



Historia de un alemán. Memorias 1914-1933

Sebastian Haffner

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¿Qué condujo a la sociedad alemana a la locura colectiva? A esta pregunta intenta dar respuesta la sobrecogedora biografía de juventud del periodista y escritor Sebastian Haffner. Escrita en 1939 -aunque encontrada entre los papeles del autor tras su muerte en 1999-, es una obra imprescindible para comprender el complejo proceso que permitió la aparición y consolidación del movimiento nazi en Alemania entre 1914 y 1933.

Pero el texto no es sólo una singular evocación autobiográfica. Como ciudadano, como alemán, Haffner quiere entender el descontento social que hizo posible el triunfo de Hitler y la violencia. Por eso analiza los diferentes acontecimientos históricos e intenta descifrar las emociones y las ambigüedades de sus compatriotas.

Memoria de un itinerario vital y crónica de una generación y de un país, Historia de un alemán ha sido considerado el último texto clásico del siglo XX.

Historia de un alemán. Memorias 1914-1933 Details

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Eleanor says

A brilliant and clear examination of the rise of Hitler and the Nazis to power in 1930s Germany. It is chilling to see how quickly and thoroughly a group of thugs terrorised and subjugated a whole country.

Towards the end of the book, Haffner and his fellow law students were required to undergo some military training and of course indoctrination, before they could take their final exams, an efficient way of ensuring the judiciary was a part of the system.

They were in uniform and of course marching behind a flag with a swastika on it as part of their training.

"When we came through villages, the people on either side of the road raised their arms to greet the flag, or disappeared quickly in some house entrance. They did this because they had learned that if they did not, we, that is I, would beat them up. It made not the slightest difference that I - and, no doubt, others among us - ourselves fled into entryways to avoid these flags, when we were not marching behind them. Now we were the ones embodying an implicit threat of violence against all bystanders. They greeted the flag or disappeared. For fear of us. For fear of me.

I still feel dizzy when I consider my predicament then. It was the Third Reich in a nutshell."

Later when the group of young men is required to listen to one of Hitler's speeches on the radio, and at the end they all raised their arms in the salute while singing Deutschland uber alles and the Horst Wessel song. "... we all sang or pretended to do so, each one of us the Gestapo of the others."

A powerful and gripping book.

JoséMaría BlancoWhite says

"El alma colectiva y el alma infantil reaccionan de forma muy parecida. Los conceptos con los que se alimenta y se moviliza a las masas nunca serán lo suficientemente infantiles."

La historia de Alemania entre 1914 y 1933 desde el punto de vista de la calle, de un joven alemán que sin ser nazi se ve obligado a plegarse a las coacciones de la masa nazionalista o a sufrir represalias. Este libro tiene una vigencia en la España actual de primer orden. No hay más que mirar la historia pseudo-democrática reciente del País Vasco y de Cataluña, donde las masas nazionalistas furibundas e intolerantes hacen uso de la coacción, atemorizando a las masas neutras y apolíticas para imponer su ideología en todos los ámbitos sociales. Como antes los judíos en Alemania, ahora los que no sean nazionalistas, deben plegarse para seguir llevando una vida "sin problemas sociales" o hacerse valientes y enfrentarse a la jauría que asediara los colegios de sus hijos que quieran hablar castellano o que hagan uso de su libertad de expresión para criticar a los nazis catalanes actuales.

Hay que agradecerle al autor haber elegido este lenguaje tan sencillo y coloquial y que haya aportado esta visión a pie de calle de la Alemania nazi de pre-guerra. Uno se dará cuenta de qué forma tan sutil los que emplean la violencia y las amenazas van imponiéndose en todos los niveles: su voz e ideas totalitarias se extienden como un cáncer, imparable. Cuando uno se da cuenta ya es tarde para reaccionar. La lección es

que el silencio, ignorarles, no sirve, no basta. Quienes gritan, quienes toman la calle, aunque sean unos violentos canallas llenos de odio y de mentiras, acabarán dictando las normas más nimias con las que el hasta entonces ciudadano se deberá comportar en sociedad, en el bar, en el concierto, en el parque, en cualquier lugar público; se le mirará como mira el agente de la Gestapo: buscando a quien delatar, a quien exterminar, a quien apartar del resto de la sociedad como quien extrae una manzana podrida de una cesta.

El autor consiguió emigrar a Inglaterra, justo antes de acabar haciéndose un nazi de verdad, actuando como ellos. Lo que él llama camaradería, y que ayudó mucho a solidificar ese sentimiento nazi tan generalizado entre los jóvenes alemanes, nosotros podemos llamarlo también socialismo, en su más extenso sentido del término, como aquello que se contrapone a lo individual y ala responsabilidad personal. Sin responsabilidad individual, personal, cualquier crimen se puede justificar. Si la sociedad pide que se metan en campos de concentración a los judíos yo también lo pido, la sociedad es la responsable; si la sociedad decide que hay que matar a unos cuantos en bien del resto de la sociedad y de la idea imperante del momento (el Estado Catalán, la raza, lo que se tercié por parte de los intolerantes) habrá que hacerlo, la responsabilidad no es mía, es de la sociedad en general.

Un libro ameno y de vital actualidad. El silencio no es una alternativa.

Ruth Wahtera says

This memoir of growing up in Germany as Hitler was coming into power offers a remarkable first-person story. It should be required reading for us all.

Matt says

This is the story of Sebastian Haffner, a man who lived in Germany during Hitler's rise to power. I loved hearing the story from the perspective of the average German. I can't imagine living in such tumultuous times, but reading this book gives me a glimpse. The best part about it is the fact that it tries to answer two very important questions: how on earth a regime like the Nazis could rise to power, and how almost the entire nation where corrupted by them. It's a wonderful story that I would recommend to anyone that is the bit interested in that period. Remember, it's by understanding the past that we can best keep from repeating it.

Alice says

This book is an account of what went on in Germany from the end of WWI to right before the start of WWII. It is told from an everyday German person's point of view. This is an era that is largely ignored by history books and the story of a regular persons life as his home country changes before his eyes is very compelling. People often ask "How could the German people let this happen?" (meaning the Nazi takeover). This book is rather frightening in that it shows how easily it happened without organized leadership of the opposing parties. How everyday people were slowly but surely indoctrinated into the new order with virtually no resistance.

Lisa says

Reposting this with tears in my eyes, realising the fascist plague has reached the German Bundestag as well. I thought what I witness in America was as bad as 2017 can get. I was wrong!

"Je länger dieser Sommer 1933 dauerte, umso unwirklicher wurde alles."

Translated into contemporary time, I would say: "Over the course of the 2017 winter, everything became more and more unreal."

Haffner, growing up and maturing in a Germany increasingly influenced, and then taken over by, Hitler and his thugs, wrote down his thoughts on what happened, why it happened, and how he and his close relations reacted to it - the "Story of a German".

Starting with a chilling sentence, claiming that he tells the story of a duel between a strong, ruthless state and himself, a powerless individual, he shows in his erudite prose how he came to form his own opinions on the development of fascism and its spread.

The passage that haunts me most is a dialogue between himself and his father, where he declares that his greatest fear is that war breaks out and he has to fight "on the wrong side".

His father opposes him. "Fighting on France's side would be right for you?"

Haffner tells his father that he believes that to be the only way to save Germany, but his father refuses to accept that, falling back on all the mistakes "the liberals" have made in the past, resulting in the Hitler regime. Haffner, still young and energetic, rejects that fatalistic approach, and questions his father's attitude.

"Aber dann siehst du gar kein Ziel und keine Hoffnung?" No goal? No hope?

And the father replies, "For the moment, no!"

What a horrible message for the son: his own father does not believe in any future, has no hope, and no solutions, just resignation under the worst possible scenario, blaming earlier political mistakes for current disasters.

Why did Haffner write his book? He was not a hero (despite the ridiculous, probably sales-oriented English translation of the story with the title "Defying Hitler"), just an educated, decent man who saw what went wrong and decided not to be indifferent.

He describes the effects of the propaganda machinery on himself and others with frightening honesty: how thoughts were deliberately suppressed to adapt to "groupthink" and mandatory coordinated activities for "the greater good" of the nation, ignoring individual intelligence and choice. How certain things were endured to secure personal goals like exams, career, plans for the future. How accepting one step in the chain of events compromised the own conscience and made him vulnerable, culpable in his own eyes: If I sang that song with the group (how could I have refused, in the context?), can I honestly say I am not one of them? If I waved the flag (how could I have refused, in the context?), can I say I am not supporting the party?

"So lange der Bann anhält, gibt es fast kein Mittel dagegen."

History has plenty of examples of mass hysteria functioning like a spell, all-powerful, until the hypnotised person wakes up to the ugly truth.

Haffner himself went into exile, became an emigrant, or immigrant, depending on the point of view. And he raised his voice for the importance of understanding historical processes, and emotional responses to stress, manipulation and violence.

He wrote for others to understand, so that it may not happen again. He described the slow eroding of democracy, as witnessed by himself, for example through changed paragraphs in general laws, each one taking away a grain of what people had considered basic human rights. Gradually, the exceptions were accepted as normal, and citizens got used to a completely new kind of language, and law enforcement. They stopped fighting it as it fell apart step by step, and each step could somehow be justified, in a flawed way, of course, but as a single event not worth the cost of resistance. Mass depression and fear ruled the political climate in which Haffner wrote his reflections.

That is why this book should be required reading again, for all those who say that the developments in America at the moment are due to "liberal mistakes in the past". The answer to that is: "If so, so what? Who cares?" It hardly excuses the new, more serious mistakes which affect not only the voters in the United States, but peoples across the globe.

We have a responsibility to raise our voices against aggression, regardless of whether it is aimed at religion (and this is the atheist speaking, on behalf of religious freedom, as long as the religion does not force others to believe and commit to specific rituals and rules that are only relevant to its particular dogma), ethnicity, gender, or social status. And we have to protect our shared environment against policy makers who confuse scientific data with personal opinions and beliefs based on profit. When the world is taken hostage by people with a clearly narcissistic, criminal agenda, we are in the same position as Haffner in the 1930s.

We can give up, like his father, or we can speak up, like himself. We don't have to be heroes, but sometimes, we have to choose sides. I am with Haffner on that: you can't be diplomatically standing in the middle where fascism is concerned, for its ultimate goal is to destroy diversity and freedom of choice, and to force its power on as many facets of life as possible. Master bullies need to be resisted - that is what teachers try to implement in schools, and it applies to the world of "so-called" grown-up politics as well.

That was my angry review for this week, read Haffner, PLEASE!

Brian Leach says

If you are like me and you've always wondered just how an insane madman like Adolf Hitler came to power in a modern country like Germany then read *Defying Hitler*. The author, who describes his personal experiences of the time, pulls no punches and makes no excuses for the shift to radical nationalism in Germany in the 1930s.

The book is presented much like a diary recounting the author's life at specific times in Germany between WWI when he was a small child and 1933 when the Nazi regime began to reveal its true face to the German people.

Sebastian Haffner presents his own theory about where this radical nationalism first developed and supports his theory with what he experienced.

It's an excellent book and a great read.

Dana says

It was hard to get into the book at first- all the different German leaders and shifting politics was hard to keep up with. But it was interesting to read about Hitler's rise to power from the perspective of a German youth who did not believe in Hitler's ideals. The last half is where I started to get more interested, as that is when Hitler and the Nazis began to gain power.

Maksim says

?????, ?????? ? ????????????

Jan-Maat says

[which may have been a tautology given the circumstances (hide spoiler)]

Lewis Weinstein says

Haffner provides a real sense of what it was like to experience the Hitler takeover of Germany. From the eyes of a child before Hitler was ever heard of through 1938 when Hitler had squashed all opposition, Haffner reports in often electric prose how he felt.

A few examples ...

... Göring ordered the police to intervene in any brawl on the side of the Nazis, without investigating the rights and wrongs of the matter, and to shoot at the other side without prior warning

... my reaction was icy horror ... I could physically sense the man's odor of blood and filth, the nauseating approach of a man-eating animal, it's foul sharp claws in my face ... even so, I did not give the new government much chance of surviving, not with Hitler as its mouthpiece

... terror under the Nazis is more repulsive than under any other regime in European history ... systematic torture and murder of defenseless victims ... while publicly declaring in fine noble words that nobody would be harmed and that never before had a revolution shed less blood

... The 56% of the population which voted against the Nazis then engaged in a cowardly treachery ... extending from left to right ... including the Social Democratic leadership which betrayed their faithful and loyal millions of followers ... and the great middle class Catholic Center Party which supplied devotes necessary for the two thirds majority that legalized Hitler's dictatorship (referring to the Enabling Act)

Kim says

Wow. Where has this book been? I can't believe it's taken me this long to find it. It is a brilliantly written first hand account of life for a pretty average boy growing up in Berlin in the early 1900s. It was originally written in 1939 (so before the outbreak of WWII) when the author had just emigrated to the UK from his home in Germany. What I really appreciated about the book was that it was written before the war (so no 20/20 hindsight view) and that it recounts both how strange the times were and yet how the average person, especially young person, adapts, accepts, and goes on as best they can. It's easy to look back and say how could they allow it, but when you read how it occurred and everything else that was going on...including the mundane...it is easier to understand and rather frightening to consider how easily it could happen again. Perhaps now not as easily as then (prior to radio, television, and the web) but still rather slyly. Excellent book. I'm actually rereading it already. Loved it.

Kristy says

I love this book. I've been a fan of what my school described as 'Modern World History for as long as I can remember. This book - written in 1939 whilst the author was in exile in England - satisfies my lust for the historical facts and the personal views on how Germany came under the thrall of the National Socialist Party. It is brilliantly written. He is critical of his fellow Germans in a way that only a native can be. I would have loved to have met him.

Alissa says

As I have read and studied about World War II through the years, I, too, have had the same questions Haffner's son mentions near the end of this book--How were the Nazis possible? and Why weren't they stopped by the German people? This book does an awesome job of providing some answers. It made it clear to me that Germany and its people were the first victims of Hitler and the Nazis. They were conquered first and then Hitler/Nazis moved on to other countries around them.

I think that Haffner did a great job portaying what it was like for a common German during the Nazi takeover. His confusion, frustration, and helplessness and some of the things he experienced must have been what thousands of other Germans were feeling and going through at the time. What a dark time it must have been as they came to grips with the new realities of their world. I just wish Haffner would have finished writing his whole story before he died. I would have loved to read the rest of his journey. Thanks, Michael, for the recommendation.

Orsodimondo says

NESSUNO PIÙ COLPEVOLE DEL PROPRIO VICINO

Hitler Jugend.

Con la storia contingente e privata della mia della mia contingente e privata persona sono convinto di

raccontare un pezzo importante della storia tedesca ed europea, non ancora raccontato. Qualcosa di più importante e di più significativo che se raccontassi chi ha incendiato il Reichstag e cosa si siano detti veramente Hitler e Röhm

Wow, Haffner si sente in pole position!

Hitler con Ernst Röhm, comandante delle SA.

Il punto di vista di chi scrive è enormemente interessante perché coetaneo dei fatti narrati, e interno a questi fatti in quanto tedesco.

È quello di un figlio di un alto funzionario dello stato prussiano, un giovane conservatore liberale, di educazione puritana, più portato per le idee di destra che di sinistra, spinto dal padre a studiare giurisprudenza per proseguire la tradizione familiare di impiego statale.

Nel 1933, quando Hitler e il nazismo vanno al potere, Haffner (il cui vero nome era in realtà Pretzel) ha ventisei anni.

E ne ha trentuno quando decide che con il nazismo e Hitler non riesce a conciliarsi in alcun modo, meglio emigrare.

Nel 1933 alle ultime elezioni il partito nazista raccoglie il 44% dei voti. Tanti, tantissimi: ma rimane comunque un 56% che non aderisce, non lo vota, ha idee diverse.

Rispetto alle elezioni precedenti (1932) ha guadagnato un 7%. Ma è ancora insufficiente per spiegare quello che stava per succedere.

E quindi, da questa partenza, mi sono aspettato illuminazioni a go go.

Ho sperato in un bel libro di storia ricco di fatti e dati, ma sono rimasto subito deluso: non è un libro di storia (per esempio, le note sono pressoché inesistenti e collocate malissimo, alla fine di ciascun capitolo diventano quasi inutilizzabili).

Ma soprattutto, più che fatti, sono ricordi.

E quindi è se non altro un memoir. Per di più scritto in contemporanea (anche se pubblicato postumo nel 2000, questo testo era già così, pronto e ultimato nel 1940).

Ma un memoir di solito ha la qualità di essere emozionante, palpitante, vibrante.

Qui, invece, nessuna emozione, nessuna vibrazione, men che meno palpazione. Il tono adottato è quasi sempre ondivago, con gran ricorso a un'ironia che gli viene male, salvo qui e là ricorrere a sostantivi e soprattutto aggettivi un po' troppo enfatici.

Perché è successo, come è potuto succedere quello che è successo?

Il mistero non si svela, la grande domanda rimane senza risposta, anche Haffner non aiuta.

Il 56% di elettori tedeschi che la pensa in modo diverso da Hitler si può leggere anche in modo opposto: quasi la metà degli elettori tedeschi la pensava come lui. Un'enormità.

Che il nazismo si sia costruito sfruttando l'umiliazione per la sconfitta nella Grande Guerra e le pesanti sanzioni imposte al paese che seguirono, la povertà, l'incertezza, la fragilità economica e sociale degli anni della Repubblica di Weimar, incrociando con la crisi internazionale del 1929, è un fatto noto.

Che i partiti tradizionali, sia quelli conservatori che quelli 'rivoluzionari' (socialdemocratici e comunisti) abbiano tradito o si siano dissolti il giorno dopo le ultime elezioni, è cosa nota.

Se l'hanno fatto per paura, per salvarsi vita e pelle, come è stato possibile che un paese di così lunga e solida tradizione abbia consentito che quasi la sua metà aderisse a un'ideologia basata sulla violenza, sulla retorica,

sulla sopraffazione, sull'eliminazione fisica dell'avversario, sulla tortura? Tutti opportunisti? Come è possibile che corpi dello stato, a cominciare dalla polizia, tollerassero, proteggessero, affiancassero, l'incredibile violenza nazista?

Sottovalutato il pericolo?

Ma le cose sono andate avanti per anni, i nazisti non hanno mai fatto passi indietro, la gente vedeva e assisteva.

Le SA, organizzazione paramilitare del partito nazista, furono fondate nel 1920: sciolte dal governo per meno di un anno, già rifondate nel 1924 – nel 1933 erano più di due milioni.

Lo stesso Hitler fu condannato a cinque anni di prigione, scontò solo nove mesi, e fu subito riammesso in politica.

In tanti, almeno la metà, scelsero di partecipare all'orrore nazista, in qualche modo, vigoroso o blando che sia stato: *Questo era appunto il segreto del successo del nazionalsocialismo, il suo appellarsi a qualcosa che era insito profondamente nella natura di tutti i tedeschi.*

(Peccato che la spiegazione di Haffner non riesca ad andare oltre lo spirito di cameratismo: sarebbe quella la vera ragione della vittoria del nazismo!).

Forse, come dice Haffner, *in una specie di seminarcosi, con una percezione cosciente penosamente sottile dietro alla mostruosità oggettiva.* Ma non mi pare granché come spiegazione.

Ecco, su questo Haffner non accende nessuna luce, non chiarisce nulla, non aggiunge niente alla conoscenza. In circa un quarto delle pagine utilizzate da Haffner, *Destinatario sconosciuto* di Kathrine Kressman Taylor, pur adottando la finzione invece del ricordo dei fatti storici, si spinge ben più in là, 'spiega' e racconta andando oltre.

PS

Nessuno più colpevole del proprio vicino è un verso di Bertold Brecht da "Der Jasager / Der Neinsager".