LIFE AND DEATH in a German Town

Osnabrück from the Weimar Republic to World War II and Beyond

Panikos Panayi

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Osnabrück residents killed by Nazi policies and Allied bombs.

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PREFACE

This book has the central aim of describing the continuities and discontinuities in the everyday life of all ethnic groups in the Lower Saxon town of Osnabrück between 1929 and 1949. These years witnessed a series of crises in the form of the collapse of the Weimar economy, the transformations of the peacetime Nazi years, the impact of World War Two and the consequences of post-War dislocation. The volume argues that all ethnic groups experienced great hardship during these years but recognizes the differences between native ethnic Germans, refugees, Jews, Romanies and foreigners established in post-War historiography.

The book has three distinct features, two of which are unique. First, it takes the perspective of *Alltagsgeschichte*, in an attempt to demonstrate everyday realities for people living in one German location in the years 1929-49. It is rooted in many of the standard histories, which have taken this approach, including the work of Detlev J. K. Peukert.[1] It uses a similar methodological approach to Robert Gellately[2] and Ian Kershaw,[3] amongst many others, who have focused on the local to inform the national, and is based on a wide range of official and unofficial sources. Nevertheless, like these, the centre remains the focus of the book. While the historiography helps to root the text, events in Osnabrück carry the narrative forward.

Its second, unique, feature lies in the time scale taken. Most works about Germany in the second quarter of the twentieth century focus purely upon the Nazi period, whether they consist of local or national studies. Some include the Weimar Republic, particularly its final years. But I have not found any studies that cover the period from the end of the Weimar Republic to the immediate aftermath of World War Two, which allows the narrative to trace the experiences of all of those who lived through the crises of the years 1929-49 in Osnabrück. In this sense, the book is broader in conception than the studies of Gellately or Kershaw, which focus on the relationship between the Nazis and the populace, or of the volumes of William Sheridan Allen[4] or Walter Struve,[5] which have the political history of the Third Reich at their core. My own volume traces all of the economic,

social and political aspects of everyday life before, during and after the Nazis.

Equally unique is the study of all ethnic groups in one German town, or even in Germany, during this period.[6] Despite the centrality of race in Nazi ideology, I have found no study which has looked at the experiences of the differing ethnic groups in Germany during this period: native ethnic Germans (by which is meant German Roman Catholics and Protestants), German Jews, Romanies, foreign workers and prisoners of war, and German refugees from eastern Europe. The book examines the individual experiences of these groups over two decades (its main concern) as well as the relationships between them.

The volume therefore has two basic themes, which drive the narrative forward. First, the whole point of choosing the years 1929-49 is to illustrate issues of continuity and discontinuity in the everyday lives of Osnabrückers during four small periods when dramatic short term change deeply impacted upon their experiences. These periods consist of: the final years of the Weimar Republic, when the economic and political systems established in 1918, collapsed; the peacetime Nazi years, when the new regime instituted dramatic economic, social and political changes; World War Two, when mobilization and Allied bombing had a profound impact upon the residents of Osnabrück and other German towns; and the immediate post-War crisis, when Germans came to grips with the consequences of defeat.

The chapters on ethnic minorities pay particular attention to the impact of Nazi racial policy upon them. They also tackle, in addition to the issue of continuity and discontinuity, which varied from one group to another, the theme of inter-ethnic relations. State policy towards minorities changed under the Nazis, but how did this impact upon the ways in which individuals from different ethnic minorities interacted with the majority population?

The volume divides into four parts and ten chapters. Part I, introductory in nature, has two chapters. 'National and Local History in Germany' elaborates upon the central concepts of the volume and then moves on to discuss the unique features of Osnabrück, its history before 1929 and the historiography of the town during our period. 'The Economic Crisis and the Rise of the Nazis' is again introductory in nature, placing Osnabrück against the background of national events. It outlines the collapse of the national and local economy and then traces the rise of the NSDAP, focusing particularly upon electioneering, propaganda and violence in Osnabrück, which are themes covered in detail by local police reports.

Part II of the book tackles the experiences of ethnic majorities. Chapter 3 examines 'The Establishment of a New Society, 1933-39', under the three

issues of 'Social and Economic Transformation', 'Propaganda' and 'Repression', which illustrate the changes which took place in Osnabrück and other German towns during these years. While real transformation did occur, it came with the elimination of opposition and a campaign of persuasion. The fourth chapter has the consequences of Allied bombing as one of its core themes. It further argues that mobilization went a considerable way towards denting the economic and social gains made before 1939, and also demonstrates how repression intensified. The fifth chapter turns to the aftermath of defeat, demonstrating how Osnabrück, in common with the rest of the country, had, by 1949, gone a significant way towards recovery from the trauma of Nazism and War in social, economic and political terms, but also illustrates the uncertainties and shortages of these years. The final chapter in Part II looks at the experiences of German refugees who arrived in Osnabrück after the War. Although they had a harder time than natives, the support of local institutions meant that they did not face the hostility experienced by ethnic minorities.

Part III examines these ethnic minorities. It begins with the experience of Jews, demonstrating how the relatively integrated group of the early 1930s, despite the antisemitism which existed, faced elimination as a result of Nazi racial policy, which led most of the Osnabrück community to leave by 1939. Those who remained faced deportation to eastern Europe during the War. Unlike communities in other German towns, Osnabrück Jewry re-established itself after the War, albeit on a smaller scale. Chapter 8 tackles the experience of Romanies by looking at the small number of files which have survived in the local archive. As the title suggests, the chapter specifically focuses upon 'The Continuity of Anti-Romany Discrimination', recognizing that it intensified under the Nazis, but demonstrating that it existed before 1933 and after 1945. The chapter on 'Foreign Workers and Prisoners of War' looks at the experience of the thousands of people who moved to Osnabrück from locations throughout Europe after 1939, making the town more 'multicultural', on a surface level, than it has ever been. The chapter demonstrates how Nazi racial policy marginalized and exploited these forced migrants. At the end of the War they took revenge on natives, even though many of the latter displayed sympathy towards them.

The 'Epilogue' places the history of Osnabrück in the years 1929-49 against the background of its development after 1949. It argues that those who survived the crises, moved from 'pain to prosperity', to experience the 'German economic miracle'. The Epilogue also deals with inter-ethnic relations, tracing the interaction of the different ethnic minority populations with the ethnic majority during the years 1929-49 and making

comparisons with relations between Germans and ethnic minorities under the Federal Republic.

LEADING PERSONALITIES IN OSNABRÜCK, 1929-49

Berning, Wilhelm (1877-1955)
Born in nearby Lingen, Berning became the Roman Catholic Bishop of Osnabrück in 1914, holding the position throughout the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich and the first post-War decade.

Day, Geoffrey Herbert (1905-77)
Born in Worcester, this British colonel served as chief of the British Military Government in Osnabrück from April 1945 until September 1947.

Gaertner, Erich (1882-1973)
Born in Neckarbischofsheim, Gaertner became Mayor of Osnabrück in 1927 and held his position until the end of the Third Reich, when he faced arrest.

Karwehl, Richard (1885-1979)
Karwehl studied theology in Tübingen, Göttingen and Berlin, displayed sympathy for socialist ideas and became pastor of the *Paulskirche* in the working class Osnabrück area of Schinkel in the 1920s, opposing Nazi ideology during the following two decades.

Kolkmeyer, Erwin (1889-1961)
This native born watchmaker was one of the leading Nazis and antisemites in Osnabrück, joining the NSDAP in 1929 and serving as *Ortsgruppenleiter* of Osnabrück Altstadt from 1933-45.

Kühling, Karl (1899-1985)
This native-born leading journalist in Osnabrück during the Third Reich subsequently went on to write standard local histories of the town in the period between 1925-45, as well as a series of other more specific studies.

Landwehr, Ludwig (1897-1981)
A leading figure in the Osnabrück KPD during the Weimar Republic, he faced arrest for high treason in March 1933 and subsequently served a prison sentence of 15 months, after which he moved to Stuttgart. At the end of the War he found himself in the concentration camp in Buchenwald.

Marxer, Otto (1896-1942)
Born in Augsburg, this dentist took over as leader of the NSDAP in Osnbrück in 1925, but lost this position after a conflict with *Gauleiter* Carl Röver in 1933. He moved to Munich in the summer of that year, where he held a more senior position. He died on the Eastern Front in 1942.

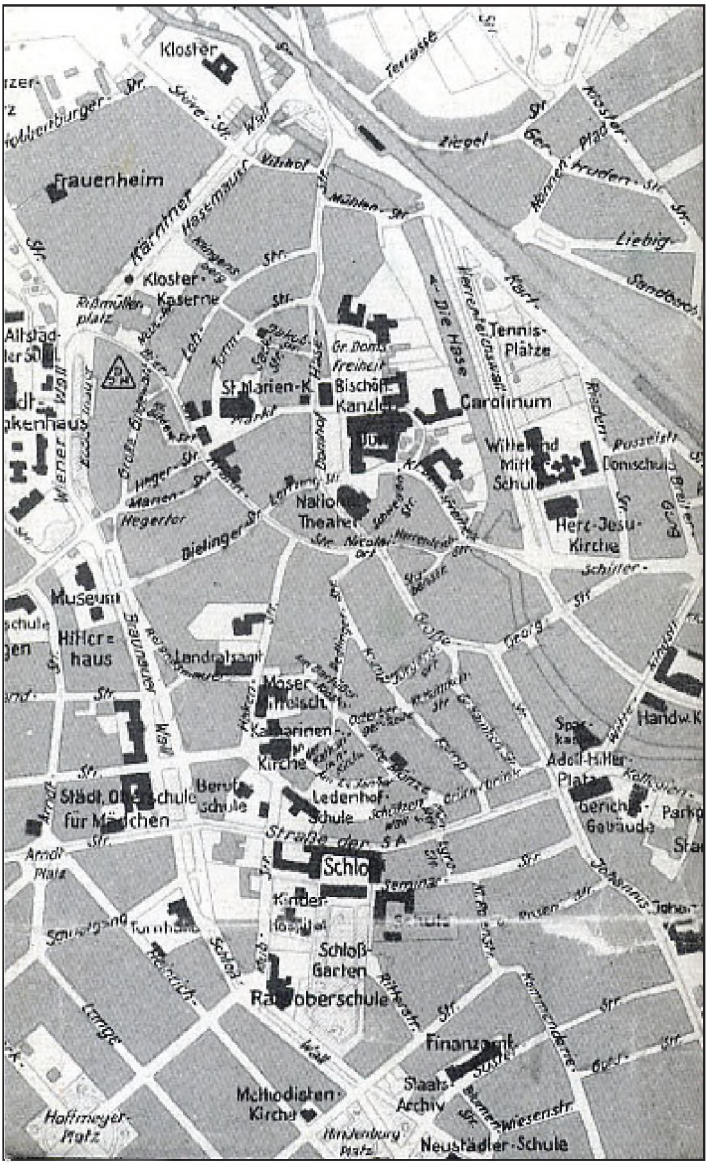
Petermann, Johannes (1886-1961)
This member of the Catholic Centre Party, had served as deputy mayor of Osnabrück from 1926-38 and found himself appointed as the new Mayor after the arrival of the British Army in 1945. He held this position for just a few months as a result of promotion to *Regierungspräsident*, which he retained until 1951.

Rißmüller, Julius (1863-1933)
Born in Münden in Hanover, Rißmüller served as Mayor of Osnabrück from 1901-27.

Schierbaum, Heinrich (1883-1934)
Born in Voxtrup, just outside Osnabrück, this quack doctor founded the antisemitic *Stadtwächter* party, which poisoned civic politics in the town at the end of the Weimar Republic.

Map 1: Location of Osnabrück within the Nazi Gau Division

Map 2: Areas of Osnabrück



Map 3: Osnabrück City Centre During the Late 1930s.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1

NATIONAL AND LOCAL HISTORY IN GERMANY, 1929-1949

Yet Another Book on the Nazis?

In his award winning volume on *The Third Reich*, Michael Burleigh wrote that the 'subject of one chapter in this book is the subject of over 55,000 titles, and many of the other chapters concern issues covered with something approaching this density'.[1] Virtually every subject area in the history of Nazism has received a significant amount of attention from scholars writing decades later and from contemporaries, both within Germany itself and also in Europe and the USA. Every aspect of the regime and every geographical region have received attention. By the early twenty first century, local and professional historians have dissected the experiences of virtually every ethnic group in a medium sized German town such as Osnabrück and have also covered nearly every aspect of the social history of the town in this period.

Do we therefore need another book on the history of the Third Reich? This seems a rather bizarre question in view of the time frame covered by the volume. It does not deal with the years 1933-45, but extends backwards to 1929 and forwards to 1949. While the core of the project clearly consists of the Nazi period, it is about the history of everyday life in Germany, as illustrated by the experiences of one German town, in the years 1929-49. The years before 1933 created the circumstances which allowed the Nazis to come to power, while the period after 1945 represented the aftermath of the defeat and collapse of the Third Reich.

From an *Alltagsgeschichte* perspective the first half of the twentieth century is a period of constant upheaval and trauma in Germany. Locations throughout the country went through a series of seemingly never ending crises from the upheavals of the First World War, the economic catastrophe of the Weimar Republic, the rise of the Nazis and the consequences of their political and racial cleansing, the horrors of the Second World War and the aftermath of the total defeat following total war.[2] The period 1929-49 witnessed the most traumatic events in central European history since the Thirty Years War three hundred years earlier.[3]

The present study contains, at its core, a case study of an individual medium sized German town. The experiences of its residents, both

majorities and minorities, resemble those of other people who lived within German borders during the years 1929-1949. While the archival and other primary source material concentrates entirely upon Osnabrück, the historiographical context focuses upon Germany as a whole.

The volume can therefore be read as a narrative of one location, but also as a story of Germany between 1929-49. The local case study approach I am taking mirrors that used by other scholars studying Nazi Germany. For instance, the work of Robert Gellately, which concentrated on Würzburg and Düsseldorf as examples of the way in which the Gestapo operated.[4] The case studies of William Sheridan Allen dealt with the experience of Northeim in Hanover between 1922 and 1945[5] while Walter Struve tackled Osterode in the Harz mountains between 1918 and 1945.[6] All of these works, like the present one, accept that their centres have unique features. While they might represent 'German' experiences, they do not efface the centre upon which they focus.

Nevertheless, the present study differs from those of Allen and Struve because while they concern themselves mainly with political history, which I certainly do not ignore, I take a micro-historical approach which looks at individual lives and experiences, as well as focusing upon events which occurred in the town, particularly those which remain etched on the popular memory. This book is therefore an example of social history, of history from below, the ways in which tumultuous and traumatic events impacted upon one German town and its inhabitants. However, it is an example of one particular form of social history, which developed especially in Germany and which has had a particular focus upon the Nazi period, in the form of *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life. This approach helps us to place ourselves at ground level within the minds of the individuals who experienced the events of the years 1929-49.

The book fits into a tradition which has counted some of the leading German historians within its ranks. The most important of these include Detlev J. K. Peukert, who produced several books which took this approach, using, once again, local case studies.[7] He concentrated especially upon opposition and did much of his work on the Ruhr.[8] *Alltagsgechichte* has now become, in the German language historiography, a fairly conventional approach amongst both professional and popular historians. Some volumes have taken a national perspective, particularly the more populist ones,[9] while most focus upon particular locations[10] or themes, including women,[11] the consequences of Nazi medical policies,[12] and the local experience of the educational policies of the Third Reich upon elementary schools.[13]

How old is *Alltagsgeschichte*, how does it work and what disadvantages does it have? Some scholars have asserted that this form of history represents a reaction to the structuralism which characterized social and

economic approaches, which had become dominant in alternative history by the 1970s, rooted in the Marxist tradition, which offered little scope for individuals to make themselves heard.[14] We could see the emergence of *Alltagsgeschichte* as part of the process of the death of the grand narrative which has happened as a result of the growth of postmodernism from the 1970s. The *Alltagsgeschichte* approach would encapsulate this process because it allows individual voices to make themselves heard.[15] On the other hand, one of its main practitioners, Peukert, would not have recognized this description, as he saw himself as a Marxist, pointing to the fact that a variety of alternative approaches had emerged by the 1980s.

Alltagsgeschichte focuses upon the micro, which helps to illustrate the macro. It almost takes an anthropological approach,[16] which centres 'on the actions and sufferings of those who are frequently labelled "everyday, ordinary people". What is foregrounded is their world of work and nonwork. Descriptions detail housing and homelessness, clothing and nakedness, eating habits and hunger.'[17] In essence, the historian attempts to reconstruct everyday realities for ordinary individuals.

In terms of sources, *Alltagsgeschichte* does not differ fundamentally from other social history. It uses a wide range of sources.[18] In his book on the 'Edelweiss Pirates', a youth opposition group in the Ruhr, Peukert's material includes Gestapo files. Stefan Riesenfellner has pointed to the importance of contemporary accounts, especially newspaper articles, in helping to reconstruct everyday life.[19] *Alltagsgeschichte* allows members of the group under scrutiny to speak for themselves. Oral history represents a major source for practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* because of its central aim of describing the experiences of ordinary people. 'The history of everyday life has also directed historians to look in a new way at sources such as diaries, memoirs, petitions from ordinary people, sermons and church visitations. Historians have been encouraged to look at them from the perspective of those involved'.[20] The personal memoir actually represents a central source for the history of everyday life. A few have survived on Osnabrück for our period.[21] Clearly, many of the individual sources described above would prove problematic in themselves because they often present the views of individuals. They therefore need balancing against other material.

Does the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach have any disadvantages, particularly when dealing with the Third Reich? A volume on this subject, originated from a colloquium in Munich attended by Martin Broszat, Detlev Peukert, Klaus Tenfelde and Heinrich August Winkler, all of whom agreed on the value of this approach.[22] Broszat, for instance, asserted that the relationship between politics and society could only be understood at the microhistorical level.[23] Winkler pointed out that, in a society in which free

speech had disappeared, historians need to turn to new sources and new forms of research to get inside the minds of people who lived under the Nazis. *Alltagsgeschichte* especially allows a study of dissent and resistance under the Third Reich,[24] a point stressed by Peukert in the introduction to *Inside Nazi Germany*.[25]

Nine years after the colloqium in Munich the 39th *Historikertag* held a plenary session attended by 800 people which asked: 'What comes after the history of everyday life?'. The discussants, including Wolfgang Hardtwig, Jürgen Kocka, Hans Medick, Ute Daniel and Alf Lüdtke, reaffirmed their faith in the progress which the history of everyday life had made over the previous decade focusing upon specific methodological issues. Hardtwig looked at the pluralization of historical research and the increasing importance of the study of individuals. Medick stressed the importance of micro-historical studies in illustrating broader themes.[26] The 1992 *Historikertag* also provided impetus for a volume edited by Brigitte Berlekamp and Werner Röhr reassessing the importance of *Alltagsgeschichte* for the Third Reich. One essay in the volume focused especially upon the regional and local importance of this approach, with a section containing essays on individual locations.[27]

The present study represents a history of everyday life in one specific town between 1929 and 1949. It is not yet another book on the Third Reich because of its original features. The first of these consists of the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach. It will examine all aspects of the lives of Osnabrückers during the years under consideration. It will consider their economic situation, their social lives and their attitudes towards politics. It will also focus upon the changes which took place as a result of the rise and fall of the Nazis in political terms, such as the suppression of opposition, the elimination of racial undesirables, and the arrival of Allied troops. While I will provide background about the national and local level bureaucratic changes, my main concern consists of the consequences of these changes for ordinary people, i.e. ethnic cleansing through the eyes of a Jew or Romany, or the arrival of the British as experienced by a native German. The project also allows for the examination of the consequences of specific developments during these years such as the introduction of non-Hippocratic medical practices and, above all, the issue which impacted most upon the majority population, Allied bombing. I am therefore attempting to produce a portrait of the totality of life under the Nazis, using one town as the case study, with the aim of reconstructing the realities of German life between 1929 and 1949. The *Alltagsgeschichte* approach means that one of the central aims of the book, following Broszat, consists of the relationship between political developments and the individual's reaction to them. The volume aims at reconstructing the

realities of the traumatic events of the years 1929-49. The *Alltagsgeschichte* approach may therefore not be original, but the totality of the approach is. In this way, the project differs from the single town studies of Allen and Struve, which primarily concerned themselves with politics.

A second departure of the project lies in its examination of the experiences of all ethnic groups in Osnabrück, an approach which does not seem to have been attempted elsewhere.[28] By dealing with the different ethnic groups on this local scale, we can compare the experiences which they endured and also examine the relations between them. The project proceeds along the ethnic lines drawn up by the Nazis in the form of German Aryans, Jews, Slavs and Romanies.[29] The present project also deals with the German refugees expelled from eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War, millions of whom made their way westward, with a small number finding their way to Osnabrück. By the time they had arrived the racial categories devised by the Nazis had disappeared.

But ethnic divisions in Germany neither originated with the Nazis nor ceased to exist with the collapse of the regime. The differences between Germans and Jews had established themselves from the medieval period as part of the legacy of Christianity and continued throughout the process of industrialization, despite emancipation and intermarriage.[30] At the same time, Romanies had faced persecution since their arrival in Germany in the fifteenth century.[31] Similarly, direct continuities exist between the persecution of eastern European workers during the Second World War and the history of German policies in eastern Europe, especially after the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, when the future German state had acquired territory which it would hold until the end of the First World War.[32] The German nation state had imported labour, from both eastern and western Europe, from the end of the nineteenth century, shortly after its formation. All of the leading scholars on the history of labour importation have recognized the continuities in the history of this process, which continued after the end of the Second World War.[33]

This book therefore deals with the experiences of differing ethnic groups in a particular location through four political systems from the late Weimar Republic through the Third Reich, the Allied occupation to the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949. It does not argue that each ethnic group experienced the same levels of persecution, exploitation or loss as a result of the rise of the Nazis. The vast amount of literature on Nazism stresses the differing experiences of racial insiders and outsiders, the latter clearly coming off worse than the former. This project does not challenge this assertion. What it does is to focus upon the everyday life of the differing populations to illustrate that everybody living on German soil between 1929 and 1949 experienced major upheaval.

Of course, no ethnic group in Germany had a uniform experience during the first half of the twentieth century and it would be erroneous to speak of sections of the population as if they consisted of monoliths. This applies more to the ethnic majority than the ethnic minorities. For the former, individual experiences varied according to two factors in particular in the form of political persuasion, which could mean imprisonment immediately after the Nazis came to power, and health, which could lead to sterilization or death. In addition, members of the ethnic majority could make choices about their relationship to the regime, usually determined by their family's allegiance. Thus, those from left wing backgrounds often opposed the Nazis in various ways, while a small percentage actively worked on behalf of the regime. In the ashes of 1945, all members of the ethnic majority found themselves losers, although at least they had survived and would witness a relatively quick recovery. In the immediate post-War period those German refugees who moved from the east faced greater problems than natives.

The experience of ethnic minorities remained more monolithic in the sense that they had fewer choices, although this applied more to some groups than others. The majority of Jews in Osnabrück actually managed to emigrate before the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938. Only a small minority therefore faced deportation to concentration and death camps after 1939. But the majority of Osnabrück Romanies went to Auschwitz in March 1943. The experience of foreign workers from both east and west transported to Osnabrück remained overwhelmingly bleak in the sense that they had to endure bad living conditions, working long hours hundreds or thousands of miles away from their families.

While this project revolves around the ways in which the different ethnic groups reacted to the crises which confronted them, particularly the Nazi regime, Section III also deals with relations between them. The examination of the attitudes of the majority towards the minority proves easier, however, than vice versa. Oral history and archival material allow us to achieve this task. The situation is more complicated in reverse because we know less about the attitudes of ethnic minorities towards Germans.[34] This interethnic approach will demonstrate, as the previous literature has done, that the actions of Germans towards minorities were complex.

The ethnic approach means that the project does not concern itself with the history of Osnabrückers born and living or having lived in the town between 1929 and 1949. Instead, the central focus, as the above discussion has made clear, consists of the lives of individuals who found themselves in the town in these years. This means that the experiences of Osnabrück males fighting on the eastern front do not concern us, unless these experiences affected relatives who remained in Osnabrück. But the project

will reconstruct the lives of foreign workers in the town, as well as those of the ethnic majority and the refugees, in detail. In short, to reiterate, this is a history of the town of Osnabrück and those who lived within it between 1929 and 1949.

The timeframe of the project also makes it unusual and perhaps unique. Clearly, by picking the period 1929-49, Nazism remains at its core. But why go back and forward to the dates mentioned? On the one hand, we can see that the beginning and end of the project simply confirm the centrality of Nazism in the book. The late Weimar crisis represents the background to the rise of the Nazis, while the period 1945-9 forms the aftermath of the Third Reich. On the other hand, we can also see the years 1929-49 as a period during which three of the major crises of the first half of the twentieth century affected Germany. In a sense much of the nineteenth century in Germany, until 1914, represented a time of economic and political upheaval and transformation due to industrialization and political unification.[35] The second half of the twentieth century, on the other hand, became a period of extraordinary stability for West Germans, if not for those in the east who had to face the economic disaster caused by the collapse of communism and reunification during the 1990s.[36] But the first half of the twentieth century represents a period of constant crisis. In fact, we can count six crises, causing varying degrees of upheaval, which affected the German population between 1900 and 1949, four of which this book covers. First, the Great War, which resulted in the collapse of *Kaiserreich* and economic hardship.[37] Second, its aftermath, which meant extreme economic dislocation.[38] Third, the late Weimar crisis, which saw the end of democracy and high levels of unemployment. The peacetime Nazi years represent the next crisis, a period during which the new regime transformed the nature of German economy, society and politics. The Second World War is the most dramatic period in German history during the first half of the twentieth century. During these years the country experienced extreme dislocation, especially as a consequence of Allied bombing. There then followed the final crisis of the immediate post-War years when people rebuilt their lives.[39]

As well as a social history of Nazism, its immediate origins and its aftermath, the book also examines how a single town and the individuals within it coped with crisis of the most extreme kind, whether they formed part of a minority or the majority. The former could face loss of civil rights, exploitation, humiliation and deportation, while the latter would experience the consequences of Allied bombing. Although the book may attempt to deal with discontinuity in German history, it is, however, also concerned with continuities, examining the ways in which individuals survived the

crises outlined above as well as tackling changes and continuation in local, regional and national economic, social and political development.

Two projects carried out during the course of the 1980s and 1990s would seem to question some of the original features suggested above for the present study. The first, under the leadership of Lutz Niethammer, focused upon the Ruhr[40] and the second tackled the Saarland, led by Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul.[41] The former resulted in three volumes spanning the years 1930-60. Based upon more than 150 interviews, it aimed to trace personal experiences of residents of the Ruhr, a much larger area than Osnabrück town, from the end of the Weimar Republic to the first decade of the Federal Republic. In this way the project aims to examine 'people's histories and social culture',[42] with the aim of demonstrating the most important experiences in individual lives as perceived by individuals themselves. There are clear differences between this project and my own. First, and most obviously, the time period is different. I have chosen to end in 1949 because my core concern remains the impact of Nazism, unlike Niethammer, who tells us that he is trying to understand the history of the Federal Repubic by placing it in its immediate Nazi background.[43] Secondly, the methodology is highly dependent upon oral history because the Ruhr project was concerned with establishing how people saw the decades from 1930-60. However, this is just one way of tackling the history of everyday life. Peukert, Gellately and others have relied just as heavily upon written sources. Finally, the Ruhr project does not deal with ethnic minorities to any great extent, with the exception of one essay by Ulrich Herbert, examining attitudes towards foreign workers. The events in the Ruhr between 1930 and 1960 are seen through the eyes of the ethnic majority.[44] The project led by Paul and Mallmann is also different from mine. Again, it concerns itself with a significantly larger area, the Saarland. The chronology only covers the years 1935-45. It has, as its core, the theme of relationships between individuals and the Nazi state, with the three volumes covering different aspects of this theme. It pays considerable attention to racial issues. The project is concerned with reconstructing the realities of the time and therefore uses oral history along with other available written material. In these last three ways my own work follows a similar path, if not in its geographical and chronological coverage.

In terms of sources the present volume takes a more traditional approach, but tries to use as much material as possible in an attempt to give a balanced picture. The most important information consists of the archival documentation held in the *Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv* in Osnabrück, the repository for information on the town and the administrative district of which it formed the centre. The main sources consist of governmental records of all descriptions on both the municipal and regional level, divided

amongst different departments. Regional police records proved of particular importance for all manner of developments from the surveillance of Nazi activity at the end of the Weimar Republic through the observation of illegal activity during the Third Reich, to reports about criminality in the depression which followed the end of the regime.[45] The archive also contains some *Gestapo* documentation, but not of the nature of material extant in Würzburg or Düsseldorf used, for instance, by Gellately and Peukert. The Osnabrück archive does, however, contain a card index.[46] Gerd Steinwascher, the former archive director edited for publication the regular reports written by all branches of the local security apparatus, including the *Gestapo*, which he gathered from a variety of locations.[47] The archive in Osnabrück holds a particularly good set of medical records, which allow a detailed reconstruction of the processes of sterilization.[48] The other useful regional records include a series of miscellaneous legal cases.[49] This documentation covers the whole administrative region.

In addition, the archive holds numerous records simply concerned with the city itself, including an official miscellaneous group covering a vast time period.[50] Within this overarching category we can find useful and detailed documentation left by the local air raid police, with precise descriptions of every attack which took place and the damage caused, which allows us to reconstruct the day to day experience of the Air War, especially as it intensified during 1944 and 1945.[51] The NSO also houses miscellaneous unofficial records belonging to various individuals and organizations during our time period.[52]

The project also used other repositories. Within Osnabrück the archive of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Osnabrück contains details of the charitable activities of the Church, as well as information on the controversial Archbishop Wilhelm Berning. The headquarters of the Lutheran Church in Hanover provided some details on ecclesiastical resistance to the Nazis. Some of the most interesting information used for this study consists of court records held in Münster and Hanover. The regional archive in the former contains the proceedings of the public prosecutor's office in Hamm in the Ruhr, which tried suspected Communist and Socialist activity throughout north and west Germany for the crime of high treason. Equally interesting is the documentation of the special court in Hanover, which tried cases of *Heimtücke* (treachery against the homeland) and *Volksschädlinge* (racial pests) under wartime legislation passed by the Nazis.[53]

As with other *Alltagsgeschichte* projects, archival information proves central for this project. The range of documentation available, some of it described above and most of it official, allows the reconstruction of everyday life in Osnabrück. Court and medical records give a clear account

of the consequences of Nazi policy during our period, from the point of view of both the state and individual. In many cases archival documentation gets us into the minds of people who lived in the town during our period, because many files allow local people to speak for themselves.

The project also used newspapers, mostly held in the local archive, although, as the town came under British rule at the end of the War, the British Library in Colindale also contains those published in this period. The leading Osnabrück newspapers before 1945 consisted of the following: *Osnabrücker Tageblatt*, described as without political allegiance before 1933, but this changed under the Nazis and the Allies; the *Osnabrücker Zeitung*, an organ of the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* before 1933, which survived until 1936; the *Osnabrücker Volkszeitung*, linked with the Catholic Centre party before 1933, which lasted until 1937; the Social Democratic *Freie Presse*, which survived until 1932; and the anti-Semitic *Stadtwächter*, linked to an eponymous local party. During the Third Reich the National Socialist *Neue Volksblätter* became the leading newspaper in Osnabrück. The newspapers which covered Osnabrück after 1945, licensed by the British, included the *Neues Tageblatt, Niederdeutscher Kurier, Niedersächsischer Kurier*, *Nordwest Nachrichten* and *Nordwestdeutsche Rundschau*.[54] The Nazi press clearly creates problems because of the issue of censorship. Although newspapers do not prove as useful as other sources used for this project, they provide some factual information. Those covering the Nazi years offer important information about how propaganda worked on a local scale.

The project also uses 26 interviews carried out with 33 people who lived in the town during the period under consideration. From the point of view of getting into the minds of individuals these would appear to represent one of the best of all possible methodological approaches. Nevertheless, interviews represent a complex source which needs to be treated with caution. The first problem consists of representation. The reminiscences of 33 people need contextualization against the wide ranging documentation used for the project. They essentially provide illustrative material. Unlike the project by Niethammer, this is not simply a narrative based upon oral testimonies. Interviews make up one of many sources. The sample I used is slightly skewed. Eleven interviewees consisted of women born between 1920 and 1923 who had attended the private Roman Catholic St. Ursula School. These women were contacted because they continued to have class reunions. The rest of the interviewees remain rather miscellaneous, although they do represent a reasonable cross section of the population of Osnabrück in the years with which the project deals. Most of them responded to an advert placed in the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*. These interviewees consisted mostly of men, with a variety of social and political

backgrounds and relationships with the Third Reich, as well as birth dates throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to these fairly mainstream individuals, the research also involved talking to outsiders in the form of several socialists and communists, as well as one Jewish woman. The latter came by appealing to the local headquarters of the Jewish community and the former through academic contacts at the University of Osnabrück. The St Ursula graduates came from another academic contact at the University. After writing to 38 of the 39 people on a list (the other one had already died) I carried out eight interviews.

The Typicality of Osnabrück

Having spent much time discussing the methodology and chronology of the project, we can now turn to its geographical centre, Osnabrück. Why not choose any other town or city in Germany? What makes this medium sized town in north west Germany any different from any other location in the country? Why not choose another town in south or east Germany, for instance? What are the typical features of Osnabrück?

The main reason for choosing the town actually consisted of a purely practical, but very important, one. I already had considerable previous knowledge of it, at least of its contemporary situation because I had, by the time I began substantially working on this project, already lived in Osnabrück, on and off, for the previous nine years including one period of ten months based at the *Institut für Migrationsforschung und Interkulturelle Studien* at the University. This did not simply mean familiarity with the town, but also with the research material available.

It also made sense to focus upon Osnabrück because it reflects other towns of a similar size throughout Germany, despite its individual features. We could argue that Osnabrück resembles more German towns than either Osterode, chosen by Struve, or Northeim, used by Allen, both quite small in scale.[55] We could not, however, go as far as to say that Osnabrück is more typical of the German experience than the large industrial area of the Ruhr used by Peukert, although, it may not be less typical. The Ruhr contained several towns of over 400,000 including Dortmund, Essen, Düsseldorf, Duisburg and Wuppertal.

With a population of 94,700 in 1930, Osnabrück remains much smaller than these large cities. Nevertheless, it does represent a typical medium sized town, resembling others in Germany in the second quarter of the twentieth century. In 1931 the German Statistical Office divided German urban settlements into three categories. Group A, with 27 locations, counted towns with over 200,000. Group B listed twenty settlements of between 100,000 and 200,000. Group C counted 43 locations with populations of between 50,000 and 100,000 residents. Osnabrück housed

the fifth largest number of people in this list in 1930. While a large percentage of Germans lived in major urban locations of over 100,000 people in the second quarter of the twentieth century, the experience of living in a medium sized town remained equally typical during these years.[56] In 1940 the German statistical office divided urban settlements into five categories. Group A1 simply consisted of Berlin with a population of 4,356,000 in 1939. Group A2 counted eleven locations with between 500,000 and 2 million, which, by this time, included Vienna. Group A3 consisted of seventeen settlements between 200,000 and 500,000. At number 63 stood Osnabrück, the smallest location of the 21 towns in Group B counting between 100,000 and 200,000. There then followed a further 49 locations with between 50,000 and 100,000 residents.[57] In 1949 the west German statistical office listed 427 towns with populations of more than 10,000. Group A1 consisted of Berlin and Hamburg, both counting more than 1 million residents. Group A2, Munich, Essen and Cologne, had more than 500,000. Group A3 listed sixteen locations with population counts of between 200,000 and 500,000. Osnabrück fitted into group B (at number 46 with a population of 97,745 in 1948) which listed 59 settlements of between 50,000 and 190,000. Group D counted 117 towns of between 20,000 and 50,000, while group E listed 227 locations of between 10,000 and 20,000.[58] The statistical evidence points to Osnabrück as, what we can describe as, a medium sized German town.

We might also regard Osnabrück as a good case study because of its denominational make up. Although it lies in Lower Saxony, it does not, like most settlements in this part of Germany, have an overwhelmingly Protestant majority. Instead, it divides fairly evenly between Catholics and Protestants. In 1925 it counted an evangelical population of 61 per cent and a Roman Catholic one of 36.9 per cent.[59] This reflects the history of the town as the centre of a Roman Catholic Archbishopric and also as one of the two cities, along with Münster, in which the Treaty of Westphalia was signed to end the Thirty Years War in 1648.

This leads us on to the size of ethnic minority communities in the city. The 435 Jews in 1933 would appear to make up a small percentage of the population of Osnabrück. Just 0.45 per cent, in fact. This remains considerably lower than that for the bigger cities, where members of this minority concentrated. Nevertheless, the Osnabrück figure resembles the overall percentage of Jews in the population in 1933, which stood at 0.76.[60] Similarly, the 54 Romanies residing in Osnabrück in the early 1940s,[61] reflect the fact that just 30,000 lived in the expanded German Reich in 1939.[62]

The Uniqueness of Osnabrück

While we might regard Osnabrück as a typical medium sized German town, we must also recognize that it has its own unique history and its own particular topographical, economic, social and political features. The town lies in the north west of Germany about forty five miles from the Dutch border and one hundred miles from the North Sea coast, giving it particularly north German characteristics, with damp winters and a temperate climate. It remains relatively isolated, surrounded by countryside (and the Teutoburger Forest to the south), with the nearest substantial settlements consisting of Oldenburg, Bremen, Bielefeld and Münster, the last two of which are the closest at nearly fifty miles away. In this sense it can certainly be regarded as provincial, as well as being medium sized; the nearest large cities, Bremen and Dortmund, lie over 60 miles away (see Map 1).

Within Osnabrück itself, the centre of the town, the *Altstadt*, has had an ecclesiastical heart, the seat of a Roman Catholic Archbishop, since the ninth century. By the twentieth century this heart consisted of the Roman Catholic Cathedral, the *Rathaus* and the Lutheran *Marienkirche* (see Map 3). The middle classes lived both to the north (Westerberg) and the south of this location (Großestraße and Johannisviertel). The centre of working class settlement consisted of Schinkel to the east of the city centre, with the railway station as a focal point. Beyond these two central areas of the *Altstadt* and Schinkel, lay the mixed social districts of Sonnenhügel and Gartlage to the north, and Wüste and Kalkhügel to the west and south, all of which expanded due to a housing boom during the 1920s[63](see Map 2).

An important landmark in the early history of Osnabrück came at the beginning of the ninth century when it became the seat of a Bishop. Its economic activities in the medieval and early modern period included metal work. In addition, it also became part of the Hanseatic League. The Thirty Years War tore it apart and it experienced occupation by Sweden, witch hunts and trials, as well as destruction. In fact, the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in the town hall in 1648 represents the most significant landmark in the early modern history of Osnabrück. Tolerating both Catholicism and Protestantism, the Treaty meant that the two religious groups could live side by side in the town, in fairly equal numbers, even though, until the beginning of the twentieth century, they remained fairly distinct.

During the eighteenth century the town reached a low point in demographic terms, when its population fell to 5,923 at the end of the Seven Years War. From 1780 Osnabrück experienced a 'Golden Age', which involved economic growth in the linen and tobacco industry. One of the most important figures in the history of the town, Justus Möser, was

born in 1720, writing his *Osnabrücker Geschichte*, 'the first German social and constitutional history' in the words of his twentieth century successor, Ludwig Hoffmeyer. The town underwent several significant developments during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In 1795 Prussian troops moved in but French troops entered in 1803, finally leaving in November 1813. Two years later Osnabrück became the centre of a Hanoverian region, ultimately under Prussian control from 1866.

Table 1.1: The Employment Structure of Osnabrück in 1907

Employment Sector	Percentage of Osnabrück's Population Involved
Agriculture	2.58
Mining and Industry	47.01
Trade and Commerce	21.29
Domestic Service	1.62
Military, Administration and Professions	10.60
Pensioners and Unemployed	16.66

Source: Günther Höfelmann, Wilhelm van Kampen and Alfred Lindner, 'Industrialisierung und Arbeiterbewegung in Osnabrück vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg', in Wilhelm van Kampen and Tilman Westphalen, eds, *100 Jahre SPD in Osnabrück, 1875-1975: Ausgewählte Kapitel zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in Osnabrück* (Osnabrück, 1975), p. 21.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the development of Osnabrück into the modern industrial town which it had become by the Weimar Republic, involving several major changes. In the first place, it experienced significant population growth, increasing from less than ten thousand in 1810 to over 70,000 by 1914. This formed the basis of industrialization, particularly during the second half of the century. Textiles and engineering played the central role in the future economic development of the town. Two major companies came into existence at this time, which continued as major employers into the twentieth century in the form of the Hammersen weaving mill, established in 1869, and the metallurgical firm *Osnabrücker Kupfer- und Drahtwerk*, founded in 1873. As the population increased and the town began to develop the structures of a modern urban settlement, employment in building and construction became important. In 1855 the first railway arrived as part of a stretch that joined the town with