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Dagmar Reese. *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany*. Social History, Popular Culture and Politics in Germany. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. 287 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-472-06938-5.

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A Study in the development and impact of Nazi Women's Organizations in Germany

The central argument of this book expands upon and revises earlier views of women and their activities during the Nazi period. Its specific focus is on women and the Bund Deutscher Madel (BDM)—a specific group created by the Nazi Party for girls between ages 10 and 14—during the 1920s and 1930s. After some resistance by its female leadership, this organization came under the control of the male dominated Hitler Youth. Dagmar Reese argues that Nazi ideology played a minor role in decisions by girls to join and participate in the BDM and in the aims and day-to-day activities of Nazi youth groups for women. Reese also argues that the tremendous need for leaders (although most unpaid volunteers) led to a great deal of political participation by women and that their role in these groups went far beyond emphasizing official rhetoric to the effect that women should be concerned with children, kitchen, and church. Reese also indicates that the motivation of the leader, who often was very young and had little leadership training, and the nature of the activities could determine the success or failure of the group in attracting and maintaining members. According to Reese, the legacy of these women's organizations and the experiences of the women in them are very different from that experienced by men who were more directly connected to World War II, the Holocaust, and the persecution of thousands of non-Jewish individuals. Reese concludes that it is far more difficult for women to come to terms with their past and their "guilt" due to the fact that many of them have fond memories associated with their membership in these organizations.

In the introduction Reese indicates that the English version (this book was originally published in 1989 as *Straff, aber nicht stramm—Herb, aber nicht derb*) has been "reworked" and it is clear that the introduction has been updated. The introduction includes a section discussing literature and debates among historians that have appeared since the original publication date. However, much of the book, including the two chapters devoted to case studies, remains relatively unchanged. The author uses both archival records and interviews with women who came into contact with and women who joined the BDM and other Nazi organizations for women. The author provides detailed information on and interviewed women in only two areas, Minden and Wedding. Minden is located in Westphalia directly on the Weser River and is a very small town with a long history of a strong Protestant community and a significant number of middle-class and wealthy families. Wedding, in stark contrast, is a district in Berlin that encompasses a great number of poor working-class families, and the large number of individuals associated with the social democratic and communist parties led to its designation as "Red Wedding." Reese gives extensive background on these two communities and then describes the differences and startling number of similarities among the experiences of women from both areas who participated in Nazi organizations.

This work provides an extensive amount of information on women's experiences and the role of female leaders in influencing women beneath them in the organization. The copious references make it clear that the author

is familiar with all relevant works, and the explanatory footnotes and citations are impressive. The author has also been very conscientious about providing as much information as possible about the interviewees and has noted where she is using information from separate interviews to support conclusions. She has also discussed the fact that some interviews were not included in the finalized work and has quoted examples to demonstrate why the materials were excluded from the study.

The one weakness worth noting is the diverse scope and organization of the book. For example, the extensive background on Minden, which has several pages dealing with the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries, tends to obscure the main issue regarding women's experiences in Nazi organizations in the twentieth century. Information dealing with very different aspects of the

central question is often thrown together within the same chapter. A relatively minor second issue concerns the translation of this work into English. In addition to the large number of terms in German included by necessity, the translator has rendered a number of terms into words in English that are not in common usage, such as "fungibility" and "ambit," which makes the work less readable. Overall, this work is a valuable contribution to the discussion of women and their participation in women's organizations in the decades before and after the Nazi Party came to power. Perhaps the greatest strength of this work is to expose the inherent flaws and over-simplistic nature of arguments that stress that women were confined to traditional roles and were primarily involved in discussions and activities focused on child bearing and rearing and on taking care of their homes and families.

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