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This is a revised, English-language version of a study first published in German in 1989. The updated part is found in the introduction, which includes a useful discussion of the latest literature on the subject of the Hitler Youth and its relationship to girls and young women in Nazi Germany. The core section of the book, consisting of chapters on history, ideology and organization and two case studies of girls in Minden (Westphalia) and Wedding (Berlin), nonetheless remains substantially unchanged. In fact, the new title is a little misleading, as the book provides almost as much information on the 1920s as it does on the 1930s, while the period after 1939 hardly features at all. *Growing Up Female in Interwar Germany* would have been a more accurate title, although, as all academic publishers know, including the word "Nazi" on a front cover helps to attract readers and boost sales.

In her introduction, Reese points to an interesting conundrum. Why, after 1945, did ex-members of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, the “BDM-generation,” find it more difficult to come to terms with their own pasts and the crimes of the Nazis than their male counterparts, or why, in other words, was their sense of loss and grief so much more intangible (p. 7)? One explanation is that girls, owing to traditional forms of socialization or straightforward female “passivity,” were less able to grasp the political side of National Socialism or to associate their own, apparently harmless and “non-political” activities with the murderous deeds of the Nazi regime. After 1945 they reacted to accusations of guilt and complicity by retreating into the private sphere of family and motherhood, a strategy already pursued by their forebears during the Nazi era itself. However, Reese finds such interpretations unsatisfactory. In reality, she argues, members of the “BDM-generation” were intensely political and often engaged in subtle and not so subtle “gender wars” with their parents, teachers and male peers, especially in the period down to the late 1930s. She writes: “The girls who grew up in the 1920s [and 30s] were no longer shaped by the duality dominant before 1914: the image of a woman geared to the intimacy of the family versus women fulfilling themselves and being active outside the home. They had instead been influenced by the ideal of the self-confident ‘new woman’ and the ‘female comrade’ “ (pp. 46-47). Furthermore, what drew them to the BDM was not the organization’s traditional values or its focus on “education for motherhood,” but rather its apparent ability to transcend traditional gender boundaries through an overarching emphasis on “youth” and “nation” (p. 94).

Reese’s aim, then, is to direct our attention to the political side of girls’ socialization in the BDM and to uncover its deeper meanings and legacies. To do so she works on three different levels: the institutional, the ideological and the everyday, exploring the specific cultural and social contexts in which girls encountered and experienced the transition from childhood to youth. Her sources include contemporary publications on youth culture and oral interviews with members of the “BDM-generation” conducted in the 1980s, while her broader methodology shows a number of similarities with Clifford Geertz’s model of “thick description.” This effect can be seen in particular in her two contrasting case studies: small-town, middle-class Minden and inner-city, working-class Wedding.

At first glance, the two milieus could not appear more different. Minden, a Protestant, conservative town in western Germany, dominated by soldiers and civil ser-
vants, was a million miles away, culturally and politically, from "red Wedding," one of the poorest districts of Berlin and a stronghold of the German Communist Party (KPD) from 1928 on. Yet, as Reese shows, interesting parallels can also be found in the experiences of girls growing up in these two environments. In both cases, girls were attracted to the BDM because its activities "responded to their social, physical, artistic and even erotic needs and were able to satisfy them" (p. 236), at least as far as the younger age groups were concerned. Older girls (school-leavers aged fourteen and above), were admitted less likely to put all their time into the BDM, partly because of the pressures of vocational training or paid employment and partly because they were turned off by the organization’s rigid social hierarchies. The BDM also had to compete with rival interests—boys, clothes, fashion, dancing—which admittedly were more readily available in Berlin than in Minden. This distinction is important because, as Reese argues, degrees of resistance towards the Hitler Youth were socially rather than ideologically determined and reflected particular social and cultural environments more than predetermined political standpoints (p. 245). Conversely, "political pressure alone was not enough to ensure the allegiance of the young—it had to correspond to and resonate with a social milieu that was susceptible" (p. 235). In Wedding, this problem was experienced as much by the Communists as by the Nazis: the former also failed to exert much influence on female proletarian youth and frequently dismissed young women in general as "frivolous" and "flighty" (p. 192).

The female youth of Minden were admittedly much more predisposed towards Nazism and, one assumes, completely averse to communism, but not just for traditional reasons. As Reese points out, the fact that more of these girls stayed on at school after fourteen meant that they did not "grow out" of the BDM so quickly. Those with leadership potential could also be identified and encouraged. This support was important because "young [middle-class] people [in Minden] felt in some way socially and intellectually superior to the Hitler Youth, even if they shared certain programmatic aims or organizational forms" (pp. 131-2).[4] Something more than National Socialist politics, such as help with a career outside the BDM, links to various sports activities or encouragement from teachers, had to be in place to attract and maintain girls’ interest, especially as the move toward compulsory membership after 1936 led to increased levels of "boredom and useless busywork" (p. 40).

By contrast, in Wedding the girls who stayed on at school tended to come from proud, politically conscious Social Democrat (SPD) families and were therefore reluctant to become BDM leaders, even if they had the necessary academic skills and personal attributes (pp. 237-8). Girls who left school early in Wedding—the vast majority—were more likely to work longer hours, face greater material hardship and family problems and seek release through hedonistic activities and the "pleasures of consumption" (p. 48), meaning that they gave the BDM scant attention. The anonymous urban environment also provided them with greater means of avoiding enrollment in the BDM altogether, so that whereas after 1936 virtually all schoolgirls in Minden aged ten and over had joined the BDM, this was palpably not the case in Wedding. While early school-leavers in Minden were just as likely to cut the BDM as their counterparts in Wedding, however, the difference is that there were fewer of them (pp. 234-5).

Reese’s findings are of great significance for all those interested in women and youth cultures in modern Germany. Students and scholars in the English-speaking world will benefit enormously from this new edition, which by and large is excellent. Those who know the German original will still find many new insights and subtleties in the English-language version of the book. My one small quibble concerns the translation of certain words and terms. For example, Reichsnährstand would read more accurately as "Reich Food Estate" as opposed to "Reich Ministry for Nutrition," and the DAF is conventionally known as the "German Labor Front," not the "National Socialist Labor Organization" (p. 33). Fungibilität could be rendered as "interchangeability" or "functionality" rather than "fungibility," a word which does exist in the English language but which had me scrabbling for a dictionary to discover its meaning (p. 59). These minor points aside, Reese’s book can be recommended as the most convincing study of female youth in interwar Germany and as an important corrective to works that overemphasize the "traditional," "feminine" or "totalitarian" side of girls’ socialization through the BDM.

Notes

[1] The original German-language edition was published as "Straff, aber nicht stramm–Herb aber nicht derb". Zur Vergesellschaftung von Mädchen durch den Bund Deutscher Mädel im sozialkulturellen Vergleich zweier Milieus (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz, 1989). In an even earlier form this work was presented as the author’s dissertation at the Free University of Berlin in 1987 (see p. 11 of the German edition).


[4]. A similar phenomenon was also observed by Anette Schröder in her study of male conservative-nationalist students at the Technische Hochschule in Hanover: at first they too resisted incorporation into the Nazi student league, the NSDStB, on elitist grounds, in spite of the many political views they had in common (Anette Schröder, *Vom Nationalismus zum Nationalsozialismus. Die Studenten der Technischen Hochschule Hannover von 1925 bis 1938* (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2003).

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