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Matthew Stibbe. *Women in the Third Reich.* London: Arnold Publishers, 2003. x + 198 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-340-76104-5; $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-340-76105-2.

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A general book on women in the "Third Reich" has a hard time exploring new scholarly territory, for women in Nazi Germany have already been the subject of intense, conceptionally diverse and thematically controversial studies for about twenty years. The academic debate on this topic culminated in Gisela Bock's harsh criticism of Claudia Koonz's book on female agency and complicity in Nazism and the Holocaust (*Mothers in the Fatherland*, 1987). However, feminist debate on the degree to which women in the Third Reich should be viewed as victims or perpetrators is related to at least two additional, well-discussed issues. In contrast to research on the cult of motherhood that emphasizes the private dimensions of women's lives, the first issue concerns women's involvement in the public sphere as a result of the demands of a totalitarian state and total war. The second area of discussion focuses on the degree to which National Socialism substituted race for gender as the most important category of difference in modern society. Matthew Stibbe's aim is not to present new insights into these debates but "to offer a synthesis of the most recent research and to make some of the arguments and findings in German-language publications more accessible to readers of English" (p. 1). Even if much of the research on this topic has been published in English, Stibbe's book is highly welcomed as an overview of an extensive as well as confusing research field.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first deals with the role of women in the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis. Stibbe is correct in pointing out that German women were not particularly susceptible to Nazism. The second chapter provides an overview of the "incorporation of women into the Nazi state" and discusses the connection between the propaganda of motherhood and the actual development of birthrates. While these did slowly increase, most scholars have illustrated that this cannot be directly attributed to the popularity of Nazi pro-natalist policies. The third chapter traces the impact of Nazi racial polices, for example, in the gendered reactions of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans toward initial measures of racial terror, including pressure placed on couples of mixed marriages to divorce or the "Action T-4" (the "euthanasia" project). This chapter also considers women's roles as agents of Nazi racial policy, for example, as concentration camp guards or employees in the educational and welfare sectors among indigenous and "resettled" Germans in occupied Poland. In chapter four, "Women and Work," Stibbe contrasts the decline in female industrial labor in the 1930s and efforts to uphold this trend during the war (the regime feared that an increase in female labor would undermine morale at the front) with the brutality of the forced labor of civilian deportees, prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates. The fifth chapter highlights the

ambiguous nature of the opportunities that existed for girls of the *Bund deutscher Maedel* (League of German Girls) and, during the war, for an increasing number of female students. The totalitarian regime only "allowed" (and marked the boundaries of) such opportunities as a means to bolster the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community), and not to foster individual happiness. The sixth chapter gives an account of various types of opposition, resistance and non-conformity in this *Volksgemeinschaft*, as well as of Jewish women in hiding and in concentration camps. Finally, chapter 7 explores facets of everyday life and women's loyalty to the regime on the home front. Furthermore, Stibbe reviews recent research on denunciation as a crime of the weak against the strong; however, despite the many myths on this issue, denunciation was not a crime committed primarily by women.

Stibbe's integration of social-, political-, ideological-, and experiential-historical dimensions offers a reliable introduction to a central area of German gender history and the history of National Socialism. The book's simultaneous treatment of National Socialist and women's history is both a strength and a weakness. Extensive sections of the book present developments of "general" history without clear connection to questions concerning women or gender. Gender history is, however, not the subject of the book. It deals with women, and not with gender, men or masculinities, also not–or only rarely–with the relationship between men and women and masculinities and femininities. For the most part, the book offers a history of National Socialism based on women. This strategy might be in accordance with the aim of early women's history to make women in history visible. But the narrowness of this approach does not fully utilize the potential of methodological insights brought forth by gender studies, toward which women's history has long since developed, and it does not apply these insights as a main strand of analysis.

The three outlined areas of research motivate Stibbe's synthesis, but they remain in the background; they are also not discussed in relation to each other, a division apparent in three specific examples. First, Stibbe mentions the problematic of the perpetrator-victim construction, but its complexity is diminished in the actual analysis. For while personal characteristics of the victims of National Socialism and sometimes also of its opponents are highlighted through subjective sources or biographical illustrations, the perpetrators and sympathizers of the Nazi dictatorship remain anonymous. Because of this technique, the book–implicitly and perhaps unintentionally–tends to foster the demonization of a society of perpetrators, from which historical research, and especially women's history, has disassociated itself. Second, Stibbe treats contradiction between a gender ideology that revolves around motherhood and the family and the practical instrumentalization of women through the public dimension of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, but cannot resolve it. National Socialist discourse on gender was in no way actually fixated on the notion of the motherly woman, but instead employed a wide range of very different images of women (to which the female armament worker, the female pilot and the female warrior also belonged). This pluralism was certainly an instrument of the totalitarian *Volksgemeinschaft* and, moreover, was hierarchically divided according to the principle of rule and exception. In this respect, the "remasculinization" of the 1950s was an extension of this principle. Finally, Stibbe dedicates a specific chapter to the history of women before the Third Reich, but post-Nazi history is only mentioned in passing in a couple of remarks. The legacy of National Socialist women's history and the consequences of the gender-historical specificity of National Socialism are left open. This specificity (as the book repeatedly indicates) derived from the fact that the meaning of the category of gender was systematically relativized not only discursively, but also in practice. Race as a social criterion of order was substituted for gender. Certainly, the question of why gender differences nevertheless remained so influential cannot be answered by merely looking at women.

Women in the Third Reich presents a sound synthesis of an important research area that is appropriate for academic teaching as long as students are made aware of the boundaries of this research area and the gender history of National Socialism lacking in the book.

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