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Gendered Ideas in Women's Publications: West German Women, 1945-1950

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Gendered Ideas in Women's Publications
West German Women, 1945-1950

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"

and the Degree Bachelor of Arts

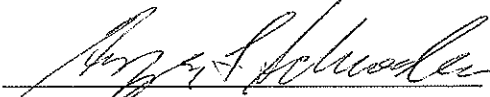
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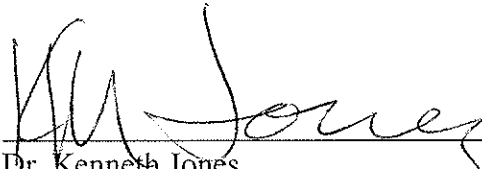
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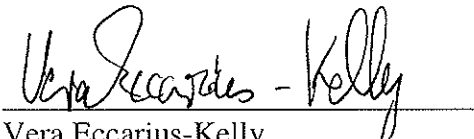
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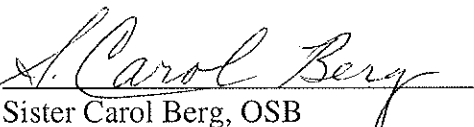
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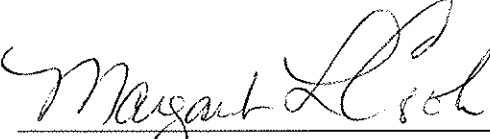
Gendered Ideas in Women's Publications
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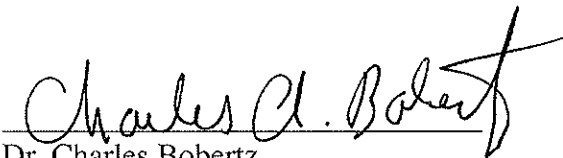

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It is unceasingly difficult for those of us raised in the spirit of women's liberation to understand why women in the past did not realize their unlimited potential but chose to limit their sphere to the home acting as wife and mother. Today many think negatively of this lifestyle choice. In turn this makes the study of recent women's history a struggle because it necessitates leaving at the doorstep perceptions of the modern struggle for equality and modern expectations of equality. The goal of this paper, in part, is to show how contemporary feminist understanding, if not left at the door, clouds understanding of the gender consciousness prevalent in West Germany at the end of World War II.

The time frame of this work is the early postwar period, with special emphasis on the period from 1946 to 1950. The reader will see that some West German women continued working for equality following the path of their feminist¹ predecessors. Congruently, the reader will also see that others² chose to abide by more traditional² ideals. Many forces impacted West German women's ideas of equality, especially Germany's war-ridden past, which adds to the complexity of understanding German women's³ long road to equality. By the end of this work, the interplay of West Germany's historical experiences with West German women's expectations for social,

¹ Finding descriptive words to differentiate the diverse ideas of German women is difficult. To eliminate confusion, the German women who in some manner were involved with working for equality and other women's causes are referred to as feminist. These women expected a postwar Germany society in which they were granted equality of opportunity to change Germany's traditionally patriarchal society.

² For the same reason, German women focused on life in the home or the three K's of German women, Kirche, Küche, und Kinder (church, kitchen, and children) are labeled as traditional. They saw German women's increased activity outside of the home during the postwar period as temporary. They held the belief that even though German women after the war were put in unusual or typically male roles, women would return to their "natural" place in the home when the rebuilding process was completed. According to traditional women, life in the home was God's will. Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 64.

³ The term "German women" is used throughout the paper, but it refers to only those women living in West Germany.

economic, and political acceptance, reflected in their writings, will illustrate West German women's conservative expectations for equality after World War II.

Understanding women's expectations for equality is difficult because it requires sorting through abstract ideas and perceptions of gender and equality. Historians are largely influential in processing this information for their readers. At times, however, historians can inadvertently confuse their audience by failing to understand the reader's preconceived ideas on gendered issues. In fact, confusion appears to have happened with postwar German women's history. The complexity of the period combined with the difficulties of gender history has opened a door for misunderstanding because modern readers have biased ideas of what constitutes feminism and traditional women's expectations. Hence, the second goal of this work is to look at how historians have portrayed postwar German women to their audiences to note possible areas of confusion. Misconceptions are clarified by using postwar women's periodicals to give a voice to German women and their expectations for equality and a role in Germany's postwar society.

Women's publications are an appropriate medium for understanding German women and how they felt and reacted to the postwar period. Through the publications it is possible to delve into the women's minds and what they are thinking. By selecting publications that reflect as many and as diverse ideas as possible, the larger body of German women and their ideas are understood.

This work focuses largely on four publications that will be briefly explained. First, *Die Welt der Frau* offers insight into the activities of women in and around the area of Stuttgart where it is published. The publication appears regional, which gives a detailed

account of what they do to compare with what they say. The same regional voice is given to the women of Berlin through *Die Frau von heute*. Also published in Berlin was the *Deutsche Hausfrauen-Zeitung: Wochenschrift für gesamten Interessen der Frauenwelt*, noted throughout the paper as *Frauenwelt*. It had been published in Berlin since 1874 and is the most mainstream of all the periodicals discussed here. As the title suggests, the publication is largely representative of the ideas and interests of housewives. Collectively, the three publications are interesting as they represent women whose ideas followed both feminist *and* traditional lines. This dual representation is especially interesting in the case of *Frauenwelt* as it represents the interests of housewives, those who had accepted the traditional role of wife and mother.

The final publication, *Die Stimme der frau*, differs from the above as it is the most feminist in content of all four publications. What is noteworthy about *Die Stimme der frau* is that traditional interests are not represented as in those above. Unfortunately, little other information is readily available. This leads to the conclusion that it was not a mainstream publication and had a smaller circulation, which is plausible considering its extreme gendered ideas.

With the exception of *Die Stimme der frau*, the publications are diverse in the ideas they represent. As will be evident later, a publication that will be thought to portray the traditional view will seem more feminist in the later 1940s compared to the mid-1940s or vice versa. This fluctuation is difficult to understand considering that publications usually reflect the beliefs of their readership. For the moment this inconsistency is overlooked because necessary background information has not yet been presented. In an attempt to set the mood for the inconsistencies and women's

arguments to follow, German women's history is briefly traced, paying close attention to the diverse ideas of German women since the turn of the century.

Turn of the century debate

Not until after the social expectations of bourgeois German women at the turn of the century changed did gender equality become an issue in Germany. These bourgeois women formed into pockets of women's rights groups, which then began working for women's causes and against other social ills.

Often these women's groups were prone to internal disagreements. Ideological differences hindered their work; and therefore, the development of larger feminist goals. For example, an argument arose among members of the women's group the League of German Women's Association or the BDF⁴ over the legality of prostitution. Two factions formed because of the disagreement. The central questions were who should be blamed and which gender needed to be reformed. The traditional side believed the women were to be blamed for the immoral act and should be punished for prostitution. The feminist side saw prostitution as the result of a male dominated society with men to blame for the immoral act.⁵ After internal debate, no resolution was agreed upon. Ultimately, the prominent women who believed women were to blame for prostitution and ought to be reformed left the BDF.⁶

Similarly, factions within women's organizations began questioning whether women should continue promoting themselves through charitable and welfare work. As early as 1898, a growing group of German women with feminist ideas felt acts of charity

⁴ Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine.

⁵ Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in German, 1894-1933* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976), 43.

were not leading them to their desired ends of greater equality. They demanded access to equal rights for all women on the grounds that women, as persons, were entitled to full equality. Internal disagreement again prevailed between the feminist women and those who wanted to continue down the traditional path. When an agreement in the BDF could not be reached, the feminist faction broke away and founded the Union of Progressive Women's Association.⁷

These are only two disagreements that could not be resolved. There were many others that also severed existing women's groups, leading to the creation of even more women's groups. Gradually, this fragmenting tore many women's groups apart,⁸ and at the dawn of World War I there were diverse ideas and membership loyalties separating the active feminist and traditional women.

German women were inevitably preoccupied by the start of World War I, which distracted them from their own cause. According to German historian Nancy Reagan, the war initially had a unifying effect, pulling the splintered groups together for the same war cause.⁹ Historian Richard Evans also noted women's unity by citing remarks from Maria Stritt, an influential women's rights leader of the time. She said women were collectively consumed with "war psychosis."¹⁰ This psychosis was reinforced by two themes stressed by women's organizations affiliated with the war: morality and service. German women were to act as "pious mothers" while the fathers were in battle, and they were to do needed work for the war cause on the home front, like caring for

⁶ Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 45.

⁷ Verband Fortschrittlicher Frauenvereine. Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 47.

⁸ Richard J. Evans in his final chapters of *The Feminist Movement* offers a very comprehensive understanding of the disagreements and events that were the beginning of the end of many German women's organizations.

⁹ Nancy, R. Reagan, *A German Women's Movement: Class & Gender in Hanover, 1880-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 187.

¹⁰ Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 210.

soldiers through the Red Cross or working through the National Women's Service organization.¹¹ Consequently, German women's preoccupation with broader concerns further slowed their already fractured gender debate of the prewar years.¹²

When the war ended, German women were forced into an unknown realm, politics. The German defeat in the war also signified the defeat of the German male. This, combined with the German Revolution, which put women into politics and gave them the right to vote, changed the sphere of German women. During this period, three key ideas defined women's impact. First, German women's organizations commenced strongly after the war, but the period of inflation forcefully shut down many women's groups by 1923.¹³ Second, German women were active in the previously male political system and the interests of right-wing women's groups dominated the time span between the end of World Wars I and II. They rejected the idea of "New Women,"¹⁴ and instead connected with ideas of nationalism. Finally, it was German women's nationalist ideas that helped bring Hitler and the Nazi party to power, which was the beginning of the end of German women's organization of independent women's groups.¹⁵

The period of Nazi rule forcefully stopped the development of women's organizations outside of the National Socialist Women's League (NS-Frauenschaft) that was organized by the Nazi party. The Nazi regime perpetuated and exaggerated the German status quo by continually enforcing stereotypical gender roles, most notably the role of motherhood. The Nazi regime saw the National Socialist Women's League as

¹¹ Reagan, *A German Women's Movement*, 190.

¹² Reagan, *A German Women's Movement*, 188.

¹³ Reagan, *A German Women's Movement*, 213.

¹⁴ Reagan, *A German Women's Movement*, 221.

the only organization women needed as it allowed them to promote the Nazi ideology to women.¹⁶ Hitler's ideology built on wives' subordination to their husbands practiced under the laws of the Weimar Republic, the Civil Code.¹⁷ Accordingly, historian Robert G. Moeller argues that German women, under the leadership of Führer Hitler, became subordinate to the state as well as their husbands.¹⁸

Stunde Null: the hour of opportunity

The end of Nazi rule in 1945 presented German women an opportunity for change. After years of forced submission to conservative Nazi ideology, the postwar period looked to be a time for women to regroup. In the zero hour (Stunde Null) German women were offered the opportunity to begin anew. Women were numerically in the majority,¹⁹ and the country *needed* their help to rebuild. In Germany's hour of need, its women responded. Women worked as construction workers, primary providers, scavengers, black marketeers, and agricultural workers in the period of rebuilding.

Besides a time of opportunity, the postwar period was also a time of emergency. Bombing raids had left cities destroyed and housing inadequate to meet the demand. Food and clothing were also in short supply. To temporarily manage, people lived

¹⁵ Reagan, *A German Women's Movement*, 246.

¹⁶ Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1992), 264.

¹⁷ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 47-49.

¹⁸ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 52. For a short overview of the time frame, see Moeller's chapter entitled, "Constituting Political Bodies."

¹⁹ As a result of the number of men lost through consequences of the war such as death and their slow return from prisoner of war camps in the east, German women had a large majority. There were roughly 124 women to every 100 men creating a situation where there were 4,952,000 more women than men in 1946. Statistics taken from B. R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics 1750-1970* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 20.

together and were forced to move from place to place.²⁰ This instability, insecurity, and shortage overshadowed the early years after the war until the Currency Reform in 1948 began long-term economic change.

In the panicked postwar years German women did exceptional work. The coined term *Trümmerfrauen* or “Women of the Rubble” recognized women’s efforts in both eastern and western Germany. Women were the first to clear away the debris, thereby earning for their efforts a mythical place in postwar German history.²¹ Clearing away the rubble and starting the rebuilding process more notably pushed women into stereotypically male jobs, with most women finding work in agriculture and construction.²²

The overwhelming distresses of the early postwar years clouded issues of gender both for women and German society as women’s contributions to postwar reconstruction were forced both by necessity *and* the government. Beginning early after the war, local policy required women in the Rhineland area to work for the reconstruction efforts. The Rhineland’s forced work policy then spread throughout the rest of West Germany, which required all fourteen to sixty-five year old men, and women sixteen to forty-five years old, without children, to work.²³

Even though German women were technically forced to work by policy makers, many eagerly accepted positions outside of the home. Their willingness stemmed from the desire to acquire larger food rations for themselves and their families. After the war, the occupation forces of the United States, Great Britain, and France offered provisions

²⁰ Gerhard Baumert with the assistance of Edith Hünigler, *Deutsche Familien nach dem Kriege* (Darmstadt: Eduard Roether, 1954), 248.

²¹ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 11.

²² Eva Kolinsky, *Women in West Germany: Life, Work and Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 34.

to alleviate the distress of the postwar condition with each taking responsibility for the welfare of its zone. One provision offered was ration cards, but the provisions given the West German people were inadequate. The rations were small, as food was scarce. The large scale shortages led to an average diet of 1,533 calories a day by the end of 1945. The actual amount varied by the region, but this unhealthily small number is a reasonable approximation. For various reasons rations often were cut, which only compounded dissatisfaction. The OMGUS (Office of Military Government – US) kept reports of people's reactions to many things including responses to changes in food conditions. Below is part of one of the report's results:

In the American Zone, 61 per cent of the respondents stated in March 1946 that they were not getting enough food to be able to work efficiently. There was a cut in rations which took effect in AMZON [American Zone] on 1 April 1946. After this cut, 72 percent of the population reported insufficient food.²⁴

Women suffered the most from these meager food rations. Their ration cards as Category V workers allocated to them the smallest rations, since policy makers considered women's labor in the home less demanding than those who accepted heavy labor positions. Due to the small caloric allotment, the Category V ration card became known as the "hunger card."²⁵ This forced women to find alternative sources of food, such as finding work outside of the home.

²³ Kolinsky, *Women in West Germany*, 33.

²⁴ Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merrit, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany: The OMGUS Surveys, 1945-1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 92.

²⁵ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 22.

Various local or regional economic incentive programs also lured women to take part in heavy labor to replace the shortages of available male laborers.²⁶ For example, in Nordrhein-Westfalen, miners received allotments according to a specially devised system. Workers began with a base caloric ration of 1,080. This was then bumped up to 1,850 or even 2,500 calories a day depending upon the nature of the work.²⁷ Often the food was not to be consumed by the worker or the worker's family, but it was earned to trade, as food and cigarettes were the two prized trading goods on the black market.

The black market developed immediately after the war and became the second system through which German women obtained needed food and clothing for themselves and their families. It has been approximated that fifty percent of the population used the black market,²⁸ with women relying on this illegal system to fill the role of primary provider in the absence of husbands. Women's "extra" rations from their jobs, combined with "hamstering"²⁹ efforts, allowed them to acquire needed food for trade. Trips to the countryside aboard the Hamsternzug³⁰ allowed women to barter with farmers for the necessary produce to trade. "Hamstern" in English means "to hoard,"

²⁶ After the war, the number of men that lost their lives totaled 3.76 million and 11.7 million men remained prisoners of war, who returned slowly in the decade after the war. Donna Harsch, "Public Continuity and Private Change: Women's Consciousness and Activity in Frankfurt, 1945-1955," *Journal of Social History* (Fall 1993): 36.

²⁷ Die Ernährungswirtschaft Nordrhein-Westfalens im Jahre 1947-48. Bericht des Landesernährungsamtes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, o. j., 81-82. Reprinted in Annette Kuhn, ed., *Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit: Band 2: Frauenpolitik 1945-1949: Quellen und Materialien* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986), 204-205.

²⁸ Katherine Pence, "Labours of Consumption: Gendered Consumers in Post-war East and West German Reconstruction," *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 216.

²⁹ Hamstering has been used to describe women's manner of collecting goods. It was an often dangerous scavenger mission, but necessary for participation in the black market.

³⁰ Hamsternzug literally means hoarding train. Photo: Frank Grube / Gerhard Richter: Die Schwarzmarktzeit. Deutschland zwischen 1945 und 1948. Hamburg 1979. S. 135. Reprinted in Annette Kuhn, ed., *Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit: Band 1: Frauenarbeit 1945-1949: Quellen und Materialien* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986), 154.

which they did. German women were scavengers in search of items of value to hoard and trade on the black market.

The question then becomes whether the postwar situation was an opportunity or a burden for German women. The easiest answer is that both thoughts are true. The distress of the postwar situation caused severe hardship on German women because of the extreme shortages and the intense physical labor. However, the postwar chaos leveled the “gendered playing field.” Assessing and explaining the level of opportunity then becomes the greatest challenge.

Historians: understanding their writings

Historians have accepted the challenge by studying German women and their unique contribution in the postwar years, but their resulting works have been misleading. Their descriptions of German women’s postwar public life resulting from the war use words that conjure up feminist ideas of independence and self-reliance when women of the period, as we have seen, were simply trying to make do, not achieving personal goals. This section uses passages and quotes to explain how historians have “set up” the German woman and misled readers.

Consider historian Donna Harsch who emphasizes women’s newfound assertive side and public life due to the postwar distress. She portrays women as realizing unbounded capabilities and a strong new voice when she writes:

. . . women did not just share in the murky post-war mood but decisively stamped it. On the streets they expressed pleasure at the end of war, contempt for National Socialists, and anger over dearth more vehemently

than men. Impressed by the energetic and assertive side of this post-war sensibility, some contemporaries believed that the “hour of women had arrived.”³¹

Harsch reiterates what we have already seen - the end of World War II and the subsequent occupation of Germany tossed the German status quo on its head – especially in respect to the traditional roles of German women. However, untraditional acts by traditional women does not necessarily make their actions feminist in nature. Similarly, many other historians have confused the era of reconstruction by focusing on the opportunity it offered West German women to prove themselves in the role of primary providers and not the emergency situation it was.

Eva Kolinsky refers to the role of provider when she describes German women’s new self-reliance: “After 1945 women found themselves numerically in the majority and catapulted into a degree of self-reliance which was out of line with the restricted place they had occupied in National Socialist society.”³² National Socialist society was the epitome of oppression for women, but German women were “catapulted” out of this state. With this argument she emphasizes women’s break from their past, self-reliance, and the feminist idea of power in numbers, which could confuse her audience.

Similarly, other historians like Petra Goedde and Robert G. Moeller have noted German women’s use of not only their new street smarts but also their sexual appeal to find necessities from American GI’s to meet their demands as providers. According to Goedde, because women were “Left without a male breadwinner and with scarce indigenous economic resources, they looked toward the occupation forces, especially

³¹ Donna Harsch, “Public Continuity and Private Change: Women’s Consciousness and Activity in Frankfurt, 1945-1955,” *Journal of Social History*, (Fall 1993): 30.

American GIs to fill the vacuum, offering companionship and often sex in return for American army rations.³³

The “Provider” was a role thrust upon women in the postwar period. The black market and paid labor were untraditional methods of providing, as was their use of sexual appeal. Even though relying on males, like American GIs, seems little different than their previous reliance on the traditional breadwinner, the German male, in this case the reliance shows German women’s resourcefulness.

Another historian, Katherine Pence, explains women’s new place in German society by focusing on the non-discriminatory nature of the postwar barter economy which “. . . freed women from the dependence on a gender-biased wage-based system . . .”³⁴ This non-discriminatory system gave women economic freedom they had never before experienced. A functioning German economy³⁵ would have favored men in their traditionally patriarchal society, giving them better jobs and wages and denying German women the role of provider after the war. Due to the urgency of the postwar situation, the black market did not see sex as a variable; therefore, gender did not impede in the exchange of goods. Undeniably, the black market economy was historically significant as it offered women the opportunity to side-step Germany’s normal patriarchal economic structure.³⁶

As shown, German women before the war were divided, distracted, or suppressed. In the eyes of feminists, the postwar period offered women the opportunity

³² Kolinsky, *Women in West Germany*, 12.

³³ Petra Goedde, “From Villians to Victims: Fraternalization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947,” *Diplomatic History: The Journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations* (Winter 1999): 11.

³⁴ Pence, “Labours of Consumption,” 217.

³⁵ As already explained there was a heavy reliance after the war on the black market. This stemmed from Nazi’s over-circulation of Reichsmarks (RM) to fund the war effort. Between 1935 and 1945 the number of RM in circulation rose from five to over fifty billion, which left them valueless after the war.

to prove themselves. However, this feminist thought leaves unanswered questions. Was there a transformation in ideas from their prewar traditional lifestyle? Did women achieve a feminist consciousness from their new roles? Or, were the changing roles merely considered temporary? These questions are impossible to answer without researching women's ideas and expectations, so this work turns to exploring German women's responses to their experiences imbedded in their writings during reconstruction. Through postwar women's periodicals and publications³⁷ these questions are answered by exploring women's feminist and traditional gender consciousness as they write about their postwar experiences and their hopes for the future.

Improving lives: the meaning of German women's social activities

Considering West German women's new economic self-reliance and social independence through their actions in the rebuilding effort, it is easy to read historians' writings and see new feminist convictions stemming from German women. Things, however, are not always as clear as they may initially seem to be. Thus, analysis begins with the media's portrayal of women's social expectations and the roles women often assumed.

³⁶ Pence, "Labours of Consumption," 217.

³⁷ As to be expected, there are limitations in this paper due to the availability of sources. Many publications were localized and short-lived, not to forget written in German. For the most part, the sources for this paper came from women's articles published in Annette Kuhn's two volume collection of women's writings: Annette Kuhn, ed., *Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit: Band 1: Frauenarbeit 1945-1949: Quellen und Materialien* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986) and Annette Kuhn, ed., *Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit: Band 2: Frauenpolitik 1945-1949: Quellen und Materialien* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986). The explanation is necessary to understand why the exact date of publications, authors' full names, and their affiliations are not known at times.

From the start, publications thrust conservative or traditional German ideas of family life upon German women.³⁸ Professionals like Dr. Elisabeth Mehling pushed for women to remain true to their family roots. While writing for the *Frauenwelt* she began her piece with an odd question, “Should not women strive for heroism?”³⁹ Dr. Mehling’s question seems strange because it uses the masculine word, heroism. Her answer to the question was yes, but the heroic rebuilding efforts of which she writes are noble acts inside the home. Women’s heroic actions in her eyes entailed work done for children. To her, women’s lasting effect on Germany’s future would be a result of mothers leading children with a strong hand.⁴⁰

Dr. Mehling’s beliefs are also indicated by where she sees women finding contentment. She writes, “The women want to see contentment’s face at the dinner table, her children to no longer go hungry.”⁴¹ Even while women faced terrible hunger with their meager ration cards, she urges them to remain focused on feeding the future. It is of little surprise that mothers would be looking out for the welfare of their children, but Dr. Mehling’s expert opinion as a professional reflects larger societal ideas of a return to a traditional prewar life for German women in the home. Her article could be considered exceptional, but her argument parallels other articles that stress traditional ideas to women.

Even with Germany lying in ruins, the media tried to give women “helpful hints” on how to improve the comforts of home. The author of the article “Out of the Practices of Housewives” from the women’s publication, *Frauenwelt*, gives women these helpful

³⁸ Even though articles like the following two examples urging women to remain true to their home life were written by women, they are kept distinct because they are not self reflective articles by ordinary German women like the reader will see later in this work.

³⁹ *Frauenwelt*, 1946/2 (1), 3-4 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 173.

hints so they can successfully be family providers. This article is anything but radical; however, and the goal is not to accentuate the ideas of current historians. Instead the article is folksy as the author encourages women to use the vitamin C rich water from boiled potatoes to make soup, to boil sugar beets for syrup, and to extract pumpkin and cranberry juice to flavor cakes.⁴² The information is undoubtedly useful considering the limited availability of food, but the goal of her article, evident in her concluding remarks, reflected expectations of German women to be not the providers, but the housewives. The author expects women to prepare enjoyable regular meals without the cost of fresh food that also met their requirements for good health.⁴³ Considering the shortages and difficulty of life after the war, this is presumptuous, but the reality expected of many women. Moreover, the author dampens our feminist expectations of women in the role of primary provider, showing the struggle to provide was more burdensome than liberating as historians would lead us to believe.

Not all articles in women's publications reflect such overtly traditional ideas, as will be evident in an article in *Welt der Frau*, which discusses the socially active women of Stuttgart. The article explains how in 1946 all of the city's women's groups began consolidating in order to pool resources. The magnitude of this is evident in the number of womens groups involved and the importance of many. Women's groups agreeing to the arrangement ranged from the politically affiliated, like the SPD (Social Democrats) and the CDU (Christian Democrats), to service groups like the Red Cross (Rotes Kreuz) and to women's groups like the Women's League for Peace and Freedom

⁴⁰ *Frauenwelt*, 1946/2 (1), 3-4 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 173.

⁴¹ *Frauenwelt*, 1946/2 (1), 3-4 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 173.

⁴² *Frauenwelt*, Jg. 1, Heft 1, 19 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 198.

⁴³ *Frauenwelt*, Jg. 1, Heft 1, 19 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 199.

(Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit.)⁴⁴ These groups were different in goals and affiliations, but each chose to let go of other ties to help the rebuilding effort.

These groups organized to further the efforts to alleviate the postwar distress for the people around Stuttgart. As explained earlier, lack of food was an immediate social problem. Not surprisingly then, the newly formed and socially active Stuttgart Women's Committee considered nourishment one of its "urgent" tasks.⁴⁵ An example of the Stuttgart Women's Committee's activity was their plan to provide lunches for 10,000 school children in the city of Stuttgart and its outlying area. This necessitated the staffing of fourteen kitchens to supply food to eighty-four schools.⁴⁶ It was a large organizational endeavor but work considered of the utmost importance.

From a modern perspective the willingness of such traditionally platform-disagreeing groups to cooperate *and* consolidate raises questions. The key question is to what degree was this cooperation to simply meet needs? Or more precisely, to what degree does their activity reflect traditional ideas?

The merger of Stuttgart women's groups into the Stuttgart Women's Committee required setting aside individual and group political interests. From its earliest plans in October of 1946 the groups willingly chose to merge personal and partisan interests. Evidence of this is found in an article published in August of 1946 titled, "The Stuttgart Women's Committee Begins to Work."⁴⁷

After much negotiation, it is now to come the foundation of a *non-partisan* and interdenominational women's committee, that brings all of Stuttgart's

⁴⁴ *Welt der Frau*, Nr. 2, August 1946 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 213.

⁴⁵ *Welt der Frau*, Nr. 2, August 1946 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 213.

⁴⁶ *Welt der Frau*, Dezember 1946, Nr. 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 216.

⁴⁷ Stuttgarter Frauenausschuß

women's groups together, in order to link all women's efforts on the social, economic, and cultural questions.⁴⁸

Logically, it was expected that greater work could be accomplished if political quibbles were avoided. The women were cautious, anticipating their own interests and plans could interfere. They agreed to put personal and political interests on hold to merge in the interest of the greater good. Reflecting on giving up their interests for the merged Stuttgart women's group, the women apologetically stated in an article two months later, "That it is too bad that on occasion personal and party interests have to be merged."⁴⁹ The easy manner in which women gave up other interests and connections leads one to question the strength of the ties between these women and their organizations, especially the political organizations like the CDU and the SPD as political groups historically have kept women at arms length.

The idea of non-partisanship not only clouds German women's connections to larger organizations, but begs this question: were women's social activities after the war to be the foundation for an expanded role for women outside of the home? A few things are evident. Yes, these women were acting as providers. Yes, these women were active outside of their own homes and concerned with more than their families' welfare. Yes, women formed independent organizations strictly for women. But, does this mean their actions were feminist and indicative of a desire to make the first step toward an expanded role for women in postwar West German society?

Women's involvement with securing necessities by their actions and how they spent their time shows that women's issues were not or could not be a priority in the

⁴⁸ *Welt der Frau*, Nr. 2, August 1946 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 213. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹ *Welt der Frau*, Oktober 1946, Nr. 4 reprinted in Kuhn Band 2, 215.

postwar period. In fact, the securing of necessities took up much of women's time, and active involvement with political and other organizations would have seemed out of place.⁵⁰ First and foremost, the securing of necessities had to be done, but that does not wholly explain women's choice to be non-partisan.⁵¹ Women's willingness to be non-partisan stands as an example of how German women's social work was traditional or without a larger agenda. These women were interested in meeting basic needs and were not interested in making a gendered statement through their work.

As portrayed, the media reflected strong traditional ideas and a desire for German women to rebuild a normal home life. The Stuttgart women had internalized this message. Their activity with social organizations in the larger picture shows their desire to care for others and return order to their lives. This group also expressed no expanded objectives outside of their social activities. Their efforts would have been forgotten after the society was rebuilt, as they showed no interest in making an example out of their work.

Women's postwar activities are hard to understand because the rebuilding process largely dictated their actions. For this reason women's gendered economic debates are examined to expand the discussion and understand women's expectations for equality and an economic role in Germany's future.

Women's role in Germany's economic future

Even though historians have argued that German women had been able to forego traditional economic structures through the black market immediately after the

⁵⁰ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 12.

⁵¹ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 45.

war, women's expected role in Germany's future was not without debate. Since many considered women's work temporary, a gendered economic debate was brought to the forefront in 1947. Arguments arose among women as to whether wives with employed husbands should also be allowed to work or continue working. A two-sided argument split seemingly traditional and feminist German women on the topic of the *Doppelverdiener*, or literally, the double earner.⁵² The arguments of the following two women give insight into the varying economic expectations of German women as their economic role in West Germany's future unfolded.

Frauenwelt published the feminist perspective on the question of access to employment. As a publication of the Berliner Hausfrauenverein, it had long represented the interest of German housewives. It is not commonly believed that housewives are the movers and shakers of feminist ideas; therefore, the stance the publication took on the issue of the dual wage earning family is somewhat surprising. But, the article "Doppelverdiener, A Keyword that again is Reality" from the December 13, 1947 of *Frauenwelt* presents an impassioned, yet economically astute reasoning for the acceptance of dual wage earning families.

Susanne S.'s leverage to make her feminist argument that women should be allowed to work stemmed from Germany's desperate, war-torn economy. She grounds her argument in the undeniable need for more workers. After presenting this fact she is able to further her argument by calling the dismissal of the *Doppelverdiener* an attack against women, and more so a direct attack against wives who work outside of the home. She writes:

⁵² Today this is called a dual wage earning family.

. . . married women should be dismissed from their jobs. That is namely at the heart of the argument: the battle is not against the real double earners, the employed worker who has more sources of income, but against the married woman who is employed. And therefore one always thinks along the lines of the traditional perception, that men's incomes are family incomes, but the income of the women is a private income.⁵³

Susanne's argument addressed a highly debated issue – how to help German families economically reestablish themselves. The central question was who was responsible for the family, and how could a sense of normalcy be returned to Germany and the home. In *Protecting Motherhood*, Robert G. Moeller details the believed necessity of laws that would ensure the male head of the household a wage large enough to care for a family. A Robin Hood method of redistributing wealth was proposed. Families with children would be encouraged with monetary benefits to bear more children with the funding for the program drawn from those with projected larger incomes that chose not to bear children. This was viewed as a way to balance incomes, so families raising the “future of Germany” would not be unfairly burdened by the expense of their children. At the heart of the debate was how to repopulate Germany in a manner that did not further hurt the German males' already wounded psyche.⁵⁴ What Susanne is pointing out is that the husband or family incomes are not public – they are for private families. Susanne's reasoning makes it seem ironic that a wife's earnings would be considered a private income, when in fact, the postwar work of

⁵³ *Frauenwelt*. 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

⁵⁴ Historians, while describing the self-reliance and independence of women in the postwar period, also note how the German male returned home a ruined person in need of care. Since the contrast makes for an interesting story,

German women was a public good. Susanne explains that women were doing highly necessary work to fill the shortage of able-bodied workers as “women made up two-thirds of the population.”⁵⁵ Logically then, there should be no argument over German women’s employment.

While Susanne justified her economic argument for women and wives to have access to employment opportunities, she also uses fears from the past to make a second argument for women’s employment:

Freely so far, the authorities have dismissed women based on individual cases in order to make spaces for men. The demand for legal regulations like that of the work crisis between 1920-1933 has again been raised, however, we are still far away from that level of regulation. It seems to us necessary in sight of such potential developments to demand the opposite, namely that such potential developments be undermined from the start.⁵⁶

Susanne warns her female readership of a return to the past and discriminatory regulations if they are not aware and proactive. As she notes, Germany in the past had legally denied women access to employment. Susanne reminds her audience of this because even though women were employed for the rebuilding process, she knew their work was largely considered temporary. She felt it critical to stop proposed discriminatory legislation from the start, before it became accepted and law.

historians generally make the connection. One such historians is Robert G. Moeller in *Protecting Motherhood*, chapter one “Emerging from the Rubble.”

⁵⁵ *Frauenwelt*, 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

⁵⁶ *Frauenwelt*, 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

Susanne's concluding argument also tugs at fears found in public debates over how Germany was going to repopulate. She reminds the reader of the period after World War I when women refrained from marrying to keep their positions in the work force:

It got to a point after the First World War that many people gave up legitimizing their marriages with the Registrar's Office in order to protect their income levels. Such tendencies should not be repeated.⁵⁷

Susanne capitalizes on two more German fears and uses them to her advantage. First, she knows the importance of marriage to the panicking German populace.⁵⁸ Security for the future lay in children; therefore, an increase in the birth rate was essential. In the heavily Christian and traditional Germany, this necessitated marriage. Her argument then, is if you don't allow women to work, the future of Germany is in jeopardy.

Second, she continually reminds her German audience of their earlier difficulties from the wars. The difficulties of the period from 1920-1933 eventually led them to follow Hitler. She quietly pushes this fear to hit at the Germans' desire to rid themselves of their Nazi past. The desire for international respect was a driving force for Germans to move beyond their tainted history.⁵⁹ By referring to the past and fears from the past, Susanne sets up a strong argument for guaranteeing women's access to employment.

Susanne's argument is undeniably sound. Her argument, however, fails to address the issue of equality within employment. This is most apparent in her

⁵⁷ *Frauenwelt*. 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

⁵⁸ Moeller's chapter "Reconstructed Families in Reconstruction Germany" details the German's concern for repopulating. Social policies trying to secure social security along with the rebuilding economy created an urgency for the implementation of incentives to entice Germans to have children. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 137.

⁵⁹ For an expanded discussion on the rebuilding of the German population's psyche, see Chapter 6 "From Feckless Masses to Engaged Critics: German Film Clubs and the Quest for Cultural Renewal" in Heide Fehrenbach's,

concluding plea for economic opportunity. Susanne falls short of making a feminist statement by minimizing the capabilities of German women. Susanne compromises her original argument when she writes, “. . . for the difficult rubble work men are more qualified, for the neighborhood or rubble related office work women could maybe be trained.”⁶⁰ If feminist women like Susanne put limits on women’s capabilities and sphere of influence, how can one anticipate an expanded feminist consciousness? Susanne is consistent with the other women writers met so far. When looking more closely at the image portrayed by historians and comparing it to women’s “feminist” demands, there is doubt as to the truth of their descriptions.

Compared to Susanne’s essay in *Frauenwelt*, Franziska B.’s essay in *Die Frau von heute* was written for a more conservative German audience as it reflects traditional ideas of women and their employment. Franziska B.’s essay titled “Dismissal of the ‘Doppelverdienerinnen’ is Not Unjust,” builds her argument on Germany’s fractured economy and Germany’s past, just as Susanne’s article above. In the end, Franziska’s reflections on her life solidify her conviction that women should *not* be in the labor force.

Franziska understands the current economical conditions necessitating German women’s postwar employment. She openly considers the Frauenüberschuß,⁶¹ when she writes:

One again reads so often of the term “Doppelverdiener” and it is expressed in women’s circles, . . . that each wife⁶² has an unquestionable

Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ *Frauenwelt*, 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

⁶¹ The term Frauenüberschuß or “surplus of women” refers to the numerical discrepancy between the number of women and men in postwar Germany already explained in note 19.

⁶² The German word used is Frau.

right to work. I am far removed to dispute this idea; I find this attitude appropriate in that enough jobs are available.⁶³

The Frauenüberschuß, or more exactly the "Männermangel,"⁶⁴ created the need for women to work after the war. The author has no problem with women working to fill gaps in employment; it is when she sees women taking work from the "deserving" men that she is concerned.

Franziska was not alone in her belief that German men were more entitled to jobs than German women. In increasingly large numbers, men were seeking paid labor, as 2,586,000 German men returned to West Germany between 1946 and 1950.⁶⁵ German employers were inclined to give jobs to these men returning from prisoner of war camps in the East. Evidence that women's work was considered important but not permanent is also found in a pamphlet circulated by the Office for Employment in Westfalen-Lippe in June of 1946:

The employment of women in the construction industry has now been authorized by the military government in the face of the massive task of clearing debris and reconstruction which has to be undertaken and because male workers cannot be found in sufficient numbers. Even if the employment of women cannot be avoided in the present adverse circumstances, it remains true that the employment of women in construction is new to Germany and is in principle undesirable because the work demands a high degree of physical strength and holds the danger of psychological coarseness; it can only be justified because of the

⁶³ *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band I, 329.

⁶⁴ Männermangel is the term coined to describe the scarcity of men due to war consequences.

current labour shortage and because it can be expected to speed up reconstruction and help improve general living conditions. Using women in the construction industry can only remain a temporary measure.⁶⁶

This pamphlet written in 1946 complements Franziska's article published 1947. The pamphlet reflects the urgency of clearing the rubble, but the message is clear; the larger German population sees no reason to hide the belief that the use of female laborers is strictly temporary because women are not physically or mentally capable.

Franziska sides with the larger society, and the reason why stems in part from her life experiences. She reflects on the struggles of the pre-Hitler unemployment and harsh economic conditions when she asks, "How will it be if we again face total unemployment?"⁶⁷ The Germans' experiences since the end of World War II make this a valid question, based on a valid fear. As a disrupted economy disrupts family life, Franziska makes her argument by describing her own family's struggles during the pre-war job crisis. She remembers when her father went without work when she writes, ". . . the feelings of bitterness were especially strong when we saw families, in which father, mother and daughter still had positions . . ." ⁶⁸ Understandably, this was upsetting – seeing what others had while she went without as her family lived through a desperate situation. To her, women working while men were left without jobs went against the German idea of family. Her family was disrupted by her father's lack of work and it was working women's fault.

⁶⁵ Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics*, 156.

⁶⁶ Kolinsky, *Women in West Germany*, 34.

⁶⁷ *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

⁶⁸ *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

Franziska's writing makes the reader's heart heavy, knowing of her hardship. Her struggles did not end as she was forced on welfare in 1931, because even with her education there was no opportunity for employment.⁶⁹ However, the hardship was twenty years in her past. This time lapse makes her closing argument interesting as she writes that, ". . . the workplaces must be justly divided."⁷⁰ It is her definition of "justly divided" that reflects even more traditional ideas:

If both a wife and a husband have a job that pays, she must quietly give up her position in favor of an unemployed father with a family.⁷¹ That is in no way an unfair treatment of the wife. Higher than our personal welfare in this case is the welfare of children that are especially affected by unemployment in the family.⁷²

Her first sentence indicates her belief that women can work, but there are gender stipulations. If needed, she believes a woman is to *quietly* hand over her position, as though to protect the dignity of a man. She claims it is necessary for the children, reflecting her concern for the family. The quote also shows her belief that women's claim to jobs in the first place were not guaranteed; they were merely filling in where necessary.

Expectations for economic opportunity and equality, as portrayed by this debate over the *Doppelverdiener*, are an excellent example of how German women appeared to hold very different ideas about women's future in Germany, yet they had ideas grounded in similar traditional roots. Reflecting on historians' description of women,

⁶⁹ *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

⁷⁰ *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

⁷¹ The German term she uses is "Familienvaters," which literally translates to a patriarchal father as the head of the family.

Susanne and Franziska portray strong and capable women. Both had survived the war. Both saw the importance and need for women's work. But, both in their own way held traditional ideas. They represent the German women virtually glorified by historians, but show how women's expectations had not changed to match the transformations of the postwar period.

Opportunity for a political presence

As shown earlier, women of the Stuttgart Women's Committee chose to limit partisan politics in the interest of expanded social work. Similarly, this section shows the expanded political activity of German women. German women's responses to and expectations of the transitional postwar period affected their political view of the present and their vision for the future. In this section German women openly discuss their ideas as they speak about their political and gendered agenda, and because women speak openly, their silence on some issues is also telling.

After the war, as already noted, German women extended their sphere beyond the home by partaking in the black market and working in stereotypically male jobs. By 1947 women's unusual postwar activities also provided them with a strong political presence. This conclusion is seen in a two-day conference organized by women from Berlin. Members of women's groups throughout Germany congregated in Berlin on the 3rd and 4th of December, and reports from the event were written in the December 1947 issue of *Frau von heute*. One essay titled "Im Namen von Millionen" or "In the Name of Millions" was a product of the conference. In it the women articulated their concerns for

⁷² *Die Frau von heute*. 15/1947 (2). S. 18 reprinted in Kuhn, Band I, 329.

Berlin and Germany's future to the British Foreign Office. The article opened forcefully with the statement:

In the name of millions of German women and mothers, [we] send a request to the Foreign Office in London to demand a just peace in consultation with women from all German zones.⁷³

The article's beginning presents two gender conscious ideas. First, the women presented their argument on behalf of a larger body of women. In fact, they claimed to represent the entire body of German women in all occupied zones. Even as the article concludes, Berlin women are still using the same gender rhetoric referring to unity when stating their final plea, ". . . we raise our voices in this crucial hour and ask the Foreign Office to give an ear to the delegation of German women."⁷⁴ Feminist writings refer to a unified women's voice because it is believed to signify demands or requests on behalf of a large body of the population – one large enough that it should not be ignored.

The second gender conscious idea is that the women were addressing a political institution, in this case the Foreign Office in London. Women used their numbers to extend their sphere into debates surrounding international politics. At the heart of the article was the issue of occupation forces, which had been active in Berlin for two and one half years, preventing them from "feeling free from the collective German guilt and the horrible crimes of the Hitler regime and the frightful success of Hitler's war."⁷⁵ The women felt it was time for Germany to be given another chance. The issue at hand appeared to be democracy, and German women were fighting for it. "We German

⁷³ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 180.

⁷⁴ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

⁷⁵ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 180.

women will direct all our power towards true democracy in a united Germany, in which neither warlike aggression nor fascist tendencies will be tolerated."⁷⁶

This article reflects Donna Harsch's description of German women. They had stamped their feminist and politically conscious stamp on postwar Germany. A closer look at Berlin and other remarks in the articles, however, raises more questions, such as what provoked women to exercise their newfound voice? Is the location, Berlin, significant?

The first provocation is similar to what incited the Stuttgart Women's Committee to act – children. The women of the Berlin conference continually referred to themselves first and foremost as mothers. "We mothers feel it our responsibility and have the burning wish for our youth, our children, to be guided in a democratic sense."⁷⁷ Not surprisingly the women addressed themselves as mothers, but it is interesting that they addressed themselves *only* as mothers. Through this word choice one gains insight into these women's gendered perceptions. It can be read that their vision for their children's future provoked the production of the article. The article can also be read as a statement that German women saw themselves as mothers first and women second. This is more evidence that traditional concerns and not the development of an international voice and political acceptance for the new Germany provoked German women to express themselves in ways not previously done.

The second provocation leading to the article was discontent with the occupation forces. Although objections to the occupation forces were not unique to Berlin, Berliners in regard to Britain had been critical and resentful of the occupation forces.

⁷⁶ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 180-182.

⁷⁷ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 6 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

For example, in OMGUS report No. 52 from March of 1947, 68% of West Berliners disapproved of the occupation forces' attempt to equalize the rationing of food between those that lived in cities and those that lived in smaller towns.⁷⁸ In another complaint, 62% of West Berliners felt the occupation forces' method of allotting building materials was unjust.⁷⁹ Considering the continual dissatisfaction with British actions, it is no surprise that West Berliners carried harsh feelings for the control these intruders had on their lives.

Considering both German women's feminist rhetoric and the conditions that provoked their actions, the question remains, which argument is accurate? Were German women taking a feminist stand with their plea for an open ear? Or do their actions solely reflect a reactionary response to living conditions? These are involved questions with answers that are neither a resounding yes nor no. Therefore, other articles from *Frau von heute* shed light on these questions.

Other outcomes of the conference were printed in the same December 24th 1947 issue of *Frau von heute*. In the collectively composed article, "Give Us a Just Freedom: Wishes from the West," a host of women from around Germany wrote about their dreams for Germany's future. Some of the women expressed hope for better East / West German relations and greater international respect for personal freedom. Others, however, made gendered demands. Their wishes are compelling, and by examining them, the gendered ideas of this pocket of German women will be better understood.

Hoppstock-Huth and Magda Langhans of Hamburg were two of the women writers focused on improving relations with the East. Hoppstock-Huth, a member and

⁷⁸ Merritt and Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany*, 150.

⁷⁹ Merritt and Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany*, 151.

international executive leader of the German section of the Women's League for Peace and Freedom (Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit), wrote, "To the East Zone we extend a hand. We will fight so that we reach our goal to create peace in Germany and the world."⁸⁰ Similarly, Langhans focused on East / West work relations, hoping that there could be a body of representative to exchange. This would meet her goal for "personal understanding and more intimate contact between East and West Germans."⁸¹ As important as these wishes were in the growing polarization of eastern and western Germany,⁸² they do not incorporate a gendered element. To these two women, at least, developing relations with the East was a more pressing concern than working specifically for issues relating to women's rights and equality.

Hoppstock-Huth's writing also expresses her concern for international respectability and a forgiving world opinion of Germany's war actions. "We want to gain the trust of other countries and finally remove world peace's enemy Nr. 1, the Prussian-militaristic spirit."⁸³ The occupation forces continually discussed their concerns for the denazification of the German population.⁸⁴ Hoppstock-Huth is obviously aware of this concern, because as she continues she tries to squelch doubts that Germans have not changed. "More important than the outer is the internal disarmament. We lead a fight within our heads with reason, not just with feelings and heart . . ."⁸⁵ Since these women

⁸⁰ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

⁸¹ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

⁸² For an expanded discussion, see Katherine Pence, "Labours of Consumption: Gendered Consumers in Post-war East and West German Reconstruction," *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁸³ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

⁸⁴ Postwar efforts to denazify the German people can be obtained from chapter two of Heide Fehrenbach's book, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.)

⁸⁵ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

were expectantly addressing a larger audience, it was important that they also address concerns regarding denazification to validate their demands and their work. She is well aware that before steps toward democratization could take place, trust was necessary. Her concern for denazification shows the German women of this Berlin conference were aware of larger concerns outside of their readership. This makes them appear to have higher aspirations than to locally organize to improve community conditions as the Stuttgart Women's Committee. These women were expanding their traditionally limited and local sphere of influence. This was an untraditional act even if their ideas were grounded in traditionally female concerns.

The women's desire for international respect does not directly correlate to the demand for greater equality or bring attention to German women's concerns. This suggests that to some women, and to Hoppstock-Huth in particular, women's issues were secondary to their work for other efforts. Considering the political awareness of this group, the timing of the conference needs to be addressed. Similar to the Stuttgart Women's Committee, demands for equality may have seemed superlative when compared to more practical or urgent efforts like meeting basic postwar needs or even freeing Germany from the occupation forces.

Even though Hoppstock-Huth's and Langhans' "wishes" were not directed towards women's rights, as might be expected from a women's conference, other women attending the conference hinted at a gender consciousness. This reflects an expanded gender consciousness as women from throughout the whole of West Germany brought their gendered agendas to Berlin. According to Herta Dürbeck, a Hamburg member of the Women's League for Peace and Freedom, "We have the

responsibility, *as women*, to bring future worth to Germany."⁸⁶ Maria Mertes, also from Hamburg, saw the means to accomplish this through the media. She wrote, "We need urgently our own newspaper, so that we [women] can do better work."⁸⁷ More specifically, Erika Buchmann of the Stuttgart Women's Committee saw power in numbers and urged building up women's support base. "Most important in the West is that we include the many thousands of willing forces to rebuild in a large unitary organization. We can no longer allow in the West Zone 50 women's organizations that must share only a thousand members amongst themselves."⁸⁸ These ideas are indeed gendered, but not specifically feminist in the modern interpretation. By modern standards these ideas are reserved, but they are somewhat striking for their time. Even though these women are not by our definition feminist, they do reflect historians' writings of German women's independence and self-reliance.

Of all the women writers published at the conference, only one used an aggressive feminist argument in the modern interpretation. Frau Otto of the Düsseldorf *Frauenausschuß* wrote aggressively against the chauvinism of men in the December 24th article:

Since we will not be successful in the near future to call a unified League for all of Germany, we will attempt to mobilize our strength to bravely oppose chauvinism - to choke it in its origin. We want to give the word Politics a new, rebuilding, creative meaning.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 183.

⁸⁸ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 182.

⁸⁹ *Frau von heute* 47/24, Dez. (2), 7 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 183.

Of the body of my research, this is the earliest explicit writing in which a German woman had taken issue with the “chauvinism” of German men. Frau Otto is the only woman from the conference to submit by modern interpretation unquestionably feminist ideas to be published in the *Frau von heute*. It is essential to remember that she is only one of many women involved in the conference. However, the wide range of expressions is intriguing and shows evidence of a multi-level gender consciousness. But, Frau Otto seems out of place because her feminist words allude to more radically feminist, gendered ideas.

Conferences like the one in Berlin opened doors of opportunity for German women to demand equality, even though evidence suggests great uncertainty as to whether that is what West German women wanted. According to the definition of self-reliance presented to us by historians like Eva Kolinsky and Petra Goedde, German women should have been excited by conferences like the one in Berlin that gave women the opportunity to meet and present their ideas to each other. However, these were opportunistic doors that German women chose not to open. The question is why?

The feminist push

Beginning in 1948, two interesting developments occurred in the publications of German women. First, as the Basic Law was being written⁹⁰ German women began including in their periodicals arguments for guaranteed equal rights. Second, as some women began making more distinctly feminist demands for equality, there was a contrasting pull towards more traditional ideals. This occurred among the larger

⁹⁰ The Basic Law or Grundgesetz was Germany’s postwar constitution. The discussion over its writing began at the end of 1948 and it sparked debate over women’s constitutional equality.

population of German women, especially at the turn of the decade and extending into the 1950s. The goal of this section is to understand both the intensifying feminist arguments and the traditional phenomena to understand what the contrast says about equality and the expectations of postwar German women.

Gleichberechtigung (equal rights) was specifically mentioned in German women's writings in 1948 in varying degrees and with varying emphasis. As well, the context in which the demand for equality appeared varied from sentimental reflections on the past to reactionary responses to perceived injustices. To explain this, a few examples are considered.

An article in *Die Stimme der Frau* titled "The Work of the Frauenrings of the British Zone" initially appears similar to articles already mentioned. Like the organizational goal of the non-partisan Stuttgart Women's Committee, the article in *Die Stimme der Frau* encouraged German women to follow the call to go "above party borders." Only in this case the goal was not to organize to feed hungry school children without the intrusion of diverse political interests, but to learn how to make sound political judgments and decision. The author wanted women in the British and American zones to unite to fend off those "with an incessant hold, pressing us in the everyday suffering, like refugees and those needing housing, placing before us management of the household economy and nourishment."⁹¹ The author perceived women as being fed distractions, keeping them from important postwar discussions, especially those relating to law and politics. In her opinion society gave women the ever-present job of attending to the needs of a household, leaving them unable to expand personal interests.

Contrary to the German women encouraging other women to work to meet the immediate needs for housing and food, this author thinks women should have long term goals and begin working for the establishment of a place for German women in a democratic Germany. Her ideal would be a Germany where women were given expanded opportunities so they could “grow up learning about debates and discussions to build their own political judgments as a precondition for independent work within political parties.”⁹² The author believes that German women could have political influence as early as the next generation if they work themselves into political parties.

Other German women were too impatient to wait for political influence and used protest to express political power. Stuttgart, as already noted, was home to active women’s groups beginning early after the war, and they were still active in 1948. The Stuttgart women writing in *Die Welt der Frau* in 1948 were still concerned with the distribution of caloric allotments similar to those concerned with feeding school children in 1946. What makes these German women different from those two years earlier is their demand for equality in food allotments. These women refused to accept women’s smaller rations because their work was viewed as not as taxing or important. According to the article “Are Housewives ‘Normal Workers’?” newspapers had been printing articles discussing the expected shift in the distribution of caloric allotments. When plans fell through, the women of the article realized their pleas had fallen on the “deaf ears” of male politicians, and to their dismay, women “just shook their heads in resignation.”⁹³ Those writing on behalf of the angered, however, did not settle for the

⁹¹ *Die Stimme der Frau*, Heft 1, 1948, 25 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 226.

⁹² *Die Stimme der Frau*, Heft 1, 1948, 25 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 226.

⁹³ *Die Welt der Frau*, 5/1948 (2). S. 2 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 171.

inequality as the women of the Stuttgarter Frauenverbände protested before the Nourishment and Agricultural Board.

Also noteworthy is the author's concerns over equal rights and their realization. The author wrote, ". . . that equal rights in practice seems to stand on very weak legs."⁹⁴ The article reflects the growing understanding of equal rights as an independent concern of women. It also shows their understanding that to have access to greater equality women need a firm legal ground to stand upon, which they did not feel they had.

Similarly, other women's publications made political demands by claiming that German women were already guaranteed constitutional equality. For example, women protested the dismissal of married female doctors, questioning not only its impracticality, as there was a great need for doctors,⁹⁵ but declaring it *unconstitutional*.⁹⁶ Claiming already guaranteed equality versus demanding equality is an interesting twist. By arguing that equality was already theirs, these German women cleverly gave themselves the upper hand. Asking for equality shows dependence on an outside influence, but stating that equality was already theirs empowered them.

The same anger over the dismissal of women doctors sparked a similar reactionary response and constitutional argument on behalf of fired teachers. The Cultural Minister declared that only married teachers who were not the heads of families would be dismissed. An article in the November 11, 1948 issue of *Frauenwelt* urged women to write about their reactions to the dismissal of married female teachers. The women's association encouraged women by forcefully arguing two points. First, they

⁹⁴ *Die Welt der Frau*. 5/1948 (2). S. 2 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 171.

⁹⁵ *Frauenwelt*. 12/13/1947 (2). S. 8 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 328.

expressed concern that this would cause larger class sizes with so many teachers forced out of their positions. Second, and more importantly, they declared it was an issue of rights, which is seen in the following statement: “The women’s groups interpret this as a principle disregard for the equal rights of women and also interpret it as unjust harshness.”⁹⁷ This again shows women’s concern for the disregard of their guaranteed rights. The author felt as Susanne did, that women deserved access to equal employment opportunities.

The pieces above were written in 1948 and more overtly demanded equal rights than previous articles examined. After 1948, pieces similar to the one above demanding women’s equality continued appearing into the early 1950s.⁹⁸ The gradual change was sparked in part by the currency reform in 1948. The currency reform restored economic stability and made possible the return to economic norms in respect to gender. This change is explored first in the following “feminist” articles from 1949 onward.

In 1949 an article directed to the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer arose from *Die Stimme der Frau*, which was powerfully titled “Input to the Chancellor.” Members of the Deutsche Frauenring wrote of their *expectation* that “. . . the Ministry hire professionally and personally qualified and also experienced *women*. . .”⁹⁹ These women wanted women’s voices for women’s issues. They felt this would be accomplished if women were given government positions.

⁹⁶ *Die Welt der Frau*, 6/1948 (2). S. 27 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

⁹⁷ *Frauenwelt*. 11/12/1948 (3). S. 32 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 1, 329.

⁹⁸ This is not to insinuate women’s publications stopped writing about demands for equality, but due to time limitations of this project, research ended with the early 1950s.

⁹⁹ *Die Stimme der Frau*, Heft 6, 1949, 39 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 229.

While women of the Deutsche Frauenring fought for equality by petitioning government officials, others pushed women's equality with constitutional arguments. In a roundabout manner, women's equality had been guaranteed under the Civil Code of the Weimar Republic, but it was continuously and conveniently overlooked.¹⁰⁰ When the Deutsche Frauenring learned of a disregard for their rights they immediately telegraphed the Bundesrat in protest. A proposed clause to the Civil Servants' law (Beamtengesetz) in 1950 would have required women to be thirty-five to be considered for a Civil Servant (Beamte) position, whereas a man only had to be twenty-seven.¹⁰¹ The Deutsche Frauenring was quick to point out how this was a "breach" of the Basic Law – especially Article 3.¹⁰² Undoubtedly the clause was unconstitutional in their minds and the women of the Deutsche Frauenring were unwilling to tolerate the blatant disregard of their guaranteed constitutional rights.

These pockets of women were astute, putting time and effort into securing their rights. When they felt their rights were being infringed upon, they petitioned and protested to make things right. The feminist ideas of women were initially shown to be cloudy and inconsistent. Outside forces and the postwar distress impacted women and their ideas and actions. As the tenseness of the immediate postwar period was relieved, however, it is easier to see the distinctly feminist women like those of the Deutsche Frauenring. Had "the hour of women" arrived?

¹⁰⁰ Suffrage was granted to German women in 1918, but the right to vote did not guarantee equality. German women's economic potential was especially hindered by practices that were seemingly against the equality granted women in the Civil Code, but there was in fact no legal ground upon which women could make a stand. Therefore, the wording was key for those involved with the drafting of the Grundgesetz – to make sure women were given access to equality in all spheres, not just the ballot box. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 48-51.

¹⁰¹ *Die Stimme der Frau*, Heft 8, 1950, 39 reprinted in Kuhn, Band 2, 230.

¹⁰² Article 3 of the Grundgesetz guarantees three things: 1) All persons shall be equal before the law; 2) Men and women shall have equal rights; and 3) No one may be prejudiced or favoured because of his sex, his parentage, his

One believer was Elisabeth Selbert. When the formal writing of West Germany's new constitution (Grundgesetz) began in 1948, Elisabeth Selbert was one of sixty-five delegates sent to Bonn. As a lawyer, she was sent in order to help re-establish courts and a system for judicial review, but she ended up contributing much more for German women. She assumed in 1948, like current historians lead one to believe, that German women would force the constitution writers to address concerns regarding their rights and include equality in the constitution. Selbert also expected the drafting of the Basic Law to be a way of confronting the past and past treatment of women. This proved not to be the case and no one was more surprised than Selbert. When other Bonn delegates did not take the lead, she became the champion of women's rights and their inclusion in the Basic Law.¹⁰³

Unfortunately, feminist women like Selbert were in the minority. The majority of German women threw their political support to the conservative party, the CDU/CSU. The CDU/CSU's platform was grounded in traditional ideas, which stated, "Equality should not erase those nuances created by nature, which require a different treatment."¹⁰⁴ The CDU/CSU saw men and women as inherently different stemming from biological differences. Imbedded in the CDU/CSU's platform were the grounds for inequality, the idea that men and women were different; and therefore, could be treated differently. Women's strong support for this position is evident in their support for the

race, his language, his homeland and origin, his faith, or his religious or political opinions. *The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany*, (Wiesbaden: Wiesbaden Graphische Betriebe GmbH, 1974), 6.

¹⁰³ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 52.

CDU/CSU, which brought into power the conservative Konrad Adenauer as chancellor.¹⁰⁵

Selbert reflected on her shock of the lack of concern for German women's rights and German women's responses to their wartime experiences in a published interview from 1980. She said:

I took for granted that after two world wars and the experiences that we women had in those decades, equal rights for women would make it through the political process without struggle and with no further ado.¹⁰⁶

Considering the postwar period as a whole and German women's rebuilding efforts as the Trümmerfrauen, it would seem logical for Selbert to think that German women had realized their potential, would point out their contributions, and make their demands for economic, political, and social equality. Selbert was neither aware of nor anticipated West German women's strong traditional ideas. The postwar years hid many traditional ideas because traditional women were doing untraditional work.

Conclusion

The opportunity for German women to impact the rebuilding process during the postwar period is unprecedented. Because of German women's contributions, which were provoked by need, there is an opportunity to see in West Germany the continuation of a feminist movement started by bourgeois German women at the turn of the century. Modern expectations and modern bias are lenses preventing us from

¹⁰⁵ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 100. This is merely included as a hint of the traditionalism of the 1950s. An expanded discussion, however, goes beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁰⁶ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 40.

seeing the presence of traditional ideas clearly. To understand the truth, traditional ideas need to be understood as well as the feminists' arguments.

The writings of recent historians compound the difficulty to understand both the feminists' and traditionalist' ideas. They stress German women's independence, self-reliance, and opportunity to be family providers. In the process historians fail to separate the reality of the postwar period from the unprecedented opportunity it could have been. This thesis addresses both issues. First, it reminds the reader of the emergency nature of the initial postwar period. It was not a revolutionary era, but rather a time of rebuilding. To understand German women and their feminist and traditional ideas requires understanding the harshness in their lives instead of solely seeing in the period a springboard for a feminist movement. The fractured pre-World War II feminist movement makes a postwar feminist movement even more presumptuous. This work also shows that it was feminist women in the minority, like Elisabeth Selbert, that forced the discussion of equal rights into mainstream society. It was only after the discussion of equal rights expanded in 1948 with the discussion of the Basic Law that women's publications began printing articles debating women's guarantee of equal rights. The slow and uncertain manner in which equality comes to the fore shows that on the whole German women were not passionate feminists. Moreover, even some of the feminist German women held traditional ideas.

Second, this work demands the reader to be conscious of preconceived gendered ideas. There is a fifty year time span separating then and now. Gender dialogue, expectations, and gendered norms have changed since the 1940s and 1950s. All researchers, historians included, need to be aware of the possible sources of

confusion. This work links the two time spans by describing the gendered ideas of the postwar period through women's publications. Ultimately, this work acts as a translator to ensure confusion does not distort comprehension of postwar West German women.

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