

SUMMARY

A clever housewife knows how to remove a stain - Women's magazines in Nazi Germany

*Kira Gronow / Finland
Freie Universität Berlin / EJF-Program
20.7.2016*

In this research I study the history and significance of women's magazines in the Third Reich. German society during the 1930s was a society of readers. Many of the journals greatly profited from the economic upturn after 1933, and the circulation figures rose considerably. Thus the women's magazines were an important part of the everyday life of German women.

The research concentrates mainly on the magazine NS-Frauenwarte, which was the only Nazi Party approved periodical for women. In general, the Nazis established only a few new magazines. The Frauenwarte was the most popular women's journal in Hitler's Germany with more than 1,4 million subscribers. It was published between 1932-1945 and came out biweekly. After the Second World War broke out in 1939, many other magazines were closed down due to the shortage of paper.

The studies of war history have mostly focused on men, as have the studies of Nazi Germany. Women's role in the war has traditionally been silent history. Also the women's magazines during the Nazi era have been under-researched, and this created some obstacles to my study. It has not been properly understood that the magazines had many social and political functions.

To give a historical perspective to the women's journals, I examine the role of German women in the 1930s and 1940s, and the German media landscape in the Third Reich. In the light of recent studies the role of women in Nazi Germany was more significant than has been thought before. Women were also active participants in the Nazi regime and *not* just victims of the war or innocent "Trümmerfrauen", as has been previously often described.

In addition, I take a look at the history of the National Socialist women's organisations. The NS-Frauenwarte magazine was originally put out by the women's organisation NS-Frauenschaft. I also examine the ideal woman in the Nazi view - the German woman was supposed to be natural and decent, strong and vigorous.

What has also interested me is that many Germans actually enjoyed their lives in the Third Reich and lived quite ordinarily. There are several studies in which Germans talk about their wonderful childhood and youth in the 1930s. On the basis of reading women's magazines of the Nazi years it seems that life was convenient and pleasant - both the war and the Nazi terror were distant. The Germans learned to "look the other way". According to some historians the popular magazines were very much part of this "training to look away" and were therefore anything but harmless.

Despite the Nazi Party connection, the content of the NS-Frauenwarte was surprisingly unpolitical. The Frauenwarte was mainly like any other women's journal

in other countries - it had recipes, fashion articles, sewing and knitting patterns, short stories, movie reviews, reader competitions, and so on. It was to a large extent a women's magazine on the American model. It was also a well-edited journal. The Nazis were skilled communicators and apparently wanted to put resources in the *Frauenwarte*.

On the other hand, the seemingly unpolitical content was also the aim of the Ministry of Propaganda, RMVP. It instructed that people should have entertainment and pleasure; too much proselytising would just turn them away. The Nazis invested heavily in different types of entertainment - magazines, radio, music and film. The popular magazines of the Nazi era have been even described as "feel-good" mass media.

The NS-*Frauenwarte* had mostly subtle or positive propaganda. There were only a few examples of negative or antisemitic propaganda. The magazine glorified German women and mothers. The *kinderreich* family was the Nazi ideal, and every woman was supposed to have at least four children. Gradually women were also encouraged to be workers for the war effort. All this was apparent on the pages of the *Frauenwarte*.

In one chapter I take a closer look at the content of the NS-*Frauenwarte*, especially at the advice articles. Even the advertisements of the magazine are interesting - it was somewhat striking to notice that many of the companies advertising still exist and have advertisements in popular magazines of today.

The most popular content of the women's magazines was the advice columns. The wartime periodicals were full of tips: how to remove a stain, how to wash empty bottles, how to cook with rye flour, and so on. The readers were most interested in practical and domestic themes - escapism was not as important for the German women. Virtues of saving and parsimony were the underlying message of the advice articles. However, there was also some escapist content in the magazines. For example, on the last Christmas of the war the *Frauenwarte* had advice for charming Christmas presents and recipes for delicious bakery.

In the last chapter of the study I compare the NS-*Frauenwarte* with the Finnish women's magazine *Kotiliesi* from the same period. Just like the *Frauenwarte* in Germany, the *Kotiliesi* was the most prominent women's journal in Finland during wartime. I noticed many similarities between the magazines. Even the layout and the sewing patterns of the journals are quite alike. That is perhaps not a surprise knowing that the editor-in-chief of the *Kotiliesi* had sympathies for National Socialism. Yet, this is a topic that has been rarely discussed in Finland and would require further studies.

What might also interest Finnish readers, is that I found several positive articles in the NS-*Frauenwarte* about Finland. This reflects the military treaty and cooperation that Nazi Germany and Finland had during the war.