

Abstract

This study of the representation of the roles of women in National Socialism in the news magazine DER SPIEGEL during the time period between 1947 and 2010 deals with the question to which extent the public-media discourse on women in National Socialism is a component of the memory discourse on National Socialism and the Holocaust, and how heteronormative and hegemonial conceptions of gender and gender role behaviour shape this discourse.

The study is embedded in a theoretical framework of memory research, media research and gender research, which focuses in particular on the interdependencies between media, memory and gender. It shows that commemorative culture is structured by (mass)media and their selection, representation and distribution of information, as well as by gender categories. This kind of memory discourse, conveyed by the media and impacted by gender, exerts influence on the public perception and evaluation of National Socialism and the role of women in National Socialism in particular.

The basis of the study are news articles on women in National Socialism, published by the news magazine DER SPIEGEL from 1947 to 2010. DER SPIEGEL was selected because of its relevance to public-media discourse, which is evident by its status as an inter-media agenda setter. The study was carried out with the help of computer-assisted qualitative content analysis. The core of the study lies in the development of a category system which not only represents the basis for a broader content-analytical evaluation of the articles, but can be seen as a result in itself.

The category system helped to determine the four central topics of DER SPIEGEL's articles on women in National Socialism: (1) Women as part of the NS-elite, (2) women as perpetrators, (3) women and resistance and (4) women as victims. These main topics were subjected to further analysis. As different as these main topics appear, the overall result of the content-analytical evaluation of the SPIEGEL articles shows that in its coverage of women in National Socialism, DER SPIEGEL promotes a memory discourse, which can essentially be seen as promoting the notion of German victimhood. In this regard, women are either seen as innocent and helpless victims or as pathological perpetrators equipped with deviant sexuality, whose divergence from the classic image of femininity predestined their participation in National Socialism. This representation fosters an identification with the victims of National Socialism while at the same time creating distance from the perpetrators, and thereby supporting a memory discourse, which attributes the emergence and perpetuation of National Socialism as well as the implementation of its anti-Semitic and racist policies to a small political ruling elite, and, to a large extent, absolves the population of guilt and responsibility.