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The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity

ELIZABETH HEINEMAN

IN A MID-1980S INTERVIEW, an elderly West Berlin woman recalled a conversation whose contours would have been familiar to many in the Federal Republic of Germany. As the woman explained, she once attended a talk where a middle-aged historian accused her and members of her generation of not having confronted the Nazi past more aggressively—starting right in 1945, at the end of the war. "I asked him, 'When were you born?' '1946.' I said, 'You know, only someone who didn't experience those times can utter such nonsense.' I mean, after '45 no one thought about confronting the past. Everyone thought about getting something on the stove so they could get their children something to eat, about rebuilding, clearing away the rubble . . . But this is what one is told today, and strangely enough it's all from people who didn't live through those times."¹ By now, the exchange seems commonplace. A member of the younger generation, horrified by what he knows about the Nazi era and suspicious about the fact that his elders have little to say about it, accuses his seniors of not having seriously confronted their past. The older German resents the younger man's moralizing tone and his single-minded focus on the Nazi years at the expense of the traumatic period immediately following.²

The older woman, however, does not simply propose a generational history. In

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¹ Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben: Alleinstehende Frauen berichten über ihr Leben nach 1945* (Munich, 1984), 178. All translations are mine.

² On different groups' employment of different reference points to make sense of their national history, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York, 1991). On the application of memories of World War II and the Nazi era to specific postwar national histories, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman, trans. (New York, 1993); Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Martin and Sylvia Greiffenhagen, *Ein schwieriges Vaterland: Zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands* (Munich, 1979), esp. 45–64; Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994).

casting her generation's understanding of the past, she universalizes on the basis of stereotypically *female* experiences. "Everybody" was trying to get something on the stove to feed their children; "everybody" was clearing away the rubble. These are references to the activities of women, yet they have come to stand for the experience of the entire wartime generation—at least, that portion that had not experienced persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime.

This essay will explore the universalization, in West German collective memory, of crucial aspects of the stereotypically female experience of Germany at the end of the war and during the immediate postwar years. It will further examine the effects of this universalization on the development of West German national identity and on the status of women in the Federal Republic. In doing so, it will explore the relationship between the "counter-memories" of a subordinate group, the "public" and "popular" memories of a dominant culture, national identity, and gender.

Memories of three "moments" in German women's history of 1942–1948 played crucial roles in the development of a West German national identity. First were memories of female victimhood during the latter part of the war, which were generalized into stories of German victimhood. Second were images of women's heroic efforts to rebuild a devastated landscape and people. The "Woman of the Rubble" (*Trümmerfrau*), who cleared away the rubble from Germany's bombed cities, laid the groundwork for the Federal Republic's founding myth of the "phoenix rising from the ashes"—a myth that did not inquire too deeply into the origin of the ashes. Finally, there were recollections of female sexual promiscuity. By generalizing a history of sexual disorder to describe a much broader moral decay, Germans found the opportunity to view the military occupation—and not the Nazi period—as Germany's moral nadir.³

These three moments told at least three different stories, and, as they were transformed in memory, they continued to serve different functions. They did not describe a straightforward, uncomplicated West German national identity. Instead, they functioned within, and helped to shape, varying strands of this emerging identity. The Cold War, the economic miracle, the effort to achieve national and cultural sovereignty from the Western powers (especially the United States), and the need to explain the Federal Republic's relationship to the Nazi past informed the development of West German national identity in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Yet memories of women's experiences from 1942 to 1948 served all of these facets of the emerging national identity.

Appropriating the female experience for the nation might be a rather surprising development, especially in the aftermath of a highly militarized society such as Nazi Germany. Yet a popular identification with selected aspects of women's experience is in some respects unsurprising. First, it is worth recalling the environment in which most Germans began to think retrospectively of the Nazi era and their part in it. The "crisis years" of 1942–1948 were framed by the defeat at Stalingrad (which marked the beginning of Germany's military collapse) and the currency reform

³ It is interesting to note that the versions of these three "moments" that were recalled in postwar West Germany closely adhere to three of the "scripts" that, according to Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, frequently provide structure for collective memory. These are narratives of shared suffering/victimhood, inspiring stories of accomplishment, and morality tales. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994), 58 and following, 87–88.

(which symbolized the beginning of the recovery in the western occupation zones). Within the larger context of the complete disintegration of the military, the state, and the economy, Germans experienced death, dislocation, hunger, and uncertainty about the future. But 1942–1948 was not just a period of prolonged crisis, it was also a time when women dominated the physical landscape and when their role in the community's survival was unusually visible. In fact, these years came to be known as the "hour of the women."⁴ Women's prominence did not signal the beginning of a new, sexually equitable order.⁵ It did, however, provide images that would strongly shape the evolution of popular representations of the recent past.

Second, Germany's total defeat and the discrediting of the ideology for which the war was fought made the largely male military experience problematic. Again, this did not serve to displace men from their leading role in society; it did not even serve to undermine individual men's military activities or the military as an institution. Given the prior importance of military imagery in national symbolism, however, it did create a certain representational vacuum.⁶ New symbols, often drawing from prototypically female experiences, helped to fill this vacuum.

Drawing on women's experience, to be sure, represented only one of many competing strategies for recasting Germany's recent past. This competition coincided with the years in which the Federal Republic was founded and in which the young state struggled to develop a uniquely West German identity. The specter of Germany's recent past made the development of a legitimate national identity difficult. At the same time, the need to reject certain aspects of the past—however problematic in terms of West Germans' ability to "come to terms with" or "work through" the crimes of the Nazi era—also created something of an open playing field, a discursive space in which many people developed diverse narratives of German experience that competed for a role in shaping a new national identity.⁷

⁴ See, for example, the book by that name, in which the author recounts his sister's central role in her family's survival from 1944 to 1947. Christian Graf von Krockow, *Die Stunde der Frauen: Bericht aus Pommern 1944 bis 1947* (Stuttgart, 1988). On the use of the dates 1942–1948 to describe a period of prolonged crisis in Germany, see *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, and Hans Woller, eds. (Munich, 1988).

⁵ On women's "lost opportunity" for emancipation, see especially Annette Kuhn, "Die vergessene Frauenarbeit in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit," in *Das Schicksal Deutschlands liegt in der Hand seiner Frauen: Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, Elisabeth Freier and Annette Kuhn, eds. (Düsseldorf, 1984), 13–24; Annette Kuhn, "Die Rolle der Frauen in der Nachkriegszeit," in *Deutschland 1945–1949: Ringvorlesung im Sommersemester 1985*, Hans-Gerd Schumann, ed. (Darmstadt, 1989), 153–68; Annette Kuhn, "Power and Powerlessness: Women after 1945, or the Continuity of the Ideology of Femininity," *German History*, 7 (1989): 35–46. For a comparative consideration, see Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940–1945* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

⁶ The heroic image of the fallen soldier, for example, all but disappeared from military cemeteries. Sabine Behrenbeck, "Heldenkult oder Friedensmahnung? Kriegerdenkmäler nach beiden Weltkriegen," in *Lernen aus dem Krieg? Deutsche Nachkriegszeiten 1918 und 1945*, Gottfried Niedhart and Dieter Riesenberger, eds. (Munich, 1992), 344–64; George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990), 212–22.

⁷ The classic psychological treatment of West Germans' failure to "come to terms with their past" was presented in Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich, 1967). The most influential philosophical discussion is Theodor Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," in Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (Frankfurt, 1970). More recently, journalists writing for a popular audience have turned to the younger generation's attempts to come to terms with the history of their parents' generation. Peter Sichrovsky, *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*, Jean Steinberg, trans. (New York, 1988); Dörte von Westernhagen, *Die Kinder der Täter: Das Dritte Reich und die Generation danach* (Munich, 1987);

Refugees and evacuees from the eastern portions of the old Reich, Christians, those who had been adversely affected by denazification, those who felt themselves to be victims of Communism, veterans, former prisoners of war, women—all offered histories that claimed simultaneously to explain their unique situations and to represent, in some way, an experience that was characteristically German.⁸ At the same time, some Germans' experiences were, correctly or not, understood *a priori* to have been exceptional and thus not particularly useful (or even desirable) in understanding the history of "Otto Normalverbraucher," the German Joe Average. Jews and other racial or religious persecutees (except those who could claim victimization as Christians), Communists, Germans who had been persecuted as "asocials," and Nazi activists—none seemed to represent the "average German." Most "average Germans" did not want to identify with members of these groups, just as members of many of these groups would have resisted having their identity claimed by the larger population of Germans.⁹

During the formative years of a new West German state and society, some narratives of the past would thus become marginal and others dominant; and those that were assimilated into dominant discourses would be transformed in the process. In focusing on the universalization of memories of women's experience of the "crisis years," I am not arguing that the development of West German identity was essentially a process of feminization; other stories linking past and present were

Sabine Reichel, *Zwischen Trümmern und Träumen: Aufgewachsen im Schatten der Schuld* (Hamburg, 1991).

⁸ On refugees and evacuees, see Robert Moeller, "Expelled into Contemporary History: *Flucht und Vertreibung*," paper delivered to the conference of the German Historical Association, 1994. On political Christianity, see Maria Mitchell, "Materialism and Secularism: CDU Politicians and National Socialism, 1945–1949," *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (June 1995): 278–308. On denazification, see Hans Woller, *Gesellschaft und Politik in der amerikanischen Besatzungszone* (Munich, 1986), 95–166; Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik: Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns* (Berlin, 1982); on veterans and former prisoners of war, James Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); Albrecht Lehmann, *Gefangenschaft und Heimkehr: Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion* (Munich, 1986). On widows, see Elizabeth Heineman, "Complete Families, Half Families, No Families at All: Female-Headed Households and the Reconstruction of the Family in the Early Federal Republic," *Central European History*, 1996, forthcoming.

⁹ Histories of everyday life and oral histories often attest to the ways non-persecuted and non-activist Germans recall a past of "ordinary Germans" that excludes the experience of the persecuted and the activists, who numbered in the millions. This opposition of "ordinary Germans" to the "others" has helped to create an apparently homogeneous category of "ordinary Germans" that downplays significant differences among them. In focusing on the majority of the population that was acceptable to the Nazi state, I do not intend to universalize that group's history and thus further marginalize the experience of outsiders to Nazi society, many of whom did not live to recount their experiences. Rather, I intend to draw on those strands of experience that became part of the dominant collective memories of postwar West German society, a society that included few members of racial and religious groups persecuted by the Nazis and that continued to marginalize members of most political and social groups targeted by the Nazis. On the need to recognize the traumas of historical actors without adopting their commemorative priorities and on the specific problems posed by *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) to this duty, see Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993), 85–101; Dominick LaCapra, "Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians' Debate," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, Saul Friedlander, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 122–23; Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 49. For a brief overview of the disputes between practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* and their critics, see Ian Kershaw, "'Normality' and Genocide: The Problem of 'Historicization,'" in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan, eds. (New York, 1993), 20–41. *Otto Normalverbraucher* translates literally as "Otto Average-Consumer."

too significant for the matter to have been so simple. I do hold, however, that the appropriation of women's history for the nation as a whole played a key role in the evolution of a West German national identity and that the national identity that resulted cannot be fully comprehended without understanding this process.

In addition to incorporating many voices, the relationship between memory and national identity was hammered out in diverse locations: in "public" or "official" memory, articulated in such locations as monuments and official anniversary speeches; in "popular" memory, expressed in artifacts such as novels, films, and magazines; and in "counter" memories of groups not well represented by the dominant culture.¹⁰ Yet public, popular, and counter-memories constantly challenged and revised each other. Memories of stereotypically female experiences, which might initially have comprised West German women's "counter-memories," became the "popular memories" of West German society as a whole. In some cases, they even entered the "official memory" of the West German state. This process profoundly affected the development of a West German national identity. It also played a role in West German women's apparent inability to develop a group identity, based on their experiences during the "crisis years" of 1942–1948, which could then serve as a springboard to improved status.¹¹

In seeking links between gender, national identity, and social memory, this essay employs an eclectic collection of sources.¹² Studies of one sort of social memory typically examine a range of themes within a well-defined, internally consistent source base: monuments for examining public memory, for example, or interviews among members of a subpopulation for exploring counter-memory. Because my aim was to analyze the relationships among various forms of social memory, I focused on a limited number of themes through a wide variety of genres. In the

¹⁰ For useful introductions to the ways historians and sociologists of memory have classified various forms of social memory (as opposed to individual memory), see *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, Thomas Butler, ed. (Oxford, 1989); Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter, trans. (New York, 1980); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992); Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, N.H., 1993); David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History*, 75 (March 1989): 1117–29; Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*; *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*, Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds. (New York, 1984); Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, trans. (New York, 1992); Nathan Wachtel, "Introduction: Memory and History," *History and Anthropology*, 2 (1986): 207–24; as well as the special issue of *Representations* on "Memory and Counter-Memory" (Spring 1989) and the journal *History and Memory*.

¹¹ In shaping women's second-class status in the early Federal Republic, the cultural history described here played a secondary role to economic, political, and social pressures. See footnote 5. For comparative explorations of the role of a conservative family ideology in Western attempts to recover from the traumas of war, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1991); Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago, 1994); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, N.J., 1993); Robert Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993); Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, 1993), 220 and following. For more general discussions on the role of war in shaping gender, see *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al., eds. (New Haven, Conn., 1987).

¹² For further discussion of the necessity of such an approach, see Saul Friedlander, *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1982), 13; Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 11–12; Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 145–47. Both Patrick Hutton and Iwona Irwin-Zarecka discuss the dangers of an overly narrow approach to collective memory. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, 22; Irwin-Zarecka, 47.

pages that follow, counter-memory may be revealed through oral histories, dominant popular memory via best-selling novels or widely circulating magazines, and public memory through commemorative speeches. In order to focus the investigation, however, I limited my analysis to references to the three stereotypically female experiences listed at the outset of this essay: victimization, rebuilding, and sexual disorder.

Neither West German social memories nor the group and national identities they helped to shape were static. Decades after the initial consolidation of a West German national identity in the 1950s, memories of women's experiences of the "crisis years" would be revisited, as part of the process of forging a distinct feminist identity. Thus, although this essay focuses mainly on the late 1940s and 1950s, during which the universalization of memories of women's experiences of 1942–1948 occurred, it then turns the clock forward to the era of the feminist challenge to this universalization—and to the implications, for West Germany and for West German feminists, of newly recast memories.

WOMEN'S OWN NARRATIVES of the war rarely begin with September 1, 1939. Instead, the recollections of the large majority of German women who were politically and racially acceptable to the regime typically begin with their husbands' or fathers' departures. They intensify with the invasion of the Soviet Union—with all the casualties that the war in the east brought—and the air war against Germany.¹³ In general, women's narratives emphasize their sufferings and losses and downplay their contributions to and rewards from the Nazi regime. The notion that ordinary Germans were innocent victims of forces beyond their control was a familiar motif in postwar representations of the Third Reich, one hardly unique to women. Before considering this theme in postwar retellings of the Nazi period, however, it is worth examining the ways it simultaneously distorted a larger understanding of the impact of Nazi rule and genuinely captured certain aspects of women's wartime experience.

German women were not, collectively, simply passive victims of a ruthless regime and a terrible war. Aside from larger questions about women's role in the functioning of the Nazi state, it is worth noting some of the advantages German women enjoyed with the outbreak of war. They profited from a generous system of family allowances that allowed hundreds of thousands of working wives to give up their jobs; the war allowed women to enjoy the introduction of war booty to the

¹³ For example, a chapter entitled "Women's Everyday Life in the War 1939 to 1945" in one of the best books on German women's experience in the wartime and postwar years unselfconsciously focuses almost entirely on the years after 1942. Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*, 27–41. See also Annemarie Tröger's observation of this phenomenon in "German Women's Memories of World War II," in *Behind the Lines*, 285–99, esp. 287.

Although this essay will most often refer to "German women" or "West German women," readers should keep in mind that the construction employed above—"German women who were politically and racially acceptable to the [Nazi] regime"—more accurately describes the women considered in this essay. In using the generic term "women," I hope to avoid repeated cumbersome qualifications. Even more important, I hope to illustrate the ways dominant German and West German culture referred to a generic "German woman" without noting just how limited this category was. Inaccurate and exclusive as the terminology may have been, it was the basis for the very stereotypes of "German women's" experience explored here. Only the possibility of imagining a generic "German woman" enabled West Germans to generalize from "her" experience.

consumer economy; some saw in employment with the Reich Labor Service or the military an opportunity for travel, adventure, or a role in realizing the Nazi Party's ideological and political aims; and Germany's early successes allowed women as well as men to feel pride in their country's military prowess (see Figure 1).¹⁴ The war was begun with an intent to win, and German women stood to gain much by being on the victorious side.

Furthermore, insofar as tales of wartime sufferings are presented as evidence that German "bystanders" were among the victims of the Nazi regime, they have a misleading tendency to distract attention away from the tremendous support German men and women lent the regime before it began the war—or, more precisely, before it began to lose the war.¹⁵ Finally, reminders of "Germans'" sufferings rarely force the listener to understand those sufferings in relation to other traumas caused, facilitated, or at least tolerated by the very people who, by losing the war, eventually experienced pain of their own. On the contrary, stories of "Germans'" sufferings tend to displace reminders of the hundreds of thousands of (German) Jews, Communists, and Socialists forced to emigrate before the war; (German) "asocials" and physically and mentally disabled people killed in the euthanasia program or sterilized against their will; and (German) criminals and political opponents who withstood torture and spent years in prison or concentration camps, often to die there. They draw attention away from the millions of Poles evicted from their homes and villages in order to "Germanize" eastern lands; the tens of millions of Europeans killed in the Germans' aggressive war or imported into the Reich as slave labor; the tens of millions who died in German concentration and prisoner-of-war camps; and the hundreds of millions of weakened, displaced, and traumatized survivors of all of these.

Women's retellings of their war experiences conspicuously omit such points, something that has deservedly raised eyebrows among women's historians both in Germany and the United States.¹⁶ But such narratives are rarely intentionally

¹⁴ Dörte Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im "Dritten Reich"* (Hamburg, 1977); Ursula von Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst* (Stuttgart, 1969); Elizabeth Heineman, "'Standing Alone': Single Women from Nazi Germany to the Federal Republic" (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1993), 135–85.

¹⁵ See the tellingly titled collections edited by Gabriele Rosenthal and Christiane Grote, *"Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun": Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des "Dritten Reiches" in Biographien* ("When the war came, I had nothing more to do with Hitler": On the presence of the "Third Reich" in biographies) (Opladen, 1990); and Lutz Niethammer, *"Hinterher merkt man, dass es richtig war, dass es schiefgegangen ist": Nachkriegs-Erfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* ("In hindsight, one sees that it was right that it didn't work out": Postwar Experience in the Ruhr), (Bonn, 1983); also *"Die Jahre weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll": Faschismus-Erfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* ("Today, one doesn't know what to do with those years": Experiences with Fascism in the Ruhr), Lutz Niethammer, ed. (Bonn, 1983).

¹⁶ See especially Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987). Koonz not only examined female Nazis and sympathizers, she also explored the ways in which apparently unpolitical women, fulfilling traditional roles, enabled the Nazi regime to function. The impassioned nature of her work and the responses to it have characterized the heated debate among feminist historians regarding women's roles in Nazi Germany. See Gisela Bock's review of Koonz's work, "Die Frauen und der Nationalsozialismus: Bemerkungen zu einem Buch von Claudia Koonz," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 15 (1989): 563–79; *Töchter-Fragen: NS-Frauen-Geschichte*, Lerke Gravenhorst and Carmen Tatschmurat, eds. (Freiburg i.Br., 1990); Atina Grossmann, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," *Gender and History*, 3 (1991): 350–58; Adelheid von Saldern, "Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State," *Nazism and German Society*, David Crew, ed. (London, 1994), 141–65.

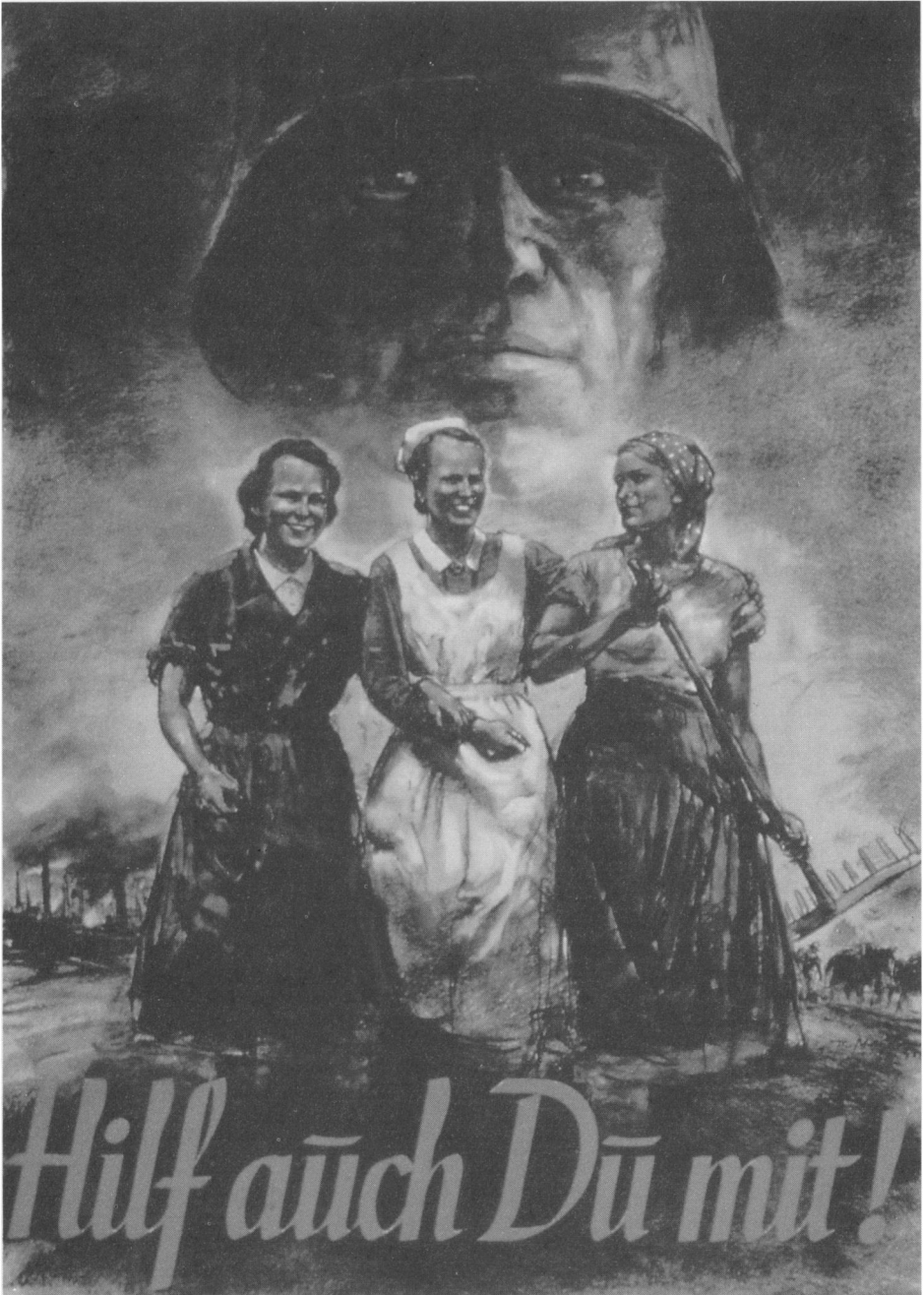


FIGURE 1: "You help, too!" Although working conditions were hard during the war, women could feel pride and adventure through their part in the war effort. Photo courtesy of the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Poster Collection, GE1070.

disingenuous. Instead, they are self-centered recollections of events that demand a broader perspective. Women's recollections of the war focus on the events that most deeply affected their own lives: bombing raids, evacuation, widowhood, flight from the east, and rape.¹⁷ Whatever the shortcomings of typical "German women's" recollections—and they are many—those recollections became the basis for important strands of postwar West German thought.

German women's war stories are indeed dramatic tales, leaving little doubt that their tellers suffered genuine traumas. Of Germany's pre-war population of roughly 80 million, 20 million were removed for military or related service during the war, half of them before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. These 20 million represented the large majority of men ages eighteen to forty, along with a smaller number of women, older men, and younger boys. The cities hit by bombs and evacuation orders in the second half of the war were thus inhabited mainly by women, children, and the elderly. Night after night, women woke to the sound of sirens, dressed their children, grabbed their belongings, and ran to the nearest cellar or bunker. After the "all clear" was sounded, and if no damage had been done, they returned home to soothe their children to sleep and salvage what was left of the night for themselves. Germany's city women, even if they and their homes were untouched by bombs, lived the second half of the war with little sleep and shattered nerves.

Millions of German women did lose their homes, members of their families, or even their own lives. In a week-long raid on Hamburg in the summer of 1943, to take an extreme example, between forty and 100,000 died; 55 to 60 percent of the city was destroyed, leaving 750,000 homeless. By the end of the war, perhaps 14 million Germans had lost their homes, and 600,000 their lives, to air raids.¹⁸ Those who emerged from the bomb shelters to find that their apartments had been hit began extinguishing the fires, rescuing their belongings, and, if possible, making at least a portion of their apartments livable. If this last was impossible, they might move in with relatives, but conditions would be cramped, particularly if they brought children along. If they had no relatives or friends with extra rooms but worked in the city, they were assigned rooms with strangers, who shared this living space only grudgingly.

Beginning in 1943, 10 million people, mainly women and children, were evacuated from Germany's cities. But being a woman did not qualify an adult for evacuation; rather, nonemployed status or responsibility for small children did. Working women without children remained in the endangered cities, as did most working mothers; only women caring for very young children could accompany their children into evacuation.¹⁹ Women who had seen their husbands, fathers, or

¹⁷ On the importance of trauma in determining which portions of experience will dominate individual or collective memories, see Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 16, 49.

¹⁸ *Unsere verlorene Jahre: Frauenalltag und Nachkriegszeit, 1939–1949*, Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, ed. (Darmstadt, 1985), 70, 74; *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Overall Report (European War)*, September 30, 1945, 92–93; rpt. in *The United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1976). Statistics on the extent of the damage and the number of dead vary considerably.

¹⁹ Over the course of the second half of the war, the criteria for mothers who wished to leave the endangered cities were repeatedly tightened. Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan, der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, Schnellbrief (VIa 5550/726), September 21, 1943, R43 II/651d, Bd. 8, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter, BAK); Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan, der Generalbevollmäch-

brothers sent into danger remained in dangerous places themselves as they sent their children into unknown parts. Or they accompanied their children into evacuation, leaving familiar support networks behind and knowing that, if their apartments were hit, they would be unable to salvage any of their property.²⁰

The story of the Darmstadt family F. illustrates the cumulative effects of the separation of marriage partners, bombing raids, homelessness, and evacuation.²¹ In 1939, Herr F. was drafted, leaving his wife with their two children: three-year-old Gisela and one-year-old Willy. Frau F. worked as a letter carrier; her mother, who lived nearby, watched the children late afternoons when the day-care center closed. In the last years of the war, Frau F. and her children spent many nights in air-raid shelters. On the night of September 11, 1944, their shelter was hit. They ran to another, from which they also soon had to flee. Willy's clothes caught fire; as Frau F. beat out the flames, Gisela disappeared. She was never found. With burn wounds, Frau F. and Willy made their way the next morning to Frau F.'s sister-in-law, who, like Frau F., her mother, and two-thirds of Darmstadt's population, had been left homeless by the previous night's raid. All that the family had been able to save were a few linens and two suitcases full of clothing. The group spent the next three days in the open air and the nights in an air-raid shelter. Then Frau F. took her mother and Willy to relatives in the countryside; Frau F. returned, as required by law, to her post in Darmstadt. She and her sister-in-law were assigned a room in an apartment with several other bombed-out families. With Herr F. at war, Gisela presumably dead, and Willy and Frau F.'s mother in evacuation, Frau F. lived out the remainder of the war in Darmstadt with her sister-in-law.²²

Despite Frau F.'s trials, she was spared two central chapters in many women's wartime experience: flight from the east and rape. The 4.5 million Germans who fled during the last months of the war and the chaotic period before official transports began in 1946 belonged mainly to female-headed families.²³ For many, this was not their first move: they had come east as part of the attempt to

tigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, Abschrift zu VIa 5558/223, May 1944, R43 II/651d, Bd. 8, BAK; Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan, der Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz, Schnellbrief (VIa 5558/374), August 25, 1944, R43 II/651d, Bd. 8, BAK.

²⁰ On the difficulties women faced in leaving friends and family behind in the cities, see Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner: Familienalltag in der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich, 1985), 51–52.

²¹ Mandatory participation in the work force is an additional element of most working-class women's recollections of the strains of the war. On women in the labor force, see Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im "Dritten Reich"*; Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst*; Timothy Mason, "Women in Germany, 1920–1940: Family, Welfare and Work," *History Workshop Journal*, 1 (1976): 74–113; 2 (1976): 5–32; Annemarie Tröger, "The Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds. (New York, 1984), 237–70; Heineman, "Standing Alone," 135–85. On women's experience of their participation in the labor force, see Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben* and *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner*; Gerda Szepansky, "Blitzmädel" "Heldenmutter" "Kriegerwitwe": *Frauenleben im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986).

²² Gerhard Baumert, *Deutsche Familien nach dem Kriege* (Darmstadt, 1954), 209–10. The family name is abbreviated in Baumert's work.

²³ The sexual imbalance among refugees exceeded that among the native West German population in 1946. *Monthly Report of the Military Government—US Zone*, no. 9 (April 20, 1946): 21. By 1950, the "surplus of women" among refugees and evacuees was less marked than that among the native population. Gerhard Reichling, *Die Heimatvertriebenen im Spiegel der Statistik* (Berlin, 1958), 15, 52–53.

"Germanize" Polish territory (thus forcing Poles onto their own refugee trail a few years earlier), or they had been evacuated east, out of the range of British and American bombers. Others were leaving their lifelong homes, indeed, the homes their families had inhabited for generations. With as many possessions as they could carry, they traveled by bicycle, horse-drawn cart, or by foot. They faced roads blocked for military use, a crippled system of railroads, and, as long as the war continued, wide-scale bombings. As they progressed westward, they arrived in badly damaged cities that already had a sizable native homeless population. Their treks often lasted weeks.

Germans fleeing westward wanted to be in a portion of Germany conquered by the Western Allies rather than by the Soviet Union. Germans could reasonably expect a much harsher payback from the Soviets. The recent conduct of the Germans in the east, however, was only one of many factors contributing to women's fears of the coming Soviet conquest. German stereotypes of brutal, semi-human peoples of Asia had a centuries-long history, and the Nazi Party had made official portrayals of "Red Hordes," "Tartars," "Huns," and "Asiatics" part of its racial and political vocabulary. As the war drew to a close, depictions of Soviet brutalities, and specifically of rape, became an important tool in urging Germans to fight to the last breath.²⁴

As the first refugees brought news west of widespread slaughter and rape, they confirmed other Germans' worst fears about the Red Army. Estimates of the numbers of rapes at the hands of Soviet soldiers range widely, from the tens of thousands to 2 million. Whatever the precise numbers, rape was a common experience for women in eastern parts of the old Reich, and fear of rape was universal.²⁵ Confronted with the conquering armies, German women were left largely to their own devices. German men, when present, were rarely able to provide any defense, and they often seemed all too anxious to trade women's safety for their own.²⁶

²⁴ See, for example, Joseph Goebbels's second-to-last radio address, delivered on February 28, 1945. Joseph Goebbels, *Goebbels-Reden*, Vol. 2: 1939–45, Helmut Heiber, ed. (Düsseldorf, 1972), 431–32. Also Anatol Goldberg, *Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York, 1984), 207; *Der Panzerbär*, April 27, 1945, quoted in Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, "Eine Woche im April: Berlin 1945; Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal," in *BeFreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder*, Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, eds. (Munich, 1992), 23.

²⁵ The highest estimates appear in Sander and Johr, *BeFreier und Befreite*, 60; more conservative figures appear in Erich Kuby, *Die Russen in Berlin 1945* (Berlin, 1965), 305–18. On the difficulty of quantification and contextualization, see esp. Atina Grossmann, "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," *October*, 72 (April 1995). On the rapes in general, see also Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 69–140; Annemarie Tröger, "Between Rape and Prostitution: Survival Strategies and Possibilities of Liberation of Berlin Women in 1945–48," in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, Judith Friedlander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Carol Smith-Rosenberg, eds. (Bloomington, Ind., 1986); Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, "Doppelt besiegt: Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal," *Frankfurter Frauenblatt* (May 1985): 18–23; Schmidt-Harzbach, "Eine Woche im April"; Erika Hörning, "The Myth of Female Loyalty," *Journal of Psychohistory*, 16 (1988): 19–45. Members of the Western allied forces also raped German women, although there was no western equivalent to the mass rapes that occurred in the east. See Ute Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte zwischen bürgerlicher Verbesserung und neuer Weiblichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), 246–47.

²⁶ For reports of the dangers men faced in defending women from rape, see *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Vol. I/1: *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse* (1954; Munich, 1984), 65E. For reports of men's unwillingness even to try, see Schmidt-Harzbach, "Eine Woche im April"; Kuby, *Die Russen in Berlin*, 305–18; Tröger,

Women's immediate reactions to rape varied widely. Some women seem to have experienced rape as one problem among many: it was a horrible episode, but so were many other events of the winter and spring of 1945.²⁷ For others, rape was an earth-shattering experience. The fact that rape was often accompanied by shooting—either of the victim, of others with her, or simply reckless shooting into the air—meant that women had to fear rape as a mortal danger, not “just” as a painful and traumatic episode. Some families and fiancés reacted with disgust even as women returned tattered and bleeding; others felt but could not express their sympathy.²⁸ Where internal injuries, sexually transmitted disease, or pregnancy resulted, women's feelings of lasting damage were confirmed.²⁹

Bombings, flight, and rape: although these experiences represented only a portion of German women's wartime experience, they quickly came to define the “home front.” Women were the majority in the civilian population, and during and immediately after the war, home-front experiences were typically described as women's experiences (see Figures 2 and 3).³⁰ Reminders that the enemy was harming “innocent women and children” were, if nothing else, effective wartime propaganda. As Germans gained a bit of distance, however, these episodes of victimhood came to represent the wartime sufferings of a population whose sex was unspecified. In essence, they came to represent a “universal German” victimhood at the hands of Allied bombers, Soviet ground troops—and the Nazi Party, which was increasingly portrayed as an alien element that had inflicted a terrible war on an unwilling people.

To be sure, German men had their tales of woe as well, usually focusing on the eastern front or incarceration in a Soviet prison camp.³¹ Given the international

“Between Rape and Prostitution,” 104; Meyer and Schulze, *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner*, 83; Hörning, “Myth of Female Loyalty,” 29. Stories of German men's efforts to defend women are highlighted in publications of the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and War Victims (hereafter, Ministry for Expellees) regarding the flight of Germans living in areas that would become part of the postwar Soviet bloc. Stories of men's uselessness in the face of Soviet soldiers intent on rape appear most frequently in Berlin women's diaries and interviews with Berlin women.

²⁷ See, for example, *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagesbuchaufzeichnungen* (Geneva, 1959), 81, 144, 271; Schmidt-Harzbach, “Eine Woche im April,” 39–42; Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Auswirkungen des II. Weltkriegs auf Familien: Zum Wandel der Familie in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1989), 227.

²⁸ See esp. Sander and Johr, *BeFreier und Befreite*, 16–17; interview with Frau Fr., Interview Collection, Institut für Soziologie, Technische Universität Berlin, p. 42. I am grateful to Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze for making transcripts of their interviews available to me.

²⁹ The police and judicial system turned a blind eye to the widespread abortions that followed these rapes. Some 90 percent of pregnancies in Berlin resulting from rape by Soviets may have ended in abortion, although the number among women on the refugee trail was probably smaller. Even some denominational hospitals and social work groups temporarily relaxed their disapproval of abortions not necessary to save the life of the mother. Within a year, however, both churches made very clear their firm opposition to abortion even in cases of rape. Schmidt-Harzbach, “Eine Woche im April,” 36–39; Sander and Johr, *BeFreier und Befreite*, 58; Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, 97–101, 121–25; Diakonieschwesterenschaft Zehlendorf am Central Ausschuss für die Innere Mission-West, August 12, 1948, ADW, CAW 391A, Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes—Innere Mission (hereafter, ADW-IM); April 1946, Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund, “Stellungnahme zur Frage der künstlichen Schwangerschaftsunterbrechung und der empfängnisverhütenden Mittel,” ADV, BP I 215, ADW-IM.

³⁰ For a gendered description of the bombings, written by a man during the war and published in 1948, see Hans Erich Nossack, *Der Untergang* (Frankfurt am Main, 1948), esp. 27, 49, 51. On the openness of early postwar discussions of the female experience of rape, see Grossmann, “Question of Silence.”

³¹ Wounded veterans, of course, could easily adopt the identity of victims of war; see Diehl, *Thanks*

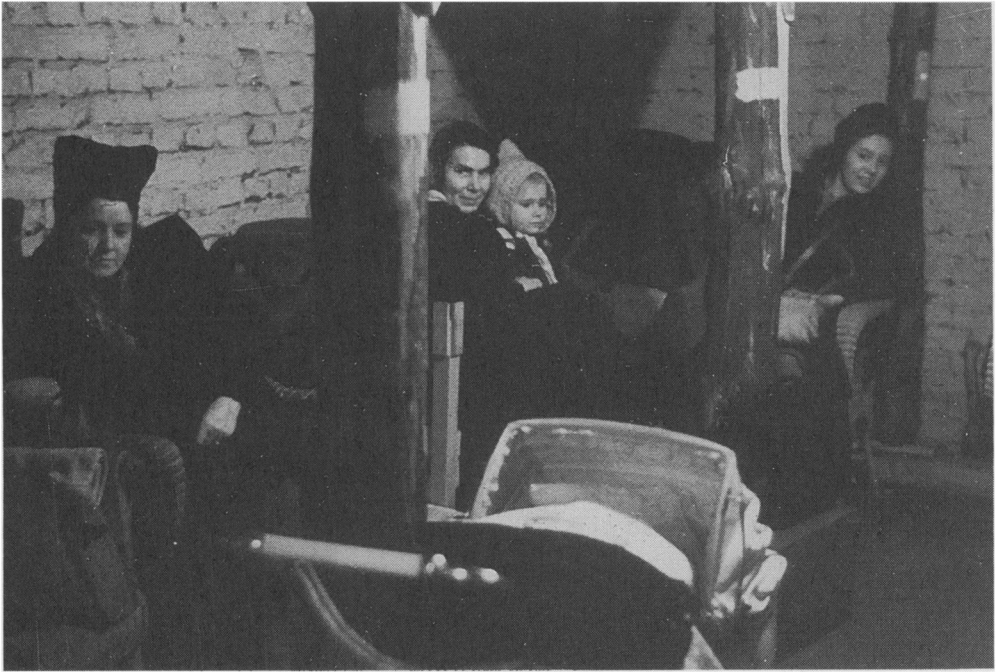


FIGURE 2: Bomb shelter, Berlin [1945?]. This wartime photograph makes clear the disproportionate degree to which women were victimized by bombing raids. Landesbildstelle Berlin.

fury at the destruction wrought by the German military, such narratives often expressed the desire to separate the individual teller from the collective. The German military machine, aggressive war aims, and inhumane actions taken “in the name of the German people” might have been criminal and brutal, but an individual veteran could point out that *he*, at least, had been an unwilling draftee. Or he could insist that he had been a member of a legitimate collective: a highly professional *Wehrmacht*, distinct in every way from the SS and completely innocent of wartime atrocities. The mythology of the innocent draftee and professional soldier had tangible implications for the development of the Federal Republic, helping, for example, to justify pensions for veterans and West German participation in NATO. Despite the significance of popular memories of male experience, however, such memories do not seem to have become so generalized that the gendered nature of the original experience was obscured. Even popular memories of an admittedly huge collective—the German military—remained just that: representations of the military.

of the Fatherland. Wounded veterans, however, nurtured an “active” identity of upright soldiers who had performed their duty rather than a “passive” identity of victimhood. On men’s experience in Soviet prison camps and their readjustment to civilian society, see Lehmann, *Gefangenschaft und Heimkehr*. For a later portrayal of prisoners of war, consider the popular 1958 film *Der Arzt von Stalingrad*, directed by Geza Radvanyi. Significantly, the leading character is less a victim than a hero, a moral anchor, and a font of technical expertise in a primitive environment.



FIGURE 3: "Two Russian soldiers harass a girl," 1945. The interaction is clearly a gendered one. Ullstein Bilderdienst.

The disproportionately female civilian experience and the almost exclusively female rape experience, by contrast, seem to have been especially well suited for allowing Germans to consider their nation as a whole an innocent victim of war.³²

³² See also discussions of post-World War II monuments emphasizing civilian suffering rather than soldierly heroism. Behrenbeck, "Heldenkult oder Friedensmahnung?"; Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 212–16.

Germans could remind themselves that not only Jews but also Germans, a category that implicitly excluded German Jews, had suffered wartime atrocities, such as the firebombing of Dresden. The fact that the adult population of cities such as Dresden had been mainly female at the time of the bombings no longer seemed so significant.

Visual culture played a part in this transition, as the lunar landscapes of bombed cities were endlessly photographed both for their historic value and for their striking aesthetic quality (Figure 4). In this genre of photography, the inanimate victims of the bombings—the buildings—became the subject. Viewers who did recall that these buildings were once full of people could easily forget such details as those people's demographic profile.³³ In fact, one of the features that made them so striking was their very sterility: they were, at least on the surface of things, utterly devoid of life.

Even representations of earlier moments, however—the years of the bombings themselves—increasingly described sex-neutral *cities*, or even German or Western *civilization*, as the victims of the bombings. Typical was an essay in the 1953 collection, "Balance of the Second World War," a book promoted, in the words of its very respectable publisher, in order "that the survivors . . . not simply push aside this most monstrous event of world history [the war], but confront it in a very basic way."³⁴ Presumably in the interests of such a confrontation, an essay titled "The Air War over Germany" portrayed Germany as the innocent victim of a war against civilians, observing that, "aside from Hiroshima, there has scarcely been a more terrible decision in the history of war than this one, which announced war and destruction to the way of life of a Western urban culture that had grown organically over a long period of time."³⁵ The essay is notably silent on the possibility that the *German* war against civilians might have embodied some of the most terrible decisions in the history of war. Less glaring but also telling is the fact that the largely female experience of the bombing raids has become war and destruction of a "Western urban culture." To be sure, the destruction of German housing and urban infrastructure was significant by any measure. But by minimizing the human and emphasizing the cultural victims of the bombing war, the author obscured the degree to which this was a gendered experience. Germany, representing no less than Western urban culture, was the victim of the war.³⁶

Most remarkable was the appropriation of the female rape experience by the nation. Although discussions of women's experiences with rape by members of the victorious armies became taboo a few years after the end of the war,³⁷ references to the rapes hardly disappeared. In fact, they permeated the culture. But they

³³ On the power of the visual image to overwhelm information provided by less striking sources, even if those other sources challenge the message of the image, see Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 176–77; Friedlander, "Introduction," in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 16.

³⁴ *Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Erkenntnisse und Verpflichtungen für die Zukunft* (Oldenburg/Hamburg, 1953), 11.

³⁵ Hans Rumpf, "Luftkrieg über Deutschland," in *Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 163.

³⁶ The author, writing in 1953, notes the predominance of women among the casualties only in passing. Rumpf, "Luftkrieg über Deutschland," 170. By contrast, note the unselfconsciousness with which the author of a 1943 account describes the victims of bombing raids as women. Nossack, *Der Untergang*, 28, 51. Both the wartime and the 1953 accounts were written by men.

³⁷ Grossmann, "Question of Silence."

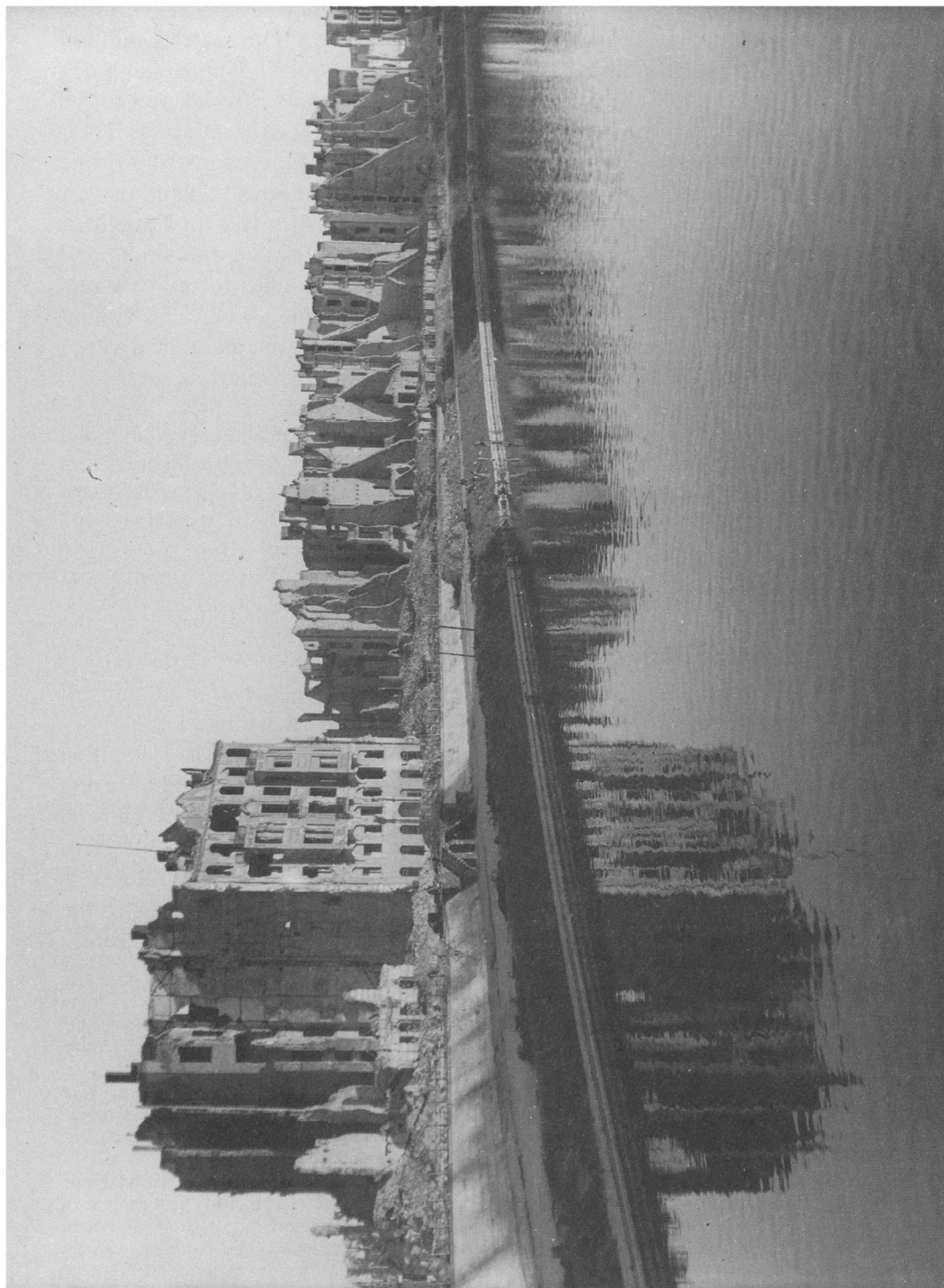


FIGURE 4: "Destroyed row of houses on the Spree," Friedrich Seidenstücker, 1946. This postwar photo is an example of the retrospective focus on the cultural and ungended victims of the bombing raids. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

ceased to be references to rapes of women and instead turned into allusions to the rape of Germany.

Cold War-era references to the Soviet rapes explained them in political, national, or even racial terms—and not as gendered acts. During the military occupation, Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union campaign posters warned against the Soviet threat by portraying Asian-featured, red-tinted men lurking in the shadows, a visual reference to the warrior/rapist. Their outstretched hands, however, reached not for a woman but for a chunk of a prone Germany (Figure 5). The image of a Germany raped by the Soviets made its way into “official history” when, in the mid-1950s, the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and War Victims published a multi-volume work on the flight and evacuation of Germans at the end of the war. The series testifies to the very real hardships of Germans who fled or were evacuated from their homes in violent circumstances. However, it also represented an official endorsement of a racial analysis of the rapes, as the ministry offered the following explanation:

It can be recognized that behind the rapes stood a form of behavior and a mentality that seem strange and repelling to European concepts. One would have to trace them back in part to traditions and ideas that are still in effect, particularly in the Asian regions of Russia, according to which women, like jewelry, valuables, and the contents of apartments and armories, are the rightful bounty of the victor . . . The fact that Soviet soldiers of Asian origin distinguished themselves by a particular ferocity and lack of moderation confirms that certain strains of the Asian mentality contributed substantially to these outbreaks.³⁸

The notion that European Soviet soldiers conducted themselves better, on the whole, than did Asian Soviet soldiers is not borne out by the several volumes of documentation that follow this analysis, and the ministry would surely have objected to a similar racial explanation for German atrocities in the east—including widespread rape of women of occupied lands.³⁹ What is especially notable in the present context, however, is how such an understanding of the rapes allowed Germans, male and female, to recall the collapse of the eastern front as an event in which Western civilization was violated by a brutal Soviet or Asian culture.

This rhetorical opposition of a violent East against a civilized West predated the Federal Republic by decades, even centuries. The reiteration of this opposition

³⁸ *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse*, 61E. See also Walter Luedde-Neurath, “Das Ende auf deutschem Boden,” in *Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 430. A volume published at the same time as the Ministry for Expellees’ collection did focus on the victimization of women per se. The title of the work, which describes the “martyrdom” of East German women as an “excerpt” from the “Passion” of the region of Silesia, nevertheless makes clear that the larger story is one of Good against Evil. *Martyrium und Heldentum Ostdeutscher Frauen: Ein Ausschnitt aus der schlesischen Passion 1945/46*, Johannes Kaps, ed. (Munich, 1954). For a much more recent account of the flight and expulsion, which also highlights rape, see Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *The German Expellees: Victims in War and Peace*, John A. Koehler, trans. (New York, 1986).

³⁹ In his contribution to the *Historikerstreit* (the “Historians’ Debate” of the 1980s), Ernst Nolte continued the tendency to characterize atrocities—in this case, the yet more horrible practice of genocide—as “Asiatic,” thus defining as perpetrators one of the very groups targeted by the Nazis. Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will,” rpt. in “*Historikerstreit*”: *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987), 45; consider also Dominick LaCapra’s commentary on this in LaCapra, “Representing the Holocaust,” 113; and Klaus Theweleit’s discussion of Weimar-era sexualized fears of the East. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, Stephan Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner, trans., 2 vols. (Minneapolis, 1987, 1989).



Figure 5: Political poster of 1949 appealing to fears of the “rape” of Germany. The poster portrays an endangered Bavaria and recommends a vote for the CDU’s Bavarian counterpart, the Christian Social Union. In the original, the face is red. Münchner Stadtmuseum.

after the war, however, legitimated the emergence of a discourse that challenged the notion that the German war effort had been, to its core, unjustifiable. According to this narrative, the Western Allies had refused to recognize that the Germans, in the final stages of the war, had been on their side, defending the West against the onslaught of the East. As the *Wehrmacht* had defended Western civilization against the "Red Flood," the Western Allies had stubbornly held out for an unconditional surrender; the results were the perpetration of "Asiatic horrors" on the East Germans and expanded Soviet power in postwar Europe. Not only German civilians but Western civilization and all its carriers became the victims of the war in this retelling.⁴⁰

Ironically, as rape became a powerful metaphor for German victimization, the government declined to recognize real rape by the enemy or occupier as a form of wartime injury deserving compensation. Insisting that rape was not an injury unless lasting physical damage had been done and that children were the natural result of sexual intercourse, the Ministry of Labor turned down repeated petitions to recognize raped women as victims under the Law to Aid Victims of War, or at least to contribute to the support of children who had resulted from wartime and occupation-era rapes.⁴¹ Only in the late 1950s did the Finance Ministry award limited support to a small number of raped women under the provisions of the Law Regarding Compensation for Work and Damages Resulting from the Occupation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Luedde-Neurath, "Das Ende auf deutschem Boden," 430–37. Similar themes emerged in the *Historikerstreit*. Andreas Hillgruber, for example, described a Germany that could anticipate *its* fate after it learned of the rape and murder of women and children in the town of Nemmersdorf late in 1944. Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1986), 19. With the Western Allies stubbornly and, Hillgruber seems to think, incomprehensibly working with the Soviets on a postwar settlement (which of course would include increased Soviet influence in Central Europe), the German military was left no choice but to prolong the war in order to give eastern civilians time to flee. This leads Hillgruber to his famous and much-criticized formulation, "If the historian looks at the catastrophe of the winter of 1944/45, only one position remains . . . he must identify with the concrete fate of the German population in the East and with the desperate and sacrificial exertions of the eastern German army and the German Baltic navy, which sought to defend the population from the orgy of revenge of the Red Army, the mass rapes, the arbitrary killing, and the compulsory deportations" (pp. 24–25). Hillgruber thus not only described a past in which the German nation adopted a "victim" identity that was particularly compelling because of the fact of rape, he also insisted that, even in the present, the (presumably German) historian has no choice but to adopt this identity.

⁴¹ Gerhard Wilke, "Versorgung unehelicher Kinder nach dem Bundesversorgungsgesetz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Ehelichkeitsanfechtung," *Sozialarbeit*, 1 (1952): 348–57; "Fall 3: Ist ein von Besatzungsangehörigen zwangsgezeugtes Kind auch als Kriegsoffer anzusehen?" *Sozialarbeit*, 1 (1952): 115–17; Bundesministerium für Arbeit an den vorsitzenden des Ausschusses des Deutschen Bundestages für Kriegsoffer- und Kriegsgefangenenfragen (IVb 2–45/51), January 22, 1951, B149/1876 folio 10, BAK; Bundesministerium für Arbeit an das Bundesministerium des Innerns, Finanzministerium, Bundesministerium für Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen (IVb 1073/50), November 20, 1950, B149/1876 folio 7, BAK.

Some provincial welfare offices gave special consideration to needy mothers raising children of wartime and occupation-era rape. Sozialminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen–Jugendwohlfahrt (IIIB/7b 10/47 II), February 20, 1947, Best. 932 Nr. 213, Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz (hereafter, LHK); Sozialminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen an den Herrn Bundesminister des Innerns, September 28, 1950, Best. 932 Nr. 213, LHK (the same document can be found in B153/345-I folio 55, BAK); der Niedersächsische Sozialminister an den Herrn Bundesminister des Innerns (W As.20 10 06a), April 30, 1953, B153/345-I folio 1952, BAK; der Hessische Minister des Innern an die Herren Regierungspräsidenten Darmstadt, Kassel, Wiesbaden (VIII a [3] 50 f 24 02–3254/53), October 17, 1953, B153/345-I folio 186, BAK.

⁴² *Gesetz über die Abgeltung von Besatzungsleistungen und Besatzungsschäden*, December 1, 1955 (*Bundesgesetzblatt* [hereafter, BGBl.], 1955, I, p. 734). This law covered only damages that occurred

As the experience of rape was degendered to apply to the nation, the state refused to recognize a uniquely female experience of victimization by rape.

Conventions of delicacy provided a ruse for minimizing women's rape experiences at the linguistic level and describing a national experience instead. The euphemism "Asian atrocities" typically replaced the word "rape" in the 1950s, thus substituting a racialized term for a gendered one.⁴³ As late as 1985, the head of the Christian Democratic faction to the Bundestag feigned an inability to call the wartime rape of German women by its name in a speech to the Federation of German Expellees:

I . . . express my solidarity . . . with you, the expellees. With two million of your fellow countrymen who lost their lives while fleeing or being driven out of their homes and with twelve million who, at the end of the Second World War, lost nearly everything but their lives—their homes, their property, their families and their honor—I do not wish to describe what was done to the women.

Three paragraphs later, however, the speaker proved capable of referring to the "rape" of a gender-neutral Europe by the Soviet Union: "The purpose of a constructive *Ostpolitik* by the free Europeans and the free West cannot be to legitimize the rape and division of Europe."⁴⁴

Stories of wartime victimization of women thus provided one important source for a popular, even official, version of German history sympathetic to Germans' recent experience. Allied bombers and the Nazi Party could serve as the villains in tales of wartime victimization, but memories of flight and rape had an especially profound resonance in the formative years of the Federal Republic. In the context of the Cold War, stories of flight and rape helped to define a West Germanness that was defined in large part by the need to face the threat from the East. But whatever the origin of Germans' suffering, as stories of victimization came to constitute

after August 1, 1945, in the territory that became the Federal Republic, however, and was thus received with some skepticism as recompense for the rapes, most of which occurred in the eastern territories prior to August 1. An order of December 1958 allowed payments to women who had been raped in other portions of the former Reich during earlier months. Neither piece of legislation made retroactive payments, and both terminated payments when the child reached the age of sixteen. Finanzministerium, Rdvfg., December 4, 1958, "Gewährung eines Härteausgleichs für den Unterhalt von Kindern, die bei einer Vergewaltigung gezeugt worden sind, die nicht als Besatzungsschäden anerkannt werden kann" (II A/8-Sk 0317-66/58), rpt. in *Die Praxis*, 12 (May 1959): 118-19. A portion of the payment was designated as child support, a portion as damages for the woman's physical and psychological sufferings. This meant that women who had not borne children as a result of their rapes could collect smaller payments. Finanzministerium, Rdvfg., December 17, 1956 (II E/1-BL 1112-352/56/0 4250), rpt. in "Abgeltung von Besatzungsschäden: Gewährung eines Ausgleichs für den Unterhalt von Kindern, die bei einer Vergewaltigung gezeugt worden sind (NR 21 BVBl.)," *Verband der Kriegsbeschädigten, Kriegshinterbliebenen, und Sozialrentner Deutschlands-Mitteilungen*, 7 (April 1957): 185-87; Auszug aus dem Schreiben des Finanzministeriums, December 18, 1958-VI-B/1-BL 1821-40/59, Best. 932 Nr. 213, LHK.

⁴³ See, for example, *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse*, 61E; Luedde-Neurath, "Das Ende auf deutschem Boden," 430.

⁴⁴ Alfred Dregger, "For a Free Germany in a Free Europe," speech delivered to the Federation of German Expellees, Bonn, on April 28, 1985; trans. and rpt. in *Bitburg and Beyond: Encounters in American, German and Jewish History*, Ilya Levkov, ed. (New York, 1987), 112. In his foreign policy of the early 1970s, nicknamed "Ostpolitik," Chancellor Willy Brandt sought improved relations with the East by recognizing the GDR and the loss of formerly German lands to Poland and the USSR.

national memory, they functioned ever less effectively in describing a female experience.

The next chapter of women's history would be represented as one of heroism, sacrifice, and hard work. It, too, would provide material for the establishment of a positive national identity at the expense of fully recognizing women's unique experience. This strand of West German identity, however, depended less on the existence of an enemy "other" and more on a positive understanding of West Germany's human resources and economic success.

UPON THE MILITARY COLLAPSE, Germany was left with a marked "surplus of women" (*Frauenüberschuss*). In October 1946, there were 7 million more women than men in occupied Germany. The demographic imbalance was particularly stark among young adults: for every 1,000 men in the Western zones between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, there were nearly 1,700 women of the same age.⁴⁵ With men scarce, women pulled their families and German society through extraordinarily lean years, times so difficult they were called the "hunger years." Millions had already lost their homes to bombing raids, and the homeless population grew by millions more as refugees from the east poured in. The lack of food supplies was catastrophic. In late May 1945, Berlin housewives could claim a daily ration of 11 ounces of bread, 14 ounces of potatoes, 1 ounce of grain, $\frac{2}{3}$ ounce of meat, and $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce of fat—a ration card popularly nicknamed the "Ascension pass." This starving, homeless population went on to face the coldest winter of the century in 1946–1947. Thus hard times persisted: in November 1947, the average weight for women was 93.5 pounds; for men, 92.3 pounds.⁴⁶ With few means for obtaining basic necessities, and with even those necessities in appallingly short supply, women almost literally had to make something out of nothing in order to feed themselves and their dependents.

They did so largely without men's help. Few men were around: they were either casualties of war or still in prison camps. Those who were present were often wounded, too weak to work, or psychologically shattered by their wartime and prison experiences. In a period of utterly inadequate rations, tremendous shortages of housing, fuel, and the most basic of consumer items, women worked the black market, stood in endless food lines, trekked to the countryside to barter away their last belongings, made bread out of acorns and soap out of ash, stole coal from trains and wood from off-limits forests, and mended their families' threadbare clothes when even needles were a scarce commodity on the black market.

Just as women's reproductive work became both more complicated and more vital for survival, a new, powerful symbol of women at the workplace emerged: the "Woman of the Rubble" (*Trümmerfrau*), who cleared away the piles of stone and brick that constituted Germany's urban landscape. Rubble clearance was not an

⁴⁵ Helga Grebing, Peter Pozorski, and Rainer Schulze, *Die Nachkriegsentwicklung in Westdeutschland: 1945–1949, A: Die wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen* (Stuttgart, 1980), 19.

⁴⁶ Men's health problems had been aggravated by their incarceration as prisoners of war. Monthly Narrative Report for Land Hessen, November 1948, Medizinalabteilung, Minister des Innern, Hessisches Staatsministerium, Abt. 649 8/59–1/11, Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter, HHA).

occupation women entered with much enthusiasm. The work was not only strenuous, it was dead-end: women were prohibited from entering apprenticeships that might have allowed them to advance in the construction industry. Since volunteers were lacking, occupation authorities assigned men and women who had belonged to Nazi organizations, as well as dependents of those implicated, to work removing rubble in many cities.⁴⁷ When this proved to be an inadequate labor pool, the same authorities turned to a system of mandatory labor among the general population.⁴⁸ In addition to those performing compulsory labor, another group of women volunteered for the task, not for the poor pay but for the better ration cards they received as heavy laborers. However mixed their motivations for taking on this chore, women set to the tedious, heavy work of moving, cleaning, and sorting building material for reuse—the first step of Germany's physical reconstruction. Women of the rubble peopled the streets of many German cities; they constituted 5 to 10 percent of employed women in Berlin.⁴⁹

From the women of the rubble emerged the Woman of the Rubble: the central symbol of the era.⁵⁰ A single image linked women in rags and ruined cities on the one hand, the resilience of Germans and the process of reconstruction on the other. The survival of ordinary German families and the economic recovery of Germany as a whole were united in one figure: a woman who devoted her days to cleaning bricks and her evenings to feeding her family. Occupation authorities tried to establish a link between the Nazi past and the current devastation, as evidenced by their assignment of former Nazis and their families to rubble clearance. Initially, women of the rubble endured the occasional taunt, "Nazi Broads" (*Nazi-Weiber*).⁵¹ Nevertheless, the Woman of the Rubble quickly came to suggest a story that began with the bombing of German cities, focused on terrible hardships, and promised renewal by the cooperative efforts of ordinary Germans. Nazi politics, aggression,

⁴⁷ Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*, 70; John Gimbel, *A German Community under American Occupation: Marburg, 1945–52* (Stanford, Calif., 1961), 58. The prohibition on women's work in construction was lifted by Control Council Law Nr. 32, of July 10, 1946, but women's work clearing rubble predated this law.

⁴⁸ The number and ages of the children that qualified a woman for an exemption varied according to region. See, for example, North Rhine province's "Verordnung über die Leistung von Pflichtarbeit, 31. Juli 1945," rpt. in *Unsere verlorene Jahre*, 42–45; Doris Schubert, *Frauenarbeit 1945–1949: Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit*, Vol. 1 (Düsseldorf, 1984), 76–77; Landesarbeitsamt Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rdvfg. 15/46 (Entwurf) an die Arbeitsämter, February 26, 1946, Landesarbeitsamt Nordrhein-Westfalen Nr. 239 folio 288, Nordrheinwestfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter, N-WH).

⁴⁹ Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*, 95. Women of the rubble were most visible in Berlin, but they were also prominent in many other cities. In Mannheim, 48 of 177 people working to clear rubble a year after the war were women. Der Badische Landesdirektor für Wirtschaft, Ernährung und Verkehr Nr. 1329 an den Herrn Landesdirektor für Arbeit, Wohlfahrt und Wiederaufbau, May 7, 1946, Abt. 460 Arbeitsamt Karlsruhe Nr. 82, Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (hereafter, GLK). In other cities, such as Munich, construction remained a male preserve even in the short term. Marita Krauss, "... es geschahen Dinge, die Wunder ersetzten": Die Frau im Münchner Trümmeralltag," in *Trümmerleben*, Friedrich Prinz, ed. (Munich, 1985), 21–74, esp. 62 and following.

⁵⁰ Although the present discussion focuses on the symbolic use of the Woman of the Rubble in the Federal Republic, she played a powerful role in the German Democratic Republic as well. Compare Ina Merkel, ... und Du, *Frau an der Werkbank: Die DDR in den 50er Jahren* (Berlin, 1990), 31–47.

⁵¹ In this context, the *Trümmerfilme* ("Rubble Films") of the immediate postwar years also warrant consideration. These films—which bore the Allies' stamp of approval via the licensing process—typically explored questions about the recent past against the striking physical backdrop of the ruined cities. The connection between past and present was thus unavoidable. Anton Kaes, *From "Hitler" to "Heimat": The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 12.

and war crimes provided only the haziest of backdrops for this story. The Woman of the Rubble had no questionable past: she came from nowhere to clean up the mess others had left behind. In the words of a 1946 pamphlet,

There is no picture that characterizes the results of a catastrophic politics more impressively and graphically, but at the same time more movingly, than these untiring women working in the rubble in all weather. Of all the boasting promises that were once made to them, nothing remains but rubble and piles of stone, which they must literally clear away with their own hands *so life can go on*. They do not hide their disappointment over their fate, but whatever may happen, they want to *put these hard times behind them*.⁵²

Rather than revisit the past, the Women of the Rubble wanted to “put hard times behind them” so “life could go on,” an attractive idea for most Germans.⁵³ Popular metaphors such as “ruins of the soul” and “internal devastation,” which established a parallel between the physical destruction of Germany and the psychological destruction of Germans, made the business of cleaning up even more essential to Germany’s renewal. “Ruins are a general phenomenon,” wrote a contributor to a social work journal in 1949. “Just as concretely as they lay on the street corners, so are they present inside people.”⁵⁴

In addition to her lack of association with the past, the Woman of the Rubble had no complicated future. This became important as the mythology of the Woman of the Rubble developed in the 1950s—the decade of the Federal Republic’s “economic miracle.” During the 1950s, West Germany’s “economic miracle” became more than the measure of its recovery from the war. Given the difficulty of building a national identity on the troubled grounds of Germany’s past, as well as the widespread lack of interest in the political foundations of the new state, collective economic success became an important basis for the establishment of a distinctly West German national identity.⁵⁵ By the mid-1950s, however, it was clear that this recovery had had a price tag, albeit one to which few objected. The recovery of West Germany had required the quick denazification of technical experts who were needed for the economy; it had involved an alliance with the West that some blamed for making reunification with East Germany impossible; it included rearmament and participation in military exercises; it demanded an attitude of humility and gratitude toward the United States for the provision of Marshall Plan aid. But the phoenix had begun to rise from the ashes with the

⁵² *Frauen gestern und heute* (Berlin, 1946), 34–36, emphasis added; rpt. in Schubert, *Frauenarbeit 1945–1949*, 263.

⁵³ For additional examples of the need to look forward rather than backward, see Ernst Wiechert in *Das Gedicht: Blätter für die Dichtung*, 1946, quoted in Arnold Sywottek, “Tabuisierung und Anpassung in Ost und West: Bemerkungen zur deutschen Geschichte nach 1945,” in *Deutschland nach Hitler: Zukunftspläne im Exil und aus der Besatzungszeit 1939–1949*, Thomas Koebner, Gert Sautermeister, and Sigrid Schneider, eds. (Opladen, 1987), 229.

⁵⁴ “Eheberatungsstelle in Hannover,” *Neues Beginnen*, 4 (March 1, 1949): 3. For a literary example of such imagery, see Walter Kolbenhoff, *Heimkehr in die Fremde* (Munich, 1949), 60, 116; for religious use of such language, consider the discussion of the left-Catholic journal *Ende und Anfang* in Gert Sautermeister, “Messianisches Hoffen, tapfere Skepsis, Lebensbegehren: Jugend in den Nachkriegsjahren,” in *Deutschland nach Hitler*, 278.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Peter Reichel, *Politische Kultur der Bundesrepublik* (Opladen, 1981), 110–49. On West Germans’ failure to identify with their constitution and the principles of constitutional democracy, see Heinz Rausch, “Politisches Bewusstsein und politische Einstellungen im Wandel,” in *Die Identität der Deutschen*, Werner Weidenfeld, ed. (Munich, 1983), 130.



FIGURE 6: Women of the rubble. Images of these women quickly entered popular iconography of the reconstruction of West Germany. Landesbildstelle Berlin.

Women of the Rubble—women who projected an image of political neutrality, equality in sacrifice, and an ability to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.⁵⁶ The Women of the Rubble provided a symbol of rebuilding on a humble scale, innocent of the disputes that would mark later stages of reconstruction in the Federal Republic.

The Woman of the Rubble did not share the fate of the victim of rape: she did not disappear in order that a nationalized, degendered version of her experience might take her place. In fact, visual images of the Woman of the Rubble became a national cliché, gracing countless dust jackets and journalistic references to the era (see Figures 6 and 7). At the same time, the appealing simplicity of the Woman of the Rubble could be removed from her person, and as such could represent not just women's extraordinary efforts but an entire era in West Germany's history. Consider this idealization of the immediate postwar period and of the physical work of reconstruction by a Social Democrat who served in the Bundestag during the 1960s: "After the total war and total defeat we began to clean up the devastated landscape, to organize the rebuilding . . . Back then, Conservative and Social Democrat, Communist and Liberal, Catholic and Protestant sat together without

⁵⁶ On the importance of collective memories of rebuilding to West German identity, see, for example, Wolfgang Mommsen, "The Germans and Their Past: History and Political Consciousness in the Federal Republic of Germany," in *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter, and Volker Duerr, eds. (Madison, Wis., 1990), 253–54; Mommsen, "Wandlungen der nationalen Identität," in *Die Identität der Deutschen*, 174–76.



FIGURE 7: Women of the rubble dancing during a break from their work. Such photos emphasized the innocence of Germans engaged in the work of reconstruction. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

examining each other suspiciously, without mistrust.”⁵⁷ Histories of the occupation era hardly support this portrayal of political parties working in harmony. Despite some promising signs of cooperation, such as the establishment of an ecumenical Christian party to replace a distinctive political Catholicism, divisions between Christian conservatives, Socialists, liberals, and Communists were intense and bitter. The parliamentarian’s reference to cleaning up the devastated landscape, however, suggests that his mental image was not one of the smoke-filled rooms of political meetings, which were filled mainly by men; rather, his reference is to the scene on the streets, which was dominated by women.

Women of the Rubble thus came to personify West Germany’s reconstruction. They lay at the heart of a national identity that emphasized hard work and economic success, and they implied that 1945 was the “Zero Hour” that marked the beginning of the new nation’s history. Women found themselves unable, however, to translate memories of their hard work during Germany’s hour of need into fairer treatment in the labor market once economic recovery began. Memories of women’s heroic role in feeding their families and in cleaning up the bombed cities had greater potential to improve women’s status than did images of women as

⁵⁷ Fritz Sanger, “Gefahrdete Meinungsfreiheit,” in *Die zornigen alten Manner: Gedanken uber Deutschland seit 1945*, Axel Eggerecht, ed. (Reinbek/Hamburg, 1979), 236. Consider also aesthetic images of the rubble and of the activity of removing it. Sautermeister, “Messianisches Hoffen,” 261 and following.

victims or as fraternizers (see below); thus their failure to have this effect is particularly telling. The adoption of the Woman of the Rubble as a national symbol served at best to compensate former women of the rubble for continued economic and legal discrimination.

With the 1948 currency reform in the Western occupation zones came a sharp rise in unemployment. Firms laid off workers, since labor paid with the new Deutsche mark was much more expensive than that paid in the old currency. At the same time, millions of people who had supported themselves through the now-defunct underground economy suddenly needed legitimate work. Women and men alike flooded the unemployment offices, as male joblessness rose 42.5 percent and that of women 70 percent in the first month after currency reform.⁵⁸ But women, whose ability to juggle paid employment with extended household responsibilities and underground work had attracted admiration during the "hunger years," found their applications for unemployment compensation rejected on the grounds that their presumed household responsibilities made them unavailable to the labor market.⁵⁹ As a result, unemployed women found it much more difficult to collect unemployment compensation than did men.⁶⁰

As the new state was formed, women found that their extraordinary efforts prior to the currency reform did not lead to the alleviation of discrimination against working women. The argument of Social Democrats and Communists that women had demonstrated their value in the labor force and that equal pay for equal work should thus be anchored in the West German constitution (the "Basic Law") proved unconvincing to the majority of representatives who drew up the document.⁶¹ The courts upheld separate wage and salary classifications until 1955.⁶² Age limits excluded adult women from practically all vocational training and from much employment.⁶³ Female applicants over the age of forty faced truly bleak prospects in seeking work, even if they had performed twenty years or more of salaried work and had lost their positions through no fault of their own. Women could have little hope that their government would challenge age discrimination: the federal

⁵⁸ Schubert, *Frauenarbeit 1945–1949*, 103; *Monthly Report of the Military Government—US Zone*, no. 37 (July 1948): 3–4, 79–80.

⁵⁹ Petri, Bezirksfürsorgestelle Friedberg (Hessen) an das Landesarbeitsamt Frankfurt/Main, January 7, 1949, Abt. 940 Umgang Nr. 164, HHA; Härting, Regierungspräsident Darmstadt an die Bezirksfürsorgestelle Friedberg (Hessen), November 30, 1948, Abt. 940 Umgang Nr. 164, HHA; Petri, Bezirksfürsorgestelle Friedberg (Hessen) an das Landesarbeitsamt Frankfurt/Main, December 27, 1948, Abt. 940 Umgang Nr. 164, HHA; Präsident des Landesarbeitsamtes Hessen an die Arbeitsämter im Bezirk des Landesarbeitsamtes Hessen, Dienstanweisung 17/48 (Entwurf), September 10, 1948, Abt. 940 Umgang Nr. 176, HHA; Präsident des Landesarbeitsamtes Hessen an die Arbeitsämter im Bezirk des Landesarbeitsamtes Hessen, Dienstanweisung 6/49 (Entwurf), January 5, 1949, Abt. 940 Umgang Nr. 164, HHA; Präsident des Landesarbeitsamtes Württemberg-Baden an den Herrn Leiter der Arbeitsämter, July 2, 1948, Abt. 460 Arbeitsamt Tauberbischofsheim Nr. 15, GLK.

⁶⁰ *Monthly Report of the Military Government—US Zone*, no. 38 (August 1948): 75, 77. See also Heineman, "Standing Alone," 233–37.

⁶¹ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 53. For an overview of legal issues regarding women and employment, see Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, *Verordnete Unterordnung: Erwerbstätige Frauen zwischen konservativer Ideologie und Wirtschaftswachstum* (Munich, 1994).

⁶² Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte*, 265.

⁶³ Käthe Mahrt, "Die Berufsnot der weiblichen Jugend," *Bundesarbeitsblatt*, 3 (1953): 468–69; "Zur Berufsnot der älteren Angestellten," *Informationen für die Frau*, 3 (July–August 1954): 18–19.

ministry charged with addressing the problem turned down applicants for typing positions because they exceeded the cut-off age of twenty-five.⁶⁴

As West Germany enjoyed its "economic miracle" in the 1950s, unemployment and poverty among middle-aged women reached critical proportions. In response, women's magazines and, especially, organizations of female employees did more than protest the general unfairness of age cut-offs. They also pointed out that such limitations hurt precisely those women who had contributed their labor during Germany's hardest years.⁶⁵ To no avail. Narratives that linked women's hard physical labor during the "hunger years" to a present in which the same women faced discrimination on the labor market did not resonate outside the circles of women's rights and women's labor advocates. The Woman of the Rubble became a profound symbol of West Germany's economic reconstruction; the former women of the rubble faced brutal discrimination in the labor force that fueled the recovery.

IF THE WOMAN OF THE RUBBLE provided a heroic, constructive identity for West Germans, other parts of women's history during the occupation were not so positively construed. Most subject to criticism was women's sexual behavior: their fleeting relationships with men on the refugee trail, their acceptance of men into their homes while they awaited word of their husbands, their use of prostitution as a strategy for survival. To many Germans, exploding rates of illegitimacy, of sexually transmitted disease, and of divorce indicated a terrible crisis.⁶⁶

Germans reserved their harshest criticism, however, for women who associated with occupation soldiers. The "Yanks' Sweetheart" (*Ami-liebchen*)—the "fraternizer" in the zone where fraternization was probably most common—came to be as deeply associated with these years as the Woman of the Rubble. Like her, the Yanks' Sweetheart eventually represented something much larger than herself.

⁶⁴ "So geht es nicht, Herr Bundesminister!" *Frau und Beruf*, 5 (March 1955): 21–22; "Zusätzliche Einstellung von arbeitslosen älteren Angestellten," *Frau und Beruf*, 4 (December 1954): 4.

⁶⁵ "Keine Chance für ältere Frauen?" *Constanze* (February 1953): 24–25; Maria Tritz, "Vermittlungsfähigkeit arbeitsloser Frauen," *Frau und Beruf*, 3 (May 1953): 3; "Zum Problem: 'Ältere Angestellte,'" *Frau und Beruf*, 2 (February 1952): 1; "Für die älteren Angestellten," *Frau und Beruf*, 4 (February 1954): 5; "Noch einmal: Die älteren Angestellten," *Frau und Beruf*, 4 (May 1954): 5–6; "Das Problem 'Ältere Angestellte,'" *Frau und Beruf*, 8 (May 1958): 34; "Zu alt fürs Vorzimmer?" *Frau und Beruf*, 10 (October 1960): 67. Likewise, when the federal government, in 1984, announced that only women born after 1921 would be eligible for new pensions for those women who had interrupted employment in order to raise children, the Gray Panthers argued that the government was excluding precisely those women whose labor had been most critical during the crisis years. Even more dramatically employing the symbol to which women's rights and women's labor advocates had referred in the 1950s, they organized a demonstration in Bonn—in which they dressed as Women of the Rubble. *Trümmerfrauen: Biografien einer betrogenen Generation*, Trude Unruh, ed. (Essen, 1987), 6. The pension law was revised to add women born earlier. *Kindererziehungsgesetz*, July 12, 1987 (BGBl. I S. 585); *Renten Anpassungsgesetz*, May 10, 1988 (BGBl. I S. 581).

⁶⁶ In 1948, 88,374 couples divorced, an 80 percent increase over 1946. "Die Ehescheidungen im Bundesgebiet seit 1946," *Wirtschaft und Statistik*, 2 (1950): 291. The divorce rate began a decline in 1949 that continued through the 1950s. The illegitimacy rate of 1946, 16.4 percent of births, was more than twice that of 1939. *Die Frau im wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Leben der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden, 1956), 4–7. At the height of the epidemic of sexually transmitted disease in August 1946, there were 90.6 reported cases of gonorrhea and 30.2 of syphilis per ten thousand civilian population; the true rates were much higher, but even these reported rates were double those of 1934. *Monthly Report of the Military Government—US Zone*, no. 38 (August 1948): 8.

Unlike the Woman of the Rubble, however, the Yanks' Sweetheart was no heroine. She became the symbol of Germany's moral decline—and, as such, implied that the decline occurred with the collapse of, rather than during, Nazi rule.

With the lifting of the Western occupation armies' prohibitions of fraternization, a lively social culture featuring young German women and Allied soldiers, particularly Americans, began to flourish.⁶⁷ By December 1945, most U.S. veterans—many of whom still had some reservations about Germans—were released from their duties. They were replaced by young men with no wartime experience, little bitterness against Germans, and eagerness for adventures abroad. Contact with German women became a routine part of their lives. Army investigators estimated that 50 to 90 percent of American troops "fraternized" with German women in 1946; among married servicemen, one in eight had "found a home"—that is, entered a relatively stable relationship—in Germany.⁶⁸

Women who formed liaisons with occupation soldiers sought emotional companionship at least as eagerly as they sought economic benefits. Occupation soldiers, quite simply, constituted a significant portion of the young male population, and they often seemed more appealing partners than the demanding, wounded, and emotionally scarred German veterans returning from war. Insofar as women were motivated to enter relationships with foreign troops for economic reasons, their behavior was consistent with traditions of women seeking suitors or husbands who could provide financial security.⁶⁹ Relationships with the former enemy could be just as exciting, or just as drab, as relationships with Germans. But this perspective on fraternization would, at best, become material for "counter-memory." Few Germans who were not involved in such relationships considered them anything other than prostitution, and Germans quickly adopted the American nickname for fraternizers, "Veronika Dankeschön" (Veronika Thank-You-Very-Much, whose initials were "VD").⁷⁰

A sexually promiscuous woman, and especially a "fraternizer," who slept with the former enemy and sometimes crossed racial or religious boundaries, thus put her reputation at risk. In the discourse of occupation-era Germany, however, a fraternizer did not just prostitute herself, she stabbed her entire people in the back. She made a mockery of the sacrifices of German soldiers: forty years later, a German veteran claimed still to be haunted by the words of an American serviceman: "The German soldier fought for six years; the German woman only five

⁶⁷ Gimbel, *German Community under American Occupation*, 49 and following. Fraternization was almost certainly most common in the American and British zones and least common in the Soviet zone. The U.S. forces lifted their non-fraternization policy in July 1945; the Soviets never had a formal non-fraternization policy but began strict segregation of Soviet troops and German civilians in the summer of 1947. Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, 92–96.

⁶⁸ "To Tell or Not to Tell Is Query of Worried Home-Bound GIs," *Stars and Stripes* (June 28, 1946): 3; "Yank-Fraulein [sic] Romances Seen Ruining Occupation," *Stars and Stripes* (June 24, 1946): 8. By the end of 1947, 2,262 German women had married occupation soldiers. *Sie*, 3 (January 4, 1948): 1. By the mid-1950s, over 7,000 West German women married occupation soldiers annually. "Eheschließungen der Deutschen und Ausländer 1952 bis 1957," *Statistisches Jahrbuch* (1959): 48.

⁶⁹ Heineman, "Standing Alone," 207–13.

⁷⁰ Heineman, "Standing Alone," 206–28. Veronika Dankeschön first appeared as a comic character in *Stars and Stripes*; comics including her initials were published on July 9 and 20, 1946. See also Ken Zumwalt, *The Stars and Stripes: World War II and the Early Years* (Austin, Tex., 1989), 141–43.

minutes.”⁷¹ Other Germans who had suffered during the war and its aftermath also found grounds to resent presumably promiscuous women. Germany’s umbrella social-work organization calculated the cost of treating sexually transmitted diseases in Hessen in 1947 and duly informed its members that the sum could have paid the pensions of 17,800 war widows and orphans for a year.⁷² As fraternizers seemed to mock the sufferings of veterans and victims of war, contemporaries concluded that young women were sullyng what they still felt was the good name of the German people. A twenty-two-year-old student wrote of fraternizers in 1946: “Have the German people no honor left? . . . One can lose a war, one can be humiliated, but one need not dirty one’s honor oneself!”⁷³ Like many of her contemporaries, this young woman held that the sexual conduct of many of her peers—and not the previous regime—had cost the nation its honor.

During the military occupation, the entire German nation stood in the international spotlight, accused of an utter collapse of moral conscience. The Nuremberg trials were only the most prominent of many forums in which the world discussed German crimes against humanity. In this context, the appearance en masse of a familiar symbol of moral decline—the sexually promiscuous woman—made it easier for Germans to avoid thinking about much more troubling characters: the patriotic civil servant or soldier who had committed crimes against humanity in the name of his nation or the upright housewife who had dutifully reported nonconformist neighbors to an unforgiving system of justice.⁷⁴

In the American zone of occupation, the scandal of sexual promiscuity and the insult to Germans who had presumably sacrificed a great deal to the nation coincided with fraternizers’ apparent embrace of American material wealth and cultural modernism—wearing American nylons, dancing to American music, and so on. This reinforced fraternization as a symbol of German decline. Even in the Weimar era, many Germans had feared that American consumer goods and cultural exports posed a threat to German culture and traditions. The extraordinary allure of this threat (American exports found enthusiastic markets in Germany) made it all the more dangerous.⁷⁵ And although the Nazis had railed especially hard against

⁷¹ The German veteran’s reference to the American soldier’s blackness—not quoted here—expresses Germans’ continuing anxieties about racial mixing, particularly in the context of political and military defeat. Niethammer, “*Hinterher merkt man, dass es richtig war, dass es schiefgegangen ist*,” 31.

⁷² “Werden die Mittel zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten richtig verwendet?” *Mitteilungen des deutschen Vereins für öffentliche und private Fürsorge*, no. 9 (September 1948): 161–63. See also Resolution of the Socialdemocratic Women of Heidelberg (and related correspondence from MG), folder 10, VD Staff Studies, Box 551, Records of Chief, Med. Aff. Section, Public Health & Public Welfare Branch, Civil Affairs Division, OMGUS RG 260, National Archives–Suitland, Maryland.

⁷³ Hilde Thurnwald, *Gegenwartsprobleme Berliner Familien: Eine soziologische Untersuchung an 498 Familien* (Berlin, 1948), 156. For language linking the decline of religiosity, guilt for Nazism, and female promiscuity in the immediate postwar period, see Bishop Otto Dibelius’s 1947 speech, “Vor dem grossen Entweder-Oder,” rpt. in Heinz Fast, *Die Antwort der protestantischen Kirche auf die Niederlage von 1945* (Sankelmark, 1968), 23–30; Betr. Grundlagen der Volkswartbundarbeit, *Volkswartbund* (November–December 1947): 5.

One of the most well-known expressions of female responsibility for a postwar decline was the controversial 1951 film *Die Sünderin*, which is thoroughly analyzed in Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), 92–117.

⁷⁴ On denunciations during the Nazi period, see Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1990).

⁷⁵ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Richard Deveson, trans. (New York, 1992), 99, 174–81.

American modernism, fear of a creeping American cultural imperialism was not limited to Nazi circles. Indeed, to many anti-Nazis, as well as to Germans for whom Nazism had lost its appeal during the war, the challenge of the postwar era would be to gain recognition for what was good in German culture at the very moment when international attention was focused on aspects of German tradition that could help to explain genocide. Germany's military and political loss must not be compounded by a loss of positive cultural identity.⁷⁶

Yet preserving, or restoring, a German cultural tradition worthy of admiration seemed an uphill battle. Not only did the Americans have all the money as well as legal control over German cultural production in their zone in the immediate aftermath of the war, but there was also tremendous demand, on the German side, for things American. This demand was not limited to fraternizers' legendary desire for stockings. American cigarettes, to name only one item, were both a treasured luxury item and black market currency, which meant that everybody wanted them. Nevertheless, ordinary black market consumers could believe that fraternizers were taking pleasure in what, for them, was a bitter necessity: not only acknowledging American military and political victory but also bowing down before American commercial success.

Thus, in addition to shifting attention from violent racial and political crime to sexual misconduct, the popular obsession with the fraternizer helped to redefine the national terms of Germany's moral decline and, by implication, the possibilities for rehabilitation. Denazification, war crimes trials, and other public explorations of the Nazi years focused on a phenomenon that was home-grown and associated with Germany's years of greatest power and an ideological insistence on a unique national character. Although much of the machinery of denazification was eventually turned over to the Germans, foreign control of the initial stages of the process made clear that rehabilitation, to some extent, would have to come from outside.

Fraternization pointed to a much more appealing conceptual relationship between Germanness, moral decay, and the possibilities for rehabilitation. The years when Germans had most insisted on their national uniqueness (and greatness) were not Germany's low-water mark; they were, rather, the "good old days," as evidenced by Germany's strength, confidence—and sexual order.⁷⁷ If fraternization

⁷⁶ Heide Fehrenbach, "Cinema, Spectatorship, and the Problem of Postwar German Identity," in *The American Impact on Postwar Germany*, Reiner Pommerin, ed. (Providence, R.I., 1994), 165–96; Uta G. Poiger, "Rebels with a Cause? American Popular Culture, the 1956 Youth Riots, and the New Conception of Masculinity in East and West Germany," in *American Impact on Postwar Germany*, 93–124.

⁷⁷ Or at least the retrospective appearance of sexual order. In fact, during the Nazi years, the perception that Nazi ideologues promoted illegitimate childbearing among the "racially fit" coexisted uneasily with the Nazis' reputation for encouraging early marriage and large families. During the war, relationships between German women and foreign slave laborers and prisoners of war were part of everyday life, as were relationships, rape, and prostitution involving the German occupying forces and women of occupied lands. Ironically, the regime that most emphatically preached racial purity did more than any previous regime to enable "racial" mixing—simply by sending millions of men abroad and by importing millions of foreigners to German lands. Postwar fraternization—as well as the fact that it was now possible to speak openly against what was displeasing—helped to shape distorted memories of supposed sexual order during the Nazi years. Heineman, "Standing Alone," 117–28; Jill Stephenson, "Triangle: Foreign Workers, German Civilians, and the Nazi Regime: War and Society in Württemberg, 1939–45," *German Studies Review*, 15 (May 1992): 339–59; Gerd Steffens, "Die praktische Widerlegung des Rassismus: Verbotene Liebe und ihre Verfolgung, in *Ich war immer gut zu meiner*

symbolized Germany's decline, then that decline went hand in hand with a loss rather than a surfeit of national strength. The fact that, decades earlier, Germans had already identified American power as a threat to German cultural identity made this reading of the contemporary situation all the more believable. Rehabilitation would not result from excising what was uniquely German while learning from foreigners, especially the Americans; instead, it would depend on a reassertion of German independence, uniqueness—even sexual, racial, and cultural purity. The official, public discourse of Nuremberg—which certainly shaped *foreign* readings of the relationship between German national identity and a specifically German loss of decency—was opposed by an unofficial, popular discourse of fraternization, which described a very different relationship between Germanness and the loss of moral bearings.

Statements such as that of the twenty-two-year-old student who blamed sexually delinquent women for “bringing down” their decent contemporaries thus coexisted with a more complicated discourse, in which fraternizers symbolized a larger degradation of Germany brought about by loss of sovereignty. At first glance, Erwin Oehl's 1946 painting *Fraternization* seems to portray a villainous fraternizer and a victimized veteran (Figure 8). The grinning young woman cruelly kicks the haggard veteran, who is already precariously balanced on a crutch. The woman's leg, which unites sexuality and violence, takes the central position in the painting; the light coloring of the veteran's and woman's face, as well as of the woman's sweater, make them stand out against the dark, indistinct background. But this interaction is in fact the making of a third character: the occupation soldier, painted in darker colors and positioned in the background, who manipulates the young woman like a puppet. Even the woman's grin, so painful to the veteran, is only a mask, veiling her own distress. The sexual disorder is real enough, but it is only the tip of the iceberg, symptomatic of a much broader landscape of misery due to foreign occupation.

As West Germany emerged from the “hunger years,” several developments seemed to confirm the connection between fraternization and loss of national self-determination. The currency reform of June 1948 resulted in the quick decline of mass prostitution as a survival strategy.⁷⁸ It also set into motion a series of events that, in less than a year, resulted in the establishment of the Federal Republic. Thus, in retrospect, the association of fraternization with lack of national self-determination was cemented. The utility of fraternization as a symbol for the larger degradation of foreign occupation was confirmed in the popular culture of the early Federal Republic. In a passage from a novel set during the occupation, which was

Russin”: *Zur Struktur und Praxis des Zwangsarbeitssystems im Zweiten Weltkrieg in der Region Südhessen*, Fred Dorn and Klaus Heuer, eds. (Pfaffenweiler, 1991), 185–200; Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des “Ausländer-Einsatzes” in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin, 1985), 79–80, 122–28, 248.

⁷⁸ This hardly meant the end of “fraternizing” relationships, since economic desperation had never been the only reason German women had been attracted to Allied men—and, in any case, prostitution with the occupation forces remained remunerative. Nevertheless, mass prostitution (and fraternization) did decline with the currency reform. See Maria Hoehn, “GIs, Veronikas, and Lucky Strikes: German Reactions to the American Military Presence in the Rhineland-Palatinate during the 1950s” (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995).



FIGURE 8: Erwin Oehl, "Fraternization," 1946. The fraternizer kicks the wounded German veteran; she in turn is manipulated by the American. Promiscuous female sexuality and foreign occupation combine to create an amoral order. The solution: restore both the national and the sexual order. Münchner Stadtmuseum.

an immediate best-seller upon its publication in 1955, a young prostitute who served an American clientele contemplates suicide:

She felt no shame about being a whore; she was ashamed that everyone seemed to be a whore . . . Whenever she walked past the PX, there were women outside, waiting for an

obliging American. Whores. In the "Mücke" [an exclusive bar where black market transactions were conducted] the waiters would keep the Germans waiting but would dart about like weasels as soon as an American bawled at them. Whores. When ration cards were issued at the food office the officials would snap at the men and women who had queued up there for hours, but they would jump up obsequiously as soon as a conqueror entered the room. Whores. Sometimes she listened to her father's conversations with the neighbors when they assured each other and themselves that they had never been Nazis. Whores. The Americans who came to visit her would dodge along the walls when they left. Whores. And on the walls of the houses a new inscription was more and more frequently being chalked up: "Yankee Whore." Who then was a Yankee Whore, Inge wondered, when everybody was a whore?⁷⁹

The degradation of the German landscape takes many forms: German women offer themselves sexually to American men, German men scurry about to please American men, German men lie to themselves about their Nazi past, even American men hide in a cowardly manner after their visits to prostitutes. Prostitution is a metaphor for the entire society in which Inge lives, and a narrative that would single her out for blame is clearly rejected. As a prostitute, however, Inge does retain a certain symbolic value, and, fittingly enough, her character is killed off shortly after the currency reform.⁸⁰ The fraternizer Inge is buried with the prostituted society she represents.

Nevertheless, although Inge symbolizes her decrepit society, she is not to blame for its decrepitude. Foreign occupation is. In the final meeting of most of the book's central characters, an American officer who is one of the moral anchors of the tale admits that the military occupation was hypocritical and corrupting. "The occupation was a dictatorship, even if in democratic garb . . . We arrived here with the Bible in one hand and the knout in the other . . . We believed ourselves to be missionaries, but we did not love those under our charge . . . Our efforts were marked by the motto: ' . . . and unless you are willing I shall have to use force.' " When a German in the circle remarks that Hitler had managed with a similar motto, the American responds that Hitler had not talked about democracy—and he had not been a foreigner.⁸¹ Neither the officer nor the author of the book are apologists for Nazism; this comparison of Hitler and the occupation government—to Hitler's apparent advantage—is thus all the more astonishing. The message is clear: West Germany must attain national sovereignty, and the Yanks must go home.

⁷⁹ Hans Habe, *Off Limits*, Ewald Osers, trans. (1955; New York, 1956), 178. Habe published a major Viennese newspaper in the 1930s before being blacklisted by the Nazis. He fought in both the French and the American armies during the war and supervised the rebuilding of the German press while attached to the U.S. army of occupation. He eventually resettled in Austria. *Off Limits* was originally published in German and was most widely read by a West German audience. The author's anti-Nazi background and professional association with the army of occupation is a reminder that anti-Americanism (including the subtle variety found here) did not necessarily indicate revanchism.

⁸⁰ Habe's novel also features a sado-masochistic relationship between a U.S. Army officer and a captured concentration camp guard clearly modeled on Irma Griesse, the "bitch of Auschwitz." Nevertheless, it reads like high literature when compared to some of the semi-pornographic publications that used sexually promiscuous young women to symbolize the degradation of occupied Germany. See, for example, Karl-Heinz Helms-Liesenhoff, *Die Demobilisierung der Gretchen-Armee* (Grenchen, n.d. [ca. 1955]), the second volume of a trilogy that begins with women's auxiliaries in the Wehrmacht but devotes most of its space to the postwar period.

⁸¹ Habe, *Off Limits*, 432–33.

Most Germans recalled the occupation as the time of their greatest physical hardship. With fraternization and mass prostitution, the occupation became, in the popular imagination, not only the material and political but also the moral nadir of recent German history.⁸² Popular support for official attempts to “confront the past”—and for the government’s choices of which “pasts” to confront—suggest that, by the early 1950s, most West Germans felt more traumatized by the years 1945–1948 than by the years 1933–1945. The young West German government, insisting as Christian conservatives on the need for “moral renewal,” neither rushed to make indemnity payments to victims of National Socialism nor was troubled by the readmittance of old Nazis to the civil service and the participation of the same in political life.⁸³ Instead, when focusing on issues they described as moral, the ruling parties referred to the legacy of the occupation era by working hard to “reconstruct the family” and to reinforce conservative sexual mores.⁸⁴ The tasks of “reconstructing the family” and “reconstructing [West] Germany” were linked.

Of all the striking images of women during the “crisis years,” that of the fraternizer thus translated most directly into official attempts to address and shape the situation of women. A significant number of major political players argued that the “surplus of women” and the large number of single mothers constituted grounds for liberalizing family law in ways that would enhance the rights of women. This position was defeated. The governing coalition argued, by contrast, that the apparent breakdown of sexual mores demonstrated the need for a conservative family policy, which reinforced women’s second-class status through a broad legislative program. In the founding years of the Federal Republic, the inferior status of illegitimate children was written into the constitution; fathers’ ultimate legal authority over their children was confirmed (despite the constitutional guarantee of equal rights for women); discrimination against families with few children (including the overwhelming majority of female-headed households) in social programs was reaffirmed; municipalities were even permitted to restrict the movements of registered, law-abiding prostitutes—something that had been outlawed during the Weimar years but reinstituted during the Nazi period. As victims

⁸² Seventy percent of respondents to a 1951 West German poll held that 1945–1948 had been the worst period of the current century for Germany. Other polls of the 1950s show a progressive rehabilitation of the Nazi period. Rausch, “Politisches Bewusstsein und politische Einstellungen,” 126. For comparative purposes, consider the felt need for moral renewal following Germany’s loss in World War I and the South’s loss in the American Civil War. Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*, 220 and following; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865–1920* (Athens, Ga., 1980), 46–47; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913* (New York, 1987), 22.

⁸³ West Germany began indemnification payments to certain victims of National Socialism only in 1953 under considerable international pressure and following strains between Konrad Adenauer (who supported payments) and his party’s parliamentary contingent (which mainly opposed them). Constantin Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung: Westdeutschland und die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus 1945–1954* (Munich, 1992). For a condemnation of the reintroduction of old Nazis to the civil service, see Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg, 1987). A high position in the Nazi hierarchy did not disqualify one from a similarly high rank in the Federal Republic. Perhaps most notorious was Hans Globke, who penned the official commentary to the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935 and became secretary of state to Adenauer.

⁸⁴ While memories of sexual promiscuity played an important role in the “restoration of the family,” they do not fully explain it. For more nuanced discussions of the reconstruction of the family, see Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*; Heineman, “Complete Families, Half Families, No Families at All.”

and as rebuilders, women's symbolic value was positive, and it was transferred to West Germany as a nation. Women would reap no material benefits from their unique burdens and contributions as women, although they shared in the overall rise in the standard of living that characterized the West German economy.⁸⁵ As fraternizers, by contrast, women's symbolic value was negative. Although certain universalized lessons were drawn from the history of fraternization—lessons that emphasized the need for national self-determination—the most tangible response to memories of fraternization demonstrated unambiguously that this was *women's* history.

THE HIGH PROFILE OF WOMEN during Germany's collapse and occupation, whether as saints or as sinners, was thus crucial in shaping West German national identity. Women not only offered sympathetic images of victimization and rebuilding, images that could be generalized and that provided vital alternatives to representations of militaristic, genocidal Germans, they also prompted a discourse about decline in the realm of sexual morality and the loss of national sovereignty that helped to deflect attention away from troubling moral questions about the Nazi past.

These popularized memories of women's pasts did not add up to a neat whole, a tidy package that equaled West Germans' national identity. The history from which these memories evolved was itself one of multiple identities: the same woman might have been the pitied victim of rape one month, a despised fraternizer the next. Furthermore, these aspects of women's history addressed different concerns during the formative years of a distinctly West German society, and they worked in tandem with other concerns shaping a new national identity. Stories that associated moral degeneracy with military occupation suggested that renewal could come only with national sovereignty. Generalized images of German victimhood countered international accusations of German perfidy; reminders of rape at the hands of the Soviets helped to formulate a West Germanness that, by definition, was opposed to all things Eastern and that implied an alliance with the Western democracies. Recollections of rubble clearance, by contrast, associated West German well-being not with membership in the Western alliance but rather with hard work by members of the national community.

Although varied, these ways of connecting memories of the "crisis years" to the situation of West Germans in the 1950s did share something: they all reflected crucial concerns of the early Federal Republic. But these concerns did not remain constant. Many elements of West German national identity and West Germans' ways of "coming to terms with their past" were negotiated anew during the student movement of the late 1960s and the Federal Republic's turn to the left in the

⁸⁵ References to women's activities during the "crisis years" did play a significant role in winning a constitutional guarantee of equal rights for women. Barbara Böttger, *Das Recht auf Gleichheit und Differenz: Elisabeth Selbert und der Kampf der Frauen um Art. 3 II Grundgesetz* (Münster, 1990); Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 38–75; Antje Späth, "Vielfältige Forderungen nach Gleichberechtigung und 'nur' ein Ergebnis: Artikel 3 Absatz 2 GG," in Freier and Kuhn, *Das Schicksal Deutschlands liegt in der Hand seiner Frauen*, 112–69. Nevertheless, the repeated delays in revising the Civil Code to reflect women's equal rights, and especially the confirmation of fathers' legal authority over their children and the legality of separate pay classifications, meant that the constitutional statement regarding women's equal rights had a more symbolic than genuine material or legal significance.

1970s.⁸⁶ Among these was the traditional linkage between Cold War hostilities and the West German tendency to focus on German wounds suffered rather than German wounds inflicted during the war. The challenge to this link reshaped both public policy and official memory as Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt reconsidered foreign relations, instituting *Ostpolitik*, and the burden of historical guilt, kneeling before the Warsaw ghetto monument in 1970.

The first real challenge to the universalization of women's history, however, came in the 1980s, when the feminist movement had matured adequately to produce a significant historical literature.⁸⁷ Feminist explorations of the "hour of the women," which drew heavily on oral histories, explicitly reclaimed for women crucial aspects of Germany's mid-century history. In so doing, they illuminated counter-memories specific to women. Bearing titles such as "The Forgotten Work of Women in the German Postwar Period" and "Housework as Survival Work," feminist writings pointed out that histories of "Germans'" hard work in the immediate postwar period obscured the extent to which that work was performed by women.⁸⁸ In describing the bombings, evacuations, and flight, they insisted, in the words of an interview subject that were chosen as a chapter heading for a major work, that "we [women] lived with the danger" (emphasis added), thus reclaiming the civilian experience for women.⁸⁹ A ground-breaking article on the rapes demonstrated that, as Germany lost the war, women were uniquely "doubly defeated," targets not only of military but also of sexual violence.⁹⁰ Even the previously despised fraternizer was reclaimed, with a positive and uniquely female pioneering role that had been

⁸⁶ Alf Lüdtke, "'Coming to Terms with the Past': Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (September 1993): 542-72; Andrei S. Markovits, "Coping with the Past: The West German Labor Movement and the Left," in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, Peter Baldwin, ed. (Boston, 1990). On links drawn by leftists of the 1968 generation between West German ways of dealing with the Nazi past and sexual repression—if not the oppression of women per se—see Dagmar Herzog, "Antifascist Bodies and the Persistence of the Past: Theorizing Sexuality among German 68ers," paper delivered at the "Conference on the Persistence of Memory," Harvard University, October 1995.

⁸⁷ Starting in the late 1960s, isolated but significant works on women's history during the Nazi period began to appear. None of these early works touched on the postwar period. Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im "Dritten Reich"*; Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst*; Mason, "Women in Germany." For feminist explorations of the postwar period directed at a popular audience, see Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, "Nun geht mal beiseite, ihr Frauen!" *Courage* (July 1982): 47-54; Schmidt-Harzbach, "Die Lüge von der Stunde Null," *Courage* (June 1982): 33-40; Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*; Meyer and Schulze, *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner*; Beate Hoecker and Renate Meyer-Braun, *Bremerinnen bewältigen die Nachkriegszeit* (Bremen, 1988); Rainer Horbert and Sonja Spindler, *Wie wir hamsterten, hungerten und überlebten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983); Ulrike Richter, *Alltag im Nachkriegsdeutschland: Frauenleben und -schicksal nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Hannover* (Hanover, 1985); *Der Hunger nach Erfahrung: Frauen nach '45*, Inge Stolten, ed. (Berlin, 1981); Unruh, *Trümmerfrauen*; Angela Delille and Andrea Grohn, *Blick zurück aufs Glück: Frauenleben und Familienpolitik in den 50er Jahren* (Berlin, 1985).

⁸⁸ Kuhn, "Die vergessene Frauenarbeit in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit"; "Hausarbeit als Überlebensarbeit: Krisenbewältigung auf Kosten der Frauen," chapter heading in Schubert, *Frauenarbeit 1945-1949*, 32-70; Gabriele Strecker, *Überleben ist nicht genug: Frauen 1945-1950* (Freiburg i.Br./Breisgau, 1981).

⁸⁹ "Wir haben mit der Gefahr gelebt": Frauenalltag im Krieg 1939 bis 1945," chapter heading in Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*, 27-41. See also Szepansky, "Blitzmädel" "Heldenmutter" "Kriegerwitwe."

⁹⁰ Schmidt-Harzbach, "Doppelt besiegt: Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal." For other West German feminist treatments of the subject in the mid-1980s, see Schmidt-Harzbach, "Eine Woche im April"; Tröger, "Between Rape and Prostitution"; Hörning, "Myth of Female Loyalty." The reclamation of a peculiarly female experience of defeat, determined by rape, reached a wider audience with

forgotten as a more general friendship between West Germany and the Western Allies became a foundation of postwar life. "The first human contact with the Allies," readers were reminded, "was via us women."⁹¹ In short, this literature, which was both scholarly and popular, attempted to reappropriate memories of women's experiences for women.

In the context of the feminist movement, this effort served two functions. First, it was a corrective to a historiography that alternately overlooked women and discussed them on the basis of negative stereotypes.⁹² In addition, it contributed to a new narrative strategy that, by retelling German women's past, struggled with the dominant female identities that had emerged since 1945—identities that, to feminists, were troubling. By noting that only women's hard work had made possible *all* Germans' survival in the aftermath of the war, for example, younger feminists were able to pose questions of profound importance to their struggle: Why had the Federal Republic not been established along more sexually egalitarian lines? Why had the gendered roles of the 1950s been so terribly conservative? Why had their own mothers, who had proven so competent and independent in the hardest of times, ensuingly embraced a domestic lifestyle that they, the daughters, would experience as a straitjacket?⁹³ At the same time that the new feminist historiography posed troubling questions, it also suggested promising alternatives. Women *had* demonstrated their strength during the "hunger years"; female victims *had* experienced the devastating effects of Nazism, militarism, and patriarchy; a large number of women of the late 1940s *had* rejected traditional limits on their sexual expression. This knowledge provided an intellectual, emotional, and rhetorical basis for calls to rethink the gender roles that had become normative in the Federal Republic.

These images gained a hearing wide enough to allow them to enter mainstream—even official—discussions about the Nazi period and its aftermath. In a major speech on the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war, West German president Richard von Weizsäcker gave special thanks to women, drawing on images of victimhood and rebuilding (but not sexual promiscuity) and noting that women's contributions had typically been forgotten:

World history forgets their suffering, their renunciation, and their quiet strength all too easily. They worried and worked, carried and protected human life. They mourned fallen fathers and sons, husbands, brothers, and friends. In the darkest years, they preserved the

Helke Sander's controversial 1992 film, *BeFreier und Befreite*. See also the companion volume, *BeFreier und Befreite*.

⁹¹ Meyer and Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben*, 67.

⁹² Feminist historians, for example, had to contend with a popular conception that an irrational, politically naïve female electorate had been swayed by Hitler's sexual power. This image stemmed in part from film clips of women swooning at Nazi rallies; it was challenged by fairly basic research into voting patterns. See especially Annemarie Tröger, "Der Dolchstosslegende der Linken: Frauen haben Hitler an die Macht gebracht," in *Frauen und Wissenschaft: Beiträge zur Berliner Sommeruniversität für Frauen* (Berlin, 1976), 350–52.

⁹³ See footnote 5, as well as Helma Sanders-Brahms' film, *Deutschland Bleiche Mutter*, 1980; also the discussion of the film in Kaes, *From "Hitler" to "Heimat"*, 160. Sanders-Brahms seeks simultaneously to reclaim a uniquely female history and to make a claim for the appropriateness of female imagery to represent recent German history—at least that part of German history that began with the hardships of war.

light of humanity from extinction. At the end of the war, without prospects of a secure future, they were the first to lend their hands to place one stone on another, the Women of the Rubble in Berlin and all over . . . Because of the war, many women remained alone and spent their lives in loneliness. But if the people did not crack inside under the destruction, the devastation, the horrors and the inhumanity, if they slowly came back to themselves after the war, then we owe it first of all to our women.⁹⁴

By enabling women to claim a laudatory past, the new historiography became an important source of identity for West German feminists.

At the same time, efforts to read women back into history posed a challenge to certain strands of West German national identity: a national identity that had been built, in part, on the universalization of experiences that were now being reclaimed for women alone. If women were raped by men—and not Germany by the Soviet Union—this had certain implications for West Germans' ability to think of their nation as victimized (and continually threatened anew) by the superpower to the east. This was doubly the case if a feminist discussion of rape demanded that increased attention be paid to German men's rape of eastern women during the war. If fraternization had been a form of emancipation for women unwilling to be tied down by German men who expected a dominant role despite their inability to provide financial or emotional support—and not a moral decline associated with foreign influence—then this implied a reconsideration of the "moral order" of the 1950s, in which the reconstruction of the family had been linked to a recovery of national strength.

Even for feminists, however, such narratives of women's experience could be troubling as well as liberating. They emerged in the context of a larger feminist exploration of the Nazi era, an exploration that emphasized misogynist population policies, the restriction of young women's horizons, discriminatory employment policies, and women's participation in the resistance against Nazism.⁹⁵ To feminists who combined their abhorrence of female subordination with criticism of German

⁹⁴ Richard von Weizsäcker, "Zum 40. Jahrestag der Beendigung des Krieges in Europa und der NS-Gewaltherrschaft," rpt. in *Eine Rede und ihre Wirkung: Die Rede des Bundespräsidenten Richard von Weizsäcker vom 8. Mai 1985*, Ulrich Gill and Winfried Steffani, eds. (Berlin, 1987), 178.

⁹⁵ On women in the resistance, see Hanna Elling, *Frauen im deutschen Widerstand 1933–45* (Frankfurt am Main, 1978); *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust*, Vera Laska, ed. (Westport, Conn., 1983); Gerda Szepansky, *Frauen leisten Widerstand, 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983). Szepansky's companion volume, listed in footnote 21, shows women in a wider variety of roles. On population politics, see esp. Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1986); Gabriele Czarnowski, *Das kontrollierte Paar: Ehe- und Sexualpolitik im Nationalsozialismus* (Weinheim, 1991); Gisela Bock, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State," in *When Biology Became Destiny*, 271–96. On employment, see Tröger, "Creation of a Female Assembly-Line Proletariat." On lesbians as "forgotten victims," see Ilse Kokula, "Zur Situation lesbischer Frauen während der NS-Zeit," *Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis*, 25 (1989): 29–36; Claudia Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität* (Paffweiler, 1991) (which, however, finds that Nazi misogyny rather than specific persecution of lesbians most shaped lesbians' experience during the Nazi period). Most (but not all) of the essays concerning the Nazi period in *Mutterkreuz und Arbeitsbuch: Zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus*, Frauengruppe Faschismusforschung, ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1981), examine how the Nazi regime worsened women's status. See also Annette Kuhn and Valentine Rothe, *Frauen im deutschen Faschismus*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1982–83); Charles Schüddekopf, *Der alltägliche Faschismus: Frauen im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1982); Marianne Lecker, *Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984); *Frauen unterm Hakenkreuz*, Maruta Schmidt and Gabi Dietz, eds. (Berlin, 1983).

unwillingness to take responsibility for some of the most horrible crimes in human history, the new historiography seemed dangerously apologetic. It appeared to describe German women persistently as victims and heroines, only rarely as accomplices, and never as perpetrators.⁹⁶ To be sure, the new women's history articulated a new dimension of the perfidy of the Nazi regime: it was deeply sexist as well as racist and militaristic. Nevertheless, this historiography seemed to fit all too well with a troubling new wave of representations of the lives of "ordinary people" during the Nazi years, in which "ordinary people" experienced good times and bad but, in any case, were governed by forces beyond their control.⁹⁷ Profound suspicion of this trend in the historiography was sharply intensified as English-speaking feminist historians, who more often identified with refugees from and persecutees of Nazism than with women of the rubble, became a significant presence in the debate. Barely had the narratives offered by West German feminists made a significant impact on discourses of the past when they were roundly challenged. That this challenge came not from anti-feminists but from feminist scholars attested to the dynamism of feminist scholarship, but this was small comfort to feminists who found their identity as victims of patriarchy and Nazism challenged by accusations of apologetics. A second generation of feminist histories thus emerged, emphasizing German women's contributions to the life of Nazi state and society. The bitterness of the ensuing dispute echoed that of the almost-contemporaneous Historians' Debate and served as a reminder that this was not an ivory-tower matter.⁹⁸ The battle for German women's past was more than an attempt to renegotiate the significance of chapters of women's past that had been universalized to apply to West Germany as a whole—and thus reinterpret a national history. Once joined, the battle was also one for the identity of West German women and feminists.

THE HISTORY OF MEMORIES of women's experience during Germany's "crisis years" shows that, in considering social memory, we need more than an awareness of the distinctions between counter, popular, and official memories. We also need to understand their interconnections. First, these interconnections help to explain the internal dynamics of social memory. Counter-memories of a subordinate group, for example, might evolve into popular or official memories of a dominant culture *if*

⁹⁶ *Opfer und Täterinnen*, Angelika Ebbinghaus, ed. (Nördlingen, 1987); Renate Wiggershaus, *Frauen unterm Nationalsozialismus* (Wuppertal, 1984); Christina Thürmer-Rohr, *Vagabundinnen* (Berlin, 1987); *Mittäterschaft und Entdeckungslust*, Christina Thürmer-Rohr, et al., eds. (Berlin, 1989); Karin Windaus-Walser, "Gnade der weiblichen Geburt? Zum Umgang der Frauenforschung mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus," *Feministische Studien*, 6 (November 1988): 102–15; *Töchter-Fragen: NS-Frauen-Geschichte*.

⁹⁷ The resonance of this interpretation of "ordinary Germans'" place in history was demonstrated by the extraordinary popularity of the West German TV mini-series *Heimat*, first shown in 1984. Kaes, *From "Hitler" to "Heimat"*, 161–92.

⁹⁸ See footnotes 39 and 40 on the Historians' Debate and footnote 16 on the feminist historians' debate. Useful overviews of the latter are provided in Grossmann, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," and in Saldern, "Victims or Perpetrators?" Consider also the debate surrounding the film *BeFreier und Befreite in Berlin 1945: War and Rape—"Liberators Take Liberties,"* Stuart Liebman, ed., special issue of *October*, 72 (April 1995).

their group specificity can be minimized or reinterpreted to communicate a message with some resonance for the larger population. Counter-memories of women's history of rape gave way to popular and official memories of a German history of rape through a process of degendering. Counter-memories of relationships between German women and American GIs, by contrast, were not degendered, neither did they give way to a popular or public history of good occupation-era relations between Germans and Americans in general. Instead, they were demonized to describe relationships utterly devoid of moral integrity, still gendered but bearing a symbolic value for understanding the demise of Germany as a whole.

Such shifts in the "location" of memory are significant, and studies that focus on official monuments *or* popular culture *or* counter-memory run the risk of systematically missing large parts of the story. This is all the more so since "shifts in location" do not follow a clear chronological sequence, with one "location" replacing another. Counter-memories of rather ordinary relationships between German women and occupation soldiers coexisted with popular memories of fraternizers as the most odious symptom of an utterly degraded society. Counter-memories of a female civilian life in the endangered cities coexisted with popular memories that drew on dramatic but ungendered images of cities in flames to describe a Germany victimized by war. No single blueprint describes the ways memories shift their "location" or when and how different memories of the same history can coexist in different locations, serving different functions in each.

How memories function in varying locations depends instead on the second, and more significant, aspect of the interconnections among various forms of memory: their relationship to larger social and political problems. In the case examined here, two such problems both played a role in the evolution of social memory and were resolved, at least partially and temporarily, by shifts in the "location" of certain memories. The first was the formation of a legitimate national identity in the aftermath of Nazism and in the multiple contexts of the Cold War, the economic miracle, and the desire to regain national sovereignty. The second was the distribution of power and privilege between the sexes in light of women's prominence during the "hour of the women" and the persistent demographic imbalance. Through memories of women during the "crisis years," the histories of women's status in the Federal Republic and of the development of a distinct West German national identity were intertwined.

Whether or not memories of the women of the rubble would contribute to increased status for women or a positive image for West Germany, for example, could not be determined by the intrinsic nature of the image itself: it was open to multiple interpretations and uses. Instead, the prospect of unemployed men in a poor economy initially hindered the transformation of the women of the rubble into a population of well-paid, well-promoted, and well-respected working women. Thus the woman of the rubble became the Woman of the Rubble: a cultural symbol rather than a member of the labor force. As a symbol, however, the Woman of the Rubble was not merely reactive. Once the economic miracle was under way, she assisted the formation of a legitimate national identity built on economic success. With the Woman of the Rubble, the "economic miracle" could trace its origins to

a time prior to the (Allied-initiated) currency reform of June 1948, the Marshall Plan, or the boom from the Korean War. According to the history implied by the *Woman of the Rubble*, the economic miracle had begun instead with "Zero Hour" and the hard work of Germans, pulling themselves up by their bootstraps in the worst of times. And, as a cultural symbol, the *Woman of the Rubble's* message about women's work was as powerful as her message about Germans' work—and had tangible results for attitudes regarding the degree to which women should be welcomed into the labor market. Women worked only under the most terrible of circumstances, according to the story of the *Woman of the Rubble*; their contributions in those times were most laudable, but no woman in her right mind would want to return to such times, and no society that wanted to treat its women well would promote women's work if this was what women's work meant. Understanding the evolution of memories of the *Woman of the Rubble* can help us to understand how those memories shaped both national identity and women's status.

Although this essay has explored a case study, certain patterns may prove to apply more generally. One is the universalization of histories specific to subpopulations in cases where those histories offer a positive identity to the whole. In the first decade after World War II, the identity of victim was appealing to West Germans; women's forms of victimization were especially fitting to the political context of the Cold War and the physical environment of destroyed cities. Likewise, a rags-to-riches success story was attractive, and the *Women of the Rubble* offered a version of this story that minimized the importance of the outside benefactor. Memories of fraternization, by contrast, offered scant material for the development of a positive identity for the larger community. Accordingly, they were much more narrowly universalized to apply to the nation only as it lay subordinate to outside domination.

A second pattern is the relationship between the social position of the group to which certain memories initially refer and the extent to which the memories continue to have implications for that group. In the context of a culture that subordinated women, women were not able to reap material or political benefits from their original "ownership" of images of victimhood and heroic rebuilding. They did, however, pay tangible penalties for memories of sexual disorder.

Finally, the feminist-inspired reexamination of memories of women's experience during the crisis years illustrates both the fluid nature of social memory and the implications of this fluidity for national identity and social hierarchies. Feminist-initiated challenges to West German collective memory did more than reflect changes in national identity and social hierarchies, as they emerged in the dual context of leftist challenges to West German identity and feminist efforts to alter gender relations. Once under way, they helped to shape the further development of both phenomena.

This process will, no doubt, become yet more complex in coming years. Much has changed since the 1980s: the incorporation into the Federal Republic of the former Democratic Republic, which had a distinct narrative of the relationship between the Nazi era and East German national identity; the very process of unification, which has created its own discourses of victimization, rebuilding, and past moral failures; the divergent histories of women in the two German states; the different lenses with

which East and West German feminists view their pasts and contemporary situations. All call for renewed negotiation of national identity, feminist identity, social memory, and the relationship between these and the German past.

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