H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Nancy R. Reagin. *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 247 S. $82.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-84113-9.

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Published on H-German (April, 2007)

Cleanliness is Next to Germanness

In Berlin's flea markets, one can time-travel through the antique stalls that provide food for the imagination of historians taking a break from files in the nearby federal archives. Some of the most striking artifacts to migrate from German attics to the flea markets are the stacks of nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century linens, tablecloths, lace curtains and towels, many of them embroidered with proverbs like "Keep order, love it" and "Cleanliness brings joy." These testimonies to the daily existence of the *hausfrau* reinforce well-known stereotypes and jokes about German obsessions with order, discipline, and cleanliness that persist even today. Nancy R. Reagin's new book demonstrates that images associated with the German household and character actually provide an important site for reconstructing the ways in which everyday Germans, in particular women, defined their relationship to the nation. In this excellent social history of German identity, Reagin expertly uncovers the ways in which German women imagined and participated in the national community from the imperial through the National Socialist eras. A groundbreaking history of national identity from below, the book bypasses the public rituals and ceremonies that have too often been the focus of work on German nationalism. She concentrates instead on a world that affected the lives of virtually every German–domesticity–to reveal the interactions between public and private spheres and perceptions of German national character as it evolved through this critical period in German history.

Reagin places this volume in the larger context of a wide range of work on nationalism, while at the same time she carves out a new approach that makes a fascinating contribution to the field. Utilizing Benedict Anderson's perspective on the nation as an "imagined community" and Pierre Bourdieu's work on social habits and nationalism, Reagin asserts that constructions of national identity must be analyzed in broader spheres. In particular, nationalism has largely been presented as the work of men, with wars, revolutions, mass media, and public rituals drawing the bulk of historians' attention. However, Reagin asserts that one of the most important sites about gender and nationhood were rooted in the private sphere. Reagin's central argument, that housekeeping and domesticity were crucial sites of national identity, is carefully developed and though she perceives no *Sonderweg* in the history of German cleanliness and the uniqueness of German domestic values, she does suggest that in the context of 1914-45, the bourgeois ideal of domesticity in Germany became exceptionally politicized and nationalized. In fact, these "private" expressions of national identity, compared to the public rituals used to define the nation, were seen by contemporaries as the most stable foundation for ideals of nationhood through this intense period.

Reagin traces the construction of an ideal "German" housewife beginning in the *Kaiserreich*, when the German household became defined as a reflection of the nation that could be transplanted to other settings, including the German colonies, before 1914. The domestic ideals of order, thrift, cleanliness, and discipline increasingly

became politicized during World War I and the Weimar period and were eventually appropriated by the Nazis, who also tried to transplant "Germanness" through the domestic training of *Volksdeutsche* in occupied territories after 1939. Reagin's volume begins with an analysis of "the habitus of domesticity," with a focus on how primarily Protestant middle-class women cultivated norms of housekeeping and exerted social control through peer pressure and a growing body of advice books and institutions of domestic training in imperial Germany. Conforming to the standards of thrift and cleanliness became a means of expression that one was part of a "moral community" that was theoretically inclusive (reaching out to working-class, Catholic and Jewish women) and connected the household to a larger national character. Germanness had to be created after the unification, and the "German housewife" was a crucial site of developing a contrast to "French," "British," and "American" character and values, which were often portrayed as lacking in the discipline, cleanliness, and love of order German women were instructed to embrace. German women were exceptional, advice books taught, because they performed *QualitÃ¤tsarbeit* in a way that mirrored "German" masculine traits of industriousness and discipline. The symbols of German domesticity could be used to resuscitate floundering Germanness at home, especially in the cities, or in the colonies, where German families were in danger of forgetting their national values when surrounded by "dirty" social and ethnic groups. These increasingly exclusive concepts of "German" versus the (especially racial) "other" household would, Reagin argues, set the foundations in a "quiet way" for later Nazi racial theories (p. 62).

Reagin effectively balances women's letters found in an impressive range of regional and national archives with the popular periodicals of the time to reconstruct the perceptions of domestic identity and its relation to the nation. Her treasure trove of sources is effectively used to support her arguments that by the First World War and the 1920s, domesticity became increasingly politicized, as the purpose of housework changed from being a means of serving the family to serving the state. Stereotypes about German housewives and thrifty housekeeping became part of the "total war" mobilization of all aspects of social life. After 1918, housewife associations explicitly aligned themselves with middle-class right-wing parties and conservative groups attempted to mobilize mass politics to take control of aspects of domestic life left in chaos by mass violence, shortages, defeat, and revolution. The ideals of housekeeping would be taken to a new, racialized level and Reagin effectively demonstrates substantial continuity between imperial, Weimar, and Nazi ideals of domesticity, as National Socialism "cherry-picked" ideas and organizations into Nazi social policy, introducing more aggressive levels of coercion and compulsion (p. 111).

Building on past scholarship that linked Nazi visions of racial purity to pre-existing German gender ideals, Reagin highlights the reactionary modernism that characterized Nazi militarization of domestic life.[1] The values of thrift and cleanliness were the same, but the context had changed as the Nazis tried to manage what Reagin describes as an "autarkic household" and economy that could withstand rearmament and war (p. 145). Reagin demonstrates that women became an integral part of Nazi efforts at "Germanizing" *Volksdeutsche* in conquered eastern territories after 1939. German women engaged in "cleaning actions" in Polish homes, providing reports to the Nazi Women's League and SS about their progress in re-establishing the greater German Reich at the domestic level. Here Reagin carefully delineates the fine line between the bourgeois and racial elements of domesticity, as she points to evidence of German women seeing themselves as engaging in primarily the "embourgeoisiement" of ethnic Germans in the East. In this capacity, German women participated in the Nazi project of genocide by developing an "odd sort of patronizing maternal relationship with resettled ethnic German women," characterized by extensive inspection, cleaning, and control of homes until they met the standards of the traditional middle-class German household (p. 214).

One of the most fascinating elements of Reagin's work is her analysis of women within and outside German borders who resented Nazi intrusions into family life. Some women resisted interference by the state into their daily existence and they found the state's call for greater thriftiness condescending and unrealistic. Reagin uncovers interesting tensions between the regime's claim to empower women, or at least make them feel empowered by participating in the larger public policies, and resentment over the regime's aggressive scrutiny of private life. Perhaps her analysis of this phenomenon could have been developed further to define resistance and relate it to wider historiographical debates over these tensions. Her focus, however, on women who enthusiastically embraced and even defined Nazi social policy reveals fascinating new trends and Reagin adds significantly to the massive body of work on gender history in the Third Reich. In particular, Reagin takes the work of Claudia Koonz and other scholars to another level.[2] She demon-

strates that women participated in Nazi policy not only as male surrogates given limited power within Nazi bureaucracy and organizations, but that women also acted on their own, enthusiastically "creating and implementing Nazi family policy" at a level that was "lower key" than what has been observed in scholarship on women who played a role leading Nazi women's organizations (p. 222). Overall, Reagin makes a substantial contribution to a wide range of fields, including the history of nationalism, the social and cultural history of Germany during the age of total war, and gender studies. Reagin convincingly proves her argument that public rituals were far less important than private life in defining national identity and she points scholars in new directions for studying the ways in which nationalism and gender are defined from below.

Notes

[1]. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-45* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2]. Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).