

Ans: The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany (1949-1968). Ed. Hanna Schissler. Princeton: PUP 2001.

C H A P T E R O N E

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.<sup>1</sup> As the woman explained, she had once attended a talk in which a young historian had 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?" [He replied,] "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.<sup>2</sup>

By now, the exchange seems commonplace. A member of the younger generation, horrified by what he knows about the Nazi era and suspicious about his elders' relative quiet on the subject, accuses his seniors of not having seriously confronted their past. The older German resents the younger man's moralizing tone and his focus on the Nazi years at the expense of the traumatic period immediately following.

The older woman, however, does not simply propose a generational history. In 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 chapter will explore the universalization, in West German collective memory, of 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 West German national identity and on the status of women in the Federal Republic. In doing so, it will explore the relationship among the "counter memories" of a subordinate group, the "public" and "popular" memories of a dominant culture, national identity, and gender.

tuple uses of POWs from the Soviet Union for the (re-)constructing of West German masculinity and citizenship. Robert G. Moeller shows how West Germany anchored its sense of achievement in the ways in which it dealt with the victims of war and destruction—the *German* victims. Moeller starts with Adorno's critique of Germans' failure to "come to terms" with the Nazi past and shows that remembering selectively is not equivalent to forgetting. In fact, Germans remembered a great deal: they remembered the war crimes committed on the Eastern front—that is, the crimes committed *against* Germans. These memories played a pivotal role in West Germans' self-definition. Implicitly as well as explicitly, the fate of expellees and POWs in Soviet captivity was weighed against—indeed, made equivalent to—the destiny of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. All sorts of organizations documented in fine detail the expulsion of Germans from East Central Europe. Numerous individuals wrote biographies and memoirs depicting the frightful experiences of the German expellees. The laments of the expellees and their advocates were heard and, accordingly, had a large impact on West German politics. In contrast, the victims of German atrocities and extermination policies were not given a voice during the 1950s. While Jewish victims remained for the most part objects—of reconciliation policies and restitution payments—homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses, Sinti and Roma, or foreign laborers who had been forced to work in Germany went completely unacknowledged. Only much later were survivors of the Holocaust and other victims of German occupation granted a hearing by a broader public and by politicians—a development that occupies us right to the present with the question of restitution for foreign laborers and the involvement of renowned domestic as well as foreign banks in hoarding Nazi gold.

Dorothee Wierling shows how the experiences of living through the Third Reich and the Second World War deeply shaped the founding generation of East and West Germany but played out in different ways. The parents of a defeated Germany invested great hopes in their children, who were to carry their parents' aspirations and their projections for the future. Endowed with a "mission to happiness," the children were supposed to make up by their sheer existence for their parents' sufferings during the war. But the life worlds of the children also diverged significantly after 1949, the year in which the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic were founded. Wierling describes the similarities and differences through an investigation of the emotional and power relations within the family, especially the roles of women and men within it. She shows how Germans, possessed of a common legacy, were made into East and West Germans, who developed quite different ways of dealing with the challenges of life. While focusing on the 1950s, she carries her analysis to the different meanings of "1968." In that tumultuous year, young West Germans ventured on a cultural revolution that, among other things, cleared the way to address the past in an unprecedented manner. Young East Germans largely kept silent in the face of the violent repression of the Prague Spring. The contrasting experiences marked the definite parting of the two German societies. When the Berlin Wall opened in 1989, Germans faced the socialization into different life worlds and, for East Germans, the loss of a future that had been advocated for forty years.

Memories of three "moments" in German women's history of 1943–48 were central to 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 efforts to rebuild a devastated landscape and people. The "woman of the rubble" (Trümmerfrau), who cleaned away the rubble from Germany's bombed cities, lay 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. With this history of sexual disorder generalized 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 wittily, 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 1943 to 1948 served all these facets of the emerging West German national identity.

Appropriating the female experience for the nation might seem surprising 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 not surprising. First, it is worth recalling the environment in which most Germans began to think of the Nazi era, and their part in it, retrospectively. These were the "crisis years" of 1943–48, framed by the defeat at Stalingrad (which marked the beginning of Germany's military collapse) and the currency reform of June 1948 (which symbolized the beginning of the recovery in the Western occupation zones). During this period of prolonged crisis, Germans experienced death, dislocation, hunger, and uncertainty about the future, and women's role in the community's survival was unusually visible. In fact, these years came to be known as the "hour of the women."<sup>4</sup> Women's prominence did not signal the beginning of a new, sexually equitable order.<sup>5</sup> It did, however, provide potent images for 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. This did not serve to discredit men or their leading role in society; it did not even serve to discredit 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.<sup>6</sup> New symbols, often drawing from prototypically female experiences, would help to fill this vacuum.

The universalization of women's experience, to be sure, represented only one aspect of a competition among ways of understanding Germany's recent past.

This competition coincided with the founding of the Federal Republic and the young state's struggle 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—created something of an open playing field, a discursive space in which diverse narratives of German experience could compete for a role in shaping a new national identity.<sup>7</sup> Refugees and evacuees from the eastern portions of the old *Reich*, Christians, those who had been adversely affected by denazification, those who considered themselves victims of Communism, veterans, former prisoners of war, women—all offered histories that claimed both to explain their unique situations and to represent in some way a characteristically German experience.<sup>8</sup> 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 "ordinary Germans." Jews and other racial or religious persecutees (except those who could claim victimization as Christians), Communists, Germans who had been persecuted as socialists, and Nazi activists—none seemed to represent the "average German." Few wanted to identify with members of these groups, and members of many of these groups would have resisted having their identity claimed by the larger population of Germans. Oral histories attest to the nonpersecuted and nonactivist Germans recall a past of "ordinary Germans" that excludes the experience of the persecuted and the activists, who numbered in the millions. In focusing on the nonpersecuted majority, 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 Germany—a society that included few members of racial and religious groups persecuted by the Nazis and that continued to marginalize members of most targeted political and social groups.<sup>9</sup>

During the formative years of a new West German state and society, some narratives of the past became marginal and others dominant; those that were assimilated into dominant discourses were 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 too significant for the matter to have been so simple. I do hold, however, that the evolution of West German national identity cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the appropriation of women's history for the nation as a whole.

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, reflected in artifacts like novels, films, and magazines; and in "counter" memories of groups not well represented by the dominant

culture.<sup>10</sup> Yet public, popular, and counter memories constantly challenged and revised each other. Memories of stereotypically female experiences, which might initially have comprised women's "counter memories," became the "popular memories" of West Germany 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 1942–48, that could serve as a springboard to improved status.<sup>11</sup>

In seeking links among gender, national identity, and social memory, I employ an eclectic collection of sources.<sup>12</sup> 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 is to analyze the relationships among various forms of social memory, I focus on a limited number of themes through a wide variety of genres. In the pages that follow, counter memory may be revealed via 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 examine only 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, now as part of the process of forging a feminist identity. Thus although this essay focuses mainly on the late 1940s and 1950s, when memories of women's experiences of 1943–48 were initially universalized, it then turns the clock forward to the feminist challenge to this universalization in the 1980s—and to the implications of newly recast memories for West Germany and for West German women's collective identity.

Women's own narratives of the war rarely begin with 1 September 1939. Instead, the recollections of the large majority of German women who were politically and racially acceptable to the regime typically open with their husbands' or fathers' departures. They get going in earnest with the invasion of the Soviet Union, with its attendant casualties, and the air war against Germany.<sup>13</sup> 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 and was hardly unique to women. Before considering this theme in post war retellings of the Nazi period, however, it is worth examining the ways it simultaneously distorted an understanding of the impact of Nazi rule and reflected significant 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



Figure 1.1: "You help too!" Although working conditions were hard during the war, women could feel pride and adventure through their part in the war effort. Courtesy of the Hoover Institution Archives, Poster Collection.

Nazi state, it is worth noting some of the advantages German women enjoyed with the outbreak of war. A generous system of family allowances allowed hundreds of thousands of working wives to give up their jobs; the war introduced war booty to the consumer economy; women found opportunities for travel, adventure, and a role in realizing the Nazi party's aims; and Germany's early successes allowed women as well as men to feel pride in their country's military prowess (see figure

1.1).<sup>14</sup> 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 suffering appear as evidence that German "bystanders" were among the victims of the Nazi regime, they 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.<sup>15</sup> Finally, reminders of the suffering of "Germans" rarely force the listener to understand that suffering 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. To the contrary, stories of the suffering of "Germans" tend to displace reminders of the hundreds of thousands of (German) Jews, Communists, and Socialists forced to emigrate before the war; (German) "asocial" and disabled people killed in the euthanasia program or sterilized against their wills; and (German) criminals and political opponents who withstood torture and spent years in prisons 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 Germany's 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 aspects of the war.

Women's retellings of their war experiences usually omit such points, something that has raised a few eyebrows among women's historians.<sup>16</sup> But such narratives are rarely intentionally disingenuous. Instead, they are self-centered reflections on 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.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the shortcomings of typical "German women's" reflections, those reflections became the basis for important strands of postwar West German thought.

And German women's war stories are indeed dramatic tales, leaving little doubt that their tellers suffered genuine traumas. Of Germany's prewar population of eighty million, twenty million were removed for military or related service during the war, half of them before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. 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, however, did lose their homes, members of their families, or their own lives. In a week-long raid on Hamburg in the summer of 1943, to take an extreme example, 40,000–100,000 died; fifty-five to sixty percent of the city was destroyed, leaving 750,000 homeless. By the end of the war, fourteen million Germans had lost their homes, and perhaps 600,000 their lives,

to air raids.<sup>18</sup> Those who emerged from the bomb shelters to find that their apartments had been hit set about extinguishing the fires, rescuing their remaining belongings and, if possible, making at least a portion of their apartments livable. If their apartments were uninhabitable, they might move in with relatives, but conditions would be cramped and tense. If they had no relatives or friends with extra rooms but worked in the city, they were assigned rooms with strangers who had rarely volunteered this living space.

Beginning in 1943, ten million people, mainly women and children, were evacuated from Germany cities. But sex did not qualify an adult for evacuation; rather, nonemployed status or responsibility for small children did. Employed women without children remained in the endangered cities; so did employed mothers unless their children were very small.<sup>19</sup> Women who had seen their men off to war now remained in dangerous places themselves as they sent their children into unknown parts. Or they accompanied their children, leaving familiar networks behind and knowing that if their apartments were now hit, they would be unable to salvage any of their property.

The story of the Darmstadt family F. illustrates the cumulative effects of the separation of marriage partners, bombing raids, homelessness, and evacuation. 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 after 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 11–12 September 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. The extended family had been able to save only 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 Willy and her mother 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> For many, this was not their first move: they had gone to the East in order to "Germanize" Polish territory (thus forcing Poles onto their own refugee trail a few years earlier), or they had been evacuated to the East, out of the range of British and American bombers. More, however, 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, and foot. They faced roads



Figure 1.2: "Two Russian Soldiers Harass a Girl," 1945. The interaction is clearly a gendered one. Courtesy of the Ullstein Bilderdienst.

blocked for military use, crippled railroads, and, as long as the war continued, bombings. As they progressed westward, they arrived in badly damaged cities that already had sizable homeless populations. Their treks often lasted weeks.

Germans fleeing westward wanted to be in territory conquered by the Western Allies rather than by the Soviet Union. Germans could reasonably expect a harsher paycheck from the Soviets than from the Western Allies. Germans' recent conduct in the East, however, was only one of many factors contributing to women's fears of the coming Soviet conquest. German stereotypes of semihuman peoples of the East had a centuries-long history, and the Nazi party had made portrayals of "Red Hordes," "Tartars," "Huns," and "Asiatics" part of its racial and political vocabulary. As the war drew to a close, the Nazi leadership urged Germans to fight to the last breath by depicting Soviet brutalities, and specifically rape.<sup>22</sup>

As the first refugees brought news of slaughter and rape to the West, they confirmed other Germans' worst fears about the Red Army. Estimates of the numbers of Soviet rapes range widely, from the tens of thousands to two 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.<sup>23</sup> Confronted with the conquering armies, German women were left largely to their own devices. When German men were present, they were rarely able to help, and they often seemed all too willing to trade women's safety for their own.<sup>24</sup>

Women's immediate reactions to rape varied widely. Some seem to have experienced rape as one problem among many: it was a horrible episode, but so were many other events of those months.<sup>25</sup> 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, and not "just" as a painful and traumatic episode. Some families reacted with disgust even as women returned tattered and bleeding; others felt but could not express their sympathy.<sup>26</sup> Where internal injuries, sexually transmitted disease, or pregnancy resulted, women's feelings of lasting damage were confirmed.<sup>27</sup>

Bombings, flight, and rape: although these constituted only a portion of German women's wartime experience, they came to define the "home front." Women's demographic majority in the civilian population meant that these were largely female experiences, and during and immediately after the war, they were typically described as such (figure 1.2).<sup>28</sup> Reminders that the enemy was harming "innocent women and children" were, if nothing else, effective wartime propaganda. As Germans gained distance from these experiences after the war, however, such episodes of victimhood came to represent the wartime sufferings of a population of unspecified gender. In essence, they came to represent a 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 upon an unwilling people.

To be sure, German men had their tales of woe as well, usually focusing on the Eastern front or on Soviet prison camps.<sup>29</sup> Given the international fury at the destruction wrought by the German military, such narratives often expressed the de-

sire to separate the teller from the collective. 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 had been an unwilling draftee. Or he could insist that he had been a member of a legitimate collective: a professional Wehrmacht, distinct from the SS and innocent of wartime atrocities. The mythology of the professional soldier had tangible ramifications for the development of the Federal Republic, helping, for example, to justify pensions for veterans and West German participation in NATO. Despite the larger significance of popular memories of male experience, however, the gendered nature of the original experience was not obscured. Even popular memories of an admittedly huge collective—the German military—remained just that: representations of the military.

The disproportionately feminine civilian experience and the almost exclusively female rape experience, by contrast, seem to have allowed Germans to consider their nation as a whole an innocent victim of war.<sup>30</sup> Germans could remind themselves that not only Jews but also Germans, a category that implicitly excluded German Jews, had suffered wartime atrocities like the firebombing of Dresden.

The adult population of Dresden had been mainly female at the time of the bombings, but this no longer seemed so significant. Visual culture played a part in this transition, as the lunar urban landscapes were endlessly photographed both for their historic value and for their striking aesthetic quality. In this genre of photography, the inanimate victims of the bombings—the buildings—became the subject. Viewers who recalled that these buildings were once full of people could easily forget such details as those people's demographic profile.<sup>31</sup> In fact, they were striking in part because of their very sterility: they were, at least on the surface, 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 the 1953 collection, *Balance of the Second World War*, a book promoted, in the words of its publisher, in order “that the survivors . . . not simply push aside this most monstrous event of world history [the Second World War], but confront it in a very basic way.”<sup>32</sup> Presumably in the interests of such a confrontation, an essay called “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.”<sup>33</sup> 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 significant, 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 urban infrastructure was significant by any measure. But by minimizing the human and emphasizing the cultural victims of the bombings, the author has obscured the degree to which this was a gendered experience. Germany, representing no less than Western urban culture, was the victim of the war.<sup>34</sup>

Most remarkable was the appropriation of the female rape experience by the nation. Although discussion of women's rapes became taboo a few years after the end of the war,<sup>35</sup> references to the rapes hardly disappeared. In fact, they permeated the culture. But they 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, CDU and CSU campaign posters portrayed 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 Germany (compare figures 1.2, 1.3). The image of a Germany raped by the Soviets made its way into official history when, in the mid-1950s, the Federal Ministry for Evacuees, Refugees, and War-Injured published a multivolume 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 violently expelled from their homes. It also, however, endorsed a racial analysis of the rapes:

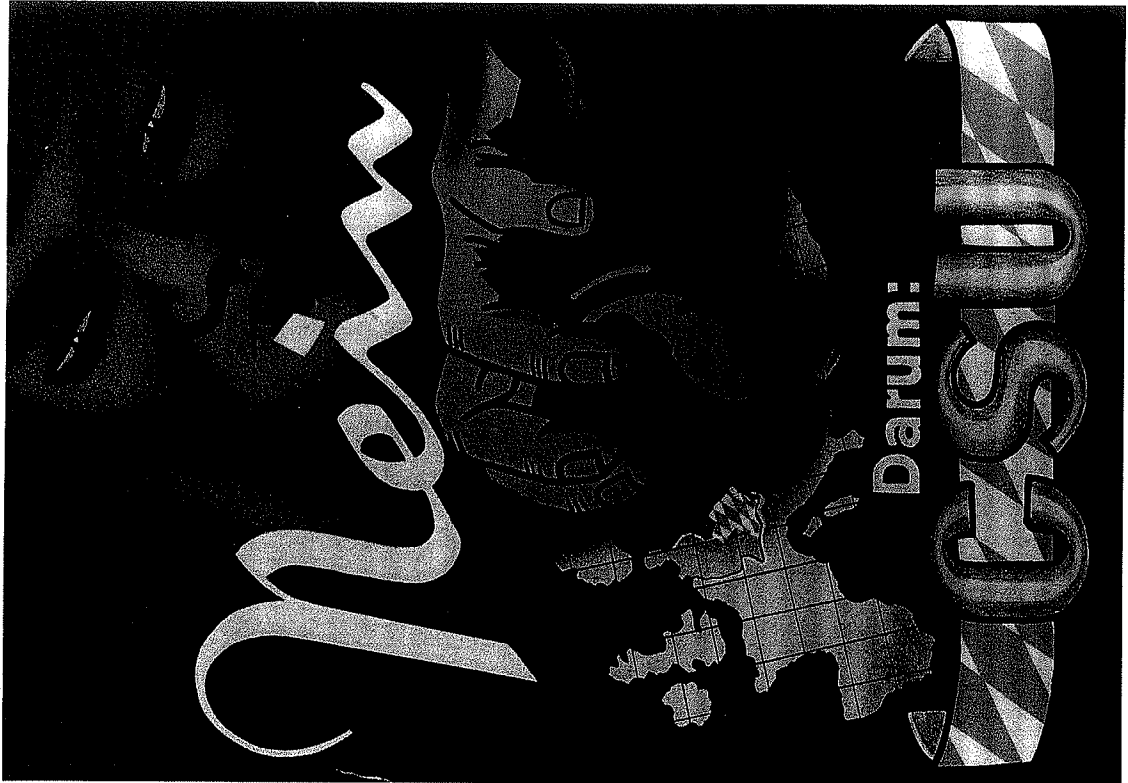


Figure 1.3: Political poster of 1949 appealing to fears of the “rape” of Germany. The poster portrays an endangered Bavaria and recommends a vote for the CDU’s Bavarian counterpart, the Christian Social Union (CSU). In the original, the face is red. Courtesy of the Münchner Stadtmuseum.

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.<sup>36</sup>

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—including widespread rape—in the East.<sup>37</sup> Especially notable in the present context, however, is how such an understanding of the rapes encouraged West Germans to recall the defeat in the East as the violation of Western civilization by a brutal 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 after the war, however, served the emergence of a discourse that insisted on the necessity of the German war effort. According to this narrative, the Western Allies had refused to recognize that the Germans had been on their side, protecting the West against the onslaught of the East. As the Wehrmacht had defended Western civilization against the "Red Flood," the Western Allies had snubbornly insisted on 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.<sup>38</sup>

Ironically, as rape became a metaphor for German victimization, the government declined to recognize rape by the enemy or occupier as a form of injury deserving compensation. Insisting that rape was not an injury unless lasting physical damage had resulted and that children were the natural consequence of sexual intercourse, the Ministry of Labor turned down repeated petitions to recognize raped women under the Law to Aid Victims of War, or at least to contribute to the support of children who had resulted from the rapes.<sup>39</sup> Only in the late 1950s did the Finance Ministry award limited support to a small number of raped women.<sup>40</sup> As the experience of rape was degendered to apply to the nation, the state denied the possibility of 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 instead describing a national experience. The euphemism "Asian atrocities" typically replaced the word *rape* in the 1950s, thus substituting a racialized term for a gendered one.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1985, the head of the Christian Democratic faction to the Bundestag feigned 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 *Ox-politik* by the free Europeans and the free West cannot be to legitimize the rape and division of Europe."<sup>42</sup>

Stories of wartime victimization of women thus provided one important source for a popular, even official, version of German history that offered a sympathetic description of recent history. 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 Germaness that was based in large part on the threat from the East. But whatever the origin of Germans' suffering, as stories of victimization came to constitute *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 seven million more women than men in occupied Germany. The demographic imbalance was particularly stark among young adults: for every thousand men in the Western zones between the ages of 25 and 30, there were nearly 1700 women of the same age.<sup>43</sup> 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 poured in. The lack of food supplies was catastrophic. In May 1945, Berlin housewives could claim a daily ration of 1.1 ounces (300 grams) of bread, 14 ounces (400 grams) of potatoes, 1 ounce (30 grams) of grain, 2/3 ounce (20 grams) of meat, and 1/4 ounce (7 grams) of fat—a ration card popularly nicknamed the "Ascension pass." This starving, homeless population went on to face the coldest winter in generations in 1946–47. Thus hard times persisted: in November 1947, the average weight for women was 93.5 pounds; for men, 92.3 pounds.<sup>44</sup> 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 camp. Those who were present were often wounded, too weak to work, or psychologically shattered by their wartime and prison experiences. Amidst fantastic shortages, 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 precious 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," who cleaned away the piles of stone and brick that constituted Germany's urban landscape. Rubble clearance was not an occupation women entered enthusiastically. 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. When this proved an inadequate labor pool, the authorities instituted mandatory labor for the general population. In addition to those performing compulsory labor, another group volunteered for the task, not for the poor pay, but for the better ration cards they received as heavy laborers. However mixed their motivations, women set to the backbreaking 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 five to ten percent of employed women in Berlin.<sup>45</sup>

Women of the rubble became a central symbol of the era.<sup>46</sup> A single image linked women in rags and ruined cities on the one hand, Germans' resilience and the promise of reconstruction on the other. The survival of ordinary German families and the 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 emphasized the link between the Nazi past and the current devastation by assigning former Nazis and their families to rubble clearance; initially, women of the rubble endured the occasional taunt, "Nazi Brooms" (Nazi-leiber).<sup>47</sup> 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, 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.<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup> Popular metaphors such as "ruins of the soul" and "internal devastation," which linked

the physical destruction of Germany with the psychological destruction of Germans, made 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 lie on the street corners, so are they present inside people."<sup>50</sup>

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 "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 disinterest 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.<sup>51</sup> By the mid-1950s, however, it was clear that this recovery had had a price tag, albeit one to which few objected. West Germany's revival had required the quick demasculinization of technical experts, and it had involved an alliance with the West that some blamed for making reunification with East Germany impossible. Recovery had included rearmament and participation in military exercises, and it demanded an attitude of humility and gratitude toward the United States for Marshall Plan aid. But the phoenix had begun to rise from the ashes with the 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.<sup>52</sup> The woman 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 cliché, gracing countless dust jackets and journalistic references to the era (figure 1.4). At the same time, the appealing simplicity of the woman of the rubble could be removed from her person and 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 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 examining each other suspiciously, without mistrust."<sup>53</sup> Histories of the occupation era hardly support this portrayal of harmonious political life, however. Despite some promising developments, such as the establishment of an ecumenical Christian party to replace political Catholicism, divisions between Christian conservatives, Socialists, and Communists were 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 by men. Rather, his reference is to the scene on the streets, where women dominated.

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 eco-



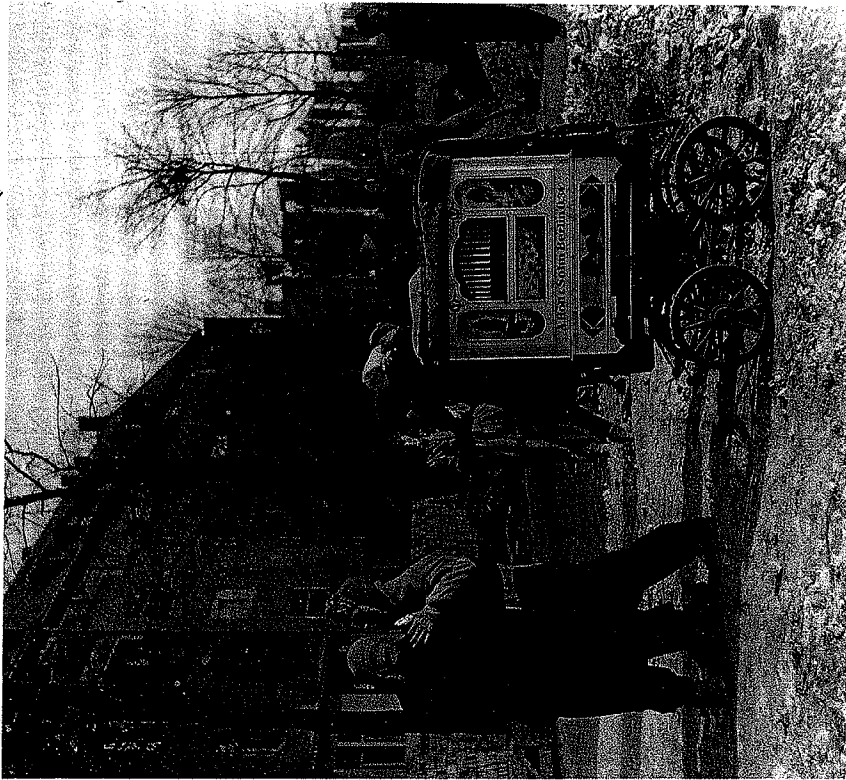


Figure 1.4: Women of the rubble dancing during a break from their work. Images of women of the rubble quickly entered popular iconography of the reconstruction of West Germany. Photos such as this one emphasized the innocence of Germans engaged in the work of reconstruction. Courtesy of the Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

omic success, and they implied that 1945 was the “zero hour” that marked the beginning of the 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. Memories of women’s heroic role in feeding their families and cleaning up the bombed cities had greater potential to contribute to improved status for women than did images of women as victims or as fraternizers; 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 came a sharp rise in unemployment. Firms laid off workers, as labor paid with the new *Deutschmark* was much more expensive than that paid in the old currency. At the same time, millions who had supported themselves via the underground economy suddenly needed legitimate work. Registered male unemployment rose 42.5 percent and that of women 70 percent in the first month after currency reform.<sup>54</sup> But women, whose ability to juggle paid employment with extended household responsibilities and underground work had made them heroines during the “hunger years,” now found their applications for unemployment compensation rejected on the grounds that their presumed household responsibilities made them unavailable to the labor market.<sup>55</sup> As a result, jobless women found it much more difficult to collect unemployment compensation than did men.<sup>56</sup>

As the new state was formed, women found that their extraordinary efforts did not constitute grounds to alleviate discrimination against working women. The position of the Social Democrats and the Communists that the principle of equal pay for equal work should now be anchored in the West German constitution (the “Basic Law”) failed to gain a majority.<sup>57</sup> The courts upheld separate women’s and men’s wage and salary classifications until 1955 and the thinly disguised alternative of “light” and “heavy” classifications thereafter. Age limits excluded adult women from practically all vocational training and from much employment at strikingly young ages. Women could have little hope that their government would challenge age discrimination: the federal ministry charged with addressing the problem turned down applicants for typing positions because they exceeded the cutoff age of twenty-five.<sup>58</sup>

As West Germany enjoyed its “economic miracle” in the 1950s, unemployment and poverty among middle-aged women reached critical proportions. In response, organizations of female employees did more than protest the general unfairness of age cutoffs and unequal pay. They also pointed out that such limitations hurt precisely those women who had contributed their labor during Germany’s hardest years.<sup>59</sup> To no avail. Narratives that linked women’s hard work 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; but the women of the rubble themselves 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 occupation-era history were less positively construed. Most subject to criticism was women’s sexual behavior: their fleeting relationships on the refugee trail, their cohabitation with men while they awaited word of their husbands, their use of prostitution as a strategy for survival. To many Germans, exploding rates of illegitimacy, sexually transmitted disease, and divorce indicated a terrible crisis.<sup>60</sup>

The harshest criticism, however, was reserved for women who associated with occupation forces. The “Yank’s sweetheart” (*Ami-liebchen*)—the “fraternizer” in

the U.S. zone, where fraternization was probably most common—came to be deeply associated with these years as the woman of the rubble. Like the woman of the rubble, the Yank's sweetheart eventually represented something much larger than herself. Unlike the woman of the rubble, however, the Yank's sweetheart was no heroine. She became the symbol of Germany's moral decline, a symbol that implied that the decline occurred with the collapse of, rather than during, Nazi rule. When the Western occupation armies lifted their prohibitions on fraternization, a lively social culture featuring young German women and Allied soldiers, particularly Americans, began to flourish.<sup>61</sup> 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 fifty to ninety percent of American troops "fraternized" with German women in 1946; one in eight married men had entered a relatively stable relationship in Germany.<sup>62</sup>

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 considered the economic advantages of relationships with foreigners, their behavior was consistent with traditions of women seeking suitors who could provide financial security. 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").<sup>63</sup>

A "fraternizer," who slept with the former enemy and sometimes crossed racial or religious boundaries, put her reputation at risk. In the discourse of occupation-era Germany, however, a fraternizer did not just prostitute herself: she stabbed her native people in the back. She made a mockery of the sacrifices of German soldiers, now returning wounded and emotionally scarred. Forty years later a German veteran claimed still to be haunted by the words of an American serviceman: "The other soldier fought for six years; the German woman only five minutes."<sup>64</sup> Other Germans who had suffered during the war and its aftermath also found grounds to resent fraternizing women. Germany's umbrella social work organization calculated the cost of treating STDs 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.<sup>65</sup> As fraternizers seemed to mock the sufferings of veterans and victims of war, contemporaries often felt that young women were sullying what they still believed was the good name of the German people. A twenty-two-year-old student and former Nazi 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!"<sup>66</sup> Like many of her contemporaries, this young woman concluded 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. 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.

In the American zone, the scandal of sexual promiscuity and the insult to Germans who had sacrificed a great deal coincided with fraternizers' apparent embrace of American material wealth and cultural modernism—wearing American nylon, dancing to American music, and so on. This reinforced fraternization's impact 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.<sup>67</sup> And although the Nazis had railed especially hard against American modernism, fear of American cultural imperialism was hardly 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 the international community busily sought aspects of German tradition that could help to explain genocide and military aggression. Germany's military and political loss must not be compounded by a loss of positive cultural identity.<sup>68</sup>

Yet preserving, or restoring, a German culture 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, but there was tremendous demand on the German side for things American. This was hardly limited to fraternizers' legendary desire for stockings. American cigarettes, to name only one item, were not only a treasured luxury item but also 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 the popular obsession with fraternizers did more than shift attention from violent racial and political crime to sexual misconduct. It also redefined the national terms of Germany's moral decline and, by implication, the possibilities for rehabilitation. Denazification and war crimes trials focused on a phenomenon that was not only homegrown but also associated with Germany's years of greatest power and an ideological insistence on a unique national character. Although much