

Historiography of women in nazi germany



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In the entirety of World War II scholarship, a heavy interest has been paid to Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. Immediately following the end of the war, scholars and citizens alike have searched for a justifiable cause of one of the most inhumane eras of humankind. A large portion of the scholarship has focused on the men. Indeed, as Michelle Mouton states, “in the immediate postwar era, public explanation blamed Hitler and his henchmen for the Nazi crimes,” however, “subsequent historical scholarship, media, and autobiographies have revealed a more widespread societal and personal responsibility.”

While the initial interest in the Nazi Regime studied the actions and ideologies of the men at the top echelons of Nazi power, recent study has also turned away from just Hitler and his henchmen to include lower levels of Nazi party members and ordinary people. This study of ordinary people in the realm of Nazi Germany includes women. Perhaps the most well known of the debates in the field of women's history in Nazi Germany is the Historikerinnenstreit, perhaps all the more well known because of its two opponents-Claudia Koonz and Gisela Bock.

Though multifaceted in depth, one major theme of the argument is the role of women-were they Opfer (victims), as Bock suggests, or Täterinnen (Perpetrators), as Koonz argues. The Historikerinnenstreit mirrors the Historikerstreit happening between male historians around roughly the same time. While the Historikerinnenstreit is not the primary focus of this review, it does pose an interesting question of how scholars in the 67 years since the end of war have handled German women in the realm of National Socialism.

Is the debate the same now as it was then? Were women either victims or perpetrators? Did women have any agency? Has the methodology changed any in seven decades to allow for new interpretations of women in a National Socialistic state? What has been revealed in this review, though hardly exhaustive, is the Historikerinnenstreit, in its traditional sense, has added some new dimensions. The study of women in the NS-State is not as binary as it once was. Indeed, this review serves less to update the status of the traditional

Historikerinnenstreit, than to review the literature over the last fifty years about women within the NS-State. How did the regime see women? What was their ideal woman? How consistent are the policies of the Nazi regime to those of the Weimar Republic? How did, or did, the engendered policies of affect women? How do they view their own lives under the swastika? Certainly, elements of the domestic policies bind all of this literature with a threat of commonality, but recent scholarship, in particular, has ventured further away from the safety of previous research to view women in a new light.