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***Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization.* By Elizabeth Harvey. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2003. Pp. xx + 384. \$40.00. ISBN 0-300-10040-X.**

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Elizabeth Harvey provides an exhaustive analysis of women who worked to enact Nazi Germanization policy in occupied Poland and points east during the Second World War. She presents an important case of the politicization and racialization of stereotypically feminine activities such as housekeeping and childraising. Her book leaves the reader impressed anew with the very massiveness [**End Page 521**] of the Nazi campaign in Eastern Europe, and with the manifold ways in which civilian Germans—in this case civilian women, mostly from the Altreich—were involved at or near the front. This book is a necessary contribution to two recent literatures: on German women and nationalism, and on German and other European women as colonizers.

As kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, social welfare workers, and settlement advisors (*Siedlungsberaterinnen*), these women focused their efforts on local ethnic Germans in the Warthegau and General Government as well as on ethnic Germans resettled to those areas from Volhynia, Galicia, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Dobrudja, and the Baltic. The women's specific duties and the geographical areas to which they were dispatched varied with Nazi policy changes in the classification of potential ethnic Germans and with the shifting combat front. They worked under the auspices of organizations such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend*, *Studentischer Landdienst*, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft nationalsozialistischer Studentinnen*, the *Landjahr*, *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*, the *NS-Frauenschaft*, and *Bund deutscher Mädel*, and under Himmler in his capacity as *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*.

After the introduction and a chapter on Weimar nationalist women's activism regarding the eastern borderlands, Harvey turns to the Nazi period proper. Chapter three discusses the incorporation into Nazi organizations of existing programs for women's activism in the East; chapter four describes how recruiters targeted particular groups of women, such as students and teachers. The women were likely to perceive the East through the lens of Nazi and older German

ideology about Eastern Europe as colonial space, the subject of chapter five. Additional chapters are organized by occupational category: settlement advisors (chapter six), schoolteachers (chapter seven), and kindergarten teachers (chapter eight). Each of these chapters, as well as the chapter on recruitment, concludes with material from Harvey's own interviews with women who worked in those capacities in the East. Chapter nine uses an unusually detailed diary to depict the eleventh-hour effort to establish a school for women village advisors (*Dotfbemterinnen*) in Zamo in the General Government. The last full-length chapter is on the retreat westwards in the last months of the war, followed by an epilogue.

The women's task was to render their ethnic German neighbors and clients—persons already classified as "German"—somehow more German. Being German consisted of, for example, distancing oneself from Polish neighbors, ceasing to use the Polish language or attend Polish-language mass, being clean and orderly, choosing spartan and modern home decor over "kitsch," and insisting on a gendered role division in farm work. The extent to which these women effectively conveyed such vague imperatives, and the extent to which their clients received and acted upon them cannot be easily quantified. Moreover, the sources used here inform us primarily about how the **[End Page 522]** Germanizing women saw their interactions with the ethnic German villagers and townspeople, not the other way around. Harvey conveys that in the main, relationships between teachers or advisors and their students or clients were marked by condescension of *Reichsdeutsche* to *Volksdeutsche* and by gulfs of class, religion, and degree of urbanization, quite apart from political differences over Nazism. Harvey is also at pains to mention more unusual scenarios, however, to give a comprehensive portrait of these interactions, and so we also learn of teachers and advisors who admire Polish neighbors for their decency and skill, and who criticize the Nazi organizations for neglecting the resettlers' basic needs, especially in the months of retreat. Indeed, the book surveys an unexpectedly varied landscape of these women's intentions, politicization, and memory, rather than offering the reader a unitary argument or polemic. Harvey poses open-ended questions about how the women came to be there, what they experienced and knew at the time, and how they have interpreted those years in retrospect, and her dissection of both questions and answers is exemplary.

The question of these women's complicity in Nazi racial imperialism and genocide is central to the book. Harvey seeks to distinguish, as much as her sources and the historical context permit, between "activists" and "willing conformists," between ideological commitment and interest in career advancement (p. 14). The organizations seeking to send women to the East never had an adequate supply of applicants, and so only compulsion of some sort (e.g., requiring a Labor Service term of those seeking university admission, p. 59) kept some women on the job. Some women found work in the East after Nazi policies had pushed them out of work in the Altreich (in youth welfare, for example, p. 55). Others were inspired to apply because of the ideologically laden rural, frontier setting, which they identified with freedom and adventure. Harvey's interviews especially allow her to ask direct questions about what the women knew at the time, and to discuss for her readers how these women remembered their work and its place in larger Nazi projects.

Once in the East, women of varied levels of political commitment lived among (Christian) Poles and to some extent (given ghettoization and deportation), among local and displaced Jews. They certainly knew of forced removals from homes, because they made use of these victims' homes

and furnishings themselves and for their ethnic German clients. Sometimes the erstwhile owners and residents even remained in the area, as forced laborers in lesser accommodations. Harvey can repeatedly show how virtually all the women advisors and teachers accepted such expropriations and deportations as morally unobjectionable. She also presents evidence of more direct complicity, in those cases where the women assisted in the seizures of property or reported minor misdeeds of Poles that ended in the latter's deportation and eventual death (p. 76). For the most part, however, persons other than ethnic German clients are **[End Page 523]** simply absent from the women's contemporary and later accounts. In general, Harvey's study indicates once more the strength of non-targeted Germans' reluctance to ask about or to consider consciously the fates of those deemed inferior to the Germans. The conflation of Nazi racial goals with supposedly apolitical "women's" skills and tasks certainly assisted them in sustaining their limited perception.

At 301 densely printed pages of text, this book is long for an undergraduate teaching text. It might have benefited from some compression; for all the specificity of occupational groups and the variety of responses that Harvey uncovers, there is repetition in each chapter at the level of general conclusions. Advanced students and graduate students will benefit from her careful discussion of analytical considerations concerning her sources and of debates over women's roles in Nazism. She has done an impressive job of collecting widely dispersed and scarce sources, and the result sheds much light not only on the themes of gender, nationalism, and colonialism as mentioned above, but on the complex episode of Nazi empire in Eastern Europe.