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Fashioning Women Under Totalitarian Regimes: “New Women” of Nazi Germany and
Soviet Russia

by

Victoria Vygodskaia-Rust

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Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
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Introduction

In the 1920s and 1930s, women in Russia and Germany faced a formidable task: to aid in the creation of vital, prosperous, and mighty nations. As Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler emphasized, the revolutionary changes – the violent demise of autocracy in Russia and the overthrow of the Weimar Republic in Germany – aimed at the construction of harmonious communities in which women were promised to play an instrumental role. Furthermore, the so-called Woman Question, the National Socialists and the Bolsheviks claimed, was solved under their leadership: in Germany, women were restored to “nature-intended” roles, while in Russia, women allegedly received previously inaccessible rights and freedoms. The grandiose transformation of the state and the individual envisioned by the Bolsheviks and the Nazis, e.g., the creation of “new men and women,” included the elimination of undesirable classes (Russia) or nationalities (Germany) and inculcation of the rest of the population with particular characteristics, values, and morals. In order to become members of the newly founded Peasant and Worker’s State and the National Community respectively, women were expected to develop a particular mentality, accept state-propagated guidelines for conduct and appearance, and perform in regime-defined gender roles. In National Socialist and Bolshevik rhetoric, the rebirth of the nation, its prosperity and survival depended directly on women’s conformity to the propagated feminine ideal and their participation in the regimes’ economic, political, and cultural policies.

The idea of comparing Nazi Germany with Bolshevik or Stalinist Russia is not a novel one. Most prior studies focus on totalitarian rule, personality cults, and the brutal

violence that were exercised by the Nazis and the Bolsheviks in order to maintain their supremacy. Some scholars contend that the Communist regime in Russia was based on coercion and terror and therefore illegitimate and unpopular, and that Soviet citizens of both genders were disappointed with the Communists.¹ Others subscribe to the belief that the system was held together by the inertia of citizens, and that public expressions supporting the regimes were falsifications: they were generated not by sincere belief in socialism but by fear of the purge or the desire to advance one's position.² Most recently, scholars from the so-called "Soviet Subjectivity School" have suggested that Stalin's regime enjoyed vitality not only because it enforced compliance through brutal force and because it offered rewards for blind obedience, but also because it succeeded in methods of domination through discourse (that is, by designing specific political, ideological, and cultural frameworks) and offered, albeit simplified, a satisfying resolution of multiple tensions (ethical or relational) associated with one's social existence.³ Other scholars, however, are convinced that there was a real commitment to Stalin's policies and a

¹ See, for example, Jeffrey Brooks *Thank you, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Jeffrey Rossmann, "The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932," *Russian Review* 56:1 (1997), 44-69, and Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Marshall Poe, eds., *The Resistance Debate in Russia and Soviet History* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2003).

² Such as Sheila Fitzpatrick's books *Everyday Stalinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *'Tear of the Masks!': Identity and Imposture in Twentieth century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³ The historians such as Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution of my Mind; Writing a Diary under Stalin*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), Igal Halfin (*From Darkness to Light: Class Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2000) and several others argue that millions of individuals in Stalin's Russia deliberately chose to accept the system, suppressing personal internal doubts and explaining away injustices and purges, because of the sophisticated and diffused channels through which Communist ideology was spread under Stalin.

readiness to make numerous personal sacrifices for the sake of the Greater Cause, e.g., building socialism, among various social strata, but especially among certain groups of women.⁴ Similarly, many scholars situate the study of Hitler's Germany along the lines of voluntary/coerced compliance to the state and its policies and underline the role that terror, fear, and inertia played in convincing the Germans to support the policies of the state.⁵ These and other scholars also note the significant number of women who responded to Hitler's vision for Germany and came to idealize and idolize the Führer, becoming active agents in the implementation of the regime's anti-humane policies.⁶ While investigating women under the Nazis and the Bolsheviks separately has been part of modern scholarship on Hitler's Germany and Lenin's and Stalin's Russia, comparative and comprehensive study of Russian and German women's culture under and relationship

⁴ See, among others, Elena Schulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Lynne Viola's *Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵ While the scholarship on Nazi Germany is too extensive to list all the works pertinent to the aforementioned points, see, for example, Joseph Benderski's *Concise History of Nazi Germany* (Rowman & Littlefield 2007), Jan Kershaw's *Hitler Myth; Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Claderon Press 1987), George Mosse's *Nazi Culture: intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (Schocken Books 1986) and others.

⁶ Claudia Koonz has convincingly demonstrated the significant role of women's organizations such as *Frauenwerk* in disseminating Hitler's eugenic policies that included forced sterilization for racially unfit Aryans and punishments for abortions among healthy Aryans. Social workers, teachers, and nurses, which belonged to *Frauenwerk*, willingly supplied the names of the mentally retarded, schizophrenics, alcoholics, and other "misfits" to the authorities, operating at the very center of the Nazi racial policy. Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (St. Martin's Press 1988).

with the regimes of Hitler, Lenin and Stalin has remained a largely unexplored terrain.⁷ This dissertation seeks to expand our knowledge of German and Russian women's history under totalitarian systems by comparing women's fashioning by the state and their self-fashioning in Germany and Russia during the Third Reich and Bolshevik and Stalinist rule respectively. I use the terms "fashioning" and "self-fashioning" to describe how the totalitarian rulers in Germany and Russia attempted to transform women into human beings with particular traits and characteristics and how women – not always consistently with the official rhetoric – created the identities that they believed helped them both to accommodate and use the system.

I argue that the aforementioned processes of women's fashioning and self-fashioning were largely influenced by the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates on the so-called Woman Question and the New Woman and were culturally specific. I will map the evolution of the Woman Question and the New Woman in the decades directly preceding and following the Nazi and Bolshevik seizure of power, defining changing standards of femininity and prevalent emancipatory paradigms. I will then analyze the complex interaction of women and the dictatorships of Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin, by looking at these regimes' policies; the existing state organizations for women; and the fashioning of women in official propaganda, as well as elite fashion and women's magazines. I seek to elucidate and compare the experiences of Russian and German women in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s as public figures – politicians, activists and writers

⁷ David L. Hoffman's "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, M0.1 (Autumn, 2000) is one of the very few texts I have found that deals with the Woman Question in Russia and Germany comparatively.

– and as ordinary citizens – young women, wives, mothers, and consumers of goods. I have designed the dissertation to illuminate the similarities and differences between the state-promoted roles and traits for women in Germany and Russia, as well as to identify the ambivalence and contradictions that the regimes displayed towards women in order to control and use them. Applying an interdisciplinary approach, that is, by weaving together women’s history with political, social, literary, and cultural studies, I will show how the “emancipatory” paradigms offered by the Nazis and Bolsheviks both constricted women’s rights and allowed some women to liberate themselves from the pressure of men-dominated governments. Making use of a variety of methodologies, I integrate close reading of popular novels and women’s magazines with the analysis of contemporary propaganda that featured women. All these materials exponentially enrich our understanding of the social, cultural and political landscapes under Stalin and Hitler and map out women’s roles in the building of socialism and National Socialism.

Because Hitler and Stalin both claimed to have solved the Woman Question to the full satisfaction of women, I begin with an overview of the key issues that concerned Russian and German women prior to the October Revolution of 1917 and the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Chapter I supplies a brief history of the Woman Question in Russia and Germany, focusing on different women’s movements and their agendas. It also outlines the professional and educational opportunities available to women before the Nazis and the Bolsheviks came to power.

Chapters II and III focus on the biographies and selected works of six prominent women whose lifestyles challenged traditional bourgeois models of femininity and whose works outlined distinct paradigms of women’s liberation in Russia and Germany in the

decades directly preceding and following the Nazi and Bolshevik coming to power: a bestselling author and feminist journalist of Late Imperial Russia Anastasia Verbitskaia (1861-1928); a revolutionary and the world's first woman ambassador Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), a highly esteemed author of Social Realism Anna Karavaeva (1893-1979); the bestselling author and celebrity of Weimar Germany Vicki Baum (1888-1960); the leader of the liberal bourgeois women's movement and feminist writer Gertrud Bäumer (1873-1954); and the celebrated woman author of Nazi Germany Ina Seidel (1885-1974). Born between 1861 and 1893, these women became the embodiment of the New Woman for their contemporaries. Their biographies effectively illustrate how much the traditions of female radicalism and maternalist ideology impacted the definition and interpretation of emancipation in Russia and Germany respectively and thus stand as paradigmatic cases for New Women of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. Their works, on the other hand, reflect a distinct, historical, moment-specific vision of emancipation and help us map out the transformation of the New Woman of Late Imperial Russia into the Soviet Woman and of the New Woman of Weimar Germany into the Aryan Woman. Finally, the analysis of these New Women and their works allows us to understand how the dictatorships of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler used the ideas of women's liberation to consolidate their power.

Bearing in mind the models of femininity and the challenges that the New Women faced in the period immediately preceding the National Socialist era in Germany and Bolshevik rule in Russia, Chapter IV maps out the models of femininity that crystallized under Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin and describes the manner with which the Woman question was "solved" under the Nazis and the Bolsheviks respectively. By

looking at laws, state-initiated holidays and lifestyle practices, as well as visual propaganda such as posters, postcards, and magazines, Part I of this chapter compares Nazi and Bolshevik changes in the conceptualization of marriage, motherhood, the family, sexuality, and work and analyzes the effects of these changes on the female populations of Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia. Part II delves deeper into the functioning of the totalitarian state by analyzing the mechanics of education and the indoctrination of girls and young women in party organizations. It also looks into the ethos and culture of adult Nazi women's organizations.

Chapter V completes my enquiry into women's history and culture under the totalitarian regimes of Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin by focusing on the physical presentation of women in elite fashion and women's magazines during the Third Reich and the Bolshevik and pre-WW II Stalinist rule. This chapter includes analysis of several phenomena that are crucial to our understanding of women's experience of Bolshevism/Stalinism and National Socialism: National Socialist and Bolshevik sartorial symbols, the debate about "proletarian culture," the so-called cultured trade and the campaign for culturedness (Russia), and Nazi and Bolshevik ideas of conspicuous consumption and consumerism in general.

Born out of somewhat similar debates about the Woman Question, the fashioning of the New Woman in Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia diverged in distinctly cultural ways. Bolshevik and Nazi "new women" were equally subjugated to ideological and political mandates of dictators; in reality, however, women did not always conform and could not always be forced. Whether conforming or not, Bolshevik and Nazi "new women" nonetheless played a much more significant role in Nazi, Bolshevik, and

Stalinist society than had been originally assigned to them by these totalitarian regimes. These “new women” were complex products of both misogynist, murderous utopias and the propagated rhetoric of liberation.

Chapter 1 : A Brief History of the Woman Question in Russia and Germany

The so-called Woman Question, or the debate about women's emancipation, emerged in Germany and Russia in mid-nineteenth century as part of a larger sociopolitical debate: in the Russian Empire, the debate about the legal and political reforms instituted by Alexander II; in Germany, the debate about citizenship and the relationship between the individual and the state in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the revolutions in the German states in 1848. Women's employment and education opportunities, legal and political rights, free choice of a marriage partner, reproductive rights, but also the elimination of prostitution were all seen as vital constituents of women's emancipation. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, reforms in dress and undergarments became part of the Woman Question as well. While contemporary fashion at large responded to the advances in technology and new movements in art (aesthetic movement in Great Britain and modernism in France, Germany, and Russia), the fashion choices of Russian women often evinced their political beliefs. In Russia, women's sartorial choices, hairstyle, and conduct increasingly signified their position vis-à-vis Westernization, underground revolutionary activity, and the Romanov autocracy.

Similar to feminist movements in Great Britain, the USA, and France, women's liberation movements in Germany and Russia featured conservative, moderate, and radical wings. The particular cultural and political climate of Germany and Russia, however, contributed to specifically German and Russian interpretations of radicalism

and feminism. In Russia, radicals rebelled against the obdurate autocratic regime and its stifling censorship and sought to ameliorate the lot of the peasantry, the most populous, culturally backward, and economically downtrodden stratum of Russian society. The “Cause of the Great Russian People,” not the separate strands of the Woman Question (reproductive rights or the vote), inspired Russian women radicals to action: alongside their male counterparts, they took part in the assassinations of prominent government officials and the tsar (Alexander II), underground revolutionary activity, and untiring political agitation among the peasantry. In contrast, in the Second Reich, “radical” thinking often implied socialism, the idea of “free love,” moral and financial support of unwed mothers and illegitimate children, and the pursuit of female suffrage. German radicals, essentially, fought against patriarchal society and the nefarious effects of an encroaching capitalist system on the lower classes.

In the Second Reich and later, in the Weimar Republic, so-called “maternalist” ideology formed the philosophical core of conservative and moderate factions of the German bourgeois women’s movement, while no such emphasis on women’s maternal energies developed within feminists in the Russian Empire. According to German feminists, the involvement of (middle-class) women in charitable and welfare organizations, e.g., their “social motherhood,” benefited the nation and the state, because women’s maternal energies possessed a potential to transform the cold, impersonal bureaucratic system of the emerging capitalist state into a loving, caring community. Just as the political and civic rights of German men were closely connected to the services they performed in the Army and government, women’s social motherhood (which represented women’s service to the nation), German bourgeois feminists insisted,

validated their claim to a wider social and political participation, employment, and (better) education.

Chapter I identifies the continuities and disjunctions between Russian and German interpretation of the Woman Question and New Woman in the second half of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and Bolshevik and National Socialist conceptions of women's emancipation respectively. It begins with sketching the evolution of the Woman Question and the idea of New Woman by outlining the social, cultural, and political factors that shaped Russian (female) radicalism and German maternalist ideology from the mid-nineteenth century until the Nazi and Bolshevik takeover. By focusing on feminists, radicals, and socialists, Chapter I then describes and compares German and Russian women's liberation movements, their organizations, agendas, challenges, and fates under the Bolsheviks and the Nazis. As personal appearance and dress played an important part in the self-fashioning of liberal and radical women, this chapter also outlines the contemporary discourse on fashion. By looking at the meaning of fashion in the decades directly preceding the Nazi and Bolshevik takeover, Chapter I builds a foundation for the analysis of fashion under the Third Reich and Stalin's rule respectively, as both totalitarian regimes assigned critical importance to the physical appearance of women, their sartorial choices, and consumption practices.

1.1 Origins of the Woman Question Debate in Russia

Unlike mid nineteenth-century Germany, which was composed of culturally and politically diverse states with separate rulers and laws, the Russian Empire had a relatively uniform, albeit archaic, legal code, an omnipotent autocratic ruler, and a highly centralized government. Regardless of their gender, all Russian subjects remained under the close scrutiny of the autocratic ruler and lacked basic civil and political rights. Over the course of the nineteenth century, a pronounced cultural and intellectual drift between Russian liberal-minded nobility, the intelligentsia, Russia's cultural elite, and the peasantry characterized Russian society. Western-educated and French-Revolution inspired nobility and intelligentsia criticized the Empire's socio-political and economic systems, whose inefficiency became evident after Russia's crushing defeat in the Crimean War (1853-56), and advocated, among other reforms, an alternative form of government such as a constitutional monarchy or republic. Most of the illiterate and backward peasantry, the majority of the Empire's population, however, remained loyal to autocracy, patrimony, and the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church and viewed Western "libertine" ideas as blasphemous and contradictory to the national character. This drift explained not only the failure of many revolutionary uprisings and of the developing foothold of liberalism in the Empire, but also contributed to the development of specifically Russian female radicalism. Russia's radical women dedicated their lives to "enlightening" and fighting for the peasantry.

From the start, the debate about women's emancipation in Russia was deeply situated within the debate about the autocracy. The emancipation of serfs in 1861 and other

political, economic, and legal reforms instituted during the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) spurred a discussion about the status of other social groups, including women.⁸ As in Germany, in the Russian Empire, the notions of male-female nature and separate spheres existed.⁹ However, perhaps due to the fact that several female sovereigns ruled Russia in the course of the eighteenth century,¹⁰ the question of female intellectual and moral inferiority

⁸ Alexander II's Emancipation Manifesto freed more than twenty-three million serfs and bestowed them with rights (to marry without the consent of their masters, own property or a business, and purchase land from their landlords). His reorganization of the army and the navy and the creation of universal military conscription and an army reserve amassed the Empire's military strength, while his founding of a new judicial administration and an elaborate network of local self-government (*zemstva*) along with a new penal code and a significantly simplified system of civil and criminal procedure seemed to suggest a partial redistribution of power from the autocratic ruler to local authorities. Geoffrey Hoskins, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552- 1917*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). However, both the Manifesto and other reforms were thwarted by the Empire's poorly developed social, economic, and cultural infrastructure, as well as by the unwillingness of the subsequent Romanov rulers and their governments to curb their autocratic power.

⁹ West European and American "cult of domesticity" never took firm roots in the Russian soil, although knitting, sewing, cooking and other housekeeping skills formed a significant part of the curriculum for girls. On domesticity in nineteenth-century Russia, see Diana Greene, "Mid-Nineteenth-Century Domestic Ideology in Russia," in *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, Rosalind Marsh, ed., (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998); and Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ The wife of Peter the Great, Catherine I (1725-1727), opened the first Russian Academy of Sciences and reduced the Empire's military expenses (which, in turn, diminished taxation of peasants). Catherine I's daughter, Elizabeth I (1741-1765), expanded the Empire's territory to four billion acres and sponsored the founding of Moscow University in 1755. Catherine II (1762-1796), also known as Catherine the Great, improved the Empire's economy by secularizing church land property and introducing paper money. Catherine II's Charter of the Nobility, Charter of the Cities, and Statute of Popular schools, as well as her founding of boarding schools for girls of noble birth and of petite bourgeoisie largely transformed the Empire's social and cultural canvas. For more on Russian empresses see Donald J. Raleigh, *The Emperors and Empresses of Russia: Rediscovering the Romanovs* and Geoffrey Hoskins, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*.

did not preoccupy nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals to the same degree as it did their Western counterparts such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Otto Weininger.¹¹ Instead, Russian intellectual luminaries such as the “writer of the peasant life” Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878), the literary critic Vissarion Belinskii (1811-1848), the social critic and writer Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828- 1889), and the “father of Russian socialism” Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) saw the improvement of women’s general status as an inevitable consequence of a more democratic form of government.¹² Others, such as the poet and radical publicist M. L. Mikhailov and the noted surgeon and educator Nikolai Pirogov focused on more specific issues such as women’s rudimentary, status-based education.¹³ Writing in 1856,

¹¹ In his well-received essay *Über die Weiber* (1851), Arthur Schopenhauer described women as “frivolous, childish and short-sighted” and “defective in the powers of reasoning and deliberation.” He insisted that the “fundamental fault of the female character is that it has *no sense of justice*” and that women are “dependent, not upon strength, but upon craft; and hence their instinctive capacity for cunning, and their ineradicable tendency to say what is not true.” (Schopenhauer, *Über die Weiber*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, 3) Otto Weininger’s widely read treatise *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1902), on the other hand, argued that woman is “soulless, knows neither the logical nor the moral imperative, and the words law and duty, duty towards herself, are words which are least familiar to her” (186), “without the power of making concepts is unable to make judgments,” (202) and has “no faculty for the affairs of State and politics, as she has no social inclinations.” (187) *Sex and Character* (London, Great Britain: William Heinemann, 1906), 186, 187, 202.

¹² Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*, 36-42.

¹³ As in Europe, education for women in Russia was status-based and limited to the propertied classes. Until the 1850s, there were no secondary schools for girls, while higher and professional schools for women did not appear until the 1870s. The decrees of 1858 and 1860 established secondary or middle schools for girls of all social classes, which were to be financed by public and private funds, while the curriculum expanded to include Russian language and literature, geometry, arithmetic, physics, geography, natural history, drawing, sewing, modern languages, music and dance. However, even this expanded curriculum did not prepare women for a vocation other than as a governess or a teacher, not to mention studies at a university. As a result, many Russian women fled to Switzerland to earn a university degree and became the most populous group among other students. Richard Stites, *The Woman’s Liberation Movements in Russia*, 89

Pirogov lamented that “[contemporary] upbringing turns the woman into a marionette. Dressed like a doll, she is put on the stage, her strings are pulled and she is made to act as the society demands.”¹⁴ According to Pirogov, Russia’s future depended on the proper education of men as well as women, because well-educated women could save Russia from the egocentric, acquisitive values of contemporary Western Europe.¹⁵ Placed in the contemporary social and political context, the Russian debate about women’s emancipation thus became a platform to voice opposition to the autocratic state and to discuss civil liberties and political rights of the tsar’s subjects; it also served as a venue to analyze the nefarious influence of Westernization on the Russian society.

Besides women’s education, Russian intellectuals such as the poet and radical publicist M. L. Mikhailov sought to change the traditional perception of women (in Russia, as well as in Europe) as capricious, vain, and irrational, mostly vividly portrayed in the misogynist writings of French liberal nationalist Jules Michelet and the socialist P.J. Proudhon. To defend women and their intellect, Mikhailov published (in addition to his own articles) the Russian translation of John Stuart Mill’s “Subjection of Women.”¹⁶ According to his contemporary and an art critic, Vladimir Stasov, in Russia, “after the publication of Pirogov and Mikhailov’s articles... the Woman Question became legitimate, a problem

¹⁴ Here and further all the translations from the Russian are mine. Nikolai Pirogov, “Questions of Life,” *Sea Collection*, July, 1856. Quoted in V. Stasov, “Recollections,” *Muzhskie otvety na zhenskii vopros v Rossii/Male answers to the Woman Question in Russia* (Tver: Feminist Press, 2005), 112.

¹⁵ For more on the debate about the effects of Westernization, see Jane McDermid, “The Influence of Western Ideas on the Development of the Woman Question in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought,” *Irish Slavonic Studies* 9 (1988): 21-36.

¹⁶ One of the most influential feminist tracts, “The Subjection of Women” demanded the removal of all legal constraints on women’s ability to act as free individuals.

worth discussing... it also became fashionable.”¹⁷ In keeping with Pirogov’s idea, Maria Vernadskaia (1831-1860), the wife of a professor of political economics and the first Russian female economist, suggested that women contribute to the welfare of the nation. Perhaps idealistically, Vernadskaia believed that women could easily find employment in “sales, at a factory, in agriculture, literature, poetry, science, medicine, arts, theater, singing, music, and crafts.”¹⁸ In a number of articles published shortly before her death in 1860, Vernadskaia sought to convince women to join the labor force and remove the stigma that was attached to labor as the occupation of the lowly classes. By engaging in productive labor and occupations that suited their “talents, not their whims,” Vernadskaia argued, Russian women would change the stereotype that men had “to court and constantly entertain them, and to take complete care of them as if they were babies or imbeciles.”¹⁹ Finding gainful employment became especially critical for single women from the propertied class in Russia after the emancipation of serfs in 1861, as they could no longer rely on serf labor and had to seek alternative forms of income.

Nikolai Chernyshevski’s controversial novel *What is to Be Done* (1863) provided the discussion of the Woman Question with a new impetus.²⁰ Besides supporting

¹⁷ Quoted in V. Stasov, “Recollections,” *Muzhskie otvety na zhenskii vopros v Rossii/Male answers to the Woman Question in Russia* (Tver: Feminist Press, 2005), 112

¹⁸ Quoted in Stasov, *Vospominaniya/Recollections*, 114.

¹⁹For more on Vernadskaia, see Robin Bisha, *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression. An Anthology of Sources* (Indiana University Press, 2002).

²⁰ *What is to Be Done* centers on the gradual sexual and personal emancipation of a female protagonist, Vera Pavlovna. In the first part of the novel, young Vera enters a fictitious marriage with the tutor of her younger brother to escape domestic tyranny of her middle-class St. Petersburg family. In their jointly rented apartment Vera lives independently in her three rooms, is entitled to take a lover or pursue a profession. Vera’s agreeable husband supports her business idea of setting up a dressmaking cooperative and

Vernadskaiia's idea that meaningful, paid labor took a pivotal position in women's liberation, the novel elaborated on the idea of personal emancipation through a fictitious marriage, cooperative work, and communal life – or through one's dedication to revolutionary activity. Albeit in a melodramatic form, the novel challenged not only the patriarchal family and stereotypes about women, but also offered (unisex) modes of personal emancipation – through work, sexual abstinence, or revolutionary struggle against the Romanovs' autocracy. Leo Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), which was censored in the Empire and prohibited from circulation, on the other hand, connected personal emancipation with a reform in (marital) sexual relationships.²¹ While the novel was not explicitly feminist, it harshly criticized the double moral standard, despotism, and spousal abuse in a patriarchal marriage. *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Tolstoy's religiously infused commentary on the novel sketched a model of a progressive marriage that was purportedly not derived from Western liberalism but rooted in the Russian

welcomes her lover. The second part of the novel describes their peaceful *ménage à trois* based on rational egoism. The novel ends with Vera opening two more cooperatives.

²¹ *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the namesake of Beethoven's composition, opens with a conversation among passengers on a train, who discuss sex, love, and marriage. One of the interlocutors, a lawyer, is convinced that many couples live long, content married lives, while another, introduced to the reader as Pozdnyashev, announces that marriage is an obscene sham. He then proceeds to explain that he has murdered his wife in a jealous rage and has been acquitted. Pozdnyashev links sexual intercourse with perversion and blames sexual lust for the deterioration and eventual destruction of his marriage. After marrying a pretty woman and having children with her, Pozdnyashev began to hate his wife, but could not stop lusting after her. Upon returning from the country and seeing his wife play Beethoven together with their mutual acquaintance musician Trukachevsky, Pozdnyashev interprets the expressions on their faces as mutual passion and shoots his wife. The musician manages to escape; Pozdnyashev gets acquitted of his wife's murder.

cultural traditions – as Tolstoy understood them.²² Condemning jealous rage and lust, Tolstoy advocated marriage as a union designed to serve God and the community and suggested sexual abstinence for couples with children. Decades later, the Tolstoyan train of thought about marriage as a union dedicated to the service of the community surfaced in the writings of prominent Russian Marxists such as Lunacharskii and Lenin, while his vision of marriage as a harmonious but not lustful relationship can be deciphered in the speeches of early twentieth-century Russian feminists.²³ At the First Assembly of All-Russia Women’s Society in 1908, the speaker Volkova argued that true emancipation of women began only after individuals of both sexes re-discovered the true meaning of sexual relationships – procreation of species. Volkova encouraged women to view sexual relationships not as carnal pleasure, but as “their sacred duty to the Motherland,” and their bodies – as “the cradle of vital and healthy civilization.”²⁴ Another speaker defined an ideal marriage as “first and foremost a spiritual union, where sexual harmony completes, not dominates, the nature of the relationship.” Knowledge about the “true meaning of sexual intercourse,” she insisted, made women “strong, sound in judgment, harmonious, and morally resistant to various temptations.”²⁵ While Russian feminist thought incorporated Tolstoy’s ideas, it also reflected the views of the conservative

²² Leo Tolstoy, “Kommentarii,” *Muzhskie otvety na zhenskii vopros* (Tver: Feminist Press, 2005), 118-123.

²³ See, for example, Krupskaiia’s chapter on marriage in *Moya Zhizn s Il’ichem/My Life with Lenin* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1957) and Lunacharski’s article *O byte* (Moskva: Gosizdat, 1921).

²⁴ “Instinct Materinstva i polovoe vozderzhanie,” *Trudy I-go Vserossiiskogo s’ezda zhenskogo obshchestva*, 386-389.

²⁵ “Brachnyi vopros v nastoyashem i budushem,” *Trudy I-go vserossiskogo S’ezda zhenskogo obshchestva*, 368, 371, 377.

faction of the German bourgeois women's movement, who discussed women's sexuality as a life-giving, marriage-harmonizing force and not as a means to self-discovery and fulfillment like German and Russian women radicals did.

Besides questioning spousal relationships in modern Russia, Tolstoy's influential novel also interrogated women's infatuation with ever-changing fashion as well as their conspicuous consumption. The protagonist of *Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyashev, lamented that women "demanded and consumed all the luxuries of life" and that millions of workers and generations of slaves "perished to satisfy the whims of women."²⁶ As presented in the novel, women compensated for their lack of rights and freedoms with expensive French fashions. French styles transformed naturally modest, pious Russian women into shameless, opportunistic enchantresses helping them to ensnare men with their "bare arms, shoulders, and exaggerated behinds."²⁷ If Tolstoy connected women's obsession with fashion and shopping to their desire to seek revenge for lack of rights, the early twentieth-century journalist and military officer I. L. Elets blamed women's conspicuous consumption for the financial ruin and moral decline of the Russian family. In his book *Polnoe bezumie: K sverzheniyu iga mod (Epidemic Insanity: Toward the Overthrow of the Yoke of Fashion, 1914)* Elets claimed that women's insatiable desire to look *a la mode* caused them to neglect their children and husbands and put their families into debt.²⁸ In addition to exposing the nefarious consequences of fashion on the family

²⁶ Lev Tolstoy, *Kreutzerova Sonata*, (Moscow-Leningrad: GosIzdat, 1992) 26.

²⁷ Ibid, 22-23.

²⁸It was customary for turn-of-the twentieth century upper class Russian women to change clothing several times a day, have a seasonal wardrobe, and dress appropriately for theater, sport, or a promenade in the country. In contrast, Russian men wore uniforms

life and budget, Russian intellectuals, doctors, and feminists all pointed out the ill effects of cumbersome petticoats, constricting corsets, voluminous bustles, and impossibly narrow skirts, which distorted women's bodies and forced them to walk in an unnatural way. Echoing their Western and American counterparts, Russian feminists viewed women's liberation from harmful garments as a vital step in their personal emancipation.²⁹

For many of the Empire's elite women, sartorial choices reflected more than just their sophistication and style or their husbands' wealth and social rank. In the aftermath of the Crimean war (1854-1856) or during World War I, Russian noble women showed their patriotism by donning traditional Russian dress. Wearing national costume at the French-speaking, Western European-educated Romanovs' court also represented an attempt to combine the two identities that had been imposed onto women by the ruling elite while showing respect for the throne. Starting with Peter the Great in the seventeenth century, who forced Western style of dress onto Muscovite Russia, until the revolution of 1917, the Imperial rulers manipulated fashion to bestow their subjects with a particular identity. For Peter the Great, Western-style dress for both sexes and clean-shaven male faces represented an initial step in the modernization of Russia; it was also an attempt to fashion Russians as cultural equals of Western Europeans. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the sprouting nationalist movements prompted Romanov rulers

or suits and did not change their dress as often as women did. Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917*, 14.

²⁹ According to the doctor and feminist journalist Mariia Pokrovskaia then-fashionable long skirts carried the dirt and bacteria off the street into the home, while S-shaped corsets impeded the health of the woman during pregnancy. Mariia Pokrovskaia, *Selected Works* (St. Petersburg, 1901), 4.

to revert to traditional clothing in order to encourage national consciousness, and, as of part of that consciousness, loyalty to autocracy. During Nicolas I's reign (1825-55), Russia's elite women were required to wear traditional dress at all court ceremonies, even though the male nobility typically donned Western-style suits or military uniforms. Nicolas II, the last Russian tsar, organized a series of costume balls, where he and his guests wore the actual gowns from the Muscovite era in order to foster the development of a national mythology in which the tsar and his people had a strong bond. The Doctrine of Official Nationality, introduced by Nicolas I in 1834 and later evoked in the rhetoric of his successors, presented *Narodnost* (*Volkstum* or Nationality), autocracy, and Orthodoxy as the pillars of the Russian nation and empire. It is not surprising, then, given the explicit connection between national Russian dress and loyalty to the tsar that so-called women nihilists and women revolutionaries rejected traditional clothing as the prerogative of the propertied classes, choosing instead a plain, unadorned robe in a Western style.

Thus, while the Russian fashion debate echoed the Western European and American ones in criticizing the discomfort, inconvenience, impracticality, and even danger of contemporary women's undergarments, it also reflected specifically a Russian understanding of nationality and national values. Besides serving as an aesthetic expression of the self, the sartorial choices of late nineteenth and early-twentieth century Russian women across the social spectrum suggested their position vis-à-vis modernization, Westernization, and the autocracy. Whether a Frenchified coquette, a somberly dressed nihilist, or a high society lady in a costume with traditional Russian embroidery and bright colors, the contemporary Russian woman constructed a particular identity for herself with the help of ready-made or custom-tailored clothing. Being

dressed in the latest French designs suggested the familiarity and ease with which the lady in question interacted with the Western world, while the unadorned robes of the nihilists implied preoccupation with the inner, not outer, worth of the wearer and a determination to follow nontraditional life-paths. Still, dressing in the traditional Russian style showed not just a woman's patriotism, but also her respect for patriarchy and autocracy. In the era of the emerging women's movement in Russia, then, fashion helped to highlight one's ethnicity and loyalty to the throne, stage a more sophisticated identity, or reject socially imposed (gender) identity altogether.

1.2 Russian Women's Liberation Movements

In the second part of the nineteenth century, men-initiated Russian debate on the Woman Question evolved into three distinct women's movements: feminism, nihilism, and radicalism. Well-educated, fashionably dressed ladies with impeccable manners, Russian feminists sought for solutions to the Woman Question within the existing social and political system. By and large apolitical, Russian feminists (who often belonged to the upper classes or the royal family) advocated a gradual and peaceful resolution of women's issues and believed that communal kitchens, cheap lodging for the poor, and shelters for diseased prostitutes could alleviate the condition of unfortunate women until official social reforms could take place. The aspirations of Russian feminists in the late nineteenth century included university education for women, extended employment, equal status as citizens, and the development of agencies and charities to prevent women

from becoming prostitutes. Universal suffrage or questions of sexual liberation such as reproductive rights or “free love” rarely played a part in their discussion.³⁰

In contrast to feminists who sought to improve the condition of women in Russia gradually, *nihilistki* (women nihilists) demanded immediate emancipation of women: from sexual inequality, obligations imposed by religion and society, and gender stereotypes.³¹ *Nihilistki* flaunted their atheism, scorned the traditional patriarchal family, and condemned art as an entertainment of the rich. To escape domestic tyranny, an undesirable marriage partner, or pursue education abroad nihilists of both genders entered a fictitious marriage. The appearance of *nihilistki* served as the outmost demonstration of their beliefs: *nihilistki* were often spotted in plain woolen dresses, with chewed dirty fingernails, short mannish haircuts, cigarettes, and dark spectacles. To establish equality between the sexes – as *nihilistki* defined it – they also smoked, adopted a loud, brusque manner of speaking, and refused any old-fashioned stylized gallantry and chivalry such as the kissing of hands or a man’s help while getting out of a carriage. As a manner of conduct and dress, nihilism survived into the late 1920s: many Bolshevik women chose unadorned clothing, a simple hairstyle, and a brusque manner of speaking to fit in the predominantly male Bolshevik party as well as to mark their proletarian origins.

³⁰ Stites, *Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*, 64-74.

³¹ On nihilism and its origins see Aileen Kelly *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Stuart Tompkins, *The Russian Intelligentsia: Makers of the Revolutionary State*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), and Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, tr. Francis Haskell, (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960). On nihilism and its reception in the Russian society see Ronald Hingley, *Nihilists* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967).

The third women's group that sought liberation in the Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century consisted of women revolutionaries.³² To improve the lot of the Russian peasantry, women revolutionaries joined the underground movement of the 1870s, Populism. Acting under the auspices of populist organizations such as *Land and Liberty* and *People's Will*,³³ women radicals traveled to the countryside to establish contacts with the peasants, distribute political pamphlets, plot assassinations of government officials, and take direct part in executing them. Like their male counterparts, women revolutionaries adopted Bakunin's *Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1868) as their motto:

A revolutionary... has no private interests, no affairs, sentiments, ties, property nor even a name of his own. His entire being is devoured by one purpose, one thought, and passion – the revolution. Heart and soul, not merely by word but by deed, he has severed every link with the social order and with the entire civilized world, and with all laws, conventions, and morality of that world.³⁴

³² The Russian intellectual colony in Zurich and so-called propaganda circles in St. Petersburg produced the majority of Russian women revolutionaries. Stites, *Woman's Liberation Movement*, 126-127.

³³ Offshoots of the nihilist movement, these organizations sought to guide peasants to the revolution. *Land and Liberty* believed that Russia's future lay in the survival of the commune or the "collective life," not with the western ideals of capitalism and individualism. *People's Will* was founded in response to the fraudulent emancipation reform that had turned millions of former serfs into paupers. The organization was dedicated to plotting the execution of the tsar (Alexander II) and his officials. *People's Will* believed that the assassinations would shatter the existing political system, bring relief to the destitute Russian peasantry, and move the masses to revolution.

³⁴ Michael Bakunin's *Catechism* was written primarily for men. It had, however, an entry about women: "...women should be divided into three basic groups: ...dumb, stupid and callous ... ardent women, dedicated and practical but not our own, ... and our own women who are completely dedicated and accepted our program. They are our comrades ... and our precious resource without whose aid we cannot succeed." Bakunin, "The Catechism," in Basil Dmytryshyn, *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917*, 351.

The mindset and conduct of Russian women radicals represented a new type of femininity. Women radicals found liberation in discarding all attributes of conventional femininity and instead dedicating themselves, body and soul, to the revolutionary movement. In underground political activities and terrorist plots, women revolutionaries acted as collaborators, not sexual objects, and could use “masculine” attributes such as intellect, character, and will without being stigmatized or ridiculed. By embarking public, activist roles, radical women took part, albeit illegally, in reformist politics alongside men.

The tsarist courts made no distinction on the basis of gender when sentencing radicals Vera Figner, Vera Zasulich, and Sofia Perovskaia to the gallows, prison, or exile to the desolate hard labor camps in Siberia. Noble-born Perovskaia, one of the Alexander II’s assassins, was hanged with her male collaborators in 1881, becoming the first woman in Russia to be executed for political murder. The self-sacrifice, courage and heroism that women radicals displayed during and after their trials were highly admired by the contemporary (male) liberal intelligentsia, while women radicals themselves became revered heroines for the thousands of women who joined revolutionary activities in 1905 and 1917.

1.3 The Woman Question in Late Imperial Russia

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the women’s movement in the Russian Empire underwent notable demographical and ideological changes: many radical and nihilist women were exiled to Siberia or fled to Europe; others joined the emerging

socialist movement. While the older, noble-born, feminists remained apolitical and focused on charity work and the younger Russian feminists (who came from clerical, officer, and professional backgrounds) shifted their efforts to the issue of women's suffrage,³⁵ Russian socialists agitated for a revolution, insisting that the charity efforts of the "society ladies" and the younger feminists' demands such as suffrage, equal pay, civil and political rights were meaningless without social restructuring.

Industrialization, urbanization, and cultural imports from the West transformed Russian society, expanding education and employment opportunities for women. By 1905, in St. Petersburg alone, there were over fifty establishments of higher learning for women offering courses in the arts, sciences, and even commerce.³⁶ Because of fewer bureaucratic barriers, the majority of women graduates went into teaching, literature, or journalism; medicine was another popular profession.³⁷ Although restrictions on and prejudice towards female doctors persisted up till the Bolshevik revolution, in 1910, Russia boasted almost 1,500 women physicians – far ahead of Great Britain, Germany,

³⁵ In comparison with the feminist movement of the West, Russian feminists were a much smaller organization: The Union for Women's Equality, the largest suffrage association of the period, included 8,000 members, while Denmark boasted 80,000. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 117.

³⁶ The so-called "Women's Higher Courses" (opened in the 1870s) enabled Russian women – mostly from the gentry – to receive a university education. The most prestigious women's higher courses, the Bestuzhev courses in St. Petersburg, offered two faculties, History-Philology and Physics-Mathematics. There were also courses for women in Moscow, Kazan, and Kiev. By 1911, there were university courses in the ten major Russian cities. In 1914, 25,000 women enrolled at the higher courses. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 169.

³⁷ On paper, women doctors enjoyed the same privileges and rights as male physicians. In reality, they were confined to pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, as well as to the police-medical organ that inspected prostitutes. Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement*, 175.

and France.³⁸ The number of women also grew steadily in law and civil service. By 1897, six million women in Russia lived on their own salaries.³⁹ By 1914, women comprised forty percent of the labor force.

The rapid growth of cities, accompanied by the lack of sufficient housing and sanitation and the rise in prostitution, brought the “Sexual Question” to the forefront of public attention.⁴⁰ Prostitution (which in Russia included “white slavery” and so-called angel factories⁴¹) – was blamed for the spread of venereal diseases, especially among innocent wives of promiscuous husbands. According to the 1900 feminist publication *The Women’s Cause*, there were 300,000 prostitutes in the Empire in contrast to the officially registered 34,000.⁴² Exacerbating the situation, child prostitutes became a common sight in years preceding World War I, especially in bustling urban areas such as Dumskaia Square in Kiev or Znamenskaia Square in St. Petersburg. Often only eight or nine-years-old, child prostitutes consisted mostly of homeless illegitimate children; however, some of them were sent to the streets by their parents, because the average wage of a prostitute

³⁸ Britain, Germany, and France reached one third of that number in 1911, 1914 and 1928 respectively. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movements in Russia*, 175.

³⁹ Rosalind Marsh, *Realist Prose Writers*, 176.

⁴⁰ In the years of 1860-1914 Russia’s overall population more than doubled; the population in major urban centers quadrupled (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw) or even grew tenfold in size (Kiev). Ian Thatcher, “Late Imperial Workers,” 101.

⁴¹ According to Bernice Madison, there was no protection for unmarried mothers in Imperial Russia until 1902. Economic and psychological hardships forced many mothers to abandon their newborns at the so-called “angel factories,” where they were largely neglected and let to die. The surviving children populated the streets of the Empire’s largest cities, eventually becoming thieves or under-aged prostitutes. Bernice Madison, “Russia’s Illegitimate Children Before and After the Revolution,” 100.

⁴² Madison, “Russia’s Illegitimate Children,” 3.

– sixty to ninety rubles per month – was four to six times more than that of a female factory worker or a servant.⁴³

The model of regulation of prostitution in the Empire mirrored national patriarchal and paternalistic traditions. Just as the tsar – allegedly – acted as the father of his people, the autocratic state monitored prostitutes as women who no longer had fathers or masters in order to shore up the patriarchal order and protect public health.⁴⁴ Prostitutes were required to carry a so-called yellow ticket that listed their name, age, and address and contained the stamp of a physician. This so-called policy of three I's – identification, inspection, and incarceration of diseased prostitutes – which served as the linchpin of the empire's system until the collapse of tsarism in 1917, created a category of women whose bodies were expected to be available not only to clients in brothels or on the streets, but also to physicians and policemen for a routine medical and document check.⁴⁵

The state's regulation of prostitution provided Russian socialists and feminists with a platform to discuss women's rights, as it impinged on questions concerning labor, sexuality, urbanization, public health, civic rights, and the status of women. The debate about sexual issues transformed into a revolt against bureaucratic despotism and autocracy, namely, the stifling control of the state in all public and social issues. The Sexual Question in Late Imperial Russia, while it included the discussion of women and their rights, became a larger discussion about basic principles of state and public

⁴³ Ibid, 46.

⁴⁴ Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia*, 15-16.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 20

authority and civic life.⁴⁶ Russian feminists considered prostitution a result of the patriarchal order that subordinated women to men, and prostitutes as victims of poverty, abuse and lack of opportunity. Consequently, feminists advocated the development of social services and better legal and medical protection for prostitutes within the existing political and economic systems. They also protested Russia's convoluted divorce laws.⁴⁷ Conservative feminists continued their charitable work to alleviate the deplorable condition of the "fallen girls," while liberal feminists sought abolition of the state regulation of prostitution and demanded women's suffrage. The deplorable manifestations of moral dereliction and illicit sexual activities such as infanticide and swarms of illegitimate children prompted feminists such as the physician and publisher Mariia Pokrovskaia and the journalist Sophia Zarechnaya to initiate a discussion about birth control and (legal) abortion as a means to control both infant death and the health of the nation;⁴⁸ yet, their efforts met with little success. In Moscow, the number of

⁴⁶ The police and state monitored all aspects of civic life in the Empire, including public health. In their discussion of syphilis, contemporary Russian physicians argued that the state should allocate more authority and judicial power to medical specialists, as well as to local and municipal organizations, instead of using police forces to regulate prostitutes. Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search of Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, 203.

⁴⁷ Many contemporary writers like Ilia Rozanov believed that Russia's tortuous divorce procedures contributed to the establishment of prostitution as an industry. The divorce proceedings included nine separated stages, expenses fees, humiliating public interrogations for female defendants and various liabilities upon a confessing adulterer. Adultery remained the only admissible ground for divorce. The inability to get a divorce caused many men to frequent brothels, contributing to the spread of prostitution and venereal disease in Late Imperial Russia. Rozanov, *Semeiny Vopros*, I, 140.

⁴⁸ Pokrovskaia defended rationally used birth control as essential to the production of psychologically and physically healthy offspring, while Zarechnaya sought to establish a direct link between women's reproductive rights and the Woman Question in general. Writing in 1910, Zarechnaya argued that birth control would reduce the incidence of child mortality and also free woman to become the equal of men in the state. She insisted

clandestine abortions performed by midwives grew two-and-a-half times in the years 1909-1914, whereas in St. Petersburg the increase was tenfold from 1897 to 1912.⁴⁹ Birth control, although it was not officially prohibited, received little support or general interest among feminists, socialists, and the public at large despite the fact that information on contraception was available already in 1910.⁵⁰

In contrast to feminists who connected prostitution with patriarchy, Russian socialists viewed prostitution as a product of class inequality that flourished under the capitalist exploitation of both women and the working class. Socialist leaders configured the proletariat as male and did not single out the women and their issues. They believed that the abolition of capitalism would eradicate the traffic in the female body. In general, however, the growth of prostitution in Russia, as in Europe, was attributed to the combined traumas of industrialization and urbanization. Connected to this idea was the widespread belief that prostitution in Russia was a malignant consequence of westernization and that foreigners and Jews forced destitute women into “white slavery.”⁵¹

that only a woman had the right to decide about the uses of her own body and criticized the social, religious, and legal pressures that forbade unmarried women to have a child and forced married ones to have offspring even against their desire. Several male doctors, such as a Petersburg doctor Karl Drexler also supported birth control as a means to relieve the plight of poor and unwed mothers. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, 180-181.

⁴⁹ Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, 181.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, 180.

⁵¹ While Jews did not dominate the trade of prostitution in Russia, they were, according to Bernstein, visible in procuring and brothel keeping, especially within the Pale of Settlement. Newspapers and journals of the era frequently featured stories about flesh traders with Jewish last names. In the popular novel *Yama* by Kuprin, which offered the

In her research on the regulation of prostitution in Late Imperial Russia, Laura Bernstein discovered that feminist-led organizations and charities were more efficient and effective than socialist organizations in rectifying the most common problems that Russian lower class women faced (and that led them to prostitution): domestic violence, sexual harassment, poor education, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The influential feminist organization *Rossiiskoe obshestvo zaschity zhenschin/Russian Society for Protection of Women* (founded in the early 1900s) gave assistance to newly arrived peasant women at urban railway stations, offered public lectures on the dangers of prostitution, founded employment agencies for former prostitutes, and maintained a representative on medical-police committees that supervised prostitutes. In alliance with the state police, this organization also distributed religious journals to city brothels and sponsored the publication of brochures that gave information to prostitutes as to where to turn for shelter and medical help.⁵² Feminists also provided childcare, cheap housing, and literacy classes for the “fallen” women. In contrast, socialists offered women only vague promises of an egalitarian future.

Besides prostitution, progressive women of Late Imperial Russia were concerned with the plight of women at the workplace and the miserable conditions of peasant women.⁵³ Like their Western counterparts, women workers in Russia – white and blue

most compelling depiction of a brothel, the owner and his accomplices were Jewish. Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, 167.

⁵² Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, 100.

⁵³ Some literary historians such as Richard Stites believe that the feminists in Russia were rarely concerned with the plight of the female peasantry, focusing instead on the alliance between educated women and women servants and workers. However, as seen from *The Minutes of the First Assembly of All-Russia Women's Society in 1908* (St. Petersburg:

collar alike – received low wages. They also faced inhumane working conditions, miserable living arrangements, and sexual harassment.⁵⁴ If the situation of Russian women workers resembled that of Western European ones, the lifestyle of the Russian peasantry (who, according to the census of 1897, accounted for more than three quarters of the entire population) was far more destitute and archaic than anywhere in Europe. In her 1908 public address to the First Assembly of All-Russia's Women's Society, the speaker E.N. Schepkina sketched the wretched life of an average woman peasant: "To consider a woman as a being without rights is a common norm in the village. Men own the land and make decisions about the household. ... In addition to working the same shifts as men at harvest time, women knit and sew for the family at the crack of dawn; travel far to fetch the water, bending under the heavy load; tend the cattle and poultry; knead the dough for hours to make enough bread for the workers; wash and wring the heavy linens standing in the icy spring water up to their waist. ... And they do all this while pregnant or after just having a baby... As the statistics shows by the age of fifty-five, a typical Russian *krestianka* has been married for thirty-five years; has gone through twenty or more pregnancies, most of which ended in stillbirths and miscarriages; has buried at least ten of her infant children and is lucky to have two or three living ones."⁵⁵

Tipo-litographia Sankt Peterburgskoi Tjurmy, 1909), pp. 196-210, the harsh living conditions and oppressed legal status of the female peasants were important issues on the agenda of Russian feminist organizations.

⁵⁴ While the number of women employed in white-collar jobs increased during the first decade of the twentieth century, the majority of working women in Late Imperial Russia were employed in the textile, tobacco, leather, and other light industries. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, 110-115.

⁵⁵ The translation from the Russian is mine. As it was considered shameful to show signs of physical weakness or distress, rural women often performed strenuous physical tasks

An archaic way of farming and housekeeping, but also dangerous rituals that surrounded pregnancy, labor, and childbirth were the major causes of a physically straining, miserable existence and early death of Russian peasant women. To speed up hard cases of labor, rural midwives forced “the pregnant woman sufferer to drink soot and walk in circles; hung them upside down or made them sit close to the stove.”⁵⁶

If feminists sought to raise the overall hygiene and literacy of peasant women by sending more educated women to the Russian countryside, socialists pursued – albeit with little success – the political enlightenment of illiterate and “backward” rural female masses.⁵⁷ In contrast to feminists, whose views on women’s emancipation remained a mixture of ad hoc responses to distinct women’s issues, the emerging socialist movement in Russia boasted a well-defined theoretical framework for the Woman Question (although socialists did not single out women’s issues) derived from *The Communist Manifesto of 1848*, Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Bebel’s *Woman under Socialism* (1879), and the writings of the leader of the German socialist women’s movement Klara Zetkin. In 1900, a prominent Russian female Social Democrat and the wife of Lenin, Nadezhda Krupskaya, published her influential brochure

far into their pregnancy, which led to pre-term labor, high mortality rates for both mother and child, and consequent health complications for women. After the birth of a child, women peasants routinely brought their newborns along to the field (as it was considered wasteful to take time to care for the baby) or left them at home, under the inadequate care of other children or ailing elderly adults. Infants died frequently due to overexposure to the elements or neglect. *Trudy S’ezda*, 212-13.

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ In her 1908 speech at the First Assembly of All-Russia Women’s Society, a Schevyreva emphasized that the solution to the Woman Question in the village differed from the one in urban areas. What applied to all peasant women, however, Schevyreva insisted, was that they needed law-enforced reduction of labor and proper education about pregnancy, birth, and infant care. *Trudy s’ezda*, 222.

titled *The Woman Worker*, where she attempted to apply Marxism directly to the various aspects of the Woman Question. In *The Woman Worker*, Krupskaja outlined the disadvantages of capitalism for working women: lack of maternal benefits, insurance, childcare and medical facilities, and an impending threat of prostitution. Using the results of Lenin's research on the Russian village, she also portrayed the wretched lot of the undernourished and overworked woman peasant, who was a frequent victim of domestic abuse. Krupskaja's brochure encouraged proletarian women to join the labor movement and assist in the preparation of the socialist revolution, because only socialism guaranteed them fair pay and legal protection. The socialist state, Krupskaja maintained, would also dramatically improve women's lives by organizing communal kitchens and daycares.⁵⁸

While Krupskaja's work helped to position women's issues onto the agenda of the Russian Social Democrats (drafting a Party program in the early 1900s, Lenin used Krupskaja's arguments to advocate equal political and civil rights for men and women), Alexandra Kollontai became the first female Bolshevik who extensively engaged with the Woman Question. Kollontai (whose works are discussed in Chapter II) departed from the Orthodox Marxist position that claimed the Woman Question was not that of gender but of economics. She insisted that the Sexual Question, namely, sexual relationships and family life, constituted a significant part of women's life and defined her identity; hence, these issues must be discussed as part of socialist revolution.

⁵⁸ Krupskaja, *Selected Works*, 19-21.

The senseless shooting of unarmed demonstrators in 1905 (also known as Bloody Sunday) became a seminal event in the history of the Russian Marxist movement.⁵⁹ It intensified radicalism and lent the women's movement a revolutionary mood. The institution of autocracy – as conceived by Nicolas II – was becoming increasingly anachronistic and inefficient in the context of a modern capitalist state.⁶⁰ Over the course of his reign, Nicholas II (1894 –1917) repeatedly refused to acknowledge the changes wrought by modernization onto the Empire's social canvas, namely, in the mentality of Russia's working and peasant classes, and instead preferred to cling to the myth of the loyal and steadfast Russian people. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, following the tsar's orders, sought to repress self-organizing groups and took a hostile position toward any

⁵⁹In the years 1903-1904 Russia was engaged in a disastrous war with Japan. On Sunday, 9 January 1905, a peaceful worker procession, organized by former Russian Orthodox priest Father Gapon, attempted to deliver a petition to the tsar. This petition requested to end the Russo-Japanese War and grant universal suffrage, fair pay and an eight-hour-long working day. The tsar's infantry troops shot unarmed petitioners in various locations around the city, as well as outside the tsar's city residence on Palace Square. The government's disastrous mishandling of the peaceful workers' demonstration tarred Nicholas II indelibly with bloodshed and oppression and led to a wave of assassinations of governmental officials and policemen and more violent strikes of the workers (the sequence of events later known as Revolution of 1905). Badcock, "Autocracy in Crisis: Nicholas the Last," 24.

⁶⁰ In addition to keeping with the State's original roles – to defend its borders, maintain order within the realm, and collect taxes – the Empire required the development of a representative system of government, a more effective bureaucratic apparatus, and better-coordinated and executed state policies. The modern state also necessitated new and better educational and healthcare systems, transportation, labor and industry legislation, as well as expanded political and civil rights. The eventual violent collapse of autocracy in 1917, modern historians such as Sarah Badcock, Jan Thatcher and others note, was caused in part by the fundamental collision between the "demands of a swiftly modernizing state structure and Russia's increasingly anachronistic style of government." Ian D. Thatcher, ed., *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects*.

labor protection.⁶¹ Nicolas II showed deep distrust in the state's bureaucratic machine and in any form of a representative statewide or local government, and thus hardly assured the coordination between his Ministries, his personal advisors, and their proposed policies.⁶² He attributed the problems he faced in governing the Empire to the intrusion of bureaucrats, and the intrigues of various anti-state groups, namely, Jews and revolutionaries. Hence, the tsar repeatedly ignored the demands of workers to improve labor laws and did little to ameliorate the situation of the peasantry.⁶³ For Nicholas II, the worker unrest and the wave of assassinations of his officials that followed Bloody Sunday represented the result of the activities of a handful of revolutionaries and did not point to more widespread discontent among the proletarian masses.

In the aftermath of the disastrous Russo-Japanese War and Bloody Sunday, the women's movement in Russia became increasingly politicized. While the October Manifesto, the outcome of the revolution of 1905, promised civil liberties and offered Russia an opportunity to develop a constitutional monarchy similar to those of France and Germany, the Russian Fundamental State Laws showed that Nicolas II refused to

⁶¹ Any initiative to channel the growing discontent with the regime among the workers into state-supervised organizations was suppressed by the tsar. In 1902, the head of secret police initiated a pioneering scheme for limited state-sponsored workers' unions, which aimed to operate as a safety valve for worker discontent, providing legal worker's organizations under the firm guidance of the state. As they grew more radical and outspoken these unions were abruptly terminated on the tsar's order. Badcock, "Autocracy in Crisis," 24.

⁶² Badcock, "Autocracy in Crisis: Nicholas the Last," 9

⁶³ Badcock, "Autocracy in Crisis: Nicholas the Last," 20-21.

relinquish any fundamental aspects of his autocratic power.⁶⁴ As the Manifesto did not give women the vote, many progressive women across the social spectrum joined in underground activities of various political parties. In contrast to feminist organizations, which remained small, Russia's socialist circles expanded, attracting a large number of female students and progressive female intelligentsia. As women radicals of the 1870s, many socialist women abandoned their parents, husbands, and children to join the revolutionary movement. Notably, by 1910, the doctrine of Russian Marxism included several points on women, such as the claim that revolutionary effort could best be measured by women's conditions and that women were the best agents of their own emancipation, which undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the movement among female students.⁶⁵ The suffrage campaign in Russia, on the other hand, remained the concern of the few: the Empire lacked a substantial middle class that could appreciate and benefit from the universal franchise; the majority of the population, peasants and laborers, were occupied with more practical issues such as labor laws, childcare, and medical facilities.

The devastation of World War I further radicalized various segments of Russian society and pushed the empire to the brink of revolution. The Woman Question in Russia became closely intertwined with the quest for the abolition of autocracy and the establishment of a democratic, constitutional state. On the eve of the revolution, Russia's

⁶⁴ Peter Waldron, "Late Imperial Constitutionalism," *Autocracy in Crisis*, Jan Thatcher, ed., 28-30.

⁶⁵ Other statements were that only revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat could free women from exploitation and injustice; equal wage for equal labor served as the best guarantor of women's emancipation; women must be freed from the chains of domestic slavery. Krupskaja, *Selected Works*, 24-25.

educated, liberally minded, and professionally employed women, e.g., the New Women, were less concerned with women's reproductive rights or female suffrage than their Western counterparts. Instead, they sought to actively participate in the impending social reconstruction: as theoreticians, politicians, and social activists. As the next Chapter will show, Russian New Women, such as the popular liberal bourgeois author Anastasia Verbitskaia and feminist Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai impatiently awaited a new era in women's history and designed emancipatory paradigms that the imminent revolution, they believed, would help implement. If Verbitskaia and Kollontai both represent Russia's New Women of the transitional period, Anna Karavaeva, the third protagonist of Chapter II, serves as a fitting example of the changes that occurred in the conceptualization of the Woman Question and the New Woman during Stalin's rule. Despite their pronounced differences, all three New Women were influenced by the tradition of Russian female radicalism and as such serve as an effective illustration of paradigmatic shifts that gradually occurred in the status and rights of women in the decades directly preceding and following Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.

1.4 Origins of the Woman Question Debate in Germany

A highly industrialized state with a large and growing middle class, Imperial Germany did not have a parliamentary, constitutional government like that of Great Britain or the USA. Nor did it have an autocratic state along the lines of the Russian Empire. Established in 1871, the German "Eternal League of Princes and Free Cities," as the name suggests, was a federation of independent entities, with separate rulers and

laws.⁶⁶ Although the Kaiser was the official head of government, he was essentially an instrument of the German landowning aristocracy, the Junkers. This aristocratic agrarian elite occupied key positions in the army, the civil service, the judiciary and the government of Germany; it also set the tone in attitudes towards women. Imbued with feudal notions of honor and propriety, the Junkers placed a high value on military service, separate spheres for the sexes and were increasingly hostile to the idea of women's emancipation.

In Imperial Germany, the army held a hegemonic position among other social institutions: it could declare a state of siege in times of internal unrest, establish a military government, institute censorship of the press, imprison the opposition, and curtail civil liberties.⁶⁷ Besides political power, the army yielded enormous influence on moral codes and standards of German civil society, including its attitudes towards women. If in the Russian Empire economic and political backwardness, a high rate of illiteracy, and the lack of a substantial middle class curtailed the development and impact of a large and viable feminist movement, in Germany the social distribution of power explained the continuing restriction of women's rights and the stagnation of the women's movement well into the twentieth century. Men, it was believed, earned their rights because they sacrificed their lives for the nation during war, while women did not deserve the vote –

⁶⁶ More specifically, the German Empire consisted of four kingdoms (Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony, and Württemberg), six grand duchies, five duchies, seven small principalities, and three free cities (Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck). Matthew Jefferies, *Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871-1918*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9.

⁶⁷ The respect for military strength was also influenced by the fact that the unification of the north German states into the North German Confederation and the inclusion of the southern German states in a German Empire under the Prussian monarchy in 1871, e.g., the creation of the *Kaiserreich*, was the result of Prussia's military victories.

and other rights – because they did not serve in the army and die in battle. The government and the army were a male sphere; women belonged to the home. This widespread notion of service as the basis for rights was further emphasized in the ideology of the Protestant church, which stressed service to the State and community and subservience to the ruling class as the most vital moral values.⁶⁸ Notably, the women's liberation movement in Germany differed from that in the USA in that it did not tie women's rights to the liberal idea of natural rights, e.g., that all individuals were born free and therefore deserved equal rights; instead, German feminists demanded the extension of women's rights because German women performed services for the nation comparable to those of German men.⁶⁹ Most women's organizations and associations in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Germany were founded to alleviate social problems created by industrialization and urbanization and to fix a perceived cultural degeneration (*Kulturverfall*).⁷⁰

The belief in the moral and intellectual inferiority of women served as the ideological foundation for the laws in Imperial Germany. Furthermore, contemporary philosophical, psychological, and medical discourse insisted on women's moral and mental inadequacy

⁶⁸ For more on the Church and its influence in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1972); Catherine Prelinger, *Charity, Challenge, and Change: Religious Dimensions of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Women's Movement in Germany*, e-book (Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 1987).

⁶⁹ For more on differences between American and German feminists, see Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

⁷⁰ The women's movement in Hannover emerged to combat the negative effects of industrialization and urbanization. Reforming working class households by instilling bourgeois values, standards, and norms constituted one of their major goals. Nancy R. Reagin, *A German Women's Movement: Classes and Gender in Hannover, 1880-1933* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 12-14.

well into the twentieth century.⁷¹ It was presumed that due to their emotionality and irrationality, women did not possess the ability to make reasonable decisions and needed a male guardian. According to the Prussian Civil Law, which was in effect until the 1890s, a wife was not a legal person; the husband was the legal guardian of his wife and her children and the owner of all property. Unlike Russian women, who could hold land and serfs to their name, German women did not possess property and inheritance rights. Even the amended Civil Code of 1900, which remained binding until after WWII, only marginally improved women's legal rights. Although women received the status of legal persons and no longer required their husbands' permission to enter employment, they still had no legal rights over her children and property.⁷²

While Germany remained a militaristic and conservative state for most of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, its intellectual and political elite was not impervious to the ideas of the French revolution, namely, ideas about the nature of citizenship and the relationship between the individual and the state. Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, German liberals described a harmonious state as based on "maternal" values such as emotional attachment, unity of feeling and organic bonding, and not on "paternal" values such as authority and obedience. The nineteenth-century German debate about authority, citizenship, and community was also greatly influenced by the pedagogical theories of the Swiss Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746 -1827) and his German student Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852), who drew a conceptual link between a new form of family based on maternal love rather than paternal discipline

⁷¹ Schopenhauer's essay *Über die Weiber* (1851) and Weininger's treatise *Geschlecht und Character* (1902) serve as fitting examples of this misogynist train of thought.

⁷² Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 14-15

and a new form of state, which was based on maternal values and rooted in unity of feeling rather than authority.

In her study of nineteenth-century German feminism, Ann Taylor Allen aptly describes how Pestalozzi and Froebel's pedagogical theories contributed to the development of the Woman Question in Imperial Germany. In their pedagogical essays, Pestalozzi and Froebel re-introduced maternal and childrearing practices as vitally important to the welfare of the state, and the functions of motherhood – as morally shaping and culture-producing ones, not just menial and custodian.⁷³ While Froebel and Pestalozzi's theories did not espouse the emancipation of women in the traditional (modern) sense, e.g., as the extension of political and legal rights to women, they enlisted women in a new, socially significant way, drawing the public's attention to the potential of women's "maternal energies" and talents. Because Froebel believed that all moral and social consciousness in children originated in their relationship with the mother, he suggested professional training for women as early childhood educators, a vocation he termed "spiritual motherhood." In Froebel's innovative educational institution, the kindergarten, women employed their maternal gifts in the public sphere, serving the state not only as biological but also as "social" mothers.⁷⁴

⁷³ Contemporary lawgivers and pedagogues portrayed mother's work as limited to natural or instinctual activities. Pestalozzi's pedagogic theory modified the existing father-centered style of parenting, transferring much of the moral and cultural as well as physical responsibility of childrearing from the father to the mother. Froebel and Pestalozzi also suggested the secularization of the concepts of child rearing and maternal duty and the incorporation of these functions into public policy. Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*, 24.

⁷⁴ Froebel's kindergarten synthesized the mother-centered pedagogy of Pestalozzi with the institutional approach to education advocated by the German philosopher and one of the founders of German idealism Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762 –1814). Unlike traditional

Despite the official ban of kindergarten education by the Prussian minister of education Karl von Raumer in 1851, the idea of kindergartens inspired reformers across the political spectrum. In the view of German bourgeois feminists, the professional training as kindergarten teachers proposed by Froebel not only created job opportunities for middle-class single women, but elevated childcare into a dignified and respected profession.⁷⁵ The advancement of Froebel's kindergartens, later known as the kindergarten movement, became a major focus for nineteenth-century German bourgeois feminists, as it allowed women to perform meaningful, socially useful work. In an era where most educational establishments were under the leadership of men, kindergartens and kindergarten societies represented enclaves of female power: there, women worked as administrators and teachers, organized seminars for kindergarten trainees, and created a familial and nurturing community for children and their parents.

For German socialists the kindergarten exemplified an educational establishment that fostered initiative and independent thinking rather than blind obedience to authority – a

charity kindergartens that emphasized discipline and authority, Froebel's kindergarten was based on "motherly" teaching methods, such as internalized rather than externally imposed discipline and familial atmosphere, and focused on the child's individual development. Froebel's educational establishment blurred the traditional boundary between the private and public spheres by taking women and small children out of the home into a public educational institution. It also formed a formal institutional culture, which centered on intimate, familial values. Günter Erning, Karl Neumann, Jürgen Reyer, eds., *Geschichte des Kindergartens*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1987).

⁷⁵ In 1863 an avid supporter of Froebel's philosophy Bertha Marenholtz-von Bülow founded the Society for Popular Education, which used funds from tuition-based kindergartens to finance a training institute for female kindergarten teachers and a Free Kindergarten for the children of the poor in Berlin. Froebel's niece, the former head of the institute for women Henriette Schrader-Breymann, expanded Marenholtz's enterprise by adding a kindergarten society in 1874, which later became known as a Pestalozzi-Froebel house. The demand for kindergarten teaching among middle class women was reflected in the increase of training seminars: by 1877, twenty training seminars had been established in various German cities. Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 98, 117.

worthy alternative to the repressive educational institutions of the past. In his treatise on education titled *Kindergarten und Schule als sozialdemokratische Anstalten* (1877), socialist educator Adolf Douai praised the kindergarten as an institution that inculcated the virtues of cooperation and social responsibility, while the socialist leader August Bebel stressed that, as a social service, the kindergarten supported a new, elevated status for both women and children.⁷⁶

Besides contributing to the establishment of kindergartens, the ideology of spiritual/ social motherhood, derived from Pestalozzi and Froebel's pedagogic theories, became the philosophical foundation for the German bourgeois women's movement that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Instead of advocating or exalting the liberation of women as individuals or as a group *from* their maternal role or values, feminists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century presented motherhood (both social and biological) and maternal energy as the foundation of women's claim to dignity, equality, and an expanded participation in both public and private spheres.⁷⁷ For German bourgeois feminists, the maternalist ideology embodied, as Christoph Sachße puts it, "the incarnation of life and humanity in a technical world of capitalism and bureaucracy, of social disintegration and cultural decay."⁷⁸

While the maternalist ethic served as the ideological foundation of the German liberal bourgeois women's movement, the contemporary belief in the existing

⁷⁶ in Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany*, 106-107.

⁷⁷ Allen, "Feminism and Motherhood in Germany," 113.

⁷⁸ Christoph Sachße, "Social Mothers: The Bourgeois Women's Movement and German Welfare-State Formation," *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and The Origins of welfare States*, (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), 142.

demographic crisis called the *Frauenüberschuss* (female surplus) greatly impacted its focus. Although the female surplus was *not* a real population event, but a cultural construction, the perception that there were significantly more single women in Germany than men played a powerful role in creating the vision, practical work, and bourgeois orientation of the German women's movement from the time of its inception in 1865.⁷⁹ The Woman Question (Frauenfrage) in Germany was often perceived as a "singles" question' (Ledigenfragen). Likewise, contemporaries often termed the German women's movement (Frauenbewegung) as a Jungfrauenbewegung (movement of virgins connoting old maids). Because laws of individual states in the German Empire precluded married women from working in any professional field, the discussion about working opportunities necessarily centered upon single women. If in Russia many middle class women sought employment because they could no longer rely on serf-based economics, in Germany, it was middle-class women who could not or did not want to marry who needed paid work. Convincing society that childless and unmarried women could and should contribute to the welfare of the state, and thereby removing the cultural stigma attached to spinsters, became a major goal of the women's movement in Germany.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Through her demographic analysis Dollard affirms that the female surplus was a cultural construction. Nevertheless, this scholar stresses that contemporary belief in the surplus of unmarried women was foundational to the moderate, radical and religious German movements. Catherine L. Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*, 11.

⁸⁰ For more on the cultural stigma attached to spinsters, see Catherine L. Dollard, *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*, 3.

1.5 German Women's Movements

In the view of the German bourgeois feminists, organized in 1865 under the leadership of the social novelist Louise Otto Peters into the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein (General German Women's Association), motherly gifts of women, e.g., their social motherhood, could effectively alleviate poverty, assist orphans, and help establish public nutrition programs.⁸¹ Henriette Goldschmidt, a leader within the General German Women's Association, believed that properly organized women could do more for the Social Question than the best constructed systems because of "their warmth of heart and moral strength."⁸² Echoing Goldschmidt, feminists such as Alice von Salomon, Frieda Duensing, and Anna von Gierke insisted that the compassionate, individualized approach of the women-led welfare organizations resolved social problems more effectively than the rule-oriented bureaucracy of the state.⁸³ Feminist welfare

⁸¹ A modern understanding of feminism, e.g., as a doctrine that advocated equal rights for women, does not apply to the women's liberation movement in nineteenth-century Germany. The leaders of the German women's movement such as Gertrud Bäumer, Marie Stritt, and Anita Augspurg never referred to themselves as *Feministinnen*. Within the German women's movement itself there were different interpretation of the goals of the movement. Augsburg agitated for female suffrage, while Bäumer connected women's emancipation with the spreading of the female influence, embodied in spiritual motherhood, patriotism, and commitment to the collective identity of the Volk. The socialist Klara Zetkin, on the other hand, maintained that the struggle for legal rights for women indicated a narrow approach, as women could not be truly emancipated without a proletarian revolution. Richard Evans, "The Concept of Feminism. Note for Practicing Historians", *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries: A Social and Literary History*, Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes, eds, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 248.

⁸² Quoted in Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 102.

⁸³ The professionalization and bureaucratization of social services under Bismarck's government represented a threat to charities, which were major centers of female power.

organizations such as the Mädchen- und Frauengruppen für soziale Hilfsarbeit (Girls' and Women's Groups for Social Assistance Work), founded by Minna Cauer and Jeannette Schwerin in 1893, sought to redefine the concepts of social service and volunteer work. The organization's leaders such as Alice Salomon believed that social work was a privilege and a blessing for propertied women, and an act of *true* emancipation.⁸⁴ According to Solomon, emancipation through social responsibility, besides allowing middle-class women to learn useful skills, gave them an opportunity to mold the character and influence the behavior of working class families, thereby strengthening the unity of the nation.⁸⁵ Salomon's idea that social work was a powerful means to reform working class households resonated with many women's organizations in late nineteenth-century Germany such as the Hannover Patriotic Women's association. The Infant Care Clinics (Säuglingsfürsorgestellen) organized by the members of the association in the years 1906-1910 in order to reduce infant mortality among working class families, effectively illustrate how, besides giving monetary assistance, the Hannover Patriotic Women's association sought to instill habits of good mothering in proletarian mothers. The brochures published by the association explained the benefits of breastfeeding (versus bottle feeding), suggested a family diet, and outlined the activities mothers could

In order to preserve their influence, women activists pushed for admission into the state bureaucratic apparatus, pointing out the value of women-led charitable establishments. For more on 'social motherhood' as a metaphor for a female approach to social reform see Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 206-28, Sachße; Meyer- Renschhausen and others.

⁸⁴ In M. Simmel, "Alice Salomon. Vom Dienst der bürgerlichen Tochter am Volksganzen," in: Sachße, C. and Tennstedt, F. (eds.): *Jahrbuch der Sozialarbeit* 4. Reinbek/ Hamburg: Rowohlt; Kuhlmann, C., *Alice Salomon. Ihr Beitrag zur Entwicklung der Theorie und Praxis Sozialer Arbeit*, (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien-Verlag, 2000).

⁸⁵ Quoted in Christoph Sachße, "Social Mothers," 146-148

do to develop the talents and skills of their children. These models of motherhood and childrearing, however, were hardly applicable to the lifestyle and income level of working class families.⁸⁶ The association's advice and instructions reflected bourgeois norms and values: they implied that the mother stayed at home and had the time (and income) to design the diet and lessons for her children. As a result, many proletarian women, as well as women socialists, perceived the attempt of German bourgeois women activists to espouse the values and norms of their class as humiliating patronage.

If maternalist ideology shaped the rhetoric of the German feminist movement in the second half of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the issue of female suffrage played a less consequential role. While the first president of the General German Women's Association, Otto-Peters, engaged in feminist propaganda of the classical kind, demanding equal rights for women in all spheres, including the vote, the organization as a whole over the course of its existence remained largely apolitical and focused on propagating women's "maternal potential" rather than political and legal restructuring of German society.⁸⁷ Because until 1908, German women could neither join political parties nor attend political gatherings, many German activists viewed the

⁸⁶ The brochures stressed the importance of cleanliness in the house and a child's room, a regular timetable for a child's day, a particular diet and menu for each meal, precise order and methods for washing children, and rules for homework and play. Reagin, *A German Women's Movement*, 91-94

⁸⁷ The German bourgeois women's movement's concept of social motherhood resembled female reform policies and reform ideologies traditionally summarized under the umbrella term of "social feminism" in the USA. Unlike the USA, in Germany, the concept of "social motherhood" was championed by the *organized women's movement*, e.g., by bourgeois women who defined themselves as feminists and sought not only to reform the social situation of mothers and children, but to extend female influence and female culture in society in general. Christoph Sachße, "Social Mothers: The Bourgeois Women's Movement and German Welfare-State Formation," *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and The Origins of welfare States*, 156

vote for women as a proposition that was simply out of reach. Conversely, ideas about the humanizing and harmonizing powers of maternal energy allowed German bourgeois feminists to work within the existing cultural and social frameworks, as they re-enforced rather than challenged traditional vision of femininity. Early feminists such as Bremen teacher Betty Gleim championed the cause of unmarried and childless women, who could not rely on their family income, by emphasizing that vocations such as teaching and charitable work fulfilled women's "natural calling" of motherhood. Other feminists advocated the professional involvement of women in the medical profession, as women doctors could better understand the needs of a female body. In the period of 1890-1914, the presence of large numbers of women in voluntary welfare work allowed the General German Women's Association to argue for the right to sit on school and welfare boards and have an equal voice with men in determining their policies.⁸⁸ Maternalist ideology, not common feminism, enabled the German bourgeois women's movement to use the system to advance their goals.⁸⁹

By the turn of the century, the emergence of new professional and educational organizations for women and the proliferation of local women's organizations created a need for a central coordinating body. In 1894, the General German Women's Association

⁸⁸ Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 29.

⁸⁹ The petition campaign to gain access to women into the medical field gathered 55,000 signatures. The petition, as well as Mathilde Weber's influential text titled *Female Physicians for Women's Diseases* (*Ärztinnen für weibliche Krankheiten*) both argued that women doctors were naturally suited to understand and treat the diseases of their sex. This argument proved to be effective in dealing with the Reich authorities: in 1899, an action by the Bundesrat opened medical certification for women. James Albsetti, "Women and Professions in Imperial Germany," in *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries: A Social and Literary History*, 96.

joined thirty-four other women's organizations to form the Federation of German Women's Association (Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, or BDF) under the leadership of Auguste Schmidt. By March 1895 the Federation included sixty-five organizations with 50,000 members; by 1901 it contained 137 associations with 70,000 members.⁹⁰ Similar to Russian feminists, feminists in Imperial Germany carefully avoided direct confrontation with the authorities and did not intend to undermine the existing political system.⁹¹ The BDF consistently expressed its loyalty to the German government in words and in deeds, hoping that co-operation would bring the women's movement much-desired concessions.⁹² What distinguished the German feminists from the feminist movement in Russia and the United States, as well as from the socialist and radical women's movements, was their pursuit of the creation of a distinct female culture. Instead of rejecting or altering the role society prescribed to them, as radical and socialist women did, German bourgeois feminists directed their energies to ennobling social and

⁹⁰ Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 37.

⁹¹ The fear of closure often curtailed the efforts of the German bourgeois feminists. When the new Civil Code, which effectively nullified the parental rights of mothers during the lifetime of the father, was announced publicly in 1887, the General German Women's Association attempted to modify the provisions of the code by drafting respectful petitions to the Reichstag. It gave up on the issue altogether when it learned that the petitions were largely ignored. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 88.

⁹² The public statements of the BDF during the first decade of the twentieth century expressed a strongly nationalistic line on foreign policy. A booklet in 1899 claimed that the BDF did not want Germany to disarm as long as "the world bristles with weapons around us." Refusing in 1899 and 1907 to join in worldwide women's demonstrations for peace organized by feminist organizations in other countries, the Federation reasoned that "we do not want Germany to face other nations weaker ...if she should be compelled, despite her love for peace, to defend her national integrity in any war that might be forced upon her." Quoted in Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 209.

biological motherhood in the eyes of society.⁹³ Consequently, their social criticism often focused on those institutions that did not allow female nature, e.g., femininity and motherliness, to flourish. Helene Lange, a leader within the General German Women's Association, criticized the educational system of Imperial Germany not because it imbued young women with rudimentary academic knowledge, but because it did not foster womanliness and because it poorly prepared them for their proper profession: motherhood.⁹⁴

In the ideological framework of German bourgeois feminists, then, the goal of the women's movement was not political, sexual, and social equalization or the democratization of society, but the expansion of female culture and the consequent transformation of the rational, self-centered, and industrialized state. Writing in 1905, the future president of the BDF Gertrud Bäumer (whose works are described in Chapter III) defined the ultimate aim of female emancipation not as "the formal equality, but the equally full and rich influence of all female values on our culture, [and] a richer flow of specifically female forces into the world's activities."⁹⁵ Because women *were* different, Bäumer claimed, they could not benefit from the same rights as men; instead, they should aspire to have the rights that would suit most comfortably to their feminine nature and

⁹³ According to Allen, the German feminists' idea of motherhood reflected a specifically German national culture and German conceptions of citizenship. Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany*, 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 116.

⁹⁵ Gertrud Bäumer, *Die Frau* (1905), quoted in Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 155.

allow them to develop their femininity to the fullest degree. Only then could they contribute to the most noble of tasks: the “conversion of the masses into a people.”⁹⁶

Service to the state via maternal gifts and energies (and not emancipation in the private forms of behavior such as sexuality and dress), formed the core of the German bourgeois feminist ideology in Wilhelmine Germany. Notably, by the 1900s, the moderate members of the BDF increasingly divorced women’s emancipation from the democratization of society and female suffrage, concentrating instead on social welfare and limiting their involvement in politics to a minimum. This non-confrontational, apolitical attitude and the resulting inability of the bourgeois feminists to improve the position of women in Civil Law, education, and the professions were the major reasons why the younger generation of progressive women did not join the BDF during the Weimar Republic, but turned to socialists or women radicals instead. In addition, unlike the previous generation, many young German women were reluctant to chart their destiny between social and/or biological motherhood. During the Weimar Republic, as Chapter III will demonstrate, purported professional success, fashions, and sexual freedom of the New Woman posed a serious challenge to maternalist ideology.

By the early 1900s, the issues of education and work for women no longer dominated the German debate on the Woman Question. Nor did the increasing concentration of the BDF on social welfare satisfy some of its members. Instead, feminists such as Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, Minna Cauer, Adele Schreiber, Anita

⁹⁶ Bäumer’s views echoed the writings of the politician Heinrich Naumann, who, among other things, advocated völkisch collectivism, imperialist nationalism, and the state’s intervention into the private affairs of individuals.

Augspurg, and Käthe Schirmacher focused on the sexual emancipation of women and female suffrage. From 1904 until 1908, the German women's movement became increasingly polarized over the issues of sexual emancipation and the female vote, resulting in a gradual division into moderates and radicals. Unable to persuade the BDF to include the issues of prostitution, women's reproductive rights, and female vote on the Federation's agenda, the radicals formed their own organizations: the Suffrage Union (1902) and the League for the Protection of Mothers (1904).

The New Morality (*die Neue Ethik*), advocated by Helene Stöcker and her supporters, served as the ideological foundation for women radicals. The New Moralists demanded not only legal equality for men and women within marriage and their legal relations to their children, but the legal recognition of "free marriage" and the same rights for children born out of wedlock. More unorthodox, however, were their views on women's reproductive rights and their sexuality. For Helene Stöcker, the existing beliefs about women's distaste for and lack of sexual enjoyment represented a false, anachronistic misconception and a cultural construction that no longer (if ever) held true. Traditional patriarchal marriage, devoid of sexual attraction between husband and wife, in Stöcker's view, was the primary culprit in the rise of prostitution and the number of illegitimate children. To reform the institution of family implied a need to reform the values that stood behind it. Influenced by Nietzschean idea about the creation of the self (which in his framework applied only to men), Stöcker encouraged women to seek sexual fulfillment in their relationships with men (their husbands) as well as self-realization in professional activity. Women, she claimed, deserved to experience sexual fulfillment in

their marriage; they also were capable of combining their roles of mother and wife with a career.⁹⁷

The Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform (The League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform), established in 1904 by Ruth Bré, became the first women's organization to put Stöcker's ideas into practice.⁹⁸ The first major feminist organization in Germany (and in Europe) that placed the issues of birth control and abortion on its public agenda, the League was also one of the few feminist organizations that enjoyed significant male support.⁹⁹ With its membership notably smaller than the membership of the BDF,¹⁰⁰ the League saw active political involvement. Besides publishing pamphlets and petitions that demanded the legalization of abortion and the extension of municipal welfare to unmarried mothers, the League agitated for the introduction of sex education in state-supported schools. It also arranged lectures on contraception for proletarian women. Repression and police supervision, the League members argued, could not fight prostitution, venereal diseases, sex crimes, and

⁹⁷ Helene Stöcker, *Resolutionen des Deutschen Bundes für Mutterschutz 1905-1916*, (microform).

⁹⁸ The founder Ruth Bré had imagined the League as an organization that would set up mother-colonies in the countryside, where unmarried mothers and their children would perform light agricultural work. Bré's ultimate aim was to improve "the state of the nation through the breeding of the healthy." Her rural utopia echoed the ideas of Social Darwinism and anti-urban philosophy.

⁹⁹ Nearly a third of the League members were male. Physicians, specialists on venereal diseases, and dermatologists constituted the largest male group; others came from the revisionist Socialist Democrats. Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 128.

¹⁰⁰ According to *Statistik der Frauenorganisationen im Deutschen Reiche*, in 1909, the League counted nearly 25,000 of members. The table is quoted in Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 116.

pornography effectively, as the root of the evil lay in the minds of the people.¹⁰¹ Despite its progressive agenda and untiring agitation, the League for the Protection of Mothers failed to achieve any significant changes in the legal status of unmarried women nor did the organization grow significantly to rival the BDF. The internal squabbles, public scandals, and no less than seven lawsuits ruined the League's infrastructure, causing its eventual demise in 1914.¹⁰² Yet Stöcker's ideas about women's reproductive rights, sexuality, and the right to self-realization, notwithstanding the lack of official support, undoubtedly resonated with some liberal bourgeois German women, and were put into practice by a small, but visible group of so-called new women in the Weimar Republic.

Besides women's sexual emancipation, radical women such as Minna Cauer, Anita Augspurg, and Käthe Schirmacher ardently pursued the issue of the female vote. Writing in 1905, Cauer explained that their suffragist movement sought to "educate the State and society so that recognition of women's equal rights is not necessary, but also desirable for the maintenance of order, manners and morality."¹⁰³ As seen from the 1908 leaflet of the Suffrage Union, Cauer and her supporters envisioned women's suffrage as bringing a moral reform: "Women's suffrage spreads culture, ... raises the level of

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 149

¹⁰² Ironically, the two leaders of the League, Adele Schreiber and Helene Stöcker were the reason for the public scandals and lawsuits. Upon discovering that Stöcker had been living in a common-law marriage with one of her supporters, Adele Schreiber accused her of sexual promiscuity. In return, Stöcker attempted to prove that Schreiber had had sexual relationships with more than one of her supporters on the League's committee. The seven lawsuits that followed exposed the private lives of the two radical women to the dismay of the general public, as well as the League's members. For more on the League, see Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement*.

¹⁰³ "Warum fordern wir das Frauernstimmrecht?" (1905). Quoted in Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 76.

politics, as only candidates of blameless character will receive support from women, ... encourages peace and harmony between different peoples, ... effectively promotes abstinence and thus prevents the ruin of a people through alcohol, ... opposes the exploitation of the economically and physically weak, takes pity on children and tormented animals, and makes laws against cruelty to animals and the exploitation of their working strength to exhaustion.”¹⁰⁴ Despite the fact that the radical part of the women’s movement did not insist that women should have the vote because they performed services to the State – as German feminists had in the past – the link between duties and rights often surfaced in their propaganda.

Like the League for the Protection of Mothers, the Suffrage Union failed to gain any remarkable popular support: in its heyday in the years 1908-1914, the members of the suffragist organizations numbered only 14,000. Internal conflicts and external influences such as World War I and the rise of conservative and völkisch movements limited the influence of the Union and contributed to its disintegration in 1914, four years before the Constitution of the Weimar Republic granted women the long-awaited vote.

While conservative feminists agitated for employment, education opportunities and for the expansion of female culture and while women radicals pursued sexual emancipation and female suffrage, the proletarian women’s movement focused on issues related to the workplace and the exploitation of female labor. Under the stern leadership of Klara Zetkin, women socialists formed a large, well-organized, and extremely militant branch of the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany. The German Socialist Party (SPD),

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

formed in 1875, resulted from an uneasy coalition between reformist and Marxist socialists.¹⁰⁵ As the party shifted towards Marxism, it also altered its attitudes toward women, becoming the only liberal party in Germany until the twentieth century that endorsed political and legal equality for both sexes. According to the leader of the SPD, August Bebel, the emancipation of humanity included social independence and the equality of the sexes. In his influential book *Women under Socialism* (1879), which became the ideological foundation for the SPD, Bebel stressed that the proletarian revolution could not be achieved without women's participation.¹⁰⁶

To educated women such as Klara Zetkin, Bebel's idea about the interconnection between women's issues and socialist revolution touched upon the most significant dilemma the women socialists faced: the relationship between the Woman Question and the Social Question. In a series of publications in the Party's journal *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), Zetkin outlined the Cause of the Proletarian Woman: the fight against class exploitation. Social inequality – be it patriarchal oppression or the exploitation of female labor – Klara Zetkin maintained, resulted from the existing capitalist system and could be

¹⁰⁵ The SPD was the result of the merger of two principle groups – one of them created by Ferdinand Lassalle, the other led by individuals who espoused Marxist views. Despite the antisocialist law of 1879, the SPD was the largest party in the German parliament. Alfred. G. Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 37.

¹⁰⁶ In this book Bebel argued that women's oppression was a byproduct of class society and could be eradicated only by a proletarian revolution. He identified several sources of women's oppression in a capitalist society. Women were exploited as workers, as under conditions of capitalist economy a woman earned significantly less than a man. They were worn down by domestic work and taking care of children, and were also victims of the double standard of sexual morality. Finally, women were victims of contemporary restrictive fashion. The socialist society, the end goal of the proletarian revolution, according to Bebel, would give women economic independence and personal freedom, relieving them from monotonous and strenuous domestic work and establishing collective daycare for their children. Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, 6.

remedied only through a socialist revolution. The Woman Question did not exist separately from the Social Question, because the propertied class dictated laws for proletarian men *and* women. The assumed phenomenon of surplus woman (Frauenüberschuss) provided socialists with proof of the unsettled, antagonistic, and rotten nature of bourgeois society.¹⁰⁷ Proletarian women could not share the goals of the surplus middle-class women who pursued job opportunities and professional training to compete with bourgeois men in the capitalist economy. Similarly, the focus on gender issues such as sexual emancipation represented a narrow, class-bound approach. In the socialist framework, the needs of the working class took precedence over the needs of the female sex.¹⁰⁸

Neither Bebel nor Zetkin's writings grappled comprehensively with how a proletarian revolution might affect the connections between female identity and marital status, femininity and class. Instead, German socialists, as did Russian socialists, resorted to the vague conceptions of sexual equality and communal life under socialism. The ambiguity about what constituted socialist marriage and sexual relationships may have explained SPD's limited acceptance by German women and contributed to the rise of conservatism.

1.6 The Woman Question in the Weimar Republic

Similar to what transpired in Russia during the first decades of the twentieth century, the German women's movement was greatly affected by domestic and

¹⁰⁷ For more on the discussion of the female surplus in the socialist circles, see Dollard, *Unmarried in Imperial Germany*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ Klara Zetkin, *Selected Works*, 30-40.

international historic events. World War I, the November Revolution of 1918 and the subsequent establishment of the Weimar Republic not only transformed the German political and social milieu but notably changed the status of and attitudes towards women. World War I in Germany, as in Russia, forced women to enter the workforce and fill the civil and administrative positions vacated by men. For bourgeois feminist organizations such as the BDF, the mobilization of women for the war effort became one of the major tasks and the fulfillment of their patriotic duty. During the war, a significant number of middle-class women worked in social and nursing services, while even more working class women were employed as munitions workers.¹⁰⁹ Notably, the increased presence of women in heavy industry forced employers to introduce an eight-hour day and improve working conditions, as well as to provide daytime childcare and dormitories for single female workers.¹¹⁰ Along with the right to enter universities, these changes necessitated by the war represented a significant expansion in women's rights and opportunities compared to the previous century. Still, the most important legacy of the war for the

¹⁰⁹ Most scholars agree that while the female workforce grew during the war years, the increase in employment of women was far from massive. Instead, there was a considerable change in the *types* of work performed by women. According to Matthew Stibbe, 400, 000 women now left domestic service and the agricultural sector, while a slightly bigger number of women took traditionally male positions in war-related industries, such as metalworking, machine building and chemicals, or entered temporary administrative positions on behalf of the military or civilian authorities. Even with this increase, after the war, unpaid family assistants on small farms and in businesses still formed the largest single group of working women in the German Reich in 1925 – 4.63 million persons, compared to 4.2 million women in regular (paid) employment. Of those working for pay, one million women worked in agriculture and 1.3 million were employed as domestic servants. Women who had white-collar jobs constituted 1.5 million. Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, (London: Oxford University Press Inc, 2003), 11-12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 10

Woman Question in Germany was the public acceptance – no matter how short-lived – of women’s professional employment regardless of their class.

The November revolution of 1919 and the subsequent establishment of a parliamentary republic in Germany seemed to have brought another significant gain for women, for the Constitution of the Weimar Republic granted the long-awaited female suffrage.¹¹¹ On the surface, the reforms in both local and national laws introduced by the Weimar Constitution of 1919 ameliorated the position of women in Germany: The Constitution opened all civil offices and guaranteed women equality in marriage and civic life. In addition, the Weimar government attempted to employ women in an extensive network of state welfare services as professional social workers. The ambiguous wording of the Constitution of 1918, however, while formally granting women rights, also reflected how limited they really were.¹¹²

The provisions of the Constitution concerning women had an adverse effect on the bourgeois women’s movement. Because traditionally, bourgeois women’s clubs and organizations were involved in social work, charity, and other welfare projects, the State’s official takeover of these services left many members of the BDF with nothing to do. Unlike professional, religious, and socialist organizations, whose *raison d’être*

¹¹¹ According to Matthew Stibbe, nearly eighty percent of eligible women exercised their new political right in 1919, while almost ten percent of the delegates to the new National Assembly were women. *Women in the Third Reich*, 12.

¹¹² Articles 109 and 119 of the Constitution declared that “men and women have basically the same rights and duties” and that “marriage rests on the equality of rights of both sexes” respectively, while Article 128 opened all civil offices to women. The First Chamber of the national legislature in 1921 demonstrated, however, how conservative the upper crust of the government remained. The Reichstag rejected the admittance of women to courts as lay assessors and jury members on the grounds that women were too emotional to reach a fair verdict. Evans, *The Feminist Movement*, 246.

included other missions, German feminist organizations began to lose their footing and identity in the Weimar Republic.¹¹³ In addition, the female vote, which was granted as the result of November revolution, elicited an ambivalent response from German bourgeois women as well. On the one hand, the leaders of the bourgeois feminist organizations were not accustomed to exercising their new political right and operating in a male sphere of influence and with masculine political tactics. On the other hand, many bourgeois women could not adjust to the reality of women's suffrage, since it resulted from Germany's military defeat and revolution. Writing in 1918, the wife of Max Weber and a leading BDF moderate, Marianne Weber, noted in an article that it was "unbearably painful" to receive political freedom out of "collapse of our national hopes, and through shattering of the state's form of being."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the establishment of democracy did not alleviate the postwar civil, economic, and political unrest, nor did it bring women lasting security in the workplace or in academia; on the contrary, the Weimar Republic ushered a new era of instability and growing popular discontent.

The increasing popular dissatisfaction with the new democratic government was caused largely by Germany's defeat in the war and the conditions of the Peace Treaty, which became a permanent economic, psychological and political burden on the German nation. Unwilling to accept Germany's guilt in starting the war and its humiliating defeat,

¹¹³ The BDF experienced a remarkable loss of members during the Weimar Republic as women's professional organizations that formed a significant part of the Association no longer needed the BDF to represent them and could pursue their economic goals by dealing directly with employers and government officials. It is also important to note that the Depression of the 1920s depleted the funds of the BDF, curtailing its ability to finance projects and assemblies. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, and Nancy Reagin, *A German Movement. Classes and Gender in Hannover, 1880-1933* and others.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Nancy Reagin, *A German Women's Movement. Classes and Gender in Hannover, 1880-1933*, 204.

many prominent military leaders and the officials in the German Foreign office circulated the so-called “stab in the back” theory, blaming the Weimar politicians at home, the Marxists, and the Jews for the lost war. The “punitive peace,” imposed onto Germany by the Treaty in Versailles, was perceived as the result of the ineptitude of the Weimar government. Under the Treaty, Germany suffered great territorial losses,¹¹⁵ including economically valuable areas of Alsace-Lorraine and Upper Silesia, and was cut off from East Prussia by the Polish Corridor. Germany was also obliged to pay reparations to the injured parties and allow the stationing of allied troops in parts of the Rhineland for at least fifteen years as a guarantee that the treaty would be honored.¹¹⁶ When hyperinflation and massive unemployment struck in the early 1920s, many Germans blamed the Weimar government for ruining the domestic economy through its compliance with the reparation payments.

In addition, to German conservatives and liberals alike, the frequent change of chancellors testified to the government’s inability to stabilize Germany and provide effective (and lasting) leadership: Indeed, during its fourteen-year existence, the Republic had twenty-one cabinets and fifteen chancellors, six within the first five years.¹¹⁷ During the Weimar Era, multiple political parties and special interest groups manipulated the

¹¹⁵ As Alessandra Minerbi notes in *New Illustrated History of the Nazis*, Germany lost thirteen percent of its territory, including industrial land with seventy-five percent of the country’s iron-ore deposits and twenty five percent of its coalmines (13).

¹¹⁶ The reparations to the Allies (6600 million British pounds) became a permanent economic, psychological, and political burden on the German nation. Modern historians such as Bernadski, A.J. Nicholas, Mathew Hughes, and Chris Mann argue, however, that the true culprit of the hyperinflation was Germany’s internal debt during the war, not the reparations imposed by the Versailles treaty.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Bernadski, *A Concise History of Nazi Germany*, 13.

government in order to pursue their own interests, causing left-wing intellectuals such as Carl von Ossietzky and Kurt Tucholsky to blame the republic for instituting neither socialism nor real democracy,¹¹⁸ and right-wing groups, such as the WWI-veterans' association *Stahlhelm*, to demand a dictator whose heroic leadership would rid Germany of the "plague of parliament."

While inflation and political uncertainty roiled the everyday existence of all Germans in the Weimar Republic, the situation of professionally employed women worsened the most. As the state and trade unions had a political interest in removing women from the jobs they had held during the war, many working-class women were fired in order to provide positions for returning soldiers. The titles and description of the white-collar jobs were often changed to justify a cut in pay.¹¹⁹ Exacerbating the situation, female married workers, in contrast to males, received no financial or tax benefits; they were also stigmatized in society as opportunistic double earners (*Doppelverdiener*).

Besides growing resentment toward the democratic government and its policies, many middle-class Germans disapproved of the modern trends in fashion, lifestyle, and gender relations, as well as in art and literature, associating the Weimar culture with the degeneration and decay of the nation. Contemporary polemics revolved around the so-called New Woman and her appearance. During the stabilization period in the Weimar

¹¹⁸ The Weimar Republic was not completely without popular support: most Socialists and workers, Catholics, and a fraction of the middle class remained loyal to the new constitutional order. Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Female teachers, for example, had to go through the mandatory retraining for a clerk position (with lesser pay) or accept a ten percent decrease in pay for the existing position. Petersen, Vibeke Rützou, *Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany: Reality and its Representation in Popular Fiction*, (Berghahn Books, 2001), 21.

Republic from 1924 to 1929 especially, the clothes, hairstyle, and daily wear of makeup of contemporary women stood at the center of heated debates.

With the introduction of reform clothes (Reformkleidung) in the pre-WWI years, many women stopped wearing corsets and gave preference to loose, flowing styles. The gradual shortening of skirts, as well as the rising popularity of male-like jackets in the postwar years drew attention to women's legs, de-emphasizing the traditionally cherished attributes of female beauty such as a tiny waist, large bosom, and wide hips. Other signs of this liberated femininity included bobbed hair and red-painted lips. Because until World War I only prostitutes and demimondaines wore make-up during the day and because women's (long) hair and hourglass figure had long served as attributes of feminine beauty, many male social commentators interpreted the contemporary fashion as offensive. To conservatives, this complete negation of the feminine contour, embodied in the 1920s androgynous or masculine styles, represented yet another sign of cultural degeneration and decline.

The sexually emancipated, sterile, professionally employed, and androgynously clothed *Neue Frau* that figured prominently on the pages of fashion magazines and in cinema, provided a stark contrast to prewar femininity which was associated with childbearing, housekeeping, and self-sacrifice. The lifestyle of the cigarette-smoking, tango-dancing modern woman, conservatives claimed, indicated a significant paradigmatic shift in contemporary women's attitudes vis-à-vis motherhood and marriage. Part of the urban landscape, where crime and decadence took place, this liberated femininity was seen as the antithesis of the femininity that could regenerate the recently defeated German nation.

In popular, scientific, and medical contemporary discourse the New Woman posed a tangible danger not just to men, but to society at large. In his essay titled *Das Weib als Sexualverbrecherin* (Woman as a Sexual Criminal) a leading contemporary criminologist Erich Wulffen blamed emancipation for setting women free from the constraints and protection of the domestic sphere and thereby encouraging their “inborn criminality.” According to Wulffen, because of emancipation, unrestricted woman – a creature ruled by instinct, emotion, and the desire of the moment – easily succumbed to the temptations of the modern world, stealing and murdering to satisfy her whims.¹²⁰ Concerned about waning femininity, a broad spectrum of commentators turned to the biological sciences for answers and solutions. The popular press of the era, Lynne Frame discovered when surveying the Weimar Republic’s cultural typologies and taxonomies, classified and evaluated the types of femininity that modernity created by looking at women’s physiques, temperaments and their manner to behave. The 1929 article in *the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* alerted men about unsuitable partners for marriage by evaluating how women positioned their legs while sitting. The practice of crossing the legs, the article warned, indicated “quarrelsomeness, hot temperament, and volatility,” while legs held in a “rigorously parallel position,” indicated a “particular suitability for marriage, adaptability, and inner restraint.”¹²¹ From the three dominant types of modern femininity outlined in the study by the Marburg psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer – a slender woman with intellectual preoccupations (Gedankenmensch), a muscular woman with a

¹²⁰ For more on Wulffen’s essay and his points, see Ingrid Sharp, “Gender Relations in Weimar Berlin,” in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, Christiane Schönfeld, ed., (Würzburg: Köningshausen & Newmann, 2006).

¹²¹ “Neue Wege der Charakterforschung: Was die Beinhaltung enthüllt,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 38, no.13 (1929). In Lynne Frame, “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne,” 15.

strong will and quick to act (Tatmensch), and a woman with a rounded physique and an uncomplicated and optimistic nature (Gemütsmensch) – only the last type, Gemütsmensch, made a good marriage partner because only her femininity was well-balanced.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the emerging model of femininity embodied in the professionally employed, sexually emancipated, and androgynously clothed female posed a serious threat to the (patriarchal) family and traditionally conceived gender roles. Many of the attributes ascribed to the New Woman, however, such as financial independence, prominent public and political roles, and sexual freedom were more projections of a desirable future than the real present, as women with these characteristics constituted an insignificant minority in both pre-Nazi Germany and pre-Bolshevik Russia. Yet, as Chapter III will demonstrate, such women existed, and their professional achievements, as well as their fashionable appearance, represented a model for their female contemporaries. Vicki Baum, a popular writer and celebrity, and Gertrud Bäumer, a feminist activist and politician, expanded their socially prescribed roles, led unorthodox lifestyles, and achieved popular recognition for talents and traits that were not traditionally perceived as feminine. Like Baum and Bäumer, the acclaimed woman author Ina Seidel also represented a New Woman. With the help of her literary gift, Seidel bestowed German women with what she considered an alternative, more progressive feminine ideal, the one that was nationalistically and racially imbued.

As Chapter I has demonstrated, the Woman Question in Russia and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was deeply intertwined with

a more general quest for social reconstruction and regeneration. The debate about women's liberation only partially focused on women themselves; rather, it sought, by using women as examples, to demand a thorough political or social reform for all. The nascent women's movements in Germany and Russia focused on the expansion of employment and education opportunities for women because the emerging capitalist economy necessitated a search for independent income. The rapidly changing Western European and Russian social and cultural canvas, however, encouraged progressive women to strive for a more active public role and put additional items such as sexual emancipation and the universal vote on the agenda of their organizations and associations.

While similar issues surfaced in the discussion of the Woman Question both in Russia and Germany, the political, social, and cultural milieu of these countries largely defined the ideology and nature of the women's movements. If in Russia the inflexible and oppressive autocratic regime provided a favorable soil for the development of radicalism within and without the women's liberation movement, in Imperial Germany the contemporary belief that the two sexes were divided by innate and incommensurate differences contributed to the longevity and popularity of maternalist ideology.

Modern scholarship on (Western) feminism has habitually portrayed German maternalist ideology as reactionary. The politics of the German bourgeois women's liberation movement, which made women's spiritual motherhood and not the elimination of gender-based injustice the guiding principle for their activities, led Richard Evans to conclude that the German bourgeois women's movement did not adhere to progressive

ideas like the feminist movement in the USA, Australia or New Zealand.¹²² Following Evans, the scholar of feminist movements in the 1860s Herrad-Ulrike Bussner labeled German feminism, which advocated for the expansion of rights that would contribute to the development of femininity and motherliness rather than for equal rights for men and women, as conservative and stagnant.¹²³ Other scholars such as Claudia Koonz even linked the development of maternal feminism to specifically German authoritarian and anti-liberal tendencies, suggesting a similarity between the motherly emphasis of the German feminist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the “Mothers of the Race” ideology of the Nazis.¹²⁴ Yet other literary historians such as Ann Taylor Allen argued that maternalist ideology reflected the contemporary German bourgeois understanding of feminism and hence should be viewed outside of the modern dichotomy of “progressive versus reactionary.”¹²⁵ By designing extended public roles for (unmarried and childless) women, German maternalist ideology questioned the antithesis between the public and private world that was fundamental not only to nineteenth-century German but European culture, and as such represented a revolutionary idea indeed. Furthermore, the maternal ethic, as understood by nineteenth and early twentieth-century German bourgeois feminists, evolved from the interaction of the traditional concept of

¹²² Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*.

¹²³ Herrad-Ulrike Bussemer, *Frauenemanzipation und Bildungsbürgertum*, 185-223.

¹²⁴ In her widely read book *Mothers in the Fatherland*, Claudia Koonz underlines the similarity between the rhetoric of feminist leaders and that of the Nazis, who emphasized social duties of the individual and the maternal role of women and praised the family as a cell of the social organism. The feminists’ emphasis on maternal love as a source of power, Koonz argues, encouraged a view of female virtue that was limited to the private realm and separated from politics. The National Socialist State, according to Koonz, was “the nineteenth century feminists’ view of the future in nightmare form.”

¹²⁵ Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*, 240.

motherhood and the liberal ideals of individualism and equality. The maternalist ideology thus represented a (bourgeois) concept of female citizenship.¹²⁶

While it is true that National Socialist policies towards women employed many elements of the maternalist ideology, the support of the Nazi regime by many bourgeois women can hardly be attributed to the maternal ethic alone. Upon consolidating its power in the mid and late 1930s, the Nazi government closed all feminist, socialist, and radical women's organizations to make room for National Socialist organizations for women and young girls. The abrupt and irrevocable closure of the BDF suggests that the public involvement of women – in social welfare and charities – that was not based on National Socialist ideology had no place in the National Community. Furthermore, as Chapter 3 will demonstrate, although the New Woman represented a major target for National Socialists in their agitation for a 'truly German' model of femininity, the model of femininity upheld by the nationalist, conservative BDF also contradicted the regime's rigid prescriptions for women.

In keeping with the framework for feminism outlined by Allen, radicalism in Russia must also be seen outside the modern dichotomy of reactionary vs. progressive. While women radicals' appearance, manners, and beliefs challenged traditional femininity and their terrorist activities "elevated" their status in the eyes of tsarist prosecutors, the major impact of the radical women's movement (e.g., women's participation in the nihilism and populism movements) was not a revolutionary *transformation* of women's status and role in Russian society, but the *creation* of a precedent, a model for the future generation of radically minded women. As Chapter 2

will show, in the decades directly preceding and following the violent collapse of autocracy in 1917, the interaction between traditional femininity and the model of femininity offered by women nihilists and revolutionaries constituted a vital part of the contemporary literary discourse, as well as popular culture. In the Bolsheviks' Peasant and Worker State, women radicals of the 1870s, 1905, and 1917 were used as models of heroic and noble behavior and as an ideological foundation for the Soviet Woman.

Viewed historically, Russian female radicalism and German maternalist ideology represent a progressive women's response to emerging capitalism, changing attitudes towards profession, personal relationships, self-actualization, and seminal events of the early twentieth century. The New Women of Late Imperial Russia and the Weimar Republic, which will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, thus must be understood as phenomena that reflected the up-to-date achievements of women's movements – no matter how meager – and the social, cultural and political constraints that affected lives of women in Russia and Germany in the decade preceding the Bolshevik and Nazi takeovers. Most importantly, the New Woman of Late Imperial Russia and the Weimar Republic must be viewed as a vital historical precedent (and antithesis) of the Bolshevik and Nazi New Soviet Woman and Aryan Woman respectively.

Chapter 2: From New Woman to Soviet Woman

The increasing involvement of women in professional careers and the political and social activism at the turn of the twentieth century transformed the definition of the Woman Question into the New Woman Question: no longer seeking merely professional employment or an academic degree, New Women in Russia and Germany strove to gain more agency in all facets of personal and public life, often combining traditional roles with a professional career and social and political activism or choosing the lifestyle of single, childless woman to better apply themselves to a career or goal. Chapter 2 focuses on the changing models of emancipated femininity both described in the writings and embodied in the personas of Anastasia Verbitskaia, Aleksandra Kollontai, and Anna Karavaeva. Successful women literati such as Verbitskaia actively participated in emerging capitalist society as a consumer and as a creator of commodities (e.g., popular books) and combined professional journalism and creative writing with family and motherhood. According to Verbitskaia, women's emancipation began from within: from finding a meaningful profession and fostering one's individualism and autonomy. Whether writing an article for a highbrow journal or a book intended for mass consumption, Verbitskaia took stands on contemporary social dilemmas and insisted women become the agents of their emancipation. The strong fictional heroines of Verbitskaia – just as the author herself – sought individual happiness and intellectual growth on their own terms, offering much-anticipated alternatives to traditional feminine virtues of self-sacrifice, domesticity, and dedication to family and children. Echoing the

views of the liberal intelligentsia, Verbitskaia envisioned revolution as enabling women to develop their inner selves and lives according to their self-defined morality and ethics.

Alexandra Kollontai, on the other hand, represented a New Woman who emancipated herself by participating in an underground revolutionary movement and, later, in Bolshevik politics. Socialist revolution, in her view, reformed not only the social structure but also sexual relationships, transferring the duty to define morals and ethics from the individual to the collective. The collective drafted the new, proletarian moral sexual code, according to which men and women did not claim to possess each other physically, emotionally, or legally, but sought to respect each other's personalities and goals. In a socialist state, women dedicated themselves to productive labor instead of a lover, family, or children. By shifting focus from romantic and maternal love to productive labor and social activism, Kollontai believed, women liberated themselves emotionally, becoming free and useful members of society. The collective allowed women to create and explore by providing communal kitchens, cleaning facilities, and daycare centers. In Kollontai's paradigm of emancipation, women subordinated their emotional side to their intellectual side in order to contribute most effectively to the collective. Party leaders especially, Kollontai wrote, set an example of selfless, dedicated existence.

If Verbitskaia and Kollontai represent New Women rooted in revolutionary dreams, Anna Karavaeva stands as a fitting example of the New Woman produced by the Stalinist system. Karavaeva envisioned women's emancipation as closely connected with the building of communism, namely, with industrialization and collectivization. In her fiction, Karavaeva invoked the benefits of the regime: the socialist state protected

women's rights in marriage and motherhood with fair laws; solved the problem of unemployment by involving women in industrialization and collectivization; and opened (higher) education to women by making universities public. For the New Soviet Woman, Karavaeva argued, political enlightenment formed the core of her intellectual development and growth. Unlike the pre-revolutionary New Woman who sought sexual freedom and individual happiness, the Soviet Woman focused on becoming a better Communist, devoid of materialistic and individualistic urges. Importantly, it was not just the collective in general, but Party leaders who guided the moral and intellectual development of women. If Party leaders established the Communist moral code and characteristics of anti-Soviet behavior, literature served as a means of communicating this code to the masses. Karavaeva's female protagonists, like the author herself, enthusiastically complied with the directives of the Party because these policies represented progress and emancipation in the way Karavaeva understood them.

By analyzing the lives and legacies of Verbitskaia, Kollontai and Karavaeva, Chapter II seeks answers to the following questions: What qualities and traits propelled these women to success and turned them into role models of their generation? How did these women respond to the regime that claimed to have solved the Woman Question for good? How do their fates under the Bolsheviks illuminate the relationship between the totalitarian state and women in general?

2.1 A Star of Russian Modernism: Anastasia Verbitskaia

An obscure name to most modern Russian readers, in the mid-1910s Anastasia Verbitskaia was one of the most commercially successful women fiction writers of Late

Imperial Russia, the first female film script writer, and a national celebrity. In addition to her literary career, Verbitskaia chaired the Society for the Betterment of Women's Welfare and actively participated in the underground Marxist movement. Born 11 February 1861 in the small town of Voronezh, Anastasia (née Zyablova) was the middle child of a well-to-do army officer and a provincial actress. The sudden death of her father ushered in an era of financial struggles for the family, forcing Anastasia to abandon her dreams of becoming a professional singer. She worked briefly as a governess and taught music and choir at Elizavetinski Women's Institute, her former boarding school. In 1882, Anastasia married and was forced to quit the Institute, as only single women and widows were allowed to teach in Russia.¹²⁷ Soon mother to three sons, Verbitskaia took an editor's job at the national newspaper *Zhizn'* (Life) to supplement her husband's earnings: journalism and literature remained accessible to Russian women regardless of their marital status.

While economic necessity prompted Verbitskaia's decision to embark on a literary career, she used journalism and fiction as a forum to engage with the Woman Question and ameliorate the position and status of Russian women. Over the course of

¹²⁷ Low pay and low status were associated with the teaching profession in the Empire. In addition, teachers had little autonomy in their private lives. If teachers married, they could lose their seniority, their free lodgings, and their position. Within the teaching profession as a whole, women teachers were main targets of this form of discrimination: men were rarely fired. The informal discrimination became law in 1897; following the law, the press derisively termed women teachers as the "vestal virgins." The private lives of teachers were subjected to scrutiny, and while both genders had to be certified for political reliability, female teachers in some areas of Russia also had to submit medical proof of their virginity and adhere to a strict curfew. While teachers repeatedly appealed to the local authorities to remove the marriage ban and while the right to marry while working was widely discussed as a basic civil right by Russia's feminists, the Petersburg Duma did not repeal the ban until 20 November of 1913. Christine Ruane, "Vestal Virgins of St. Petersburg: School Teachers and the Marriage Ban of 1897," *Russian Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (April 1991) 163-182.

her career as an editor and journalist, Verbitskaia addressed the penury of female students and the challenges that women faced in medical, scholastic, literary writing, journalistic, translation, and service occupations.¹²⁸ Her first, semibiographical, novel *Pervye lastochki* (*The First Signs*, published under the title *Discord* in 1887) also focused on the economic and psychological vulnerability of professionally employed women.

Verbitskaia's later fiction, besides romantic love, interrogated contemporary intellectual concerns such as women's creativity and sexuality, the Social Question, the theory of heredity, and the nature of (Nietzsche's) charismatic personality.¹²⁹

Verbitskaia's contemporaries highly regarded the scope and quality of her writing. From the mid-1890s, her essays and fictional works were regularly featured in highbrow publications, namely, so-called thick journals such as *Russkie Sokrovishcha* (Russian Treasures) and *Obrazovanie* (Education).¹³⁰ In 1902, Verbitskaia founded her own publishing house. Besides independence, this venture gave Verbitskaia an opportunity to promote Western European ideas about women's emancipation and financially support other women intellectuals: she released more than twenty books and essays concerning the Woman Question, donating a part of the sales to Russian women students and translators.¹³¹ Remarkably, Verbitskaia's novels *The Spirit of Our Times*

¹²⁸ Rosalind Marsh, "Realist Prose Writers, 1881-1929," *A History of Women's Writing in Russia*, Adele Barker and Jehanne Gheith, eds., 190-191.

¹²⁹ Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 134.

¹³⁰ "Thick journals" targeted Russia's educated elite and sought to educate and enlighten the reader on domestic and foreign culture, philosophy, and literary works.

¹³¹ The titles included *The Woman Who Dared*, *The Women Students*, *Free Love*, *The Third Sex*, *The Woman Who Loved Nietzsche*, *A Fashionable Marriage*, *Socialism*

(1907) and *The Keys to Happiness* (1906-1913), as well as her memoirs, were published at her own expense as well.

Verbitskaia's bestsellers *The Spirit of Our Times* (1907) and *The Keys to Happiness* (1906-1913), which presented modern role models – sexually emancipated women as well as revolutionaries – and interwove contemporary preoccupation with free love with the liberal intelligentsia's excitement about the emerging revolutionary movement in Russia, evidently resonated with large segments of the population in Late Imperial Russia. Following the smashing commercial success of the novel *The Keys to Happiness*, Verbitskaia was invited to write the screenplay for a full-length film. Like the novel, the film became box-office success, catapulting Verbitskaia into a movie career. By 1914, Verbitskaia had become a national celebrity and a rich woman.¹³²

Ironically, the commercial success of her novels, as well as her popularity, damaged Verbitskaia's literary reputation. Esteemed critics such as Korneii Chukovski lamented that Verbitskaia's bestsellers inundated the reader with "armchair" culture and philosophy, as well as teemed with melodrama and sensation, thus descending to the level of so-called "boulevard fiction."¹³³ After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917,

Without Politics, and *The Woman Artist*. Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia*, 401.

¹³² An edition of over 10,000 was unusual even for respected "serious" male writers such as M. P. Artybashev, A.I. Kamenskii, and A.V. Amfiteatrov. Between 1908 and 1930, *The Keys to Happiness* alone sold 35,000 copies. By 1914, twenty of Verbitskaia's other books had published more than 500, 000 copies. Her popularity inspired an amateur writer Count Amori to publish a fictional biography of Verbitskaia under the title *The Amorous Adventures of Madame Verbitskaia* and an alternative ending to her bestseller *The Keys to Happiness*. Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russian Learned to Read*, 154-156.

¹³³ Korneii Chukovski was especially adamant about Verbitskaia's claim to serious literature, noting with indignation that "Mme Verbitskaia had the temerity to join her

Verbitskaia's bestsellers were condemned because they focused on the pursuit of personal happiness and sexual emancipation. Even though Verbitskaia depicted revolutionaries as modern heroes and extolled the revolution, the regime castigated Verbitskaia for her "obsession" with individualism and sexuality. In an era when the interests of the collective took precedence over one's personal fulfillment and happiness, Verbitskaia's emphasis on the individual was labeled as hysterical and melodramatic and her oeuvre as anachronistic and harmful for the consciousness of the Soviet reader.¹³⁴ Only because of the patronage of Maxim Gorky did Verbitskaia's works escape complete destruction. Following Gorky's pleas in Verbitskaia's defense, a committee of twelve literary critics, sanctioned by the Soviets, examined her oeuvre for three months, determining that most of them were harmless. She was, however, forever excluded from the cohort of politically correct proletarian authors.¹³⁵ To earn a living, Verbitskaia ventured into children's literature and wrote movie scripts under different pseudonyms. She died in obscurity after prolonged heart disease in 1928. The Communist newspaper *Krasnaia Gazeta* acknowledged Verbitskaia's death with a brief eulogy that remembered the literary star and celebrity of Late Imperial Russia as "the only writer in the history of

name with the names of serious writers such as Gorky, Sologub, Kuprin, and others because she viewed the extent of her popularity as a measure of her writing talent." Quoted in Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia*, 403.

¹³⁴ A. Gracheva. "Literaturnaya zvezda russkogo moderna," (Sankt Petersburg: Severo-Zapad, 1993), 15-16

¹³⁵ With the revival of the commercial book market in post-Soviet Russia *The Keys to Happiness* and *The Spirit of Our Times* were reprinted in 1992 and 1993 respectively. The new edition of *The Keys to Happiness* is shortened and edited: it contains only two volumes instead of six. The omitted parts are summarized before the full-length chapters.

the Russian literature who created politically charged fiction in a pronounced ‘boulevard’ (trashy) manner.”¹³⁶

Renewed interest in Silver Age literature in the early 1990s brought Verbitskaia’s bestsellers back to the mass market and her literary persona to the attention of (Western) literary historians. In his book *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* Geoffrey Brooks credits Verbitskaia with the innovation of the bestseller in Russia and lauds her ability to rework the genre of romance to suit her own context. Given the absence of a vast middle class in Russia, Verbitskaia had to adapt (Western European) genre to suit the tastes and demands of Russia’s heterogeneous reading public. As a result, Verbitskaia produced a different version of a romantic heroine – non-aristocratic, talented, charismatic, and sensual – and modified a traditional love story to include highbrow topics (art for the art’s sake, “free love,” Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, autocracy and revolution, etc), descriptions of lavish estates and exquisite travel sites, and tantalizing sexual scenes. According to Catriona Kelly, Verbitskaia’s innovation lies in her unique presentation of sensual women as not constrained by guilt.¹³⁷ Although Verbitskaia’s texts, Kelly states, were “anything other than radical,” but rather “long-winded, clumsily written, and employing the Gordian knot approach to psychological problems,” they exemplified the difficulties that Russian women writers experienced in “dealing with large-scale genres,” and especially erotic fiction. (Kelly 151)

¹³⁶ *Krasnaia Gazeta* (18 Jan 1928), p.2. Quoted in A. Gracheva, “Literaturnaya zvezda russkogo moderna,” (Sankt Petersburg: Severo-Zapad, 1993) 16.

¹³⁷ Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women’s Writing, 1820-1992* (Oxford: New York Clarendon Press, 1994).

In her analysis of Late Imperial Russia's publishing market, Beth Holmgren aptly explains that Verbitskaia's fiction in the late 1900s reflected the shifts that occurred in national literature with the intrusion of a consumer-oriented, multilayered publishing industry. Russia's publishing market did not completely duplicate the Western hierarchy of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow literature to accommodate the increasingly diverse readership. Nor did it acknowledge an audience stratified according to education, taste and desire. Instead, the Russian literature of the 1900s and 1910s named no distinct categories and produced popular literature that catered to a variety of tastes and education levels simultaneously.¹³⁸

While Verbitskaia's ability to adapt Western literary models to suit the tastes of Russia's heterogeneous reading market undoubtedly contributed to her popular success, her literary talent alone could not have made her commercial success possible. Rather, Verbitskaia's own unique experiences bestowed her with the ability to grasp contemporary aesthetic, cultural, and political tensions and communicate them to the reader in a popular, entertaining form, making her books stand out from a legion of commercial novels. As a longtime feminist journalist, Verbitskaia succeeded in creating portraits of professional women that resonated with Russia's female professional workforce. It is no accident that Verbitskaia's female protagonists include women from across Russia's social spectrum: the liberal intelligentsia, merchants, actors, and revolutionaries, as these groups responded differently to deteriorating autocracy and the offense of capitalism. Her involvement in the Russian Socialist Democratic Party, which

¹³⁸ Beth, Holmgren, *Rewriting Capitalism: Literature and the Market in late Tsarist Russia and the Kingdom of Poland*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

made it important for her to include politics in romantic love stories also helped her to bridge the gap between fictional events and authentic historical and political milieus in her fiction and emphasize the singularity of the epoch in which she and her readers lived.

Verbitskaia's entrepreneurial spirit and the business sense that she demonstrated with the founding of a profitable publishing house suggest that she perceived her writing career as a profession and not a hobby and that she sought to extend women's presence in literature by publishing texts for and by women. It is noteworthy that Verbitskaia stayed attuned to the development of new media in Late Imperial Russia and continued to sharpen her professional skills, venturing into the nascent film industry and becoming Russia's first woman film scriptwriter. These bold decisions boosted Verbitskaia's career and turned her into a celebrity and a role model for her female contemporaries.

While the vibrant consumer culture and emerging capitalist economy of Late Imperial Russia allowed for Verbitskaia's success, the political, economic and cultural restructuring under the Bolsheviks necessitated her removal and replacement with a new, proletarian role model. The confrontation between the Bolshevik regime and Verbitskaia could not have resolved in favor of the popular writer, because her pre-revolutionary fiction as well as her affluent status contradicted the ideology that sought to redeem downtrodden masses. Because the information about Verbitskaia's life under the Soviets is so scarce, it is hard to tell with certainty whether she attempted to modify the themes of her pre-revolutionary writing to suit the dictates of the new regime. It is clear, however, that in Bolshevik Russia the writer could not succeed by portraying the struggle of an individual without connecting it to class struggle and the building of communism. The small number of women writers in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, on the other hand,

suggest that Verbitskaia's gender may have played a role in her dismissal from the ranks of Soviet writers as well. Yet, the major reason for Verbitskaia's decline remains ideological, not sexual, because she, a representative of the Russian liberal bourgeoisie, simply could not fit the Soviet requirement for writers with "proletarian consciousness."

2.2 Documenting pre-revolutionary Russia: *Дух Времени*

Дух Времени (The Spirit of Our Times) centers on Andrei, the youngest son of wealthy Siberian fur traders, whose charismatic personality enables him to influence his family, friends, lovers, and acquaintances, as well as transcend class boundaries and earn the trust of underground revolutionary leaders of proletarian extraction. Andrei's life is divided between the theater where he directs and acts, the underground revolutionary movement that he supports, and his romantic relationships with four women. As presented in the novel, Andrei's artistic, political, and sexual pursuits are equally important to his development as a human being. Andrei is clearly modeled on the Nietzschean superhuman, who achieves supreme autonomy with the help of his multiple talents and open disregard of conventions. A quintessential artist and egotist, Andrei derives inspiration and pleasure from romance, the imaginary world of theater, and the real-life drama of underground politics. While Andrei's charisma enables him to manipulate his Old Believer family,¹³⁹ fellow actors, revolutionaries, and his love

¹³⁹ Old Believers were members of the Russian Orthodox Church who refused the reforms of Patriarch Nikon in 1652. They were exiled to Siberia and not allowed to return until the 19th century. It is possible that Verbitskaia chose to make Andrei's family Old Believers to underline the chasm between the most traditional, religious segment of Russia's population and Western-educated, liberal Andrei.

interests, he does not pursue leadership in any transformative, benevolent, and meaningful way. Andrei does not strive for committed relationships, popular success, or prosperity; instead, he seeks novelty, experiences, and immediate gratification of his desires.

In Verbitskaia's interpretation of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, "superhuman" characteristics apply to women as well as – if not better – than they do to men: several female protagonists exhibit leadership qualities, artistic talent, or striking beauty. In *The Spirit of Our Times* women emerge as influential and independent members of their families: after the death of her husband, Andrei's elderly mother Anna Porfier'evna dictates the routine of the household and controls the family's wealth, while Andrei's stunningly beautiful sister-in-law Lisa retains full control of her body and finances after two years of marriage. Defying the role of an obedient bourgeois wife, Lisa remains a virgin and an affluent woman, forcing her narrow-minded and promiscuous husband Kapiton to keep his distance. Meanwhile, Andrei's love interest and future wife, Katya, is an exceptional pianist who before their marriage taught music at the prestigious Academy for girls and gave private music lessons in order to provide for her disabled mother and teenaged sister, Sonya. As presented in the novel, Katya's personal emancipation is closely connected with her musical genius and work. Accustomed to put the needs of others before her own from an early age, Katya channels her disappointments and broken dreams into the piano, composing music of remarkable emotional range. Her work at the academy, on the other hand, while it provides for her and her dependents also imbues her with a sense of purpose and direction. With the help of her art and teaching, Katya emancipates herself from economic and family worries and her own fatigue; she also

fashions her social identity. Katya displays a sober attitude in regards to money: she does not spend conspicuously nor is corrupted by vanity. Her frugality and business sense continue to benefit her husband's family, as she undertakes the management of expenses. Her "benevolent dictatorship," based on her profound knowledge about recent discoveries in hygiene and nutrition, transforms the irregular, unhealthy lifestyle and habits of her in-laws, creating a salubrious and stable domestic haven. Verbitskaia's Katya embodies a New Woman who is practical yet artistic and whose character is compassionate and dutiful yet independent. Lisa, on the other hand, represents a New Woman who reinterprets the idea of "free love" to fit her circumstances – an arranged marriage – by keeping her body and soul under her own control, not that of her licentious husband.

Written in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, the novel features a number of women revolutionaries. Like Katya and Lisa, women revolutionaries have taken emancipation into their own hands by charting their lives according to their beliefs. Unbounded by family and children, class and tradition, these radical women tirelessly perform the tasks of the revolution alongside male comrades and willingly sacrifice their lives for the oppressed and downtrodden. In the context of the novel, then, women revolutionaries, too, exhibit a powerful charisma, which comes not from their physique, personality or talent but from their complete dedication to the cause of the "Great Russian People." If Katya and Lisa's self-emancipation is a work in progress, that is, it is impacted by their familial duties (Katya) or romantic feelings (Lisa), the emancipation of women revolutionaries is complete. They are free and fulfilled because they have cast off the traditional constraints of their gender to dedicate themselves to the cause of the

revolution: romance, family, and motherhood. As if to support atypical behavior of women revolutionaries, the traditionally lauded feminine virtues such as motherliness and domesticity are portrayed as remnants of the rotten autocratic regime and as conditions that destroy one's artistic talent or sensuality. Katya's obsessive parenting transforms her from a sensual woman and dramatic pianist into a quarrelsome, possessive mother hen. A positive role model at the beginning of the novel, married Katya squanders her artistic potential by adhering to the three pillars of (bourgeois) worldview – family, property, and monarchy, which causes not only the dissolution of her marriage to the freedom-loving, liberal, intellectually curious Andrei, but the loss of her creative self.

The spirit of the New Times, according to Andrei, inspires individuals to seek realization in art, sex, or revolution without the restraints of bourgeois morality or gender expectations. Consistent with this ethic, Andrei dismisses fidelity, domesticity, and parenthood as ties that constrict an artist and individual. On many a dawn, Andrei passionately describes to sheltered and religious Lisa his ideal woman, who “claims her happiness and freedom, treating a man not as her master, but as her equal, enjoying him in the minutes of passion and abandoning him without regrets when disappointment comes” (*Dukh Vremeni* 77). The women who follow the old morality, the novel suggests, cannot understand the benefits of this freedom and as a result, fall victim to their nearsightedness: Andrei's penchant for independence destroys Lisa's psyche and leads her to suicide; it also ruins the lives of Katya and her sister. As represented by Lisa and Katya, even emancipated New Women can lose their independence and even their lives if they stop seeking self-realization and instead become trapped by possessive romantic or motherly love. The spirit of the times, as argued in the novel, necessitates women to

discard “old” patterns of behavior and to adopt a new, revolutionary outlook on sexuality, family, and self-realization.

While reflecting contemporary debates about artistic, sexual, and personal freedom, *The Spirit of Our Times* offers a distinct vision of women’s emancipation. The variety of female heroines in her fiction – professionally employed, sexually emancipated, or involved in revolutionary activities – mirrors Verbitskaia’s nuanced interpretation of the New Woman of Late Imperial Russia and separates her from merely commercial writers. Impacted by encroaching capitalism and crumbling autocracy, Verbitskaia’s psychologically complex female protagonists search for ways to liberate themselves and survive. Their emancipation – and survival – depends on the revolutionary transformation of Russia, which, according to Verbitskaia, would guarantee sexual and personal liberation of the individual.

2.3 A Feminist Bolshevik: Aleksandra Kollontai

Like Verbitskaia, Aleksandra Kollontai interpreted emancipation as reformed sexuality and unbounded creativity, possible only after the socialist revolution. In her *Autobiography of A Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* (1926), Kollontai stated that

I always believed that the time must inevitably come when woman will be judged by the same moral standards applied to man. For it is not her specific feminine virtue that gives her a place of honor in human society, but the worth of the useful mission accomplished by her, the worth of her personality as a human being, as citizen, as thinker, as fighter. Subconsciously this motive was the leading force of my whole life and activity. To go my way, to work, to struggle, to create side by side with men, and to strive the attainment of a universal human goal, but, at the

same time, to shape my personal intimate life as a woman according to my own will and according to the given laws of my nature – all this conditioned my line of vision.¹⁴⁰

Consistent with this vision of women's emancipation, Kollontai dedicated her life to organizing women politically for the cause of socialist revolution and later, after the Bolshevik takeover, to encouraging women to seek personal and sexual autonomy.

Determined to practice what she preached in regards to sexuality and romance, she also repeatedly challenged traditional bourgeois as well as Bolshevik morality.

Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai (née Domontovich) was born on March 31, 1872 in St. Petersburg, the only child of an aristocratic general and Finnish peasants' daughter. The Domontovich family traveled frequently: to rural Finland; to war-torn Bulgaria, and to France and Germany. Kollontai's fluency in languages and cultures, acquired during childhood and youth, proved instrumental to her future political career, helping her to connect with socialists throughout Europe and, after the revolution of 1917, landing her the post of the ambassador of the Soviets to Norway, Sweden, and Mexico and perhaps saving her from Stalin's purges. When Kollontai was fifteen, her brief romantic relationship with Vanya Dragomirov (the son of a family friend) ended in his sudden suicide.¹⁴¹ To assuage her grief, Kollontai's parents contacted Professor Ostrogorsky, a distinguished literary scholar at St. Petersburg University, about private literature lessons. Admitting in her memoirs to having no real literary genius, Kollontai nevertheless

¹⁴⁰ The translation from the Russian is mine. Kollontai, *The Autobiography*, 3

¹⁴¹ Shura's friendship with Vanya, interspersed with passionate letters and secret kisses, lasted a few months. Before shooting himself, Vanya left Shura a note, citing lack of self-control as the reason for his suicide. His unexpected death accompanied by these cryptic words plunged teenaged Shura into a long depression. This incident also may have contributed to her future theses on non-possessive love.

credited Ostrogorsky for her later much praised clear and exact style of writing. During her political career, Kollontai's succinct and emotionally laden speeches and agitation brochures earned her the reputation of a brilliant orator and pamphleteer. Lenin especially considered Kollontai one of the most gifted socialist agitators and speakers.

Kollontai's marriage to her second cousin, Vladimir, at nineteen turned out to be a catalyst for her decision to dedicate her life to the cause of revolution. She viewed the sheltered life of a housewife, mother (Kollontai gave birth to a son in 1894), and spouse a "cage"¹⁴² and she yearned to become more socially useful. When accompanying her husband on an inspection of a large textile factory, Kollontai found an abandoned dead boy her son's age. Never quite recovering from the shock – she learned that the mother of the boy had neither time nor money to take care of her son as she worked eighteen-hour shifts at the factory – Kollontai decided to fight to improve the conditions of Russia's working women. In 1898 Kollontai traveled to Zurich to study political economy, leaving her husband and four-year-old son in St. Petersburg. They eventually divorced, although Kollontai kept her husband's name. Their son was raised by grandparents and his stepmother.

In Switzerland Kollontai met with the leaders of Russian Marxism in exile, the erudite and witty Plekhanov and the energetic Lenin, and joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. Despite her avid interest in Russian Marxism, Kollontai did not officially commit to Lenin's ranks until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Quoted in Porter, 34.

¹⁴³ Similar to many Russian socialists, Kollontai was neutral in the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903. In 1904, Kollontai conducted evening classes in Marxism for Russian workers as a Bolshevik, while in 1905 she took a Menshevik position, pressing for unity

Politically, Kollontai shared the Bolsheviks' (Lenin's) complete dedication to the Party (the Mensheviks argued that every individual member could decide the extent of his or her commitment); yet, she also supported the Mensheviks' vision of a larger, decentralized Party. Kollontai's essays and a book on the life of the Finnish workers (published in Zurich between 1899 and 1903) attracted much attention among revolutionary circles in Europe, establishing her reputation as a Marxist economist. Later, during her career as a Soviet official, Kollontai was considered an expert on the Finnish question and European socialist movement in general.¹⁴⁴

After Bloody Sunday ignited the socialist circles in Russia, Kollontai found her own, unique "field" within Russian Marxism. Realizing how "little the Party concerned itself with the fate of the women of the working class and how meager was its interest in women's liberation" and feeling "completely isolated with her ideas and demands," Kollontai threw herself into organizing women workers against imperialism, tsarism, bourgeois feminism, and the patriarchal family – a campaign that would establish her place in history.¹⁴⁵ When back in Russia in 1908, Kollontai attempted to sabotage the All-Russian Women's Congress organized by the feminists.¹⁴⁶ She gave several speeches in St. Petersburg, determined to dissuade women workers from joining the feminists, and

of the party factions. In 1906, Kollontai left the Bolsheviks over the question of boycotting elections to the Russian Duma.

¹⁴⁴ Kollontai is credited with advising Lenin on granting Finland independence in 1917-1918 and signing of the armistice and peace between Finland and Soviet Union. Iring Fetscher, Afterword to Kollontai's *Autobiography*, 109.

¹⁴⁵ Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Kollontai's very presence disturbed the running of the Congress as several feminists launched virulent comments about her before the leaders even began outlining the feminist program. Potter, 224.

published a book, *The Social Bases of the Woman Question*, in which she outlined a socialist approach to women's liberation.¹⁴⁷ *The Social Bases of the Woman Question* sought to deepen the definition of socialist revolution to include the reconstruction of family and sexual relationships. For women, Kollontai argued, a fundamental reform of the patriarchal family and beliefs about love and motherhood was "no less important than the achievement of political equality and economic independence."¹⁴⁸ It was high time, she insisted, to abandon the current definitions of love and marriage as exclusive relationships designed to protect women legally and financially, in which the woman was dedicated solely to her husband and children. The fixation on romantic love, motherhood, and the (individual) family, according to Kollontai, was dangerous and destructive since the happiness of the woman depended on her partner's feelings. The New Woman valued her work and personality and exhibited "self-discipline instead of emotional rapture, the capacity to appreciate her own freedom and independence rather than impersonal submissiveness, the assertion of her own individuality instead of the naïve effort to internalize and reflect the alien image of the beloved."¹⁴⁹ A so-called free union, which feminists suggested as the alternative to the eternal, church-sanctified marriage, Kollontai believed, could be realized only after the state and society relieved women from the dual economic dependence on capital and a husband and assumed responsibility for childcare and domestic duties, thus implementing a thorough reform of the institution of the family.

¹⁴⁷ In addition to disputing with the bourgeois suffragettes, the book intended to challenge the Party to build a viable women-workers movement in Russia. Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Kollontai, "The Social Bases of the Woman Question," from *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, (Allison and Busby, 1977), 7.

¹⁴⁹ Kollontai, *The New Women*, 94.

Unlike Verbitskaia, Kollontai argued that the focus on the collective (as opposed to the individual) provided the best outlet for the emotional and intellectual energies of women, as it allowed them to develop their talents. After the socialist revolution, the family as an isolated unit, she believed, would cease to exist. This idea that a socialist revolution would bring a sexual revolution and destroy the traditional family (an idea she shared with Verbitskaia) made Kollontai's reputation and stirred up controversy after the revolution of 1917.

Shortly after the Congress, Kollontai fled St. Petersburg for Berlin,¹⁵⁰ where she joined the German Socialist Party in 1909 and befriended the leaders of the German women's socialist movement, Klara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg. Unlike Zetkin and Luxemburg, Kollontai insisted on separate women's organizations within the socialist movement, as she believed that these organs would most effectively transform women's political consciousness.¹⁵¹ At a time when domestic drudgery and childcare shackled women's intellects and sensibilities like the chains of a capitalistic enterprise, socialist women's organizations staffed with energetic and committed women leaders, Kollontai argued, could reach masses of women more effectively than any socialist men. In addition to outlining her approach in a number of the SPD's publications, Kollontai gave speeches in England, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, and Switzerland. As reflected in Kollontai's essay *Новая женщина* (*The New Woman*, 1913), she increasingly saw her

¹⁵⁰ An arrest warrant was issued for Kollontai because of her recently published book against Tsarist Duma. Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 14.

¹⁵¹ Kollontai's interpretation of the socialist movement and its goals about women resembled that of another high-born and cultured socialist (later an outcast in the SPD), Lily Braun, whose book *The Woman Question* (1901) undoubtedly influenced Kollontai's future writings on the family and housing under socialism.

calling as the life of a single, politically active woman, whose life goal consisted of deepening the socialist treatment of women's issues.

Shocked by the SPD's decision to support the war (of 1914), Kollontai, who admitted to be "no enemy of Germany and still less a Russian patriot," decided to join the Bolsheviks "who most consistently fought social patriotism"¹⁵² – a decision that was in part determined by her beginning romantic liaison with Lenin's lieutenant Shliapnikov. The polyglot Kollontai became an invaluable asset to Lenin, traveling multicultural Europe as a Bolshevik agitator and translating Lenin's *Thesis on War* into German. Together with Shliapnikov, Kollontai collected donations, smuggled illegal literature into Russia, and took frequent trips to Norway and Sweden as Lenin's envoy. In 1915, an invitation to lecture from the German Socialist Federation in America took Kollontai to the United States. During the trip, Kollontai was instructed to confront the pro-war chauvinists, establish contact with the socialist publisher Charles Kerr in Chicago, bring together the left-wing internationalists and raise money for the Bolsheviks in Europe.¹⁵³ When in America, Kollontai gave 123 speeches in four months, frequently speaking in Russian, German, and French during one evening.¹⁵⁴ Some newspapers, such as the *Erie Evening Herald* called her the "Charming Russian socialist countess," while others branded her "either a spy of the German Kaiser, or as an agent of the Entente."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 23-25.

¹⁵³ Beatrice Farnsworth, *Alexandra Kollontai*, 59.

¹⁵⁴ Farnsworth, *Alexandra Kollontai*, 60.

¹⁵⁵ Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 26-27.

Following the abdication of the tsar in March 1917, Kollontai returned to Russia on a new assignment – to strengthen Bolshevik influence among the Russian proletariat.¹⁵⁶ After having been briefly imprisoned as Lenin’s associate, she launched a vast propaganda campaign at factories, on battleships, and at women workers’ meetings, unfazed by their hostility and threats. With Lenin still abroad, Kollontai was elected as director of the Bolshevik faction and a member of its Executive committee – the only woman to be ever granted that honor in Lenin’s and, later, Stalin’s Russia.¹⁵⁷ In a private conversation with Maxim Gorkii, Julius Martov succinctly summarized Kollontai’s significance in Bolshevik politics in 1918: “There are only two communists in Russia: Lenin and Kollontai.”¹⁵⁸ After the Bolsheviks’ seizure of Russia’s Provisional government in November 1917, Kollontai was assigned to the post of the People’s Commissar (Minister of Social Welfare). Her alleged common-law husband Shliapnikov was appointed the Commissar of Labor.

¹⁵⁶ Russia’s Provisional Government ruled side by side with the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies; within which Bolsheviks constituted a minority, outnumbered by Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs).

¹⁵⁷ For the rest of 1917, Kollontai was a constant agitator for revolution in Russia as a speaker, leaflet writer and worker on the Bolshevik women’s paper *Rabotnitsa*. In June she was a Russian delegate to the 9th Congress of the Finnish Social Democratic Party and reported back to the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets on the national question and Finland. During this period she joined other women activists in pressing the Bolsheviks and the trade unions for more attention to organizing women workers, and helped lead a citywide laundry workers strike in Petrograd. From <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/into.htm>

¹⁵⁸ Julius Martov was a close friend of Lenin before the split of the Russian Social Democratic Party into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions in 1903. After 1903, Martov headed the Mensheviks, but remained a good friend with Lenin until his death in 1920. The record of this conversation between Gorki and Martov comes from Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai*, 212.

Although Kollontai's international fame as a socialist agitator and her reputation as Lenin's close associate made her suitable for this appointment, Kollontai's personal life was increasingly criticized as incompatible with Bolshevik morals. Bolsheviks, including Lenin, who considered Kollontai married to Shliapnikov, were shocked to find out about Kollontai's demonstrative liaison with naval officer Pavel Dubenko. Kollontai seemed to be practicing what she had trumpeted in her works: a sexually emancipated lifestyle. In keeping with her own emancipatory paradigm, Kollontai did not seek to commit to a man and become his reflection; she sought to realize her social identity. The New Woman, Kollontai claimed, did not equate faithfulness with love or relationship with commitment and marriage. She welcomed new love without seeing herself as a "dishonored, fallen creature."¹⁵⁹ For the new woman each feeling of love became a "diversion, poetry, light," and sexual relationships an opportunity to "find and strengthen her own identity, to prove her writing talent, and to take a more sober, more reflective and more conscious stance towards life."¹⁶⁰ Although Kollontai's views on love and marriage were well known, her penchant for love affairs with much younger men (both Shliapnikov and Dubenko were at least twelve years younger than Kollontai) and her apparent unsteadiness kindled hostility among her comrades and political opponents alike. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, Kollontai's relationships with both Shliapnikov and Dubenko created further controversy, causing her eventual removal from the Soviet government.

As the Commissar of Public Welfare, Kollontai was responsible for "angel factories" (notoriously known orphanages), leper colonies, orthopedic workshops, TB sanatoria,

¹⁵⁹ Kollontai, *The New Woman*, 54.

¹⁶⁰ Kollontai, *The New Women*, 61.

almshouses, veterans and the elderly. The plight of women, children, and veterans displaced by the revolution and the Civil War, however, became her primary concern. Unable to raise pensions and distribute financial help to her wards, Kollontai focused on their accommodations. Together with Dr. Korolev, she established a clean and modern facility, the Palace of Motherhood, in a former “angel factory” in St. Petersburg. Although the Palace was soon set on fire by unidentified provocateurs, the significance of this enterprise should not be underestimated: for some, Kollontai’s short-lived palace represented a tangible example of a socialist future. For others, given Kollontai’s reputation as an agitator of non-possessive love and state care for mothers and children, the Palace confirmed their worst fears about the imminent collectivization of children and women under the Soviets. In any case, Kollontai was perceived as a Bolshevik who acted swiftly on her own initiative and delivered results. During Kollontai’s two-year term as the Commissar of Public Welfare, she took part in the drafting of the law about illegitimate children and their rights, divorce and civil marriage laws, and a number of provisions for the protection of widows and veterans.¹⁶¹ In her memoirs, Kollontai considered the legal foundation of a Central Office for Maternity and Infant Welfare her most important accomplishment.¹⁶² Always eager to practice what she preached, Kollontai was one of the first women to enter a marriage along Soviet lines with her then

¹⁶¹ By 1921 the number of homeless children rose to 7, 000, 000. Together with Krupskaya and other Bolshevik women, Kollontai discussed the establishment of foster homes, but the problem was too large for her underfunded Commissariat. Potter, 297.

¹⁶² Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 37.

partner, Pavel Dubenko (she was never legally united with Shliapnikov).¹⁶³ Foreign observers such as Jacques Sadoul, an attaché of the French military, marveled at this “Minister of the Soviet State:” dressed in a tight fitting velvet dress and a big hat with feathers, Kollontai received dozens of petitioners a day, shared a tiny living space with three people (including her adult son, her husband Dubenko, and a childhood friend Zoya Shadurskaia), and survived mostly on hot tea.¹⁶⁴ It is indeed striking to see the existing photographs of this unorthodox Bolshevik: dressed in an elegant fur coat with muffs and coquettish hats, Kollontai stands out as the embodiment of “bourgeois” elegance among “proletarian” looking men and women wearing drab loose garments.

That Kollontai did not wait for the Party to sanction her actions was confirmed by her decision to summon Dubenko and his troops and take the Nevsky Monastery by force in order to turn it into a veterans’ sanatorium. This ill-fated move infuriated the religious and further damaged Kollontai’s reputation within the Party leadership. In December of 1917, the nascent Bolshevik government had yet no intention of openly confronting the Church. Kollontai’s cultural insensitivity and open disregard for the Party’s instructions presented her as impulsive and undisciplined. Perhaps even more than the incident with the Nevsky monastery, Kollontai’s reputation as defiant was solidified by her open criticism of the Brest-Litovsk treaty¹⁶⁵ and her intercession on behalf of Dubenko who

¹⁶³ Under this law published in the midst of the Civil War on December 19, 1917, any man of eighteen and woman of sixteen (provided they were not already married, insane or closely related) could legalize their marriage at the local Department of Marriage Registration). Potter, 295, 297.

¹⁶⁴ Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 34.

¹⁶⁵ The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918 was a peace treaty between the Bolshevik government of Russia and the Central Powers (which consisted of the German

attempted to mobilize the Ukrainian population against the advancing German troops.¹⁶⁶

Women mixing love with politics, Lenin inferred, threatened the stability of the Soviet State, undermining party discipline and disturbing the execution of its policies. At the end of 1918 Kollontai was sent to the Volga basin on the agitation train, while her Commissariat became part of the Commissariat of Labor.

“Work among women” became Kollontai’s primary focus, as she was convinced that women, exhausted by famine and the Civil War, represented a dormant counterrevolutionary force. Convinced that the Party should address women immediately, Kollontai petitioned for a Women’s Congress.¹⁶⁷ With more than 1100 delegates from villages and small towns of Russia present, she and Inessa Armand launched into a passionate attack on domestic drudgery. Lenin, who unexpectedly appeared in front of the women delegates on the third day of the Congress, confirmed the Party’s commitment to abolish housework. For the organizers and the attendees alike, the identity of the backward, domestically enslaved Russian woman had to change. In the final resolutions of the Congress, the delegates agreed to banish the derogatory word “baba” (a peasant

Empire, the Austrian Hungarian Empire, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria). The treaty, which marked Russia’s exit from World War I, lasted only eight months.

¹⁶⁶ Similar to many leftists in the Bolshevik government, Dubenko supported the continuation of war with the Germans, while Lenin and his associates advocated for armistice. Dubenko’s insubordination (he attempted to gather troops in the Ukraine to continue the war) cost him his membership in the Party; he was also charged with high treason and removed from his post as a military commander.

¹⁶⁷ The Congress of Women took place in November of 1918 almost a year after the Bolsheviks seized power. Lenin and Sverdlov, his secretary, were among the very few party members (men and women alike) who saw benefits in organizing the Women’s Congress.

hag) from the Russian language.¹⁶⁸ In the newly established Worker and Peasant's State the separation of marriage from the kitchen, as well as separation of women from the stove, was considered as vital as the separation of the State from the Church.

In order to reach women workers more effectively, in 1919, Kollontai (together with Armand and the wife of Lenin, Nadezhda Krupskaya) organized a women's section of the Communist Party – *Женский отдел*, or Zhenotdel, (Women's Bureau). As the state desperately needed to mobilize women to support the Red Army in the Civil War, Lenin welcomed the new office, yet, instead of Kollontai, the unofficial leader of the Russian women's socialist movement, he appointed Armand director. Exceptionally loyal to Lenin, Armand did not question Party directives. Only after Armand's death in 1920 did Kollontai become the head of the Zhenotdel. Under Kollontai's two-year leadership, Zhenotdel addressed abortion, prostitution, universal labor conscription, female unemployment, and famine relief—the very issues that were often neglected during the Politburo sessions.¹⁶⁹ In addition to her Zhenotdel duties, Kollontai resumed her theoretical exploration of family and sexuality under socialism and communism. Her *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* and her essays *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle* and *Communism and the Family* attempted to outline the moral code of the Communists. Unlike the majority of Bolsheviks who believed that a rejection of bourgeois values would suffice, Kollontai was convinced that the psychology

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Potter, 326.

¹⁶⁹ The staff of the Zhenotdel also attempted to build a two-way connection with women workers and farmers through so-called *zhenskije stranichki* (women's little pages) in major newspapers and Soviet women's magazines, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka*, encouraging women to submit their questions and particular concerns. Potter, 326.

of human relationships represented an important revolutionary theme and that its transformation along communist lines would benefit the class struggle:

Only with spiritual values, created by the working class and answering its needs, will that class manage to strengthen its social position. It can succeed [in the world revolution – Rust] only by adhering to these new norms and ideals. To search for the basic criteria for a morality that can reflect the interests of the working class, and to see that the developing sexual norms are in accordance with these criteria – this is the task that must be tackled by the ideologues of the working class.¹⁷⁰

To abolish the family as an individualistic unit, to transform sexual relationships based on possession into those based on solidarity and friendship, and to transfer the duties of raising and educating children to the state, these were, according to Kollontai, the initial steps of the (socialist) sexual reform.

The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 severely curtailed Zhenotdel's efforts as it was accompanied by state budget cuts for women's sections and their social services such as communal childcare, kitchens, and laundrettes.¹⁷¹ In 1922, the Zhenotdel staff was reduced from forty to twenty-one. The Party also began to frown

¹⁷⁰ Kollontai, *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, 12-13.

¹⁷¹ NEP replaced War Communism. During War Communism (1918-1921), the Bolshevik government nationalized all industry and prohibited private enterprise. Army-like discipline was instituted at factories to control production (work shirkers could be shot), while peasants were forced to turn in all of their produced goods. Workers were paid in kind, as paper money was abolished. The measures of War Communism significantly weakened the economy and resulted in a number of peasant strikes. To revitalize industry and agriculture, Lenin introduced NEP. Under NEP, the Soviet government took only a small percentage of goods from the peasants allowing them to sell their surplus. The state now also permitted some privately run businesses and invited foreign specialists to help modernize Russia's industry and learn new technologies. While NEP had a positive effect on the Russian economy as a whole, it caused major unemployment among women and significantly diminished state funding of orphanages and daycares. By 1922 a third of the women in the workforce had lost their jobs; prostitutes (35, 000 in St. Petersburg alone!) flooded the city centers, while seven million orphans roamed the streets in armed gangs. Potter, 414.

on the insistence of the Zhenotdel's leaders, especially Kollontai, on increasing women's representation on the factory committees, in trade unions, and in the Commissariats. Separate organizations for women, many believed, could cause a split in the Party and give way to dangerous feminist tendencies. Finally, Kollontai's views on the family and her sexual theories, which she readily discussed with young students, workers, and peasants were increasingly seen as decadent and petty bourgeois.

Kollontai's prestige within the Party leadership continued to deteriorate with the launch of the so-called Workers' Opposition in 1920.¹⁷² Initially lukewarm to its existence, Kollontai eventually became one of its strongest advocates. The pamphlets that Kollontai wrote for the Workers' Opposition (which were swiftly translated into German and French) became a potential weapon against the "democratic" Soviet government if distributed abroad. As with the Brest-Litovsk treaty, Kollontai pressed for increased freedom of speech, namely, for an opportunity to criticize Party policies without being ostracized. Together with another leader of the Workers Opposition and her former lover Shliapnikov, Kollontai publicly accused Lenin and his cabinet of departing from the revolutionary principles with which the Bolsheviks assumed power.¹⁷³ Kollontai

¹⁷² The Workers Opposition was a movement that originated in the summer of 1920 in response to the bureaucratization of industry and the concurrent decline in the authority and autonomy of workers' unions. Headed by the leader of the Metal Workers' Union Alexander Shliapnikov, the Workers' Oppositionists were stalwart Bolsheviks who founded it unacceptable that the intelligentsia, formed into a new bureaucracy, displaced proletarians as the country's ruling class. The opposition posted questions such as were the factories to become autonomous democratic collectives or were they to be subjected to the capitalist industrial managers, repeating the model from the not-so distant tsarist past. For more on Workers' Opposition see Beatrice Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 213-240.

¹⁷³ At a time when the Soviets exercised dictatorial powers over industry, the Workers' Opposition advocated a role for trade unions in the state economy. Specifically, the

challenged the Party leaders (i.e., Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin) to institute workers' control over production – the very first promise that Lenin gave to the Soviet regime.¹⁷⁴ In the construction of Communism, Kollontai argued, the errors of the proletariat were preferable to the “wisdom of the leaders,” and were historically “more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.”¹⁷⁵

Kollontai's open confrontation with Lenin and the Party, her defiantly undisclosed relationships with much younger men, as well as her controversial theories about the family and sexual relationships all contributed to her gradual removal from all official posts in the Soviet government. In early 1922, Kollontai was reassigned from her post as the head of Zhenotdel to the position of Commissar of Propaganda and Agitation in Ukraine. Later in the same year, Kollontai was appointed to a diplomatic post in Norway and thus virtually sent into political exile. It was believed that her prolonged enforced absence would discredit her sexual theories among the youth and weaken the opposition.

The Norwegian press welcomed Kollontai's arrival with a deluge of insults and rumors: Kollontai was portrayed as a bloodthirsty, coarse, and heartless Bolshevik who abused vodka worse than a man, smoked day and night, and was responsible for the

Workers' Opposition demanded that workers (blue and white collar) in unions have a right to elect representatives to councils and oversee the economy. The Workers' Opposition also insisted that the Bolsheviks cease petty interference in the operations of trade unions. Finally, they opposed giving foreign and domestic “bourgeois” specialists leading administrative posts.

¹⁷⁴ Indeed, very few workers were elected to the government: only seventeen percent of the Commissariat was workers, while tradesmen and salesmen constituted 50 percent. Farnsworth, 229.

¹⁷⁵ Kollontai, *Rabochaiya Oppositzia*, quoted in Farnsworth, 227.

nationalization of women and children in Russia. A few weeks later, after learning that Kollontai spoke eleven languages and knew how to hold a knife, the press embellished her story with new details, describing Kollontai's furs and the diamonds stolen from the Romanovs. Kollontai's main business in Norway, one conservative Norwegian newspaper added, was to arrange marriages between the local citizens and Bolshevik spies.¹⁷⁶ Besides dispelling the rumors, during her years in Oslo (1923-26) Kollontai concluded several key trade agreements between Norway and Bolshevik Russia: Russian corn for Norwegian herring and fish and Russian wood products for Norwegian paper and cellulose. Due to Kollontai's diplomatic service, Norway officially recognized Bolshevik Russia as an economic and political partner.¹⁷⁷ Following the announcement, Kollontai was designated as the Russian "chargé d'affaires" in Norway, becoming the world's first woman ambassador. For Kollontai, the appointment of a single woman to be an ambassador represented not just a personal accomplishment, but "a victory for women in general, a victory over their worst enemy, over conventional morality and conservative concepts of marriage."¹⁷⁸

Although physically removed from Russia's political epicenter, Kollontai continued to incite audiences with her writings about sexual relationships under socialism. Her novel *Vasilisa Malygina*, novella *Love of the Worker Bees* (both published in Russia in 1923 as part of the series *Revolution on Feelings and Morality*), the article

¹⁷⁶ Potter, 424.

¹⁷⁷ In 1924, largely due to Kollontai's diplomacy, Norway recognized the USSR de jure. The Finnish government also nominated Kollontai for the Noble Prize in 1946.

¹⁷⁸ Kollontai, *Autobiography*, 5-6

The Work of Women's Departments in the New Conditions,¹⁷⁹ (published in the newspaper Pravda in 1923), and the article *Make Way for Winged Eros* all focused on moral codes under the Soviet regime – a topic only briefly discussed in the Bolshevik press. In these and other works published in the 1920s, Kollontai insisted that instead of labeling erotic love as a private issue, the collective had to define what forms sexual relationships should take in the new proletarian culture, reforming them in the spirit of “comradely solidarity.”¹⁸⁰

Kollontai's suggestions provoked virulent attacks in the Russian press. In a lengthy article titled *Questions of Sex, Morality, and Everyday Life* (June 1923) the editor of the newspaper *Communist Woman* and one of Kollontai's former colleagues at the Zhenotdel Paulina Vinogradskaja announced that at a time when Russia was economically devastated, problems of education and employment played a much more significant role than the problems of love and sexuality. She proceeded to label Kollontai's preoccupation with sexual matters as anti-Marxist, superfluously intellectual and petty bourgeois. Vinogradskaja's assessment of Kollontai's theories reflected the official Party policy towards the opposition, in which any deviation was labeled as anti-Marxist and undermining the class struggle.

Although Kollontai returned to Moscow in 1925 to participate in the debate on a proposed marriage law, her opinion no longer played any role in internal Soviet politics. Highly regarded internationally for her revolutionary past and diplomatic skills, in

¹⁷⁹ In this article, Kollontai suggested that if the government did not have resources to establish nurseries and canteens, women should be allowed to form societies that could take these tasks into their own hands.

¹⁸⁰ *Young Guard*, (Moscow 1923), n.5; quoted in Potter, 428.

Russia, polyglot Kollontai was seen as a merely ceremonial figure, valuable for her linguistic abilities and refined manners. Her political exile continued: in 1926, she was sent to Mexico as part of a trade delegation; in 1930, she traveled to Norway and Sweden on yet another diplomatic mission where she remained until 1945. She continued to serve the Peasant and Worker's State, securing the return of the gold hidden by the leader of the Provisional Government Kerenskii and playing an instrumental role in the resolution of the conflict between Finland and Russia in the late 1940s.¹⁸¹ While many of the old Bolsheviks (such as Dubenko) and Kollontai's comrades from the Workers' Opposition (including Shliapnikov) perished in Stalin's purges, Kollontai was miraculously spared and even rewarded: in 1933, she received the Order of Lenin for her work with women; in 1942, she was awarded the Order of Red Banner for her diplomatic service. Her last years were spent in Moscow, writing her memoirs, corresponding with her friends abroad, and serving as an adviser to the Russian Foreign Ministry. Perhaps out of fear for the life of her son and his family, as well as for her own, Kollontai's infrequent articles in the national press reflected the official laudatory tone and praised Stalin's role in the consolidation of the Soviet regime. She may have mourned the deaths of her comrades privately, but half paralyzed and ailing, the woman Bolshevik who openly defied Lenin had no moral or physical strength to rise against Stalin publicly. She was allowed to live, but hers became a forgotten, unremarkable existence. Her *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, which appeared first in Germany in 1927, remained unpublished in

¹⁸¹ Kollontai was instrumental in the peace negotiations between Finland and Russia. In 1946 Finland's Prime Minister J.K. Paasikivi nominated Kollontai for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Russia. Her death in 1952 did not receive any official eulogy in the national newspapers. A prominent revolutionary and stateswoman in early post-revolutionary Russia, Kollontai was expelled from the ranks of role models and heroes in the Stalinist state. The independent, sensual, and politically active New Woman yielded the stage to the Soviet Woman – politically correct, focused on building communism, and active in collectivization and industrialization.

Similar to Verbitskaia, Kollontai's fate under the Soviets was determined by the 1920s conflicts between ideology and culture, and the personal and the political. Kollontai emancipated herself *before* the Bolsheviks' ascent to power and expected to lead other women in the liberation campaign she had designed with the help of the Soviet state. Her attempts to formulate the moral and sexual codes of the Bolsheviks kindled hostility not only because the Party leaders considered morality and sexuality secondary to political indoctrination of the masses, but also because Kollontai herself embodied her ideal: openly sensual, intelligent, and committed to the class struggle. Because sexual and marital relationships remained at the center of Kollontai's political agenda and at the periphery of the Party's, the confrontation between the two was inevitable. Kollontai believed in her vision of emancipation and held the regime responsible for its promises to liberate women. She proceeded to demand laws and decrees that ensured sexual freedom and demonstrated her views about sexuality under socialism not only in her articles and novels, but also in her private life. In Lenin's and later, Stalinist Russia, however, the emancipation of women, while it did form part of the Bolshevik program, was envisioned as contributing to the goals of the totalitarian regime. Kollontai's unsurpassed skill as a political agitator shielded her – albeit temporarily – from Lenin's disfavor. This very

talent, however, contributed to her descent from Lenin's ranks as Party leaders castigated Kollontai for the influence her theories had on the young students and workers. In addition to her provocative beliefs about sexuality and marriage, Kollontai challenged the authority of the Party: she often acted on her own initiative, establishing a dangerous precedent for other Party members. Her political influence continued to deteriorate, because in order to achieve its goals, the regime required blind obedience.

Writing in 1913, Kollontai observed

The feminine virtues changed: passivity, devotion, submissiveness, gentleness proved to be fully superfluous, futile, and harmful. Harsh reality demands other characteristics from independent women: activity, resistance, determination, toughness, which were previously viewed as the hallmark and privilege of men.¹⁸²

The Soviet "new woman," that is, the Social Realist Woman, undoubtedly differed from bourgeois paragons of virtue and resembled more the new woman outlined in Kollontai's essay. Yet, unlike in Kollontai's vision, women's "activity, resistance, determination, and toughness" were carefully orchestrated by the Stalinist State with the help of women writers such as Anna Karavaeva.

2.4 A Trumpeter of Socialist Realism: Anna Karavaeva

In her essay *New Woman* Kollontai pointed out that contemporary popular literature was populated with emancipated women created as a result of capitalism.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Kollontai, *New Woman*, 96.

¹⁸³ "Precisely because there is such a profusion of these new women who daily appear [in society] in ever larger numbers," Kollontai wrote, "their tainted likeness is found even in the boulevard-literature of a Verbitzkaia [sic]." Kollontai, *New Woman*, 73

Surveying more than forty female protagonists, Kollontai sketched the heroine of the 1910s: a single woman who “asserted her personality, protested against the universal servitude of women to the state, the family, and society, and fought for her right to represent her sex.”¹⁸⁴ Romantic love and maternal bliss no longer defined the female protagonist; instead, contemporary heroines – radical women, professionally employed women, women artists and scientists – sought to realize their social identity, to create and explore.

The Revolution, the Civil War, and the policies of the Bolshevik regime after NEP bestowed writers and journalists with new images of women: a leather-clad woman revolutionary, a Komsomolka, a Party delegate, a scientist, a *kolkhoznitsa* (collective farm worker), and a Stakhanovite (an overachieving worker). In life as well as literature, the Soviet woman explored new terrains: a battlefield, a cooperative, a collective farm, a factory, or Party meetings. If popular literature in the 1910s interrogated women’s individuality, artistic talent, sexuality, or intellect, Soviet literature in the post-revolutionary decades sought to situate women along ideological lines, namely, in relation to the collective and the Party. Because it was believed that Russian women were more ideologically backward than Russian men, positive Soviet fictional heroines were created both to educate and convert women readers to the regime.¹⁸⁵ In contrast, the decadent flapper woman of the NEP era, prostitutes, or women kulaks, that is, women

¹⁸⁴ Kollontai, *New Woman*, 54.

¹⁸⁵ According to Xenia Gasiorovska, in the Soviet literature of the 1920s and 1930s rural women first served as illustration of the prejudiced, backward behavior (vicious female characters) and then as examples of truly Soviet attitudes (female pioneers of collectivization and members of village councils). Xenia Gasiorovska, *Women in Soviet Fiction, 1917-1964*, 7.

who were overtly sexual or consumed with achieving material riches, often served as the antithesis of the Soviet Woman.

The village theme dominated post-revolutionary Russian fiction, climaxing during the years of collectivization (1928-32). Fraught with primordial customs and superstitions, the Russian countryside posed enduring challenges to the Soviet regime: the Russian Orthodox clergy, who loathed the state-imposed closure of monasteries and churches, sabotaged the activity of the Party organs, while kulaks (well-to-do peasants) fought against the redistribution of land and livestock and the Soviet ban on religious practices. The tensions between century-old practices and the innovations promoted by the Communists served as rich soil for independent and *engagé* writers. Continuing the Symbolist tradition, some so-called “fellow travelers” writers such as Boris Pilnyak depicted the village as a dark, mysterious, semi-Asiatic territory that resisted the onslaught of progress in the form of October revolution.¹⁸⁶ Other such as Leonid Leonov gravitated to a more realistic portrayal of the village: as shattered and disrupted by the blizzard of the Revolution and ruined by the civil war. Instead of focusing on the disturbances and tensions of the post-war rural Russia, officially promoted authors such as Anna Karavaeva, on the other hand, explored the positive impact of the Socialist worldview and Bolshevik innovations in the countryside.

Women protagonists – heroines as well as villainesses – created by regime-acclaimed women-writers in the 1920s and 1930s provide particularly valuable insight into the mores, tensions, and stereotypes of Bolshevik and later Stalinist Russia, as they

¹⁸⁶ Leonid Leonov and Boris Pilnyak belonged to so-called *poputchiki* (fellow travelers) – the term adopted by Trotskii from the vocabulary of Russian socialism and applied to Russian writers who cooperated but did not join the Communists. Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 208.

represent a complex marriage of the author's writing talent, her understanding of women's psychology, her political convictions, and Soviet officials' guidelines for mass literature. On the one hand, the heroine(s) – as well as villainess – that was fashioned in the vein of Socialist Realist ideology enlightened women readers about the codes of Soviet and anti-Soviet behavior. On the other hand, the female characters also projected the beliefs and attitudes of their creators, outlining the characteristics and traits that women writers themselves admired and sought to emulate.¹⁸⁷ Like the officially recognized male authors of the era, women writers depicted their heroines as already walking the streets and countryside of the Soviet Land.¹⁸⁸

Despite the regime's claim that women had the same opportunities as men in all professions, including literature, during the 1920s and 1930s male authors significantly outnumbered women writers. The highbrow women literati of Russia's Silver Age such as Zinaida Gippius, Anna Akhmatova, and Marina Tsvetaeva as well as mass literature writers such as Anastasia Verbitskaia were exiled or silenced. In the Stalinist State, only women authors who embraced the dictates of Socialist Realism – such as Anna Karavaeva – achieved official recognition and the opportunity to publish their works. Another almost forgotten name of Soviet literature, in her lifetime Anna Karavaeva

¹⁸⁷ Village fiction of the 1920s portrayed the twofold process of change that occurred in rural Russia: the transformation of backward peasantry, especially women, under the new order's economic and psychological pressure, and the "Sovietization" of the pre-revolutionary mores and mentality. Much of the village fiction of the 1920s featured three types of female characters: pioneers, reactionaries and weaklings. Xenia Gasiorovska, *Women in Soviet Fiction, 1917-1964*, 34.

¹⁸⁸ In her study of Soviet fictional women, Xenia Gasiorovska identifies this trend in the post-revolutionary literature as "replacement of the traditional Russian quest for a positive hero by an imposition on the reader of a model character allegedly already existing in real life." *Women in Soviet Fiction*, 45.

received the Order of Lenin (the highest honor of the Soviet Union) five times and was awarded a Stalin Prize in 1951. She attained high office in the Union of Writers at its establishment in 1934 and was chosen as a Soviet delegate to writers' conferences in France, Finland, and Poland.

Karavaeva (née Shalaevskaia) was born 27 December 1893 in Perm (near the Ural Mountains in Siberia) into the family of an office clerk.¹⁸⁹ After graduating from a gymnasium in 1911, the eighteen-year-old Anna worked briefly as a teacher in a remote village school, saving her meager wages for further education. Two years later she moved to St. Petersburg to enroll into the so-called Bestuzhev (Higher) Courses for women. She took part in students' strikes against autocracy and became a member of the socialist movement. Literature courses with an esteemed professor Vengerov kindled Karavaeva's interest in creative writing. Together with her fellow students, Anna engaged in heated discussions about modernism and realism in literature, writing a number of essays in which she attacked "decadent" literature. In 1916, Karavaeva graduated from the Courses with a teaching certificate.

Karavaeva spent the turbulent years of the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War working at a primary school and teaching Russian language and literature in a Party school for Red Army soldiers in the Urals. The information about her personal life is scarce, but it is known that after her husband's demobilization in 1920, Anna and her family moved to Barnaul in Southwest Siberia. The culture and history of nearby small

¹⁸⁹ Her extended family included teachers, railway workers, actors, but also a director of metallurgic factories in Perm (her maternal grandfather), and non-aristocratic landowners. Karavaeva described her heterogeneous family in her first novel, *Fliegel*. In her memoirs, she credited her grandfather, a "humane" factory director, for her early developed "class consciousness" and heightened sense of social injustice.

towns and farmsteads inspired Karavaeva to return to writing. Her first novels *The Golden Beak* and *The Stork Valley* depicted the oppression and exploitation of Siberia under the tsars; her later fiction focused on the revolutionary transformation of the Siberian landscape under the Soviet regime. Although she had been writing poetry and prose since the mid-1910s, Karavaeva did not submit any of her works to journals until late 1921. Her first published piece, a poem, was featured in the Barnaul newspaper Red Altai in early 1922, inaugurating Karavaeva's involvement with the Soviet literary realm. She took a journalist position at the Red Altai and spent several years traveling to remote areas of the Ural Mountains in order to conduct interviews for the newspaper. She also submitted some of her prose inspired by her experiences as a Red Altai journalist to the newly established literary journals *Sibirskie ogni* (Siberian Lights) and *Novyi Mir* (New World).¹⁹⁰

Karavaeva's novels *Dvor* (*Homestead*, 1926) and *Lesozavod* (*Sawmill*, 1928) that depicted the Sovietization and industrialization of the Siberian rural landscape received much critical attention and started her ascent within the Stalinist Union of Writers. In 1928 she and her family moved to Moscow, where *Dvor* was made into a film and a play. Karavaeva enthusiastically embraced the guidelines of Socialist Realism, in her subsequent essays and novellas glorifying overachieving workers in Soviet factories and plants. In addition to her writing career, Karavaeva was appointed as chief editor of the literary journal *Molodaya Gvardia* (Young Guard), where she oversaw the preparation

¹⁹⁰ Her contemporary and fellow woman writer, Lydia Seyfullina, recalled that Karavaeva's style captured the reader immediately: in an epoch when most characters "were painted red or black," Karavaeva's protagonists boasted "a rare psychological depth." Quoted in Skorino, *Sem' Portretov*, 66.

and publication of several future Soviet classics.¹⁹¹ She kept a close relationship with other prominent contemporary Soviet writers, whom she later described in her memoirs—A. Serafimovich, N. Ostrovskii, A. Fadeev, and M. Zalka.¹⁹² During the Great Patriotic War (WWII), Karavaeva traveled as a reporter for the main Soviet newspaper Pravda.¹⁹³ Her trilogy *Motherland*, inspired by the courage of partisans and civilians during the war, received a Stalin Prize in 1951. She was sent as a delegate to the International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture (1935), to the First National French women’s conference (1945), and to Gogol Evenings in Poland (1952) and Finland (1953). After the death of Stalin in 1953 Karavaeva’s prominence diminished, but she remained in official favor until her own death in 1979.

2.6 Narrating Soviet Civilization: *Лесозавод* and *Двор*

One of the most critically acclaimed of Karavaeva’s novels, *Dvor* (first published in two sequential issues of *Novyi Mir* in 1926), depicts the transformation of an individual rural household under the Soviet regime.¹⁹⁴ After being discharged from the

¹⁹¹ Nikolai Ostrovski’s proletarian chef-d’oeuvre *How the Steel was Tempered* as well as Bazhov’s famous collection of Ural fairytales, was published in *Molodaya Gvardia* during Karavaeva’s time as chief editor.

¹⁹² Skorino, *Sem’ Portretov*, 79.

¹⁹³ *Encyclopedia of Soviet Writers* online, [http:// sovlit.com/bios/karavaeva.html](http://sovlit.com/bios/karavaeva.html).

¹⁹⁴ “Dvor” translates roughly as a rural household that includes a house and a courtyard. “Dvor” can also mean a (usually) gated space around or behind a peasant’s house. It served many purposes: store farming equipment, fix tools, cut wood, etc. Wedding or remembrance meals also took place in a dvor. The Russian word “dvoryanstvo” (gentry) underlines that the dimensions of the dvor varied depending on one’s class.

Red Army in 1924, Communist and Civil War hero Stepan Bayukov returns to his home village, Berezhki, to organize a *tovarishchestvo* (a cooperative), only to find that his wife of five years Marina has been unfaithful. Bitter and furious, Stepan banishes Marina from the house and his heart. The destitute Marina turns for help to her lover's family, the rich Korzuninovs. Far from accepting Marina as their new relative, the father demands that Marina and his son Platon, Marina's common-law husband, work in exchange for food and shelter. Pretending to act on Marina's behalf, the old Korzuninov also claims half of Stepan's property and livestock. In the meantime, his daughters-in-law, Matrena and Praskoviia, spread rumors that Stepan physically abused Marina and forced her to flee.

A lawsuit between the Korzuninovs and Stepan divides the peasants into two camps, but the majority supports Communist Stepan against kulak Korzuninov, who has been long known as an exploiter and cheat.¹⁹⁵ Stepan wins the case in the Soviet court, but he faces the disapproval of the villagers for his petty-bourgeois behavior towards Marina and for letting his personal life interfere in the plans of the community, namely, the establishment of the cooperative. Lipa, the young *komsomolka* from the city, whom Stepan had hired to take care of the household, especially sees the conflict between him and Marina as rooted in materialism and thus contradicting the Soviet moral code. She feels sorry for backward Marina despite the fact that the latter had physically assaulted her out of jealousy. A woman with a Socialist worldview, Lipa encourages Stepan to give

¹⁹⁵ The term "kulak," which literally means "a fist" in Russian, emerged in the vernacular and fiction after the revolution of 1917 to describe a category of affluent peasants, who speculated and meddled in addition to tending their land and livestock. In *Dvor*, the Korzuninovs are described as peasants who "valued commerce more than their wheat fields or vegetable gardens." Everybody in the village knew that "the Korzuninovs possessed an extraordinary sense of a bargain, buying cheap when there was an urgency to sell— as they always had money—making their profit and cheating, and convincing the seller that they sincerely wanted to help." Karavaeva, *Dvor* 19.

Marina half of their mutual property (money and livestock), because it is the Soviet law, and help her to become a “free Soviet citizen” by joining the cooperative. For politically unenlightened individuals like Marina and her lover Platon, Lipa believes, the collective farm serves as an entry ticket to a new life and true happiness. Lipa’s reasoning causes Stepan to re-evaluate his position. He agrees to follow his “[Communist] party soul,” not his individualistic urges, and divides the property with Marina. Bribed by the Korzuninovs, a drunkard shoots Stepan and gravely wounds him. Unable to sabotage the establishment of the collective farm in Berezhki, the Korzuninovs flee; the drunkard is brought to justice. While recovering, Stepan proposes marriage to Lipa. The novel ends with the reconciliation and an emerging friendship between the two couples: Stepan and Lipa, and Marina and Platon.

Written after the Soviets had defeated the White Army and consolidated a relatively stable government, the novel presents the individual and his or her possessions through the prism of their impact on the collective. Stepan’s household and his land, his *dvor*, become a showcase of the latest innovations in agriculture and animal husbandry as practiced by the Soviet regime: greenhouses, architecturally improved barns, electricity, and machinery. No longer individual property or private space, Stepan’s *dvor* serves as proof of his qualifications as the director of a collective farm and an example of the future productive Socialist household. By opening up his *dvor* for public evaluation, Stepan hopes to transform the mentality of his townsmen:

Culturedness in a peasant’s household, cleanliness in the back yard, in the pigs’ house, [and] stables do not require money; instead, they demand literacy, consciousness! He, Stepan Bayukov, had not spent his time in the Red Army in vain, but went through a school of politics and culture. That

is why he is filled with strength and joy to use his knowledge for the good of the people (*Dvor* 21).¹⁹⁶

While Stepan's *dvor* offers a glimpse into the bright Socialist future, the *dvor* of the Korzuninovs guards the remnants of the gloomy pre-revolutionary past: the unfairly accumulated riches and daily exploitation of family members and hired help. Behind the massive gates, the *pater familias* Markel Korzuninov preys on the physical weakness of his bed-ridden wife, the timidity of Platon, one of his sons, and the misfortune of Marina. The antagonism between these protagonists metaphorically reflects the relationship between the propertied and the poor.¹⁹⁷

Besides showing how individual households represent their owner's ideological position, the novel also depicts how the emotions of an individual reflect his ideological maturity. Stepan's jealousy, anger, and materialism – which in the novel are connoted as bourgeois traits – are no longer hidden in and confined to his *dvor*, but become the business of the collective. In order to transform the village, Stepan has to transform himself first, that is, acquire new, Soviet virtues under the guidance of a more ideologically mature comrade. Stepan's transformation happens with the help of Lipa, who, although unattractive physically (she has short dull hair, a boyish figure, and a pale, freckled face), magnetizes Stepan with her inner strength. In the framework of the novel, Lipa represents the Communist-created New Woman who lives by Soviet ethics, building her relationships on equality, fairness, and truth. Lipa is well-versed in Soviet laws,

¹⁹⁶ The translation from the English is mine.

¹⁹⁷ The father Korzuninov exploits scrawny and taciturn Platon by making him work without pay. Shortly before her death, his mother tells Platon that Markel Korzuninov is not his biological father and that his real father was a revolutionary who died in exile in Siberia.

which she uses to demand a written work agreement when being interviewed for a housekeeper position by Stepan and his younger brother. Similarly, educated Lipa becomes an advocate for backward rural women such as Marina, defending her rights in the division of her and Stepan's property because it corresponds with Soviet marriage and property law.¹⁹⁸ Lipa loathes violence, dishonesty, and gossip, but shows no fear or timidity when facing abuse or lies. When confronted by Marina, who envies the respect Lipa receives in Stepan's household, Lipa employs reason and common sense to win Marina's trust; in addition, slender Lipa, purportedly armed with her ideological superiority, also wins their physical confrontation.

The relationship between Stepan and Lipa thus sparks from their ideological similarity and not the physical attraction, suggesting changes in the definition of love and romance in the Soviet ideology. Unlike Marina who is dazzled by Stepan's gifts from the city – a flowery cashmere shawl and tall leather boots—Lipa pays little attention to fashion or luxury items. When changing clothes after a day of work, Lipa follows a strict regimen of hygiene rather than an inclination to vanity. Coquetry, sexual appeal, and conspicuous spending, the characteristics of the pre-revolutionary bourgeois and the NEP female, as well as “unenlightened” rural women such as Marina, are thus replaced with straightforwardness, the closeness of comradery, and the frugality of the Soviet woman-worker.

¹⁹⁸ In *Лесозавод* (*Sawmill*, 1926) a former war reporter Elena encourages a local rural woman Zinoveika to seek alimonies from her lover Zakhar after he refuses to marry her and acknowledge their child, because Soviet marriage law offers protection for women in her situation. Likewise, using the Soviet criminal law, the daughter of the local forester, Ksenia brings Zahar to justice after Zinoveika and her infant son were found drowned.

By juxtaposing Stepan's marriage to Marina with his relationship with Lipa, Karavaeva emphasizes that the Soviet ideal of love is based on comradeship and not lust:

When Bayukov was going to ask Marina to marry him, he knew she would agree. He did not, however, know Marina at all: was she dumb or smart, honest or sly. He was simply mad about her, and his blood boiled impatiently when he thought about Marina... He felt differently towards Lipa: he yearned for warmth in her eyes, cherished each friendly word, valued her opinion about him and his actions, and wanted to decipher her thoughts about the future (*Dvor* 97).

In the framework of the novel, then, Lipa represents a mature, ideologically sound leader, whose love makes Stepan not just a better person but also a better Communist.

While Lipa embodies the Soviet woman, Marina emerges as a woman in transition to that ideal. She thus serves as a metaphor for the majority of Russian rural women in the 1920s – impoverished, politically unenlightened, but yearning for a better lot. Marina's character and her personal life require a Socialist revision in order to adjust to the rapidly changing post-civil war reality. In the context of the novel, then, the physical confrontation between Lipa and Marina contains an additional meaning – that of an ongoing fight between the backward women of the Russian countryside and the Soviet-enlightened women of the city. Notably, Karavaeva depicts Marina as lost and miserable but not promiscuous. Marina's wretched childhood in a foster family, her illiteracy, and passivity serve as extenuating circumstances in her situation: she married Stepan to escape from drudgery and started a sexual relationship with Platon because they both felt inferior and exploited in their families. While Karavaeva did not appear to judge Marina's unsteadiness, her novel suggests that instead of merely starting a new relationship, Marina needs to adopt a different, socialist approach to marriage (and work).

Marina and Platon will become “real human beings” and have a happy, meaningful relationship only when they join the cooperative.¹⁹⁹

Karavaeva’s other well-received work, *Лесозавод (Sawmill)*, continues the discussion of love and sexuality under the Soviets, depicting how Ksenia, the daughter of a forester, gains control of her feelings and sexuality in order to fulfill her duty as a Soviet worker. When learning that her love-interest, an engineer from the city, is married, Ksenia does not succumb to jealousy or attempt; instead, she focuses on their partnership in the building of a sawmill. While other, “backward” peasant girls surrender to their boyfriends’ sexual advances, Ksenia subordinates her sexual longings to Soviet ethics. This attitude enables Ksenia to fully participate in the new life. As presented in the novel, it also protects her from becoming the victim of a self-centered, wicked villain: Ksenia’s neighbor Zinoveika who failed to resist sexual temptation, is drown along with her infant by the kulak Zahar, who wanted to avoid marriage. In Karavaeva’s depiction, the new, Soviet work ethos not only channels sexual desires into productive labor, but also transforms rural patriarchal, backward traditions and mores. The construction of the sawmill, e.g., industrialization, empowers young women peasants by giving them an independent income as well as an opportunity to escape exploitation and oppression at home – as in the case of Ksenia’s timid friend, Dunia, who defies her abusive father’s orders and takes a job at the sawmill.

¹⁹⁹ Rather than representing the majority of peasants, Platon and Marina embody the individuals who could be easily swayed to the counterrevolutionary forces because of their political backwardness. Although in the novel the villagers enthusiastically embrace the establishment of a cooperative, the frequent dialogues about property, tools, land, and livestock aim to outline the benefits of collectivization for less sophisticated readers.

As depicted in *Двор*, the Soviet Woman arrives from the city to enlighten and convert the backward, illiterate rural women to the Bolsheviks. Armed with Lenin's political writings and Soviet laws, she seeks to enlighten rural women about their rights as citizens of the Soviet state. As an important agent in the construction of the new Socialist morality, the Soviet Woman models Soviet behavior with her untiring, dedicated work for the collective along with her ability to curb sexual desires and individualistic and materialistic urges. Projecting inner strength and wholeness, the Soviet woman also rescues her ideologically confounded comrades and brings potentially subversive elements to justice (kulaks, promiscuous men, and female opponents of Bolshevik policies). She is not immune to love and affection, but romance and courtship happen against the background of community work, with a man of a similar ideological makeup. As presented in *Лесозавод*, smart young rural women such as Ksenia, who lack formal education, embrace Bolshevik ideology inherently because they believe that the Bolsheviks will eradicate poverty and exploitation in the village. Conquering the mighty Russian forest and building a sawmill helps the community to modernize and prosper; it also unites the exploited against the common enemy, the kulaks, by giving them an opportunity to work elsewhere and receive a fair pay.

These novels of Karavaeva aptly demonstrate how the emancipation of women was subordinated to the state's policies of industrialization and collectivization and how women's relationships with friends, lovers, and family members were intertwined with the building of communism. A prolific author, Karavaeva portrayed a variety of protagonists that were positively transformed upon accepting the Communist doctrine. Karavaeva's fiction extolled collective farmers, Communists, and shock workers – the

heroes and heroines of Stalinist Russia – thereby suggesting her commitment to the tenets of Socialist Realism and Bolshevik ideology. Did Karavaeva actually believe in the ideals that she communicated to the masses in her works? The interactions and dialogues of Karavaeva's characters, as well as the endings of *Dvor* and *Lesozavod*, reveal the author's desire to convince the reader of the goodness and fairness of the new regime, a desire that can be attributed to official pressure only partially. Karavaeva's ethics and ideas about emancipation followed the official Party line; they also made her existence in Stalinist Russia productive, harmonious, and meaningful.

The transformation of the New Woman of Late Imperial Russia into Soviet Woman mirrored the transition of Russia from a shattered autocratic state into a one-party dictatorship whose stability rested on the masses' acceptance of Party leadership and policies. In the decade preceding the revolution of 1917, Russia's New Women became increasingly involved in politics and social activism, because they anticipated profound changes in women's status and mission. In the decade directly following the revolution prominent Bolshevik women such as Kollontai attempted to implement their feminist ideas only to find that the State required women's participation in industrialization and collectivization and not in sexual revolution or politics. The survival of the Bolshevik regime depended on propaganda that would convincingly replace Kollontai's sexually and personally emancipated woman with a woman whose emancipation was connected exclusively with the building of communism. The Soviet Woman described in Karavaeva's fiction enthusiastically followed the leadership of the Party and actively participated in its policies because this process propagated her freedoms and rights under the Bolsheviks. She was, after all, allegedly emancipated.

Chapter 3: From the New Woman to the Aryan Woman

If in Russia liberal women discussed emancipation as connected with a social revolution that would radically change the traditional model of femininity, many progressive women in Germany in the 1910s and 1920s insisted that emancipation did not mean abandoning gender differences and discarding traditional feminine traits and virtues. In their attempt to construct new role models, prominent German feminists such as Gertrud Bäumer and popular urban liberal writers such as Vicki Baum worked with the familiar mother role as the mode of identification. Their works as well as their personal choices helped to integrate the nineteenth-century idea of spiritual motherhood into the Weimar discourse on the New Woman, offering two distinct models of femininity: the first model, embodied in Vicki Baum and her fictional heroines, presented a financially independent, glamorous, and sophisticated working mother and wife; the second, as seen in the writings and persona of Gertrud Bäumer, was a “spiritual” mother who dedicated her energies to social and political activism.

Parallel to these paradigms of liberated behavior, a third model of femininity emerged, which insisted on emancipation as reflecting national characteristics. German women, the renowned poet and fiction writer Ina Seidel posited, liberated themselves from the malicious effects of capitalist economy and the temptations of modern lifestyle by retaining a profound, intimate bond with their children and a lifelong attachment to their *Heimat*. According to Seidel, the experience of motherhood not only fulfilled woman’s ultimate calling, but also released her creative energies, making her more in tune with herself, her family, and her people. *Heimat*, the place and people of one’s childhood, on the other hand, served as source of renewal and strength.

This chapter outlines the paradigms of emancipation that best exemplify the transition from the New Woman of the Weimar Republic into the National Socialist Aryan Woman. It seeks answers to the following questions: 1) How did the nineteenth-century maternalist ideology impact the definition and interpretation of emancipation in the Weimar Republic? 2) What qualities and traits turned Baum, Bäumer, and Seidel into role models for their generation? 3) What elements of their paradigms of emancipation migrated into the National Socialist ideology? 4) How did the fates of Baum, Bäumer, and Seidel in the Third Reich illuminate the resolution of the Woman Question under Hitler's dictatorship?

3.1 Vicki Baum: The Working Mother in the Weimar Republic

Born 24 January 1888 in Vienna, Vicki Baum (Hedwig Baum) was the only child of an accountant and a housewife. Her parents were affluent assimilated Austrian Jews, who did not practice Judaism, or speak Yiddish at home. Little Vicki hardly spoke with her father, while her rare interactions with her mother, as Baum recalled in a novel with autobiographical elements, *Marion lebt*, were limited to discussions of woman's subordinate and helpless role in marriage, the "beastly" nature of sexual relationships, and a woman's need to have an independent income. These conversations undoubtedly informed Baum's perspective later, when, as a journalist at Ullstein, she began writing about sexual education for teenagers and careers for modern women.

At the age of eight Vicki began playing the harp. She continued to study music as a teenager, earned a degree at the Viennese conservatory, and became a professional

harpist. During her lifetime, Baum played for orchestras in Munich, Vienna, Berlin, and Darmstadt, and was often the only woman among the sixty-four members of the orchestra. She also explored the life of musicians, actors, and dancers in her fictional works, including her first novel, *Eingang zur Bühne*. At twenty-one, Vicki married the Viennese poet and journalist Max Prels. Because Prels was often between jobs and suffered from writer's block, Vicki had to provide for their family, performing, giving music lessons, even dabbling in a writing career. Having written fiction to amuse herself already in childhood, Vicki at first submitted stories, articles, editorials, and musical and theater reviews under Prels's name. Then Vicki entered a literary contest under her own name and won 1,500 marks. In 1913, Vicki and Prels divorced, but remained close friends until his death in 1922.

After several months of half-starvation and odd jobs, Baum found employment as a tutor with the Lert family and as a harpist at the Darmstadt orchestra. In addition to music and teaching, Baum continued to write, publishing the novella *Frühe Schatten, das Ende Einer Kindheit*, in 1914. Following the outbreak of World War I, while working as a nurse, she drafted a novel about two young female singers, *Eingang zur Bühne* (translated into English as *Once in Vienna*). The novel would inaugurate Baum's relationship with Ullstein, the largest publishing company in Germany at the time, and eventually propel her career to great heights.²⁰⁰ During the war years, Baum became romantically involved with Hans Richard Lert, her employers' son and the conductor of

²⁰⁰ Ullstein published the leading national newspapers and magazines, including the *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Die Dame*, the *Uhu*, and the *Vossische Zeitung*. Lynda King, *Best-Sellers by Design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 15-16.

the Darmstadt orchestra, whom she married in 1916. Soon mother of two sons, Vicki attempted to supplement her husband's unstable earnings by submitting a few manuscripts to the publisher Erich Reiss, and, following the advice of Prels, her former husband, sent *Eingang zur Bühne* to Ullstein. Baum's novellas sold well, and Ullstein asked her to write another one. In 1926, Baum signed an exclusive contract with the company.

“Branding” of the author represented an essential step in Ullstein's marketing and selling process. From 1926, in addition to being an on-staff writer, Baum worked as an editor and journalist for Ullstein publications such as *Die Dame*, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, and *Uhu* (all of which targeted different social groups), so that she could build a literary reputation on the topics that would be of interest to contemporary women.²⁰¹ Baum's articles analyzed contemporary fashions and culture, and parenting, as well as recent discoveries in science and medicine; they positioned her as a cosmopolitan author, a modern wife and mother, and an expert on the topics described.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Modeled on *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, *Die Dame* targeted affluent women, offering articles on high society, fashion, cosmetics, cars, dogs, etc. *Uhu*, on the other hand, aimed at educated middle-class public and featured articles with “substance.”. King, *Best-Sellers by Design*, 85.

²⁰² Among the articles Baum published were “Weiblicher Takt” (Female tact), “Lippenstift, Parfüm, und Spitzenwäsche in Sowjetrusland” (Lipstick, Perfume, and Lace Lingerie in Soviet Russia), “O, Diese Eltern! Die Kluft zwischen Generationen” (Oh, These Parents! The Gap between Generations) in der *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*,” and “Die Mütter von morgen—Die Backfische von heute” (Mothers of Tomorrow- the Teenagers of Today). Baum's article “Die Erfahrung mit der Verjüngung: Ein Rundgang durch die Laboratorien einer neuen Wissenschaft” (Discovering the Youth Potion: A Round through the Laboratories of the New Science), published in *Uhu* before the release of *Helene*, sought to establish Baum as an expert in the field and add credibility to Baum's protagonist in *Helene*. Ullstein's advertisements for the book included testimonies of female students and pictures of young women scientists. Lynda King, *Bestsellers by Design*, 81.

Employment at Ullstein (1926-1933) transformed Baum's life. A gifted, intellectually curious, and ambitious individual, she gradually became the New Woman that Ullstein had fashioned her to be: a popular writer and celebrity, who combined motherhood and family life with career and who took active part in the leisure activities of the Weimar era. As seen in surviving photographs, Vicki endured grueling boxing workouts to keep physically fit and vigorous, donned the latest trends in dress and hair, and starred on Berlin's social and cultural scene. Of the five Baum novels that Ullstein serialized and later published – *Feme* (1926), *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* (1928), *Menschen im Hotel* (1929), *Zwischenfall in Lohnwickel* (1930), and *Das Leben ohne Geheimnis* (1932) – two became international bestsellers. Baum's novels *Feme* and *Menschen im Hotel* were turned into films: Austrian director Richard Oswald released his film version of Baum's *Feme* in 1927, while the American Edmund Goulding of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer introduced *Menschen im Hotel* to US audiences as the film *Grand Hotel* in 1932.²⁰³ *Grand Hotel*, starring Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Wallace Beery, and Lionel Barrymore became a smash hit in the USA, even receiving an Oscar. Translations of *Menschen im Hotel* appeared in Dutch, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Portuguese and Polish, making Baum a European literary star. She became a household name in Germany, one of the highest paid writers at Ullstein, and an international celebrity.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Two other Baum novels were turned into films as well: *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, 1930, (director Fred Sauer, starring Olga Tschechowa, Ernst Stahl-Nachbaur, Elza Temory, Igo Sym) and *Hotel Berlin*, 1945, (director. Peter Godfrey, starring Faye Emerson, Helmut Dantine, Helmut Dantine, Peter Lorre, Andrea King).

²⁰⁴ By the early 1930s, contemporary caricatures placed Baum next to “serious” authors such as Thomas Mann, Emil Ludwig, and Jakob Wasserman. Lynda King, *Bestsellers by Design*, 81.

Her international fame notwithstanding, contemporary literary critics diverged in their opinions, some from denigrating Baum's works as "Kitsch" and "Schriftstellerei," and labeling her as the literary "daughter" of Hedwig Courths-Mahler to others praising Baum for her unique ability to create a poignant contemporary novel – a *Zeitroman*.²⁰⁵ The modern reader, however, may find Baum's vivid portrayals of social and cultural milieus in the late 1920s and early 1930s, her accessible vocabulary and humor, and multidimensional characters quite entertaining. For the modern reader especially, Baum's novels provide valuable commentary on the life of bourgeois women in the Weimar Republic, as they underline the ambivalence and ambiguity of Weimar emancipation. The novels *Zwischenfall in Lohwinkel*, *Die Karriere der Doris Hart*, *Pariser Platz 13*, and *stud. Chem. Helene Willfüer* (analyzed later in this chapter) effectively illustrate her perspectives on fashion, sexuality, career, marriage, and motherhood – the very experiences that defined a woman's life in the Weimar Republic. These novels feature socially prominent contemporary New Women – a vamp actress, a cynical opera singer, an ambitious student of chemistry, and a successful beauty salon owner – and contrast them with "regular" bourgeois women. Most importantly, these novels present Baum's ideas about emancipation, e.g., her model of modern femininity: In *Zwischenfall in Lohwinkel* Baum emphasizes the unchanged value of morality and the commitment to family for a modern woman; In *Die Karriere der Doris Hart* she rejects the commodification of love and sex; in *Pariser Platz 13* Baum emphasizes the importance of a groomed, youthful appearance and tasteful dress; and in *Helene*, Baum insists that a

²⁰⁵ In sales, Courths-Mahler surpassed the majority of the "serious" Weimar writers. Between 1920-1941, her 122 novels sold thirty million copies. Nottelmann, *Strategien*, 30.

modern woman can combine career, family, and motherhood, without sacrificing her feminine side. Written by a woman about women, Baum's novels retain remarkable authenticity for the modern reader as well, because they interrogate topics that have remained the subject of debate even eighty years later: the conflict between career and family; divorce; abortion; love and the commercialization of sexual appeal; motherhood and self-realization; and others.

The negative reaction to Baum's oeuvre in the early 1930s, however, was closely tied to the debates within the contemporary literary milieu: "high" and "low" literature, commodification and commercialization of art and literature, and about the different types of mass literature that competed for readership in the Weimar Republic. Baum's collaboration with Ullstein, which had a reputation as a *Buchfabrik* (an enterprise geared for profit that produced entertaining literature for mass consumption), especially influenced the reception of her works in the Weimar Republic as "lowbrow" and trivial.²⁰⁶ Historically in Germany, books and literature were connected with the nation's acquisition of culture and *Bildung* and served as an assimilatory and cohesive force within the bourgeoisie as well as a barrier against the proletariat and outsiders.²⁰⁷ In the eyes of the German intellectual elite, the emergence of a literary "market" meant the trivialization of literature, and the rise of books produced for mass consumption indicated

²⁰⁶ Because Baum aspired to be recognized as a writer of a higher caliber, between 1920 and 1926, she submitted several manuscripts of what she considered her better fiction, to another publisher, the *Deutsche Verlagsanstalt*. Only one of the submitted novels, *Der Weg*, received critics' attention, winning the contest and a significant monetary reward (5 000 marks). Lynda King, *Best-Sellers by Design*, 78.

²⁰⁷ Different nationalities, but especially Jews, within the German-speaking territories participated in *Bildung*, e.g., studied German language, literature, and culture, in order to be accepted into society.

a disconcerting decline in culture. Not only did such phenomena erode traditional barriers between the middle class and the proletariat, but it also challenged the traditional conception of the book and literature and the culturally specific understanding of the written text (book) in the development of an individual.²⁰⁸ The already existing conflict between “high” and “low” was further exacerbated by the emergence of new forms of literary production and types of mass literature in the Weimar Republic.²⁰⁹ Entertaining literature (*Trivalliteratur*), Weimar politicians and social commentators argued, polluted the mind. Campaigns against “Schmutz- und Schundliteratur” (trashy literature) started in Wilhelmine Germany, but they peaked in the late 1920s with the state sponsoring a campaign against so-called Kolportageromane or Hintertrepperomane (dime novels), establishing a national Book Day and expanding the German Academy of literature.²¹⁰

The commercial success of several Ullstein releases, including Remarque’s *Im Westen Nichts Neues* and Baum’s *stud.Chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Menschen im Hotel*, which, while adhering to a high stylistic and literary standard, were written and produced

²⁰⁸ A traditional conception of a book was that of a classic, permanent, and precious possession, and of the cultural and intellectual property of the individual. Reading, in turn, was perceived as a matter of serious attention, and as a duty and responsibility.

²⁰⁹ The new types of mass literature included: 1) bestselling literature, 2) conservative and nationalistic mass literature, and 3) proletarian and revolutionary mass literature. The bestseller literature (*Literatur der Bestsellerlisten*), popularized by Vicki Baum, Erich Maria Remarque, and Arnold Zweig, exhibited democratic-liberal and pro-bourgeois tendencies and belonged to so-called urbane literary genre (*Großstadtliteratur*). In contrast to bestseller literature, which portrayed modernity in positive terms, conservative and nationalistic literature lauded the patriarchal family and idealized life in the country. Proletarian revolutionary literature often employed slogans such as “Die Politik kommandiert die Literatur” and “Kunst als Waffe“ to popularize their anti-capitalist ideas. Nottelmann, *Strategien des Erfolges*, 20-26.

²¹⁰ In 1926, the German Parliament even discussed a law against “trashy literature.” Kirsten Barndt, *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit*, 32

for a large audience, prompted Thomas Mann and other writers to question the traditional dichotomy (of high/low literature) and suggest a new category – “middle(brow)” literature, or using Mann’s term, “das gutgemachte Mittlere”²¹¹ (a well-done “middle” literature). The modern reader finds Baum’s oeuvre in this category: in the literature that sought to bridge the gaps between “high” and “low” cultural products, and individualized and mass consumption, and that disseminated bourgeois values among wider segments of German society.²¹²

Baum found her niche among liberal urban writers, who made self-confident, professionally employed New Women the subject of their fiction, in a revised and updated version of literature for women (*Frauenliteratur*).²¹³ The topic of New Woman occupied a leading position in the popular literature and press of the Weimar Republic.²¹⁴

²¹¹ The term middlebrow culture originated in the USA in the 1920s to describe “serious” literature produced for large segments of society.

²¹² The rise of middlebrow literature in the Weimar Republic, as Katrin Völkner noted in her dissertation *Books for a Better Life*, functioned as a sign of *Verbürgerlichung*, or dissemination of the bourgeois culture among wider segments of German society and challenged the very idea of restricting *Bildung* to a section of society. Völkner, “Books for a better life,” 105-106.

²¹³ Austrian writer Gina Kaus stressed Baum’s accurate and positive portrayal of the challenges of a modern female student in *Helene* – without “streitbaren Auseinandersetzung über Frauenrechte,” (militant campaign/debate about women’s rights) while Alfred Arna, a contributor to the German Social Democratic Party’s newspaper *Vorwärts* lauded Baum’s ability to construct a sober, modern woman, who “steht mitten im Leben, ist von seltener Sachlichkeit, will als selbständiger Mensch in der Arbeit leben” and who is “bei der Arbeit gestaltet und nicht nur in der Liebe oder in ihrer Stellung zur Gesellschaft.” [who is in the middle of her life, displays rare sobriety, and wants to live her life as an independent, self-efficient individual ... who is defined by her work and not by love or her status in society] In Lydia King, *Bestsellers by Design*, 75.

²¹⁴ Baum’s *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer*, Irmgard Keun’s *Gigli, eine von uns* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), Marie-Luise Fleißer’s *Mehltreisende Frieda Geyer*, Christa Anita Brück’s *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (1930), and Joe Lederer’s *Das*

Modern historians have provided three theories as to why the New Woman figured so prominently within the literary and political discourse of Weimar Germany. A first group of scholars connect a crisis of masculinity resulting from the defeat in World War I to the mutilation of male bodies in combat and the changing gender roles during and after the war, while the second group, concerned with the history of eugenics, situate the debates about the New Woman within the context of demographic decline. Still, a third group argues that the New Woman aroused a wide spectrum of reactions from the social strata of the Weimar society as it epitomized modernity and challenged traditional views of femininity.²¹⁵

In literature, conservative women writers such as Ina Seidel and Hedwig Courths-Mahler lauded self-sacrifice, domesticity, and service as virtues for women, charting women's destiny within the private spheres of motherhood and family.²¹⁶ Liberal urban authors such as Baum updated the literature intended for women with new role models: independent women with a distinct social identity and ambitions to achieve success in career as well as in love. Like the successful woman writer Irgard Keun, the author of *Gigli, eine von uns* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), Baum wrote in the tradition of the emerging historical-aesthetic and literary trend called *Neue Sachlichkeit*

Mädchen George (1931) were the most commercially successful novels about the New Woman in the Weimar Republic. Nottelmann, *Strategien*, 31.

²¹⁵ Rüdiger Graf, "Anticipating the Future in the Present: "New Woman" and other Beings of Future in Weimar Germany," *Central European History* 42 (2009), 648-650.

²¹⁶ Courths-Mahler's novels typically offered a Cinderella story, in which a pious and timid woman was rewarded for her perseverance and patience with prosperity and a good husband. Nottelmann, *Strategien*, 29-30.

(New Sobriety/New Subjectivity).²¹⁷ It is noteworthy that Baum viewed her collaboration with Ullstein as a well-paying job and was pragmatic about the commercial success of her books. In her own words, she possessed the skill to entertain the masses, not the intellectual elite: “Ich weiß, was ich wert bin. Ich bin erstklassige Schriftstellerin zweiter Güte.”²¹⁸ (I know my own worth: I am a first-rate second-class writer). While they depicted controversial issues, Baum’s novels about the New Woman did not attempt to take a political position; instead, they sought to discuss these issues within popular culture.²¹⁹

The concept of the New Woman did not evoke a unanimously positive response among the male population in the Weimar Republic. As pre-war femininity was associated with childbearing, housekeeping, and self-sacrifice, the femininity that emerged during the years of the Weimar democracy – embodied in the professionally employed, androgynously clad, cynical and increasingly sterile New Woman – signified to many politicians and intellectuals a decline of national culture and the decay of the nation. Even though Baum portrayed a range of New Women, emphasizing that her

²¹⁷ The literature of New Subjectivity reflected the worldview of a growing white-collar worker class and of the Berlin metropolis, exhibiting liberal-democratic tendencies and the sober, disillusioned attitude of the post-WW I generation. This literary trend increasingly distanced itself from trivial literature as well as elite aesthetics. Instead, it sought to re-define the role of art, especially literature, in the age of mass culture, claiming that literature and commerce, as well as literature and entertainment, should no longer be in opposition. Nottelmann, *Strategien*, 33.

²¹⁸ Vicki Baum, *Erinnerungen*, 16.

²¹⁹ As Kirsten Barndt pointed out, the novels about the New Woman “besetzen damit im doppelten Sinn ein Feld der Mitte: politisch wie ästhetisch kollidieren sie mit geschlechtsspezifischen Literatur- und Politikvorstellungen von links wie von rechts. Doch im Versuch, die Neue Frau und ihre Kultur politisch wie ästhetisch zu disziplinieren, öffnete sich der Diskurs Stimmen, die ohne die Romane der Neuen Frau unhörbar geblieben wären.” *Sentiment und Sachlichkeit*, 88.

heroines remained feminine and motherly despite their academic or professional pursuits, with the advance of National Socialism in Germany, Baum's thematic choices – emancipated women and the way they overcame challenges in capitalist society and patriarchal families – became targets in nationalist-conservative and anti-Semitic publications, which proclaimed her works creations of a Jewish émancipée that contaminated the minds of German women with false ideas about social roles and identity.²²⁰

In 1933, Baum moved her sons and husband to the United States out of fear of increasing anti-Semitism in Germany. She settled in Hollywood and spent the next thirty years of her life collaborating with the publishing company Doubleday, writing scripts for film studios such as Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and composing fiction in English and German. She published seventeen novels and took trips to Asia and South America. Baum was moderately successful and enjoyed a comfortable life; her husband was highly esteemed as a musician and conducted a concert in honor of Roosevelt's birthday. Baum died of leukemia at her home in Hollywood in 1960.

3. 2 The New Woman as a Motherly Scholar: *Stud. Chem. Helene Willfüer*

Baum's much-discussed bestseller *Helene* depicts the story of a young chemistry student who finds herself pregnant out of wedlock after the suicide of her lover, considers

²²⁰ Such as, for example, the 1932 essay *Die systematische Vernichtung der arischen Kulturgüter* by Hans Hauptmann, who wrote that “Es ist Tatsache, dass weite Kreise unseres Volkes dem Geschmacke an seichten, amoralischen Sensationsromanen, wie sie die Jüdin Vicky (sic) Baum-Levy mit anerkannter Schamlosigkeit zu schreiben pflegt, gewonnen sind. Es ist Tatsache, dass die Jahrtausende alte Stellung der deutschen Frau als Hüterin des Hauses und der Sitte keine Geltung mehr hat.” In Andrea Capovilla, *Entwürfe weiblicher Identität in der Moderne*, 66.

abortion but decides to keep the child, invents a rejuvenating elixir, and leaves her successful career in chemistry to marry her former professor. Baum's positive depiction of the New Woman in the novel received much public acclaim in the Weimar Republic; yet, the ending is criticized even in the most favorable reviews, including one by the renowned German writer Gabriele Reuter. Writing in the *Vossische Zeitung* in 1929, Reuter noted that Helene "gives up her job in the large chemical works, marries Professor Ambrosius, whom she loved early in shy secrecy.... To prove that the immortal feminine capacity for self-sacrifice lies even in the strongest female spirit... and that is a small weakness in a strong book."²²¹ Modern scholars such as Lydia King, on the other hand, connect the conventional ending with Baum's status as an Ullstein author who could only go so far in her exploration of controversial issues so as not to alienate her middle-class readership.²²² Other scholars such as Katharina von Ankum argue that in *Helene*, Baum participates in the contemporary adaptation of "essentialist femininity to a cult of rationalization that supported patriarchal and capitalist structures, thus preparing the ground for the backlash against women in 1933."²²³ While all of these remarks are well taken, we can also assume that Baum constructs her protagonist based on herself, on what she considers an improved model of femininity: the New Woman who, on the one hand, remains motherly and family oriented, e.g., feminine in the traditional sense, despite her "masculine" pursuit of science (or, in Baum's case, a writing career), and, who, on the

²²¹ Quoted in Lynda King, *Best-Sellers by Design*, 103.

²²² Ibid 110.

²²³ Katharina von Ankum, "Motherhood and the New Woman Vicki Baum's stud. Chem.. Helene Willfüer and Irgard Keun's Gigli-eine von uns," *Women in German Yearbook*, 11 (1995), 171.

other hand, excels in several roles *because* of her intellect as well as her traditional female virtues such as motherliness, compassion, and selflessness. In contrast to the New Women outlined in the works of Kollontai and Verbitskaia, who were focused more on their intellectual, artistic, and sexual self-fulfillment than children and family, Baum's heroines forcefully articulate that motherhood only enhances their life journey and helps them reach professional and personal heights.

Baum's own biography and her literary legacy demonstrates that she valued work for its power to give a modern woman financial and psychological independence from her husband, but that she never envisioned career as more important than family. Baum's attitude towards motherhood is well documented in her novels as well as memoirs: all of her heroines are caring, dedicated mothers, while her anti-heroines are sterile because of an illness, contraception, or abstinence. Baum's Helene embodies a new idealized female type: a rational and sober, yet compassionate woman mother-worker of modern times. Not only does Helene's commitment to chemistry not destroy her womanliness, through it she is able to enhance the work environment, as well as the living conditions of her roommate Gudula with her housekeeping and motherly talents. With remarks such as "You can make everything flourish" and "anything could be safe with you" (64) Helene Willfüer manifests the talent to create an ambiance of comfort in the middle of a messy, pungent laboratory" (32-33), Baum establishes her heroine's image as a balanced, orderly, and nurturing individual. Helene's soft, loyal, and compassionate side is further developed in the depiction of her lifelong friendships with the maimed bookseller Kranich whom she regularly visits in the hospital and with Professor Ambrosius, with whom Helene remains in contact after his suicide attempt. Finally, the fruit of Helene's

scientific research and the reason for her wealth and stellar reputation – the elixir Vitalin that heals and rejuvenates – stands as a metaphor for women’s comforting, nurturing power, thus suggesting that Helene’s occupation releases her motherly power to benefit mankind.

To highlight Helene’s virtuousness, Baum juxtaposes Helene with Gudula, her roommate and a student of archeology, and the Professor’s first wife, Yvonne, focusing on the two most-discussed attributes of the New Woman: fashion and sexuality. Helene’s sartorial choices – she dresses modestly, but tidily and orderly – sharply contrast with those of the Professor’s wife Yvonne, who dresses to flaunt her bobbed hair, slender figure, and long legs. If Yvonne adopts modern fashion to enhance her sexual appeal, Helene is guided by reason and practicality, choosing clothing that is suitable for work as well as physically active leisure. Placed in the contemporary context, Yvonne resembles the model of femininity known as the Girl, who, fixated on youth, rejected motherhood and the patriarchal family.²²⁴ Childless and ageless, Yvonne acts out her sexual desires in an affair, destroying not only her marriage but also the physical and mental health of her husband. In contrast, Helene’s inherent motherliness comforts and restores her sexual partners. Baum’s further commentary on fashion and character emerges in the description

²²⁴Many popular press publications such as the 1927 article in the Berlin newspaper *8-Uhr-Abendblatt* identified three domineering types of modern femininity: Gretchen, Girl, and Garçonne. The Gretchen type referred to young German women who were conservative, naïve, religious, patriotic and involved in militaristic organizations such as the ones within the rising Social Nationalist party. The ambitious and opportunistic Girl type was described as originating in America, the product of pioneers and immigrants. She stressed her youth and rejected socially imposed roles of mother and wife. The third type, the Garçonne, preferred a boyish or masculine look and was ambitious and intellectually curious. Both the Garçonne and the Girl types were negatively connoted. Lynne Frame, “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal Woman,” in *Women in Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Katharina von Ankum, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

of Gudula's shapeless cloaks. While Yvonne dresses provocatively and Helene chooses practical clothing, Gudula prefers garments that downplay her gender. Neither a man nor a traditional woman, this androgynous figure, when placed in the contemporary context, resembles the model of femininity known as the *Garçonne*. The *Garçonne* favored a boyish look, seeking to blur gender lines in her dress and displaying more intellect than emotionality. In contrast to goal-oriented but warm and compassionate Helene, sexually ambiguous Gudula projects coldness and egotism. If Helene dedicates her life to learning, Gudula seeks glory.

Deeply situated in the political and cultural discourses of the inter-war years, *Helene* forcefully advocates the reconfiguration of the New Woman as the New Mother, who, instead of feeling ashamed of her out-of-wedlock, single motherhood status, transforms the idea of childbearing as the meaning of a woman's life into the idea of child-bearing as a prerequisite to professional, as well as personal success.²²⁵ Gradually, Baum unfolds the dormant motherliness in Helene's science-focused personality: at the beginning of the novel, Helene is elated to hold a stranger's baby in a loud train car, later, when confronted with her friend Rainer's despair, Helene plays a motherly role in their brief relationship. Helene's maternal instinct blossoms when she accepts her fate and keeps her baby rather than aborting it. Finally, the relationship between the professor and Helene, while it reflects the physical attraction between them, is founded on Helene's

²²⁵ For more about the contemporary portrayal of single motherhood, see Katharina von Ankum, "Motherhood and the New Woman Vicki Baum's *stud. Chem. Helene Willfüer* and *Imgard Keun's Gigli-eine von uns*," *Women in German Yearbook*, 11 (1995).

nurturing, comforting, and maternal personality.²²⁶ With this plot development, Baum draws on theories about female creativity that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century: against the argument that women's reproductive role hindered their need or ability for creative expression (bourgeois feminists such as Helene Stöcker, Helene Lange, and Gertrud Bäumer argued that through motherliness – biological as well as spiritual – women could best unfold their artistic and intellectual ability).

In its presentation of abortion and single motherhood *Helene* represents an attempt to integrate the ideas promoted by radical German feminists into the cultural and social realities of the last years of the Weimar Republic. A self-reliant and self-sufficient individual, Helene Willfürer deals with her challenges without hysteria, shame, or self-victimization. She cannot be placed decisively into the Gretchen, Garçonne, or Girl category. Rather, she represents a morphed type that combines traditional feminine virtues such as patience, compassion, and motherliness with traits that were traditionally perceived as masculine: intellectual curiosity, sobriety, self-reliance, and discipline. Helene's decision to abandon her career may seem sudden, but it is important to remember that she agrees to marry a person who shares her academic interests and forms a strong bond with her illegitimate son. The scholar Helene displays femininity of a better, more sophisticated kind. This "evolved" femininity combines the need for self-realization with maternal qualities and romantic love. In contrast to the New Woman Katya Erhlich in Verbitskaia's novel, whose musical genius and sensuality are destroyed

²²⁶ Baum's portrayal of Helene's encounter with Professor Ambrosius in the train compartment in the middle of the novel emphasizes that their relationship has elements of a mother/son bond: "It seemed to her as though she had a wounded and precious animal to comfort; and the man – just like an animal or a child—feeling this desire to comfort, cried aloud. He let himself go... and fell at Helene's feet as though at a mother's. She put her arms around him, clasped him tightly, strongly, like a woman." (*Helene* 154).

by the demands of motherhood, Baum's Helene triumphs in her career as well as in love because she embraces her motherliness and succeeds in finding balance between her career and nurturing those she loves.

3.3 New Woman as a Beauty Industry entrepreneur: *Pariser Platz 13*

First published in 1930, the play *Pariser Platz 13: Eine Komödie aus dem Schönheitssalon* centers on the woman entrepreneur Helen Bross, who earns wealth and public acclaim as the owner of beauty salons in European capitals and in the USA. Helen Bross embodies a New Woman who is not only in control of her finances but also of aging: she claims to retain her youthful, dashing appearance as a result of the treatments in her salons. This reputation, however, rests on an enormous scam, for the owner is young (twenty-four), and she uses cosmetic means to appear older. The play thus masterfully explores contemporary tensions between the inflated promises of fashion and cosmetics and reality; between a groomed look and professional advancement or a successful love life. In addition, it underlines the ambivalence of a constructed identity, for the owner of the salon performs her role as a rejuvenated middle-aged woman because it is the only condition that helps her business to flourish.

Helen's salon on Pariser Platz in Berlin, the locale of the play, reads as an enclave of female power, a completely restructured and modernized public sphere. Bross's clients – an architect, a socialite, and an actress – represent the most visible strata of contemporary German society that rely on appearance to succeed professionally; the clients also form the new social group of white collar workers, which (allegedly) has

access to the newest discoveries in science and medicine and can buy beauty and youth just like other commodities. Between rejuvenating procedures and hair and makeup sessions, the affluent guests of the salon flaunt the latest fashions, their expensive automobiles, and even their comely lovers. The luxurious and trendy setting of Bross's beauty salon provides a perfect venue for social interactions, and allows the clients to gain confidence in the business world, on the social scene, and in love. In the context of the play, then, the desire to appear younger and more beautiful is not simply narcissistic; rather, it represents an attempt to attain full control of one's age and love life.

Put in the historical and cultural context, this play testifies to the critical role that fashion and the beauty industry played in the lives of German women in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Fashion became central to women's experience of modernity not only because it helped to create an identity or satisfy narcissistic urges, but because it allowed them to participate actively as professionals – journalists, illustrators, designers, photographers, models, shop assistants, or beauty salon owners – and as consumers of pleasure – movie goers, buyers of fashionable items, cosmetics, etc. The pursuit of a fashionable look was not limited to the propertied class; on the contrary, it became a vital prerequisite for professional advancement in many white-collar jobs. Ullstein's publicity photographs of Baum featured the author dressed in the latest fashions, with a bob haircut, and smoldering, heavily made-up eyes to stress her New Woman image. Baum and other fashion journalists of the 1920s were media celebrities in the modern sense: they embodied, displayed and performed the styles they wrote about. As Siegfried Kracauer insists in his 1929 essay *Die Angestellten/The Salaried Masses* without a “pleasing appearance,” which included stylish attire, tasteful makeup, and an attractive

haircut, female office and store employees could not hope to get promoted or even keep their jobs. Then as now, fashion played a seminal role in defining modern femininity. It functioned, in Sabine Hake's words, as a "marker of economic status and social ambition, as an expression of female narcissism and beauty, and as the focus of consumerist fantasies and commodified versions of the self."²²⁷

In contrast, fashion plays a lesser role in the writings of Russia's New Women Kollontai and Verbitskaia. Emancipation, according to Kollontai and Verbitskaia, starts from within, from focusing on self-development, and triumphs after the socialist revolution. In the Russian context, fashion is seen as a mere reflection of changing economy and lifestyles, not as a means of achieving professional and personal success.

3.4 New Woman as a Commercial Artist: *Die Karriere der Doris Hart*

As foreshadowed already in the title, *Die Karriere der Doris Hart* depicts the multiple careers of an orphaned German immigrant Doris Hart in mid 1920s America, who gradually overcomes the constraints of her middle-class upbringing in order to survive. Here Baum vividly showed how a girl from "a good family" (Doris's father was a doctor who died early leaving his family destitute) learns to adapt to the demands of a capitalist economy and to life in a foreign country, developing a cynical, pragmatic attitude to love, sex, and art. Ultimately, the novel offers a story of a modern Cinderella, who takes charge of her life, rising from a waitress and nude model to a world-renown opera singer and finding a way to release her prince from prison. Yet, it reads as a

²²⁷ Sabine Hake, "The Mirror of Fashion," 185.

fairytale without a happy end: Doris is the anti-heroine, who becomes disillusioned and corrupt in the process of fulfilling the American dream.

Doris's life in New York resembles that of millions of immigrants: she experiences hunger, loneliness, and despair, and yearns to form a new family and find a new *Heimat*. She works exhausting shifts at a German restaurant and poses nude for her lover Basil Nemeroff, a Russian sculptor. In her rare spare time, Doris takes singing lessons from the retired Italian opera diva Salvatori and dreams about becoming a big star. She comes into contact with the careless, opulent lifestyle of the American rich when she attends a party of Basil's potential client, Franklin Bryant. The party becomes a turning point in her life: Doris learns the value of her statuesque body and also of life, when Basil, out of rage and jealousy, accidentally fires his gun into her chest, leaving Doris with one functioning lung.

The illness forces Doris to remain childless (one lung is not conducive to pregnancy, her doctor says), and she decides to focus on her ambitions and on getting Basil out of prison. She gradually adapts the sober, practical attitude of the post-World War I generation, accepting the commodification of love without disgust, shame, or remorse:

Sie ist nicht mehr die Doris von vorher, die Dinge geschehen und die sich treiben lässt. Sie denkt und handelt, sie hatte die Möglichkeit, abgewiesen zu werden, schon vorher ins Auge gefasst, und da ist eine undeutliche und unwegsame Art von Plan in ihr, wie sie dennoch zu dem Geld kommen soll. ... Es ist wichtig, das Geld zu beschaffen, mit dem sie zu Basil fahren kann. Es ist unwichtig, auf welche Art sie es sich verschafft.

[She is no longer the Doris who allows things to happen and drift away. She thinks and acts, she had already envisioned the opportunity to be dismissed, and now she is contemplating a plan how she should nevertheless get the money, although it is still a vague, rough plan. ... It is

important to find money so that she can go to Basil. It is unimportant how she does it.] (*Die Karriere* 468)

Selling herself becomes Doris' *modus vivendi*. She views both her short and long lasting affairs as cleanly conducted business in which both parties receive what they wanted, and does not feel any emotional remorse – only a slight discomfort when men fall in love with her. Doris accepts tips from her lovers, figuratively and literally, changing her hair color, wearing make-up, and buying fashionable clothes to increase her sexual appeal. As her musical skill develops, Doris also becomes a connoisseur of the male psychology, knowing when to flatter and when to imitate jealousy. When she reaches her goal and becomes a celebrated mezzo-soprano, nothing remains of Doris the German immigrant: she is now Dorina Rossi, the Italian-born pupil of the unforgettable tenor Delmonte and a capricious diva, who converses with aplomb in Italian, French, and English; bedazzles with furs and jewelry; and feels nowhere at home.

This displacement and disillusionment connects the fictional Doris with Baum's generation. Like her peers in Germany, the Americanized Doris realizes that she no longer fit into the "average" femininity defined by bourgeois morality:

Wieder fühlte Doris das sonderbare Bedauern, dass sie nicht sein konnte, was sie gerne gewesen wäre, ein harmloses Mädel, ein Kamerad für diesen Durchschnittsjungen, eine Durchschnittsfrau mit einer Durchschnittsliebe.

[She felt again this strange feeling of regret that she could no longer become what she would like to be: a harmless pure maiden, a friend for this average young man, an average wife with an average love.] (477)

This New Woman actively and willingly participates in modern capitalist society and survives only by applying capitalist principles to her career, as well as to her relationships.

As presented in the novel, Doris's acceptance of the commodification of love and sex, however, backfires: once a prostitute, she cannot disengage herself from that role and cannot fill the vacuum in her heart, even though she reunites with the love of her life, the sculptor Basil, at the end of the novel. She dies from complications of her lung disease on an island alongside her lover, a physically broken woman, a forgotten star, and a disillusioned artist. While Doris no longer resembles the "girl from a good family," she also fails to become an emancipated, fulfilled modern woman, because she has allowed capitalist society to consume her body and destroy her soul.

3.5 New Woman as a Progressive Housewife: *Zwischenfall in Lohwinckel*

In *Zwischenfall in Lohwinckel*, Baum returns to discussion of traditionally constructed femininity – as embodied in a dutiful, dedicated wife and mother – and its challenges in the Weimar Republic. The differing worldviews of the protagonist Elisabeth, a small town housewife, and big city dwellers collide when a car accident breaks the soporific atmosphere of the town where Elisabeth lives with her husband (who is a doctor) and their two young children. The car passengers – a beautiful and decadent movie star; her affluent and handsome lover, Peter, and a famous boxer – who all originate from the Metropolis of Berlin, inundate the provincial town with demonstrations of modernity: clothes, thoughts, ideas, and conduct. The intrusion of these sophisticated travelers forces their hosts to re-evaluate their values and lifestyle: the sister of the host where the actress stays begins to discuss her homosexuality openly, while Elisabeth, who takes care of Peter, confronts her husband about her joyless,

purposeless life. The unlikely romance between Peter, a self-indulgent world traveler, and Elisabeth, a subservient, submissive small town housewife, reads as Baum's commentary on gender relationships in the Weimar Republic. The fact that Peter easily disposes of his emancipated, fashionable lover-actress and forms an attachment to the traditional bourgeois wife suggests that the vamp, albeit seductive, cannot withstand a comparison with a less-modern but virtuous woman. On the other hand, Elisabeth's enchantment with modernity is short-lived: while she develops a liking for Peter Carbon's compliments and their conversations about music, food, art, and entertainment, she also understands that he does not intend to commit. Peter's respectful, attentive conduct and his ability to see a person, not a servant in her, however, have a lasting effect upon Elisabeth. Because of her contact with Peter, e.g., modernity, Elisabeth transforms into an outspoken and assertive individual, who is able to express her grievances and dissatisfaction. Elisabeth, a traditional wife in a patriarchal union, Baum insisted, revitalizes her marriage by modernizing her relationship – by insisting on her emotional need to be valued and appreciated.

Baum's presentation of domestic life and marriage in this and other novels differs significantly from that in the writings of Kollontai and Verbitskaia. If Russia's New Women considered patriarchal family and marriage shackles for a modern woman, Baum believed that modernity bestowed women with the tools to transform their married lives. Rather than abandoning conventional marriage, Baum invited contemporary bourgeois women to build a meaningful, deep relationship with their spouses. In her framework that implied expanding the boundaries of marital communication and intellectual horizons while staying fully committed to children and husband.

My analysis of the New Woman in Baum's selected works demonstrates that popular literature in the late 1920s and early 1930s, while describing allegedly existing modes of emancipated female behavior, also focused on developing a new identity for contemporary women. As seen in Baum's works, the New Woman fiction often used the mother role as a mode of identification, but accompanied this familiar role with the attributes of emancipation: motherhood out-of-wedlock, single motherhood, or a motherhood that supplemented a successful professional or academic career. Although it retained traditional characteristics (compassion, loyalty, service, sacrifice), this more nuanced model of femininity, as embodied in Baum herself and her heroines, also advanced a woman's autonomy, her financial and emotional independence, and did not insist on women's duty to the state and the nation. In the last years of the Weimar Republic, however, this model became increasingly problematic: discouraged by competition in the job market during the post-WW I economic crisis and disenchanted with the emancipatory promise of the Weimar constitution, many women found comfort in fantasizing about "old" models of femininity, including the idea of spiritual motherhood. In an atmosphere of a collapsing economy and widespread belief in the cultural and demographic decline of the German nation, progressive women such as the leader of the German bourgeois women's movement, Gertrud Bäumer, continued to promote their distinct model of emancipation, which presented women not as bystanders who focus on individual aspects of women's existence, but as active agents in the regeneration of the nation. This model of femininity connected the welfare of a woman with the welfare of the state and insisted on women's power as mothers (both biological and spiritual); it competed with the notorious New Woman and the improved New

Woman depicted in Baum's works. It also was ruthlessly exploited during the Third Reich.

3.6 Gertrud Bäumer: the Spiritual Mother of the German Liberal Bourgeois Women's Movement

In her 1911 essay *Der Wandel des Frauenideals in der modernen Kultur* (*The Changing Ideal of Femininity in the Modern Culture*), the newly elected chairperson of the German Women's Association (the BDF) Gertrud Bäumer identified a major dilemma that her generation faced:

In unserer Zeit stehen die Frauen vor der großen Frage: Wie weit gehört überhaupt mein Leben mir selbst, und wie weit gehört es den andern? Wie weit hat überhaupt heute irgend ein Mensch das Recht darauf, seiner eigenen Persönlichkeit zu leben, nur für sich Schätze, äußere und innere, zu erwerben, alle Mittel die ihm die Kultur der Zeit darbietet, zu verwenden zu einem geistig reichen, exklusiven, nur auf sich konzentrierten Kulturdasein, das sich immer feiner und erlesener gestaltet? ... Diesen Konflikten [zwischen persönlichen Lebensdrang und Pflicht] aber stehen gerade die Frauen unsicherer und zweifelnder gegenüber.

[In our times women face a real dilemma: how much does my life belong to me and how much does it belong to others? Does one have the right at all to live as an individual, in agreement with one's own personality, and to acquire the inner and outer treasures of the modern civilization for one's own personal use and pleasure? Does one have the right to appropriate all available means of contemporary culture to enrich her cultural and spiritual existence, to make it finer and more exquisite? ... The conflict between their duty and their longing to live fully makes [modern] women increasingly unsure and doubtful.] (23)

A woman of many talents, Bäumer answered this question by dedicating her life to the German bourgeois women's movement, and later, after Hitler's disbandment of bourgeois women's organizations, to the defense of German womanhood – the way she

conceptualized it. Parallel to liberal women-writers such as Vicki Baum who suggested that a modern woman could successfully combine a professional career, motherhood, and family without becoming unfeminine, liberal bourgeois women-activists such as Bäumer insisted that women's pursuit of self-fulfillment and personal emancipation, in order to remain feminine, had to reflect the interests of the state and the nation, and benefit society as a whole, not just an individual woman. Bäumer, like Baum, sought to create a model of femininity that best corresponded to Germany's changed political, cultural, and economic realities. Although Bäumer loathed the idea of socialist revolution, her paradigm of emancipation closely resembled the paradigm outlined in the writings of Alexandra Kollontai in that it connected women's aspirations and goals with the welfare of the nation as a whole.

Like Baum, Bäumer adopted a lifestyle that was progressive and emancipated for her era: If Baum expanded the traditional sphere of family and children by becoming a successful popular writer and participating in contemporary leisure activities, Bäumer forewent marriage and motherhood altogether in order to benefit women (and society) as a reformer, scholar, writer, and political activist. The president of the BDF between 1910-1919, the vice-chairwoman of the German Democratic Party (DDP) in 1914-1933, a professor at the College of Politics, and the life-long editor and contributor to the feminist monthly *Die Frau*, Bäumer exemplified a quintessential "spiritual" mother. She continued to serve her nation and state – in the way Bäumer defined it – throughout the years of the Third Reich, even after her influence was reduced to publishing in *Die Frau*, attempting to inscribe liberal bourgeois women's visions of German womanhood into the bio-maternal and racist discourse of National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*. No liberal

bourgeois woman-activist of the early twentieth century sheds more light on the complex relationship between German feminism and National Socialism than Bäumer, whose life and activities in the 1930s and early 1940s represent a combination of collaboration and victimhood, resistance and accommodation.

Born 12 September 1873 in Hohenlimburg, Gertrud Bäumer was raised by a liberal Protestant minister and a housewife. Bäumer became interested in social problems when as a Sunday school teacher she encountered proletarian families. The living conditions of the workers in this rapidly industrializing city shocked the fifteen-year-old Gertrud, and she immersed herself in Christian Socialist literature, namely, in the writings of Adolf Stöcker and Friedrich Naumann, to find solutions.²²⁸ She also decided to pursue a career in education. After passing her state exams in 1890, Bäumer took a position at a public school in Westphalia. Although she loved teaching, Bäumer suffered from the “animosity and class hatred” that the proletarian families of her students often

³³ Adolf Stöcker was the founder of the Christian Social Party, which existed from 1878 until the early 1900s. His beliefs combined theology with a political philosophy that insisted that German culture was being corrupted by materialistic economic dogma. Upset with the dislocating socio-economic effects brought on by rapid industrialization and the new capitalist system, Stöcker advocated a Christian revival and a return to Germanic rule in law and business. He blamed Jewish capitalists for controlling Germany, becoming one of the early supporters of the idea of a Jewish conspiracy. Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919) was a German liberal politician and Protestant pastor and the founder of National Social movement and of the German Democratic Party. In addition to publishing the weekly non-Marxist, middle-class-oriented magazine *Die Hilfe* (The Help), Naumann joined Stöcker’s Christian Social Party to advocate Christian values, which he hoped would improve the fraught relations between workers and corporate businessmen. In 1919 Naumann cofounded the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (German Democratic Party or DDP).

displayed towards her.²²⁹ After teaching for three more years at another school, Bäumer decided to pursue her studies in social sciences further and find remedies to contemporary social ills. While contemplating how to finance her further education, in 1897, Bäumer attended a conference organized by the General Association of German Female Teachers in Leipzig as a Magdeburg candidate. There she encountered Auguste Schmidt (1833-1902) and Helene Lange (1848-1930), the leading feminists and educators within the German bourgeois women's movement. There, where "Bavarian and East Prussian, Westphalian and Saxon were spoken," she first realized that "we did not belong to the nation as individuals, but through our common efforts were a complete part of the life of the nation, that in the combined efforts of its energies we had our own purpose, which had grown organically from our womanhood."²³⁰ Impressed by the feminists and especially by Helene Lange, Bäumer joined the BDF.²³¹

In 1898, after twenty-six-year-old Bäumer moved to Berlin to continue her studies, she volunteered to become assistant to Lange, who, then fifty-years-old, struggled from poor eyesight and needed a secretary. From 1899 until Lange's death

²²⁹ Bäumer, *Lebensweg*, 141. Quoted in Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914*. (Harvard University Press, 2000), 110.

²³⁰ Bäumer, *Lebensweg*, 141. Quoted in Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914*. (Harvard University Press, 2000), 111-112.

²³¹ At the time Bäumer and Helene Lange met, the latter held seats in the executive committees of the Female Teachers' Association, the General German Women's Association, and the BDF. Lange extended a profound influence on the German bourgeois women's movement. Lange's ideology weaved together patriotism and economic and biological arguments, reshaping the women's movement in Germany in a moderate vein. Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914*, 112.

thirty years later, they not only collaborated on publications and projects but also shared a house and household, in a so-called Bostonian marriage.²³² Their contemporaries, such as the wife of Max Weber, Marianne Weber, described the relationship between the two women as “Wahlmutter- und Wahltochterschaft,” (that between adopted mother and daughter) who shared the same ideals.²³³ Whatever their relationship, we can assume that the lifestyle of a single, childless woman suited Bäumer’s personality and life goals, allowing her to pursue further education and concentrate on her duties as Lange’s assistant. In between taking classes at the Victoria Lyceum and University of Berlin, Bäumer accompanied Lange to England to research for the *Handbuch der Frauenbewegung/ Handbook of the Women’s Movement* (1900-1901). She also led panels on pedagogical issues for the International Congress of Women in Berlin (1904) and published on a variety of topics in Lange’s feminist journal *Die Frau*. In 1904, Bäumer defended a dissertation on Goethe’s *Satyros*, becoming one of the first women-PhDs in

²³² The term “Boston marriage” (after Henry James’s book *The Bostonians*) meant a marriage-like relationship between two women, without male support. It did not necessarily imply a lesbian marriage.

²³³ Neither biographical sources on Bäumer nor her own literary legacy disclose whether her relationship with Lange at some point expanded the borders of a close, intimate friendship into a sexual relationship. A letter from Lange’s great-great-niece found on the internet denies that she was gay.

Voller Empörung las ich die eindeutig zweideutigen Bemerkungen zum Verhältnis meiner Großtante Helene Lange zu ihrer Kampfgährtin Gertrud Bäumer. Diese diffamierenden Äußerungen sind wohl nur auf die moralische Einstellung der Autorin zurückzuführen, die gesellschaftliche Ideale auf Bettgeschichten reduziert. Ich möchte an dieser Stelle nochmals ausdrücklich darauf hinweisen, daß meine Tante zwar den Tisch, aber nicht das Bett mit Frau Bäumer geteilt hat.

Gertrude Weber-Lange
1 Berlin 47

(http://www.karnele.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/leserbrief_courage.jpg)

Germany.²³⁴ Shortly after her defense, Bäumer organized congresses for women teachers at the national level and led a campaign for Prussian girls' school reform, seeking to achieve women's entry into public administration. Bäumer's efforts earned her acclaim and respect among her peers: she was elected to the executive committees of the German Female Teachers' Association and the BDF and asked to be editor of *New Pathways*, the official newspaper of the General German Women's Association.²³⁵

The problem of women's education and employment surfaces as a major theme in Bäumer's works. In her essay *Krisis des Frauenstudiums (Crisis of Women's Education, 1911)* Bäumer criticized the popular belief that professions hindered women from being good mothers and wives and argued that women's employment benefited the entire family:

Die berufstätige Frau wirkt positiv familienstützend, denn erstens entlastet sie die Familie von ihrer eigenen Versorgung... Zweitens übernimmt sie durchgehend die Versorgung der Eltern oder Geschwister, wenn der Mann für seine eigene Familie sorgen muß. Und drittens erobert sie sich vielfach die Ehe durch den Beruf. Sie verdient sich die Aussteuer und sie ermöglicht bei unsicherer Wirtschaftslage des Mannes seine Ehe.

[A working woman extends a positive influence over her family because she, first of all, liberates the family from her own upkeep. Secondly, she assumes financial responsibility for her siblings and parents whereas a man has to take care of his own family. And thirdly, she secures herself a marriage through her profession. She earns herself a dowry and enables the man to marry her even if his economic position is insecure.]²³⁶

In Bäumer's presentation of bourgeois women and work, employment shielded women from becoming victims of unfortunate circumstances (as captured in Gabriele Reuter's

²³⁴ *Encyclopedia of German Writers, 1900-1933*, Vol 1, p. 81.

²³⁵ Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 114.

²³⁶ Bäumer, *Krisis des Frauenstudiums*, 5.

heroine from *Aus guter Familie*) and transformed them into the agents of their own welfare. Echoing nineteenth-century feminist thought, Bäumer's argumentation focused on the latent benefits of bourgeois women working for the state rather than on the gains for the individual woman: potentially more marriages and an increased birthrate. Her paradigm justified women having a socially useful and satisfying life while retaining traditional female virtues of service and sacrifice: woman serves her family by working and uses (sacrifices) her earnings not to consume conspicuously but to enable the man she loves to marry her. Bäumer still defined marriage and not "career for the sake of career" as women's ultimate aspiration.

Besides serving their own families and partner by earning income, Bäumer insisted, women could tangibly benefit the community and nation in the professions which

vor allem in der Wirkung auf Menschen beruhen und deren Vollkommenheit von der Lebendigkeit des Kontakts mit Menschen abhängt... Es besteht ein Bedürfnis für die Lehrerin, die Ärztin, die Wohlfahrtspflegerin, die Richterinnen usw., weil sie anderen Gruppen von Menschen gegenüber als der Mann anderer Formen seelischer Wirkung auszubilden vermag.

[first of all, are based on the human interaction and whose execution depends upon the liveliness of the contact with an individual... A need exists for a woman teacher, doctor, social worker, judge, etc, because she is able to impact groups of people spiritually like a man is able to extend other forms of mental influence.]²³⁷

Bäumer defined these professions as inherently motherly, e.g., as those in which women could best employ their natural maternal gifts. Bäumer's dream to offer German women the opportunity to become social workers was realized in 1917, when she, together with

²³⁷ Bäumer, Gertrud. *Krisis des Frauenstudiums*, 14.

another bourgeois feminist Marie Baum, founded the Social Pedagogical Institute and Social Women's School in Hamburg (Sozialpädagogische Institut and Soziale Frauenschule), both of which she led until 1920 in addition to chairing the BDF.²³⁸

Throughout her writings Bäumer suggested reforms that would reflect traditional division: women – nurturing, men – intellectual. Bäumer's claim that women should work in certain occupations because they are “naturally” equipped to do so reads as simplistic and near-sighted today because it does not take into consideration women's actual talents and abilities, as well as other important factors that women (should) consider when choosing a job: pay, benefits, work hours, self-actualization, and lifestyle. Nevertheless, Bäumer's list of professions shows that she sought to incorporate women into essential sectors of society, convinced that women, like men, possessed talents to employ and the ability to influence.

Women engaged in the “motherly professions,” Bäumer insisted, did not sacrifice their femininity but instead released its benevolent power for the good of the state and the nation. Yet, while the modern economy necessitated women's entry into the working world, Bäumer warned, it also tempted them with new values such as individualism and “free love.” These slogans of the New Morality (Neue Ethik), according to Bäumer, did not actually liberate women but functioned as a way of personal enslavement. The contemporary social, cultural, and political situation, she argued, required women to understand their role in the community and intertwine their aspirations as individuals with the needs of the nation:

²³⁸ Bach, *Gertrud Bäumer, biographische Daten und Texte zu enem Persönlichkeitsbild*, 30.

Die Frau muß lernen, die großen objektiven Interessen des Staates und ihres Volkes, ihrer Gemeinde und der mannigfachen Korporationen, die sich umgeben, mit als ihre Interessen anzusehen. Sie muß lernen, auch diesem Gemeinschaftsleben seine Kräfte persönlicher Kultur abzugewinnen, eines durch das andere: Persönlichkeit durch Gemeinschaft und Gemeinschaft durch Persönlichkeit, das öffentliche Leben durch Innenkultur und Innenkultur durch das öffentliche Leben zu bereichern, zu beleben und zu befruchten.

[A woman must learn to consider the vital, objective interests of the state, her people, her community, and the diverse societies that comprise it together with her own interests. She must also learn to reclaim strength from communal life [in order] to develop her personality, one with the help of the other: personality through community and community through personality, public life through her inner culture and her inner culture through public life [so that she can] enrich, enliven, and contribute to both.]²³⁹

In this line of thought Bäumer significantly differed from other German liberal bourgeois women such as Baum. Bäumer defined emancipation as going beyond the development of women's intellect and talent (Selbstentfaltung), attaining sexual freedom, and combining family and career. Bäumer's emancipated woman seeks "es in der Tat fertig zu bringen, diese persönliche Kultur, diese Genussfähigkeit allem Schönen und Großen zu sehen, allen Mächten der seelischen Verfeinerung gegenüber zu vereinigen eben mit dem inneren Anteil und der praktischen Arbeit für die Gesamtheit." [to unite successfully this personal culture, this ability to enjoy all that is great and beautiful, these powers of the mental refinement with the inner support of and practical work for the community]²⁴⁰

The task of Bäumer's New Woman lie in uniting the social and the personal and in contributing to the community while accomplishing personal goals.

²³⁹ Bäumer, *Der Wandel des Frauenideals*, 22.

²⁴⁰ Bäumer, *Der Wandel des Frauenideals*, 21.

Bäumer's feminist paradigm moved away from seeing woman as an individual in her own right to the vision of woman as part of the organic whole. Besides expressing Bäumer's individual preference, such an interpretation of emancipation also reiterated the nineteenth-century idea that the task of German (bourgeois) women was to foster and transmit national culture and tradition. Bäumer saw women's most active role in the preservation of the community's identity and culture. Like nineteenth-century liberal women, Bäumer firmly believed in collaboration with the existing government, rather than open confrontation. As seen in *Der Wandel des Frauenideals* and in her later texts, Bäumer conceptualized the government as inherently wise and humanistic, although not always just towards women, and remained optimistic that "progressive elements" would eventually triumph, resulting in the deeper integration of women into the social, cultural and political life of Germany.

While we can hardly call Bäumer's paradigm of emancipation radical since it essentially attempted to ameliorate the existing order rather than restructure it dramatically, Bäumer's position on women's suffrage and the socialist movement suggest that she attempted to adapt what now could be viewed as moderately conservative views to the changing political milieu. Bäumer supported the idea of women's suffrage, because it allowed women to participate in the making of the policies that affected them most. Bäumer's perhaps unexpected endorsement of the socialist movement – she was one of the very few bourgeois feminists who spoke favorably about socialists – testifies not only to her tolerance toward other political parties but also underlines her ability to connect a political movement with an idea (in this case, elimination of social inequality by means of a revolution) without labeling it anti-German (as many of her colleagues did). Thus,

while Bäumer flatly rejected the idea of revolution because she believed that focusing on women's biological functions, rights, and duties, rather than the proletarian revolution, would diminish social inequality, she credited the socialist movement for the increased public attention (at least among German intellectuals) to prostitution, child labor, unequal pay, and other social ills.

Despite her lack of revolutionary fervor, Bäumer forcefully promoted her ideas. She also gained the reputation of an expert negotiator and peacemaker – the traits that made her a welcome candidate for the president of the BDF in 1910.²⁴¹ Under Bäumer's leadership, the German women's movement soon numbered 600,000 members. During her presidency of the BDF (1910-1919), Bäumer clearly expressed her position on controversial contemporary topics, including women's fashion, nationalism, and eugenics, which present her as a progressive, cosmopolitan, and humanistic thinker. Bäumer opposed vehement nationalism, advocating instead for patriotism to bring harmony within the nation as well as align Germany with Europe.

In her essay *Deutsche Mode* (German fashion; 1916) Bäumer described fashion not only as a means of expressing one's personality but also as a means of incorporating Germany into the European community. Starting her analysis by criticizing contemporary French fashion (it fits the particular types of women's bodies poorly, does not account for the natural changes that occur with women, lacks individuality, and is unable to express either the German spirit or personality), Bäumer then proceeded to point out that the

²⁴¹ Bäumer replaced the controversial chairwoman Marie Stritt, who proposed a resolution in favor of legalizing abortion.

French dominate the world's fashion industry.²⁴² The French superiority in fashion, according to Bäumer, came from their astute perception of what women of the world needed: Instead of demanding that people wear a national costume, as German designers did, the French created a French world-fashion (französische Weltmode), namely, styles that appealed to various peoples. Promoting the *Tracht* as the German fashion for the modern, educated German woman, Bäumer argued, was „ein Unding, ein innerer Widerspruch zum Wesen moderner Lebensformen.“²⁴³ [an idiocy, an inner contradiction with the essence of modern life-forms] Comfort and health should serve as primary parameters for clothes, she maintained. One did not show patriotism by wearing outdated, constricting *Tracht*. In writing as in life, Bäumer fashioned herself first as a European and then as a German: in photographs, Bäumer wears a simple dark-colored dress (neither French fashions nor a dirndl) with embroidery and few pieces of jewelry as accessories.

Here and in her 1926 article titled *Europäische Kulturpolitik* Bäumer insisted on viewing Germany as part of the European community and Germans not as intellectually and physically superior. Bäumer is convinced that the cultural and intellectual exchange between nations is a sign of progress and a necessary prerequisite of civilization:

Der Austausch des geistigen Lebens der Nationen vollzieht sich zumeist ohne Politik, d.h. ohne planmäßige Zielsetzung und Lenkung. Das Bildungsbedürfnis der meisten Kulturvölker selbst verlangt nach diesem Austausch. [...] In Jahrhunderten geistesgeschichtlicher Entwicklung

²⁴² Bäumer writes: “Die französische Mode ... ist so eingerichtet, als der Mensch ewig eng wäre. ... Sie verleugnet die Mutter in der Frau, nicht nur jetzt, sondern immer.” [the French fashion is designed as if a person remains forever slim and narrow... It denies the mother in a woman, not only at the present time but always.] Gertrud Bäumer, “Deutsche Mode,” *Weit hinter den Schützengräbern* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1916), *An Encyclopedia of German Women Writers, 1900-1933*, 92.

²⁴³ Gertrud Bäumer, “Deutsche Mode,” 90-91.

entstand ein Netz von Wirkungen [...], das viel mehr war als ein Kanalsystem für den Transport von Kulturgütern, das ein Stück Leben, Bewegung, übernationaler Formung und Bildung darstellt. Die europäischen Nationen insbesondere sind nicht nur sie selbst, sie sind alle zugleich ein Stück voreinander, und sie sind zusammen Europa – ein geistiges Gebilde von durchaus wesentlicher, durchaus deutlicher Gemeinsamkeit.”

[The exchange of the intellectual legacy (life) of nations occurs mostly without politics, e.g., without regularly set goals and direction. The thirst for education of most civilized peoples demands this exchange... During centuries of spiritual and intellectual developments there formed a powerful network [...]. which was more than a system for transfer of cultural goods [...]. The European nations especially are no longer separate entities; they are all simultaneously a unit among themselves, and they constitute together Europe – an intellectual structure/body of entirely essential, entirely distinct commonality.]²⁴⁴

Bäumer retained her cosmopolitanism even during the xenophobic atmosphere of the Third Reich: her publications on international affairs in *Die Frau* (discussed later in the chapter) while featuring criticisms, never intertwined problems with race.

Bäumer defined patriotism, especially women’s patriotism, as service to the nation. In August of 1914 following the outbreak of World War I, she co-founded the *Nationalen Frauendienst* to assist women whose husbands were at the front with money, shelter, food, advice and employment. After the war, when Anti-Semitic and Anti-Communist sentiments formed a Dolchstoßlegende (stab-in-the-back theory) to explain the defeat of Germany, Bäumer, echoing another liberal bourgeois feminist Marie Lüders, argued instead that the Wilhelmine government had made insufficient use of women in WW I, failing to train them sufficiently for the war economy and the battlefield, and that

²⁴⁴ Bach, 59.

was one of the reasons why the Germans lost the war.²⁴⁵ During the Third Reich, Bäumer continued to advocate the inclusion of military training in the school program for girls – with the purpose of preparing women for the hardships of wartime.

Bäumer’s position on eugenics further demonstrated that her patriotism did not translate into advocacy for Aryan supremacy, and that she sought, above all, reforms that would create social harmony. Her refusal to support the 1915 proposal of the Society for Population Policy to offer premiums for childbearing in order to increase the population for Germany’s defense in future wars suggests that Bäumer connected eugenics with humanism. Following the conference on the Maintenance and Augmentation of Our National Energy where the proposal was first discussed, Bäumer published her (and the BDF’s) response to the proposal. In her impressive article “Guidelines for Population Policy” she insisted that in order to reverse the declining birth rate, the German government restore women’s faith in the future and create a safe and secure social and economic environment. The well-structured and transparently written article included detailed proposals on temperance, maternity and childcare, social insurance, increased educational opportunities and improved working conditions, all of which, according to Bäumer, would encourage women to have children – an impressively progressive line of reasoning for her era.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Marie Lüders advocated women’s military mobilization and employment in a number of articles and especially in her book *Unknown Army* (1936). Ironically, Lüder’s writings, which did not necessarily espouse National Socialism, became an important propaganda piece in the Third Reich. Kurlander, *Living with Hitler*, 91.

²⁴⁶ During the National Socialist era, Bäumer, while continuing to support biological engineering in the interest of improving the health of the nation, never endorsed state-enforced sterilization or, later, termination, of the mentally or physically disabled. Kurlander, “ ‘The Woman’ in the Third Reich,” 110.

After the Weimar Constitution granted women the right to vote in 1919, Bäumer sought deeper engagement in state politics. A member of the German Democratic Party (DDP) from 1914 on, Bäumer began to publish on various political issues in the DDP's newspaper *Die Hilfe* in addition to sharing her ideas in *Die Frau*. In 1920 Bäumer was appointed as an advisor to the cultural department of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministerialrätin in der Kulturabteilung des Reichsministeriums des Innern). During her service at the Ministry, Bäumer assisted in drafting several decrees on women's and youth welfare and was sent as a German delegate to the League of Nations in Geneva for international youth politics from 1926 until 1933. Following the Nazi takeover, Bäumer lost all her positions, and her social and political activism focused on the publication of the monthly *Die Frau*. In retrospect, Bäumer considered the publication of the magazine during the Third Reich as her resistance to Hitler's regime. Writing in 1947, Bäumer described how she had perceived the mission of the magazine:

Es gab nach der Machtergreifung für die Gegner des Nationalsozialismus drei Möglichkeiten. Die eine war der offene Widerstand. Die andere, dass man sowohl sein 'Für' wie sein 'Wider' verschwieg. Die dritte: den in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit etwa noch vorhandenen Raum für die Vertretung abweichender Anschauungen auszunutzen. [...] Ich [...] habe nach der Machtergreifung *Die Frau* weitergeführt ... Das Wesentliche war mir, in *der Frau* anknüpfend an ihre Vergangenheit, gegen die nationalsozialistische Beeinflussung ein positives Gegenwicht zu erhalten: in der Herausstellung von Persönlichkeiten, Auffassungen, geistigen Gütern und Schöpfungen, die vom Nationalsozialismus unterdrückt, übergangen und bekämpft wurden.

[There were three possibilities for the opponents of National Socialism after the party seized power. The first one was active resistance. The other was to remain silent about one's position, whether it was a "yes" or "no." The third one was to take

advantage of the still existing free space of the German public sphere in order to present deviating worldviews. ... I ... continued to publish *Die Frau* after the takeover. It was essential for me to provide in *Die Frau*, which was rooted in the past, a positive counter-balance vis-à-vis national socialist influence by exposing the personalities, opinions, intellectual legacies, and concepts that National Socialists suppressed, overlooked and fought against.]²⁴⁷

As a form of resistance, the magazine did not achieve much: the Nazis obviously did not perceive Bäumer as a serious threat if they allowed her to publish after the Gestapo interrogated her several times. It is also doubtful that *Die Frau* inspired other women to fight National Socialism: the tone of *Die Frau* can be described as cautiously optimistic as a whole, (implicitly) critical on some issues, and religiously infused in general. Nevertheless, the issues of *Die Frau* from the 1930s and early 1940s repeatedly evoke the ideas of Lange, Schmidt, Solomon, Otto-Peters and others. Here we can see Bäumer's conscious attempt to incorporate the ideas of German liberal bourgeois feminists into the racial discourse of the Third Reich.

At the time of the Nazi takeover in 1933, Bäumer was sixty years old – a mature individual who had supported her liberal ideas with activism throughout her service at the BDF and in Naumann's Democratic Party (DDP). Unlike many supporters of Naumann's movement who welcomed Hitler, Bäumer never joined the Nazi Party. Her relationship with the Third Reich, as Eric Kurlander aptly demonstrates in his book chapter “ ‘The Woman’ in the Third Reich: Gertrud Bäumer, Social Policy and the Liberal Women's Movement,” combined “distrust and fascination, resistance and accommodation.”²⁴⁸ But even this variegated assessment of Bäumer's activities during the Third Reich requires

²⁴⁷ Bach, *Gertrud Bäumer: Biographische Daten und Texte zu einem Persönlichkeitsbild*, 320.

²⁴⁸ Kurlander, *Living with Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich*, 85.

more thorough analysis, because in order to understand Bäumer's position vis-à-vis Hitler and National Socialism one has to focus on nuances: Why did she mistrust the NS party and what in it appealed to her? How did she define resistance? And finally, were her favorable reviews of some features of the Nazi regime in *Die Frau* such as state-supported organizations for women really an accommodation?

Like many other liberals, Bäumer perceived similarities between Naumann's National-Social ideology and Hitler's National Socialism, namely, in their views about social welfare and the need of creating a Greater Germany inclusive of all ethnic Germans. Therefore several of the 1933 issues of *Die Frau* retained a cautiously optimistic tone about the regime. Bäumer also welcomed those Nazi policies that benefited mothers and families and that encouraged women's service in any capacity (such as women's conscription into the army and National Socialist mother's service), because they echoed the ideas of the German bourgeois women's movement. In Bäumer's view, Nazi establishment of the state-supported organizations for women was progressive:

In den NS-Frauenschaften und den Verbänden des Frauenwerks sind etwa 3 Millionen Frauen zusammengefasst, von denen aus mühelos und ohne neue organisatorische Schöpfungen jede äußere oder seelische Frauennot erreicht werden kann. Die NS-Volkswohlschaft als sozialpflegerisches Organ kann mit ihnen zusammen alle praktische Einrichtungen schaffen, die unter den Umständen nötig werden: Betreuung und Unterbringung [...] alle Einrichtungen der Kinderhilfe und Kinderfürsorge.

[In organizations such as National Socialist Womanhood and in the branches of the Frauenwerk there are united around three million women, with whose help one can reach any external or emotional needs of women, effortlessly and without further bureaucracy. Together with these organizations, National Socialist welfare, as an organ for social care, can create all practical provisions that will be necessary under certain

circumstances: assistance and lodging, facilities for care and aid to children.]²⁴⁹

Yet, already in December of 1933, Bäumer confided to her friend and fellow bourgeois feminist Emmy Beckmann:

Was positiv im Gehalt des Nationalsozialismus ist nämlich eben die Idee, die ihm den Namen gibt [...] Der Form gegenüber und dem Geist, von dem das nun kommt, habe ich kein anderes Urteil als das, was Karl Barth an einer Stelle seiner Schrift über die Existenz der Theologie ausspricht: Das deutsche Volk hat auf das Recht, die Freiheit und den Geist verzichtet. [...] ich schäme mich, dass es in meinem Volke Menschen gibt, die meinen, nur in diesem Ton und auf diese Weise herrschen zu können, und Menschen, die das Unwürdige daran – das Unrassische, wenn man schon von Rasse spricht – nicht spüren, sondern sich gefallen lassen. Ich schäme mich der bornierten Brutalität [...] in der Behandlung der Gegner.

[What is positive in the content of the National Socialism is namely only the idea, which gives it the name. ... As for the form and the spirit that emanates towards us at the present time, I can only judge it as Karl Barth describes the existence of theology at one point of his writing: the German Volk renounced its right, freedom, and spirit. ... I am ashamed of the fact that among my people there exist individuals who are convinced that they can rule in such a manner and through such ideas and that [my] people not only do not feel how unworthy such rule is, how racially inferior it is (if we are going to speak of race), but allow it to happen. ... I am ashamed of this disgusting brutality ... in the treatment of opponents.]²⁵⁰

One cannot interpret Bäumer's remarks here as endorsing National Socialism as a movement. Bäumer did not always express her disaffection with the regime so explicitly, but an astute reader can deduce Bäumer's criticisms in *Die Frau* even if they are presented in a less direct way. She consciously focused on women, using the Nazi's own rhetoric to expose the hypocrisy of the regime.

The Nazi rhetoric that presented women's return to the domestic sphere as a return to nature (*Rückkehr zur Natur*) especially distressed Bäumer, who argued that

²⁴⁹ Bach, 156.

²⁵⁰ Bach, 99.

there was nothing “natural” about denying women employment, training, and education. Work and higher education, according to Bäumer, should be given to those who are qualified, not only to those who are perceived as socially acceptable. In the 1941 issue of *Die Frau* Bäumer used the Soviet Union to describe the discrimination of women in Germany. She begins by pointing out that “only” 227 women occupy (minor) positions in the Soviet government and that “only” eighty women work as judges in the Soviet courts, undoubtedly aware that her reader would immediately recognize how much lower the numbers are in Nazi Germany. Genuinely outraged by Soviet atheism and the Communists’ refusal to acknowledge that “it could possibly bring joy to a woman to work for her husband and children,” Bäumer also made it clear that Germany was also no longer religious, and that the employment of women in the army, bureaucracy, and industry was significantly higher in the Soviet Union than in Germany.²⁵¹

We may describe Bäumer’s position as insufficiently critical, but she had *never* advocated open confrontation with the state (male authority). Bäumer was more concerned with the decline of the German bourgeois women’s movement and of liberalism in general that manifested itself already in the 1920s, than with the change in the form of government.²⁵² She envisioned emancipation as a timeless task, unbounded by political and social changes:

²⁵¹ Bäumer, “Die falsche Emanzipation: Zur Stellung der Frau in der Sowjet-Union,” *Die Frau*, 10-11/41. Quoted in Kurlander, *Living with Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich*, 90.

²⁵² A pamphlet, published in 1932, by Emmy Beckmann, the chairperson of the German Women Teachers Association encapsulates the mood of the younger women in the early 1930s: “A new generation of women has grown up, equipped with the education, which a previous generation had fought for so hard, and with new rights and freedoms. These young women see the tasks and lifestyles, which await them as an unwanted burden and

Es [...] ist für das uns gestellte Problem im letzten Grunde vollkommen gleichgültig, wie der Staat beschaffen ist, in dem heute die Einordnung besteht: ob es ein parlamentarischer, ein demokratischer, ein faschistischer Staat ist. Für jeden Aufbau wird sich die Frage der Mitgestaltung für die Frauen ergeben, und immer wird die Grundforderung die gleiche sein [...], den Kultureinfluss der Frau zu voller innerer Entfaltung und freier sozialer Wirksamkeit zu bringen.

[Because for the task in front of us it absolutely does not matter how the state is constructed, to which classification it belongs today: whether it is a parliamentary, democratic, or fascist state. For each order the question of the involvement of women in the creation/design will arise, and the basic demand will always remain the same: to bring the cultural influence of women to its own fuller inner development and freer impact on society.]²⁵³

It was, of course, utopian and nearsighted of Bäumer to believe that the structure and ideology of the state did not impact its policies toward women. Like her colleague Annemarie Doherr, who believed in the future productive relationship between liberal women and Hitler's regime, Bäumer also hoped that the "progressive" elements of National Socialism would triumph, and the regime would gradually allow for "active participation of women in the new state."²⁵⁴ Obviously, she did not realize that in the National Community that Hitler outlined in his speeches women could hardly hope to spread "female culture" the way Bäumer envisioned it. It is surprising to see a sophisticated researcher such as Bäumer think that a couple of policies that protected Aryan women somehow compensated for the tragic destiny of those women who were

responsibility, a cold and empty substitute for the fulfillment to be gained from a peaceful home and the close family ties of husband, wife and child. ... For them the ideal of liberation ... ,which the previous generation followed with such conviction, has faded away." Quoted in Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, (London New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

²⁵³ Bäumer, *Die Frau*, July 1933.

²⁵⁴ Kurlander, 87.

born and raised in Germany, but did not have pure Aryan blood or did not fit the state's health criteria. In her attempt to feminize – and humanize – Hitler's *Volksgemeinschaft*, Bäumer overlooked that the danger of Nazism lay not just in discrimination against women but in the ruthless restructuring of society along racial lines, from which both genders suffered. Finally, Bäumer's interpretation of Hitler's call to rearmament and his scheme of conscription of women into the national army as an expression of liberalism and progressive thinking also appears as naive: evidently, Bäumer did not recognize that, given the explicit emphasis on Aryan superiority of National Socialism, these decrees foreshadowed a new war.

An astute and politically experienced observer, Bäumer cannot be easily placed in the categories of a victim, bystander, or perpetrator of the Third Reich. She identified the demonic nature of Hitler's regime early on and chose to articulate her criticism in the way German bourgeois feminists always did it: by attempting to find ways to place women's issues on the agenda of the state without open confrontation while retaining a Christian outlook. At the same time, she cannot be blamed – as Richard Evans formulates it – for “propagating a vague Christian mysticism.”²⁵⁵ While Bäumer insisted on the conciliatory power of religion, her overall communitarian and humanitarian arguments were always supplemented by figures, facts, and solid economic and historical analysis. Nor can Bäumer be placed into the category of a bystander: she actively engaged with the gloomy reality of the Third Reich and attempted to draw the attention of the state to its failed promises to women. Although she immersed herself deeply in the writing of historical novels during the 1940s, Bäumer continued to comment on contemporary

²⁵⁵ Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894-1933*, 260.

issues until the demise of the Third Reich.²⁵⁶ Publishing *Die Frau* undoubtedly required courage; even disguised criticism could have landed Bäumer (whose health was slowly declining) in prison. Did Bäumer in some way assist the regime in the propagation of its bio-maternalist ideas? Yes, but so did millions of other middle-class Germans who welcomed Hitler's pro-family and anti-abortion rhetoric and turned to the National Socialists in the early 1930s after having voted for less racially oriented parties such as the Catholic Centre, the German National People's Party (DNVP), the German People's Party (the DVP), and the German Democratic Party (the DDP).

In order to create a morally improved, economically stable, and eugenically superior German nation, nationalists and especially National Socialists argued, women had to meet their reproductive responsibilities as well as the demands of capitalist economy. In the last years of the Weimar Republic, activists of all political hues proposed and supported measures that would facilitate women's dual roles as capitalist workers and modern mothers: revised abortion legislation, easier access to contraception, and legal equality for illegitimate children. The increased public interest in issues of reproduction did not, however, express a new, progressive morality welcoming single mothers and children born out of wedlock and allowing women to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Rather, the attention to women as biological mothers represented an attempt to redirect female sexuality into forms where it could be most effectively functionalized for the benefit of the state. In this rhetoric that connected biological motherhood with the regeneration of the German nation another model of femininity emerged in the early 1930s – the model of emancipation of Ina Seidel. This model, like the models described

²⁵⁶ *Adelheid – Mutter der Königreiche* (1936) und *Die Macht der Liebe – Der Weg des Dante Alighieri* (1941) were the historical novels Bäumer published.

in the fictional works of Vicki Baum and political writings of Gertrud Bäumer, also claimed to be progressive and harmonious with women's nature.

3.7 Ina Seidel: a Visionary of German Womanhood

In his 1935 book, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Alfred Rosenberg outlined the differences between the humanistic ideas of the liberals and National Socialist ideology:

Der Liberalismus lehrte: Freiheit, Freizügigkeit, Freihandel, Parlamentarismus, Frauenemanzipation, Menschengleichheit, Geschlechtergleichheit usw. [...] Der deutsche Gedanke fordert heute, mitten im Zusammensturz der feminisierten alten Welt: Autorität, typenbildende Kraft, Beschränkung, Zucht, Autarkie (Selbstversorgung), Schutz des Rassencharakters, Anerkennung der ewigen Polarität der Geschlechter.

[Liberalism advocated freedom, free movement of people, free trade, parliamentarianism, women's emancipation, equality among peoples, equality between the sexes and so on. ... In the midst of the collapsing old feminized world the German idea stipulates authority, strength of character, constraint, discipline, autarky (self-sufficiency), protection of the essence of the race, recognition of the eternal polarity of the sexes.]²⁵⁷

Echoing Hitler's speeches that relegated women to "Heim und Herd" (home and hearth), Rosenberg did not just castigate the sexually liberated and ambitious New Woman but also dismissed the ideas promoted by the German bourgeois women's movement, namely, the idea that women's maternal gifts could be applied in vast spheres of social life, including the professions. National Socialism conceptualized a man as a soldier and

²⁵⁷ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 503.

progenitor of children, and a woman as a fertile mother.²⁵⁸ Women assisted mainly in “Blutserhaltung und Rassenvermehrung” (preservation of the blood and reproduction of the race), not in politics or the business world.²⁵⁹

Like their nationalist, conservative predecessors in the Weimar Republic, National Socialist ideologues connected the military might of the German nation with its women’s fertility. Hence pregnancy and birth were often described in military terms: as “heroische Höhepunkte” (heroic heights), “Wehrpflicht im Schoße der deutschen Familie” (national military service in the bosom of the German family), “Geburtenfront” (birthing battlefield), and “Schlachtfeld der Frau” (a woman’s battleground).²⁶⁰ In Hitler’s Germany, as Karin Stiehr points out in “Auf der Suche nach Weiblichkeitsbildern im Nationalsozialismus,” motherhood was understood as “eine Leistung im Sinne der Gesellschaft und keineswegs ein Zustand, der in erster Linie die individuelle Frau betrifft” (an activity that benefits society and in no way a condition that concerns first of all an individual woman).²⁶¹ Biological motherhood now migrated from a private sphere into the public sphere, assuming a critical role in the state’s survival.

²⁵⁸ As described in chapter IV, Nazis often contradicted their own ideology. Parallel with the propaganda that lauded German mothers and housewives, state publications for youth such as the 1934 edition of “Jungen Deutschland” encouraged women to enter the workforce, emphasizing that “unsere Industrie heute ohne das junge Mädchen nicht auskommt. Weibliche Fabrikarbeit ist heute noch soziale Funktion und damit Dienst im Ganzen...” [our industry cannot function today without young woman. Women’s work at the factory emerges today as having a social function and as such represents a service to the nation.] Karin Stiehr, “Auf der Suche nach Weiblichkeitsbildern im Nationalsozialismus,” 55.

²⁵⁹ Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 483.

²⁶⁰ Thalmann, Rita, *Frausein im Dritten Reich*, (Wien, München, 1984), 118.

²⁶¹ Karin Stiehr, “Auf der Suche nach Weiblichkeitsbildern im Nationalsozialismus,” 32.

The regime employed various channels to solidify these beliefs in mass consciousness, especially literature. Unfortunately, the cultural and ideological orientation of German literature at the time of Nazi takeover provided the regime with favorable conditions for the dissemination of its racial policies: The novels of popular women authors such as Hedwig Courths-Mahler, Margarete Böhme, Lena Christ and others that described devoted mothers, the continuity of the nation and the nuclear family, and especially the idea of *Heimat* gained popularity before Hitler, and could be interpreted in the National Socialist vein after 1933.²⁶² The novels that emphasized the indissoluble bond between German women, their *Heimat*, and the Volk represent another type of literature that was widely read in the 1920s and became even more prominent in the 1930s. Using historical figures such as Queen Luise or creating their own, authors such as Lydia Kath portrayed their female protagonists as active defenders of fatherland and nationhood.²⁶³ The literary works of a devout Catholic like Ruth Schaumann, on the

²⁶²The genre of the *Heimatsroman*, which suggested a profound bond between protagonists and the ancestral soil and presented native land as the source of strength and life, flourished especially in Austria in the works of Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti, Maria Grengg and Paula Grogner, but found a wide readership in Germany as well. Well-received novels such as *Die Rumpfhanni* (Messy Hanna; 1916) and *Madam Bäuerin* (*Madame Farmer*; 1920) by Lena Christ depicted life in the Bavarian countryside, while the popular ballads and fairytales of Agnes Miegel and the poetry of Lulu von Strauß und Torney mapped the fortunes of their protagonists onto the canvas of Eastern Prussia and Niedersachsen respectively. Agnes Cardinal, "Women's Writing under National Socialism," in *A History of German Women's writing in Austria, Germany and Switzerland*, (Cambridge 2000), 148.

²⁶³ In her novels concerning the life of Germanic tribes in ancient times such as *Aud. Geschichte einer Wikingerfrau* (Aud. Story of a Viking woman; 1934) and *Urmutter Unn: Geschichten um altnordischen Frauen* (Great mother Unn: stories about ancient Germanic women; 1936) Kath depicted strong, fearless women warriors, who sacrificed their lives alongside men. Other authors such as Josefa Berens-Totennohl, Marie Diers, and Anne-Marie Koeppen portrayed heroines who protected the purity of the German

other hand, outlined visions of German womanhood that, besides revering motherhood, familial ties, and national identity, were deeply religious.

One of the most renowned conservative authors, Ina Seidel vividly captured the spirit of her generation: her lyrical collections celebrated the beauty of the German landscapes, evoked the bond between mother and child, and lamented the death of Germans in World War I, while her novels interwove nationalist pride and mysticism with depictions of the German past. The daughter of a distinguished orthopedic surgeon Hermann Seidel and a housewife Emmy Loesevitz Seidel, Ina Seidel was born in Halle on the Saal on 15 September 1885 but grew up in Braunschweig. Seidel's ancestors on both sides of the family had literary inclinations, and her uncle, Heinrich Seidel, was a well-known author. As part of their education, Ina and her two younger siblings, Willy (1887-1934) and Annemarie (1895-1959), were regularly tutored in the arts and world literature, and introduced to pantheism while receiving instruction in the Christian faith. All three siblings retained a penchant for the exotic and mysterious in their adult lives: Ina as an author deeply rooted in mysticism as well as Christianity, Willy, who became known as the "German Kipling," as a skillful fairy-teller and poet; and Annemarie (Mirl) as an actress in the expressionist tradition.

An entry from Seidel's diary, written in Munich when she was twenty, discloses how the future writer defined her life goals: "Ich will gern fähig werden, meine Pflicht als Mensch gegen andere zu erfüllen. Ich habe eingesehen, dass man das als Frau am besten als Gattin und Mutter kann. Um aber das zu werden, fehlt mir die notwendigste

race against dark-skinned, exploitative foreigners and sinister gypsy-women. Agnes Cardinal, "Women's Writing under National Socialism," in *A History of German Women's writing in Austria, Germany and Switzerland*, (Cambridge 2000), 147-8.

Bedingung: der Mann, der mich liebt. So habe ich mich entschlossen, mein Abiturium zu machen und später Lehrerin zu werden. ...” [I very much want to be able to fulfill my duty to mankind. I realized that as a woman one achieves this by being a spouse and mother. But in order to become [mother and wife], I lack the most necessary condition: a man who loves me. So I decided to continue my studies and become a teacher.]²⁶⁴ Seidel met her future husband, her cousin Heinrich Wolfgang Seidel (1876-1945), the minister and writer, when she was sixteen, and became his wife at twenty-two. The couple settled in Berlin, where Seidel gave birth to a daughter in 1908. The illness that followed left the twenty-three-year old mother with a handicap that impaired her movements for the rest of her life. Although Seidel suffered from a deep depression during her slow recovery, she later admitted that she would have never taken up writing had it not been for the seclusion and limitation in movement that accompanied her illness.

Before the outbreak of WWI in 1914, Pastor Heinrich was transferred to a small town near Potsdam. In 1915, after her health slowly improved, Seidel published her first collection of poems *Gedichte* followed by another under the title *Neben der Trommel her: Gedichte*, which received recognition from such established women authors as Lulu von Strauß und Torney and Agnes Miegel. Miegel, whose mysterious, supernatural ballads Seidel considered among the best of contemporary poetry, became her lifelong mentor and friend. Besides Miegel, Seidel maintained lively correspondence with and received visits from Thomas Mann, Albrecht Schaeffer, and the playwright Carl Zuckmayer.

²⁶⁴ Christian Feber, *Die Seidels. Geschichte einer bürgerlichen Familie*, 153.

Seidel's art centered on her own spiritual world, especially on the experience of motherhood. Her poetry, especially the poems *Erstes Kind*, *Mutters Brief*, *Die Mutter bei der Wiege*, *Mutter und Kind*, *Mütter und Töchter*, *An Meine Kinder*, and *Der süße Schlaf* celebrated the miracle of a child and his or her unique bond with the mother and presented motherhood as the source of renewal. Not just joy in, but a complete surrender to the experience of motherhood emerges as a prominent theme in the diary entries that Seidel wrote about her daughter Heilwig, as well as in her first novel, *Das Haus zum Monde* (1916). Supernatural closeness between mother and son also constitute the subject of Seidel's masterpiece, *Das Wunschkind* (1930).

After the unexpected death of her second infant daughter in 1918 Seidel focused on the life of the eighteenth century traveler Johann Forster (1754-1794): "auf die Arbeit an meinem Forster-Roman [*Das Labyrinth*, 1922] geworfen wie nach einem Schiffbruch auf eine rettende Planke." [I threw myself into the work on a novel about Forster as one clasps a plank after a shipwreck.]²⁶⁵ Along with working on the novel, she continued to compose poetry. Her second lyrical collection, *Weltinnigkeit: Neue Gedichte* (1918), is notable for its pantheistic mysticism and praise of nature. The birth of a son, Georg (her future most comprehensive biographer),²⁶⁶ and the end of WWI inspired Seidel to write the continuation to her first novel, *Das Haus zum Monde* (published in 1923 under the title *Sterne der Heimkehr*), and a children's book, *Das wunderbare Geißleinbuch: Neue*

²⁶⁵ Ina Seidel, *Lebensbericht*, 32.

²⁶⁶ Georg became a novelist under the pseudonym of Simon Glas and a literary critic under the name of Christian Ferber. In 1979, he published a vast collection of Seidel's letters and diary entries, as well as essays about her relatives and ancestors (*Die Seidels: Geschichte einer bürgerlichen Familie 1811-1977*), which offers a unique window into the private world of his mother.

Geschichte für Kinder, die die alten Märchen gut kennen (1925). Seidel's literary fame continued to rise: her novellas *Die Fürstin reitet* (1926), *Der vergrabene Schatz* (Buried Treasure 1929), and the novel *Renee and Rainer* (1928) were well received, and in 1930, Seidel was admitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts. In 1932, Seidel was awarded the Goethe Medal. The publication of her novel *Das Wunschkind* in 1930 – a bestseller at the time of its release – earned Seidel a reputation as one of the leading conservative German women writers of her generation. Between 1930 and 1945, the novel went through nine editions, selling more than 450, 000 copies, and was placed onto the reading list for schools, where it remained until the late 1960s. Writing in the 1931 edition of the protestant publication *Eckart*, Elisabeth von Randenborgh described *Das Wunschkind* as

Das Buch der deutschen Frau, in vollendeter dichterischer Form ohne Pathos und ohne Geiste; [das Buch, das] in scheinbar sachlicher Distanz und beherrschter glutvoller Innigkeit ein Bekenntnis zu Frauentum, Deutschtum und Religion, in der Krise unserer Zeit eine befreiende Tat [ist].

[A book by a German woman, which is written in a perfected poetic style without pathos or excessive stylization; from an apparent realistic distance and with a commanding fervent intimacy [and which represents] a commitment to womanhood, Germanness, religion and as such stands as a liberating achievement during the crises of the era.]²⁶⁷

In the same year, Julius Bab, a well-known theater critic and writer from Berlin, lauded Seidel's novel as a "zeitloses Buch, ein Buch, das von den ewigen Dingen spricht, von denen, die in Geburt und Tod den Kreislauf des Lebens umfassen. Ein Buch, das von einer Frau handelt, und das nur eine Frau geschrieben haben kann: das Buch der Mutter."

[A timeless book, a book that concerns itself with the eternal issues, spanning a course of

²⁶⁷ In Regina Dackweiler, "Rezeptionsgeschichte von Ina Seidels Roman 'Das Wunschkind'," 86.

life from birth to death. A book that depicts a woman and that could have been written only by a woman: a mother's book.]²⁶⁸ In 1939 the National Socialist press exalted Seidel's ability to render in her female protagonists "wahres Muttertum" and the "Größe der im Heimatboden verwurzelten deutschen Frau."²⁶⁹ [true motherliness and the greatness of the German woman, who is rooted in the native soil.] Several girls' schools were named in Seidel's honor, while her novels *Das Wunschkind* and *Der Weg ohne Wahl* (1933) became part of Nazi school curricula.

In 1933, together with eighty-eight other writers, Seidel declared her loyalty (Treuegelöbnis) to the National Socialist regime. She was placed on Hitler's honorary list of writers who captured the true German spirit. Although Seidel's husband, who retired from the church in protest against the politicization of religion in 1934, increasingly retreated into private life, Seidel took active part in the cultural and social life of Hitler's Germany. Following the invitation of the NS-Kulturgemeinde (National Socialist Society of Culture), she lectured in schools and universities and participated in several literary conferences organized by the Ministry of Propaganda between 1933 and 1941. Seidel consciously aligned herself with National Socialism, perceiving Hitler's regime as leading Germany to greatness and her duty as capturing "the heroic" essence of the times. In 1939, Seidel paid homage to the dictator on his 50th birthday with a poem *Lichtdom*

²⁶⁸ In Dackweiler, "Rezeptionsgeschichte von Ina Seidels Roman 'Das Wunschkind,'" 88.

²⁶⁹ Quoted in Regina Dackweiler, "Rezeptionsgeschichte von Ina Seidels Roman 'Das Wunschkind,'" 94.

and a eulogy.²⁷⁰ After the war, Seidel denied that the poem and eulogy were published with her consent and knowledge after 1939.²⁷¹

Seidel's thematic subjects: the mother/child bond, patriotism, family, and *Heimat* appealed to the post-WW II readership as strongly as they did in the interwar years. As Regina Dackweiler pointed out in her book chapter "Rezeptionsgeschichte von Ina Seidels Roman 'Das Wunschkind,'" Seidel's novels remained on the school curriculum of the 1950s and 1960s "ohne jede Erwähnung oder gar Kritik in ihrem Engagement und ihrer Loyalität für das NS-Regime." [without any mentioning or critique of her involvement in and her loyalty toward the NS-regime.]²⁷² She was awarded the Wilhelm Raabe Preis in 1948, the Verdienstkreuz der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands in 1954, honorary membership at the Akademie der Künste Berlin (West) in 1955, and the Kunstpreis of Nordrhein-Westfalen in 1958. Her oeuvre became the subject of several dissertations and research projects. Awards and recognitions continued with the Großes

²⁷⁰ She wrote: "Wir Mit-Geborenen der Generation, die im letzten Drittel der vergangenen Jahrhunderts aus deutsche Blute gezeugt war, waren längst Eltern der gegenwärtigen Jugend Deutschlands geworden, ehe wir ahnen durften, daß unter uns Tausenden der eine war, über dessen Haupte, die kosmischen Ströme deutschen Schicksals sich sammelten, um sich geheimnisvoll zu stauen und den Kreislauf in unaufhaltsam mächtiger Ordnung neu zu beginnen. ... Dort, wo wir als Deutsche stehen, als Väter und Mütter der Jugend und des Zukunft des Reiches, da fühlten wir heute unser Streben und unsere Arbeit dankbar und demütig aufgehen im Werk des einen Auserwählten der Generation – im Werk Adolfs Hitlers." Quoted in Ernst Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945*, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 2007), 564.

²⁷¹ That Seidel remained loyal to at least some National Socialist ideals can be deciphered in a collection of letters to the fighting German soldiers that Seidel published under the title *Dienende Herzen* in 1942. There she praised spiritual motherhood that supported the "totalen Krieg" with service, humbleness, and sacrifice. Christian Adam, *Lesen unter Hitler: Autoren, Bestseller, Leser im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Verlag Galiani, 2010), 264.

²⁷² Dackweiler, 96.

Verdienstkreuz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in 1966 and the honorary distinction of the city of Stanberg in 1970. Seidel died 3 October 1974 in Ebenhausen bei München.

3.8 German Mother, the Mother of Germany: *Das Wunschkind*

Seidel's *Das Wunschkind* (The Wish Child; 1930) centers on the adventures of a Prussian war-widow, Cornelia Echter von Mespelsbrun, during the Napoleonic Wars in Germany. Cornelia, who is constructed as a dutiful, self-abnegating mother, a devoted patroness of her family and estate and an ardent patriot, represents a distinct ideal of femininity rooted in community, family, and race. Her life journey is affected by the early nineteenth-century tensions: between German Protestantism and Catholicism and between the ideas emanating from post-revolutionary France and Frederickian Prussia. The historical milieu depicted in Seidel's novel echoes the contemporary preoccupation with the Prussian rulers, especially with Frederick the Great and Queen Luise, while the fate of both Cornelia's husband and son, Christoph, who are slain in battle with the French, could be read as an allusion to the defeat of the Germans in WWI. Over the course of the novel, Cornelia transforms from a devoted young wife and mother into a service-oriented widow and then into a benevolent, nurturing matriarch. The novel ends with Cornelia assuming the role of the mother of the Volk who sacrifices her son for the sake of national unity.

For the modern reader, Seidel's lengthy saga is fraught with mysticism, racism, and an excessive preoccupation with the mother/son bond. Seidel's juxtapositions of German/French and German/Jewish appear stereotypical and xenophobic, while abundant

fateful coincidences and mystical connections (Cornelie's firstborn son and her sister die on the same day, her second son, Christoph, dies at the same age as his father, etc) make the plot contrived. Cornelie, who exhibits no desires besides mothering, emerges as an obsessive mother hen and stands in sharp contrast to independent, intellectually curious, socially involved New Women of Seidel's era such as Baum and Bäumer or the Russian New Women such as Verbitskaia and Kollontai. While Cornelie resembles Bäumer's New Woman in that she develops harmoniously as a woman and individual only by her gradually assuming care of her family and community, she is constructed as a domestic and farming genius rather than a social innovator or activist. In her all-consuming motherliness and housekeeping passion, Cornelie also contrasts with the New Women described by and embodied in Verbitskaia and Kollontai, who both condemned obsessive parenting and domestic drudgery as shackling women's intellect and self-development.

Frequent, unfavorable juxtapositions of Cornelie and her half-sister, Charlotte (who was born to a French mother), and, later, Charlotte's daughter Delphine (whose father was a French officer) re-enforce the readers' impression that Seidel believes in irreconcilable differences between purely German and mixed-blood women. Given, Seidel does not propagate the Aryan physical ideal – Cornelie is a fair-skinned brunette, with a heavy frame and an unremarkable gait – but that could be attributed to the fact that Seidel herself had a walking impediment and was dark-haired and fair (although she had blond hair as a child). Even though Seidel does not identify Nazi propagated agility and blondness as necessary attributes of Germaneness, she forcefully suggests the spiritual and moral divide between the Germans and the rest of the world. By nature “wortkarg und spröde,” [reticent, prim, and sparing of words], Cornelie carries in her blood “die

schwere Zärtlichkeit ihrer mecklenburgischen Mutter, die warme Wucht des Bodens.”
[the heavy tenderness of her Mecklenburg mother and the warm weightiness of the earth]
(Das Wunschkind 22) Maternal and dutiful, Cornelia is deeply devoted to her husband,
her father and her *Heimat*. In contrast, her dainty and seductively beautiful half-sister,
Charlotte, the daughter of a French actress, and charming Delphine, the daughter of
Charlotte and a French officer, seek to enchant and manipulate men and do not form deep
attachments. By imbuing German and mixed-blood women characters in the novel with
specific corresponding traits and physical features, Seidel argues a strong connection
between nationality (race), character, and destiny. Nurturing Cornelia emerges victorious
because she draws strength from her family and the ancestral soil, while self-absorbed
Charlotte and Delphine perish under the blows of fate because they reject their German
Heimat in the pursuit of pleasure.

The benevolent power of Cornelia’s nurturing nature is best captured in her
relationship with her husband-soldier. On the eve of the war, Hans Adam yearns for
Cornelia’s “warme Wucht des Bodens” [warmth of grain-bearing soil; 30], explicitly
connecting their sexual intimacy with his memories about the safety of the womb:

Demütig und klein in ihren Schoß eingehen zu können, sich einwiegen zu
lassen von diesem starken sanften Rhythmus; Samen zu sein, der ins
Erdreich sank, sich aufgab, verging und doch lebte; wieder Kind zu
werden, nichts als ihr Kind [...]. Ganz in den wunderbaren Hellschlaf des
Weibes hineingezogen, der nichts ist als der Zustand der Erde, wusste er
für einen Augenblick, nun würde er sterben können, nun würde er da
draußen im Felde den Tod durch eine feindliche Kugel hinnehmen können
wie aus Bruders Hand und fallen, nicht anders als Früchte fallen.

[To be able to enter her womb, humble and small, to allow himself to be
cradled in its strong, gentle rhythm; to be a seed that fell into the earth,
surrendered, perished and came back to life; to become a child again,
nothing but her child... . After being wholly absorbed in the wonderful
waking sleep of the woman, the sleep that was nothing else but the state of

the earth, he realized immediately, he would be able to die, to take the enemy's bullet as a gift from a brother's hand and to fall, just as the fruit falls.] (Das Wunschkind 79)

The subsequent description of the sexual act between Hans Adams and Cornelia (in which the wish child Christoph is conceived) reinforces Cornelia's image as a maternal figure rather than a seductress or vamp:

Er bedeckte sie mit Küssen und wusste nicht, ob ihre Haut von seinen oder von ihren Tränen nass sei. Dann erschrak er vor ihrer Stummheit und vor der dulddenden Hingegebenheit ihres Körpers, der kühl war trotz der Schwüle der Nacht, wagte aber nicht zu fragen, sondern küsste weiter, angstvoll suchend... Vor seinen geschlossenen Augen sausten Meteore und flammende Feuerräder; die Erde schrie und bebte und schüttelte ihn, sie würde untergehen, wenn er nicht gehorchte! Denn er gehorchte, gehorchte der Julinacht [...], gehorchte am tiefsten der Frau, die Arme um seinen Nacken schlang und leer von allem Wünschen war bis auf den einen Willen zur Fruchtbarkeit... Und so geschah dies, dass in dieser Nacht ein lodernes Wetter Himmel und Erde zusammenschlug – dass der prasselnde Regen die reife Ähre ausdrosch und das junge Korn in den Boden stampfte. Tags darauf hing die Ähre leer. Aber schon quoll im Erdreich der Reim.

[He covered her with kisses, not knowing whether her skin was wet from his or her own tears. The stillness and patient surrender of her body, which was cool despite the dampness of the night terrified him, but he dared not ask, and continued to kiss her, anxiously searching... Meteors and burning pinwheels sprang before his closed eyes, the earth moaned and quaked and shook him and would swallow him if he would not obey! So he obeyed the July night... , surrendered himself completely to the woman, who clung to his neck and was drained of all wishes but one: the desperate desire to conceive. And so it happened: during the night, when the blazing weather threw the heavens and earth together violently, when the clattering rain threshed the ripened wheat and pressed a young seed in the earth. In the days that followed the husk hung leer. But the germ was swelling in the soil.] (19)

By making explicit connection between the storm and sexual intercourse between Cornelia and her husband, Seidel stresses Cornelia's bond with nature and emphasizes that her sexual desire was closely connected with her desire for fertility and the continuation of her family. Unlike Kollontai and Verbitskaia who connect the sexual

desire of the (Russian) New Women with their need for self-discovery, Seidel ties women's sexuality to their reproductive mission.

This presentation of the relationship between Cornelia and her husband underlines the restorative, comforting power of Cornelia's sexuality. Like Baum's chemistry student Helene, Cornelia satisfies her husband's natural need, imbuing their sexual love with motherly care. The discussion about sexuality and Germanness is explored further in the novel when Cornelia forms a relationship with Italian-born Dr. Buzzini, who moves into her house to attend to her ill son, Christoph. Although Cornelia eventually becomes his lover (to satisfy his natural, physical need), Seidel emphasizes that Cornelia cherishes the opportunity to assist with Buzzini's patients the most. When she learns that the doctor cannot marry her (because he is already married but does not know the whereabouts of his wife), Cornelia terminates their relationship regretting mostly that she can no longer serve as Buzzini's secretary and assistant. Instead of defying the convention – like a New Woman would do – she turns away from romantic love to dedicate herself fully to motherhood and the patronage of the poor. In the framework of the novel, then, Cornelia's sexuality, e.g., the sexuality of a virtuous, truly German protagonist, is sublimated in order to serve a higher mission – the needs of the family and community. Cornelia's quest centers not on the satisfaction of her ego or the pursuit of sexual pleasure, wealth, status, etc., but on preserving and strengthening the bond with the maternal land and the German people.

As outlined in the novel, race determines personality and character. After learning about her husband's death in battle, Cornelia, together with her grief-stricken mother-in-law, flees. Charlotte, who is supposed to have followed in the next coach, oversleeps and

remains in Mainz. While Cornelia assumes care for her ailing mother-in-law and escapes to safety following the order of male authority (her brother-in-law), Charlotte befriends the French officers billeted in the house and marries Lieutenant Gaston Loriot, a French bourgeois. Not only does Charlotte defy the expectations of her class by remaining in Mainz without a chaperon and deciding to “live and die a good Republican,” she betrays her fatherland by marrying the enemy of Prussia. She emerges as a triple traitor: of class, family, and the Volk. Seidel’s depiction of Charlotte as a woman who erases traditional markers of gender and class differences can be read as the author’s critique of the mores in the Weimar Republic. Like the New Woman, Charlotte pursues sexual fulfillment, defying male (her father’s) authority. While Cornelia protects and strengthens her family (and the Volk), Charlotte succumbs to her sexuality and disrupts the familial bonds.

The portrayal of Cornelia’s and her half-sister Charlotte’s attitudes to motherhood also can be read as an allusion to the contemporary debate about the sexuality of the New Woman. Charlotte, who enjoys sex for the sake of sex, would rather avoid pregnancy and motherhood, while Cornelia, who yearns for fertility, accepts the child as the ultimate reward. Cornelia’s, e.g., German woman’s destiny is closely connected to duty to family and Volk – the procreation: “... zu leben, zu altern, von hier aus dahinzugehen aus dem schönen sanften Rhythmus erdgegebener Arbeit heraus, nach dem Gebären, Großziehen und Aufriss der Zukunft; an dessen gottgewollter Selbstverständlichkeit ein Zweifel gar nicht möglich war?“ [to live, to grow old, and finally to pass away in the sweet, gentle rhythm of laboring for the soil, after bearing, breeding and sending forth many handsome, well-bred children into the world- was not that her pre-ordained future, already settled beyond a doubt?] (Das Wunschkind 52) Cornelia, who surrenders herself to the “innerste

Urordnung der Frau” [the ancient, sacred destiny of the woman], regains strength from her motherhood and survives, while Charlotte, who denounces motherhood and rejects her kin and family, perishes (dies in childbirth). Cornelia’s son, as presented in the novel, is her ultimate reward, which bestows her existence with meaning and happiness.

Repeatedly, *Das Wunschkind* presents motherliness and love for one’s fatherland as German (Prussian) dominant character traits. Cornelia yearns to reunite with Hoelkewiese, the place where she was born and raised, her “Heimat des Herzens” (home of her heart). Only there, on the ancestral soil, can she rejuvenate herself and realize her potential as a woman. As Cornelia notes in the letter to Countess Walburn,

Hoelkewiese und ich, wir brauchen einander, um wieder gesund zu werden. [...] Ich glaube, ich muss nun auch nicht weiter suchen: für mich heißt es nur, für Lebendes sorgen – für Lebendes, verstehe mich wohl, das noch wachsen will, also für Kinder, Tiere, Blumen, Bäume, ja, und nun auch für Acker und Wiesen, für Land und Leute. Das ist mir wohl, da geb’ ich so leicht, da strömt es mir doppelt und dreifach an Kräften zurück.

[Hoelkewiese and I require each other to get well again. ...I believe that I mustn’t search any further. My task now is to take care of all the living – I mean, for what is alive and desires to grow – of children, animals, flowers, trees – yes, also now of fields and pastures, of land and people. It rejuvenates me, as I enjoy giving and it all flows back to me twofold, threefold.] (*Das Wunschkind* 132-3)

In “the home of her heart,” Cornelia transforms from a dutiful daughter into a universally respected matriarch. In the midst of the continuous social unrest and military conflict with France, Cornelia succeeds in creating an oasis of peace and comfort for the inhabitants of Hoelkewiese and especially her son. She prepares him for his “natural” career as a Prussian soldier, but is devastated when Christoph, barely thirteen, is summoned to the battle:

Und euren Wahnsinn, dass die Kinder, die eben zum Leben erwachten, vor die Kanonen gestellt werden, dass man ihnen beibringt, Mordwaffen zu handhaben und sie auf Brüder zu richten, den mach' ich nicht mehr mit.

[I no longer support your madness of sending children, just awakening to life, to be mowed down by a cannon and of being taught how to handle murderous weapons to aim them against their brothers.] (*Das Wunschkind* 185)

Here Cornelia castigates the war because the current Prussian army aims to protect the old patriarchal and monarchal order. Later in the novel, Cornelia accepts the summoning of Christoph and ultimately his death because her son dies for national unity.²⁷³ *Das Wunschkind*, as did Seidel's lyrical collections published during the war, endorsed wars that protected the race and motherland.

If serving her community, race, and family represents Cornelia's *raison d'être*, Delphine's "calling" – to seduce and manipulate – is realized in the company of the French and the Jews. After being serendipitously reunited with her father, a French general, Delphine immerses herself in a life of pleasure in Berlin, in a family of affluent Jewish bankers, the Kalishers, where her father installs her. Like her chauvinistic characterization of the French earlier in the novel, Seidel's portrayal of the Kalishers is fraught with anti-Semitic stereotypes. In the midst of shortages, the Kalishers enjoy luxurious furniture and gastronomical delicacies. They perpetuate the sin and temptations of the city, worship money, and quickly change loyalties, when acquaintances and friends find themselves in a precarious situation. As presented in the novel, the Jews, like the

²⁷³ Children like Christoph, Hölscher suggests in her analysis of *Das Wunschkind*, cannot yet understand sacrifice for their motherland and do it willingly. That is why Seidel's Christoph has to mature before accepting his destiny. Ingard Hölscher, „Gesichtskonstruktion und Weiblichkeitsbilder in Ina Seidels Roman ‚Das Wunschkind,‘“ *Verdeckte Überlieferungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag+Herchen Verlag, 1991), 71.

French, lack patriotism, community, and the love of the land. Under the influence of the French and Jews, but ultimately because of her “natural,” race-determined disposition, Delphine fails to develop the expected feminine virtues: modesty and domesticity. Eventually, she goes on stage and marries another actor, thus confirming the reader’s expectation that her sexuality, unlike Cornelia’s, cannot be transformed into a productive, benevolent force.

Although situated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, *Das Wunschkind* echoes many contemporary tensions: between the seductive femininity embodied in the actress and the nurturing femininity represented in the mother, between patriotism and racism, between the disillusioned post World War I generation of women and conservative women writers, and finally, between the idea of spiritual motherhood and the idea about women as reproducers of the race. In her attempt to construct a progressive role for contemporary women, Seidel situated her paradigm of femininity within the family and the community, repeatedly emphasizing that the German woman belong thoroughly to her Volk and was first and foremost a daughter and a mother. Seidel’s vision of womanhood echoed the National Socialist rhetoric in that it suggested Aryan superiority. It insisted that German women strengthen their national identity by returning to the land and biological motherhood. In Seidel’s view, children (sons) served as a condition for women’s emancipation – from the destabilizing, destructive reality of the Weimar Republic.

As personified in Baum, Bäumer, and Seidel, the political and social milieu of the Weimar Republic allowed for the development and co-existence of at least three distinct

models of femininity. These models attempted to adapt the traditional mother role of women to the changed economic and cultural reality: Baum by advancing a motherly New Woman, Bäumer by advocating spiritual motherhood, and Seidel by insisting on women's reproductive role. If the first two models attempted to integrate a cosmopolitan approach into their visions, Seidel's model posited a culture- and race-specific understanding of women's role and duties. In an atmosphere of rising nationalism and the increasing popularity of eugenics, Seidel's model fit the image of the Aryan Woman: a mother and wife who was racially conscious, home- and community-oriented, and respectful of male-authority.

The brutality and destruction that accompanied the establishment of Soviet Russia and the reality of the Weimar parliamentary democracy disappointed moderates and radicals on the German political left and directed their visions of Germany away from Communism and parliamentarism. Tough competition in the job market in the post World War I years and the continued limitations on professional advancement, on the other hand, prevented the majority of German women from realizing the promise of the New Woman. Economic insecurity and the failed promises of the Weimar democracy forced both genders to look for alternative visions of the future.

Like the New Woman, the Aryan Woman belonged to the anticipated future in which Germany could achieve prosperity, stability, and growth in population. Above all, the Aryan Woman promised cultural and spiritual renewal. The displacement of the New Woman of the Weimar Republic by the Aryan Woman mirrored the transition of Germany from a democratic republic into the *Führerstaat*, from liberal and unstable into a one-party dictatorship that aimed to control all and everything.

In comparison to the Soviet Woman, the Aryan Woman represented a more reactionary development: the Soviet Woman retained many features of the New Woman of Late Imperial Russia, including her radicalism, and began to explore new terrains: the battlefield, the collective farm, industry, and party meetings. At least two reasons help to explain this difference: first, the Soviet Woman was from the very beginning conceptualized as a co-builder of socialism, who contributed to the state economy as an industrial worker and assisted in “political enlightenment.” In contrast, the Aryan Woman, like the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century woman, was relegated to the home, to housekeeping duties and childrearing, because she was seen primarily as a reproducer of the race. Second, the Aryan Woman’s more traditional role and status represented a response to the sexually emancipated New Woman and the perceived crisis of masculinity, which figured in German political and philosophical discourse more prominently than it did in Late Imperial Russia and the nascent Soviet Union.

The realities of the Third Reich and Stalin’s Russia, however, demonstrate discrepancies between image and reality, and between propaganda and women’s actual experience. As Chapter IV will explore, the Aryan woman, like the Soviet Woman, did not remain a passive consumer of ideology but instead attempted to create a distinct, female culture that (subconsciously) combined misogynist ideologies of the Third Reich and Stalin’s Russia respectively with elements of feminism.

Chapter 4: Controlling the Body, Disciplining the Mind: Bolshevik and Nazi Paradigms of Emancipation

Using the writings of prominent New Women in Germany and Russia between the 1910s and mid-1930s, the previous two chapters sought to map the continuities and disjunctions between contemporary paradigms of emancipation, the nineteenth-century traditions of female radicalism (Russia) and maternalist ideology (Germany), and Marxism-Leninism and National Socialism respectively. Chapter IV outlines the paradigms of emancipation promoted by the Nazi and the Bolshevik regimes and elucidates the similarities and differences in the Nazi and Bolshevik's approach to the Woman Question. By looking at laws, state-initiated holidays and lifestyle practices, as well as visual propaganda such as posters, postcards, and magazines, Part I identifies and compares Nazi and Bolshevik changes in the conceptualization of marriage, motherhood, the family, sexuality, and work and analyzes comparatively the effects of these changes on the female populations of Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia. Part II delves deeper into the functioning of the totalitarian state by exploring the mechanics of education and the indoctrination of girls and young women in party organizations. It also looks into the ethos and culture of adult Nazi women's organizations. Part II seeks to parse the differences and similarities between the Communist and National Socialist organized women and youth groups and illuminate how participation in state-sanctioned organizations and youth movements contributed both to the rise of the new womanhood and the building of the Nazi and Bolshevik empires. This chapter argues that while the dictators exploited the rhetoric of liberation to mobilize women, Nazi and Bolshevik

“new women” – albeit often unconsciously – exploited official ideology to relieve themselves from the pressures of men-dominated governments.

4.1 The Woman Question Solved!: The Nazi and Bolshevik “Liberation” of Women

Through various media, the Nazis and Bolsheviks bombarded women with ideas about discarding the “decadent” behaviors of the past and cultivating new, “healthy” identities connecting such self-transformation with liberation. The new identity for women that the Nazis and the Bolsheviks propagated rested, above all, upon ideological awareness, inner discipline, self-sacrifice, and blind obedience to the Party – the traits that the totalitarian regimes in Russia and Germany required from men as well. In comparison with the conservative model of femininity from the pre-Bolshevik and pre-Nazi era, the Soviet Woman and Aryan Woman displayed more unisex characteristics and fewer traditionally ascribed feminine traits such as religiosity (piety), emotionality, and compassion.

In order to forge their “new women,” the Nazis and the Bolsheviks attempted to redefine the crucial components that constituted conventionally constructed femininity – marriage, motherhood, the mother/child bond, family, and domesticity. In the 1920s, many Bolsheviks based their idea of women’s emancipation on four precepts: free union, women’s liberation through wage labor, the socialization of housework, and the “withering away” of the family unit.²⁷⁴ The belief that under socialism a free union

²⁷⁴ Unlike during the Stalinist era, in the 1920s the Party did not maintain a rigid orthodoxy and differences were freely expressed, especially concerning such controversial issues as sexual relations, child rearing and the need for the family in the

would replace (bourgeois) marriage, making the terms “husband” and “wife” and the concept of illegitimacy obsolete, and divorce easy, was prevalent (despite the fact that Lenin and a number of older Bolsheviks supported an officially sanctioned, monogamous marriage and stable relationships in general) and was reflected in the first marital law (the Code of 1918).²⁷⁵ The traditional family – as a cell of production and consumption and a unit for rearing children, Bolshevik ideologues predicted, would eventually “wither away,” as the state would take full responsibility for raising and educating children. On the surface, the Soviet Woman appeared more progressive than her Nazi counterpart: she was an equal citizen, encouraged to work and participate in the social and political life of the nation. Because of Bolshevik marital laws, she was allegedly economically independent from a man, married or single. She was also purportedly less constrained in her reproductive choices: in November 1920 the Bolshevik government legalized

transitional period to socialism. In addition to Kollontai who propagated free union as a substitute for marriage and insisted on the “withering” of the family under socialism, Semen Vol’fson, a sociologist and a professor of law, economy, and dialectical materialism, argued that the duration of marriage should be defined exclusively by the mutual inclination of the spouses. The renown writer M. Shishkevich, too, sketched the Soviet marital ideal as a free union of comrades founded on mutual affection and united by common interests. Lenin, it should be noted, strongly disliked the terms “free union” and “free love” because he associated them with bourgeois promiscuity. Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6-8.

²⁷⁵This Code represented a radical breakthrough from tsarist laws: it legalized divorce, replaced the religious marriage ceremony with a civil ceremony, and gave rights to children born out of wedlock. The Code abolished the inferior legal status of women and established divorce at the request of either spouse, without grounds. It also extended the same guarantees of alimony to both men and women. The Code forbade adoption in the belief that the state would be a better guardian for an orphan than an individual family. A woman retained full control of her earnings after marriage and neither spouse had any claim on the property of the other after their divorce. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 52.

abortion, and in 1923, sanctioned birth control.²⁷⁶ If she chose to become a mother, she had state-run facilities at her disposal: Within months after seizing power, the Bolsheviks founded the Department of Maternal and Infant Welfare and created a number of maternity homes, nurseries, milk kitchens, and pediatric clinics. Since the state assumed responsibility for child rearing and education, the identity of the Soviet Woman was thus connected primarily with her participation in the state economy and the construction of socialism and communism. Even when official Soviet culture and politics shifted in the 1930s and reverted to a traditional family model, at no time during the campaign to bolster the family did Soviet official rhetoric suggest that a woman's place was in the home taking care of children. Soviet propaganda, as David Hoffman has noted, "constructed gender in a way that stressed women's economic contribution and their role in bringing up the next generation;" it did not focus on their domestic or parenting skills.²⁷⁷

If the Bolsheviks strove to substitute traditional marital bonds with a free union and encouraged women to be productive workers, the Nazis attempted to turn marriage – or any sexual relationship – into a racial sanctuary and trumpeted fecund motherhood. In the early years of the Third Reich, women were systematically directed away from pursuing a professional career towards starting or extending a (racially pure) family. Allegedly,

²⁷⁶ Notably, the Bolsheviks never recognized abortion as a woman's right. Rather, legalization of abortion was accepted as a means to combat the growing number of illegal abortions in the aftermath of the Civil war. At the time of the decree, the Commissar of Health, Nikolai Semashko, explicitly stated that abortion could negatively impact the birthrate and hurt the interests of the state and hence should be practiced only in extreme cases. David Hoffman, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in its Pan-European Context". *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, M0.1 (Autunm, 2000), 46.

²⁷⁷ Hoffman, "Mothers in the Motherland," 39.

with Hitler as the leader, the German mother enjoyed a more honorary and esteemed status in German society than ever before and was also more economically protected. Pompously celebrated Mother's Day, state award ceremonies for fecund mothers, and a series of welfare schemes all emphasized the national importance of motherhood.²⁷⁸ Of course, Nazi benefits extended only to Aryan couples.²⁷⁹

In September of 1935, Nuremberg Laws forbade marriages between Jews and Aryans, while the Marriage Law of October 1935 restricted marriage to a union between healthy Aryans only. Goebbels explained the natal policies of the regime as being about "not just children at all costs, but ... racially worthy, physically and mentally unaffected children of German families."²⁸⁰ So important was the production of biologically fit, racially pure offspring for the National Community that the SS leader Heinrich Himmler created *Lebensborn* maternity clinics in the same year where not only the wives of the SS

²⁷⁸ The holiday honoring mothers originated in the USA in 1907 and was observed on a small scale in Germany from 1923. The Nazis used Mother's Day to emphasize the regime's pro-natal and pro-family orientation: all married men were given a day off, and all SS men, SA men, Hitler Youth and BDM members released from their duties; churches were supposed to address the theme "mother and motherhood" and theaters to stage a play on the topic. Mothers of four received a bronze medal, while mothers of six and eight and more received silver and gold medals respectively. On Mother's Day in 1939, three million mothers of four and more children were awarded the title of "Mother of the Reich." Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 41- 42.

²⁷⁹ In 1933, the Nazis introduced a series of welfare schemes to boost marriage and the birth rate, in which the (Aryan) husband received vouchers for furniture and other household goods if the (Aryan) wife gave up work and dedicated herself to motherhood and family life. The birth of a child reduced the loan by a quarter, and if the couple had four children together, repayments were no longer necessary. Aryan couples could also apply for an interest-free loan of 1,000 Reichsmarks (about one-fifth of average yearly take-home pay). During 1934, 224,619 couples received loans, while forty-five percent of all marriages were supported by state loans. Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 43.

²⁸⁰ Bock, "Anti-natalism, maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism," *Nazism and Society*, 120.

men could give birth, but also unmarried women, if their children were deemed racially valuable.²⁸¹ For Nazi leaders such as Himmler, the monogamous bourgeois marriage could not satisfy Germany's demographic need: in his addresses to the SS corps and in private conversations with Hitler and Baldur Shirarch, the leader of the Hitler Jugend, Himmler insisted that racially valuable Aryans conceive as many children as possible, in marriage or not. The Lebensborn homes received priority treatment during the war, receiving timely and adequate supplies of rationed items.

In the cause of raising the birth rate, the Nazis toughened sections of the Reich Penal Code dealing with abortion and announced prison sentences as a punishment to those undergoing or assisting with the termination of pregnancy in racially valuable citizens. Although the official ban on their manufacture and sale did not come until 1941, access to contraceptives in Nazi Germany became increasingly difficult. The policing of female sexuality and the reproductive sphere continued with the introduction of additional taxes (1938) that childless couples were forced to pay and the 1938 Marriage Law that allowed the courts to approve the dissolution of marriage if one partner turned out to be infertile. Compared to Nazi Germany, fears of depopulation were less acute in Bolshevik Russia, as the birthrate recovered to near pre-war levels by the mid-1920s. Hence the state budget in the 1920s did not include incentives to increase the number of children in the family. Only after an extensive demographic study in 1934 revealed that the birthrate had fallen from 42.2 births per thousand people in 1928 to 31.0 in 1932 did the Soviet government grant women a 2,000 ruble annual bonus for each child they had over six children, and a

²⁸¹ About 8, 000 children were born in *Lebensborn* homes in Germany. During the war, *Lebensborn* program expanded into occupied France, Poland, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 71.

5, 000 ruble bonus for each child over ten children.²⁸² Unlike the Nazi government, which limited marriage loans to members of the National Community (racially valuable Germans), the Soviet government included “outsiders,” allowing any mother with seven or more children to receive bonuses regardless of her social origin or even if her husband was arrested for counterrevolutionary activity.²⁸³

With Stalin’s ascent to power, the Soviet state engaged in policing of sexuality and the reproductive sphere similar to that in Nazi Germany. The Family and Marriage Decree of 1936 outlawed abortion (except for medical reasons) while a secretive directive of the Commissariat of Health from the same year ordered the withdrawal of contraceptives from the market.²⁸⁴ However, unlike Nazi officials, Soviet authorities never adopted explicit Darwinist thought. Like Lenin, Stalin disapproved of the idea of free love and connected stability of the regime with traditional family units. Healthy and happy families with multiple children played an important role in the creation of the Social Realist utopia as they represented the success not only of the Bolshevik revolution but also of Stalin’s statesmanship.

²⁸² The author of the study and one of the leading Soviet statisticians, S.G. Strumlin, argued that the drop in fertility correlated with urbanization and the entrance of women into the industrial workforce. Strumlin’s other important discovery was that social groups with higher wages had lower fertility. This finding in particular contradicted previous research that had correlated low fertility with economic hardship. The lower birth rate contradicted the Stalinist propaganda, which attempted to convince the general population that their material conditions had improved. The decree on increasing the birth rate came out in 1936, right after the decree outlawing abortion. Hoffman, “Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pro-natalism in its Pan-European Context.” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, M0.1 (Autumn, 2000), 37-41.

²⁸³ Until Stalin’s ascent to power, Soviet physicians divided on the use of contraceptives as a means to control the spread of venereal disease and the number of illegal abortions. David L. Hoffman, “Mothers in the Motherland,” 37.

²⁸⁴ Hoffman, “Mothers in the Motherland,” 39.

While Stalin's heightened attention to reproduction caused a shift in the official presentation of the family and motherhood, Nazi policing of the female reproductive sphere, according to Gisela Bock, became the first step leading to subsequent anti-humane measures such as forced sterilization and euthanasia programs.²⁸⁵ Indeed, Hitler's regime nationalized the questions of birth and motherhood not simply by forcing all women *into* childbearing, but methodically and ruthlessly preventing undesirable women *from* childbearing.²⁸⁶ Nazi scholars such as the researcher on race and heredity and medical doctor Agnes Bluhm (1886-1943), whose theories were later reflected in the Nazi sterilization laws, placed heredity, selection, and race above women's "natural" maternal instinct, insisting on abortion and sterilization in cases when offspring was not racially pure or likely to have a physical or mental disability.²⁸⁷ The fact that women accounted for eighty percent of the fatalities that resulted from botched sterilizations and suffered more than did men from a destruction of their identities and bodies, led Gisela Bock to conclude that women became the primary victims of National Socialism. While

²⁸⁵ While Bock advances this view in her article "Anti-natalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism," Kater, Pine, and Stibbe, as well as other scholars, identify a connection between the Nazis' heightened attention to reproduction and their subsequent sterilization and euthanasia programs as well.

²⁸⁶ On 1 January 1934 the Sterilization Law, also known as the Law of the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, came into effect. It called for the compulsory sterilization of anyone suffering from "congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic depression, hereditary epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, serious deformities and chronic alcoholism." Between 1934 and 1939 approximately 320,000 people of German ethnicity were forcibly sterilized (0.5 percent of the entire population); the "feeble-minded" made up two-thirds of all those sterilized of which about two-thirds were women. Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 71.

²⁸⁷ Bluhm embraced fertility selection in the form of eugenically indicated, forced sterilization as an effective measure toward the eradication of inferiors. Ogilvie, Marilyn Bailey, *Women in Science*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 150.

for many women the reproductive ability was undoubtedly vital in their definition of self and hence forced sterilization (or abortion) was tragic, it is crucial to note that Nazi sterilization policy targeted both genders. In this (rare) instance, that is, when enforcing the sterilization of the “unfit,” Hitler’s regime was not discriminatory towards only women. After all, in his 1933 speech on “population and race policy,” Hitler’s Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, estimated that twenty percent of the German population (roughly eleven million people!) were undesirable as mothers and fathers.²⁸⁸



Volk und Rasse, (August 1936). “Sterilization is liberation, not a punishment. What parents would like their children to have such a miserable life? Who would want to be responsible for these [physically and mentally handicapped children]?”²⁸⁹ Ads such as this were part of the Nazi concerted effort to convince the general population about the necessity to sterilize (and kill) “biologically unfit” Germans.

Like reproduction, housekeeping practices acquired political meaning in Nazi society. Aryan women were responsible for safeguarding the economic independence of the Third Reich from Jewish merchants by buying from German manufacturers. In preparation for the “total war,” the Nazis propagated frugality and sacrifice, appealing to housewives to

²⁸⁸ Bock, “Anti-natalism, maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism,” 111-114.

²⁸⁹ German Propaganda Archive online, <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/volkundrasse1936-8.htm>

make substitutions in their cooking, sewing, and laundering practices. Numerous leaflets and magazines demonstrated how to use soya beans instead of meat, potato starch for ironing and cleaning instead of store-bought materials, and how to cut up old clothes in order to make new ones.²⁹⁰ To professionalize housework and elevate its value, women's organizations such as NS-Frauenschaft und Deutsches Frauenwerk offered courses in home economics and nutrition. According to the leader of women's organizations Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, a cooking spoon was a German woman's weapon, helping her to combat food shortages and assist in the war economy. Taking part in Nazi welfare programs (*Winterhilfswerk* and *Eintopf*) was a German housewife's duty as well.²⁹¹

If the Aryan Woman had to embrace domesticity, the Soviet Woman in the 1920s and 1930s was expected to apply herself at work and in social activism. The representation of women in the official propaganda of the 1920s and 1930s varied, but the achievements of the Soviet regime vis-à-vis women remained the same: Soviet women cast off the chains of housekeeping and found fulfillment and purpose as workers, scientists, students, Komsomol activists, and Party delegates.

²⁹⁰ Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 73.

²⁹¹ An annual drive of *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization), *Winterhilfswerk*, sought to collect food, clothing, and other items for the poorer members of the National Community. The *Eintopf* (one-dish) campaigns encouraged families to substitute their usual meal on Sunday for a cheap one-pot dish and donated the saved money to a state-charity. Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 55.



Unknown author, (1920)
 What did October revolution give the worker woman and the peasant woman: library, club of women workers, palace of mother and child, communal dining hall, crèche, school



Adolf Strakhov-Braslavskii (1926)
 Liberated Woman! Build Socialism!



G. Shegal' (1931). Away with the slavery in the kitchen!
 Make way to the new *byt*! Other captions: creches, Palaces of leisure, communal dining halls



G. Eiges (1939). Long Live the Equal Woman of the USSR: The true participant in government, culture and industry!

The social, economic, and cultural conditions of Bolshevik Russia in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s, however, hardly allowed for the implementation of major tenets of the Bolshevik vision of emancipation the way they had been discussed by Western-educated, cosmopolitan, feminist-minded thinkers such as Kollontai. The staggering economy, social and political unrest, the draught of 1920 and the subsequent devastating famine left many women without jobs; most of all, these economic conditions did not allow for rapid establishment of childcare centers and communal dining facilities. On the other hand, the unclear standards of Bolshevik morality resulted in a general chaos and confusion about sexual relationships, in which women, due to their reproductive ability, also became primary victims. The Bolsheviks expected to replace bourgeois morality with socialist morality; young male workers, and especially those in the Young Communist League, instead responded by debauchery and hooliganism. The confusion about what constituted Bolshevik sexual relations surfaced in a rise of out-of-wedlock births, abortions, and abandoned pregnant women; it also manifested itself in gang rapes conducted by inebriated Komsomol men.²⁹² One social observer lamented in an article in the journal *Kommunistka* in 1920:

The old rotten foundations of the family and marriage have collapsed ...
But there are no guiding principles for the creation of new, beautiful,
healthy relations. There is unimaginable bacchanalia. The best people
understand freedom of love as freedom of depravity.²⁹³

²⁹² The most notorious incident that involved Komsomol men was the rape of two women in Leningrad in 1926. Out of twenty men who assaulted the two young women workers, more than a half belonged to the Young Communist league. Victims of group rapes, such as a young student Islamova, often committed suicide. Hans Halm, *Liebe und Ehe in Sowjetrussland*, 36.

²⁹³ in Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 109.

Hans Halm, a professor of German at the Irkutsk University in East Siberia, in his book *Liebe und Ehe in Sowjetrußland* (published in Berlin in 1937) described the Bolshevik liberation as having the most perilous impact on Russian women:

Die "Befreiung" der Frau hat dazu geführt, dass sie so gut wie "verpflichtet" ist, jedem Manne zu willen zu sein. Selbst Kommunistinnen von reinstem Wasser lehnen sich auf gegen diese beispiellose niedrige Einschätzung der Frau als einer Sache und als weiter nichts. ... Die Moral unserer Jugend besteht zur Zeit kurz in folgendem: Jeder kommunistische Jugendbündler, jeder Student der Rabfak ("Arbeitsfakultät"), wenn auch minderjährig, ist berechtigt und verpflichtet, seine sexuelle Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen. Die Enthaltsamkeit wird als eine für das bürgerliche Denken charakteristische Borniertheit angesehen. Wenn ein Mann ein junges Mädchen begehrt [...] so ist dieses Mädchen verpflichtet, sich dieser Begierde zu fügen, da sie sonst als Bürgerliche angesehen wird, die des Namens einer echten Kommunistin unwürdig ist.

[The "liberation" of women has led to this: she is as good as obligated to satisfy every man who desires her. Even the most ardent female communists rebel against this unprecedented denigration of women as a mere object and nothing more. ... The morals of our youth at the present time consist in short of the following: every member of the communist Party, every student of the Rabfac, even if he is underage, is entitled and duty-bound to satisfy his sexual urges. Abstinence is considered to be the narrow-mindedness characteristic of bourgeois mentality. If a man covets a young girl ... she must submit to his urges, since she will otherwise be considered (petit) bourgeoisie, who is unworthy of the name of a true communist.]²⁹⁴

In cases when women were married, easy divorce proceedings made it close to impossible, especially for rural women, to obtain child support.²⁹⁵ In the mid-1920, the Soviet Union had the highest ratio of divorce to marriage of any European country: eleven marriages and 16 divorces per 1000 people, which was almost three times as high

²⁹⁴ Halm, *Liebe und Ehe in Sowjetrußland*, 33.

²⁹⁵ The provision of the 1918 Marriage Code included legitimate and illegitimate children; however, the alimony provision of the Code was quite narrow: An ex-wife was entitled only to six months of support after a divorce and only if she was disabled or in need. The provision excluded able-bodied women.

as Germany and twenty-six times higher than England and Wales.²⁹⁶ It is not surprising that when asked to comment on family legislation in 1926, working-class women supported laws to strengthen marriage, discourage promiscuity and punish male irresponsibility, demanding in fact to “be liberated” from the social effects of the new sexual freedom.²⁹⁷ In the “equal” Soviet society, male sexual license emerged as an acute problem, and women, as during the tsarist regime, continued to be treated primarily as sexual objects.



K. Rotov (1930). Away with disgusting womanizers!
Let us discipline ruthlessly all philandering lads!



Unknown artist, (1922).²⁹⁸ Stop!
The poem by Demian Bedny (translated and discussed below) condemns the decadent lifestyle of flapper/prostitutes.

²⁹⁶ Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, 107.

²⁹⁷ Goldman, “Freedom and Consequences,” 364, in Elena Schulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*, 31.

²⁹⁸ <http://www.my-ussr.ru/soviet-posters/social.html>

The grotesque contrast between the socialist ideal of a free union and the economic circumstances of the time was nowhere so vividly portrayed as in streetwalkers. Many modern scholars draw attention to the connection between high unemployment among women during NEP and the increased number of women turning to prostitution.²⁹⁹ Surveys from the early 1920s tell repeated stories of divorce, separation and abandonment, and of women's need to provide for themselves and their small children, aged relations, or younger siblings. Some women, perhaps like the decadent flapper on the 1922 poster above illustrating the poem "Nocturnal Pleasures" by Demian Bedny, engaged in prostitution to obtain fancy clothes and to take part in the chic lifestyle of the Nepmen. The majority, however, became prostitutes after industrial retrenchment or when their lovers abandoned them.³⁰⁰ In Bolshevik ideology, prostitutes (as well as fancy flappers) offended Communist morals and had to be eradicated from the Soviet society. The Bolsheviks characterized prostitutes as "decadent elements" and as women who shirked work and sabotaged socialist construction and thereby deserved to be sent to hard labor camps.³⁰¹ The official discourse, however, often blurred the divide between the

²⁹⁹ See for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinovich and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*; Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and the Revolution*; Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, Elizabeth Waters, *Everyday in Urban Russia in the 1920s* and others.

³⁰⁰ About sixty percent of prostitutes in the 1920s came from working-class backgrounds (former servants and workers from the Soviet Food Industry [*Narpit*] dominated). Of the remainder, nine percent were from the aristocracy and the bourgeois, five percent from intelligentsia, and twenty-six had been employed in handicrafts, sewing, and dressmaking. Almost forty-five percent of the working class women entered prostitution after industries such as medical services, food industry, and factories fired them. Goldman, *Women, the State and the Revolution*, 120.

³⁰¹ See, for example, the late 1920s speeches of the party functionary E.V. Motylev made to the Central Council for the Struggle against Prostitution. Quoted in Waters,

decadent vain flapper, who sold herself for material luxuries, and the woman who had no other income. As seen from the following poem “Nocturnal Pleasures” by Bedny, many Bolsheviks, including proletarian artists, believed the prostitute to be the remnant of tsarist Russia, not a product of Lenin’s economic policies.

Ночная панель

Nocturnal pleasures

Вот чему должна быть крышка,

This is what we have to conquer

Вот вести с чем надо бой,

Bringing quickly to its end:

Строя старого отрыжка

The remains of the old order:

На панели пред тобой.

The dirty pleasures of the street.

Перья, пудра, краски, мушки

Feathers, powder, paint, and beauty marks-

Блеск поддельной красоты

All that elegance she fakes,

Продающиеся “душки”

Easily bought and sold this sweetheart

Безобразные коты.

In the company of repulsive tomcats.

Заразное наслажденье

This pleasure spreading disease;

Визг распутный до утра

the screams of debauchery till dawn

Это злое наважденье

We must destroy the evil spell,

Прекратить давно пора.

We should have done it long ago.

Надо кончить с гнойной свалкой

We must do away with this rotten dump,

Оздоровить города

And sanitize our cities

Пролетарской закалкой

With the proletarian strength

“Victim or Villain: Prostitute in Post-revolutionary Russia,” *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Linda Edmondson, ed., 163.

Женской воли и труда

With the women's willpower and labor.³⁰²

The poem conveniently overlooked that many Russian women in the 1920s, more so than Russian men, were influenced by their roles and responsibilities within the extended and immediate family. The conditions of NEP hampered many women's attempts to live up to the Bolshevik feminine ideal. Women could not avoid prostitution simply by using their "proletarian strength and willpower" if there were no jobs available to them and they were sole providers for their relatives, small children, or themselves.

While Bolshevik ideology in the 1920s questioned the value attached to motherhood, domesticity, and the family, the traditional models of masculinity and femininity still held a tight grip on Russian society. Even Zhenotdel activists tended to adhere to the embedded models of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, while Kollontai and other Zhenotdel workers attempted to shift women's focus from the domestic sphere to studies, social and political activism, and wage work, and while the official propaganda sought to convince women that their emancipation came from communal dining halls, laundrettes, and daycare facilities, for the most part, neither the Zhenotdel nor the state attempted to restructure the behavior of men in the household nor redefine the meaning of masculinity. Without truly modernizing gender relations or improving childrearing, Bolshevik claims of women's equality remained empty promises. The Bolshevik model of "emancipation" essentially de-sexualized women, downplayed the implications of their reproductive ability and the importance of family life, and attempted to make them more like male workers.

³⁰² The translation is mine.

If denigrating anything bourgeois formed an important part of Bolshevik ideology in the 1920s, over the course of the 1930s, the discussion about (private) parenthood, domestic skills, and stylish appearance shifted from an explicit condemnation to cautious praising and then to official acceptance. The official propaganda in the 1930s profusely celebrated the USSR's economic, scientific and social achievements, namely, the abundance of consumer goods; improved hygiene, health and childcare; and the overall improvement of citizens' standards of living. By the late 1930s, Soviet woman became less militaristic and androgynous and more home-oriented and motherly. If in the mid- and late 1920s, the covers of popular magazines and newspapers and agitation posters showed Soviet woman flaunting her productivity at work or asserting her political maturity, the official propaganda from the mid-1930s on celebrated the coziness and prosperity of the Soviet home, the culturedness of Soviet men and women, and the joyful, rewarding experience of motherhood and family life under Stalin's rule. The New Soviet Woman appeared to have been liberated once again: from the pluralism of ideas about love and relationships, motherhood, and her destiny in the Socialist state. She was expected to perform and overachieve in all her roles while keeping blind loyalty to Stalin: work, social activism, and motherhood.



O.V. Eiges (1939). Long Live Stalin's Constitution! Long Live the Equal Woman Of the USSR!



K.V. Zotov (1934). "Every collective farm worker or a private owner has the right to live well, if only he wants to work honestly, without procrastinating, vagabonding, or stealing from the collective farm!" J. Stalin.

If the Bolshevik model of emancipation turned women into androgens and the Stalinist vision combined traditional femininity with increased economic productivity, the Nazi "liberation" model essentially attempted to turn women into reproducing automatons. It would be simplistic, however, to view National Socialism merely as a regime that pursued a consistent conservative or reactionary policy of returning women to their "natural roles". As Eve Rosenhaft observes,

On the contrary, ... the Nazi system identified a place for women at work as well as in the family. What was peculiar to National Socialism was its intention to rationalize the process of deciding which women should perform which functions.³⁰³

The Nazi regime employed an array of propaganda, including the Hitler myth to forge the National Community and create the Aryan Woman; however, there was no revolutionary

³⁰³ Quoted in David Crew, ed., *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

transformation of society and of gender relations between 1933 and 1945. Nazi ideology welded women and the *kinderreiche* family together; however, in practice, the Nazis themselves did not necessarily comply with this ideology; nor did the Nazi regime exercise complete control over all women. Even between 1933 and 1936, when many women lost their positions in the state administration and were either barred altogether from state employment or permitted only limited access, some sectors of the economy such as the German postal service resisted the Nazi policy: Many female postal office workers, for example, not only kept their positions but advanced in their careers during the Third Reich.³⁰⁴ The National Socialists had no great success in driving married women out of the workplace either: By 1939, 6.2 million working women were married, which was two million more than in 1933.³⁰⁵

On the one hand, the Nazis needed women to help implement their racial policies by bearing valuable children and by preventing undesirable pregnancies; on the other hand, the economic conditions of the Third Reich necessitated women's participation as part of the workforce. The Nazi obsession with improving the birth rate manifested itself in discouraging women (especially the so-called double earners) from working (to a degree), but already in the mid-1930s, pragmatic considerations overrode ideological concerns and women were allowed (in fact, forced) to work in certain professions. According to the Nazis, employing women in social work, nursing, agriculture and domestic service, as well as monotonous assembly tasks at the factories, fit women's biological "nature"; it also aided in the implementation of the regime's racial and social

³⁰⁴ *Nazism and German Society*, 13-15.

³⁰⁵ Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 72.

policies. Women's paid and voluntary service in Nazi organizations for girls and women as leaders, teachers and medical personnel, as well as agricultural workers, too, fulfilled Nazi ideological objectives and assisted in the Nazi indoctrination campaign. The conscription of women into party organizations alone contradicted Nazi ideology about confining women to the home. In 1936, eleven million of the thirty-five million women in Germany belonged to the NS-Frauenschaft (National Socialist Womanhood) and its agencies.³⁰⁶ But especially after the rearmament program was launched in 1936, the regime could not sustain itself without having women fill the jobs in industry and agriculture that were vacated by men who had been conscripted in the army. The thrust of Nazi propaganda thus changed from encouraging women to embrace domesticity to calling them to fulfill their new, economic duties to the nation.

The ideal of the traditional, fecund family proved problematic in German society. Despite Nazi welfare schemes, the proportion of married women with four and more children decreased from twenty-five percent in 1933 to twenty-one percent in 1939. The two-child family was prevalent during the Third Reich.³⁰⁷ Nazi efforts to expand the size of the German family were perhaps undermined by the regime's unwillingness to undertake major financial expenditures to assist *kinderreiche* families, for example, in building sufficient housing.

The private domain of the family was the sector of society where the Nazis were able to institute tight control and thus impact women the most. The Nazi pursuits of increased birth rate, racial homogeneity, and an ideologically structured social life affected the

³⁰⁶ Adeilheid von Salden, "Victims or Perpetrators," in *Nazism and German Society*, 151.

³⁰⁷ Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 78.

family quite profoundly. The family was not a safe and sane haven, a “female sphere,” but rather “an institution for breeding and rearing children, with its relationships largely emptied of their emotional control.”³⁰⁸ In her analysis of the Nazi state Adelheid von Saldern suggests viewing the situation of women under the Third Reich as a direct consequence of the interaction between the *Massnahmenstaat* (the prerogative state dominated by Nazi illegality and injustice) and the *Normenstaat* (the normative state where the norms of pre-Nazi bourgeois society still survived).³⁰⁹ Neither state was independent of each other. In the private sphere of the *Normenstaat*, that is, in their family life, housekeeping practices, leisure activities, child rearing, etc., women (and men) were incessantly confronted with the regulations of the *Massnahmenstaat*: they were told to boycott Jewish stores, accept the deportation of their neighbors, enroll their children in Nazi youth groups, buy particular products, participate in Nazi welfare schemes such as *Eintopf* and *Winterhilfswerk*, and adhere to “Aryan fashions.” Even without being directly connected with the Nazi regime – as a victim or as an active agent of its policies – women were influenced by the *Massnahmenstaat*. Hitler’s regime sought to control not just the government and the army, but every facet of an individual’s existence: education, work, but also reproduction and consumption.³¹⁰

The common assumptions about National Socialism – that it would restore femininity and strengthen the family– were not realized during the Third Reich. The Nazi campaign

³⁰⁸ Pine, *Hitler’s National Community*, 78.

³⁰⁹ Adelheid von Saldern, “Victims or Perpetrators,” in *Nazism and German Society*, 147-148.

³¹⁰ As the next chapter will show, the regime also attempted to create an illusion of “free spaces” with the help of entertainment films and elite fashion magazines.

to “emancipate German women from emancipation” never actually aimed at protecting women but instead sought to re-establish male supremacy in public and private spheres. Nazi propaganda, which extolled women as “mothers of the race,” did not aspire to elevate their status in society but rather bring women’s reproductive ability under state control. The family structure and the feminine ideal that the Nazi regime sought to create in many ways directly violated the conservative bourgeois model. Instead of being protected against state intrusion, family units under the Third Reich were forced to accept it. The family served the regime’s goals of population growth and racial hygiene rather than individual desires concerning reproduction and childrearing. German women were expected to follow Nazi guidelines in their sartorial and consumptive practices as well as parenting and family life. According to Weber-Kellermann, the Nazi state “did more than any other regime to break down parental autonomy and to make the family simply a vehicle of state policy.”³¹¹ National Socialists, Lisa Pine writes, “atomized family units, allowing for intrusion and intervention in everyday life ... subjected the family to intervention and control, reduced its socialization function, attempted to remove its capacity to shelter its members emotionally and subjected it to radical ideology.”³¹² The regime used the process of *Gleichschaltung* (co-ordination) to streamline and homogenize society and to eliminate any potential resistance or dissent. The Nazis’ primary goals were to break down religious, gender, regional, institutional, and class barriers and reconstruct Germany along racial lines; their rhetoric about women’s “liberation” and “true German femininity” was just a means to that goal.

³¹¹ In Pine, *Hitler’s ‘National Community:’ Society and Culture in Nazi Germany*, 79.

³¹² *Ibid.*

Just as many assumptions about Hitler's regime turned out to be misconceptions, assumptions about the Bolshevik revolution – that it would forcefully implement the stated ideals of equality and involve women in the government and policy making – turned out to be a myth. While the Bolsheviks proclaimed civil, legal, and electoral equality for women in January 1918, establishing the social and political hegemony of the Bolshevik party and revitalizing the economy took precedence for Bolshevik leaders in the 1920s and Stalin in the 1930s. When the Bolsheviks launched campaigns to reform social and marital relations, everyday life (including manners, fashion, language, and personal hygiene), and leisure recreation activities, they primarily sought to spread the Bolshevik worldview, not to protect the interests of a particular group (such as women).

4.2 Strengthening the Body, Disciplining the Mind: Nazi and Bolshevik Organizations and Women

To convert women to their ideologies and redirect their activities in the interest of their respective regimes, the Nazi and the Bolshevik leaders encouraged women to enroll into party organizations.³¹³ In Russia and Germany both, women presented a challenging target for political conversion. The Bolshevik leaders considered Russian women politically apathetic, backward, and uneducated as the consequence of the Tsarist oppression. The Nazis, on the other hand, believed that Jewish and Marxist influences, as well as the ills of the city, contaminated the minds of Aryan women. Both in Russia and

³¹³ Until their takeover of power, the National Socialists and Bolsheviks did little to attract women into their ranks; most women in these movements decided to join on their own or became loyal followers by virtue of a relationship with the member.

Germany women's connection with the Church also created obstacles for the movements that openly displayed antireligious tenets (Communists) or downplayed atheism (Nazis).³¹⁴

The division of organizations into male and female in the Third Reich concurred with the National Socialist value system, which emphasized the separation of the sexes, while the mixed composition of the mass organizations in Bolshevik Russia allegedly reflected the major tenet of Marxism-Leninism – gender equality. The first official Nazi organization for women, the NS-Frauenschaft (Nazi Women's League or the NSF), originated in a group of committed women Nazis in 1931.³¹⁵ The NSF transformed into a centralized and relatively autonomous organization with an array of nationwide projects and a biweekly newspaper, *NS-Frauenwarte*, under the leadership of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1933-1945), who also became officially promoted as the embodiment of the Nazi female ideal. In order to reach wide segments of Germany's female population, in 1933 the NSF created a sub-organization, *Deutsches Frauenwerk*, (German Women's Enterprise or the DFW). By 1941, the aggregate membership in these organizations had reached approximately six million, while the total number of Nazi organized women reached eleven million. Starting from 1934, the agency of the NSF, *Reichsmütterdienst* (National Mothers' Service or the RMD), founded special mother schools to prepare

³¹⁴ Nazi stance towards both religion and churches as institutions was ambivalent: Heinrich Himmler and Martin Bormann were openly contemptuous of Christianity, while Hitler, who realized the influence of the Church within German society, publically adopted a conciliatory attitude. Pine, *Hitler's National Community*, 84-87.

³¹⁵ On the eve of the September 1930 election women constituted 7, 625 – a mere six percent of the entire NSDAP membership. Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 34.

German women for their role as mothers of the race.³¹⁶ Other agencies of the NSF took active part in the *Gleichschaltung*: the *Hilfsdienst* (HD) “nazified” social work and assistance, the *Volkswirtschaft/Hauswirtschaft* (Vw/Hw) helped to restructure national and domestic economy, while the *Grenz – and Auslandwerk* (GA) assisted in the Germanization of ethnic Germans abroad.³¹⁷

While the ethos and activities of the NSF and its agencies by and large supported National Socialist doctrine, the views of the NSF’s leader, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, namely, her interpretation of women’s role in the National Community, serve as a fitting and evocative example of how even the most committed women Nazis attempted to incorporate emancipatory elements into the patriarchal, bio-racial discourse of the Third Reich. Scholtz-Klink had no real political influence (she did not take part in policy making or governing); yet, within the NSF, she emerged as an influential Nazi theoretician, orator and organizer, whose rhetoric enthralled a significant number of women.³¹⁸ One possible reason for Scholtz-Klink’s influence could be her position on

³¹⁶ By March 1939 over 1.7 million attended almost 100,000 RMD courses, despite the fact that they were voluntary and included a large element of ideological indoctrination as well as practical instruction. Stibbe, 38.

³¹⁷ The *GA* was founded to raise the national consciousness of ethnic Germans abroad, especially those living in disputed areas of Poland, Czechoslovakia, South America and the former German colonies in Africa. The *HD* trained women to become auxiliary nurses and social workers, partly so they could implement Nazi family and racial policies and partly to overcome the expected shortage of professionals as the economy geared itself for war. Stibbe, 38.

³¹⁸ In general, however, the NSF failed in recruiting the majority of German women because it was primarily middle-class oriented and hence did not reflect the interests of working women and because many German housewives remained loyal to their Church denomination and its groups.

women's employment, which she promoted simultaneously with the Nazi pro-family policy:

Man sagt so oft, die Frau gehört nicht in den Beruf, vor allen Dingen nicht an die Maschine, die Fabrik verdirbt die Frau und lässt sie nicht Frau sein. Dieser Gedanke ist falsch. Wir müssen auch hier nur den richtigen Standpunkt zu den Dingen einnehmen. Die Frau im Beruf wird auch an der Maschine so lange Frau bleiben können, so lange die ihr innewohnende Kraft die Arbeitsteilung bestimmt, d.h. so lange Kraft und Arbeit in richtiger Harmonie zueinander stehen.

[It is often said that women do not belong in professions, above all, not next to a machine in a factory as the factory[work] damages a woman and does not allow her to remain a woman. This type of thinking is wrong. Here we only had to have the right perspective on things. An employed woman can remain feminine even when working at a machine, as long as her inherent strength/inclination determines the nature of labor, e.g., as long as her strength and her work stand in the right harmony with each other.]³¹⁹

Another reason for the effectiveness of Scholtz-Klink's propaganda was, perhaps, her nuanced stance on the new, "healthy" model of womanhood that the National Socialist regime had purportedly allowed to flourish in contrast to the "decadent" models of the Weimar Republic:

Wir kommen aus einer Epoche des Liberalismus ... Drei Mächte haben an den Menschen gezerrt: der Materialismus hat in der Form des Marxismus die Frau von jeder natürlichen Bindung als Frau und Mutter gelöst und sie nur zur „Genossin“ gemacht; der scheinbar frauenfreundliche Intellektualismus war dennoch ein Gegner des weiblichen Prinzips, ihm galt die Frau um so mehr, je mehr sie dem Manne angeglichen war. Der kirchliche Dogmatismus aber, der sich so gern also Beschützer der Frau abspielte, sprach nur die Frau heilig, die sich nach seiner Lesart aus aller fleischlichen Verhaltung losgelöst hatte und nur „Seele“ war. Alle drei Mächte, so verschieden sie auf den ersten Blick scheinen mögen, haben das Leben der Menschen zersetzt. Wir aber wollen Frauen haben, die eine

³¹⁹ “Rede von Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and die Deutsche Frau auf dem Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg 1934, Sonderdruck der Reichsfrauenführung, Berlin 1934. In Massimiliano Livi, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: Die Reichsfrauenführerin. Politische Handlungsräume und Identitätsprobleme der Frauen im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der “Führerin Aller Deutschen Frauen.” Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005.

mütterliche Seele mit geistigen Format und praktischer Lebensgestaltung vereinen.

[We are coming from an epoch of liberalism ... Three different powers tore at people: materialism in the form of Marxism destroyed the natural connection between woman and mother and turned her into a mere “comrade”; deceptively women-friendly intellectualism was despite appearances opposed to the feminine principle as it validated women the more they became like men. The dogmatism of the Church, on the other hand, while it presented itself as the protector of women, considered a woman holy [only] if she followed its teachings and renounced everything carnal and lived by spirituality alone. All these three powers, no matter how different they may appear at first glance, disintegrated the life of a human being. We, however, strive to become women, who combine a motherly soul with a spiritual orientation and a practical lifestyle.]³²⁰

Scholtz-Klink’s theory allowed women to find a national meaning for their lives, be it the life of a housewife and mother or the life of a professional nurse or social worker – as long as women internalized National Socialist doctrine. Her vision of femininity, although it was deeply rooted in Nazi ideology, also echoed the ideas of the German liberal bourgeois women’s movement that emphasized that women’s best contribution was working alongside men, not competing with them for political and social influence. By embracing and fostering motherhood and domesticity, but also by actively participating in Nazi women’s organization and its programs, according to Scholtz-Klink, women aided the construction of the National community. Thus, Scholtz-Klink consciously invited women to engage in Nazi social and racial reconstruction not just as fecund mothers and frugal housewives but social activists –under her direct command.

While the NSF focused on converting adult married women to National Socialism, organizations such as the Hitler Jugend and the BDM focused on the indoctrination of

³²⁰ Scholtz-Klink, “Wir brauchen Frauen mit totaler Lebenshaltung“ (1937, [31]) in In Massimiliano Livi, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: Die Reichsfrauenführerin. Politische Handlungsräume und Identitätsprobleme der Frauen im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der “Führerin Aller Deutschen Frauen”, 152

German girls and adolescents. Both in Bolshevik Russia and Nazi Germany, youth were seen as a source of revolutionary renewal and the guarantors of future social and political hegemony – insofar they were able and willing to reproduce official values and culture. In contrast to Communist organizations that sought to create equal comrades, Nazi youth groups aimed at perpetuating the separation of the sexes. In reality, however, Nazi and Communist youth groups remained only theoretically venues for fostering (Germany) or eliminating (Russia) gender differences.

Official membership for girls in Russia began at six, when they (together with boys) joined the Octobrists (literally, the children of October, in honor of the October revolution). From ages nine until fourteen girls continued in the Pioneers, and at fourteen entered the Komsomol, or the Young Communist League, where they could stay until their late twenties. Official membership for German girls started at ten.³²¹ Ten-year-olds joined the separate group Jungmädelsbund (The League of Young Girls or the JM) under the auspices of the Hitler Jugend, the official Nazi organization for youth, where they remained until fourteen.³²² Then girls became members of the Bund deutscher Mädel (League of German Maidens or the BDM) until they turn seventeen. Older girls, from seventeen until twenty-one, belonged to a sub-group within the BDM called *Glaube und*

³²¹ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink attempted to organize children under ten within the NSF, but little data is available about how successful and numerous those groups were. Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, 91.

³²² “Am Beispiel der Hitler-Jugend“, Dagmar Reese wrote, „lässt sich zeigen, dass Segregation ein Herrschaftsmittel war, mit dem es dem Nationalsozialismus gelang, die weibliche Jugend politisch zu integrieren und an sich zu binden... Trotz der geschlechtlichen Segregation der Hitler-Jugend kann die BDM-Generation als die erste weibliche Generation einer entwickelten modernen Gesellschaft in Deutschland gelten“. Dagmar Reese (Hg), *Die BDM Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus*, (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2007), 11, 13.

Schönheit (Belief and Beauty).³²³ After turning twenty-one, young German women were encouraged to enter the NSF and its branches. The Communist and Nazi youth groups both started as voluntary; however, Nazi organizations became compulsory for all children and adolescents by 1939.

The attributes of the BDM, the Pioneers, and the Komsomol – a fitted, attractive uniform and paraphernalia, rituals, songs, and activities – played a crucial role in creating the approved identity for girls and young women. The Bolsheviks and the Nazis understood the aesthetic appeal of fashion, using the uniform to cater to impulses such as peer pressure to belong by imitation and the desire to escape parental control (including in selecting clothes). BDM members donned the traditional dress, the *Tracht*, in addition to their uniforms; they also engaged in a variety of cultural activities: folk festivals, singing of German songs around the fire, and teaching the German language and culture to the *Volksdeutschen* (ethnic Germans) in occupied Poland. BDM girls were required to style their hair in a “Germanic way” – in braids or in a bun. In contrast, the Komsomol girls did not engage in a reproduction of ethnic difference because “Soviet” was not a nationality. The Soviet woman was not asked to defend or spread Russian neo-traditional culture in the remote regions of Siberia or the Far East because concerns about race and biological determinism played no role in Soviet politics. Soviet officials, according to Francine Hirsch, acted upon the belief that nationalities like classes were “socio-historical

³²³ This agency of the BDM sought to appeal to beautiful and Nordic-looking young women who were single and who could be gainfully employed. In contrast to the BDM, *Glaube und Schönheit* remained entirely voluntary. It offered elite sports that were not available to the BDM girls: tennis, horse riding and fencing. *Glaube und Schönheit* prepared young women to become a *Hohe Frau*, whose skills, among others, included driving a car, using a handgun, and riding a horse. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 52.

groups with a shared consciousness and not racial biological groups.”³²⁴ The uniform, in the context of the Bolshevik iconography, served as a symbol of belonging to the Bolshevik party, not specifically to the Russian ethnicity:

Символом принадлежности к пионерской организации им. Ленина является красное пионерское знамя, пионерский галстук, значок «всегда готов» и пионерский салют. [The Red Pioneer Banner, the red handkerchief, a pin with the inscription Always Prepared, and a pioneer salute signify belonging to the Lenin's Pioneer Organization.]³²⁵

As seen from the propaganda posters from the 1920s and 1930s, the Pioneers in Russia and the girls from Jungmädelbund and the BDM wore a similar uniform: a necktie, a white blouse, and a navy skirt below the knee (the Komsomol females wore a badge). Although uniforms were similar, the official representation of females in Nazi and Bolshevik iconography differed. Soviet posters downplayed traditional feminine attributes such as hair, face, and body. Nazi posters, on the other hand, featured attractive girls and women with styled Nordic blond hair or celebrated their physical prowess. Nazi women projected excitement, happiness, and (national) pride, Soviet women exuded confidence and determination. As suggested by the captioning on Samokhvalov’s 1924 Soviet poster, girls and young women assisted in the re-education of the population, spreading Bolshevik doctrine – just like the scarlet revolutionary banner on the poster – over Russia’s vast social and geographical terrains. The visual framing of young women in the posters echoed the fashioning of women in the official press, namely, in the popular magazines *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) and *Krestianka* (*Peasant Woman*). Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s these and other magazines regularly featured

³²⁴ Francine Hirsch, “Race Without the Practice of Racial politics,” *Slavic Review* 61:1 (spring 2002), 30. Quoted in Schulman, 22-23.

³²⁵ *Справочник комсомольского пропагандиста и агитатора*, 113.

stories about young Komsomol women converting their reluctant parents to the Bolshevik/Soviet regime. As suggested on the 1932 Soviet poster, Communist women did not only help their male comrades in establishing the Bolsheviks' social and political hegemony, but they formed the avant-garde of the new, culturally different Soviet generation. Mastering artillery and defending the Motherland was also among the tasks of a young *Komsomolka*, along with driving tractors, building metro stations, mining, and working in heavy industry. While the Soviet posters emphasized women's new capacities, the Nazi posters presented an appeal to become part of the National Community by belonging to the Nazi youth organization. With the images of crowds, Nazi flags, and German-style architecture, these posters presented the Hitler Jugend and the BDM as an organization based on national tradition and popular acceptance. To be German, the posters forcefully suggested, was to serve Hitler in the BDM.

Nazi and Bolshevik youth organizations both took on the role of primary educational institutions and created a world devoid of parental authority, conventional morality, and the dogmas of the Church. The significance of the younger generation in building a new nation and a new world was repeatedly emphasized. In the name of instilling racial awareness, Nazi organizations deliberately sought to replace any humanitarian, ethical, or religious teachings with doctrine about the superiority of the Aryan race. On the other hand, while they emphasized the equality of all peoples and advocated vague humanism, Communist youth organizations insisted on the superiority of the Bolshevik worldview.



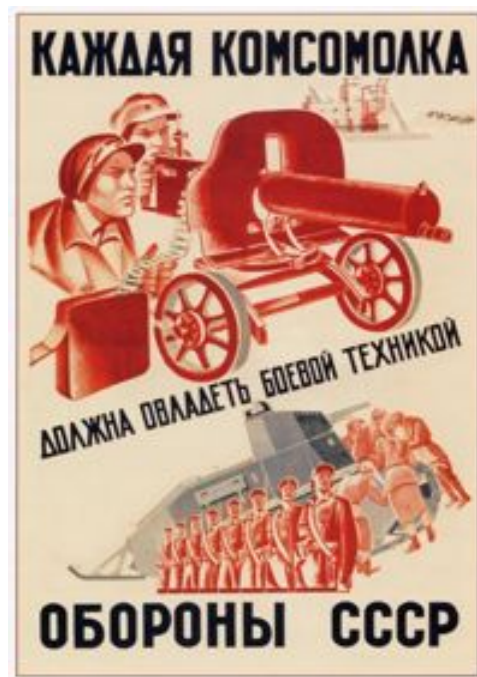
Samokhvalov, (1924). To the seventh anniversary October revolution. Long Live Komsomol! Young Fighters Grow to Succeed the Older Ones



Klutskis G. (1932) Long Live Multimillion Lenin's Komsomol!



Long Live Young Pioneers – Worthy Successors of Lenin and Stalin's Komsomol!



Bree-Brain, M. (1932) Every Komsomol Woman Must Master Arms to Defend the USSR!



Youth serves Hitler! All ten-year-olds in the Hitler Youth!



League of German Maidens in the Hitler Youth



In the League of German Maidens: the Sport Day Of the Reich³²⁶

³²⁶ There are no dates available on these German posters



League of German Maidens in the Hitler Youth Build youth hostels and rest homes!

The Komsomol became the major organization with which the Party attempted radically to reconstruct the previously prevalent traditions and customs, including fashion, religion, and *byt* (lifestyle practices and habits). To counteract the influence of the Orthodox Church, the Komsomol arranged Red Christenings, Komsomol weddings, Easters and Christmases. In place of religious ceremonies, Komsomol celebrations offered gatherings in workers' clubs, carnivals, and torchlight parades with revolutionary or folk songs. Komsomol parents also often chose "Bolshevik" names for their newborns: Vladilen (Vlad. Il. Lenin), Ninel (Lenin spelled backwards), Rem (**r**evolution, **e**lectrification, **m**ir/peace). A short story in the 1925 *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) humorously described unexpected developments in the new trend: "So,"— said the clerk in the Marriage and Death office, — "I am relieved to see the name you have chosen for your boy is rather normal. The other day a beaming father bestowed his newborn

daughter with the name ‘Kro’.” Stepan looked at her, bewildered. “—Kro?” – “ Yes, to signify his ties with the *kontrrazvedka* [Bolshevik Secret Foreign Service].”³²⁷

During the NEP period when a rising number of dance clubs, restaurants, game rooms, and private cinemas tempted Soviet youth, the Komsomol led campaigns against the foxtrot, drunkenness, hooliganism, flapper fashions, and gambling. Appeals to stop public swearing and spitting, too, were part of Komsomol propaganda activities. On a more practical level, the Komsomol popularized so-called “Subbotniki” – voluntary assistance in the cleaning and repair of public spaces on Saturdays – and attempted to shape leisure time activities for workers and peasants. Sport clubs, clubs of cultural leisure, reading rooms, and sewing groups were all part of the Komsomol’s concerted effort to create Soviet Men and Women.

In theory, Nazi organizations sought to prepare Aryan girls and women for (racially conscious) motherhood, matrimony, and domesticity, while Communist organizations instructed girls and young women to be political agitators, active fighters against class enemies and saboteurs, and overachieving workers. The duties and responsibilities of Komsomol members included:

быть активным борцом за претворение в жизнь программы коммунистического строительства; показывать пример в труде и учёбе, беречь и приумножать социалистическую собственность; настойчиво овладевать марксистско-ленинской теорией, культурой, достижениями современной науки и техники, вести борьбу со всеми проявлениями буржуазной идеологии; быть патриотом, крепить Вооружённые Силы СССР; содействовать развитию дружбы народов СССР, братских связей сов. молодёжи с молодёжью социалистических стран, с пролетарской трудящейся и учащейся молодёжью мира; укреплять ряды комсомола, развивать критику и самокритику; закалять себя физически.

³²⁷ “Staroe derzhit,” *Rabotnitsa*, Vol. 5, 1925, 22.

[to engage actively in the construction of communism; set an admirable example in work and studies, value and increase socialist property; be persistent in the mastering of Marxist-Leninist theory, culture; be aware of the achievements in modern science and technology; fight against all manifestations of bourgeois ideology; be patriotic; strengthen the defense forces of the USSR; assist in establishing friendly relations among all the peoples in the USSR, with the youth from other socialist countries and with the working and studying proletarian youths around the world; strengthen the ranks of the Komsomol.]³²⁸

Compared to the Communist youth organizations, Nazi organizations offered a more “feminine” curriculum, two-thirds of which consisted of sports and outdoor activities.³²⁹

Through running, swimming, ball games, gymnastics, floor exercises, and formation dances, but also hiking and camping, the BDM sought to develop the overall health, stamina, and grace of its members. Physical training in the BDM discouraged competitiveness and sought to develop communal spirit, blind obedience, and strict discipline, discouraging any trace of spontaneity or individuality.³³⁰ Other activities, such as group singing and staging of folk plays were designed to foster national pride and a sense of belonging to the National Community. Starting in 1936, BDM girls received instruction in cooking, baking, gardening and needlework, nutrition, health, and home economics in so-called household schools. A one-year course at the household school educated the BDM girls about racially conscious motherhood and infant care.

³²⁸ *Справочник комсомольского пропагандиста и агитатора*, 145.

³²⁹ Medical personnel made certain that sports did not harm girls’ childbearing potential. Birgit Retzlaff and Jörg-Johannes Lechner, *Bund Deutscher Mädel in der Hitlerjugend. Fakultative Eintrittsgründe von Mädchen und jungen Frauen in den BDM* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2008), 141.

³³⁰ During the 1936 Olympic games, over a thousand of BdM members, all dressed in white, gyrated simultaneously with balls in their hands, symbolically representing the collective, totalitarian strength of Germany. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 50.



Contemporary magazines portrayed the Nazi regimen of lessons in housekeeping, motherhood and structured leisure as joyful, rewarding experiences for German girls. *Deutsche Moden-Zeitung* (1937). Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

Their further incorporation in the National Community continued with BDM programs such as *Pflichtjahr* and *Landdienst*, where girls received practical training in farming, housekeeping, and taking care of children.³³¹ These programs allegedly kept the young German females from the ills of the city and prepared them for future roles as mothers and homemakers; in reality, they allowed the state to further develop the infrastructure of

³³¹ During the *Pflichtjahr*, a yearlong working arrangement, the BDM girls assisted *kinderreiche* farmer families with housework, washing, cooking and shopping. The 1938 decree issued by Hermann Göring made it compulsory for all teenage girls, whether in the BDM or not, to work at a farm before they could take a permanent position elsewhere. By 1940, there were 157, 728 German girls starting their *Pflichtjahr* in agriculture and another 178, 244 in domestic services. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 84-85.

the rural east and fill labor shortages in the countryside with cheap or free young women's labor.³³²

The ethos of the BDM and the Komsomol entailed a loss of individuality for its members who were bound to the community of peers and to the community of the nation. Simultaneously, both organizations provided girls and young women with a distinct role, responsibilities, duties, and a sense of purpose. In contrast to their proletarian mothers, the Komsomol women were literate, mobile, atheist, and athletic. They socialized with men in worker's clubs, palaces of leisure, and athletic events, and insisted on their human, not feminine worth. The nature of the BDM and labor service programs, which necessitated girls to spend considerable time away from parental authority and provided opportunities for leadership and control over their peers, on the other hand, challenged traditional ideas about femininity and domesticity. The membership in a state organization gave Russian and German girls and young women both opportunities to travel (within or outside their place of residence) and be involved in the national cause and social life of the country.

The BDM and the Komsomol played a crucial role in the socialization of German and Russian girls and young women. These organizations significantly assisted in the self-fashioning of Russian and German young women: as a mode of identification, a means of self-empowerment and a lifestyle that was not defined by parental authority and the dogmas of the Church. Of course, young women's involvement in state organizations ultimately furthered the aims of the totalitarian regimes in Russia and Germany; however, it also allowed some of them (namely, those in leadership roles) to forge an identity that

³³² In 1934, 7000 German girls started farm work; by 1937, 43,000 girls had worked in the East, Silesia, Pomerania, or East Prussia. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 86.

did not entirely correspond to Nazi and Bolshevik visions of women as passive consumers of ideology. As described further in the chapter, these “new women” envisioned themselves as strong and capable of taking control and leading – the traits that were not necessarily part of Nazi and Bolshevik virtues for women.

In her comparative study of the BDM and the Wandervögel girls (a youth movement from the Weimar Republic) Irmgard Klönne highlights several features of these youth groups that we can also apply to the Komsomol: first, they developed an ideal of beauty that emphasized naturalness, health, and athleticism. Second, they allowed for the discovery of health and body culture – in contrast to “puritanisch-bürgerlichen Moralvorstellungen” (puritan-bourgeois moral standards) that often discouraged the study of the body. Finally, in these groups girls and young women developed a particular sense of belonging to a community and to a national movement and understood that they had a right to participate in the creation of a unique youth culture.³³³ In her study of the BDM Dagmar Reese explains that the time in the organization for some young women was marked by personal growth and achievement: they were able to make careers for themselves as group leaders as a result of their organizational capacities and leadership skills.³³⁴ Such was the case of Jutta Rüdiger, who joined the BDM at the age of 23 in 1933, after having finished her doctorate in psychology. After holding several unpaid positions, Rüdiger was promoted to her first salaried position (leader of Untergau) and was eventually appointed the head of the BDM in 1937. Although Rüdiger was a convicted Nazi, she was also single, childless, and highly educated. Judging from the

³³³ Irmgard Klönne, in *Die BDM Generation*, 81.

³³⁴ Dagmar Reese (Hg), *Die BDM Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus*, 11.

surviving photographs, she was a beautiful young woman who obviously preferred her employment as a youth leader and, later, as the leader of the BDM to the secluded domestic haven of a fecund mother even though the curriculum of her organization emphasized motherhood and domesticity as women's calling.

In their research on the BDM, Birgit Retzlaff and Jörg-Johannes Lechner underline that the experiences of leaders were more positive than that of regular members, however, they also emphasize that to all members

Der BDM bot anscheinend Lebenssinn, soziale Sicherheit, gesellschaftliche Anerkennung, brachte Gemeinschaftserlebnisse, eröffnete eine eigene Jugendphase auch für Mädchen und erzeugte das Gefühl von Gleichwertigkeit.

[The BDM offered an apparent meaning for one's life, social security, social recognition. It brought the experience of community, inaugurated for young girls their own phase of youth (as the Hitler Jugend did for the boys) and generated the feeling of equality.]³³⁵

The claims of Retzlaff and Lechner, however, deserve further assessment. Indeed, BDM top leaders such as Rüdiger, as well as ordinary leaders of girls' groups within the organization, may have found meaning for their lives: they supervised, educated, and fully controlled their charges. Their charges, on the other hand, had to blindly follow orders of their female superiors; they were not allowed to complain to their parents and often had to lie in the letters home about their actual experiences during their *Landdienst*.³³⁶ Thus the seemingly positive features of the BDM were always closely connected with subordinate girls' blind obedience and their ability to accept negative

³³⁵ Birgit Retzlaff and Jörg-Johannes Lechner, *Bund Deutscher Mädel in der Hitlerjugend. Fakultative Eintrittsgründe von Mädchen und jungen Frauen in den BDM* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2008), 10.

³³⁶ For more on the negative experiences of BDM girls see Louise Willmot, "Zur Geschichte des Bundes Deutscher Mädel," in Dagmar Reese, hrsg., *Die BDM Generation*

experiences as part of their “training.” Like Nazi organizations for men, the BDM was a totalitarian structure, only supervised by women.

While the Communist and the Nazi organizations were certainly popular among particular groups, neither one succeeded in taking over the majority of young women. In Germany, girls from small towns joined Nazi organizations more willingly than the big city girls; in addition, many Catholics resisted entering the BDM and adult NS-Frauenschaft.³³⁷ In Russia, the particular culture of the Komsomol as well as economic factors kept female membership numbers low. Often, parents resisted their young daughters’ entrance into the Komsomol because of the notorious reputation of the Komsomol men. In general, urban female youths responded to the Komsomol’s appeal to enroll, while rural women offered resistance not just to this youth organization but to the Bolsheviks as a whole.

Perhaps another reason why Nazi and the Communist organizations failed to attract the majority of young women was the reputations that they developed – as sexually immoral and misogynist respectively. In general, the BDM and the Komsomol avoided extensive discussion of sex and sexuality.³³⁸ In Russia, because it was considered bourgeois to engage in such decadent discussions at a time of great socialist construction; in Germany, because the BDM’s sexual education reflected conservative bourgeois

³³⁷ In late 1933, girls in Jungmädelbund and the BDM comprised 243,750 and 349,482 respectively. The entire population of Germany in 1933 was 66 million. At the beginning of 1939, the BDM had 1, 502, 571 members and JM 1, 923, 419. The entire population of Germany was 80 million, of women 27, 960, 000. Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 114. <http://www.feldgrau.com/stats.html>.

³³⁸ Komsomol brochures discussed the harm of abortion and condemned drunkenness as a condition that led to sexual license. However, while they pounced on promiscuous Komsomol men and women, these articles gave little guidance to what constituted healthy sexual relationships in the Bolshevik framework.

morality: it condemned lust and desire, tied sexuality primarily to procreation, and insisted on sex only in (monogamous) marriage. Ironically, instead of sheltering its young members from sexual license and harassment, the culture and ethos within both the Nazi and Communist youth organizations directly contributed to it. Because the BDM girls received so little information about the mechanics of procreation, many became pregnant by SS men and soldiers or by men in the eastern-occupied territories.³³⁹ Rumors about the sexual indecency of Hitler Youth boys and BDM girls circulated in Party headquarters, including the headquarters of the Hitler Jugend, as early as 1934. In Mannheim in 1935 out of the twenty-five fifteen- and sixteen- year-old girls, all BDM members, every one was discovered pregnant as they were going through their confirmation in a church. Dozens of BDM girls became pregnant while fulfilling their *Landdienst* (service in the countryside); nine hundred BDM members returned home pregnant after the Reich Party rally in Nuremberg in 1936.³⁴⁰ Many girls, to the dismay of their parents, intentionally engaged in sexual intercourse to conceive children for the Führer.³⁴¹ While the BDM prided itself in raising future mothers of the race, the general public ridiculed its standards of morality: In the contemporary popular discourse, the BDM's letters stood not for the League of German maidens but for **Bubi drück mich** (squeeze me, laddie),

³³⁹ By 1940, BDM members in the Ermland chose Polish laborers and prisoners of war as their lovers; in the Upper Danube region, girls engaged in sexual intercourse with work-drafted Czechs, Poles and Bulgarians. The affairs between the BDM girls and Soviet and French POW were documented in early 1942. In big German cities, patriotic BDM members engaged in sexual activities with philandering Nazi soldiers. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 110.

³⁴⁰ Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 108.

³⁴¹ Kater connects the escalated sexuality of the BDM girls in part to the Hitler cult. Because Hitler's persona was virtually present at training sessions at all levels, it was not surprising that young girls developed adulation for Hitler. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 105.

Bedarfsartikel deutscher Männer (requisite for German men), **Bald deutsche Mütter** (soon-to-be German mothers), **Bund Deutscher Matrazen** (league of German mattresses) or **Bund Deutscher Milchkühe** (League of German milking cows).³⁴²

In Russia, many young Komsomol women became victims of the unclear Communist morality, namely, of their male counterparts who believed that the ideal young communist lived in a state of a permanent, exuberant, and unencumbered adolescence and rebelled against conventional morality and norms.³⁴³ In the early 1920s Komsomol men displayed hostility towards women and “adult” issues associated with the family and parenthood and frequently attempted to avoid responsibility for their pregnant Komsomol girlfriends. The belief that the Komsomol was an organization for the “unattached” was reinforced by the official press which routinely criticized young married couples or a married Komsomol member who became consumed with motherhood and household duties and could no longer engage in Komsomol activities. Contrary to stated ideals of equality, the culture of the Communist youth organization emphasized gender differences and connected men with the public sphere and women with the private one. The Komsomol assigned women to more marginal and more traditionally female roles such as cleaning after meetings, decorating for festivities, working with the Pioneers or the

³⁴² Pine, *Hitler's 'National Community': Society and Culture in Nazi Germany*, 63.

³⁴³ According to Gorsuch, “maintaining the [rebellious] maleness of the Civil War model and disdain for the private world of home and family may have been a way to preserve the fighting spirit of the youth league, as well as a way to maintain their own identity in a period of great political and personal transition. Anne Gorsuch, “ ‘A Woman is not A Man’: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 55, No.3 (Autumn 1996), 645.

Octobrists, cooking, or setting up sewing or drama clubs.³⁴⁴ Through sexist jokes, crude behavior, and rude public dismissal of young women's contributions to meetings and classes, the Komsomol men regularly alienated female members and caused their departure from the organization, to the degree that the Komsomol leadership deemed it necessary to launch a number of campaigns in 1926 and 1927 against "an un-comradely environment" and sexual harassment, along with campaigns against drunkenness and hooliganism.³⁴⁵ As Anne Gorsuch has argued in her study about the relationship between the culture of the Komsomol and women's political participation in the life of their generation, "through language and behavior, *Komsomoltsy* [male Komsomol members] created a masculine identity [for the organization] that was separate from the female sphere; indeed this separation was central to their own definition of the self." This explicit masculine culture of the Komsomol, according to Gorsuch, "marginalized and excluded women."³⁴⁶

In 1926, young women constituted about twenty percent of the Komsomol. While this also meant that the Komsomol had only two percent of available young women as compared to nine percent of available men, this number exceeded the number of women in the Communist Party, where by 1927 women comprised only about twelve percent of

³⁴⁴ Gorsuch, " 'A Woman is not A Man' ," 636.

³⁴⁵ After the introduction of the NEP, the older Bolsheviks increasingly criticized the militant model, encouraging the Komsomol men to adapt to the model of a disciplined, politically literate, and organizationally skilled young man. The public campaigns against the mistreatment of women may have reflected larger concerns about corruption within and failure of the Party to transform the daily life of the Soviet citizen. With the Party's enhanced control over social activities, personal life was no longer seen as a private sphere, and the Komsomol organs launched a concerted effort to arrange leisure and love habits of their members. Gorsuch, " 'A Woman is not A Man' ," 651.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 638, 650.

the total membership.³⁴⁷ The number of women in leadership positions in the Komsomol reflected the overall misogynist character of the organization: often, women were selected as leaders only to fill quotas received from the raikom or gubkom, the Bolshevik executive committees. In 1921, only twenty-five of 614 candidates were women at the fourth all-Union Congress. In the mid-1920s, out of more than 3,000 national and local representatives at a Komsomol plenum only ten percent (308) were women. The situation was no better at the highest levels: of eighteen people on the Komsomol Central Committee, only one was a woman.³⁴⁸

While the prevalent masculine culture of the Komsomol in the early 1920s forced many young women to avoid or limit their involvement in the Komsomol, it also convinced others that new socialization practices required accommodation to the male adolescent ideal. These committed *Komsomolki* discarded obvious attributes of womanhood, leaving their children in the care of parents or grandparents, wearing military styled clothing, and even replicating male attitudes toward “women’s issues.” Not all of the new female attributes, however, came from imitating the male ideal. In their articles in popular Komsomol publications, the activists of the Zhenotdel supplied women with visions of a “bold, impetuous, practical, prudently intelligent, and actively seeking more knowledge.” Soviet Woman was “a strong, free citizen, not inferior to man in anything.”³⁴⁹ As one Zhenotdel worker described it: “Communism emancipates

³⁴⁷ Gorsuch, “ ‘A Woman is not A Man’ , 636-660.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 653.

³⁴⁹ Zinaida Chalaia, “Bortsy I stroiteli,” *Kommunistka*, no.6 (1920) in Barbara Evans Clements, “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel,” *Slavic Review* 51, no.2 (Summer 1992): 487.

women, communism emancipates children, communism transforms the relations between the sexes into simply ‘private relations,’ communism transforms woman from the ‘wife of a person,’ into a person.”³⁵⁰ Critical to the Zhenotdel’s vision was local organizing: women themselves would build communal institutions. The activists in the Zhenotdel did not expect men to reform themselves voluntarily and treat women as equals, but they were convinced that if women built new *byt* institutions, men would change their habits and attitudes. Two popular novels of the 1920s, *The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate* (1927) and *Love of Worker Bees* (1923), declared women not just the equal of men, but their superiors: “We shall be engineers, inventors, artists – we shall beat you at your own game!”³⁵¹

The intention to “beat men at their own game” was nowhere so clearly illustrated as in Komsomol women engaging in activities not only previously reserved for men, but less explored and dangerous – such as parachuting and aviation. The state warmly welcome the pursuit of male occupations: Women-parachutists graced the cover of contemporary magazines, while their extensive biographies (despite their young age) formed part of the content. Posters from the mid-1930s emphasized that the female Komsomol aviator belonged to the Soviet “nobility” along with women shock workers.

³⁵⁰ Zhenotdel vision of the Civil War years did not differ from the conception of women’s emancipation dominant throughout the Party. However, the Zhenotdel tended to emphasize the importance of small scale, local organizations such as daycares, public dining halls – as the means of communalizing society. Male Bolshevik leaders such as Bukharin and Preobrazhenski argued in the *ABC of Communism* that large, centralized structures would be employed both to build communism and to run it. Barbara Evans Clements, “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel,” *Slavic Review* 51, no.2 (Summer 1992): 487.

³⁵¹ N. Ogniov, *The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate*, 41 in Gorsuch, 657.

In 1938, the female crew of the plane *Rodina*, who just successfully exceeded the women's international straight-line distance record by 1,500 kilometers, received a standing ovation from the party leaders, Heroes of the Soviet Union, prominent aviators and cheering crowds.³⁵²



This issue of *Woman Worker* (July 1936) extensively described the daring jumps of these 18 and 19 year-old *Komsomol*kas. Courtesy: Minsk National Library



Greetings to Women Achievers: The noble people of the great Soviet Country. Posters such as this connected super-efficiency in industry work with courage and daring of women-aviators. Shubina, Galina. (1935)

From the mid-1930s on, Stalinist iconography used women to portray Soviet achievements. This was also the period when Komsomol women played an important role in the Soviet narrative about wilderness, adventures, and border defense. In her book *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire* Elena Schulman describes the so-called Khetugoravites (women volunteers who relocated to the Soviet Far East to help

³⁵² Heroic aviators were invited to the official banquets at the Kremlin. During the feast, the Party leaders and the aviators exchanged numerous toasts to each other's accomplishments, celebrating the monumental achievements of the aviators and monumental political wisdom of the leaders. This exchange symbolically equalized the role of both groups, however, it was harder for females to bridge the gap between citizen and hero, as the Communist leadership included no women. Karen Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous, Comrades*, 59.

industrialize the region), convincingly illustrating how the official exaltation of women as travelers and adventure seekers impacted the young Komsomol women: “Excited by the possibilities of learning through reading and travel, young women were extraordinarily receptive to the frontier fantasies and wilderness adventures coursing through films, music and literature of the 1930s.”³⁵³ These New Soviet Women were convinced of their uniqueness and often imagined their Komsomol activities as catapulting them into a broader world; they connected their identities with the Soviet Union’s place in history. For Schulman, “the amalgamation of frontier mythologies, the women’s perception of themselves as grateful products of the Soviet system, and long-entrenched beliefs that self-abnegation was the ultimate expression of honorable womanhood fueled their desire to take direct action in securing the Soviet system in its most frightening periphery.”³⁵⁴ If the Nazi Woman embodied racial superiority, the Soviet Woman exemplified a rupture between “backward” women who remained confined to the home or village versus the mobile, modern, Komsomol/Soviet woman who traversed dangerous spaces and went on daring quests alongside men.

³⁵³ On February 5, 1937 *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, the national newspaper of the Soviet Communist Youth League, published a letter by Valentina Khetagurova, a Komsomol member and wife of an army officer living on a frontier. Surrounded by the proclamations decrying the machinations of ‘enemies of the people’ and announcing arrests and trials of formerly prominent Bolshevik leaders, Khetagurova’s letter invited Soviet women to “pacify the nature, so that all of the region’s riches [in the Primor’e and Priamurskaia taiga] can be exploited for socialism.” Over the next several years, more than 300, 000 volunteered to join Khetagurova. Elena Schulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, 12.

³⁵⁴ Elena Schulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire: Women and State Formation in the Soviet Far East* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 21.

For some young Russian and German women participation in party organizations had an empowering, emancipatory effect. We can describe their relationship with the totalitarian state as symbiotic: the regimes exploited these women's idealism and youth for building their empires, while the women exploited the system to pursue their desires for self-development, adventure, career opportunities, and public acclaim.



The New Soviet Woman, at the center of another, 1938' poster by Galina Shubina, Oh, My Motherland is a Spacious Country (Shiroka strana moia rodnaia) encapsulates the new position of women as explorers of wide geographic and imaginary spaces of the Soviet empire. Underneath the image is the widely popular 1936 patriotic song by Vasilii Lebed'-Kumach and Isaac Dunaevskii.

While official propaganda celebrated women's accomplishments as ones not previously associated with their gender and possible only under the Soviet regime, "new women" often refused to be classified as (super)women, instead suggesting a neutral, androgynous characterization of their personas and accomplishments or even adopting equality-as-maleness attitude. Women physiologists in the article "Women Workers – Scientists of Physiology" in the 1937 *Woman Worker* credited their Soviet motherland for the opportunity to rise above personal circumstances such as age, lack of education, or

family duties rather than against gender prejudice. “I grew up an orphan and worked as a seamstress in my teens and twenties,” wrote a thirty-seven year-old scientist M.

Prokhorova. “In the years 1918-1920 I took classes at a university but professors looked down on me because of my humble origins. ... When I was in my early thirties I became involved in social activism and took several position within the Party. ... [To help me fulfill my academic aspirations] The Party leaders gave me three years to obtain a graduate degree [in physiology] and become a scientist. ... I may have been much older than a typical student and had previously worked as a seamstress but these circumstances have no significance in my Soviet motherland. I have always been a scientist by calling.”

³⁵⁵ Further in the article, Prokhorova proudly described her women colleagues, S.

Gutsevich and O. Semenova who, by the virtue of their hard work, conquered their academic ignorance. In Prokhorova’s presentation, neither the gender of her colleagues nor their maternity (both were mothers of teenagers) defined their identity. Nor did their humble origins or rather inconspicuous previous occupations (Gutsevich had worked as a seamstress’s assistant and Semenova had been employed in textile industry) hinder these women from pursuing science and rising on the social ladder: after obtaining a Master’s degree in natural sciences, Gutsevich became the director of a state national park complex, while Semenova became a scholar of human and animals’ nervous systems.

A similar insistence on genderless characterization emerges in biographies of women Stakhanovites. The founder of the first Soviet all-female tractor brigade and the most lauded and decorated female labor hero in Soviet history, Pasha (Praskovia) Angelina may have been a woman and a mother, but she defined herself first and

³⁵⁵ M.I. Prokhorova, “Работницы, ученые, физиологи,” *Woman Worker*, March 1937, 23.

foremost as a skillful and fearless individual, capable of leading men and women: “After having worked as a tractor driver for a year and even becoming a shock worker,” she writes in her autobiography, “I have not been able to overcome the distrust of my fellow villagers. Even friends would say: ‘Pasha may be doing okay because she is so spunky, but basically a woman does not belong on a tractor.’ So I realized, I need to organize an all-female tractor brigade. We will all become shock workers, and then we will see if they dare say that a woman does not belong on a tractor. We will be known as professionals not some loonies.”³⁵⁶



Тов. ЯДЛОВСКАЯ, член ВЛКСМ, окончила киевскую школу связи им. Калинина на „отлично“. На снимке: тов. Ядловская за работой на аппарате Юза.

Pasha Angelina (left) often donned ties and mannish sweaters when posing for professional pictures. Like Angelina, a renown Komsomlka and radio mechanic, Yadlovskaya, (right) downplayed her gender by putting on a military uniform even though she was not in the army. *Woman Worker* (1937) Courtesy: Minsk National Library

The emancipatory paradigms that the Nazis and the Bolsheviks propagated among the female populations in Germany and Russia did not pursue women’s interests.

³⁵⁶ Pasha Angelina, “The Most Important Thing,” *In the Shadows of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women From 1917 to the Second World War*, 314-5.

Although in theory, Bolshevnik ideals were more women-oriented and progressive than those of the Nazis, neither ideology elevated women's status in society. The official conceptualization of marriage, motherhood, the family, sexuality and work were largely undermined by totalitarian ideology; few of the implemented changes actually benefited women. By seeking to forge New Women (and men) the Nazis and Bolshevniks strove to stabilize their power and build a totalitarian state. While the New Woman was an object of discussion, rhetoric, and propaganda, she was always subordinated to the needs – and primacy – of the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships.

Some ideological tenets – free union (the Bolshevniks) and the ideal of the rural fertile family (the Nazis) proved problematic for the majority of women in Russia and Germany. Individuals, however, (women as well as men) perpetuated the system by tolerating the totalitarian reality and making obedience (or non-resistance) their maxim. In a way, the most tangible effects of Bolshevnik and Nazi ideologies were not multitudes of overachieving androgynous workers or avid female Nazi proselytizers, but the general acceptance (non-resistance) of the state's infiltration of public space, the policing of women's reproduction, and the complete dissolution of boundaries between the private and public.

In Dagmar Reese's words, "in the case of adults, obedience means support, with the result that a system which appears to be passively tolerated is in fact actively maintained."³⁵⁷ Boycotting Jewish stores (Germany), enrolling children in Party organizations, not attending church and persecuting church leaders (Russia), campaigning against American dances and bourgeois lifestyles are just a few examples of how

³⁵⁷ In Von Saldern, "The Role of Women in the Nazi State," 157.

“ordinary” people in Bolshevik Russia and Nazi Germany helped solidify totalitarian rule. “Ordinary” people in Russia and Germany also supported the dictatorships by continuing with their everyday lives while witnessing the inhumanity of official policies. Claudia Koonz argues that German women who carried on with “normal” family life despite the regime’s open use of violence and terror towards “racial enemies” and the outsiders of the National Community made an invaluable contribution to the sustenance of the Nazi system – even if they did not support the Nazi worldview. We can also apply Koonz’s findings to the reality of the Stalinist era, when the persecution of old Bolsheviks and Stalin’s political opponents at so-called show trials became part of everyday existence but did not stop the majority of the population from leading “normal” lives.

The primary culpability for supporting brutal dictatorships in Russia and Germany, however, belongs to those women who willingly joined party and state organizations and who enthusiastically participated in the implementation of the regimes’ policies. Those women who were directly involved in spreading Nazi and Bolshevik ideology were Nazi and Bolshevik New Women. Although these New Women had no real political influence (in the sense of policy making or governing), it is important to note that politics, in the context of the Third Reich and Bolshevik and later, Stalinist Russia, was not limited to governing and drafting of laws and decrees, but included propagating the social norms and values of the regimes.

This comparison of the NSF, the BDM and the Komsomol reveals that a model of new womanhood indeed emerged under the auspices of state organizations: exceptional youth leaders, organizational experts, daring aviators, fearless explorers, overachieving

workers, and others. Far from being mere consumers of official rhetoric, these “new women” imagined themselves as integral to the National Community and the Soviet collective respectively, and as active participants in society: as theoreticians, industrial and athletic champions, and social leaders. Most important, these “new women” exercised incredible positional and often physical power over women under their command and outside their circle. In Russia, overachieving androgynous workers became new feminine models, whose contributions revitalized the economy and by and large helped the USSR emerge as a world power. In Germany, the Nazi female mold manifested itself most vividly in the female nurses and social workers that assisted in forced sterilization and euthanasia programs or female guards of concentration camps. These “new women” were able to exploit the system and develop skills that allowed them not only to survive but also to achieve career advancement, self-enrichment, and, in some cases (more so in Russia than Germany), public acclaim. By willingly and enthusiastically implementing the regimes’ policies and influencing other women, these “new women” created a totalitarian reality of their own.

Chapter 5 : Dressing Women under Totalitarian Regimes

Chapter IV demonstrated how the totalitarian regimes in Russia and German attempted to institute control not just over the realms of politics, education, economics, and domestic life but also over the bodies of its citizens, especially women. The National Socialist state intervened in the private space of the body to an extent never before experienced and in unprecedented ways that, as Terri Gordon puts it, “rendered the individual body a public site whose purpose was to further the larger social organism.”³⁵⁸ The woman’s body especially became a social site onto which the NS regime inscribed its political ideals. Vast propaganda and the state’s economic policies pushed (Aryan) women to lend their bodies for the purity and vitality of the race. While in Russia the emphasis on race and the healthy body as a microcosm for the healthy state was less pronounced, the Bolshevik regime nonetheless attempted to seize similar control over reproduction, saddling women with a double burden of childbearing and economic productivity.

Chapter V continues the discussion of the female body and totalitarianism by focusing on the physical presentation of women in elite fashion and women’s magazines under the Third Reich and during the Bolshevik and pre-WW II Stalinist era. It argues that both in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia popular fashion and consumer culture most vividly reflected the failure of ideology; yet at the same time, the relative freedom allowed by the regimes in these aspects of citizens’ lives furthered Hitler’s, Lenin’s, and

³⁵⁸ Terri Gordon, “Fascism and the Female Form: Performance Art in the Third Reich”. *Sexuality and German Fascism*. Dagmar Herzog, ed. (New York Oxford: Bergham Books, 2005), 164.

Stalin's pursuit of political, cultural, and social hegemony. To illuminate how Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin fashioned women's appearance, I include analysis of National Socialist and Bolshevik sartorial symbols, the debate about "proletarian culture," the so-called cultured trade and the campaign for culturedness (Russia), and Nazi and Bolshevik ideas of conspicuous consumption and consumerism in general. Because Nazi cinema and its female stars exerted a profound influence on the popular culture of the Third Reich and largely set the stage for the fashion industry, I also provide a brief sketch of the star images that circulated in various Nazi media and analyze how Nazi Germany's own celebrity cult contributed to women's consumption and self-stylization.

Part I defines the meanings of the terms *culture*, *culturedness*, *bourgeois*, and *class* in post-revolutionary Russian society and aims to show what the Bolsheviks wanted culture to achieve and whether it worked. To elucidate major agents in the development of Soviet consumerism and answer why Stalin's regime sanctioned decadent, capitalist trends such as conspicuous consumption, I include analysis of state model department stores and the elite consumer (embodied in the Stakhanovites and the Party bureaucracy and political leaders). In order to identify the connection that the Bolsheviks and later, Stalin's officials saw between women's sartorial choices and the stability of the regime, I will sketch the evolution of Soviet "fashion" by looking at the debate about proletarian art, major Soviet fashion designers, and the prevalent feminine types as seen in contemporary women's magazines and the fashion press.

In keeping with the view of a large group of modern scholars who dispute the long-held belief that the Nazi regime was ideologically unambiguous, politically effective, and socially stable and that the Nazi message to women was monolithic, Part II explores the

Nazi's multifaceted and often contradictory stance on fashion, women, popular culture, and consumption by looking at elite fashion magazines, mainstream propaganda featuring women, and Nazi film stars such as Zarah Leander and Lilian Harvey. Just as Nazi feature films catered to the needs of a mass audience and were promoted as ideology-free consumer products, fashion magazines were officially sanctioned to nourish the demand for a private sphere and to grant women's potentially subversive desires a measured release. At the same time, popular films and fashion magazines functioned as political vehicles by creating an illusion of a free space in the otherwise highly politicized reality of the Third Reich. Part II seeks to answer the following questions: What were the sartorial symbols of National Socialism and why did these symbols gain limited acceptance? What role did modern consumer culture play in Nazi Germany despite the regime's explicit anti-capitalist commitment? How did Nazi popular films and their female stars set the stage for the fashion industry? Why did the Nazis fail at creating genuinely German fashion?

5.1 Proletarian Fashion

In the post-1917 period, *культура* (culture) became one of the main ideology-laden terms. After the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks' first impulse was to destroy all cultural idols of the past, ranging from statues of the tsars and opulent manors and churches to "bourgeois" forms of art and literature, dress and conduct. As vividly portrayed by Richard Stites in *Revolutionary Dreams*, vandalism, iconoclasm, cultural

and social nihilism,³⁵⁹ and hostility towards intellectuals were not just the consequences of post-revolutionary chaos and destruction, but rather conscious attempts at creating a radically new, Bolshevik civilization. The creation of new, socialist culture and culturedness in post-revolutionary Russia was closely connected with the ongoing “class-war.” When in October of 1917, the Bolsheviks proclaimed themselves the “vanguard of the proletariat” and announced the creation of a revolutionary workers’ state, they also threw themselves zealously into “class-war,” stigmatizing their bourgeois “class enemy” and rewarding their proletarian allies. Bolshevik “class-consciousness,” according to Sheila Fitzpatrick, was above all “an awareness of the need for vigilance and ruthlessness in the face of the threat of bourgeois counterrevolution.”³⁶⁰ While the primary class enemies (according to strict Marxist-Leninist analysis), capital owners and the aristocracy, had been expelled from Russian society by the revolution and subsequent large-scale emigration, eliminating the remaining competitors for political, intellectual, and moral authority was imperative for the creation of a one-party, Bolshevik, dictatorship. In the absence of the aristocracy and capitalists, the most visible survivor from Russia’s prerevolutionary elites, the intelligentsia, inherited the symbolic mantle of the bourgeoisie.³⁶¹

Over the course of the 1920s, however, the Bolsheviks applied the term *bourgeois* not just to the intelligentsia but also to other social and occupational groups that had little

³⁵⁹ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 45.

³⁶⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*, 34.

³⁶¹ Fitzpatrick, “Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia,” 23-25.

in common with each other or, in some instances, with capitalism: so-called *бывшие* (or “former people” who included the remaining nobles, former landowners, tsarist bureaucrats, White and Imperial officers, and priests) and Nepmen.³⁶² In general, however, the class identity of a significant number of Soviet citizens in the 1920s was “contestable and contested.”³⁶³ Avoiding association with stigmatized groups (kulaks, Nepmen, priests, and “former people”) was among the foremost concerns of Soviet citizens in the 1920s, as was achieving membership in the politically correct class of the proletariat or the poor peasantry. In the context of Bolshevik society, being designated as the *правильный классовый элемент* (“right” class element) meant not just being able to enter the university and secure a job, but it often meant avoiding persecution and death.

Over the course of the 1920s, for some Bolsheviks the anti-bourgeois war implied a crusade against anything that could be associated with the pre-revolutionary elites’ norms and lifestyles, including fashionable dress, refined manners, cultured speech, and chivalrous conduct. Sexuality and sexual appeal were additional areas that were highly contested by Bolshevik ideologues. Writing in 1927, the renowned doctor and People’s

³⁶² Fitzpatrick, “Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia,” 24.

³⁶³ Such was the peasantry, which constituted four-fifth of the total population. To describe peasants, the Bolsheviks used a vague tripartite system, according to which peasants were either poor, “middle” (*средняки*), or kulaks. Another large group of population that was neither clearly proletarian nor clearly bourgeois included white-collar workers (*служащие*). Although theoretically, white-collar workers should have been treated equally with blue-collar workers as both groups represented the “employee class,” Soviet public discourse persisted in giving them a separate, non-proletarian class status. The pejorative term *meshchanstvo*, derived from the lower urban stratum of Russian pre-revolutionary society and denoting a petit-bourgeois, philistine mentality was so often used in Bolshevik discourse to describe white-collar workers as to suggest that the new class of *служащие* was in effect a Soviet version of the old tsarist estate of *мещане*. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Ascribing Class,” 25-28.

Commissar (1918-1930) N. A. Semashko urged Soviet youth to “lead a ruthless war with the bourgeois fashion for it seeks to incite lascivious behavior.”³⁶⁴ Using makeup or donning flapper styles or speaking with any hint of coquetry or seductiveness was labeled as “class-foreign”; doing so automatically made a woman a decadent petit bourgeois or a prostitute. Proletarian poets such as Demian Bedny emphasized willpower, physical strength and ability to work as leading attributes of the Soviet woman and condemned the seductiveness of young flappers. Young Communists of both genders, just like the nineteenth-century nihilists, flaunted their vulgar speech and untidiness; short hair and unisex attire were also considered desirable. With a tangible dose of irony, a contemporary observer noted that “the [Komsomol] girls know only one hairstyle: the hair gathered in the back, similar to the style of Marx. One cannot even part her hair because it is how the last tsar Nicolai II wore it.”³⁶⁵ The lack of basic hygiene among the younger generation appalled the old Bolshevik guard like Semashko, who insisted that “there is nothing ‘revolutionary’ in wearing dirty rags, on the contrary, the unkempt, untidy look represents a disgusting remnant of the old barbarian, oppressive [tsarist] order.”³⁶⁶ Moreover, the Commissar of People’s Education (1917-1929) and a leading theorist of socialist culture Anatolii Lunacharskii argued, sloppy appearance and uncivilized behavior did not belong to the type of culture that the Bolsheviks sought to accumulate and purposefully transmit to wider segments of the population. As seen from Lunacharskii’s 1927 essay *О быте (About byt)* and other contemporary sources, the term

³⁶⁴ Semashko, N.A. *Isskusstvo odevatsia*, 23.

³⁶⁵ From Hans Halm, *Liebe und Ehe in Sowjetrussland*, 70.

³⁶⁶ Semashko, N.A. *Isskusstvo odevatsia*, 19.

культура became widely adopted in Bolshevik Russia in connection with the idea of cultural policy, that is, with the transmission of specific values and codes of behavior from the Party leaders to the proletariat.³⁶⁷ *Культурность* (culturedness) was understood as the direct effect of this policy. The new, socialist culturedness included heightened attention to one's personal hygiene, sartorial choices, and manners. Pluralism characterized the 1920s Bolshevik discourse on culture and culturedness, ranging from interpreting proletarian culture as uncouth and rebellious to adhering to conservative, middle-class norms. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, attention to bodily hygiene as well as to the tidiness of one's home and workspace heightened; cleanliness was increasingly connected to self-discipline and labor efficiency.³⁶⁸

Bolshevik ideologues were not only interested in the bodily hygiene of young proletarians, but they were also concerned about their sartorial choices. A clash of styles, or so-called "mass eclecticism," characterized "proletarian attire" in the 1920s. The question "What a Soviet citizen should wear?" occasioned diverse answers.³⁶⁹ Bolshevik

³⁶⁷ Lunacharskii's essay urged Komsomol youth to discard their rebellious or indifferent attitudes towards personal appearance or sexual behavior and harshly and equally condemned sexual license and lack of basic hygiene.

³⁶⁸ A Stakhanovite was routinely described as having strict discipline and being the model of cleanliness, tidiness, and culturedness at work and in private life." Vadim Volkov, "The Concept of *Kulturnost'*: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process." *Stalinism: New Directions*. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 218.

³⁶⁹ Some extremists advocated nudity as a democratic, revolutionary form, an eccentric approach that culminated in a series of "Evenings of the Denuded Body" in Moscow in 1922. Others championed disposable paper clothing that America was allegedly already wearing or lauded the cascading, loose-fitting tunics worn by the dancer Isadora Duncan as proper revolutionary garb. John Bowlt, "Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design", in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, 206-209.

society in the early post-revolutionary years experienced not just the shortage of new, “democratic” styles but clothes in general. The Revolution disrupted the textile industry but also the conditions under which clothes were traditionally produced – by private tailors commissioned by the aristocracy and wealthy merchants. The disappearance of the privileged class and the attack on fashion as a social marker eliminated the need for private tailors; the nascent “proletarian” clothing style and of the technical conditions for mass production, on the other hand, lent Soviet citizens no alternative. Only after the New Economic Policy was instituted in 1921 did the Soviet clothing industry begin slowly to recover from stagnation: the emergence of new affluent clientele, the Nepmen, revitalized the private tailor while the Soviet textile industry received impetus from increased materials and manpower. The state created a network of model retail stores, whose primary goals, besides providing viable competition to private NEP entrepreneurs, were to revolutionize the practices of buying and selling and instill Soviet citizens with more cultured, rational, socialist modes of consuming and self-fashioning.

In her study of the State Department Store (*IYM*), Marjorie Hilton vividly illustrates how state retailers were viewed as central to the creation of a socialist society. To underline the regime’s commitment to bring luxuries to those who had been previously denied them, Bolshevik officials chose the most capacious, elegant, well-appointed, and renowned venues to house the state retail stores: *IYM*, for example, moved into the ornate, arcade-shaped Upper Trading rows on Red Square, while Mostorg Department store replaced the exquisite Imperial merchant Muir & Mirrielees in the prestigious building on Petrovka street. The Moscow trend was then swiftly followed in the other Soviet Republics. The official press for state retailers declared that *IYM* and other state

stores anticipated all needs and satisfied them by offering a variety of consumer goods through one central point: the centralization practice that would later culminate in the establishment of a state-run economy. The recasting of retail practice in the Bolshevik state also included linguistic changes. Many leading businesses of Late Imperial Russia were renamed to evoke revolutionary imagery or personalities: the nationally renowned Sui Confectioners were resurrected in 1924 as Bolshevik Confectioners, Einem became Red October Confectioners, while perfume and cosmetics manufacturers Brocard & Company and A. Rale & Company were reinstated as New Dawn and Freedom.³⁷⁰

The most important Bolshevik changes, however, were reflected in new protocols for selecting and purchasing consumer goods. Unlike capitalist retailing that relied on customers' browsing and touching to generate sales, Soviet retailing placed all merchandise behind glass counters, thus limiting shoppers' access, and further curtailed shopping with a three-queue system where in order to buy something a customer approached three different store workers: a sales clerk who calculated the order, the cashier who received the payment, and the assistant who issued the merchandise. Instead of improving the shopping experience, such "reform" generated a reputation for state retailers as inefficient and inconvenient. As the state stores regularly lacked the advertised merchandise or delayed the delivery of mail-ordered goods, they significantly contributed to the establishment of a strong, widespread and flourishing black market.³⁷¹

While the majority of Soviet citizens had to turn to the black market to procure basic

³⁷⁰ Marjorie L. Hilton, "Retailing the Revolution: the State Department Store (GUM) and Soviet Society in the 1920s." *Journal of Social History*, Summer 2004, Vol.37, Issue 4, pp.936-964.

³⁷¹ Hilton, "Retailing the Revolution", 953, 958.

goods, a system of priority access and specialty stores developed for the new “elite”: party officials, secret police personnel, Socialist Realist authors and artists, and regime-approved actors.

In her study of consumption and what she terms “cultured trade” under Stalin, Julie Hessler argues that the rationing periods (1917-1924, 1928-35, 1939-47) served as “the crucible of consumer culture in Stalin’s Russia.”³⁷² During the first years of industrialization, Soviet leadership had presented scarcity as the price of modernization: the deprivations experienced by Soviet consumers were seen as temporary and as less significant than the heroic achievements of Soviet metallurgy and the rapid growth and development of heavy and light industries in general. While scarcity was perceived as a condition of industrial development, it was never imagined as its outcome; rather, Soviet ideologues assumed that scarcity in the present would lead to unprecedented affluence for individuals and society in the imminent future. The most immediate effects of Stalin’s policies of collectivization and industrialization, however, included unprecedented deprivation in village and city, while prosperity seemed distant as never before. Anxious to make progress, Stalin and his acolytes attempted to bridge the gap between scarcity and abundance by replacing the destabilizing culture of shortages through the culture of consumption.³⁷³ The early Bolshevik values of asceticism and eclecticism were replaced by “cultured” consumerism under Stalin as an officially recognized right of a

³⁷² Julia Hessler, “Cultured Trade: the Stalinist Turn towards Consumerism,” *Stalinism: New Directions*. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 184.

³⁷³ Hessler, “Cultured Trade,” 185.

hardworking Soviet citizen. Furthermore, Stalinist ideology sanctioned individuals' aspirations for material goods as a new kind of public value.

Parallel to the development of Soviet consumption culture, various forms of "Soviet fashion" began to take shape. The Constructivist movement of the 1920s was one of the first post-revolutionary formations that attempted to provide alternatives to both elite fashion and post-tsarist "mass-eclecticism."³⁷⁴ To a degree, Constructivist fashion design in Russia in the 1920s incorporated various interpretations of the idea of "proletarian art."³⁷⁵ Despite their differences in the definition of proletarian art, most intellectuals agreed that the proletarian culture/style should permeate all social and cultural structures: architecture, interior design, clothes, but also language, appearance, and conduct. Leading Constructivists such as Varvara Stepanova, Liubov Popova, and Aleksander Rodchenko aspired to create consistent, and coherent democratic styles that reflected the spirit of the

³⁷⁴ Constructivism originated in Russia at the beginning of 1919. It rejected the idea of autonomous art and championed socially useful art. Constructivism extended major influence upon Soviet architecture, graphic and industrial design, theatre, film, dance, and fashion of the 1920s and, to a lesser degree, music. The People's Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs (1919-1925) Leon Trotskii was a main supporter of the Constructivists in Russia, a reason why the movement began to be regarded with distrust and suspicion after the expulsion and political demise of Trotskii in 1927-8. Starting from 1934, Socialist Realism replaced Constructivism.

³⁷⁵ Leon Trotskii tended to dismiss proletarian art because he defined any art as a class art and believed that imminent international revolution would eliminate class divisions and bring a different form of culture and art, not necessarily proletarian; Alexander Bogdanov, the leader of the Proletkult, maintained that proletarian art must be mechanical and industrial, with the artist finding inspiration in the proximity of a factory. A third popular conception of proletarian art was that it was anonymous, abstract, and non-national; it reflected the belief that the Russian revolution was only the first one in a series of anticipated worldwide revolutions and thus proletarian art could not reflect Russian culture only. Another view advocated proletarian art as mobile, dynamic, and variable, because it believed the Revolution to be perpetual and universal. John Bowl, "Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design", in *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, 206.

times and the new socio-economic conditions.³⁷⁶ In the Constructivist interpretation, the worker of Bolshevik Russia should wear abstract patterns and bold colors, features that were both international in nature and presumably reflected modernity. In general, the Constructivists followed European modernist tendencies in fashion that emphasized that clothes should be functional, practical, and sporty. Russian modernist theater, most notably the theater of Vsevolod Meyerhold, became the major venue to showcase the clothing ideas of the Constructivists.

Constructivist fashions encapsulated the spirit of the early twenties – idealism, experimentalism, and pluralism – yet were hardly successful. Most of the designs remained prototypes and were never mass-produced. The lack of sophisticated manufacturers hindered the popularization of the “industrial fashion.” In addition, stars, sickles, hammers and a white-red-black color scheme, which formed part of revolutionary iconography and were favored by the Constructivists, contravened popular taste. The real worker of Bolshevik Russia was more concerned with procuring basic clothing, not fashionable attire. Ironically, while as a movement Constructivism rejected art-for-art’s sake, its fashions eventually became considered as such.

³⁷⁶ Soviet Constructivists were in part influenced by the ideas of Leon Bakst (1866-1924), a Russian painter and theater scene-costume designer. Most famous for the costumes he produced for the ballets *Scheherazade* (1910) and *L’Oiseau du feu* (1910), Bakst approached the human body as the central organizational element of stage and the primary factor of the costume’s “expression.” Bakst’s radicalism was demonstrated in his method of emphasizing and exaggerating the body’s movement through clothes: he used decorative elements such as feathers, pendants, veils, etc., as functional devices to amplify and expand the actions of the body. John Bowl, “Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design,” 207.



Sports attire by one of the leading Constructivists Varvara Stepanova (1923). Only Stepanova's clothes designs reached mass market in Bolshevik Russia. Courtesy: Minsk National Library

If the Constructivists focused on the creation of “industrial styles,” the first Soviet fashion-oriented magazine, *Ателье*, (*Atelier*) sought to create glamorous fashions. An ambitious intellectual endeavor, the magazine (first published in 1923) featured contributors such as the poet Anna Akhmatova, the soon-to-be famous sculptor Inna Mukhina, and the Russian professional clothes designers Nadezhda Lamanova and Alexandra Exter. *Atelier* ventured into a wide range of themes including fashion and theater, fashion and revolution, and fashion and dancing. Neither the magazine's fashion designs nor its articles strove to channel Bolshevik ideology, that is, to theorize and illustrate proletarian styles; rather, the intention of *Atelier* was to situate fashion as a phenomenon into the new, revolutionary milieu of Russia. When designing modern attire,” one contributor wrote, “one should strive to combine the Pan-European tendencies in fashion with the specifics of Russian nationality and culture.”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ Quoted in Raeva, D. M., *Sotsiokulturnyii analiz sovetskoi mody 20-30h godov*, 43.



The two strikingly different creations of the Soviet sculptor Inna Mukhina: a delicate fantasy of an evening gown, the famous “rosebud-dress,” which she submitted to the *Atelier* magazine in 1923, and the monumental celebration of Soviet ideals embodied in her sculptural ensemble *Worker and Peasant Woman* (1937). Courtesy: Minsk National Library

A former couturiere of the Imperial court, Lamanova attempted to professionalize the clothing industry in Bolshevik Russia, publishing several essays about the process of fabric selection for different styles of dress and about the use of decorative elements. Lamanova’s version of “revolutionary” fashion was the incorporation of Russian folk motifs onto the silhouettes in the style of art deco (virtually unknown in Bolshevik Russia at that time). She and Exter sought to re-establish the connection with the West and its cultural heritage, imbue the Western designs with “revolutionary spirit,” and adapt them to the Soviet *byt*. The models created by Lamanova and Exter suggested a sophisticated, intellectually curious, and cosmopolitan wearer – hardly a common type in Russia in the 1920s. These models, however, received international acclaim and the grand prix of the

Contemporary Fashion Exhibition in Paris in 1925, where Lamanova, Exter, Mukhina, and the specialist in folk embroidery, Pribylskaia, traveled to represent Soviet Russia.³⁷⁸



“Revolutionary” fashions suggested by Lamanova (left) and Exter (right). Reproduced from *Швейная Промышленность*, Vol 7 (1931). Courtesy: Minsk National Library

In addition to *Atelier*, at least eleven other magazines, all printed on high-quality paper with colorful illustrations, familiarized the Soviet reader with the latest Western European fashion trends.³⁷⁹ The print output of women’s magazines in Bolshevik Russia, however, reflected the “ideological worth” of the magazine. *Домашняя портниха*

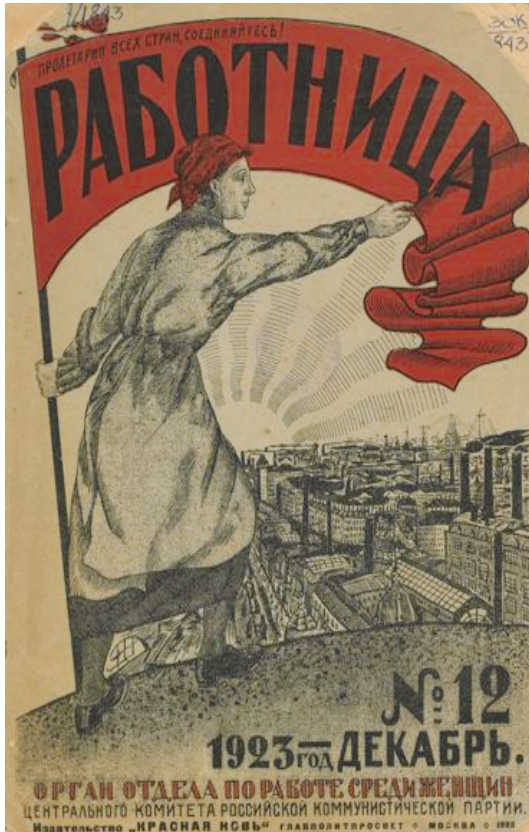
³⁷⁸ The famous French couturier Poiret purchased several designs by Lamanova for his Fashion Establishment. Raeva, D. M., *Sotsiokulturnyii analiz sovetskoi mody 20-30h godov*, 57.

³⁷⁹ Magazines such as *Домашняя портниха*, *Новости моды*, *Моды сезона*, *4 Сезона*, and *Альбом мод* were especially in high demand among urban dwellers and the Nepmen. *Домашняя Портниха (Home Seamstress 1928-1930)*, *Искусство Одеваться (The Art of Dressing 1928-29)*, *Женский журнал (Women's Magazine 1926-1930)* had the highest circulation. Other magazines were *Модный журнал*, *Модный мир*, *Моды*, *Модели сезона*. Strizhnova T. and S. Temerin, *Sovetskii kostum za 50 let*, prilozhenie k *Zhurnalul Mod*, Vol. 3.(1967), 2.

(*Home Seamstress*), for example, had a circulation of 14, 000 compared with 425, 000 for *Работница* (*Woman Worker*) not because it lacked readership but because it did not assist in the political indoctrination of Soviet women. Bolshevik women's magazines such as *Woman Worker* and *Woman Peasant* came out sixty and thirty times a year respectively, and in fact performed the function of a newspaper, informing their readers about the latest party resolutions, successes of other women workers and collective farmers, international news, and domestic events. While their articles dealt with women's issues (breastfeeding, pregnancy, abortion, childcare, information about Soviet laws concerning alimony and maternity leave, etc), teaching women about dressing appears as an insignificant item on the agenda of these magazines. Only in the late 1920s did *Woman Worker* (which had existed since 1914) begin to include one two-sided page with sketches of clothes and their brief descriptions; *Woman Peasant*, on the other hand, hardly ever mentioned clothes.

Even a brief overview of women's magazines in the 1920s and 1930s suggests that there were two dominant female types in the women's oriented press: the artistic/elegant type with a languid gaze and the energetic, militant worker-peasant type. The dreamy actress/socialite, a possible reincarnation of the artistic /elegant type, graced fashion publications while the worker/peasant type dominated the Bolshevik women's magazines *Woman Worker* and *Woman Peasant*. Photographed or drawn, the female type in *Woman Worker* and *Woman Peasant* resembled contemporary propaganda posters. Her primary role was not to suggest how to enhance one's look or emanate sexual appeal (such was the role of elegant models in fashion magazines), but to underline the political and economic tasks of the Soviet Woman. While the covers of fashion magazines

changed with each issue, *Woman Worker* used the same cover image for a number of years before changing to photos and collages. One explanation is, of course, the cost; however, it is also possible that the editors of *Woman Worker* intentionally downplayed the attire of their cover model: a red handkerchief was her most important accessory as it identified her political beliefs.



Two types of femininity, as shown on the cover of 1923 *Woman Worker* and the 1925 *News of Fashion*, were allowed to coexist throughout the 1920s. Courtesy: Minsk National Library

After most fashion magazines were terminated as “lacking ideological value” in 1929, the professional journal of the Soviet sewing industry, *Швейная Промышленность* (Sewing Industry) became the primary venue for discussing the ideological, aesthetic, and manufacturing concerns of Soviet fashion and design. A perusal of the articles published in the *Sewing Industry* between 1931 and 1939 illustrates

an important shift in the contemporary discourse about “proletarian style.” In the 1920s, Soviet artists and couturiers experimented with modernist fashions, attempting to incorporate into them what they considered proletarian forms and elements. The subtext of “proletarian fashion” for many ordinary citizens, especially for the Komsomol youth, implied austerity, minimalism, and unisex styles. In the 1930s, Soviet fashion designers sought to channel changes that occurred in the official representation of material luxuries and fashionable goods. From 1931 on, every major speech by Stalin (cited extensively in the magazine) contained references to the increasing prosperity and culturedness of Soviet citizens, as well as projections of a glorious imminent future. Popular aspirations for a higher standard of living were legitimized; for the first time since the Revolution, the Soviet leadership conceded that the satisfaction of individuals’ private material interests could further the public good and asserted prosperity as an aspect of socialist culturedness.³⁸⁰ As Sheila Fitzpatrick describes it, “One of the great advantages of the concept of *kulturnost*’ in a post-revolutionary society burdened by the hangovers of revolutionary Puritanism was that it offered a way of legitimizing what had once been thought of as ‘bourgeois’ concerns about possessions and status; one treated them [now] as an aspect of *kul’tura*.”³⁸¹ From 1934 on, during the period that the sociologist Nicholas Timasheff termed a “Great Retreat,” early Bolshevik values were abandoned. Marked by

³⁸⁰ This reconfiguration of consumption culminated in Stalin’s speech to the First All-Union Congress of Stakhanovites in November 1935, where he insisted that the fulfillment of the socialist revolution required the acquisition of “material goods” (material’nye blaga) to complement its hard won political benefits for the Soviet citizen. There Stalin coined the later much-quoted description of life under his rule: Life has become better, comrades. Life has become more joyous.” In Hessler, “Cultured Trade,” 185.

³⁸¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*, 35.

the massive migration of rural population into the cities, the era of the Great Retreat saw the rise of the new elite – the so-called proletarian intelligentsia – and extensive changes in everyday behavior, manners, clothing and tastes.³⁸²



Boyish, loose-fitting designs – albeit in bright, “youthful” colors, as seen on the image from this 1929 issue of *4 Сезона* (Four Seasons) on the left dominated fashion magazines in the late 1920s. In contrast, the coats and accessories in the late 1930s, as presented in the 1939 issue of *Швейная Промышленность* on the right had a distinctly feminine, tailored, and elegant vibe. A more groomed, sophisticated look corresponded with the official propaganda that trumpeted the increased culturedness of Soviet citizens. Courtesy: Minsk National Library

³⁸² The drive for industrialization, which started in 1928, brought some thirty million peasants into the cities and new construction sites. “Ruralization of the cities,” as Moshe Lewin termed it, profoundly changed the composition of the urban population and challenged the public, legal, and political order. Throughout the 1930s, a significant number of these peasant-turned-industrial workers were detained and executed for theft, robbery, swindling, hooliganism, and similar violations. To urbanize and civilize the new workforce, the authorities (who for obvious ideological and pragmatic reasons were unable to continue with full-scale punitive measures) adopted a more subtle strategy. From 1935, and especially during 1936-7, these policies revolved around the concept of *kulturnost’*. Volkov, Vadim. “The Concept of *Kulturnost’*: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process.” *Stalinism: New Directions*. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 215.

In the official representation of material luxuries and fashionable goods the Stakhanovites (shock workers) played an important role. Designated as the “new nobility” of the Peasant and Worker’s State, the Stakhanovites were rewarded for their industrial achievements with monetary prizes and consumer goods that were largely inaccessible (financially and physically, due to shortages) to the majority of Soviet citizens: radios, motorcycles, record players, apartments and luxury items such as gold watches or silk dresses. By using the Stakhanovites as the citizen-consumer, the state sought to appeal to workers’ material aspirations and make an explicit connection between higher productivity and a more prosperous, comfortable life. Simultaneously, these highly publicized awards served as a vehicle of advertising, that is, they sought to cultivate consumer demand by celebrating the conspicuous consumption of Stakhanovites.³⁸³

While Stalinist propaganda trumpeted the increased level of prosperity and culturedness of Soviet citizens and of their overall optimism and joyfulness, *Sewing Industry*, the most prominent mouthpiece of Soviet fashion designers and clothes manufacturers, launched a series of ideologically infused articles that sought to “normalize” evening gowns and fur coats, as well as to elevate the sophistication of everyday attire in general. As if furs, pearls, and expensive fabrics were already financially and physically accessible to all Soviet consumers, one article cheerfully announced the availability of a “variety of models that fit a range of bodies” to “avoid the

³⁸³ Hessler, “Cultured Trade,” 199.

standardization of one's look."³⁸⁴ The Stalinist Constitution, the readers were informed in a matter-of-fact way, provided "every citizen of the USSR with maximum opportunities for self-realization and display of individuality." Just how controlled and strictly outlined "individuality" was during the Stalinist era is evident in the author's commentaries about a recent collection of fur and fur-trimmed coats: "Although many designs use fur reasonably, one can also see real distortions in style such as when fur is attached vertically in a way that it is hidden when the woman is standing. It creates an unhealthy surprise when the woman turns ... Or when the fur only covers a part of the coat ... or when the coat has two types of furs ... these details, so prevalent in Western models, are carnival-like, extravagant, and perverted."³⁸⁵ The particular use of fur, apparently, could turn an otherwise ideologically solid piece of clothing into a decadent, class-foreign model. Evening gowns with plunging necklines, on the other hand, posed no such danger, because only in the West did such attire have a "degrading, explicitly erotic effect." Soviet women, the article suggested with an amusing naïveté, remained modest and asexual even in tight-fitting, revealing fashions – perhaps because political maturity and economic productivity safely replaced their eroticism.

Showing modesty along with prosperity indeed emerged as a leading idea in the Stalinist conceptualization of fashion. However, identifying how this Party directive could be implemented into clothes' design evidently remained a conundrum for Soviet fashion writers despite their readiness to comply with the official guidelines. The author

³⁸⁴ L. Artemova, "The Perspectives of Fashion in 1938", *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 1, 1938, 50.

³⁸⁵ L. Artemova, "The Perspectives of Fashion in 1938", 51.

of the 1935 article “Let’s give the Stakhanovites beautiful clothes!” simply declared that “Soviet fashion ... should reflect the main characteristics of our youth: their timidity when talking about personal successes and their boastfulness when sharing the achievements of their Soviet motherland,”³⁸⁶ leaving readers with the task of imagining designs that would capture that vision. Another article penned by Shekhman, the director of the Experimental Clothes Factory, was hardly more specific: after reiterating that fashion “interests Soviet citizens only insofar it assists their cultural enrichment and reflects their rising material prosperity” and that “the leading trait of a regular Soviet citizen, as well as party and state leaders, is their exceptional modesty,” the author succinctly – and cryptically – concluded that “Western styles that favor sensation and extremism are not acceptable to us. Our fashions have to be simple and modest, but not poorly tailored or lacking style... .”³⁸⁷ As this article and, in fact, the entire issue had no images to illustrate Shekhman’s elaborations on Soviet fashions, readers had to figure out for themselves whether what they were wearing at the moment or contemplated buying was ideologically correct.

With guidelines such as this, it is no wonder that Soviet designers and manufacturers were often perplexed: Were they to make modestly cut designs or were they to create elaborate clothes out of luxurious materials to underline the increased prosperity of the Soviet people? What fashion paradigms were they to follow if current Parisian styles were labeled “provincial bourgeois fashion,” the Constructivist designs were discarded as “individualistic decadence,” and the elegant styles of Lamanova and Exter were branded

³⁸⁶ *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 12, 1935, 1.

³⁸⁷ “The question of fashion,” *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 3, 1938, 18.

as “bourgeois eclecticism”? The Soviet sartorial experts routinely condemned the fluidity of Western fashion and its “wrong” ideological message; however, their attempts to “sovietize” did not result in original, attractive, wearable styles. As one contemporary noted in 1931,

All attempts to “sovietize” the textile design for garment fabrics ... have been confined to a very narrow choice of themes, in most cases lacking any sociopolitical trenchancy. At best, the subject is a rather naïve one – a Pioneer, a Red Army soldier, a smiling head ... Or take the so-called industrial motifs ... What’s Soviet about them? Why does a mere tractor have to be a Soviet theme? There are actually more tractors in bourgeois America than in the USSR.³⁸⁸

Textile patterns with aeroplanes, tractor drivers, and athletic Komsomol members may have appeared ideologically correct but in practice, the 1934 issue of *Швейная промышленность* lamented, cutting such fabrics for dresses or men’s shirts presented a challenge: “one had to concentrate immensely not to behead the woman tractor driver or turn upside down [the depicted] modern machinery”³⁸⁹ Even when the problem of choosing the fabric and cut was solved, Soviet clothes manufacturers faced difficulties in sizing the “average Soviet citizen” who was busy with building socialism most of his or her waking hours. To address the problem, the Research and Science Institute of Sewing Industry had to pair efforts with the State Institute of Anthropology.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ A. Fedorov-Davydov, *Isskusstvo tekstil’ia*”, *Izofront. Klassovaya bor’ba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv. Sbornik stteo ob’edineniia “Oktiabr”* (Moscow- Leningrad, 1931) in Bowt, *Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design*, 218.

³⁸⁹ Robotnova, “The Questions of Design in a New Phase,” *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 4, 1934, 20-21.

³⁹⁰ *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 8, 1931, 6.

The concerted efforts of Soviet designers to expand the selection and variety of styles, on the other hand, often met with resistance from the directors of factories who would refuse suggested designs only because they included embroidery or fabric-covered buttons. The exhibitions of Soviet Houses of Fashion such as Mosbel'e and Leningradodezhda featured 280 and 90 designs respectively, of these only a few made it to the clothing factory, mostly due to technical difficulties.³⁹¹ Soviet manufacturers felt the pressure to ensure mass production of simple styles – in order to fill the notorious shortages in stores at least to a degree – but they also had limited resources, time, and technical equipment to supply the Soviet consumer with more interesting fashions.³⁹² The end result, according to Evgenia Pribylskaia, the specialist in folk embroidery, was that dresses intended for women workers “used the fabric that did not go well with the style of the dress,” while the dress for women peasants “resembled the costumes from the plays of [the nineteenth-century playwright] Ostrovskii and shocked the viewer with bold, vulgar, un-tastefully mixed colors.”³⁹³

In addition to showing the prosperity and culturedness of Soviet citizens, Soviet fashion was to reflect citizens' increased physical prowess and athleticism. “Our beauty,” one observer proudly announced in 1931 “is the beauty of a physically active person, the

³⁹¹ 19,000 people during 18 days in Leningrad and 5,000 people during 9 days in Moscow attended the exhibitions. *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 6, 1933, 13-14.

³⁹² P. Sternin, “Two systems of modeling”, *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 3, 1938, 23.

³⁹³ E. Pribylskaia, “Exhibition of Modern Everyday Clothes”, *Швейная промышленность*, Vol. 1, 1931, 22-23.

beauty of health, enthusiasm, and work.”³⁹⁴ Throughout the 1930s, athleticism was closely connected with super-efficiency at work and with the ability of regular citizens to defend their Soviet Motherland from inner as well as outer enemies. The official propaganda portrayed work as a joyous, celebratory experience but also as a military conquest, in which Soviet citizens functioned as industrial soldiers bringing victory in the form of abundant harvests, overflowing production of consumer goods, and apartment houses, metro stations, highways, railways, factories, etc., completed before their deadlines. The “cheerful militarization” of industrial and agricultural achievements in Soviet iconography is effectively captured in poster captions such as “I go to work as to a celebration” (на работу как на праздник) or “Fight for Harvest!” (битва за урожай). Posters and magazines profusely circulated the theme of women “catching up” with and prevailing over men not only in industry, education, medicine, science, and agriculture in general, but in professions previously practiced only by males: mining, construction, aviation, army and others. The popularity of the unisex and mannish styles manifested itself in women wearing the same professional laboratory or factory coats, same cut jackets, ties, and especially military uniforms as men. Female cadets, pilots, and parachutists but also many Komsomol women donned military uniforms to mark their social equality with (and sometimes superiority over) men.

³⁹⁴ Mashurina, Silich, “The Role of Artist in sewing industry”, *Shveinaia promyshlennost*, Vol.7, 1931.



Служащие Военно-воздушной академии им. Жуковского (слева направо): Лидия Шор, организатор Тамара Соловьева и Илона Ковалева в момент приема военной присяги.

Women cadets at the Military Aviation Academy, like women parachutists, were promoted as role models. *Woman Worker* (1939). Courtesy: Minsk National Library.

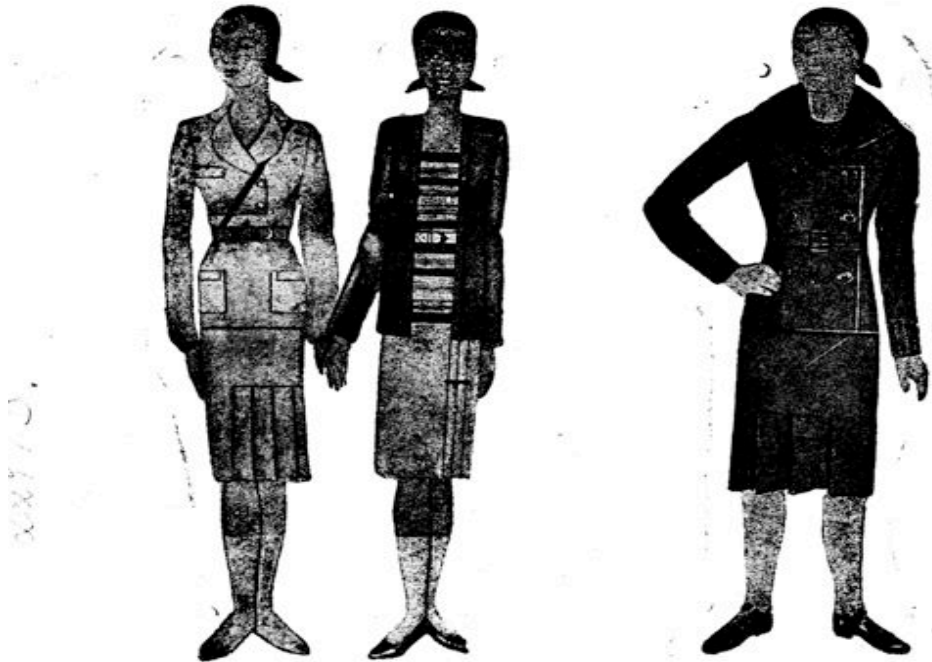


Рис. 5, 6 и 7. Костюмы комсомолок

Sewing Industry (1931) advertised styles for Komsomol women that resembled military uniforms. Courtesy: Minsk National Library.

If Stalinist propaganda advanced work as connected to accelerated tempo and superhuman productivity, leisure was promoted as the time to engage in vigorous

physical activities, preferably in those that enhanced one's ability to defend the USSR such as shooting, track and field, parachuting or flying classes.



Be ready for work and defense!
Kokorekin A. A. (1934)



Parade of Fitness demonstrates the strength and invincibility of the Soviet People! Kibardin, G. (1938)

The Soviet fashion of the mid- and late-1930s encapsulated this ideology by popularizing shorts and bra tops and canvas shoes as athletic clothing for women. Oftentimes, young girls and women took defense training in their everyday or work attire. In Stalinist Russia, the divide between the private and public spheres, work and leisure, military training and physical exercise became increasingly blurred. Tight and revealing contemporary athletic fashions developed concurrently with another propaganda campaign sanctioned by Stalin that encouraged Soviet citizens to reveal their personal flaws and professional oversights during Komsomol or Party meetings. In order to increase its power, Stalin's totalitarian system sought to establish tight control over the activities, thoughts, and bodies of Soviet citizens.

In the early post-revolutionary years, the attempts of Soviet artists to create a genuine “proletarian style” were thwarted by the lack of technology, advertising, and skillful manufacturers, as well as the changing political climate. By the end of the 1930s, however, fashion in Soviet Russia took a distinct shape. In many aspects it incorporated prevalent Western trends such as sportiness, practicality, and functionality. It also channeled the Stalinist social and cultural reality: the militarization of society, Social Realist utopia, which included the promotion of the increased culture and prosperity of Soviet citizens and the heightened attention to physical fitness.

The official celebration of the Stakhanovites as primary consumers of Soviet fashion served several political goals of the regime: to encourage workers' productivity and to provide tangible demonstrations of the state's economic achievements. While Stalinist rhetoric lauded the increased prosperity of *all* Soviet citizens, and especially of the Stakhanovites, the highest income groups were hidden from the public view. One privileged group in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s and early 1940s comprised members of the cultural elite: (Socialist realist) authors, playwrights, musicians, actors, orchestra conductors, and ballet dancers. Another included Party leaders, NKVD personnel, and state bureaucracy. These so-called *otvetstvennye rabotniki* (workers entrusted with responsibility) enjoyed a high salary and also perks such as special stores, eating halls, automobiles with chauffeurs, free travel, luxurious lodgings, and vacations. While these groups enjoyed a semi-official system of access to luxurious goods and services, the majority of Soviet citizens had to live in the imagined socialist realist present, experiencing the reality of shortages and having to procure basic goods from a large and sophisticated black market.

5.2 Nazi “Haute Couture”

Like the Bolsheviks, the Nazis allocated an important role to the physical appearance and sartorial choices of women. During the 1920s, the Nazis (as well as many conservatives) vociferously decried in their speeches and publications what they described as androgynous, French- and Jewish- imposed styles and the “unhealthy” fascination with cosmetics and smoking, all of which had purportedly led to the moral degradation of German women. In accordance with Nazi ideology, Aryan women had to avoid artificial beauty enhancements and dieting, style their hair in a Germanic way – in braids or a bun, don “Aryan fashions,” and lead a lifestyle that was conducive to motherhood.

If the Soviet Woman was expected to spurn all vestiges of “bourgeois fashion,” the Aryan Woman, according to Nazi ideologues, had to steer away from any display of “Jewish cosmopolitanism” and French and American influences in both her appearance and dress. That included attaining prettiness, freshness, and style with natural means, and not with the help of “ridiculous” fashions or permanents, hair dyes, or makeup. The glow, the National Socialist rhetoric insisted, should come from outdoor activities such as gardening or hiking, sports, sunbathing, and motherhood. In particular, Nazi proselytizers pounced on the vamp, embodied in Hollywood stars such as Joan Crawford, Mae West, Jean Harlow, Marlene Dietrich and others: their smoking, mannish or femme fatale’s fashions, heavily made-up eyes, plucked eyebrows, bright red lips and fingernails. The officially promoted Aryan feminine ideals were makeup-free, sun-kissed, and athletic girls or young women in a dirndl or (BDM) uniform. At the same time, highly popular

Nazi actresses such as Lilian Harvey and Zarah Leander did not conform to the sartorial mandates of the regime. In their films and publicity stills, Leander and Harvey supplied German women with a striking diversity of roles and images that seemed to contradict National Socialism's gender paradigm, especially, the model of womanhood promoted in women's organizations such as NS-Frauenwerk or the BDM. Parallel to scrutinizing sexual practices, punishing misbehavior, and imposing "Aryan fashions," the NS-regime also nurtured the very desires it professed to extinguish – by inviting the male population to lust after and the female population to associate itself with and imitate the Nazi female stars that never adopted the sartorial mandates of the regime, and who were not even German in origin.³⁹⁵ From the beginning of the Third Reich until its demise there was a sanctioned discord between those who supported the National Socialists' officially promoted vision of womanhood – and those (including high-placed Nazis themselves) who continued to embrace modernity. As a result, as far as fashion and women's fashioning were concerned in the Nazi state, contradictions, ambiguity, and mixed imperatives abounded.

Officially lauded female ideals included the rural, fertile housewife/farmer's wife and the racially, ideologically, and physically trained Hitler maidens. In NS propaganda posters and publications, the attire of the farmer's wife, the *Tracht*, and the organizational uniform of a young BDM female were presented as sartorial symbols of the regime and as a genuine German fashion. In Nazi iconography, the folk costume suggested a tie with the past and the uniform reflected the connection with the present, whereas both images signified a rejection of Germany's common history with Europe (e.g., common

³⁹⁵ Röck was Hungarian, Söderbaum and Leander were Swedish, while Harvey was British.

international trends) and insisted on its unique, singular path of development, including in the realm of fashion. The “pure” beauty of the farmer’s wife was rooted in her voluptuous, strong body, her ability to perform strenuous work, her fecundity, and her hand-sewn folk costume, which were all described in the official propaganda as true “Nordic features.”

By the time the Nazis seized power, the dirndl was not a central garment in women’s wardrobes. In big cities such as Berlin, Cologne, or Hamburg, women wore European styles. It was still common for rural women to wear a dirndl in Austria, in East Prussia, in parts of Bavaria, and Munich, but even there it was hardly all-occasion attire. In fact, many rural women ceased to wear *Tracht* in everyday life because of its impracticality (the white blouse with puff sleeves and embroidered apron could easily get sullied, while the tight bodice could hamper the performance of various farm tasks). For the National Socialists, however, the dirndl represented a successful marriage of community, the Volk, and German history. “The *Tracht*,” a contemporary wrote, “grows out of mutuality and tries to give expression to this essence. So, it becomes a symbol of community based on blood, on race, and on the landscape, and it encompasses an inner commonality.”³⁹⁶ Because it was Germany’s own, the *Tracht*, Nazi ideologues believed, could serve as a visual expression of the bond between women and the German soil, as well as a sartorial token of National Socialism. The dirndl could liberate Germany of the French dominance in fashion and instill German women with national pride.

Although the official propaganda pushed the *Tracht* as everyday, every-occasion wear, elite fashion magazines such as *Elegante Welt*, *Die Dame*, and *Deutsche Moden-*

³⁹⁶ Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 111.

Zeitung offered this “ideologically correct” attire in a more subtle way. Undoubtedly realizing the anachronistic, impractical character of the dirndl, these magazines either encouraged their sophisticated, fashion-savvy readers to implement folk decorative elements into modern styles or wear dirndls when traveling in the mountains or while gardening, thus limiting its use to particular situations. *Die Dame* especially, while it included romanticized accounts about rural life with pictures of young women in elaborate regional *Trachten*, never fashioned the dirndl as casual wear, less so as an evening gown or as an outfit for a businesswoman. In the contemporary German fashion press the dirndl remained a mere trend, not a revolutionary event.



Elegante Welt (1934) “aryanized” a woman’s jacket by stitching folk- inspired embroidery on its front, while the 1936 issue of *Deutsche Moden-Zeitung* included a dirndl together with a dirndl-inspired dress on its cover.

Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.



According to this 1936 issue of *Deutsche Moden-Zeitung*, a woman could diversify and enrich her vacation in the mountains by donning different *Trachten*

Die Dame preferred to show its loyalty to the regime by including illustrated essays about Germany's regions but not featuring models in dirndls. *Die Dame* (1937)

Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

While the Nazis failed to popularize the dirndl as everyday wear, the Nazi-unrelated endorsement of the German folk style by Marlene Dietrich in America helped make the dirndl more fashionable in Germany and elsewhere. Dietrich boosted the dirndl's popularity, and ironically, aided Goebbels' propaganda efforts when she, a staunch opponent of National Socialism, spent the entire summer wearing *Tracht* styles created for her by the Austrian émigré and filmmaker Fritz Lang.³⁹⁷

Along with the *Tracht*, elite fashion magazines also attempted to incorporate into their content the other sartorial symbol of the regime, the uniform. In Nazi ideology, a uniform epitomized belonging to the National Community and loyalty to its ideals. With its historical connotations of unity, symmetry, order, and hierarchy, a uniform helped NS

³⁹⁷ In addition to Dietrich, Gräffin Wernberg, an Austrian, helped widen the appeal of the folk style in Europe and America when she opened an exclusive *Trachten* and sports clothing shop in Munich in the 1930s. The international nobility outfitted at Wernberg's store before vacationing in the Alps. Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 115.

leaders to highlight the athleticism of BDM girls and their conformity to NS racial mandates. Most importantly, the uniformed BDM female served as a Nazi alternative to the unhealthy, decadent, promiscuous *garçonne* of the Weimar years. On a more subconscious level, a uniform also helped to fulfill one of the original pledges of National Socialism – to eliminate social distinctions. Unlike the dirndl, during the Third Reich a uniform indeed became part of many women’s wardrobe. BDM, JM and the NS-Frauenschaft members, but also female police auxiliaries, telephone and telegraph operators, filing clerks, radio operators, medical personnel, and postal workers all donned uniformed attire with Nazi insignia. One reason why German women accepted uniforms and were reported even to like them was perhaps because in the Third Reich, the uniform likened them to men in that it evinced power and authority. Although elite fashion magazines never elaborated on the designs and colors of uniforms, that is, tried to make uniforms more fashionable, most of them featured illustrated articles with uniformed or dirndl-clad BDM girls wandering in the mountains, or as seen in the following image from the 1935 issue of *Die Dame*, strolling along the sun-lit, serene shore of the Baltic. Placed in the contemporary context, then, the featuring of uniforms in elite fashion magazines can be interpreted in several ways: first, as paying tribute to the regime, second, as illustrating an actual “fashion” trend that empowered especially young women by making them part of a community.



Uniform “fashion” as presented in *Die Dame* (1935). Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

Along with (scarce images of) the Nazi imposed female ideals that were rooted in national history and imagery, fashion magazines featured and promoted the model of womanhood that through fashion designs, hairstyles, and makeup embraced international trends. Many of the officially denounced attributes continued to be advertised and sold, because, first, the Nazi-espoused “natural beauty” simply could not be fabricated without the help of manufactured, “artificial” means, and, second, because many women in Germany, especially urban, aspired to imitate Hollywood as well as Nazi actresses, not the uniform-clad, staunch Nazi women activists or the dirndl-clad farmer’s wife.

Women’s magazines that featured the photographs of “un-German,” vampish, stylishly dressed Hollywood actresses, sold out not because German women accepted the virulent diatribes that accompanied the photographs but because the high resolution and quality of these images allowed style-conscious readers to decipher the latest trends in hair-styling and make-up application. Similarly, postcards and magazines that featured Germany’s

own film stars such as Leander (she was of course Swedish) and Harvey (who was born in Great Britain) were sold out for their exotic look and glamour not “Nordic features.”

Magazines such as *Elegante Welt* (see the advertisement below), *Die Dame*, and *Deutsche Moden-Zeitung*, among others, regularly featured advertisements for sun lamps, hormonal preparations to enhance the bust, hair removal creams, makeup and highlighting shampoos, cosmetic surgery, and American-owned beauty salons such as Elizabeth Arden. Given, many of these artificial means helped women to achieve that heavily advertised Nordic ideal; however, elite fashion magazines were more likely to cater to women’s vanity and existing consumer demands than pursue ideological objectives. Ads for imported cigarettes and American brands like Palmolive and Pond’s, on the other hand, suggest that despite Nazi anti-artificiality and anti-foreign polemics, the regime intentionally allowed ideological incongruities in order not to alienate female consumers and make them hostile toward the regime.

Damenbart Sichere Entfernung des. Haars durch d. wirkksamste Nat. WASSER. Sehr bewährt u. n. von hoch. Ärzten empfoh. Bild. Besondere Zuschriften, z. T. in. Dauererfolge (Ausklappen d. Nachschick). Marke Helwaka o. Stern. gestrand. Nr. 60559 verbürgt Erfolg, schützt Sie daher vor Enttäuschungen. Kleiner RM. 2.75, stark 3.25, f. groß. Flächen 3.50 o. 6.50 Nachh. Helwaka-Köln 1938.

Schön geformte Büste gelangen schon viele Frauen durch unser gut schmeckend. Hormongehalt. „Hormonal“ U od. E. Unverdauliche oder erschaffte Masse ist ungesund! Das Unwohlsein nehmen Sie daher Hormonal. 1 Pf. bei Erschlaffung d. S. (2-3 Malte Kaffeestoff täglich.) Teilweise geradezu verblüffende Wirkung! 120 Gg. Packung RM. 3.50, Depotpackung RM. 6., dazu Porto. Genau angeben, ob U od. E. erwünscht wird. Versandhaus „Lebensmittel“ Z. 12 Dresden-A. 1, Marschallstr. 27

Niemand sieht es ihr an Mit dem „Bunten Beyer-Schnitt“ schneidet es sich so leicht, daß mit ihm auch Ungeübten alle unsere Dorell gelingt! Die „Beyer-Schere“ überbiegt stets guten Dln.

Spalt-Tabletten Die Spalt-Tabletten sind ein Kombinationspräparat, das auch die spastischen Ursachen von Kopfschmerzen bekämpft. — Die es Ihnen bringen zu machen, auch unterwegs ein paar Spalt-Tabletten hat sich zu führen, ist jeder Zweckverachtung. 1 kleine Packung 10 Stück. Preis 10 Stück 99 Pfg., 30 Stück RM. 1.75, 48 Stück RM. 2.75. Zu haben in allen Apotheken.

Seifix Dein Bohnenwachs

NUR-BLOND ist ETWAS BESONDERES und soll etwas Besonderes bleiben! Trotz Preisrückgang bleibt NUR-BLOND in Qualität unverändert. Wir können auch gar nicht anders. Das besondere Rezept, auf dem die einzigartige Wirkung dieses Spezialshampoos für Blondinen beruht, garantiert nur die Verwendung allerbesten und besten Rohstoffe. NUR-BLOND wird von Millionen Blondinen auf der ganzen Welt bevorzugt. Es erhält deren Haar — auf natürlichem Wege und durch einfaches Waschen — die leichte Schönheit der Jugend und gibt selbst nachgehärtetem und mattem Haar wieder seinen alten Glanz und verführerischen Glanz wieder. Es macht Ihr Haar und auch Ihre Schattierungen heller durch einfaches Waschen. NUR-BLOND enthält keine Färbstoffe. Kein Brennen und ist frei von Soda. Es schäumt wunderbar, hinterläßt keinen Kalkschleim, macht Ihre Haare weicher, haltbarer und sie garantiert unerschütterlich. Millionen Blondinen in der ganzen Welt besitzen es seit Jahren. Versuchen Sie es selbst und verlangen Sie Ihr Geld zurück, wenn Sie nicht zufrieden sind.

Erst, wenn Sie NUR-BLOND kennen, wissen Sie, wie schön Ihr Blondhaar sein kann!

NUR NUR-BLOND FÜR BLONDINEN

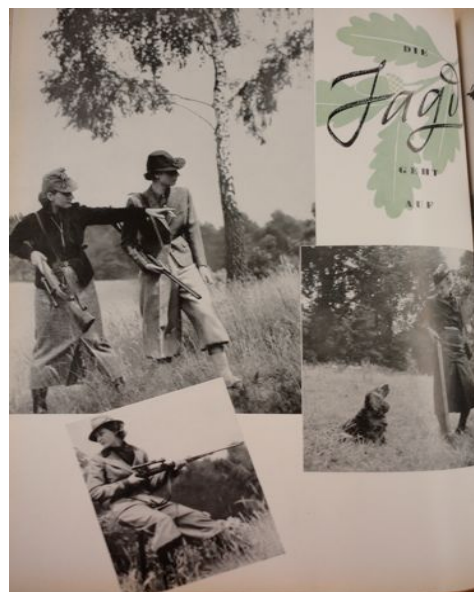
A typical advertisement page in *Die Dame* included a variety of manufactured products to enhance German women’s “natural” beauty. *Die Dame* (1938). Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

While the state tightened its control in spheres like education and reproduction, Goebbels and his acolytes allowed diversity in cultural expression, mostly in the cinema but also in fashion, because German audiences continued to express marked preferences for cultural forms and ideas that did not correspond to Nazi doctrine. In a way, the regime *had to* embrace its ideological competitors in order to accommodate its (female) citizens' fantasies and desires and not to alienate them from the regime. Nazi film stars, in their on- and off-screen personas, assisted the regime's aim of creating the illusion of freedom and cultural diversity. Fashion magazines were allowed to show alternative models of beauty. The Nazi position on fashion and towards the fashion press hence can be described as "controlled laissez-faire." As symbolically captured on the following 1933 cover of *Elegante Welt*, the cosmopolitan, urban, sophisticatedly elegant woman was allowed to exist – under the close but lenient watch of the Nazi state.



Elegante Welt (1933). Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

Along with official rhetoric urging women to focus on racially conscious mothering and housekeeping, elite fashion magazines continued to supply their readership with designs of outfits for cocktail parties, tennis matches, and as captured in the following 1935 issue of *Elegante Welt*, car trips and hunting. Fashion magazines were not concerned about teaching their readers how to re-make old clothes or use home made cleaning agents (as many mainstream NS-publications for women did) but instead described the most current trends for hats, shoes, and lingerie. *Die Dame* and *Elegante Welt*, often using prominent Nazi women as examples, promoted lifestyles that were not limited to children and the kitchen and encouraged conspicuous consumption. Given the growing shortage of not just luxury items but everyday necessities in the mid- and late-1930s these magazines, of course, were deeply embedded in an imaginary reality and completely out of touch with the lives of the majority of women in the Third Reich. Yet, while serving primarily the needs of their affluent clientele, elite fashion magazines also, albeit unintentionally, sanctioned dreaming about alternative pastimes and fashion designs for ordinary women readers.



Instead of mothering children and attending to their households as prescribed by the Nazi regime, these models engaged in less-feminine activities such as car rides and hunting. *Elegante Welt* (1937). Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY, Fit Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

Even a brief analysis of the fashion press in the Third Reich suggests that the Nazis faced challenges when they attempted to gain broad female acceptance of their proposed “Aryan fashions.” As Irene Günther convincingly demonstrates, part of the problem was that Hitler never publicly voiced a coherent, lucid, concrete position on women’s fashions other than endorsing the *Tracht* and the uniform; another reason, perhaps, was the absence of a suitable German role model for the general population to emulate.³⁹⁸ The wives of Nazi officials, Magda Goebbels, Emmy Göring, Margarete Himmler, and the film maker Leni Riefenstahl, may have belonged to the Nazi elite, but they showed no desire to conform to the regime’s anti-cosmetics, anti-smoking, and anti (international)-fashion campaigns. Frau Goebbels frequented expensive fashion salons and even favored the German Jewish couturiers Paul Kuhnen, Richard Goetz, and Fritz Grünfeld. Frau Göring did not shun furs, jewelry, and French and Jewish-made designs. Leni Riefenstahl, on the other hand, rejected not just the dirndl and organizational uniform, but feminine attire in general, appearing everywhere in pants or military-styled outfits. The self-fashioning of these prominent Nazi women certainly collided with images of homespun folk costumes and unassuming uniforms promoted in the official propaganda.

³⁹⁸ In a conference with Party leaders, Hitler declared that “clothing should not now suddenly return to the Stone Age. ... Why should a young woman, who wants to be well-dressed, why should I make that hard for her ... Is it really something so horrible when she looks pretty? Let’s be honest, we all like to see it.” In Guenther, *Nazi Chic*, 112.



Nazi elite, such as Herman Göring and his wife Emmy, was frequently featured on the cover of fashion magazines, but their fashions followed the European trends. While on this 1935 cover of *Die Dame Frau* Göring models rather understated elegance, she was often spotted in more daring styles. Coquettish hats, bold jewelry, and furs (as featured on a model of this 1937 issue of *Elegante Welt*) were essentials of the Nazi elite women's wardrobes. Courtesy: Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY, FIT Library Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives.

Luxury and distinction both of which characterized Nazi wives and Nazi elite in general deserve further analysis. On the one hand, Nazi officials sought to modify the concept of luxury prevalent during the Weimar Republic with the policy of forced Aryanization of businesses and enterprises.³⁹⁹ On the other hand, Nazi dignitaries promoted a supposedly new kind of (middle-class) luxury that was now accessible to all members of the National Community with the help of the state-funded tourism and leisure organization known as *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy): cruises, trips abroad and within Germany, discounted tickets to the theater and cinema, and sports. The

³⁹⁹ In *Mein Kampf* Hitler cited the ostentation of wealth, namely the opulence of Jews as a principal cause of social conflict. He also condemned the excessive visibility of luxury, or more precisely, the inappropriate use of wealth.

regime sought to foster the illusion that under Hitler all members of the Volk were creating a surplus and that the nation as a whole enjoyed unprecedented prosperity including the ability to travel and enjoy “cultured” leisure. Looking at lavishness in relation to Nazi elite, however, reveals that the Nazi regime did not just focus on distributing luxury among ordinary members of the National Community. The Nazi regime offered advantages to racially valuable Germans; at the same time, it granted *extraordinary* benefits and privileges to the Nazi elite: automobiles, villas, domestic personnel, state-of-the-art central heating systems, billiard rooms, and private home cinemas. As Frances d’Almeida points out, flaunting oneself and one’s luxury were essential features of the National Socialist ethos, which explains why the ostentatious villas and luxurious attire of Nazi officials and their wives continued to appear in the press despite all the propaganda that championed frugality and self-sacrifice. In the National Socialist rhetoric, luxury functioned as a mode of distinction separating outsiders from those involved in the NS movement. For Nazi male elite the automobile represented one such distinction; for elite women, fashion played a similar role.⁴⁰⁰

The concept of luxury, distinction, and glamour was nowhere so vividly illustrated as in the Nazi female movie stars. Scholars such as Antje Ascheid, Jana Bruns, and Lutz Koepnick, among others, convincingly illustrate the critical role that Nazi film icons played in the self-stylization of German women in the Third Reich, the development of the Nazi marketplace, and above all in the creation of a double reality: on the one hand,

⁴⁰⁰ Frances D’Almeida, “Luxury and Distinction under National Socialism”, 72.

Germans lived in an Aryanized and streamlined totalitarian state; on the other hand, fashion and entertainment remained relatively diverse and free cultural spaces.⁴⁰¹

UFA's (Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft) film stars were the most visible women in the National Socialist state, while Nazi wives were often excluded from their husbands' appearances or, like Hitler's lover Eva Braun, completely hidden from public view. Nazi leaders were often photographed in the company of movie divas, who, ironically, hardly embodied the Nazi ideal of the homebound, make-up free fecund mother. UFA's press photographs perpetuated glamour as a prerequisite to women's appeal by featuring the beloved Zarah Leander in the most exclusive gowns, ostentatious fur coats, and exquisite jewelry. Her interviews described her passion for sailing, golf, and silk gowns.⁴⁰² Given, Leander's publicity reels also emphasized that she was a hard worker and a devoted mother and wife, yet a mother and wife who enjoyed perks such as bodyguards, a chauffeur, a riding instructor, a gymnastics teacher, a private chef, and a

⁴⁰¹ Between 1935 and 1938, Lutz Koepnick explains in *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood*, the Nazi regime attempted to create a German Hollywood in order to boost consumption of German-made entertainment as well as to "set moods, define norms, and align conflicting interpretations of reality". (73) A multinational venue (through coproduction arrangements with European neighbors and marketing in areas as remote as the Balkans of Latin America), the Nazi film industry produced light amusement fare that omitted any references to Nazi political agendas or idols, aspiring to "stir national sentiments and exploit Germanness as a conduit to international success." (74) Just like Hitler's Germany was not a perfectly organized machine of domination and mobilization, Nazi cinema was not a production of overt fascist aesthetics. Rather, it functioned as a "relatively apolitical sphere of private distraction and commodity display" (72). While offering entertainment for the masses, the Nazis sought to "organize the viewer's spontaneity" by offering "predigested choices that defined points of view and – with the help of film music's beats and rhythms – organized emotions." Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror*, 72-74.

⁴⁰² The popular press of the 1930s and early 1940s indicated that many German women dreamt about becoming movie stars. The publications of the period gladly fed their readers' desires by offering quizzes that prompted women to check whether they were as "expressive as Zarah Leander" or "photogenic as Brigitte Horney". Bruns, 38.

nanny for her two children.⁴⁰³ The accounts of Leander and Harvey repeatedly blended, according to Bruns, “exoticism, glamour, luxury, and international flair” with “ordinariness, accessibility and familiarity.”⁴⁰⁴ The on-screen personas of Harvey and Leander, on the other hand, were also often at variance with the ideological mandates of the regime. The standardized narrative that came to mark Harvey films, Antje Ascheid explains, presented her as an unruly or androgynous figure whose eroticism derived from a pubescent appeal. In contrast to “womanly” stars such as Söderbaum or Leander, Harvey was cast as an audacious, sprightly coquette, the eternal “girl-woman,” thoroughly modern, neither vamp nor mother – a heroine that reflected Harvey’s Weimar roots and Weimar female iconography, not National Socialist ideology.⁴⁰⁵ Leander always played a star and an independent woman. The emancipated aspects of Leander’s strong, sexually experienced, professionally employed characters referred more to the ideals of the German bourgeois women’s movement than the reactionary, patriarchal Nazi conceptualization of womanhood.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Bruns, *Nazi Cinema’s New Women*, 129. At the same time, Bruns wrote, Nazi star reporters styled Leander as a model of conventional femininity who enjoyed the company of her husband and children, was a skillful homemaker, and showed particular affection for her *Heimat* (Sweden). Juxtaposed with accounts of Leander’s lavishness and exotic glamour, such a presentation of Leander had a dissonant tone; both, however, furthered the aims of the regime by appealing to “fantasies of consumption and erotic delight, ... delineating them as extraordinary ... and juxtaposing them with a more real, ideologically affirmative picture of Leander as a dutiful wife and mother.” Bruns, 132.

⁴⁰⁴ Bruns, *Nazi Cinema’s New Women*, 131.

⁴⁰⁵ Antje Ascheid, *Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema*, 104.

⁴⁰⁶ Ascheid, *Stardom and Womanhood*, 175.

In addition to being visibly made up, glamorously styled, and professionally employed, Nazi actresses were also women who did not necessarily look or sound German or strive to project Germanness. A large number of Nazi stars were foreign-born: Söderbaum and Leander were Swedish, Lida Baarova (also notoriously known as Goebbels's lover) was Czech, Marika Rökk was Hungarian, and Lilian Harvey was British. Stars like Harvey and Leander especially emanated cosmopolitanism and were often cast in roles that thematized and emphasized their foreignness. Their exotic looks, accents, and cosmopolitan flair, as well as their eroticism, not their physical fitness or projection of fertility, propelled them to stardom. More than her face and figure, Leander's alto voice was perceived as the hallmark of her celebrity status. Only a few of Leander's musical numbers during her UFA period really adhered to what the Nazi ideologues described as "German art." Musical forms considered "racially degenerate" in the NS ideology dominated her performances: foxtrot, tango, habanera, and czardas.⁴⁰⁷ The songs performed by Leander and Harvey in their films became national hits, inaugurating new commercial relations between film and record industry. With the help of Nazi stars German film became a cultural product package that offered celebrity-endorsed music, fashion, makeup, and tourism for mass consumption. The ambiguity of Third Reich popular culture so effectively captured in Nazi stars and the Nazi cinema project in general pointed to tensions that were not resolved in the social cultural sphere of Nazi Germany. A culture of fragmentation and heterogeneity – albeit largely

⁴⁰⁷ Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror*, 83.

orchestrated by the state itself – Nazi culture could be held together only by a totalitarian system with leaders comfortable and even committed to hypocrisy.⁴⁰⁸

With so many of National Socialism’s most visible women veering away from the officially advertised female ideals, it is no wonder that Nazi stalwarts had a difficult time finding the embodiment of the female Aryan ideal. Only Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the director of all women’s organizations, appeared to internalize and embody the features and characteristics of the Nazi Woman. This blue-eyed mother of six children alternated between her NS-Frauenschaft uniform and dirndl-like dresses, shunned makeup, wore her hair in a bun or braids around her face and enthusiastically trumpeted both National Socialist doctrine and the conservative fashioning of women.



Uniformed women as fashion models
NS-Women's Watch (1940)⁴⁰⁹



Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the “First Lady of the Reich” (1934)

⁴⁰⁸ Just as women’s fashioning was fraught in the Third Reich with ideological contradictions, Nazi-created cinematic images of womanhood were “thoroughly ambiguous, oscillating between deviance and conformity, open-mindedness and reaction.” Jana Bruns, *Nazi Cinema's New Women*, 7-8.

If Nazi policy towards women's fashions manifested many ideological incongruities, the regime was consistent in one respect: that the German fashion industry had to be completely *judenrein* (cleansed of the Jews). The regime-sanctioned boycotts and destruction of Jewish stores and *Konfektion* (fashion houses), the replacement of Jewish owners, and the virulent anti-Semitic campaign in all spheres of German society along with the forced deportation of the Jews and their emigration, all helped achieve that goal of the regime by January 1939. Ironically, the Aryanization of fashion had a perilous effect on German clothing and textile manufacturing and fashion design: historically, Jewish fashion designers and Jewish-run *Konfektion* were instrumental in garnering international acclaim for Germany's fashion industry, and their abrupt absence caused Germany's fashion exports and domestic sales to drop. New, Aryan owners of the *Konfektion* houses often had little or no practical experience in the garment industry or lacked design skills.

The fact that the Aryanization of the fashion industry did not automatically result in the creation of "unique German fashion" is well illustrated in the history of the *Deutsches Modeamt*. The only fashion enterprise of the Third Reich with full government support at the ministerial level, *Deutsches Modeamt* was founded within five months of Hitler's rise to power. The goals of this new fashion establishment (later renamed *Deutsches Mode-Institut* – German Fashion Institute), as specified in the official announcement, were "to unite all existing artistic and economic forces in the nation for the creation of independent and tasteful German fashion products ... and through a comprehensive public campaign

⁴⁰⁹ German Propaganda Archive online,
<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/volskundrasse1936-8.html>

to increase consumers' receptivity to German fashion products."⁴¹⁰ All fashion designs had to be produced from domestic textiles and materials and reflect the nature and character of the German woman. A spokesman for the fashion institute assured that the *Modeamt* "will make absolutely certain that German fashion will not be a fashion for the upper ten thousand ... rather, it will be a fashion for everyone."⁴¹¹ The fashion designs at the subsequent shows organized by the *Institut*, however, while they were all beautifully executed and had German-manufactured materials and accessories, lacked anything that would mark them as uniquely German.⁴¹²

After a hiatus between 1934 and 1936, the *Institut* resumed its activity under new leadership. Hela Strehl, the new managing director of the Institute, stated its changed goals:

Whoever thinks that the *Deutsches Mode-Institut* will now forcefully and suddenly concoct a German fashion or something similar is gravely mistaken. To be sure, we want, in time, to create an international reputation for German fashion product. Fashion is – like art, like music – something that cannot be halted by national boundaries, not even by oceans. So, the Mode-Institut, with full official support, will be the central

⁴¹⁰ Although the *Institut*'s explicit goal was to provide leadership for the German fashion industry, it was repeatedly emphasized that its designs lay "within the framework of international fashion." Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 170.

⁴¹¹ The *Institut*'s first fashion show took place in August of 1933, in the upper rooms located at the *Zoologischer Garten* in Berlin, with more than 180 individual designers participating. The show was a mixture of propaganda and fashion display: the captions to the design models emphasized that they were made out of German wool, hand-woven textiles, and satin. All the German fashion shows were timed to precede the Parisian ones. Despite the concurrent Aryanization of German society, Jewish fashion houses of Hermann Hoffman and Hermann Gerson participated in the first three fashion designs shows. Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 171.

⁴¹² Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 17.

administration of all fashion happenings in Germany and also the representative of German fashion abroad. ...⁴¹³

The history of the *Deutsches Mode-Institut* highlighted several important facts about fashion in the Third Reich: first, ideology alone could not produce unique German fashion; rather, it ensured that international fashion was reproduced with materials manufactured in Germany and a domestic workforce. Second, even the Nazi-loyal leadership of the *Institut* understood that in order to be economically viable, e.g., domestically and internationally popular, fashion had to reflect the needs and tastes of the consumer. Dirndls and uniforms may have fit staunch Nazi supporters and the members of Nazi organizations, but they were in no way the fashion accepted by the Nazi elite or the majority of women as their primary attire. Finally, the Aryanization of the fashion industry left Germany without the most experienced and talented designers. These factors along with the rivalry and power struggles within the *Institut* became the primary reasons why Nazi couture fashion never took shape.

For the Nazis and the Bolsheviks both, the creation of a distinct, ideologically imbued consumer culture played an important role in the building of their totalitarian empires. Despite their different conceptualizations of an ideal society, the Nazis and the Bolsheviks both strove to create conscious, rational, socially useful modes of working, earning, living, and consuming. This goal was fundamentally interrelated with the goal of reforming popular attitudes towards physical appearance, fashion, and clothes in general. More so than men, women were encouraged to accept Nazi and Bolshevik-imposed re-fashioning.

⁴¹³ In Irene Guenther, *Nazi chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, 176.

At various points, Nazi stalwarts and the regime in general attempted to convince German women to adopt “pre-modern” habits: weave and spin clothes at home, don traditional folk wear, substitute manufactured household products with homemade ones, reject “artificial” beauty enhancements, abandon the working world, and revert to mothering and housekeeping. While some groups such as staunch female Nazi proselytizers may have found these ideas appealing, even they hardly implemented them fully into life: organizational work and classes left little time for properly managing one’s family and home, less so for weaving and spinning. For the majority of German women, however, the anti-modernist ideology of National Socialism did not sit well, perhaps because women, along with official propaganda, were bombarded with a plethora of magazines and advertisements that offered modern means of attaining (international) fashion and beauty ideals. The regime consciously allowed such ideological incongruities to develop and flourish due to economic considerations and political imperatives, and sometimes to satisfy personal preferences of the Nazi female elite.

Among their goals, the Bolsheviks pursued not just the redistribution of wealth and the radical change of the structured government, but the creation of proletarian, socialist culture and *byt*. State model retail stores served as a means for achieving the regime’s socio-economic goals, which included “revolutionary struggle against private enterprise, democratizing consumption for the working classes, and establishing efficient and dignified norms of buying, selling and consumption compatible with socialist lifestyle.”⁴¹⁴ The forging of new consumption practices was accompanied by Bolshevik attempts at creating proletarian styles, because as in Nazi Germany, in Bolshevik Russia

⁴¹⁴ Hilton, Marjorie L. “Retailing the Revolution: the State Department Store (GUM) and Soviet Society in the 1920s”, 940.

physical and sartorial fashioning of women served as an important tool of demarcation. It was conceptualized as a means to differentiate between the Bolsheviks and the capitalist West, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

In Bolshevik Russia and Nazi Germany both, clothing was exploited as a means by which the regimes hoped to consolidate political unity and form a community. The rhetoric of rejecting negative foreign influences and creating a distinct and popular national style was similar in both totalitarian realms; however, the connection between “national” and “ethnic” was more pronounced in Nazi Germany. Because “Soviet” was not a nationality, in Russia the term *national* meant politically correct, e.g., Bolshevik. The pursuit of “purity” in the fashion industry backfired for both the Bolsheviks and the Nazis: Aryanization left Germany without much of its skillful, sophisticated workforce just as did the elimination of the private tailor and ‘eclectic-bourgeois’ designers in Russia.

Fashion magazines created a fantasy world that was largely apolitical and that bridged international borders. They situated Germany and Russia – and their women – in the world community and channeled their desires to emulate glamorous and elegant women. Fashion magazines supplied women with visions of femininity that were cosmopolitan and sexually alluring and thus strikingly different from officially espoused feminine ideals. Because both regimes were torn between their egalitarian and elitist pretensions, alternative fashion fantasies were allowed to continue – in Russia until Stalin firmly consolidated his power, in Germany until the demise of the Third Reich. One of the reasons for the longer lifespan of international fashion in Nazi Germany is perhaps its ideological purpose: like Goebbels’ sanctioned entertainment films, fashion magazines

served as a smokescreen and a diversion for the regime's methodical persecution of women (and men) who did not fit Nazi standards. Fashion magazines never performed such a role in Bolshevik Russia; rather, they were an expression of pluralism, idealism, and experimentation that marked the pre-Stalin years. During the Stalinist era, fashion magazines were replaced with Socialist Realist visual propaganda and professional journals of Soviet sewing industry and clothes' manufacturing. This development was consistent with Stalin's overall "streamlining" of the Soviet cultural realm.

Both regimes attempted to create self-contained domains in which everything and everybody was subjected to the needs of the totalitarian state. Fashion and the self-fashioning of citizens, however, remained the area where the totalitarian state was least able to achieve control – as compared with politics, education, music, or art. It was also a realm where both regimes consciously allowed some freedom – more so in Germany than in Russia. Ultimately, the Bolshevik and Nazi ideologies both displayed conflicting sartorial messages and iconography. This confusing mixture of intensely modern and radically anti-modernist aspects was what marked "proletarian fashion" in Russia and Nazi "haute couture."

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of the Woman Question and the New Woman has demonstrated that Nazi and Bolshevik regimes, while they never acknowledged even a subterranean influence upon each other or identified any affinities in their systems of political and social control, adopted a strikingly similar approach when dealing with women. This approach was culturally specific and reflected Russia's and Germany's respective economic milieus; it included the re-conceptualization of femininity, the family, women's work, and reproductive choices and sexuality. The Nazi and Bolshevik approaches to the Woman Question also entailed creation, as well as accommodation, of distinct popular and consumer cultures. As a result of Nazi and Bolshevik transformations, Soviet and Aryan "new women" displayed both intensely modern and radically anti-modernist characteristics in their sartorial choices, conduct, and mentality.

An important difference between Nazi and Bolshevik positions on the Woman Question, however, was their conceptualization of gender. For the Nazis, the ultimate goal of Hitler's "revolution" was reconstructing Germany along racial lines and segregating the sexes. The Nazis used the Woman Question and the controversial New Woman to establish themselves as a conservative party (that is, the party that loathed the Weimar democratic system, Marxism and Bolshevism, and sexually emancipated women, and was explicitly nationalistic and anti-Semitic) which was dedicated, among less publicized goals, to providing men with work and returning women to their "natural roles." The perceived "crisis of masculinity" along with the threat of Bolshevism largely informed the initial conservative bend of Nazi politics towards women. In the early years

of the Third Reich, the Nazi “new woman” was conceptualized primarily as “the mother of the race.”

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, essentially sought the elimination of gender, that is, the creation of a society in which women would be more like men and in which both genders would subordinate their traditional gender characteristics to the Greater Cause of building socialism/communism. As a radical movement that rose in response to autocracy and social inequality, Bolshevism did not differentiate between “male” and “female” issues and used the Woman Question primarily as a platform to condemn the oppression and backwardness of women under tsarism. The Bolshevik “new woman” was less maternal, more industrially skilled, and more involved in social activism.

Significantly, the desire to define women’s reproductive choices and control their activities inside and outside the home animated both Nazi and Bolshevik ideals of womanhood. At the end of the interwar period, however, neither Stalinist nor National Socialist murderous utopias could function without women performing (simultaneously) in several roles. In Germany in the late 1930s, women were forced to play a role as part of the national workforce, social mothers of the National Community at the disposal of Nazi leaders, and fecund mothers. Similarly in Russia, women had to assume a triple burden of “volunteerism” as assigned by the Party or Komsomol, work outside the home, and childbearing.

In order to gain and sustain women’s loyalty and support, the Nazis and the Bolsheviks extensively exploited the rhetoric of liberation – not because the liberation of women played an instrumental role in their political agendas, but because by the time both regimes seized power most women were familiar with various paradigms of

emancipation: through popular novels, newspapers, films, women's organizations or movements, work, or personal life choices. The visions outlined in the writings by Verbitskaia, Kollontai, Baum and Bäumer, in addition to evoking these authors' personal, unique convictions, also largely reflected the beliefs and hopes of a particular class and generation of women whose numbers were significant. Verbitskaia, Kollontai, Baum, and Bäumer thus represented ideological competitors whom the Bolsheviks and the Nazis respectively had to take into account at least until they established their one-party dictatorships. In Russia, several facets of emancipation described by Verbitskaia and Kollontai formed part of the "revolutionary ethos" of the early 1920s: pluralism of opinions about the family, sexuality, and marriage; expanded involvement of women in society and politics via Zhenotdel; and women's increased geographical mobility and literacy. In Germany, Bäumer, the BDF, and members of various women's organizations supported the regime (at least in the beginning) because it seemed to have realized German feminists' dreams by creating an extensive network of women's organizations, supported and funded by the state.

In addition, the writings of these influential New Women conveniently provided the Nazis and the Bolsheviks with a platform to advocate their paradigms of liberation as more progressive and beneficial, as well as ideologically correct. As the Bolsheviks restructured Russian society in terms of class and the Nazis "cleansed" Germany of its racially inferior inhabitants, "new" categories (re-) emerged in the evaluation of emancipation. Obviously, Nazi ideologues claimed, *Jewish* liberals such as Baum could not teach Aryan women about their true calling; surely, Bolshevik theoreticians argued,

bourgeois authors such as Verbitskaia knew nothing about the aspirations of proletarian women.

The long tradition of Russian female radicalism may have helped the Bolsheviks remove bourgeois liberals such as Verbitskaia from the cohort of “new women” despite the latter’s explicit support of an alternative, socialist form of government in the years preceding the October Revolution. Historically in Russia, radical women tended to discard traditional constituents of femininity: domesticity, family life, and parenthood. Prominent Bolshevik women such as Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, and Nadezhda Krupskaja, among others, adhered to this model of “de-feminized womanhood” just as their nineteenth-century radical female counterparts had done. Unlike Verbitskaia, who advocated personal emancipation for the sake of personal fulfillment, Bolshevik women insisted on the individual’s self-abnegation and complete dedication to the Bolshevik cause. While the Bolsheviks viewed women’s liberation from patriarchy and autocracy as a consequence of their planned social revolution, they also believed that embedded, traditional gender roles would not prevail under socialism. If they were educated (literate) and converted to Bolshevism, Bolshevik ideologues insisted, women would be glad to cast off the “shackles of motherhood and domestic drudgery” and become active builders of socialism. Under the Bolsheviks, the so-called “work among women” (that was performed by Zhenotdel agencies during the 1920s) focused almost exclusively on the progressive features of the regime (communal halls, daycares, worker palaces, party organizations, etc), not on challenges that “liberated” women faced in the Komsomol, during NEP and later, and during all-out campaigns for industrialization and collectivization. In addition, “work among women,” that is, the propaganda work

performed by city women among female peasants, as seen in the officially acclaimed novels *Dvor* and *Lesozavod* by Anna Karavaeva, included encouraging women to bring potentially subversive elements to Soviet justice: kulaks, collectivization-resistant women, and promiscuous men. In Bolshevik Russia, the Woman Question was not about revolutionizing gender relations or involving women in government or policy making, but about creating an enthusiastic, dedicated, and gender-unrestricted workforce that fearlessly implemented party economic and cultural policies into life; it was also about enlisting women as social surveillance agents. Autobiographies of Soviet women from the 1920s, such as the 1924 autobiography of the ardent Komsomol agitator Paraskeva Ivanova, indeed reflect that the Bolshevik emphasis on the “radicalization” of womanhood resonated with some groups of women, mostly with those in their late teens or early twenties. Ivanova’s reminiscences, which reiterate self-abnegation as a necessary condition to serve the Party, succinctly capture the mood of her generation: “I was young and inexperienced. But what did it matter? I had firmly resolved to renounce everything personal and give myself to the party fully, irreversibly. I knew I had to rid myself of all the elements of the old ways that still lived within me and study, study as hard as I could ... in order to become ... as good as the old Bolsheviks.”⁴¹⁵ In the minds of young idealists such as Ivanova, giving oneself fully to the Party meant liberation; implementing Party mandates into life meant making history along with “the old Bolsheviks.”

The most fitting and perhaps tragic example of how the Bolsheviks exploited the rhetoric of liberation, however, is embodied in Kollontai. Kollontai’s ideas may have been utopian in the sense that she presupposed that *all* women saw (traditional) marriage,

⁴¹⁵ In the *Shadows of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., 214.

domesticity, and (private) motherhood as anachronistic and hindering their intellectual development and destroying their social self. However, Kollontai's desire to design a politically influential office that dealt specifically with women's issues and had authority in services and policies that concerned them (such as women's congresses and Zhenotdel) cannot be called unreasonable. After all, the October revolution, as the Bolsheviks had proclaimed, bestowed Russian women with "true" equality. Kollontai was justified in hoping that the Bolshevik male leaders would attempt to realize their promises to women.

But the Bolshevik paradigm of "emancipation," like the Nazi one, was only minutely about women. It may have appeared more progressive on the surface than the patriarchal Nazi model, but it was fraudulent nonetheless. In Bolshevik and, later, Stalinist Russia, women were encouraged to lead *only* in the ways that furthered the aims of the regime: by taking on strenuous, physically challenging jobs (such as mining, metro building, construction of railways or power lines in Siberia), exerting themselves at production plants, modernizing Soviet Russia's agriculture and countryside with limited machinery, funds, and workforce, heroically managing despite shortages of basic consumer goods and the lack of daycare centers, reforming resistant comrades, and reporting on unstable, subversive, class-foreign "elements." Socialist Realist writers such as Karavaeva brilliantly captured "the spirit of the times" by showing their women readers how Soviet ideology worked: Bolshevism, Karavaeva claimed, was the only way to a bright socialist future; one lived that future by believing in it despite grim reality.

The example of Karavaeva gives us more food for thought than just an illustration of Stalinist utopia. Like industrially heroic Stakhanovites, fearless Khetugorovites, dedicated women scientists, and bold women aviators, Socialist Realist authors such as

Karavaeva formed the cohort of Soviet “new women.” Instead of questioning and resisting the system as Kollontai did, Karavaeva and other “new women” – perhaps not always consciously – exploited its mechanisms to carve out comfortable, harmonious, and fulfilling lives for themselves. They did not question Party objectives nor did they object to the Party’s questioning and purging of “enemies of the people.” They instead focused wholeheartedly on their tasks at hand without giving much thought to the encroaching terror and surveillance. Having internalized the values and the language of the regime, Soviet “new women” felt themselves agents of history, grateful beneficiaries of the state, heroines, and daring dreamers. They felt productive, fulfilled, and invigorated by the Soviet civilization. “When I was riding in the newly built metro,” wrote the nineteen-year-old Lida Sorokina in the February 1935 issue of the *Woman Worker*, “I marveled at its luxurious marble walls and its exquisite décor and thought to myself with pride: my labor is here! I did not realize it when I was working deeply underground and was involved in various, seemingly unrelated tasks. But the beauty of [completed] metro stations surpasses the opulence of palaces. It is the beauty of our girls’ labor.”⁴¹⁶ Like women metro builders, young female Soviet scientists found self-fulfillment in their profession and fashioned themselves as part of a generation of superhumans. “I am twenty-four years old,” wrote V. Balakshina in the 1935 *Woman Worker*, “I am an active *Komsomolka*, a post-doctoral student of physiology and biology, and a mother of a one-and-a-half year old daughter. I defended my dissertation earlier this year and dream about getting a second medical degree. I want to become a surgeon. ... Many marvel at my productivity and efficiency and ask how I can be so fully engaged

⁴¹⁶ M. Shelkanova, “Our women metro builders,” *Rabotnitsa*, February 1935, 11

in science and the Komsomol. That is because I force myself to rest on the weekends at least half a day. I compete in various sports, ski, skate, and shoot a rifle. Twice a week I play volleyball for two hours and do gymnastics. I read classical literature, listen to music, and go to the theater.”⁴¹⁷ As far as we can deduce from the article, Balakshina was single and not concerned about parenting her small daughter or dividing her life between scientific experiments, studies, sports, and the Komsomol. She embodied the Stalinist feminine ideal: she was a prolific researcher (author of ten domestically and internationally acclaimed scientific essays, according to the article), e.g., an overachiever, an ardent Komsomol volunteer, and a mother.

Soviet “new women” believed in what they did, felt empowered by their achievements and were re-enforced in their self-value by official recognition: medals, Stalin’s monetary prizes, and rewards in kind. Balakshina was “given monetary prizes four times, awarded books, vacation trips to Worker Rest Homes and even was sponsored to spend national holidays in Moscow.”⁴¹⁸ Young metro builders received high pay – seven hundred rubles per month – and took state-reimbursed vacations in Soviet resorts. As the new Soviet “nobility,” they saw a “magic tablecloth” with consumer delights and material luxuries unfold before their eyes; they also enjoyed the respect and admiration of other women. Being a “new Soviet woman” was, indeed, a lucrative and invigorating occupation, and for those looking for guidance, emulating “new women” was a way to fit into the rapidly industrializing, politically and culturally leveled Stalinist society.

⁴¹⁷ V. Balakshina, “Nauchnyii rabotnik, active Komsomolka and mother,” *Rabotnitsa* (June), 1937, 11

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*

In contrast to the Bolshevik message to women, which remained relatively monolithic and uniform (even after Stalin reinstated the traditional family structure and encouraged women to be mothers in addition to builders of socialism), the Nazi message was fraught with ideological contradictions from the start. The perceived “crisis of masculinity” and the threat of Bolshevism may have determined the Nazis’ initial removal of women from the workforce, politics, and higher education, but the regime’s pragmatic concerns in preparation for war overrode ideological mandates and brought women back to the work world only a few years after the Nazis had seized power. Their rhetoric may have emphasized frugality and self-sacrifice for all Germans, but it also sanctioned luxury and privileges for the Nazi elite, as well as for those who actively supported the movement.

If in Russia the category of “new women” was relatively uniform in that it was comprised of overachieving builders of socialism and Socialist Realist chroniclers, in Germany, this category was broader, ranging from the heroines of Ina Seidel’s novels, who willingly sacrificed their sons for Germany’s wars, to untiring Nazi proselytizers such as Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, to glamorous yet maternal films stars (with the exception of Lilian Harvey). If the Bolsheviks incorporated the tradition of female radicalism into their emancipatory paradigm by visualizing “new women” as self-abnegating, genderless comrades of revolutionary men, the Nazis aligned their vision of women’s “liberation” with maternalist ethics – by reinterpreting this nineteenth-century idea along racial lines. In their own way, each of the Nazi “new women” asserted the supremacy of the National Socialist worldview and sustained the regime. Seidel’s racially conscious, patriotic female protagonists foreshadowed the role of the German mother in the imminent “total

war,” lauding their sacrifices and emotional suffering for the sake of the Volk. Scholtz-Klink and her volunteers propagated fertility and domesticity as German ideals, extended maternal care to the members of the National Community through *Winterhilfswerk* and *Eintopf* programs, and involved themselves directly in Nazi sterilization campaigns (by reporting on “unfit” Germans and working as nurses and social workers). Nazi film stars provided an escape from the highly politicized realm of the Third Reich while channeling women’s potentially subversive desires for luxury, exoticism, and glamour.

Like Bolshevik “new women,” Nazi “new women” were expected to deny themselves fully and become selfless servants of male Nazi leaders. Yet, the BDM’s leader Jutta Rüdiger and the NSF leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink serve as fitting examples of how even staunch women Nazis did not remain simply passive consumers of ideology but instead took charge, only to create a totalitarian reality of their own in which girls and young women under their command were conditioned to abandon their individual desires and follow their superiors. Scholtz-Klink and her volunteers, and BDM leaders and their charges demonstrated both modern and anti-modernist characteristics: they propagated patriarchal ideals and pre-modern lifestyle practices with the help of modern means and rituals. The BDM’s and NSF’s curricula may have reflected conservative views about sexuality, domesticity, and the family, but extensive roles for women outside the home, national programs and sports activities for women, and the creation of an exclusive (Nazi) women’s ethos represented distinctly modern features.

This study has identified tensions and disjunctures between ideology and popular culture, between totalitarian ethos and the rhetoric of liberation, in Nazi Germany and Bolshevik and Stalinist Russia. Arguing against older (separate) analyses of Nazi

Germany and Bolshevik and Stalinist Russia, I have demonstrated that neither of these regimes sent a monolithic, uniform message to women nor that women under Hitler, Lenin and Stalin could be described merely as victims or perpetrators. By shifting the focus from the dichotomy of “dictator/victims” to “dictator/new women/agents,” I wanted to show that Nazi and Bolshevik/Stalinist “new women” were not mere automatons but rather conscious agents within totalitarian systems.

The history of the Woman Question and New Woman under the Nazis and the Bolsheviks reveals that women in Germany and Russia lived in dual realities: one that was consistently fashioned for them by totalitarian rulers and another that they fashioned themselves. While in general women’s freedoms and rights were undermined by Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin’s pursuits of supremacy, Nazi and Bolshevik ideologies hardly achieved control over all women and even the kind of control that they did achieve was by no means total. “Racially inferior” women in Germany and “class-foreign” women in Russia became primary victims of the Nazi and Bolshevik regimes, respectively, while Nazi and Soviet “new women” refashioned the misogynist and brutal realities of the Third Reich and Stalinist Russia respectively for their own benefit. They became active agents in sustaining and strengthening Hitler’s, Lenin’s, and Stalin’s murderous utopias and hence also bear guilt for the violent politics of Nazism, Bolshevism, and Stalinism.

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Chapter 5

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Das Blatt der Hausfrau

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Elegante Welt

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