

Mothers in the Fatherland - Woman, The Family, and Nazi Politics

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A good response

Nazism appealed to women who felt that sexual emancipation was not relevant to their needs. ^{AND CAN BE DISCARDED.} Not only did these women eagerly welcome the opportunity to serve the Nazi regime, they gladly accepted the secondary role assigned to them by the Nazi hierarchy. These points are brought out by Claudia Koonz in Mothers in the Fatherland, - Woman, The Family, and Nazi Politics (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987). Koonz is troubled by what she found and devotes much of her book ^{to it} ~~to~~ trying to show that not all women had accepted the Nazi rule. But her efforts in this area are not convincing. Koonz argues that some Catholic women and, of course, Jewish women, opposed the Nazis. Yet their opposition was so weak and ineffective that it was no more than a puny counterweight to the massive popular support and adulation Hitler enjoyed among German women in the Third Reich. Open dissent was out of the question. Either you obeyed Nazi directives or you were punished. Quiet opposition, such as that described by Koonz in the chapter on Catholic women, accomplished nothing in the face of massive and systematic repression. Anyway, it is unrealistic to expect that opposition to the Nazi regime could have been strong or widespread. The Nazi Party was firmly entrenched in Germany. Even the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler on July 20, 1944, did not topple the Nazi government, this while Germany was being obliterated from the air and German armies were being defeated on the ground. The Nazis were determined to maintain power, even in the face of total defeat. Perhaps this is best illustrated by a conversation that took place between a German woman named Bertha

Bremer and a German soldier one day before the British marched into Bremerhaven. Bremer recalled:

Ich sprach ihn an: "Sie wollen doch hier nicht mehr schießen? Bremerhaven ist doch ganz zerstört, und da gibt es doch nichts mehr zu verteidigen!" Er erwiderte: "Wir verteidigen uns bis zuletzt!" Darauf sagte ich: "Ich werde eine weiße Fahne aus dem Fenster hängen." Seine Antwort: "Die schießt' ich runter!"

In view of such fanaticism, the feeble opposition described by Koonz had absolutely no chance of succeeding.

Koonz shows that Nazism gave German women a sense of purpose in helping to create a new society, but there was a price to be paid. Soon their husbands, sons and brothers would have to go war. In Bis alles in Scherben fällt - Wie wir die Nazizeit erlebten 1939-1945, Bernt Engelmann, who served in the Luftwaffe during World War II, quotes a German woman as saying:

O ja, ich erinnere mich noch sehr gut, wie es damals war, im Herbst 1939, gleich nach Kriegsausbruch.... Alle Frauen in der Nachbarschaft und bei uns in Betrieb waren sehr bedrückt. Wir hatten Angst ... Auch der Männer, die noch daheim waren, verhielten sich ziemlich still, sogar die von der "Arbeitsfront," die sonst immer das grosse Wort führten. Und ich - ich hatte vor allem Angst um meinen Jungen, den Schorsch. Der war beim Militär, bei der Infanterie, und vom ersten Kriegstag an vorn an der Front, in Polen....

Moreover, by following Adolf Hitler, German women unwittingly placed their own lives and the lives of their families in danger. In 1985 Hanna Lambrecht recalled what she went through after her home in Bremerhaven was destroyed in an air raid.

Am 13. 2. 1944 zerstörte eine Bombe dieses

Haus. Ein Brandkanistervolltreffer liess nicht übrig! Nichts! Mit drei Generationen erlitten wir den Totalverlust sämtlicher Habe. Meine Grosseltern und Mutter rettete ihr nacktes Leben, meine Mutter mit schweren Brandwunden. Wir anderen waren, als die Bombe fiel (mittags), nicht daheim. Vorangegangenes und nachfolgendes Leid machte mein junges Leben zu einer einzigen Tragödie.²

What happened to Ms. Lambrecht and her family was terrible, but this was the price that many Germans had to pay because ^{for} of Nazi aggression. Nazism was not only a disaster for German women, but for the entire German people as well.

FOOTNOTES

1. Harald Neujahr, Das Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges im heutigen Bremerhaven (Ditzen Druck und Verlags-GmbH, Bremerhaven, 1985), p.10.
2. Bernt Engelmann, Bis alles in Scherben fällt - Wie wir die Nazizeit erlebten 1939-1945 (Verlag Kiepenheuer und Witsch, Köln, 1983), p.11.
3. Neujahr, p.29.