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 relationship between Germans, 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. If fraternization symbolized Germany’s decline, then that decline was associated with a loss rather than with a surplus of national strength. Rehabilitation would not result from excising what was uniquely German and learning from foreigners, especially the Americans. Rather, it would depend on a reassertion of German independence, uniqueness—even sexual, racial, and cultural purity. The official, international 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, domestic, and popular discourse of fraternization, which described a very different relationship between Germanness and the loss of moral bearings.

This meant that statements like those of the twenty-two-year-old student, who blamed sexually delinquent women for “bringing down” their decent contemporaries, coexisted with a more complicated discourse in which fraternizers symbolized a larger degradation of Germany brought about by loss of sovereignty. On first glance, Erwin Oehl’s 1946 painting, Fraternization, seems to portray a villainous fraternizer and a victimized veteran (figure 1.5). The grimacing young woman cruelly kicks the haggard veteran, who is already precariously balanced on crutch. The woman’s leg, which unites sexuality and violence, takes the central position: the light coloring of the veteran’s and woman’s face, as well as of the woman’s sweater, makes 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: it is symptomatic of a much broader landscape of misery resulting from foreign occupation.

As West Germany emerged from the hunger years, several developments seemed to confirm the link between fraternization and loss of national sovereignty: the currency reform resulted in the quick decline of mass prostitution as a survival strategy. It also set in motion a series of events that in less than a year resulted in the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany. Thus in retrospect the association of fraternization with lack of national self-determination was cemented. Fraternization’s utility as a symbol for the larger degradation of foreign occupation was confirmed in the popular culture of the early Federal Republic. In passage from a novel set during the occupation, which was an immediate bestseller upon its publication in 1955, a young prostitute who serves 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 FX, there were women outside, waiting for an obliging American. Whores. In the "Mücke" [a bar] the waiters would keep the Germans waiting but would dart about like wasps 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?71

The degradation of the German landscape takes many forms: German women offer sex to American men, German men scramble 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 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. The fraternizer Inge is buried with the prostituted society she represents.

Nevertheless, although Inge symbolizes the moral decline of her society, she is not to blame for this decline. Rather, 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 employed a similar motto, the American responds that Hitler hadn't claimed democracy—and he hadn't been a foreigner.72 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 astonishing. The message is clear: West Germany must attain national sovereignty and the Yanks must go home.

Most Germans experienced the occupation as the time of their greatest physical hardship. With the phenomena of 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.73 Popular support for official attempts to "confront the past"—and for the government's choices of which "past" to confront—suggest that by the early 1950s most West Germans felt more traumatized by the years 1945–48 than by the years 1933–45. The young West German government, dominated by Christian conservatives who insisted upon the need for "moral renewal," neither rushed to make indemnity payments to victims of National Socialism nor was troubled by old Nazis' political prominence and readmission to the civil service.74 Instead, when focusing on issues they described as moral, the ruling parties responded to the legacy of the occupation era by working hard to "reconstruct the family" and to reinforce conservative sexual mores.75

Of all the striking images of women during the "crisis years," that of the fraternizer thus translated most directly into official attempts to shape the situation of women. Many political players argued that women's demonstrated competence, the demographic imbalance between the sexes, and the numerous single mothers constituted grounds for improving the status of women in family law. This position was defeated. The governing coalition countered that the apparent breakdown of sexual mores demanded a conservative family policy. In the founding years of the Federal Republic, the inferior status of illegitimate children was written into the Basic Law, husbands' legal advantage over their wives was confirmed, and discrimination against families with few children (including most female-headed households) in social programs was reaffirmed. Municipalities were even permitted to restrict the movements of registered, law-abiding prostitutes, a practice that had been outlawed during Weimar but reinstated during the Nazi period. As victims and as rebuilders, women's symbolic value was positive, and it was transferred to West Germany as a nation. Women, however, would reap no material benefits from their unique burdens and contributions as women, although they shared in the improved standard of living that characterized West Germany as a whole.76 As fraternizers, by contrast, women's symbolic value was negative. Although certain universalized lessons emerged from the history of fraternization—lessons emphasizing the need for national self-determination—the most tangible response to memories of fraternization reflected 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 did not only offer sympathetic images of victimization and rebuilding, generalizable images that provided alternatives to representations of militaristic, genocidal Germans. They also prompted a discourse about a decline in 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 pitted victim of rape one month, a despised fraternizer the next. Furthermore, these aspects of women's history addressed different concerns during West Germany's formative years, and they worked in tandem with other factors 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 accusations of German perfidy; reminders of rape at the hands of the Soviets helped to formulate a West Germanness that opposed all things Eastern. Recollections of rubble clearance, by contrast, associated West German well-being not with mem-
bership 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 with the student movement of the late 1960s and the Federal Republic's turn to the left in the 1970s. Among these was the link between Cold War hostilities and the 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 Chancellor Willy Brandt, a Social Democrat, reconsidered foreign relations, instituting Ostpolitik, and the burden of historical guilt, kneeling before the Warsaw ghetto monument in 1970. The first challenge to the universalization of women's history, however, came in the early and mid-1980s, when the feminist movement had matured adequately to produce a significant historical literature. Feminist explorations of the "hour of the women," which drew heavily on oral histories, 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 the hard work of "Germans" following the war obscured the extent to which that work had been performed by women. In describing the bombings, evacuations, and flight, they insisted, in the words of an interview subject who were chosen as a chapter heading for a major work, that "we [women] lived with the danger" (emphasis added), thus reclaiming his civilian experience for women. A groundbreaking article on the rapes demonstrated that as Germany lost the war, women had been "doubly defeated," targets not only of military but also of sexual violence. Even the previously despised ratterin was reclaimed and assigned a uniquely female pioneering role that had been forgotten as friendship with the Western Allies became a foundation of postwar life. "The first human contact with the Allies," readers were reminded, "was in us women" (emphasis added). 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 challenged a historiography that alternately overlooked women and discussed them on the basis of negative stereotype. 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 troubled feminists. By noting that only women's hard work had made possible all Germans' revival, for example, younger feminists were able to pose questions of profound importance to their struggle: Why had the Federal Republic not been established on more sexually egalitarian lines? Why were the gendered roles of the 1950s conservative? Why had their own mothers, who had proven their competence and independence, then embraced a domestic lifestyle that they, the daughters, would experience as a straitjacket? 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 recognized the devastating effects of Nazism, militarism, and sexism; many 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—event official—discussions about the Nazi period and its aftermath. In his speech on the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war, the 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 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 upon 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.

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 postwar history challenged 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 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 bound by German men's demands—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 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 resistance. To feminists who combined their abhorrence of sexism with criticism of German 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, and never as perpetrators. To be sure, 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 in all too well with a troubling new wave of representations of the lives of “ordinary people” during the Nazi years, representations in which “ordinary people” experienced good times and bad, but in any case were governed by forces beyond their control. Profound suspicion of this trend in the historiography increased as English-speaking feminist historians, who more often identified with refugees from and persecutors of Nazism than with women of the rubble, became a significant presence in the debate. The narratives offered by West German feminists had rarely made a significant impact on discourses of the past when they were roundly challenged. That this challenge came not from antifeminists but from feminist scholars attested to the dynamism of feminist scholarship, but this was small comfort to feminists who found their explorations of the costs of patriarchy and Nazism countered by accusations of apologism. A second generation of feminist histories has emerged, emphasizing German women’s contributions to 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.

The battle for German women’s past was not only a reexamination of chapters of women’s past that had been universalized to apply to West Germany as a whole—and thus a reinterpretation of 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 memory. 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 their group specificity can be 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 degendered German history of rape. Counter memories of relationships between German women and American JWs, by contrast, were not degendered, nor did they give way to a popular or public history of good relations between Germans and Americans in general. Instead, they were demonized to describe relationships devoid of moral integrity, still generated 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 because shifts in location do not follow a clear chronological sequence, with one “location” replacing another. Counter memories of ordinary relationships between German women and occupation soldiers coexisted with popular memories of fraternizers as the most odious symptom of a degraded society. Counter memories of a female civilian life in the endangered cities coexisted with popular memories of cities in flames that described a genderless 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 multiple locations, serving different functions in each.

The way that memories function in varying locations instead depends on the second aspect of interconnections among forms of memory illustrated here: 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.” Through memories of women during the “crisis years,” the history of women’s status in the Federal Republic and the development of a distinct West German national identity were intertwined.

Whether memories of the woman 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 image itself: it was open to multiple interpretations and uses. Instead, the prospect of unemployed men in a poor economy worked against the transformation of the women of the rubble into a population of well-paid and well-respected working women. Thus the woman of the rubble became a 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 Korea boom. According to the history implied by the woman of the rubble, the economic miracle had begun with “zero hour” and the hard work of Germans, who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. 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 women’s paid labor. 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 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 chapter has explored a case study, certain patterns may 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 the Second World War, 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 story was attractive, and the woman 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 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 profit materially or politically 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 reflected changes in national identity and social hierarchies, as they emerged in the dual context of leftist challenges to West German national identity and feminist efforts to alter gender relations. Moreover, 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; and 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 German past.

NOTES

1. A longer, more thoroughly referenced, version of this essay appeared in American Historical Review 101 (1996): 354–95; it is reprinted here with permission.


8. On refugees, evacuees, and prisoners of war, see Robert Moeller’s chapter in this volume.


10. On historians’ and sociologists’ ways of classifying varieties of social memory, see Thomas Butler, ed., Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); James Fentress and Chris Wickham, Social Memory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992); Patrick H. Hutton, History as an Art of Memory (Hanover: University of Vermont Press, 1993); Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance; Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds., Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); as well as the special issue of Representations, “Memory and Counter-Memory” (Spring 1989), and the journal History and Memory.