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BETWEEN GRETCHEN AND VALKYRIE¹ THE MODEL OF WOMANHOOD IN THE CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE OF THE LEAGUE OF GERMAN GIRLS (1933–1945)

The history of the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*, BDM) has long remained a marginal topic in research concerning the history of the Third Reich. The organisation has been presented either as an element of the history of the Hitlerjugend² or in the context of analyses of the position of women in the structure of the Nazi state.³ It was only in 1983 that a monograph was published by Martin Klaus devoted in its entirety to the BDM, being a development of that author's doctoral thesis.⁴ Further academic studies concerning the League would not appear for almost another two decades. In 2000 a book by Sabine Herring and Kurt Schilde was published about the *Glaube und Schönheit* ("Faith and Beauty") organisation, a structure set up in 1938 within the BDM.⁵ Deeper knowledge about the League itself was also supplied by a work by Gisela Miller-Kipp⁶ and a collection of texts edited by Dagmar Reese.⁷ The first Polish article about the history of the structure

¹ The terms "Gretchen" and "Valkyrie" come from a 1937 article in the magazine *Das Deutsche Mädel*. Cf. *Die BDM-Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus*, D. Reese (ed.), Belin 2007, p. 238.

² A key role here is played by the works of Arno Klönne, Guido Knopp and Michael Kater: A. Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich. Die Hitlerjugend und ihre Gegner*, 3rd edn., Cologne 2008; G. Knopp, *Hitlers Kinder*, 2000; M. Kater, *Hitlerjugend*, 2004.

³ Cf. A. Böltken, *Führerinnen im „Führerstaat“*, Pfaffenweiler 1995; H. Manns, *Frauen für den Nationalsozialismus*, Opladen 1997; G.T. Szepansky, „Blitzmädel“, „Heldenmütter“, „Kriegerwitwe“. *Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt am Main 1989; K. Kompisch, *Täterinnen. Frauen im Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne 2008.

⁴ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung zur Zeit der faschistischen Herrschaft in Deutschland – Der Bund Deutscher Mädel*, Frankfurt am Main 1983. An abridged version of this book was titled *Mädchen im Dritten Reich*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, republished 1998.

⁵ S. Herring, K. Schilde, *Das BDM-Werk „Glaube und Schönheit“*. *Die Organisation junger Frauen im Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd edn., Opladen 2004.

⁶ G. Miller-Kipp, „Der Führer braucht mich“. *Der Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM): Lebenserinnerungen und Erinnerungsdiskurs*, Weinheim-Munich 2007.

⁷ *Die BDM-Generation...*

was by Agnieszka Sobieszczyk, and appeared in the journal *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis* in 2004.⁸

While the aforementioned publications filled a gap in the picture of the activities of the BDM, they did not focus on the cultural phenomenon of that organisation – its promotion of a new lifestyle among its members, often against the will of the Nazi leadership. Indeed, the League was significant not only in terms of its numbers (following the *Anschluss* of Austria it counted almost four million girls among its members). Independently of its totalitarian affiliations and the criminal nature of the ideology that it served, it was also a structure that stimulated the process of girls' "emancipation" – even if that emancipation was not accepted by the authorities of the BDM.

The present article will look at the League's history from a different angle: not primarily as a description of the organisation, but as an analysis of one element of its activities – the model of womanhood that it promoted, in both theoretical and practical dimensions. The notion of a model is understood here as a certain ideal picture of the desired features of the female sex and the relations between the sexes, both during adolescence and in adulthood. This image is confronted with the forms of activity carried on within the BDM by its ordinary members and functionaries (the *Führerinnen*). The analysis is based on historical methodology, and considers a number of separate issues, taking account of the evolution of the League's aims and forms of activity over the twelve years of the existence of the Third Reich.

The text concerns what is called in the subject literature the "BDM generation" – people born after 1900 and before 1933. These limits are of a conventional nature, and arise from the specific nature of the source material.⁹ In reality there are three groups of representatives of the BDM generation: women born before 1918 (the background from which the League's leaders came), those born in 1918–1928 (the mid-ranking *Führerinnen*), and those born after 1928 (ordinary members of the organisation and lower-ranking *Führerinnen*).

The article is based on the accounts, published after the war, of women who had belonged to the BDM. There are good reasons for this choice of sources. Unlike in the case of other Nazi organisations, the number of available documents relating to the BDM is limited, since most of the files of the Hitlerjugend leadership were destroyed at the end of the war. In turn, surviving copies of the League's own publications speak more about the official models promoted by the organisation than about the true face of the BDM. The situation with narrative sources is different. From the end of the Second World War onwards, the memoirs of many former members of

⁸ A. Sobieszczyk, *Związek Dziewcząt Niemieckich w systemie nazistowskiej indoktrynacji*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Studia nad Faszyzmem and Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi*, 2004, vol. XX-VII. The author of that article made limited use of diary sources.

⁹ Authors of texts about the League often restrict the meaning of the term "BDM generation" to the years 1918–1932. Cf. *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 13.

the League were published in West Germany. The value of these may sometimes be questioned, but by way of comparison and appropriate criticism they serve as a valuable source of information on the functioning of the BDM “from within”.

The memoirs used in the article were written in several different periods. The earliest accounts date from the end of the 1940s¹⁰ A significant watershed came with the publishing in 1963 of the diaries of Melita Maschmann,¹¹ which met with critical reactions from some former BDM members.¹² Further memoirs appeared in the late 1970s,¹³ followed by a heavy crop in the 1980s. A key role was played by the monograph by Martin Klaus, and particularly its second volume, which contained the author’s interviews with former BDM activists, including Trude Mohr and Jutta Rüdiger.¹⁴ The second of these responded to Klaus’s publication with her own description of history of the League.¹⁵ Independently of Rüdiger’s text, whose value is disputed, there appeared in the 1980s a number of extremely valuable memoirs by BDM members: Eva Zeller,¹⁶ Margarete Hannsmann,¹⁷ Eva Sternheim-Peters,¹⁸ Carola Stern,¹⁹ Hildegard Fritsche,²⁰ and Ursula Meyer-Semlies.²¹ Another wave of diaries appeared in the 1990s, which saw the publication of a set of accounts edited by Helmut and Loki Schmidt²² the memoirs of Lore Walb,²³ and – of more questionable significance – the diaries of Jutta Rüdiger.²⁴ The final phase of publications, in the first decade of the 21st century, included the memoirs

¹⁰ These accounts were used in the work of Gisela Miller-Kipp.

¹¹ M. Maschmann, *Fazit, mein Weg in der Hitler-Jugend. Kein Rechtfertigungsversuch*, Stuttgart 1964.

¹² Texts “correcting” Maschmann’s self-critical accounts appeared frequently in the neo-Nazi press.

¹³ At the end of the 1970s there appeared the first editions of the memoirs of Renate Finkh and Ilse Koehn (the author has used later editions): R. Finkh, *Sie versprachen uns die Zukunft. Eine Jugend im Nationalsozialismus*, Tübingen 2002; I. Koehn, *Mischling zweiten Grades. Eine wahre Geschichte*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1991.

¹⁴ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung zur Zeit der faschistischen Herrschaft in Deutschland*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, Frankfurt am Main 1983.

¹⁵ J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund Deutscher Mädel. Eine Richtigstellung*, Lindhorst 1984.

¹⁶ E. Zeller, *Solange ich denken kann. Roman einer Jugend*, Stuttgart 1981.

¹⁷ M. Hannsmann, *Der helle Tag bricht an. Ein Kind wird Nazi*, Hamburg 1982.

¹⁸ E. Sternheim-Peters, *Die Zeit der grossen Täuschungen. Mädchenleben im Faschismus*, Bielefeld 1987.

¹⁹ C. Stern, *In den Netzen der Erinnerung. Lebensgeschichten zweier Menschen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1986. The memoirs of Carola Stern combine accounts by the author herself and by her husband Heinz Zöger.

²⁰ H. Fritsche, *Land mein Land*, Oldendorf 1986.

²¹ U. Meyer-Semlies, *Glockenläuten und Kanonendonner. Eine Kindheit und Jugend in Ostpreußen 1914–1945*, Marxen 1989.

²² H. Schmidt, L. Schmidt, *Kindheit und Jugend unter Hitler*, Berlin 2012 (first edition: 1992).

²³ L. Walb, *Ich, die Alte – ich, die Junge. Konfrontation mit meinen Tagebüchern 1933–1945*, Berlin 1998.

²⁴ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben für die Jugend. Mädführerin im Dritten Reich*, [Rosenheim] 1999.

of Margaret Aull-Fürstenberg²⁵ and Loki Schmidt,²⁶ and further diaries by Carola Stern.²⁷

Information has also been taken from collections of accounts documenting the general picture of childhood at the time of the Third Reich, chiefly with regard to the role played by schools in raising German youth of both sexes.²⁸ Little use could be made, however, of the memoirs of the two heads of the Hitlerjugend, Baldur von Schirach²⁹ and Artur Axmann.³⁰ The first of these did not mention the name BDM at all, and did not refer to any specific person from the League. Axmann, in turn, while recalling the history of the BDM, did so exclusively within the context of considerations of the Hitlerjugend as a whole.

To enable an analysis to be made of the question addressed in this article, a general outline of the Nazi model of womanhood will first be given, in its theoretical and practical dimensions. It will also be necessary to present some key facts relating to the history of the BDM. Both of these topics are covered succinctly, only to the extent necessary for the presentation of the main subject of the article.

THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST MODEL OF WOMANHOOD IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

In Nazi ideology, the role of a woman was considered from both a political and a biological and racial standpoint. Politically she was exclusively an object of historical processes, and her characteristics (physical weakness, emotionality) endowed her with a “subordinate” role in society. A much greater role was assigned to a woman in the biological context. Her reproductive functions made her a guarantee of the survival and purity of the German race in its struggle for world domination. Out of this vision grew the Nazi model of womanhood, the ideal picture of a “German woman” – wife, mother, and guardian of the household. A condition *sine qua non* for the fulfilment of these roles was, firstly, that the woman must be “Aryan”, and secondly that she must not carry hereditary diseases (physical, intellectual or psychic). The “German woman” was to wear feminine but unprovocative clothes, not

²⁵ M. Aull-Fürstenberg, *Lebenslüge Hitler-Jugend. Aus dem Tagebuch eines BDM-Mädchens*, Vienna 2001.

²⁶ L. Schmidt, *Erzähl doch mal von früher. Loki Schmidt im Gespräch mit Reinhold Beckmann*, Munich 2011 (first published 2008). Schmidt’s memoirs cover most of her life; about one-third of the book concerns the period before 1945.

²⁷ C. Stern, „Uns wirft nichts mehr um“. *Eine Lebensreise*, T. Schadt (ed.), Reinbek bei Hamburg 2005; idem, *Doppelleben*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2006.

²⁸ *Pimpfe, Mädels und andere Kinder. Kindheit in Deutschland 1933-1939*, J. Kleindienst (ed.), Berlin 1998; *Unvergessene Schulzeit. 1921–1962. 68 Erinnerungen von Schülern und Lehrern*, idem (ed.), Berlin 2007.

²⁹ B. von Schirach, *Ich glaubte an Hitler*, Hamburg 1967.

³⁰ A. Axmann, *Hitlerjugend. „Das kann doch nicht das Ende sein“*, Koblenz 1995.

to use artificial means of enhancing her beauty (make-up, dyeing of hair), and to avoid cigarettes and alcohol. Because of her emotional lability she could not perform party or state functions (in parliament or in the government, for example), although she was not excluded from membership of the NSDAP or activity within the Nazi women's organisations. Women could work only for a limited time (until they married) and only in "women's" professions – as teachers (in girls' schools), nurses or social careers. Girls' education was consequently seen as a subsidiary matter, or even as posing a risk, since it might lead to unnecessary intellectual ambition and a desire to "equal" men.³¹

Up to 1933 this model of womanhood was favoured by most of the party's supporters, but not without exception. Particularly among the female members of the "movement" there was a dominant perception of the need for the female sex to be valued more highly, through an increase in the role of women in the party itself or elevation of the status of the Nazi women's structures.³² However, when the NSDAP took power in the spring of 1933 the voice of these "emancipists" was suppressed, and the women's organisations functioning in the Third Reich – the *Nationalsozialistischer Frauenbund* (NSF) and *Deutsches Frauenwerk* (DFW) – became tools for the realisation of the Nazi vision of the German woman.³³ Although the head of both of these structures, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, received the spectacular title of *Reichsfrauenführerin* ("Leader of the Women of the Reich"), this did not translate into any real political position or contact with the leaders of the state.³⁴

This does not change the fact that the model of womanhood promoted by the Nazis proved, in the long run, to be an impermanent construct. Even in the second half of the 1930s, with the intensification of German arms production and the transfer of men to heavy industry, women began to play the role of a reserve labour force – for example, in light industries, trade and services. This phenomenon intensified during the war, in view of the shortage of men for work and the growing military needs. Experts agree that it was the work of German women (alongside foreign forced labour) that enabled the Nazis to prolong the war in spite of their telling military defeats.³⁵

³¹ K. Kompisch, *Täterinnen...*, pp. 19ff.

³² K. Fontaine, *Nationalsozialistische Aktivistinnen (1933–1945)*, Würzburg 2003, pp. 23ff. There were many women's organisations with Nazi sympathies in Germany up to the early 1930s.

³³ The NSF was founded in 1931 for women with Nazi views. The DFW was founded in 1934 for all women, including those who had previously belonged to other parties or women's organisations (such as church organisations).

³⁴ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink was a model mother (she raised her husbands' children as well as her own), but not a model wife: after being widowed, she married for the second time in 1932, but this marriage failed after six years, not without guilt on her part.

³⁵ In July 1944 almost 50% of German women in towns were engaged in paid employment. In rural areas they made up almost 100% of the labour force. C. Seifert, *Aus Kindern werden Leute, aus Mädchen werden Bräute. Die 50er und 60er Jahre*, Munich 2006, p. 35.

A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The League of German Girls (BDM), founded in 1930, differed from the very start from the women's structures operating within the "movement". The author of its programmes was Baldur von Schirach, who from October 1931 held the post of *Jugendführer* – head of the Nazi youth organisation, the Hitlerjugend.³⁶ Unlike many of the leaders of the NSDAP, he favoured raising the status of the BDM and increasing its numbers.³⁷ As a result of Schirach's decisions, the League was opened up to younger members (aged 10-14 years), while its leader (the *Bundesführerin*, later *BDM-Reichsreferentin*) acquired the right to designate her subordinates up to regional (*Obergau*) level.³⁸ An even greater change was brought by the rule introduced in July 1932 that made the BDM the exclusive representative organisation of German girls from 10 to 18 years of age. In practice this meant the liquidation of the girls' structures within the *Nationalsozialistischer Frauenbund* (NSF), which had been founded in July 1931.³⁹

Contemporary documents of the BDM reveal clear differences between the model of womanhood promoted by the NSF and the vision put forward by Schirach. While the League's programme of July 1932 made clear that the organisation was not to have an "emancipatory" character, the BDM propaganda materials suggested something else. Leaflets referred to the need to involve girls in the work of "national renewal" and to break with the model of "little women" (*Weibchen*) or "dolls" (*Modepüppchen*). One recruitment poster appealed to women directly to "Fight together with us!" ("*Kämpft mit uns!*").⁴⁰

The growth in the League's membership in the year 1932 (from around 2000 to 24,000) was a result not only of the growth in the popularity of the National Socialists and of the Hitlerjugend as a whole. In the case of the BDM, equally important were certain specific features of that organisation – its relative autonomy within the Hitlerjugend and its more modern treatment of girls' aspirations.⁴¹ These advantages were manifested at the first *Reichsjugendtag* (National Youth Day) organised by Schirach in Potsdam in October 1932. The Hitlerjugend representatives who marched in the presence of Adolf Hitler included a significant group of girls from the BDM.⁴²

³⁶ Schirach's promotion to leader of the Hitlerjugend was a result of his earlier achievements as head of the Nazi students' organisation (1928–1931).

³⁷ The organisation's full name was *Bund Deutscher Mädel in der Hitlerjugend*.

³⁸ *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 93. The structure for younger girls was given the name *Jungmädel* (JM).

³⁹ A. Axmann, *op. cit.*, p. 66. This decision also led to the closure of the girls' section of the Nazi schoolchildren's league.

⁴⁰ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, pp. 154-155.

⁴¹ This motif is repeated in the diaries of then members of the *Jugendbewegung* – a conglomerate of organisations operating in Germany from the early twentieth century. Cf. *Die BDM-Generation...*, pp. 62-63.

⁴² B. von Schirach, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161. Newspapers that were critical of the Nazis pointed out the appalling sanitary conditions at the meeting, including in terms of the discomfort that must have been felt by the girls taking part.

A spectacular growth in the membership numbers and the status of the BDM, however, came in 1933, after the Nazis took power in Germany. In the first year of the existence of the Third Reich, following the liquidation of most existing girls' organisations, as well as the arrival of new members who had not previously belonged to any organisation, the League's membership swelled to approximately 600,000. Further increases in numbers followed from the "Youth Act" of December 1936, which made membership of the Hitlerjugend/BDM formally compulsory for those aged 10-18. In 1939 the League's ranks consisted of more than 3.5 million girls (out of a total of over 8 million Hitlerjugend members).⁴³ In this way the Nazi girls' organisation became the largest structure of its kind in the Western world.

With the growth in the BDM's membership, changes were also made as regards personnel policy. As early as December 1932, no doubt as a result of pressure from "traditionalists" within the party, the post of head of the League was given to the then leader of the NSF, Lydia Gottschewski (who herself was relatively independent in her ideas). In the summer of 1933 she was persuaded to resign from both positions, as a result of which the post of head of the BDM remained vacant for almost a year.⁴⁴ By June 1934 Schirach was strong enough to entrust the position to an activist who had been linked to the BDM from the very beginning. This was Trude Mohr, a postal clerk, respected for her work in setting up the League's structures in Berlin and Brandenburg.⁴⁵

The change of leadership was accompanied by a process of defining more precisely the League's goals. Schirach stated in November 1933 that the BDM was to raise girls, and not "future mothers". As an integral part of the Hitlerjugend, the League served as the girls' component of the Nazi youth organisation. According to Schirach's ideas, which accorded with the vision of Hitler himself, girls had the right to develop their abilities equally with boys.⁴⁶ In practice, this meant that the BDM practised forms of activity similar to those of the boys' section of the Hitlerjugend, such as sports, hiking, and summer camps in tents. In both structures, emphasis was placed on ideological development and participation in mass political events.

This uniformity of activities within the whole Hitlerjugend nonetheless had its limits. As a result of critical voices concerning the "masculinisation" of the BDM, and the evolution of the views of Schirach himself, in 1936 an adjustment was made to the League's programmes. There was a move away from "male" customs (assemblies summoned by whistle, sleeping in tents), while training in household skills was introduced. The changes reached their peak in January 1938, when the "Faith and Beauty" (*BDM-Werk Glaube und Schönheit*) organisation was founded for women

⁴³ *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 114. Gisela Miller-Kipp writes of as many as four million League members; G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ M. Klaus, *Mädchen...*, p. 86.

⁴⁵ From the account of Trude Mohr; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, pp. 17-19.

⁴⁶ *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 100.

aged 18-21. The new structure had the aim of developing suppleness and providing opportunities for the pursuit of “womanly” interests.

Together with the changes to the League’s educational model, Schirach also made a symptomatic change in the post of *BDM-Referentin*. In the autumn of 1937 Trude Mohr was replaced by Jutta Rüdiger, a doctor of psychology who had been the head of one of the League’s regions.⁴⁷ She became a symbol of the further transformations in the organisation which resulted from the outbreak of war. At that time, BDM members took on additional responsibilities – not only “womanly” tasks like childcare and first aid, but also strictly “male” roles such as anti-aircraft defence. The increased quantity of duties and taking on of additional tasks by the BDM endured until the fall of the Third Reich.

THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE BDM’S PROGRAMMES

Formally, the League of German Girls was an integral part of the Hitlerjugend and worked for the goals laid down in the programmes of the organisation as a whole. It was to raise the young “for nation and fatherland”, ready to subordinate themselves to the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and to feel a sense of responsibility for its fate.⁴⁸ In the service of these aims, however, the BDM leadership developed its own vision of the objectives of upbringing, suited to a structure whose members were girls. The League’s propaganda materials promoted the model of a future “life partner” for a German man; of a woman who would not be the traditional “Gretchen” or *femme fatale*, but would not play the role of the mythical Valkyrie either. “The Third Reich needs national socialist women who have a clear mind, are modern, and live according to our contemporary times” – these words appear in the conclusion of an article by an anonymous female writer in the magazine *Das Deutsche Mädel*.⁴⁹

In fact the model of womanhood adopted by the BDM was a long way both from the haut bourgeois vision of a “young lady from a good home” and from the concept presented by the NSF. Evidence of the complexity of the picture of a woman as seen in the BDM programmes is provided by the post-war accounts of the League’s leaders. According to Trude Mohr, the League aimed to impart to its members a belief in the “equality of birth and rights” of both sexes, while at the same time accepting the “significant differences” between them. In this vision, women and men were perceived as beings that complemented each other, not only in marriage, but within the whole of the national community.⁵⁰ A similar view was expressed after the war by Jutta Rüdiger. She writes that the BDM leadership were aware that it was not pos-

⁴⁷ The official reason for Mohr’s departure was not her marriage, but the resulting pregnancy.

⁴⁸ From the account of Luise Michel, head of the *Führerinnen* school in Potsdam, and later head of the Akademie der Jugendführung. *Die BDM-Generation...*, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 238.

⁵⁰ From the account of Trude Mohr; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 23.

sible to cut across social realities and women's "natural calling". On the other hand Rüdiger, a doctor of psychology, proved by her own example the possibility of realising an alternative model of womanhood. The principle of "choice" of a future life path was said to differentiate the objectives of the League from the vision presented by the NSF. The BDM made it its task to show girls "the possibilities within themselves" and thus to strengthen their feeling of their own value. However, this did not entail a reference to the vision of "female emancipation", which was condemned both socially and intellectually as being inconsistent with the "biological" heritage and the social order.⁵¹ Instead, the ambitious were offered a feeling of responsibility, borne equally by both sexes. "Act as if the fate of the German Cause depended on you and your actions alone" was a maxim adopted as a motto for the activities of BDM members.⁵²

HISTORICAL PERSONAGES AS MODELS FOR BDM MEMBERS

In spite of efforts to establish a coherent model of womanhood, the leadership of the BDM had a problem with illustrating its vision with real-life examples. The internal inconsistencies in the programmes and the fear of excessive aspirations on the part of BDM members in fact led to an avoidance of references to outstanding female historical figures. An additional difficulty was that there were few such models in German history. The League thus referred only to a single historical heroine – the Prussian Queen Luise, wife of Friedrich Wilhelm III. This queen had become a legend in the era of Romanticism. She was famed not only for her beauty, but also for the role she played during Napoleonic times. At the peace negotiations at Tilsit in 1807 she stood before Napoleon himself, ready to "make a woman's sacrifice" to rescue the integrity of the Prussian kingdom.⁵³ Among contemporary women, the only model figure invoked by the BDM was Agnes Miegel, a poet and ballad writer from East Prussia and a supporter of the NSDAP, who frequently appeared at the League's events.⁵⁴

In spite of the modest nature of the official "pantheon" of Nazi models of women in BDM propaganda, members of the League often had their own models of heroic women. The need to refer to figures from the past was characteristic especially of the

⁵¹ *Richtlinien des Bundes Deutscher Mädel*, 1 July 1932 – *ibidem*, p. 156. Interestingly, Jutta Rüdiger, who accepted the "natural imbalance of the sexes", also underlined the equal civic rights of women and men. She believed that "outstanding women" could realise their ambitions, although without thereby challenging the authority of men; J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, pp. 200-201.

⁵² The quoted maxim was borrowed from Fichte; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 44.

⁵³ J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund...*, p. 116.

⁵⁴ *Idem*, *Ein Leben...*, pp. 111-112. Agnes Miegel received a Hitlerjugend honour from Schirach for her services to the BDM.

lower-ranking *Führerinnen*, who were responsible for leading meetings. While the instructional materials for BDM members aged 14-18 offered male heroes as examples, in the *Jungmädels* groups (10-14 years) there was a certain amount of freedom allowed in the construction of the message conveyed. Most of the figures used there in practice originated either from Germanic myths or from German history. Among the first group was Brünhild, the wife of King Gunther in the saga of the Nibelungs, who raised the spirits of her weak husband.⁵⁵ Another heroine, from the Roman era, was Thusnelda, wife of the Cherusci tribal leader Hermann, who defeated the Romans at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D. Thusnelda was later taken prisoner by the Roman leader Germanicus, and bore the conditions of her captivity with dignity.⁵⁶ Among heroines from modern times, besides Queen Luise of Prussia, there also appeared Caroline Schlegel, an early Romantic writer and translator of Shakespeare, who married August Schlegel, and later (following an earlier affair) Friedrich Schelling.⁵⁷ Also mentioned in the diaries of one BDM member is Inge Wessel, sister of the hero of the Nazi movement, Horst Wessel.⁵⁸

The list of people who served as models for members of the BDM did not include any figures from the German women's movement (such as Helene Lange or Gertrud Bäumer) or leaders of the pacifist movement (such as Bertha von Suttner). More symptomatic was the absence of references to the famous Third Reich aviatrix, Hanna Reitsch. While the latter willingly met with members of the BDM, this did not lead to collective admiration of her achievements.⁵⁹ Even the female pilots who flew repaired aircraft back to *Luftwaffe* airfields during the war did not idolise Reitsch so much as they did the male heroes of aviation, such as Charles Lindbergh, who in 1927 had made the first flight across the Atlantic.⁶⁰

According to the diaries of BDM members, however, models were also sought outside the rigid canon of the Third Reich. One example was Marie Curie (referred to only under her husband's surname), who was well-known in Germany thanks to the highly popular biography written by her daughter Ève. Until 1939 the Polish-born scientist also featured in school textbooks and magazines for girls, in spite of the critical evaluation of that fact in some party circles.⁶¹

Besides the representatives of the female sex "adopted" by the BDM for the organisation's needs, the League's pantheon did not lack male heroes either. These included not only Horst Wessel and the "martyr" of the Hitlerjugend, Herbert Norkus.⁶² Another model figure was Hagen von Tronje, the eternally loyal knight of

⁵⁵ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 243. The name of Thusnelda is mentioned by the Roman historian Strabo.

⁵⁷ L. Walb, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁵⁸ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 140.

⁶⁰ Cf. B. Uhse, *Mit Lust und Liebe. Mein Leben*, Frankfurt am Main–Berlin 1992, p. 58.

⁶¹ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291.

⁶² G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

King Gunther from the *Song of the Nibelungs*. His actions were offered as a model for the attitude of “faithfulness to the *Führer*”.⁶³ Another hero among BDM members was Thomas Müntzer, a German reformation preacher and leader of a peasant rebellion in 1525. Visits were organised for groups of BDM members to his house and workshop, and he himself was praised as a “great German revolutionary and victim of reactionaries”.⁶⁴

To an equal degree as the male section of the Hitlerjugend, the BDM honoured both Frederick the Great of Prussia.⁶⁵ and the German heroes of the First World War. Among the latter, mention was made above all of the youthful soldiers who fought at Langemarck in Flanders in the autumn of 1914, and of the Red Baron, Manfred von Richthofen, the air ace who was shot down and killed in April 1918.⁶⁶

Some members of the League had a certain amount of difficulty with the secondary role played by women in the life of the “war heroes”. Contrary to the vision cultivated in literature of the woman “suffering in silence” – the mother, wife or beloved of the main hero – they also saw themselves on the field of battle.⁶⁷ The ambitious were given succour not so much by the BDM’s canon of heroes, as by German cinematography. One of the diarists adopted as her heroine the “black archer Johanna”, a character from the 1934 film *The Eleven Schill Officers*. Disguised as a man, she took part in the Prussian uprising against Napoleon in 1809. In the film, she was revealed to be a woman only after her death, and she herself became an example of women’s contribution to the struggle for the survival of the fatherland.⁶⁸

CONTEMPORARY PERSONAGES AS MODELS FOR BDM MEMBERS

The most important point of reference for members of the League was Adolf Hitler, but it is hard to say to what extent this reflected the general emotional attitude to the *Führer* among German women. While many experts assert that there was a common desire among girls to “give the *Führer* a child”, that formula is not referred to in the memoirs of members of the BDM.⁶⁹ They speak rather of a wish to experience

⁶³ R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, p. 218. It should be noted that the figure of Hagen von Tronje aroused mixed feelings among the Nazis. It was at his initiative that the hero Siegfried was surreptitiously killed. On the other hand, Hagen saved the treasure of the Nibelungs, refusing to reveal its hiding place even in the face of death, thus proving his “faithfulness to the Germanic ideal” (the so-called *Nibelungstreue* or fidelity of the Nibelungs).

⁶⁴ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁶⁵ C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, p. 112.

⁶⁶ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 47-48.

⁶⁷ C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, p. 115.

⁶⁸ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 322. Johanna was an authentic figure; the fact of her non-Aryan descent was meticulously concealed during the Third Reich.

⁶⁹ Statements of the desire to “give the *Führer* a child” appeared in letters addressed to Hitler’s office.

the “honour” of seeing the leader of the Third Reich in real life – a desire that was common to both sexes and was also felt by adult Germans. Some achieved their dream by taking part in public events attended by Hitler. The impressions taken away from such meetings were somewhat ambiguous. Some of the girls remembered making “eye contact” with the Führer or (more rarely) his handshake.⁷⁰ In the memoirs of higher-ranking *Führerinnen* a dominant theme was Hitler’s “good manners” (he would kiss them on the hand or allow them to go through doors first).⁷¹ It is symptomatic that no mention is made of Hitler’s physical qualities. Indeed, some League members wrote of their disappointment in his unexceptional appearance, high voice and artificial poses.⁷² On the other hand, even those critical voices treated the matter of the Führer’s appearance separately from his “charisma”.⁷³

The respect felt for the leader of the Third Reich was not transferred, however, to other representatives of the German authorities. Symptomatic in this regard is the way in which League members perceived the leaders of the Hitlerjugend. In the case of Schirach, criticisms of an aesthetic nature were common (he was said to be overweight and to have an immature facial appearance).⁷⁴ In turn, Axmann, who took over the organisation’s leadership in wartime, was a figure who was practically unknown in the BDM. The few BDM leaders who made his acquaintance complained of the “bluntness” and low moral standards of the *Reichsjugendführer* and his circles.⁷⁵

The most surprising feature of the diaries of BDM members is the absence of reference to the leaders of that organisation itself. Trude Mohr is mentioned only in the memoirs of Jutta Rüdiger, although the author does not give any personal reflections on her predecessor. Rüdiger herself was considered in detail only by Melita Maschmann, who described the League’s head as a pleasant person, but one overcome by constant worry about being pigeonholed as “too highly educated”.⁷⁶

MOTIVES FOR JOINING THE BDM

An interesting element of the analysis of the “womanhood aspect” of the BDM’s activity concerns the reasons for joining that organisation, which resulted both from girls’ own motivation and from the influence of those around them. Valuable infor-

⁷⁰ L. Walb, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36; I. Jens, *Unvollständige Erinnerungen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2009, p. 30.

⁷¹ From a conversation with Trude Mohr; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 21.

⁷² C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, p. 113.

⁷³ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 253-254.

⁷⁵ M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191. The author of the diaries attended several social events organised by Axmann, and recalled the presence of “film stars” and the “sea of alcohol drunk”.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 193. Unlike Mohr, who was not ashamed of her short-sightedness, Rüdiger avoided appearing in glasses.

mation is provided by the memoirs of women who joined the League in 1933 or even before the Nazis came to power.

As regards outside influences, a key role in girls' decisions was played by family members – fathers, mothers and siblings. In the first case it was often a matter of “daddy's girls” – those who worshipped their fathers and treated their political choices as pointers for their own actions.⁷⁷ Sometimes the motive for joining the BDM was a girl's desire to please her father, he being an autocrat who had previously questioned the daughter's abilities or criticised her behaviour.⁷⁸

Mothers much more rarely provided the motivation for girls' choices. In most cases they were subordinated to their husbands and did not question their political views. An exception was widows and divorcees – independent people who often maintained their home and children by their own efforts. Such women were seen by their daughters as an example to follow and, in the context of decisions to join the BDM, as an inspiration to take up new challenges.⁷⁹ In the case of divorced women, their influence went still further, since they often transferred to their daughters an aversion to men and the belief that a woman ought to be independent in life.⁸⁰

Analysis shows that in many cases a role in girls' choices was played by their older brothers. The role of male siblings is mentioned not only by ordinary members of the BDM, but also by higher-ranking *Führerinnen*. The brother of Jutta Rüdiger was an activist in a Nazi students' union, and had previously been active in an underground movement during the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.⁸¹ In turn, Melita Maschmann was brought up to admire the “heroic acts” of her brother in the First World War.⁸² Some BDM members also recall how their decision to join the organisation was influenced by their older brothers' reading matter.⁸³

Most of the girls who joined the BDM in its early years motivated their decision by patriotic views – the belief, imbued by home and school, in the “injustice” of the Versailles Treaty and the need to rebuild the “greatness of the Reich”. In their desire to take part in the “struggle for a new Germany” they did not differ from their male colleagues in the Hitlerjugend. An additional reason for joining the League was sometimes the fact of living in the “front line” regions of the country. Such girls felt personally the arguments about the German nation being threatened by outside political forces, such as the French (in the case of the Rhineland) or the Poles (in the case of East Prussia).⁸⁴

⁷⁷ L. Walb, *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 16–17; M. Aull-Fürstenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 12–13.

⁷⁸ R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–77.

⁷⁹ C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, pp. 48–50.

⁸⁰ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

⁸¹ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, pp. 11ff.

⁸² M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

⁸³ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 23–26. The author of the diaries stated explicitly that it was her brothers who brought about her “political socialisation”.

⁸⁴ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, pp. 10–12; U. Meyer-Semlies, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–29.

A motive for joining the BDM that would have applied equally to both sexes was the desire to play a part in “rebuilding the national community” of Germans. This factor played a role particularly among middle-class girls. Some of the diarists saw it as a way of defying their parents’ condescending attitudes to the lower social orders.⁸⁵ By joining the League, they wished to help improve the lot of their less wealthy peers, to play a part in their “socialisation”, and thus contribute to the country’s “renewal”.⁸⁶ In turn, girls from lower middle class backgrounds saw the BDM as a means of improving their status in the eyes of those of their classmates who stood higher in the social hierarchy.⁸⁷

After the establishment of the Third Reich, a typical reason for joining the BDM was the need to participate in the “collective experience” (*Gruppenerlebnis*) of young Germans. This was a motivation common to both sexes, but it played a special role in the case of girls. Up to 1933, the youth organisations that functioned in Germany had been dominated by boys. It was only the Nazis, with their idea of influencing the younger generation as a whole, who created the possibility of “organisational self-realisation” for girls also. The innovative nature of what was being offered caused members of other structures to move to the BDM in large numbers. Some of them (including Trude Mohr and Melita Maschmann) had previously belonged to right-wing organisations, and others to the children’s groups of the Protestant *Luisenbund*.⁸⁸ Many girls were envious of their brothers’ membership of associations which did not accept women. In their eyes, the BDM seemed to be a “true” youth organisation.⁸⁹

A common factor in girls’ joining the BDM was features of their personality. Many of the diarists wrote of their lack of self-confidence and of being dominated by their parents or older siblings. In the case of girls with no siblings, a significant role was played by the need to find new friends and to “belong to a group”.⁹⁰ Some girls joined in order to counter the alienation that resulted from moving to live in a different place. A typical example is the case of a girl whose father, an officer, was sent to teach at a military school in Austria following its annexation to the Reich. While she was viewed in her new school as a “Prussian occupier”, in the BDM she was received with respect as a representative of the “great Germany”.⁹¹

Reasons for joining the BDM that concerned personal ambition were often specific to girls. In the case of the later *Führerinnen* there was a desire to “be someone

⁸⁵ M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁶ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

⁸⁷ C. Stern, *Doppelleben...*, p. 30.

⁸⁸ M. Aull-Fürstenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13. The girls’ groups within the *Luisenbund* carried the name *Kornblümchen* (“little cornflowers”).

⁸⁹ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 206ff. Among the youth organisations that did not accept girls, the Catholic leagues were dominant.

⁹⁰ R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, p. 12; G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁹¹ M. Aull-Fürstenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

exceptional” and to break free of the slavery of the “three K’s” stereotype.⁹² Ordinary members of the League, in turn, desired to experience the “honour of promotion” to Hitlerjugend member with the same rights as boys. The feeling of pride was also served by the ceremony, common to both sexes, that marked the acceptance of a new member into the organisation, and the oath of loyalty to “nation, Fatherland and *Führer*” which was the same for girls as for boys. The only difference in the vows was certain specific declarations made by the new members. Girls undertook to be “good, brave comrades” (the word used was *Kamerad*, not the feminine *Kameradin*) and to guard honour (it was not stated specifically what kind of honour), while their male colleagues promised to be “tough, taciturn (*schweigsam*) and faithful to the Cause”.⁹³ Members of both sexes made their vows to the flag, and then sang the “Hymn of Youth” with words by Baldur von Schirach.⁹⁴ After the ceremony their parents often held a celebratory dinner, at which the new members received gifts to mark the occasion. Girls would receive, for example, a swastika brooch.⁹⁵

THE BDM UNIFORM AS AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY

One thread of the recollections of BDM members that had features specific to their sex was the matter of their pride in the right to wear the organisation’s uniform. While for male Hitlerjugend members that privilege was a foretaste of their future military service, for girls it was an act of ennoblement, an expression of appreciation for their role in the work of “rebuilding Germany”. Most of them could hardly wait for their parents to buy the various components of the uniform – the white blouse, the dark blue woollen skirt, and above all the special corduroy-like jacket known as *Kletterweste*.⁹⁶ In the matter of the appearance of the BDM uniforms there were often disagreements between daughters and mothers: while the former were pleased to be able to dispense with traditional dresses, the latter wrung their hands over the “unwomanly” character of the new uniform. What mothers most stubbornly resisted was not so much the skirts and blouses, as the flat black shoes that accompanied the uniform.⁹⁷

In spite of their pride in the right to wear the uniform, some members of the League noticed differences in the treatment of the sexes where external appearance was concerned. Girls were not entitled to wear shirts of brown colour, and their skirts were impractical (in summer they were too warm, and in winter they failed

⁹² C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, pp. 50-51.

⁹³ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

⁹⁴ R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115; L. Walb, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁹⁵ L. Walb, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹⁶ G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, pp. 110, 123, 139.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 135, 151. Some BDM members wore hobnailed heels so as to equal the level of noise made by male Hitlerjugend colleagues during marches through town.

to protect against the frost).⁹⁸ Another potential source of problems was hairstyle. In the early years of the BDM many of its members wore bobs (the *Bubikopf* style), but after 1933 the League's leadership began to promote more traditional styles, with braids, or possibly a knot with the hair gathered around the head.⁹⁹ Support for a "girl-like" appearance did not, however, indicate tolerance for "womanly vanity or weaknesses".¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, in the BDM there was a ban not only on makeup (even ruddy cheeks were viewed with suspicion), but also on chains and rings.¹⁰¹

The external appearance of members of the League was a subject of such significance that it led to intervention by Schirach himself. He viewed uniformity as useful in the case of younger members, but thought that among the older girls it might lead to undesirable "masculinisation". It was this factor that underlay the founding of the Faith and Beauty organisation in 1938. Even the name of the new structure suggested a return to the traditional model of womanhood. The emphasis placed on the attractive appearance of members of *Glaube und Schönheit* was accompanied by a move away from the "asexual" uniforms in favour of flattering dresses that emphasised the figure.¹⁰² BDM members themselves reacted in different ways to these changes – some saw them as a move in the right direction, while others (privately) derided both the name of the new organisation and its associated "course towards womanhood".¹⁰³

BDM ACTIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SEXES

One of the reasons for the popularity of the Hitlerjugend was the variety of activities offered to young people. In the case of girls it was also significant that some of the activities had previously been available only to a limited degree – either due to an absence of tradition or because of the conservative attitudes of parents. Compared with other organisations, the BDM aimed to provide uniform activities for both sexes. Just like their male Hitlerjugend colleagues, members of the League attended meetings (on Wednesdays, subsequently on Thursdays), practised sport (on Saturdays), and participated in one-off actions (*Einsätze*) and public events. Only some of the activities were sex-specific, being related to the traditional model of womanhood; these included the gathering of herbs and forest fruits (the boys collected reusable materials). Girls also collected money for the *Winterhilfswerk* (winter

⁹⁸ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

⁹⁹ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁰ The wearing of coats or use of umbrellas was viewed with disapproval. G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁰¹ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-235. In some patrols, earrings were also prohibited. At public ceremonies, girls wearing earrings were placed in the back rows.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, pp. 259-260.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, pp. 260-261. The name of the organisation was jokingly transformed to *Glaube an Schönheit* ("faith in beauty"). Even Jutta Rüdiger, who in principle supported Schirach's idea, was "surprised" by the organisation's guiding motto; J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 45.

help campaigns).¹⁰⁴ Most BDM members took these actions seriously, seeing in them both a social goal and an opportunity to take part in the competition between patrols that was characteristic of the whole of the Hitlerjugend.¹⁰⁵ A clear minority of the girls felt inhibited by the obligations placed on them, but without reflections in the category of “inferiority of sex”.¹⁰⁶

A markedly womanly type of activity in the League was the annual home management courses, held at special BDM centres. They served as one of the forms of vocational training for girls aged 14-18. Trainees acquired both “housewife skills” (cooking, sewing, childcare) and knowledge serving the “national economy”. The latter was understood to include not only the principles of healthy eating and hygiene, but also rational management of the household budget.¹⁰⁷ In reality the courses also served to indoctrinate the girls, representing an integral part of the programme of ideological lectures.¹⁰⁸

A part of the BDM’s activity derived from the campaign to reduce unemployment and to increase the productivity of the German economy. Although that policy was addressed chiefly to boys (for instance, through the Reich Work Service or RAD, compulsory from 1935), girls were also encouraged to train in a profession and thus prepare for various life circumstances.¹⁰⁹ Of particular note is the rural voluntary work promoted by the Hitlerjugend, known as *Landdienst*, which originally took place in the summer season, and later in the form of camps lasting for several months. The programme was addressed to both sexes, although in practice there was a division of tasks – boys performed heavier farm work, while girls assisted in the farmyard, in childcare or in carting crops from the fields. It was planned that those attending these camps would eventually become “colonists” of conquered lands in the east – the boys as settlers, and the girls as future wives and mothers.¹¹⁰

The activities undertaken in the *Glaube und Schönheit* organisation were of a strictly womanlike character. Its conceivers, Baldur von Schirach and Jutta Rüdiger, assigned it the task of developing the “individual interests and proclivities” of girls between the ages of 18 and 21, a key period for psychological development.¹¹¹ Potential participants were offered a choice of training in health care, childcare, mu-

¹⁰⁴ G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ L. Walb, *op. cit.*, p. 72. Some girls even felt pride in being able to place adults in situations of compulsion; E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.

¹⁰⁶ One of those with unpleasant memories of the collections was Loki Schmidt, later wife of Helmut Schmidt. She regarded the tin collections as a form of “begging”. L. Schmidt, *Erzähl...*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁸ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113, 125-126.

¹⁰⁹ One means of improvement of vocational abilities was the *Reichsberufswettkampf*, a system of competition in work skills, run in the Hitlerjugend from 1934 onwards. The annual central finals involved the participation of both sexes.

¹¹⁰ *Die BDM-Generation...*, pp. 257-258; H. Fritsch, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹¹¹ The need to offer activities for young women was pointed out especially by Rüdiger, an expert in the developmental psychology of children and adolescents. J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 45.

sic and art. All members were also required to attend exercises in artistic gymnastics, which developed harmony of movement and womanly suppleness.¹¹²

While the programme of *Glaube und Schönheit* met with the approval of many girls (there were 440,000 members in the years 1938-1945), the new structure also had its opponents. It was received particularly critically by the BDM *Führerinnen*. They believed that *Glaube und Schönheit* was raising “partners to German men” only superficially, and in fact was a response to those men’s “needs”.¹¹³ The most sceptical preferred to end their careers in the BDM rather than continue them in the new structure.¹¹⁴

The listed forms of activities made up only a part of the overall activity of the League, and activities addressed to both sexes were organised on a larger scale. Activities of a universal nature included primarily sports, which were run independently of the school programme. Youth sport was promoted by Artur Axmann, who sought in particular to improve the state of health of children from neglected backgrounds. An innovative part of this concept was the activation of girls, who had previously taken part in physical education much more rarely.¹¹⁵ Members of the BDM were expected to obtain successive sports badges, and talented individuals received the honour of taking part in the summer and winter BDM games.¹¹⁶ The fixation on sports was a significant problem for some of the girls, either due to their lack of talent, or because of health problems. Gaining exemption from such activities was extremely difficult, and entailed undergoing special medical examinations.¹¹⁷

The universal nature of the Hitlerjugend’s activity is evidenced by the especially popular group singing. This formed an integral part of regular meetings, trips and ceremonies. Both boys’ and girls’ sections had choirs and orchestras, with their own staff of musical instructors.¹¹⁸ The great majority of the songs sung by BDM members were identical to those of their male colleagues. A key place in the League’s repertoire was taken by works that glorified Germany, the Führer and the struggle, and expressed readiness to give one’s life for the fatherland. Also of a universal nature were the songs promoting love for the country, including for the “German East”. The only songs that can be considered more “womanlike” were those devoted to the “gifts of the earth” and nature. Most of the latter in fact had folk origins and could also be sung by boys.¹¹⁹

¹¹² *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 130.

¹¹³ G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 260-261.

¹¹⁵ A. Axmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 176; *Unvergessene Schulzeit...*, p. 25. Axmann had personal experience in this regard, coming from a working-class background.

¹¹⁶ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 48. From 1934 onwards, the central BDM games were held in Berlin.

¹¹⁷ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

¹¹⁸ Membership of orchestras was sometimes a form of escape from the ideological character of other Hitlerjugend activities; cf. L. Schmidt, *Erzähl...*, pp. 60-63.

¹¹⁹ *Wir Mädels singen. Liederbuch des Bundes Deutscher Mädels*, 2nd edn., Wolfenbüttel-Berlin 1939.

All Hitlerjugend members attended mass events: youth meetings as well as party-run and state-run events. BDM members occupied separate sectors in the squares and stadiums, but they marched to the assembly point in the same manner as the boys – in closed ranks, with patrol pennants and under the command of the *Führerinnen*. Like their male colleagues, they waited for hours for Hitler to appear, and chanted support for the leader of the “Thousand-Year Reich”. For physical reasons the girls were less able to bear standing in the heat, and also more frequently fainted due to dehydration.¹²⁰

In the first months of National Socialist government, BDM patrols could be seen marching in the streets of German towns. Later than custom was abandoned, but members of the League were still taught drill.¹²¹ Some of the diarists found this training onerous, but there were also some who envied their male colleagues the experience of marching to the sounds of fanfares and drumrolls.¹²²

An integral component of the activity of the whole of the Hitlerjugend was camps, outings and hikes. These were an attraction for both sexes, and particularly for children of poorer families, who had not previously had the opportunity to see places any distance from their homes. In the case of girls, these activities also represented a form of emancipation from their parents, who were often sensitive in matters of their daughters’ safety. Hikes also had their downside – the need to cover distances of many kilometres carrying a heavy load. Many of the girls got blisters, or even open wounds on their shoulders, as a result of carrying rucksacks. Some of them had to return home early for this reason.¹²³

A popular and open form of activity was the summer camps – organised for boys and girls separately, but often in the same neighbourhood. Both sexes were subject to the same camp routine (early morning exercises, assembly and raising of the banner, preparation of meals, etc.). BDM members met with their male colleagues at bonfires and other joint events held in nearby villages. The girls also assisted in the preparation of field games for the boys, learning to read maps and to find directions by the stars.¹²⁴ Some of them felt unfulfilled by the more “civil” nature of their own games.¹²⁵ but most accepted the differentiation in these types of activity. Some diarists, on the other hand, complained of the inconveniences of camp life – the insufficient hygiene, primitive sleeping conditions and constantly sweaty clothing.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, pp. 63ff. One of the ways of coping with thirst was to suck slices of lemon.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 60, 151.

¹²² E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹²³ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

¹²⁴ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

¹²⁵ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁶ R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113. There is disagreement in the literature on the BDM concerning girls’ sleeping in tents. Formally, from the mid-1930s, it was recommended that this be restricted

In spite of information to the contrary given by some experts, no shooting practice took place at BDM camps.¹²⁷ Girls were in fact taught shooting at school: in regular defence lessons and on special anti-aircraft defence courses.¹²⁸ The BDM did not offer sailing, gliding or motor sports, although girls interested in such activities were able to take part in courses run by other organisations, with their parents' permission and with BDM letters of reference.

SEXUALITY IN THE BDM

Questions of *mores* are still one of the topics relating to the activities of the BDM that are most frequently discussed in the literature. Many authors of books about the League have reported on the supposedly large number of pregnancies among the organisation's members.¹²⁹ This phenomenon is supposed to have been caused by, on the one hand, the authorities' "suppression of sexuality", and on the other the coeducational nature of the Hitlerjugend.¹³⁰ Mentions of "unfortunate matters" occurring during mass youth events also appear, in the form of rumours, in the diaries of some BDM members.¹³¹ The issue of unwanted pregnancies was addressed after the war by Jutta Rüdiger. Though admitting that there were cases of "human errors" and "aberrations" in the BDM, she emphasised that such situations occurred only sporadically and would lead to exclusion from the ranks of the organisation.¹³²

The actual picture of relations between girls and boys in the Hitlerjugend would seem to represent a combination of both of the aforementioned interpretations. One of the organisation's principles was *Kameradschaft* ("comradely relations") – both between members of the same sex and between sexes. The boys were to be "gallant" towards the girls, while girls were to teach the boys "good manners" and respect for the rights due to a woman.¹³³ In practice a variety of situations arose, and the coeducational nature of the activities favoured relations that were more emotional

to older girls, with younger girls sleeping in barns or hostels. M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, p. 86; C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, p. 108.

¹²⁷ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, p. 101. Information on shooting lessons at BDM camps is found only in one Sopade report, drawn up for the leadership of the SPD in exile.

¹²⁸ H. Schmidt, L. Schmidt, *Kindheit...*, pp. 36-37.

¹²⁹ This topic appears primarily in the work of Kater, who writes of "widespread cases of illegitimate pregnancies" in the BDM; M. Kater, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. The information came from the Sopade reports, and were thus based on rumour and gossip; *Die BDM-Generation...*, pp. 146-147.

¹³⁰ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 77.

¹³¹ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-292. The abbreviation BDM was jokingly expanded to *Bund Deutscher Matratzen* ("league of German mattresses") or *Bald Deutsche Mutter* ("soon German mothers").

¹³² J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund...*, p. 133. According to Rüdiger, these cases generally concerned *Führerinnen*.

¹³³ From the account of Jutta Rüdiger; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, pp. 91-93.

than comradesly. This did not mean that the BDM “suppressed” (or promoted) sexual activity on the part of its members. Cases of pregnancy were a result rather of the mass nature of the organisation and related problems of control. Some authors rightly draw attention to the differences in the behaviour of that generation of girls compared with today’s generation. Most girls then became sexually mature much later than at present, and were averse to sex due to the fear of the scandal associated with pregnancy.¹³⁴ In the case of BDM activists there was also the problem of constant tiredness and the lack of time for dating. Some of the *Führerinnen* thus had very different experiences from their schoolmates – thinking constantly of “service” while their friends listened to hit songs and collected photographs of film stars.¹³⁵

Alongside the propagation of the model of “natural relations” between the sexes, the BDM also aimed to increase its members’ knowledge of female physiology. During talks given by the League’s (female) doctors, the girls learnt about the menstrual cycle and the problems of adolescence. The speakers did this in a “delicate manner” and avoided the topic of contraception. The place of the latter was taken by teaching about “heredity” and propagation of the principle that every woman should “remain pure until marriage”.¹³⁶

While the effectiveness of the aforementioned guidance was an open question, there is no doubt that the talks themselves played a positive role. Most of the girls attending would not have had any chance of learning about these matters from their own mothers, while information passed down by their older friends was often highly inaccurate. One diarist wrote later that she had taken her knowledge of human anatomy from an illustrated copy of Goethe’s *Faust*.¹³⁷

INDOCTRINATION IN THE BDM

The matter of the ideological indoctrination of BDM members is usually considered within the context of the indoctrination of the whole of the Hitlerjugend. The key determinant was the organisation’s conceptual programmes. The Hitlerjugend was intended to prepare young people to live in a community and imbue them with the idea of service to the German nation.¹³⁸ In practice, these goals were realised in different ways for different age groups (10-14 and 14-18) and sexes. Sources are inconsistent as to the specific features of the political education of girls. Most former members of the BDM described the organisation as “politically neutral” or played down its ideological objectives. Another picture is presented, however, in the memoirs of Jutta Rüdiger. While she accepted that the BDM had promoted the NSDAP’s

¹³⁴ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹³⁵ G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹³⁶ J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund...*, pp. 131-132.

¹³⁷ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹³⁸ B. von Schirach, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

political programme and the Nazi world view, she denied that the organisation had disseminated “xenophobia” or “pro-war feelings”.¹³⁹

The picture of the actual ideological impact of the BDM requires more extensive analysis. There is no doubt that the foundations for its members’ picture of the world were created not so much by that organisation as by the family home. Although girls did not take part in family discussions as often as boys did, they were still influenced by the opinions presented to them by their close relatives. It is no accident that most BDM enthusiasts came from households that had nationalist attitudes, or were at least critical of the Weimar Republic.¹⁴⁰ The views of BDM members were also significantly influenced by their schools, in some cases even before the Nazis took power.¹⁴¹ After 30 January 1933 the school programme was adapted to conform with the face of the Nazi state, and teachers could be dismissed if they attempted to convey any other message.¹⁴²

In this context, the BDM’s role was not so much to create the Nazi world picture, but to reinforce the views already cultivated outside the organisation. The messages conveyed at meetings were mostly identical for both sexes, except that in the case of girls there were fewer references to male model personages – military heroes, for example.¹⁴³ The intensity of ideological indoctrination depended on age. There were noticeably fewer political overtones in the activities of the *Jungmadel* (10-14 years); the younger girls were chiefly indoctrinated subliminally, for example through the singing of songs or reading of a short book titled “Children, what do you know about the Führer?”. Some JM patrol leaders read the girls the poetry of Walter Flex, which extolled the cult of heroic death on the battlefield.¹⁴⁴

More directly ideological content was conveyed at the meetings of girls aged 14-18. They listened to talks about Hitler and other party leaders, the history of the Nazi movement and the problems of the Germans living outside the borders of the Reich.¹⁴⁵ Popular BDM activities included the reading of books and reportage describing the past and present of German colonies, particularly in Africa.¹⁴⁶ Members of the League were also imbued with a belief in the decisive role of the National

¹³⁹ J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund...*, pp. 127, 144-145.

¹⁴⁰ A nationalist attitude did not have to have a link to a particular political grouping. C. Stern, *Uns wirft...*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁴¹ One diarist remembered a lesson in 1932, where the teacher required the girls to say what newspapers their parents read. If a girl replied that the SPD newspaper *Vorwärts* was read in her home, this was met by a reproving look from the teacher and mocking comments from other girls. *Pimpfe*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁴² On the scale and forms of indoctrination in schools in the Third Reich, see M. Schwerendt, „Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heide und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid“. *Antisemitismus im nationalsozialistischen Schulbüchern und Unterrichtsmaterialien*, Berlin 2009, pp. 27ff.

¹⁴³ *Die BDM-Generation...*, pp. 235-237.

¹⁴⁴ C. Stern, *Uns wirft...*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁴⁵ H. Schmidt, L. Schmidt, *Kindheit...*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁶ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-333.

Socialists in Germany's "renewal". One diarist later wrote: "All the time I had the feeling that I had been born in times that were wonderful as never before, and that future generations would envy us for that."¹⁴⁷

Compared with the boys' section of the Hitlerjugend, girls in the BDM were not so much indoctrinated with antireligious messages. In the 1930s the organisation's leadership did not place obstacles in the way of girls wishing to take their first holy communion or confirmation.¹⁴⁸ Some girls attended Protestant church services in the League's uniform. Most of the girls gave up religious practices after the age of 14, although they did so not only for ideological reasons, but also because of "competition" from the "more attractive" activities offered by the BDM.¹⁴⁹ Another sign of the "tolerance" of the League's leadership was the church marriages of *Führerinnen* – which in the case of Protestants were often attended by their charges in BDM uniforms.¹⁵⁰ However, this "openness" to members' religious views gradually declined. From the end of the 1930s the *Führerinnen* were told to avoid the singing of carols at meetings (an exception was made for songs with neutral content, such as *O Tannenbaum*). One diarist, working as a teacher at a village school in East Prussia, recalled the unpleasantness that she encountered after she organised an Advent performance for her pupils. She was saved from more serious consequences by the support given to her by the pupils' parents.¹⁵¹

A form of ideological indoctrination that was common to both sexes was the "racial" content communicated at meetings. Formally, the BDM set itself the task of "raising awareness" of the negative consequences of "racial mixing".¹⁵² In accordance with Schirach's recommendations, direct attacks on Jews were avoided in the programmes of meetings, and indirect messages were used instead, such as pictures illustrating the difference between the "German sense of humour" and "Jewish irony".¹⁵³ On the other hand, the Hitlerjugend was closed to both Jews and people of "mixed race", and in the case of persons performing organisational functions their genealogy was checked as far back as the late 13th century. In the case of girls, such practices often lead to dramatic situations – among not only the candidates themselves, but also their potential supervisors, who had the task of conveying the unpleasant verdict to them.¹⁵⁴ Some girls of "mixed" origin succeeded in get-

¹⁴⁷ Quoted after G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹⁴⁸ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-145. Confirmation took place at the same time as inauguration of membership of the BDM (at age 14); L. Walb, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

¹⁴⁹ M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, p. 45; M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁵⁰ E. Zeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁵¹ U. Meyer-Semlies, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁵² J. Rüdiger, *Der Bund...*, p. 117.

¹⁵³ M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 140. Much more anti-Semitic material was provided during the training of *Führerinnen*, including various aspects of the "Jewish question", such as the "domination of public life in Germany by Jews"; M. Hannsmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76.

¹⁵⁴ E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-239.

ting through the checks, but the issue could return, for example in case of possible promotion to *Führerin*.¹⁵⁵ Even Trude Mohr, honoured for her role in building the League, confessed after the war that she had sympathy for those of her colleagues who were forced to leave the organisation on such grounds.¹⁵⁶

The only difference between the sexes in the approach taken to racial matters was in the way of reacting to anti-Semitic excesses. During the Kristallnacht there were cases in which male Hitlerjugend members took part in the pogrom, while girls were merely observers of events.¹⁵⁷ Some of the girls felt uncomfortable at the use of violence, but there were also some who accepted the “action”¹⁵⁸ or showed indifference to the suffering of the victims.¹⁵⁹ Even the girls who doubted the sense of anti-Semitic restrictions were often won over by their supervisors’ arguments that “Hitler knew what he was doing, and it was necessary for the good of the Cause to accept things that were difficult and incomprehensible.”¹⁶⁰

FÜHRERINNEN IN THE BDM

An important aspect of the model of womanhood in the League was the activities performed by its leaders. By tracing their career paths, one can not only give an indication of the position of girls in the Hitlerjugend as a whole, but also illustrate the opportunities for and restrictions on the advancement of women in the Third Reich. Formally, the system of ranks in the BDM was similar to that in the male Hitlerjugend. Girls acting as leaders of patrols, packs, groups, troops and regiments were subordinate solely to the *BDM-Reichsführerin*.¹⁶¹ The *Führerinnen* of regions (*Obergaue*) were subordinate to their male equivalents in the Hitlerjugend, and were appointed by the head of that organisation. Only the head of the League enjoyed a significant amount of autonomy, reporting only to the *Reichsjugendführer* (by whom she was also appointed to that position).¹⁶²

The limited position of the higher-ranking BDM leaders was also reflected in the structure of the Hitlerjugend leadership (*Reichsjugendführung*, RJF). The heads of

¹⁵⁵ I. Koehn, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-164. The author of the diary was not aware of her “mixed race” background, although when joining the BDM she had avoided full verification. She put her father’s warnings against attempting to become a *Führerin* down to his critical attitude towards Nazism.

¹⁵⁶ From the account of Trude Mohr; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁷ On the second day of the Kristallnacht, Schirach sent a dispatch to regional heads forbidding Hitlerjugend members from taking part in the events. E. Sternheim-Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁸ M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ C. Stern, *In den Netzen...*, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted after G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁶¹ The German names for these structures were *Mädelschaft*, *Mädelschar*, *Mädelgruppe*, *Mädelring* and *Untergau*. They applied both at *Jungmädel* level and full BDM level. G. Miller-Kipp, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁶² *Die BDM-Generation...*, p. 36.

its departments were men, while women – who were subordinate to them – could act only as clerks (*BDM-Amtsreferentinnen*). Only in wartime, when the higher-ranking Hitlerjugend leaders were compelled to serve in the military, did the women in the RJF gain possibilities of exerting a real influence on decisions.¹⁶³ Also the position of the head of the BDM was weaker than that of the *Reichsjugendführer* – she did not simultaneously hold any state function (whereas Schirach and Axmann were both chiefs of the Reich youth and leaders of the Nazi party youth organisation). In this sense she also enjoyed lesser prestige than the leader of the NSF, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, who at the same time was the *Führerin* of German women.

In reality, though, the competences and position of the BDM leaders were much greater than those of their equivalents in the Nazi women's organisations.¹⁶⁴ The League's head attended, with equal rights, the regular meetings of the whole Hitlerjugend leadership. Ideological matters lay outside her prerogative, but these were any case decided *de facto* by the leadership of the NSDAP. The exclusive competences of the *BDM-Referentin* included determination of principles of the organisation's functioning, which were worked out during her regular meetings with the female clerks of RJF departments.¹⁶⁵ The role of the leader of the BDM increased significantly when the post was taken up by Jutta Rüdiger. She carved out a special position for herself in the Hitlerjugend, as a result of both her competence and her ability to cope in a male environment. Her power is reflected by her resistance to proposals to "tolerate" illegitimate pregnancies among *Führerinnen*.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, pressure from Nazi functionaries who during the war sought acceptance for romances between *Führerinnen* and married men was firmly rejected by the organisation's head.¹⁶⁷

Rüdiger's appointment also led to greater activity of the *BDM-Referentin* in German public life. From 1938 onwards, the organisation's head made frequent journeys to countries that retained close contacts with the Third Reich (Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia). The formal aim of the visits was to tighten cooperation between the League and women's organisations in those countries, but in reality they also served the purpose of semi-official diplomatic missions.¹⁶⁸ In Italy and Spain the leader of the BDM was received with full state ceremony, more impressive than the honours accorded to her in Germany.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Female RJF departmental clerks became *de facto* acting heads of department.

¹⁶⁴ The leading position of the BDM is demonstrated by the formation within that organisation of *Glaube und Schönheit*, which covered an age group that had previously been under the auspices of *Deutsches Frauenwerk*. This led to protests at the foundation of *Glaube und Schönheit* from Gertrud Scholtz-Klink. J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁵ M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁶⁶ From the account of Jutta Rüdiger; M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁷ M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹⁶⁸ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, pp. 64-65. The visits were officially coordinated by the German Foreign Ministry.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

Rüdiger's relatively high position resulted both from her personal predispositions and from the evolution of Schirach's ideas. From 1938 onwards the *Reichsjugendführer* decided to "raise the status" of the BDM's leaders. In 1939 they attended a central training camp for Hitlerjugend leaders in Brunswick, while Rüdiger herself was invited to be one of the speakers at the event. She wrote in her memoirs about both her stage-fright and the "amusing" aspect of the event, where the listeners, tired after the previous speeches, commented most of all on the BDM leader's attractive legs.¹⁷⁰

The relatively high position enjoyed by the League's head was nonetheless an exception to the rule. Most *Führerinnen* had to be content with the possibilities associated with their function, accepting the limitations in silence.¹⁷¹ Even during the war, when girls came to play a greater role in the Hitlerjugend, challenges to the principle of "male leadership" were unusual, and did not go beyond private complaints about the "incompetence" of male colleagues. The few "emancipists" like Melita Maschmann – who in 1943-1945 was a clerk in the RJF's press and propaganda department – had to suffer in silence the derogatory label of "bluestockings" and accept their subordinate role in the leadership of the organisation.¹⁷²

In spite of their career limitations in the Hitlerjugend, the position of the BDM's *Führerinnen* was in any case higher within the organisation than outside it. Many of them felt the real restrictions applied to members of their sex only when they sought professional qualifications or wished to find work outside the League. An example is the experience of Maschmann, who in 1940-1941 trained as a journalist with the party newspaper *Ostdeutscher Beobachter* in Posen (Poznań). In spite of her previous experience as a reporter for BDM publications, she was initially subjected to bullying from her male colleagues.¹⁷³

The relatively modest role assigned to women within the central leadership of the Hitlerjugend did not deter members of the BDM from taking on functions within their own organisation. Most of them were content with posts at patrol and pack level, ending their activity there when they left school. More ambitious girls could pursue a career as middle-ranking *Führerinnen*. This path was open only to the best, and candidates had to go through a process of "selection" (*Auslese*). Here not only was their racial background checked, but tests were also made of their leadership skills (*Führungstalent*), character and political views.¹⁷⁴ Future leaders were trained at regional and central BDM schools, including the elite *Akademie der Jugendführung* in Brunswick, which was opened to girls between 1939 and 1942.¹⁷⁵ Those who were trained at these institutions were viewed as members of the future leadership

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 59, 74-75.

¹⁷¹ Cf. M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁷² M. Maschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

¹⁷⁴ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 57; R. Finkh, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. M. Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung...*, vol. 2: *Materialband*, pp. 28, 67-69.

ranks of the Third Reich, naturally subject to the condition that the senior state and party positions would be held by men.¹⁷⁶

According to the memoirs of former *Führerinnen*, their positions had both positive and negative sides. They saw the positive effects of their work as including the organisational skills that they acquired, increased creativity, and improved flexibility in stressful situations. Some *Führerinnen* were also supported financially by the organisation – this applied to girls who studied to become teachers after finishing high school.¹⁷⁷

As a negative aspect of their service, most of the *Führerinnen* listed the defects in their formal education resulting from their being overloaded with duties. All of the diaries make reference to overtiredness, particularly in relation to the period of the war. Only a minority perceived negative effects of an ideological nature. Most of them played down the problem of indoctrination in the League, or else defended the “positive” face of the organisation. The greatest amount of self-criticism after the war seems to have come from the lower-ranking *Führerinnen*, who were more intellectually aware than their charges, but less ideologically committed than their superiors.

Based on the analysis made in this article of the model of womanhood in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, a number of overall conclusions can be drawn. It is undisputed that the vision of women realised by that League had nothing in common with feminism as understood in contemporary times. The foundation for the programmatic concepts of the *BDM* was Nazi ideology, which promoted a single path for womanly activity – marriage and motherhood. However, acceptance of the official model did not mean that all of its component parts were reproduced in full. The League in fact put forward a vision that deviated significantly from the Nazi model. This applies both to the forms of activity in which the girls engaged, and the picture created of their life path. By working to increase its members’ self-reliance and sense of value, the *BDM* in fact created a picture of womanhood that differed from the traditional one. This process took place to the greatest degree among the leaders in the organisation, who were trained as future *Führerinnen* of the Third Reich – subordinate to men, but with ambitions that were a long way removed from the way of thinking of “traditional” women.

It cannot be determined with certainty what the effects of girls’ upbringing in the *BDM* would have been, given that the organisation existed for only 15 years and was abolished along with the other institutions of the Third Reich. It can be assumed that one result of the League’s activity was the impressive contribution made by young German women to the country’s post-war reconstruction. The problem was that,

¹⁷⁶ J. Rüdiger, *Ein Leben...*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁷ H. Schmidt, L. Schmidt, *Kindheit...*, pp. 141-142, 156.

despite its relatively modern nature, the BDM was an integral part of Nazi ideology, with its imperial vision of Germany and contempt for people who did not belong to the “Aryan national community”. The organisation’s members were not intended to become “mistresses of their own destiny”, but a tool for the implementation of a criminal doctrine. A doctrine which refused people the right to individual identity – including in the context of their sex.

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Keywords: *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, BDM, League of German Girls, model of womanhood in the Third Reich

ABSTRACT

This article concerns one of the issues in the history of the League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel, BDM) in the time of the Third Reich, namely the model of womanhood promoted by that organisation, both in its concepts and in practice. The notion of “model” used here means an ideal image of the female sex and of relationships between the sexes, in both adolescence and adulthood. This image is presented from the perspective of different aspects of the activities engaged in by BDM members. Topics considered include motives for joining the organisation, female model personages, the role of the uniform and rituals as an instrument of identity, “female” and “male” forms of activity, as well as the part played by the BDM in the processes of indoctrination and sexualisation of its members. Also described are issues relating to the career paths of the League’s functionaries (Führerinnen). The sources used for the article are diaries of former members of the BDM, subjected to critical analysis based on the principles of historical methodology.