areas of everyday life. It was a key term which covered up the authoritarian and bureaucratic nature of Nazi rule and functioned as a tool to exclude and exterminate all those who were not considered part of or beneficial to it. However, it was also considered by many as an egalitarian and emancipatory concept which defined their relationship to the state by transforming it into ‘our state’.

Over the last few years the ambivalence of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* has sparked off a new debate. This partly considers the usefulness of *Volksgemeinschaft* as an analytical term and asks whether it should be used by historians to describe Nazi society. But it also takes up and transforms several older discussions on what was at the centre of Nazi dictatorship and Nazi society. It comes as no surprise, then, that the concept is highly controversial and antagonizes the international community of historians of Nazi Germany considerably. Against this backdrop the German Historical Institute London (GHIL) and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin (IfZ) decided to co-organize a conference on this topic, hosted by the GHIL in March 2010 under the title ‘German Society in the Nazi Era. *Volksgemeinschaft* between Ideological Projection and Social Practice’. It was jointly organized by Bernhard Gotto (IfZ) and Martina Steber (GHIL).

More than once during the conference, comparisons arose with the 1979 conference which the GHIL had organized at Cumberland Lodge on the ‘Structure and Politics of the Third Reich’, and where Tim Mason had coined the famous distinction between an ‘intentionalist’ and ‘functionalist’ camp of historians as regards the explanation of Nazi rule. Some of the protagonists of 1979 were also present at the 2010 conference. However, the new dividing lines did not run along the old trenches. More often old adversaries now found themselves united in either supporting or denying the usefulness of *Volksgemeinschaft* as an analytical tool for the historiography of Nazi Germany. Having published a book on the German working class and the *Volksgemeinschaft*, it would have been interesting to see the position of the late Tim Mason, whose person and work is still so present, especially

¹ Alfred Volkland, *So musst du deine Briefe schreiben* (Mühlhausen 1941), 11.

² Curt Elwenspoek, *Der rechte Brief – zur rechten Zeit. Eine Fibel des schriftlichen Verkehrs für jedermann* (Leipzig 1937), 33.

among British historians on Nazi history, and the twentieth anniversary of whose untimely death was also commemorated at this conference.

This volume assembles some of the most important papers given at the conference. They are written by leading British, German, and US historians and not only outline the theoretical issues at stake, but also give insights into the many fields of politics and everyday life where this concept was 'at work' and needs to be analysed. As such, this volume provides far more than just an overview of current research. It makes an important new contribution to the debate on the function of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* as the core Nazi vision of community for the structure and politics of the Third Reich.

The 1979 conference not only internationalized a debate which had, up to then, been one of those famous German historical-political controversies with multiple internal agendas, but also initiated new research on an impressive scale. This volume aims to continue this fruitful international exchange on the social and societal history of the Third Reich and, in particular, to promote the lively Anglo-German exchange in this still flourishing field of research.

One of the great challenges of internationalizing academic debates, especially in the field of conceptual history, is to find appropriate translations for frequently untranslatable terms. This volume would not have come about without the invaluable help of Angela Davies (GHIL) and Jonathan Ashby (Winchester), whose admirable linguistic and editorial skills proved essential for turning the conference papers into a coherent book. Our thanks go to them and also to Anna Greithanner and Linus Rapp from the IfZ for their assistance with the editorial work on this volume. Particular thanks go to the contributors, who not only participated in the conference, but were prepared to rework their papers for this volume, to the referees at Oxford University Press who read the manuscript in full and whose valuable reports helped to improve the book, and to OUP's delegates who accepted this volume for publication. Finally, we would like to thank Bernhard Gotto and Martina Steber for their dedication and energy. The main credit for conceiving and organizing this highly stimulating conference as well as for editing the present volume goes to them.

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List of Abbreviations

Abt.	Abteilung
BA	Bundesarchiv
betr.	betreffend
BGH	Bundesgerichtshof
BStU	Behörde für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
CA	California
CADN	Centre des Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes
cf.	confer
ch.	chapter
Conn.	Connecticut
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DAI	Deutsches Auslands-Institut
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
DFW	Deutsches Frauen-Werk
Dok.	Dokument
DPs	Displaced Persons
Dr	Doctor
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei
e.g.	egregia gratia
ed(s)	editor(s)
edn.	edition
etc.	et cetera
esp.	especially
et. al.	et alteri
ff.	and the following pages
fo(s)	folio(s)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei
GfK	Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung
GHI Washington	German Historical Institute Washington
GHIL	German Historical Institute London
GNP	Gross National Product
HJ	Hitlerjugend
HStA	Hauptstaatsarchiv
HTO	Haupttreuhandstelle Ost
Kan.	Kansas
KdF	Kraft durch Freude

Ibid.	ibidem
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin
IfZ-A	Archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin
Ind.	Indiana
LAB	Landesarchiv Berlin
LAV NRW	Landesarchivverwaltung Nordrhein-Westfalen
LG	Landesgericht
lit.	literally
MA	Militärarchiv
Mass.	Massachusetts
Md.	Maryland
MF	Microfiche
M-Film	Microfilm
MPG-Archiv	Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft
n.	note
n.d.	no date given
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NC	North Carolina
Nebr.	Nebraska
NG	Nuremberg Government [documents of the Nuremberg trials relating to government agencies]
nos.	numbers
Nr.	number
NS	Nationalsozialismus, nationalsozialistisch
NSBO	Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSF	Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft
NSFK	Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps
NSV	Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt
NY	New York
OH	Ohio
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht
OLG	Oberlandesgericht
Ostpr.	Ostpreußen
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
p.m.	post meridiem
PO	Politische Organisation
POWs	prisoners of war
pp.	pages
pt.	part
pub.	publication
RAF	Royal Air Force
rev. edn.	revised edition
RG	Record Group
RGBl	Reichsgesetzblatt
RI	Rhode Island
RKF	Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums
RLB	Reichsluftschutzbund
RM	Reichsmark

RMBliV	Reichsministerialblatt der inneren Verwaltung
RMdI	Reichsministerium des Innern
RMJ	Reichsministerium der Justiz
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt
RdErl	Runderlass
RuPrMdI	Reichs- und Preußischer Minister des Inneren
RuSHA	Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt
SA	Sturmabteilung
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone
SD	Sicherheitsdienst
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SS	Schutzstaffel
St.	Sankt
StA	Staatsarchiv
Stapo	Staatspolizei
ThHStA	Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
Thür.	Thüringen, thüringisch
USA	United States of America
US	United States
USSBS	United States Strategic Bombing Survey
v.	vom
V-Mann	Vertrauensmann
VO	Verordnung
Vol.	volume
vols	volumes
Wisc.	Wisconsin
WHW	Winterhilfswerk

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Glossary

- Abitur** grammar school matriculation certificate
- Altreich** Germany as defined by the borders of 1937
- Amt Rosenberg** Rosenberg Office
- Amtsgericht** district court
- Arierparagraph** Aryan Paragraph
- arische Abstammung** Aryan descent
- Arisierung** Aryanization
- Armee- und Heeresgruppen-Oberbefehlshaber** Army Group Commander-in-Chief
- Blockwart** Party Warden
- Bund deutscher Mädel** League of German Girls
- Bündische Jugend** *bündisch* youth movement
- Deutsche Arbeitsfront, DAF** German Labour Front
- Deutscher Volkssturm** German national militia at the end of the Second World War into which all men between the ages of sixteen and sixty not yet serving in a military unit were conscripted
- Deutschnational** lit. 'German National'; nationalistic-conservative attitude to politics
- Eintopfsonntage** Hot Pot Sundays
- Flakhelfer** anti-aircraft assistant
- Frontkämpfergemeinschaft** community of front-line fighters
- Gau** Nazi regional party district
- Gauleiter** Nazi regional party leader
- Gauwirtschaftskammer** Gau Chamber of Economic Affairs
- Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo)** Secret State Police
- Gemeinschaftsfremde** community aliens
- Generalgouvernement** administrative regional unit encompassing those territories of German-occupied Poland not incorporated into the German Reich
- Germanisierung** Germanization
- Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums** law for the restoration of the civil service
- Gleichschaltung** lit. 'bringing into line'; enforced conformity; coordination with Nazi norms
- Großdeutsches Reich** Greater German Reich
- Haupttreuhandstelle Ost (HTO)** Main Trusteeship Office East; office overseeing the confiscation of property from Polish citizens
- Herrenmenschentum** specific mentality of racial superiority and arrogance

- Hitlerjugend (HJ)** Hitler Youth
- Industrie- und Handelskammer** Chamber of Industry and Commerce
- Kampferlebnis** collective experience of struggle
- Kreisleiter** Nazi district leader
- Kulturkampf** lit. 'culture struggle', 'culture war'; conflict between the governments of the federal states and the Catholic Church, conducted especially fiercely in Prussia by Otto von Bismarck between 1871 and 1878
- Land, Länder** German federal states
- Lebensraum** lit. 'living space'; Nazi key concept
- Luftschutzgemeinschaft im Selbstschutz** Air Raid Protection Squads
- Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation (NSBO)** National Socialist Factory Cell Organization
- Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP)** National Socialist German Workers' Party
- Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft (NSF)** National Socialist Women's League
- Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude' (NSG KdF)** National Socialist Association 'Strength through Joy'
- Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSV)** National Socialist People's Welfare Organization
- Nationalsozialistischer Reichsbund für Leibesübungen** National Socialist Reich League for Physical Exercise
- Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps (NSFK)** National Socialist Flying Corps
- Nationalsozialistisches Frauen-Werk (DFW)** National Socialist Women's Welfare Organization
- NSDAP Ortsgruppe** local Nazi Party branch
- NSDAP Ortsgruppenleiter** local Nazi Party branch leader
- NS-Rechtswahrerbund** National Socialist Lawyers' Association
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht** Wehrmacht High Command
- Ortsfrauenschaftsleiterin** Women's League local leader
- Ortsgruppe** local Party branch
- Ortsgruppenleiter** local Party branch leader
- Parteigenosse** lit. 'party comrade'; self-designation of NSDAP members
- Politische Organisation der NSDAP (PO)** Political Organization of the NSDAP
- Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RuSHA)** Head Office for Race and Settlement
- Rassenhygiene** racial hygiene
- Rassenschande** race defilement
- (Reichs)arbeitsdienst** (Reich) Labour Service
- Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für Raumforschung** Reich Study Group for Regional Studies and Planning
- Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold** lit. 'black-red-gold banner of the Reich'; Social Democrat paramilitary organization during the Weimar Republic

- Reichsschulungsamt der NSDAP** Reich Office of Ideological Training of the NSDAP
- Reichserbhofgesetz** Nazi law governing hereditary land holding
- Reichsfrauenführerin** Reich women's leader
- Reichsfrauenführung** Reich women's leadership
- Reichsführung der NSDAP** Reich leadership of the NSDAP
- Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums (RKF)** Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom
- Reichskulturkammer (RKK)** Reich Chamber of Culture
- Reichsluftschutzbund (RLB)** Reich Air Raid Defence League
- Reichsnährstand** Reich Food Department
- Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (RSHA)** Reich Security Main Office
- Reichswehr** armed forces of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich up to 1935
- Reichswehrminister** Minister for the Reichswehr
- Schicksalsgemeinschaft** community of fate
- Schützengrabengemeinschaft** trench community
- Schutzstaffel (SS)** police and security organization run by Heinrich Himmler
- Sicherheitsdienst der SS (SD)** SS 'Security' and Intelligence Service
- Sippenamt** Kinship Office
- Sozialismus der Tat** socialism of practical action
- SS Oberführer** SS Colonel
- SS Obergruppenführer** SS General
- Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten** lit. 'Steel Helmets, Association of Front Line Soldiers'; right-wing paramilitary group in the Weimar Republic
- Standesamt** Civil Registry Office
- Standesbeamter** Civil Registrar
- Sturmabteilung (SA)** Storm troopers
- Volk** organic unity of a people, bound by blood, soil, history, and culture
- völkisch** adjective of *Volk*
- völkische Konsumgesellschaft** völkisch consumer society
- Volksaufgebot** mobilization and conscription of German men, women, and young people in 1944–5 for various services on the home front, especially the building of defensive 'walls' along the borders of the Reich; based on the terminology of *levée en masse*, alluding to the French Revolutionary Wars and the Prussian War of Liberation in 1813–15
- Volksgeist** unique spirit of the *Volk*
- Volksgenosse** lit. 'Volk comrade'; National Socialist designation for the members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*
- Volkskörper** collective body of the *Volk*
- Volkschädling** parasite
- Volkstum** character and abstract expression of the *Volk*
- Volkstumskampf** battle to maintain the culture and defend the existence of the *Volk*

Volkszugehörigkeit lit. 'belonging to the *Volk*'

Wehrgesetz Military Service Act

Wehrmacht armed forces of the Third Reich from 1935

Winterhilfswerk (WHW) Winter Relief Organization

Zellenleiter of the NSDAP cell leader of the NSDAP

1

Volksgemeinschaft

Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime

Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto

In 1938, Bertolt Brecht's play *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* was premiered in Paris. It presented a dramatized collage of incidents and situations drawn from everyday life in National Socialist Germany. Brecht had been collecting material for the play since 1934. The opening scene is entitled *Volksgemeinschaft*, a term that can be roughly translated as 'community of the people'—though, as we shall see, 'Volk' has a significantly more loaded meaning than the word 'people' might suggest. In this opening scene, two intoxicated SS officers lurch down the streets of Berlin on the night of 30 January 1933. Brecht introduces them in a short poem which closes with the verse:

Their aim is a People imperious
Respected and powerful and serious
Above all, one that obeys.

Urinating against a house wall and speaking in broad Berlin dialect, the SS officers discuss their hopes for the future:

THE SECOND: And now it'll be a *Volksjemeinschaft*. I'm expecting the German people to have an unprecedented moral revival.

THE FIRST: Wait till we've coaxed German Man out from among all those filthy subhumans...

THE SECOND: Think he [the *Führer*] will really make us a *Volksjemeinschaft*?

THE FIRST: He'll make anything.

The two SS officers believe themselves to be in a 'Marxist quarter'. When an old man in a nightshirt leans out of the window and calls softly for his wife, one of them pulls out his revolver and shoots wildly in all directions. The scene closes with the terrible cry of someone who has been hit.¹

This scene brings out Brecht's angry exasperation at what was going on inside the 'Third Reich'. It is far from coincidence that, to describe German society under

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, trans. John Willett (London, 2002), 5–6. In quoting this passage, we have used the original term *Volksjemeinschaft* (Berlin dialect for *Volksgemeinschaft*) instead of Willett's attempt to render it in English. The original German version is to be found in Bertolt Brecht, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches: 24 Szenen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), 8–9. The authors would like to thank Jörg Arnold, Elizabeth Harvey, Andreas Gestrich, Nick Stargardt, and Andreas Wirsching, as well as the anonymous referees for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this introduction. We are grateful to Angela Davies for the translation of the first draft.

National Socialism, he focused on *Volksgemeinschaft*. *Volksgemeinschaft* was the Nazis' central social concept: it was within it, and via it, that visions of community in Nazi Germany were expressed, negotiated, and put into practice. This volume sets out to scrutinize the complex process of multilayered adaptation this involved and the social dynamic it instituted.

Volksgemeinschaft was the National Socialist social promise. Brecht's scene touches on many of the criteria upon which it was based: ethnic origin as the ultimate point of reference; an appeal to inner experience; tension between utopian expectations and the radical willingness to fulfil them; racist separation; unconditional trust in the *Führer*; and a deadly violence which was directed internally as well as externally. In recent years, historians have explored all of these aspects, and there has been a rapid growth in our understanding of all that the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept evoked. It is not easy to reduce this multifaceted concept to a common denominator: *Volksgemeinschaft* encompassed both a social utopia and precise instructions for realizing it. Its core component was not the individual but a collective subject, the *Volk*, being imagined as a timeless racial unit over which the *Führer* had been chosen to rule by destiny and could exercise unlimited authority. Membership of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, it was believed, overrode all differences of social stratification arising out of religious or class affiliation. It centred on notions of belonging that had to be biologically legitimized and performatively underpinned by acts and declarations of loyalty. Belonging determined people's opportunities of succeeding in the new Germany, and the new social inequalities were based on how these opportunities were distributed. And, for many, belonging determined much more: whether they could be assigned the right to live. The means by which the Nazis created the *Volksgemeinschaft* they projected were means of violence, and these turned inwards in the form of victimization and extermination as well as being directed outwards in aggressive territorial expansion.

The concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* cannot be understood in isolation from the multilayered historical semantics of the German idea of the *Volk*.² *Volk* clearly differs in meaning from the English word 'people', and therefore the word remains untranslated in this volume. In the National Socialist view, *Volk* included all the members of a race, both living and dead, as well as future generations. The *Volk* itself was seen as a timeless entity whose qualities were revealed in its individual members. Their physical appearance, character, and behaviour were all, in this way of thinking, determined by racial predisposition.

While the *Volk* was (supposedly) a pre-existent entity, it had, in the Nazis' view, become debased and deprived of its vigour. National Socialists were determined to rectify this: they wanted to change society to create a true 'community', the *Volksgemeinschaft*. This was their big project, and they intended to realize their vision of society by means of social engineering. Any belief that private lives would

² See Reinhart Koselleck, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–92), vii. (1992), 141–431.

not be affected, that individuals could keep at a distance from ‘politics’ as many hoped in 1933, would soon prove to be illusory.

WHY THE FOCUS ON *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*?

Increasingly, the regime’s social engineering became entwined with the private lives of ordinary German citizens during the twelve years of Nazi rule. The propaganda picture of a young couple’s private moment depicted on the cover of this book—the couple sunbathing on the beach with swastika bunting above them waving cheerfully in the wind—told Germans more about the envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* than any picture of ecstatic masses at the Hitler rallies did. Nazi society demanded a lot from the individual, but it also had a lot to offer: a place for individual happiness and success was promised to all who belonged to the chosen community. This was the promise the concept contained. However, the picture also carried another message: this promise of happiness and success was to be denied to all those classified unfit to belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The sunny face hid a dark and deathly background countenance.

Volksgemeinschaft was the Nazis’ central social concept. This volume takes this observation as its starting point. Its objective is to clarify the heuristic and explanatory potential of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept. By drawing on specific examples, the essays explore the extent to which the concept helps us understand social change during the period of National Socialism. The authors investigate the specific forms the concept assumed and how it was used as a guideline for the actions both of private individuals and of political leaders; they examine interpretations and perceptions of policies dictated by the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*; and they illuminate how its utopian aims could motivate people and engage their emotions. The volume also attempts to sum up the lively international debate about *Volksgemeinschaft* as an approach to research.

Current research on the National Socialist concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* is especially interested in the interplay between the various National Socialist means of exerting power and how life went on in society. The contributions in this volume therefore focus first on the interaction between the institutions of the National Socialist state, with their Party organizations and functionaries, and people living their everyday lives. The people in Nazi Germany were divided into two categories: *Volksgenossen* (members of the imagined *Volksgemeinschaft*) and ‘the others’. *Volksgenossen* were granted full citizenship and had access to the provisions of the welfare state; but the social and legal status of those who deviated from the norms established through the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was significantly less secure, and such people suffered discrimination of many kinds. In a continual series of challenges when dealing with Party functionaries, civil servants, or even just officious supporters of the regime, every individual was repeatedly obliged to choose, and to show, on which side of the divide he or she stood. Research on the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* project therefore is inspired by Alf Lüdtke’s concept of *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis*—the exercise of political control through social

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