TOO MANY (WORKING) WOMEN: ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION
AND CONSTRUCTING GENDER ROLES IN WESTERN GERMANY, 1946-
1957

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Abstract

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Too Many (Working) Women: Economic Reconstruction and Constructing Gender Roles in Western Germany, 1946-1957 (104 pp.)

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This thesis addresses the success of policymakers in the U.S. occupied zone of western Germany, 1946-1957, in encouraging western German working women to see themselves primarily as wives and mothers rather than as members of the workforce. Western German policymakers believed that the success of reconstruction depended on consumption and sought for ways to integrate working women’s salaries into the economy. In order to remove the vestiges of National Socialism from German society and to create a social model opposed to Communism, western German leaders prioritized the traditional family unit and ignored the realities of a changed demographic that necessitated female employment. By synthesizing written sources with media images, this study concludes that western German media succeeded in inundating females with images of the “complete” family. At the same time, however, women did not passively react to family policy and attendant media, but rather actively chose and internalized their vocations as working women or homemakers.

Approved:

_____________________________________________________________
Benita Blessing
Assistant Professor of History
This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Karol Wojtyla, whose teachings on the human person have contributed to my understanding of and appreciation for the body and the family.
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Introduction

The major Allied powers of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States convened in February of 1945 at the Yalta Conference to plan for the occupation of defeated Germany. At Yalta, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin agreed to only provide Germans with subsistence living, significantly reduce Germany’s industrial capabilities, and conduct trials for war criminals. At the Potsdam Conference six months later, in July 1945, the same Allied leaders changed their occupation language, stating that, “The purposes of the occupation of Germany [would be]…to convince the German people that they have suffered a total military defeat,” while at the same time, “To prepare for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful cooperation in international life by Germany.” The Allies leaders not only intended to occupy Germany; they also clearly stated that Germany’s reconstruction would follow the model most satisfactory to the occupying powers.1

The United States claimed the western zone of Germany (extending from northern Hess to southern Bavaria and the northern portions of Baden-Württemburg) for occupation in 1946. Buildings in ruins, food shortages—which had begun in 1942 as the result of harsh winters and the war years—and black market activity pervaded Germany’s cities. Casualties from World War II left Germany with a predominantly female demographic. Women had demonstrated

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their leadership abilities in supporting dependants, oftentimes working full-time while running a household, and protecting their families during air raids. After the war, many of these same women cleared rubble, made ends meet despite the food shortage, and maneuvered their way through the black market. In the absence of the male provider, women performed the duties and actions German society traditionally assigned to men.

Western Germany’s reconstruction depended on integrating working women—and their salaries—into the economy. Yet media images in western Germany emphasized the position of the wife and mother and, in effect, denied the existence of women with disposable income. The Soviet zone, on the other hand, supported gender equality by stressing the importance of women’s presence in the home, as well as in the workforce. Eastern and western Germany’s social models created tensions, which translated into public policy issues about reeducation and democratization. Both Germanys battled for women’s consumer (and thus political) loyalties in increasingly overt ideological attacks through a variety of media images such as cinema, advertisements, posters, and women’s magazines. These images revealed how western German policymakers attempted to reconcile military defeat with reconstruction and competition with eastern Germany for legitimacy and sovereignty.

This thesis addresses the appropriation of the traditional family model by policymakers in the U.S. occupied zone of western Germany, 1946-1957, in encouraging western German working women to see themselves primarily as wives and mothers rather than as members of the workforce. By prioritizing the
traditional, pre-World War II *Hausfrau*, western German and U.S. leaders attempted to reconstruct traditional gender roles in a reeducation program that included concealing public representations of the rising numbers of wage earning women. By ignoring the realities of a changed demographic that required female employment, policymakers hoped to – at least publicly – remove the effects of National Socialism on the German family and the perception of western Germany at the international level.

This study contributes to the field of women’s and gender studies, as well as cultural analyses of postwar Germany and the cold war. Consumer studies on gender and consumption in modern Germany have significantly changed the historiography in both U.S. and German scholarship; yet these works have not considered the relationship between working women and the manipulation and construction of gender hierarchies through consumerism and advertising. I demonstrate this nexus of consumer practices, economic policies, and social mores within the context of the economic reconstruction of western Germany.

This study takes into account the economic theories developed in western Germany, which argued that participation in consumer practices equaled citizenship. Although working women comprised an essential part of western Germany’s economic reconstruction, German and U.S. leaders placed emphasis not on women as employees but rather on their potential role as consumers for the traditional, nuclear family. Thus public policy denied the feminization of the workforce while exaggerating the role of the female homemaker in consumer activities. In sum, this research seeks to examine the interplay between western
German policymakers’ projected roles for women in the postwar economy and working women themselves, whether single or waiting for the return of their husbands.2

I address how western German leaders encouraged economic reconstruction by marketing goods aimed at female homemakers. Western Germany initially viewed American-style mass industrialization and consumerism as detrimental to establishing a distinctive postwar Germany. The economic boom of the 1950s and rising tensions with the Soviet occupation zone of eastern Germany, however, compelled western German officials to accept U.S. consumer culture as symbolic of democracy and the free world. I consider how German advertisers and policymakers worked together to promote a return to “normalcy” in the form of a female consumer of household products. With this strategy, media images targeted working women with disposable income while also appeasing German policymakers skeptical of American consumer culture through the attendant advertising, which recast the female consumer in a traditional social role of homemaker and wife.

Finally, I give attention to the gender hierarchies in western Germany following World War II. Contrary to popular assumptions that National Socialism promoted only motherhood, Nazi economic policymakers had redefined singleness for women by encouraging them to contribute to the Volk by entering the workforce. After World War II, however, working women who refused to abandon employment or were unable to leave the work force for financial reasons

were viewed as dangerously self-reliant, which fed into a still-extant interwar “new woman” stereotype that working women were by definition sexually promiscuous. At the same time, postwar western German women also pursued equal rights in the workforce, complaining of wage discrepancies and harassment. Nowhere did German policymakers and society address this tension between woman as worker and woman as homemaker encouraged to deny her identity as a wage-earner.

I focus on western Germany in order to examine the formation of western Germany’s a social model, which coincided with the U.S. societal structure and denied the legitimacy of the Soviet social model. Like western Germany, the United States addressed the issue of women in the workforce and how to convince those women to make way for the men returning from the war. The United States and western German policymakers had similar goals in re-establishing a prewar society and this endeavor led western German policymakers to accept American consumer goods, which they had beforehand rejected. In this way, western German consumerism and the construction of social roles are tied to U.S. reconstruction policies and consumer products. Unlike the Soviet Union, whose Marxist ideology contributed to labor mobilization of men and women, the United States and western Germany did not use the war years as an opportunity to construct a new social model. To be sure, eastern Germany also imported American goods and culture while competing with western German policymakers for the allegiance of German citizens, but I am not proposing a comparative thesis, per se; I argue that the social and economic role of working women in what
became West Germany evolved specifically within the context of U.S. occupation and German-German tensions. My time frame reflects the evolution of women and family policy up to the 1957 Basic Law, which firmly established the nuclear family as the ideal arrangement for western German citizens.³

To illustrate my argument, I have employed a variety of media images. Oftentimes, studies on the use of media images directed towards women, especially advertising, do not attempt to address specific groups of women, but women in general. Scholars who utilize this perspective argue that media images tend to obscure particularities, assuming and addressing its audience as a collective. This analysis recognizes in posters, magazine ads, cinema, for example, specific ideas, but often assumes a unanimous reaction on the part of the target audience. I argue the contrary. In examining media images from postwar western Germany, it becomes clear that media images evolved out of competing social concerns and attempted to bridge the gap between the present and what western German conservatives and politicians wanted their nation to look like. Not surprisingly, media images targeted the largest population in western Germany: women. Rather than obscuring particularities, I believe that the images targeted the specific demographic of unmarried, working women. The only generalization I found present in the images was not in the target audience but in the assumption that women needed to reestablish themselves in their pre-World War II roles as Hausfrauen and contribute to economic reconstruction through the purchase of consumer products.

Chapter One addresses working women and the precedent that World War I set for bringing women into the workforce on a large scale. The interwar period witnessed a push for the primacy of the nuclear family and a de-emphasis on the “new woman” and the culture in which she lived. I will demonstrate this point through advertising that sought to place the “new woman,” women voters, and shopping “safely” back into the realm of the traditional family, thus boosting the economy while also removing women from the political realm of men. I present how National Socialism addressed the role of women in society, initially emphasizing childbirth and homemaking and then emphasizing working to contribute to the war effort. This chapter puts the postwar western German, working woman in the context of an already established pattern of policymakers looking to the stabilization of the traditional family as an indication of recovery. Postwar western Germans believed that they had to solve new problems of unmarried working women, but the Weimar period witnessed the same concerns. Only the context of Nazi war guilt and Cold War tensions created the illusion that western German policymakers faced anomalous social upheavals.

In Chapter Two, I use media images as a key component to explain how western German leaders instructed western German women on postwar economic policies. Western German policymakers emphasized reviving their economy and believed that the reestablishment of citizenship could be achieved via consumption. As such, western German policymakers decided to cooperate with American political and economic goals. The decision to promote American consumer culture directly contradicted Germans’ long-standing anti-
Americanism, which linked U.S. consumer habits with decadence and social chaos. Despite western Germans’ aversion to American consumer culture, however, policymakers had to import U.S. products, especially the entertainment industry. Keeping western Germans happy by offering them attractive U.S. consumer goods allowed western German policymakers to evenly compete with eastern German Soviet economic model. In addition, it offered an avenue of cooperation with the United States, whose military and economic support became essential for western Germany’s speedy reconstruction.4

Convincing women to embrace the image of the docile housewife proved difficult, as Chapter three demonstrates. German women had shown themselves to be adequate breadwinners and protectors for their families. The Soviet occupation of Germany and rumors of Soviet behavior towards Germans, especially German women, further damaged the traditional view of men as heads of households and protectors of wives and families. Female victims of rape had difficulty conceptualizing German men, who were absent (and defeated), as guardians because they were not able to shield German women from Soviet soldiers. In addition, returned German soldiers would oftentimes shun their female relations who had been raped. Rather than viewing the rapes as a result of German defeat, many German men viewed the sexual assaults as consensual sex. This reaction on the part of German men did little to convince German women to welcome men back into their traditional roles as breadwinners and protectors. Many women

looked elsewhere for support and found it through fraternization with U.S. occupation soldiers.

Fraternization between American GIs and western German women garnered negative responses from German policymakers, U.S. occupation officials, and German men. Relationships with wealthy, healthy GIs, who could provide comforts from shelter to food to long-absent companionship, seemed like a natural decision for many German women. German leaders and former soldiers, however, labeled these women as “traitors” to Germany and the German soldier, who fought for the honor of his country. U.S. occupation leaders saw these women as a nuisance responsible for the rise in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among occupation troops and tried to eradicate their presence by overwhelmingly targeting German women in vice raids and random-sample STD testing. The postwar German woman, who had managed to hold her family and the German industry together, became responsible for the “emasculaton” of German men and the decline in German national pride and sovereignty.

German policymakers found themselves faced with adhering to U.S. regulations, while also trying to preserve a distinct German culture. Shedding any and all symbols of National Socialism became imperative for Germans to maintain financial and military support while Germany underwent reconstruction. Western German officials viewed working German women—whether single or married—as physical reminders of the demographic effects of the war. In an effort to construct a German democracy, western German policymakers attempted to remove all vestiges of National Socialism, which included the rising numbers
of wage earning women, while also trying to integrate women into the western Germany economy. In the minds of leaders, reconstructing western Germany demanded not only reviving the economy through women, but also the restoration of social roles. As German policymakers sought to reestablish their nation, they increasingly gave their attention to family policy and the Frauenüberschuss, the “surplus of women.” In sum, then, this section considers single women; the role of mothers; women fraternizers; and western German policymakers’ attempts to reestablish the traditional family unit by redefining the German POW and encouraging women to make way for men as potential husbands and fathers.

I end with an afterward in order to fully explain how western Germany developed its own policies on women and the family after the United States had withdrawn direct control in 1949. This section demonstrates how western Germany’s leaders struggle to produce and implement policies that addressed the realities of the postwar family, while also satisfying hopes of reintegrating the traditional mother back into the economy. This afterward offers some insight into the precedents and long-term affects of these policies on the family, women, and West Germany.

I conclude this project addressing Germany popular memory and how Germans remembered and recorded the “hour of women.” In particular, I will discuss how the memory of the physical rape of women became an ungendered way to describe the collective “rape” of Germany. In addition, when recalling their own roles during the war, German women predominantly related their memories of men rather than their own actions as survivors. How did this
discrepancy between reality and memory occur? Last, I will give an overall analysis of the policies that sought to remove women from the workforce, while also incorporating them into the economy and traditional roles as wives and mothers—an attempt at imposing a largely unrealistic lifestyle under the circumstance of postwar western Germany—and whether and to what extent these policies served their purpose.

Primary German sources for this thesis includes Weimar, Third Reich, Bonn, and GDR posters and advertisements; German newspaper editorials, photos, and articles from 1945-1949; and women’s magazines from 1952-1955; and diaries. I utilized German articles on gender construction and family policy during the interwar and postwar period in Germany. Primary U.S. sources include records of the U.S. High Commission for Germany, and OMGUS records, and polling data. My thesis is based on secondary sources on topics of gender policy, National Socialist family policies, the roles of working women in the interwar period, German cultural studies, economic policy, the physical reconstruction of Germany, reeducation, American consumer goods, and fraternization, just to name a few. This range of sources allowed me to consider German policy and opinion concerning working women. It also placed western German action in the context of U.S. policy, demonstrating a correlation between U.S. and western German ideology. Any cultural perspective of history requires a synthesis of a multiplicity of factors and my secondary sources aided me in achieving this goal. My primary research was made possible through generous travel grants from Ohio University’s Department of History and the
Contemporary History Institute, which allowed me to travel to the German Historical Institute and National Archives in Washington, D.C., and the Wende Museum for Cold War History in Culver City, California.
Chapter One: Working Women

The presence of German women in the workforce following World War II did not begin through National Socialist policy, but continued the mobilization of women laborers dating from World War I. In 1914, women organized to knit and sew articles of clothing for soldiers, collected resources, and volunteered as nurses. In 1916, the Weimar government appealed to German women’s patriotism in taking on men’s jobs to free up more German soldiers. For example, women joined the work force as coal miners, accountants, letter carriers, and truck and tram operators and they continued to work after the war. According to a German census, by 1918, women in Germany outnumbered men by two million. This ratio necessitate that women maintain their wartime work, and women enjoyed the freedom that came with holding their own jobs. On the other hand, World War I changed the perception of unmarried, married, divorced, and widowed status.5

World War I (1914-1918) left Germany in social disarray and confusion. Books like All Quiet of the Western Front (1929) expressed the postwar opinion of warfare as futile. Along with the youth of other nations, German youth demonstrated their disillusionment with the traditions, which they believed had created World War I, and defied social norms, such as religious practice, propriety, and “appropriate” demonstrations of sexuality. But while some Germans enjoyed the free expression of the 1920s, conservatives petitioned for working women to step aside for the six million men who returned from the war,

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even though many of these men could not function physically or psychologically. Conservative women, who had been raised to take on the roles of wives and mothers, also viewed this modernity as a risk to their security. They petitioned for an “emancipation from emancipation,” where a patriarchy would protect them from the chaos of the interwar period and also offer them financial security.6

In the category of social misfits, conservatives included what they referred to as the “new woman,” the female who departed from respectable social roles by, for instance, cutting her hair, showing her arms and legs, and listening to jazz. The definition of the “new woman” especially referred to working women. Conservatives viewed working women as defiantly independent and self-reliant. Women who took on the supposedly male characteristic of employment, conservatives argued, only did so in order to flout unconventional sexuality. This assumption ignored civilian experiences following World War I. Not only had World War I left behind it widows and single women with little hope of male support, supposedly stable marriages suffered and divorce rates rose 300% by the early 1920s. Germany’s depression and rising unemployment compelled many women to remain in the workforce to scrape together money, especially in view of the fact that the married state could not guarantee women the male wage. To operate within the confines of a weak economy, many couples also made the decision to have fewer children. But traditional thought on the family prescribed that married women purposely have children, or at least not do anything to

prevent a pregnancy. Reacting to this social chaos, most conservatives viewed wives, who had fewer children, as socially regressive and unwed working women as sexually promiscuous.\textsuperscript{7}

One of the topics of political debate in Weimar focused on the shifting nature of gender. World War I, the political instability in Weimar Germany, women’s suffrage in 1919, the “new woman,” and the growing presence of women in the work force caused great anxiety over women’s social roles. While reality admitted to women as wage-earners, German politicians specifically focused on the role of women as consumers based on their activity as household spenders. By politicizing the role of women as consumers, policymakers believed they could give female consumer tendencies “much needed” guidance. This strategy stemmed from the general assumption of women as largely naïve and passive and that their consumer choices would reflect these characteristics, unless they could be monitored. German, male, politicians, industrialists and advertisers cooperated in order to channel women’s consumer practices.\textsuperscript{8}

German leaders supported the advertising industry as early as 1925, the year that advertisers began to incorporate market analysis. At the World Advertising Congress in 1929, Chancellor Hans Luther said, “If we do not wish to decline as a people, then we must make our home within the new and ever-changing world. Advertising is a language of this new world. We want…to develop the German dialect of this language and to do this with a German sense

\textsuperscript{7} Elizabeth Heineman, \textit{What Difference Does a Husband Make?}, 6.

of intellectuality and art appreciation.” Weimar leaders believed advertising—that preserved German-ness—would aid Germany in modernizing and establishing itself as a powerful nation. Later, the Third Reich brought the advertising industry under tight control through compulsory cartelization, which allowed the Nazi party to determine the state of the economy. Thus, advertisers and the advertising industry stimulated the economy under the supervision of German political leaders.9

German policymakers believed that the success of their economy depended on consumption. As of 1922, Germany underwent hyperinflation and severe depression. German economists managed to bring the economy under relative control with the introduction of the Rentenmark in 1923, valued at 1 Rentenmark to a trillion Papiermarks. Advertisements coincided with the Parliamentary elections indicated that economic recovery held a primary place in the concerns of German citizens and the platforms of politicians. For example, one poster portrayed a crowd of women surrounding a woman on a stage, who adjured her peers to buy laundry detergent with, “Women! Vote for—Persil! (Figure 1).” This advertisement united women’s independence—in the form of the vote—with a consumer good for the household. In addition, the phrase Persil bleibt Persil (Persil Remains Persil), which appears on the lower left-hand side of

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the add, signified that despite World War I and its aftermath, Persil—and by extension shopping—remained a constant. In other words, Germans could return to normalcy through consumption. World War I had caused skepticism concerning the monetary system, politics, and traditional social roles for men and women. Restoring economic order offered the possibility of reestablishing peace and self-government in Germany, giving shopping and shoppers—considered to be a predominantly female demographic—a significant role in German politics.\footnote{Vorwärts 17, no. 5 (1928).}

Advertisements and politics coincided in connecting women’s political

\footnote{Julia Sneeringer, “The Shopper as Voter,” 476, 479.}
and familial roles based on products that women would most likely purchase. For example, posters depicted products such as shoes, soap, and hairdryers within the context of women’s electoral votes. Not only did ads such as the one for Persil soap mix politics with consumption, it also worked to reconcile the image of the “new woman” with that of the wife and mother: a slender, fashionable, female political activist convinces the women listening to her that the right kind of soap will create satisfied wives and homemakers. Playing upon the electoral battle, manufacturers and retailers created a platform of satisfaction with and demand for products and that supposedly guaranteed happy marriages and families.¹²

German policymakers’ emphasis on consumption served to establish economic stability. At the same time, by targeting female shoppers rather than female workers, consumer policy betrayed tensions regarding the “threat” of German women’s new roles as voters. What would the woman’s vote mean for the political process and how should politicians approach the subject of women’s newfound suffrage? Ads that displayed women’s suffrage exercised through shopping belittled women’s political freedom and made light of their votes. However, women’s votes became absolutely necessary as they made up the majority of eligible voters. Women voted for major political parties to such an extent that politicians got used to women’s support and even eventually took it for granted. Despite the fact that German policymakers could predict women’s voting trends, however, the connection between consumption and policy indicated that men believed they had to channel women’s consumption in the direction that

German politicians believed appropriate: towards that of the family and citizenship.\textsuperscript{13}

By identifying consumption as a characteristic of the “woman’s world,” advertising presented shopping women as women who retained traditional roles as homemakers and wives, specifically denying the presence of women in the workforce. Product images also demonstrated that advertisers acknowledged the fact that women controlled household spending. By 1932, women’s role in the economy revealed that they controlled 85% of the household budget. Political parties increasingly addressed women as spenders, not earners. These same parties also took it upon themselves to “educate” women, who presumably did not grasp the connection between policy and consumption. In 1928, a DDP flyer ran, “Women will not fully meet their political responsibilities, they will neither be good citizens nor good housewives and mothers, until they grasp these connections.”\textsuperscript{14} Family consumption presented the main route to female political participation

Women struggled for political recognition due to the economic problems in Germany and resilient gender inequality. Suffrage allowed for women’s political freedom, but the media images and symbols told women that their votes could be best exercised within the context of the economy as consumers, as opposed to the “man’s world” of politics. Advertisers presented the consumer market as a place where women could control their lives through the free choices

\textsuperscript{13} Sneeringer, “The Shopper as Voter,” 479,480.

\textsuperscript{14} Carter, \textit{How German is She}? 41; Sneerginer, “The Shopper as Voter,” 488.
they made in shopping. Media outlets and politicians worked together to depoliticize the presence of women in the political system and to de-feminize the workplace, despite the great number of employed women. Even though the interwar conditions of Weimar Germany obliged many women to remain in the work force, advertising and German leaders decreed that the appropriate place for the female remained with the family as homemaker, making consumer choices that would make her family more comfortable and would stabilize the German economy. Conservatives believed that women who did not adhere to this model detracted from Germany’s struggle to reconstruct itself after World War I.¹⁵

The interwar period witnessed little effort to support working women as leaders encouraged them to maintain the “ideal” role of wife and homemaker, especially considering that the depression made such aspirations unrealistic. For many women, one reason to support the National Socialist party flowed naturally from the fact that World War II Germany had a place for single women. Rather than continuing to be marginalized and labeled as a problem, Nazi Germany significantly redefined marriage and the role of single women in Germany. National Socialist ideology did not support the marriage and reproduction of ethnic “undesirables,” but it did encourage single women to contribute to the Volk in other ways, such as through officially organized agricultural labor or household service.¹⁶


Contrary to previous studies on women’s policy in the Third Reich, Nazi Germany did not disregard single women. In fact, as long as they could prove their eugenic “purity,” their lives as single women took on new worth and significance. In the interwar period single women had been defined by their deficiency precisely for being single and for working. With the rise of National Socialism, single and working women enjoyed newfound dignity as their role in the political process made them important within the National Socialist party. Women could raise and manage funds, march, organize rallies and make speeches. Women received official status in auxiliary corps, traveled abroad to study, experienced capture and death during World War II, and in some cases participated in race-related crimes, such as concentration camps. Women’s greater involvement and experience in the Nazi party and World War II emanated precisely from their status as single women.¹⁷

To be sure, Nazi ideology did not embrace the idea of the “new woman,” insofar as she defied tradition and attempted to achieve a level of “masculine” independence, which, according to Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, they would never attain. At the same time, Nazi leaders acknowledged that the interwar period of depression and a high ration of women to men made marriage and unemployment impossible for many women. Nazi leaders supported working women as long as they performed “womanly work”—employment that suited their physic and psyche. In this manner, unmarried women could serve the Volk in a unique way. The Nazi party tried to earn professional and working women votes

in a 1932 appeal to women, stating that while National Socialism primarily sought to place the man in his appropriate role as breadwinner,

No woman, who out of professional preference, wants to take up a profession, will be prevented from doing so…Germany the great mother, embodied in National Socialism, loves and needs every one of her daughters: the one by her child’s cradle…and the one in the factory…everyone who works honestly and selflessly for the rise of our fatherland.

Nazi policy not only specifically addressed single, working women; it made their employment socially acceptable and necessary.18

In order to reach a large percentage of the German female population,

![Figure 2. The League of German Girls.](image)

National Socialist policymakers employed media images. Nazi propaganda

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targeted young women and encouraged them to join the League of German Girls with posters that emphasized ideal German, female characteristics (Figure 2). One such poster displayed a young, blonde, German girl holding a Nazi flag. Her hair was “appropriately” non-descript, as was her modest dress. The more interesting features of the girl were her strong bone structure and sharp features, which instantly conveyed her as a healthy, strong young woman. At the same time, there was an almost seductive element to her facial expression, perhaps an exaggerated attempt to clearly designate her as a female in the potential role of an ideal wife and mother.

Figure 3. Women’s Home-Front Recruitment.

Another poster featured three women, a factory worker, a nurse, and an agricultural laborer side by side (Figure 3). The face of a male, German soldier

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20 Hoover Institute Archives, Poster Collection.
loomed above the women in the background and the caption at the bottom of the poster read, “You should also help!” Such posters emanated out of the rising need for women as the war continued. All three women were of young adult to middle age, healthy, and beautiful. The amorphousness of their age allowed them to relate to the German soldier in the background as sister, spouse, or daughter. The poster utilized the informal German du (you) as opposed to the formal Sie. The use of this form of address expressed a familiarity with the target female audience, signifying the tension between recognizing women’s contribution to the war effort as mothers and as workers. This poster may have encouraged women to take up employment, but it was in reference to the man in the background for whom they should dedicate their work.21

A final example featured a young, happy, attractive female in a German Auxiliary Air Force uniform (Figure 4). The poster reads, “Hilf siegen als Luftnachrichtenhelferin (Aid victory by joining the air defense information service).” This woman was encouraged to participate in the military in a non-combatant role, an unprecedented privilege for German women. This Aryan female wears a uniform that flatters her figure, but Nazi military and gender ideology inform its design. While the cut of her uniform reminds the viewer of the Khaki worn by male soldiers, her hair evokes a movie star quality, clearly identifying her as a non-combatant and more of an attractive, charming,

21 Hoover Institute Archives, Posters Collection.
eugenically sound woman, who would make an attractive wife for any Nazi soldier.\textsuperscript{22}

Nazi marriage policy also promised these same women honors and financial support once they achieved married status. In order to ensure that eugenically sound women continued having children, Nazi policy bestowed legal privileges on marriages. Women whose family life could be considered a daily task, due to high levels of housework or large numbers of children, were exempt


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
from work and once World War II started, married women received allowances for being married to soldiers.  

Many single women supported National Socialism for the status and respect it could grant them for their work as single women, despite the fact that the status of married women seemed to be more important to National Socialist Policymakers. Aryan women had a special role to play in the Third Reich, specifically that of reproducing and perpetuating the Aryan race. “Good” women bred Aryan soldiers, which would guarantee the dominance of the Third Reich. Therefore, Nazi policy, which had permeated every other facet of civilian life, made the private sphere of marriage and the family a public policy issue, and redefined marriage and sexuality.

Figure 5. Frauen Warte’s Mother’s Day.

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Media images of Nazi mothers contained similar elements, the specific emphasis always resting on women’s maternal roles. The 1939 cover to the Nazi women’s magazine *Frauen Warte* celebrated mother’s day and the cover featured a German mother surrounded by her three German children (Figure 5). Not only had this young woman borne three children, who appeared to have been born in close proximity of one another, her children were clothed in appropriate German traditional clothing. As an Aryan mother, this woman also demonstrated that she could educate her children in the precepts of Nazi ideology. And based on the youth of the women, the viewer could expect that she was capable of conceiving and raising more children.\(^{26}\)

An image from the German magazine, *Neues Volk*, showed a German mother nursing her child (Figure 6). Not only did breast-feeding convey the intimate union and love between mother and child, the positioning of the mother’s right arm indicated gentleness and protection. Her concern was solely for the baby boy, and she took care to allow the baby to feed as easily and comfortably as possible. More than a glimpse of a happy union of mother and child, this image also served to emphasize the woman’s role as a mother, who provides and cares for a strong baby boy, who already has a full head of hair. This image implied that the woman conceived, bore, and raised a soldier-son.\(^{27}\)


\(^{26}\) Ibid.

A last example comes from the Nazi publication, *Die NSDAP*, which featured a mother, cradling a baby, and a happy boy and girl surrounding her (Figure 7). She was sheltered by the ideal German husband, who in turn was sheltered by the German eagle. The viewer saw a beautiful young, productive couple, who also displayed all the qualities of good Germans. The woman covered her hair, conveying the image of modesty. The man’s strong, bare arms showed him to be an efficient provider and worker. And like Figure 5 mentioned above, the children were dressed appropriately, which proved the couple’s ability to raise and educate their children properly. The caption at the bottom of the image read, “*Die NSDAP Sichert die Volks-Gemeinschaft: Volksgenossen*”.

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Braucht Ihr Rat und hilfe so wendet euch an die Ortsgruppe (The NSDAP secures the national community: Fellow Germans, if you need advice or help, turn to the local [party] organization).” The image of the eagle demonstrated that the traditional family unit could trust the protection of the German fatherland.30

World War II demanded a high number of German soldiers to keep the Nazi war machine running. In order to meet the demands for creating a master race, the Third Reich made special provisions for immediate marriages for Germans of “desirable ethnicity.” Depending on the circumstances, these unions came to be labeled as, “war marriages,” “long-distance marriages,” and “postmortem marriages.” “War marriages,” referred to those unions between

\footnotesize 29 Hoover Institution Archives, Poster Collection.

\footnotesize 30 Ibid..
couples who married and consummated their marriage shortly before the deployment of the husband. “Long-distance marriage” and “postmortem marriage,” developed out of the same attempt to give illegitimate, but Aryan, children a legitimate father. Women who did not marry the father of their children could be married on paper to a deployed soldier. The couple could build their marriage through letter correspondence and the woman would receive all the rights and privileges of a married woman. “Postmortem marriages” occurred under the same circumstance as “long-distance marriages” except in this case, the father had been declared dead. By granting “post-mortem marriages,” the Nazi regime granted the woman the status of widow, a legitimate—though dead—father for her child, and all the rights of a married, Aryan woman.31

The Third Reich gave married couples marriage loans, family allowances, and tax advantages, which may have contributed to the popularity of the regime among women who could claim those benefits. Many conservative women saw this support as a means of further elevating their choice of marriage, which they already believed deserved respect. National Socialist policymakers also benefited from measures like the marriage loan plan, introduced as part of the Law for the Reeducation of Unemployment of 1 June 1933, because it would “send women back to the home from the workplace.” This apparent contradiction of the Third Reich’s approach to working women, mentioned above, rested on the Nazi belief

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that the Aryan family retained the position of the first and most important school of Nazi ideology.\textsuperscript{32}

The invasion of Nazi policy into the normally private sphere of the family developed out of Nazi concerns that the Aryan race expand. Even though single women found constructive roles for themselves within Nazi Germany, National Socialists believed that the traditional family unite guaranteed the best method for achieving the growth of the master race. Therefore, women’s chief duty lay in producing soldier sons, who had an obligation to fight for the fatherland. At the same time, the redefinition of marriage and focus on married women gradually erased the distinctions between married and single women, especially as Germany became more entrenched in World War II.\textsuperscript{33}

By placing emphasis on Aryan marriages, National Socialists also distinguished between married and single women based on “licit” and “illicit” sexuality. Only married women’s sexual activity could be considered licit, while any single woman who may have been suspected of sexual activity would be scrutinized. The only circumstance in which National Socialists departed from this model occurred regarding “eugenically desirable,” single, pregnant women, who could not determine the father of their child. While they had become pregnant under “illicit” circumstances, the fact that they bore the “right kind” of children earned them some leeway as they could still serve the Volk though childbearing. Heinrich Himmler created a policy of placing these women in half-

\textsuperscript{32} Moeller, \textit{Protecting Motherhood}, 15, 17.

\textsuperscript{33} Rupp, \textit{Mobilizing Women for War}, 21; Heinman, \textit{What Difference Does a Husband Make?}, 44.
way homes, where they would be taken care of and provided for through the duration of their pregnancy. Their Aryan babies could then be adopted by racially appropriate families. While Himmler toyed with the idea that these women could also be made available for impregnation by SS men as the war went on, he received prompt refusal for this policy as National Socialists predominantly believed that the nuclear family deserved primacy as the most appropriate model for German citizens.  

In placing so much emphasis on “licit” and “illicit” sexual activity, Nazi’s implied that sexuality chiefly distinguished married from unmarried women. However, with the growing absence of men in World War II, opportunities for “licit” sexual activity decreased and “illicit” sexuality increased. In this way, sexual activity became the equalizer among women regardless of their status as single or married women. In other words, any sexual activity that any woman engaged in could be classified as “illicit.” And as the war dragged on, earlier privileges of marriage, such as work exemption, disappeared as Nazis encouraged all women to work in order to keep the German army functioning. At the same time, the “quick-fix” “war marriages,” “long-distance marriages,” and “postmortem marriages” did not turn women into married women. Oftentimes, these women did not know the men they married and even if they did, they did not have much opportunity to experience marriage as a couple before the husband

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left for war. Women may have received the legal status of marriage, but they continued living as though single, without their spouses.35

The prolongation of World War II challenged Nazi attempts to keep married women out of the work force. Propagandists worked hard to redefine employment in traditionally male occupations as “womanly work,” and when that failed to raise woman laborers, propaganda resorted to labeling work as a sacrifice and appealed to women’s sense of patriotism. Women, who had been exempt from employment, and working women, who had been generally denied men’s work, took on wage earning employment in response to total war. The worsening conditions in Germany forced women to hone their leadership capabilities and protect their families, a role specifically assigned to Aryan men. By 1944, married women joined single women in black market activity, standing in long ration lines, scrounging, removing rubble and protecting dependants from bombings. Women came to ignore the Nazi gospel of Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz—the common good before self-interest—as their harrowing survival of World War II forced them, unwillingly or no, to become the heads of their families and leaders in their communities.36

Third Reich marriage policies actually did almost as much to create the Frauenüberschuss as did male casualties. In the first place, Germany entered World War II with a large number of single women, who had been denied marriage based on issues of racial purity. Either these women had been racially

36 Rupp, Mobilizing Women for War, 42; Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 19.
unfit for marriage, or the fiancé in question did not meet the racial criteria, or both the male and the female possessed undesirable genetic traits, or perhaps their genealogy was suspect. On the other hand, many women who did marry, especially the war brides, did not experience marriage in a conventional way. These women did not have the opportunity to run a household with their spouse present. In fact, many war brides continued to live with their parents, much like they did before they got married. After World War II, many of the war marriages, which the Nazi policymakers apparently thought to be stable and efficient, ended in divorce. Women did not know their returning spouses as husbands and the conditions of postwar Germany did not provide the most conducive environment for married couples to recreate their once romantic relationships. When World War II ended in Europe, Germany’s demographic consisted of a majority of women, who experienced the war and looked ahead towards reconstruction as single women, regardless of marital status.\textsuperscript{37}

Chapter Two: Rebuilding Western Germany

Western Germany’s experience of World War II left it ravaged, in ruins, and with seven million more German women than men. Food shortages, compounded by unusually harsh winters, resulted in a severely malnourished German population. For example, in 1946, women in Hessen weighed an average of 93.5 pounds, and men weighed an average of 92.3. Military occupation, starvation conditions, and the absence of a German government caused many Germans to have a more favorable opinion of the war years, which seemed rosy compared to the postwar challenges of rebuilding a nation. A pole in 1951 revealed that 80% of Germans remembered the years 1945-1948 to be the worst years of their lives. Germany’s aggressive war had not only destroyed other European countries; it had also damaged Germany’s own food sources and economy to such an extent that German policymakers could expect to devote the majority of their work to reconstruction and maintaining a tenuous survival.38

Western German policymakers agreed that economic regeneration would expedite the recovery and repossession of German sovereignty. At the same time, the fact that western Germany came under the occupation of the United States, while eastern Germany came under the occupation of the Soviet Union, created an immediate rift in the way both Germanys experienced reconstruction. The United

States’ brittle relationship with the Soviet Union informed U.S. reconstruction policies, which western German policymakers struggled to accept while also maintaining a distinctly German culture. The focus on consumption then became not only a means to economic recovery; policymakers also wanted shopping to be a means of cultural recovery.

Since the early 1800s, German nationalists had attempted to achieve democratic standards through the creation of a nation-state in Germany. After World War II, hopes for a parliamentary democracy in a sovereign, unified nation-state seemed impossible at worst, and distant at best. Instead, western German policymakers transferred these aspirations onto the market economy. Germans might have to adhere to U.S. occupation policies and wait on the return of autonomy, but consumption could be an area where Germans would be able to exercise German culture and freedom. In this way, consumption became a way of realizing German citizenship. The western German economy allowed policymakers to establish a kind of sovereignty, relatively free of U.S. dictates, and it gave Germans a sense of security. Not only did participation in the economy exemplify—although more symbolically—hopes for self-government in Germany, it also exuded the impression of order and national unity, something which Germany lacked in the immediate postwar years.39

Consumption as an act of citizenship also placed the nuclear family in the context of wealth creation. In his work on the influence of political power on social structure, sociologist Talcott Parsons posited that the family does not

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39 Carter, *How German is She?*, 23, 25.
function primarily as an economic entity. At the same time, however, Parsons argued that income and consumer expenditures serve as the foremost connection between the family and society. Thus, if German consumption identified citizenship, western German families could claim citizenship only if and as long as they contributed to the western German economy.\textsuperscript{40}

If consumption gave western Germans access to citizenship, then western Germany’s economic reconstruction not only established a new kind of nationhood; it also highlighted the sexual division in Germany. Women’s consumer choices took on a new meaning and significance precisely because it was female consumption. Media images emphasized the significance of the woman as a household consumer, making choices for her traditional family. As in the interwar period, the focus on the traditional family unite ignored the realities of a predominantly female population. Despite the large percentage of western German women in wage-earning occupations, however, western German policymakers and advertising designated consumption as the female’s primary contribution to economic recovery. In other words, German leaders believed women’s waged employment only contributed to the economy insofar as it increased family expenditures, rather than directly contributing to the national wealth by creating wealth in and of itself.\textsuperscript{41}

Economic reconstruction, coupled with a predominantly female population, meant that western German leaders, advertisers, and U.S. occupation


\textsuperscript{41} Carter, \textit{How German is She?}, 7, 41.
planners had to determine where to fit women into economic regeneration. The focus on consumption as an expression of citizenship required that policymakers identify the meaning of German women as citizens and consumers. As in the interwar period, policymakers in postwar western Germany also sought for ways to return women to traditional social roles, specifically focusing on their idealized pre-National Socialist roles of wives and homemakers.42

Policymakers believed, as did their predecessors in the Weimar period, that female consumer choices had to be harnessed and guided in order to effectively help the economy. One way to help women make “correct” choices led to the emphasis on brand loyalty. Helping women to differentiate between quality brands supposedly assisted women in shopping more “effectively,” whereas they would otherwise be confused by the multiplicity of products. A second way for businesses to direct women lay in consumer advertising. Advertisers believed that media images could achieve a two-fold affect: images would stimulate consumer desire and also manage and regulate consumption.43

Advertisers specifically targeted women with media images that promoted traditional female roles, placing consumption in the “proper sphere” of the traditional wife and homemaker. In reality, however, it was predominantly as wage-earners that women controlled much of household spending. Media images tried to reconcile this discrepancy by presenting consumption as labor in its own right. In this way, media images presented homemaking as an occupation, and

42 Carter, How German is She?, 36.
43 Ibid., 91, 93, 94.
sought to emphasize the homemaker’s ability to make wise consumer choices to help the family, and by extension, the economy. Female consumption became imperative to national recovery, while at the same time media images exhorted women to see themselves in traditional roles, aiding their country as consumer-citizens.44

Advertisers endorsed the idea of the traditional homemaker with images of consumer products that directly benefited the nuclear family. For example, a 1952 advertisement for Progress brand vacuum cleaners shows two poses of a woman cleaning curtains and feeding a little boy (Figure 8). The caption reads, “Mummy

Figure 8. Mummy Has Time for Peter45

44 Carter, How German is She?, 99, 102.

45 Constanze 6 (1952), 26.
has time to be patient and feed little Peter. She has time for her husband—she has time for herself!” The idea of saving time indicated continuity with the German emphasis on leisure time—time in which to better the mind and the body. In stating that the Progress vacuum cleaner could provide “Mummy” with leisure time, this advertisement reminded women of the prewar era and possibility of returning to that time. The flyer goes on to extol the product’s reasonable price, assuring women that the cost of keeping a home clean stays within their budgets. This ad also emphasizes the assumed order of priorities in a western German woman’s life: Children, husband, and then herself. Clearly, this image presents a woman’s primary—and most fulfilling task—as a selfless worker, but working exclusively in the home.\textsuperscript{46}

A 1953 flyer for Dyckerhoff-Weiss prefabricated concrete displayed a drawing of a woman considering a piece of concrete (Figure 9). The caption ran, “Ladies, have a say in your husbands’ building plans! When women build, they build houses for happy people in which to live and work. When women build, the foundation becomes practical and beautiful…Dyckerhoff-Weiss—the joy of building.” This advertisement explicitly ties women’s postwar work clearing rubble with the housewife’s role in her husband’s affairs. Women’s experience as rubble clearers in the postwar years made them knowledgeable about construction but the ad focuses more on the importance of the woman’s role as homemaker: without her advice, the husband might not make the best choice in building a home for the family. In this way, women’s independence and singleness in the

\textsuperscript{46} Constanze 6 (1952), 26.
postwar years became deemphasized and the housewife became a central component to a functioning family—one run, however, by a male breadwinner. Her understanding of the most efficient consumer practices ensured her family’s comfort and her status in the family.\footnote{Ibid.}

Western German politicians faced complications in determining what products to sell. Since much of Germany’s industrial capabilities had been destroyed during the war, and the 1945 Potsdam agreement stipulated that the Allies would monitor all means of production, the logical conclusion for Germany

\footnote{Constanze 13 (1953), 23.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
lay in importing American goods, especially those related to the entertainment industry. Following World War I, the United States had shown itself to be the cultural capital of the world and World War II had pushed America into economic prosperity and production superiority over all other nations. For Germany, however, the choice could not be that easy after years of arguing against America as a decadent nation. Importing American entertainment allegedly entailed importing American culture, also referred to as “Americanization,” which western German policymakers believed could compromise the reestablishment of a distinctly German culture.49

German distaste for American culture and products predated World War II Germany. During the Weimar era, policymakers feared American culture precisely because of its mesmerizing attraction for many German civilians. The Nazis lambasted American culture because of its potential to obscure German cultural traditions. Nationalists and fascists declared American culture, specifically images of pop art, as a plot to “[subvert] the German people, and as a “takeover by the Jews and niggers [sic].” By vilifying the Weimar republic as an accomplice to Americanization—via industrializing Germany—Hitler became a forerunner for preserving German-ness. National Socialism, however, could not completely expel American consumer influences from Germany, so Nazi propagandists found effective ways to modify U.S. products to fit National Socialist ideology. For example, Germany imported the distinctly American soft

drink, Coca-Cola, but fashioned advertising to reflect specifically German values.\textsuperscript{50}

German distributors initially rejected Coca-Cola because it conflicted with German drinking habits. Germans preferred alcohol and thought that drinking “ice-cold” drinks to be unhealthy. Nevertheless, Coca-Cola’s rising popularity and affordability persuaded German advertisers to appropriate its symbolism and give the soft-drink German meaning. For example, 1935 German Christmas flyers featured the American red-clad Santa, but on the back of the brochure readers learned about the origin of the Christmas tree, which “[was] truly a German creation.” A 1937 advertisement heralded Coca-Cola as an energy drink, which could make driving safer (Figure 10). In stating that, “Nothing is less excusable than a driver expending all his energy to the point of exhaustion. Life, Health,

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{coca-cola-energy-drink.png}
\caption{Coca-Cola: The Energy Drink.\textsuperscript{51}}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Coca-Cola Nachrichten} 4, no. 2 (1937), 16.
Happiness, and Family are threatened. Hopes, Wishes, Dreams are carelessly gambled,” this advertisement argued that Germans should drink Coke “out of a sense of duty.” By 1938, images of Coke portrayed average Germans, in ordinary and respectable everyday tasks, such as those performed by blue and white collar workers. Coca-Cola became integrated into the programs of the Third Reich in order to demonstrate German culture and could be purchased at any public event, from sports to the Nuremberg rallies.52

In the 1940s and into the 1950s, American products and culture continued to touch all areas of German life, from literature, to film, to music, to architecture. German appreciation for American goods heightened in the immediate postwar period, as American products became not only luxury goods, but also currency on the black market, as in the case with cigarettes. Western German policymakers and conservatives worried about this “embrace” of the U.S. “decadent culture.” For example, conservative Christians believed that continued or intensified “Americanization” would hinder a much needed return to traditional piety. German leaders believed an important step in reconstruction lay in emphasizing the heritage of Germany’s “good” qualities in the arts, literature, languages, and philosophy, for example. Many Germans thought embracing aspects of American culture threatened to take away from Germany’s efforts to rehabilitate its international appearance. Germany had already deteriorated as a military and

political power and Western German policymakers did not want to lose Germany’s positive cultural identity as well.\textsuperscript{53}

What had been a collective aversion to American products slowly declined, however, in the immediate aftermath of World War II. America’s efficient technology, fashion-forward cars, and the dynamic and sexy advertising that accompanied American products worked to make German opinion more favorable toward U.S. consumer goods. In addition, U.S. citizens had better nutrition and health, a fact not lost on many malnourished Germans. U.S. architecture came into vogue; jazz and rock n’ roll enjoyed a rise in popularity in several European countries and American films and situation comedies conveyed images of success and prosperity. Policymakers in war-torn western Germany could not compete with such obviously attractive media and products.\textsuperscript{54}

German politicians actually had little choice but to import American culture because U.S. culture was directly tied to American foreign policy. American policymakers combined consumerism with foreign policy because the U.S. market economy’s success contributed to the United States’ role as a superpower. Washington politicians saw no contradiction in allowing American consumption to inform foreign policy and vise versa, because U.S. consumerism already contained elements of politics. Exporting U.S. culture implied exporting the United States’ brand of democracy and the United States combined cultural


\textsuperscript{54} Pells, “American Culture Abroad,” in \textit{Cultural Transmissions and Receptions}, 77.
exchange with foreign policy in hopes that Germans would become sympathetic to U.S. occupation and reconstruction goals. Among U.S. occupation goals, American leaders wanted to establish democracy in Germany; denazify the German government and school system; and export American films and plays to Germany.\textsuperscript{55}

U.S. foreign policymakers made several of their goals reality through the establishment of the Amerika-Houses in major German cities, which made American books and conferences about American culture available to German citizens, and the introduction of the Fulbright program in 1946. The Fulbright became the United States primary vehicle for educational and cultural exchange with Germany. Sold to Congress as a means of gaining foreign support for U.S. diplomatic aspirations, policymakers described the Fulbright as a means of intellectually rehabilitating Germany and compared it to the Marshall Plan.\textsuperscript{56}

The Marshall Plan, originally named the European Recovery Program (ERP), aided both the U.S. and western German economy. Policymakers in the United States feared that the financial chaos in Europe following World War II could potentially lead to high unemployment rates. George C. Marshall, the Plan’s namesake, and other economic planners hoped that among other things, the ERP would increase exports to Germany, and offset unemployment. The Marshall Plan did, in fact, contribute to the success of the U.S. economy in the postwar years, which garnered the ERP support among U.S. workers. A 1948 article in a

\textsuperscript{55} Pells, “American Culture Abroad,” in \textit{Cultural Transmissions and Receptions}, 73, 75, 77.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 74.
business magazine, *Kiplinger Magazine*, stated that, “The Marshall Plan is very much a business plan…The Marshall Plan means work, and you will be one of the workers.” Implemented in 1948, by 1951 the Marshall Plan gave western Germany close to 1500 billion dollars in economic and technical support. By 1955, the United States had fifty-one American owned firms in western German territory and western Germany invested 50% of its overseas assets in U.S. businesses. Western Germany obviously benefited from the monetary boost of U.S. dollars, and as western German civilians spent the money on U.S food and manufactured goods, the U.S. economy prospered.\(^{57}\)

The Marshall Plan also increased anti-Soviet sentiment in the United States. The Allies first discussed the Marshall plan in Paris of 1947, and Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, stated that the Plan, “[Was] totally unsatisfactory.” Fearful that U.S. economic aid would require Communist countries to become capitalist democracies, Stalin rejected the Marshall Plan and stipulated that all Soviet occupied territories, especially eastern Germany, do the same. The U.S. Congress debated over implementing the Plan, with one side arguing that it would harm the U.S. economy, while the other side protested that delaying aid to European countries would encourage the spread of Communism. Proponents of the Marshall Plan succeeded, however, in 1948 when the Soviet

Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia convinced most of Congress that the Soviet Union had expansionist ambitions.58

Western German policymakers may not have appreciated U.S. culture, but they did not underestimate the importance of economic aid that came from cooperating with the United States. In addition, by 1948, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union had deteriorated to the point where U.S. occupied Germany had to make an obvious show of support for the United States in order to maintain U.S. aid and further progress towards sovereignty. The United States and Soviet Union competed for the allegiance of undecided nations in divided Europe. Western German policymakers may have been wary of completely embracing the United States politically and culturally, but they could be practical enough to realize that the United States significantly contributed to western Germany’s economic reconstruction, as well as offering military support. At the same time, western German civilians had come to embrace and demand American products. And with the Soviet Union occupying portions of Eastern Europe, the alternative of being under the governance of the Soviet Union repulsed western German policymakers more so did than anything American.59

In order to cope with the invasion of U.S. products and attendant culture into western Germany, conservatives and politicians turned to the ideal family as a means of preserving German culture. American culture particularly appealed to


59 Pells, “American Culture Abroad,” in Cultural Transmissions and Receptions, 74; Heineman, What Difference Does a Husband Make?, 97;
German youth and fears of losing control of children contributed to western Germans’ dislike for U.S. consumption. For western German leaders, the family unit became one means of controlling the flow of U.S. consumer goods and German youth’s consumer activities. In the idealized traditional family, the mother and father infused virtues into their children, thus raising good citizens. Western German policymakers believed that if they supported the model family, they could reclaim the “good” in German culture. In order to make these aspirations reality, however, western German leaders had to have the cooperation of a high population of stable families, which did not exist in the postwar years—or in the interwar period for that matter. Thus, the first step in identifying German culture within economic activity lay in policymakers addressing the postwar conditions of marriage and the family. In other words, western German leaders had to address the high population of single and working women.60

60 Pells, “American Culture Abroad,” in Cultural Transmissions and Receptions, 69.
Chapter Three: Rebuilding the German Family

Many western German women had the responsibility of clearing rubble, the first step in Germany’s physical reconstruction, and their employment continued into the 1950s. 5-10% of the 37% of employed women in western Germany cleared rubble. Working to reconstruct buildings was not only physically taxing; it was also not a career that promised advanced salaries or promotions. But little could be done to remedy the situation. Not only did Germany have to cope with a depleted male population—1700 women to every man between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five—men who did return from the war could do little to aid German women, oftentimes creating problems in addition to those many women already faced. 61

In an anonymous diary, one woman described how German women gradually took on the roles of providers and protectors. In one 1945 entry describing her and her neighbors’ stay in a basement during an air raid, she wrote, “With animals they say it’s always the males, the lead bull, the lead stallion. But in our basement lead mares would be closer to the truth.” This statement not only testified to the fact that the people in the bomb shelter were mostly women; her comment also proves the point that women had taken on greater leadership roles in the absence of men. As the war went on, women became accustomed to taking care of themselves, under very severe circumstances, and this experience affected the way many women viewed men. In an entry written a few weeks before the Soviet occupation of Berlin, the woman wrote in her diary,

61 Heineman, “The Hour of the Women,” in The Miracle Years, 33, 34; Carter, How German is She?, 31.
These days I keep noticing how my feelings toward men—and the feelings of all other women—are changing. We feel sorry for them; they seem so miserable and powerless. The weaker sex. Deep down, we women are experiencing a kind of collective disappointment. The Nazi world—ruled by men, glorifying the strong man—is beginning to crumble, and with it the myth of “Man.” In earlier wars, men could claim the privilege of killing and being killed for the fatherland was theirs and theirs alone. Today, we women, too, have a share. That has transformed us, emboldened us. Among the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex.

The end of World War II and the return of German men did not, in many cases, encourage women to rethink men as protectors and providers.62

Men who returned from the front did not anticipate the Germany they found. Unless they had been drafted shortly before the war’s end, many returned German soldiers remembered Germany as powerful and prosperous. They did not expect to meet self-sufficient—though often haggard—women. And for many men, self-reliant women contributed to tensions in relationships and marriages. Women, who had learned how to skillfully ration food, found men’s insatiable hunger and impulsive behavior difficult to tolerate. In some instances, men consumed a family’s entire care package in secret, leaving the woman with the difficulty of finding additional food for the rest of her dependants.63

Rather than alleviating women’s burdens, many men complicated matters. Women held their families together during the war, had fought through the red tape of the rationing system, and could work within the black market. Instead of applauding these women for their efforts or joining women in a shared


partnership, many men attempted to reinstate themselves in authoritarian positions, perhaps unaware of the naivety of this ambition due to their inexperience.\footnote{Hannah Schissler, “Normalization as Project: Some Thoughts on Gender Relations in West Germany during the 1950s,” in \textit{The Miracle Years}, ed. Hannah Schissler, 362; Moeller, \textit{Protecting Motherhood}, 29.}

The anonymous German women described in her journal her own experience of her fiancé returning from the war and how it quickly became apparent that they would be unable to rekindle the romance that they had before his deployment. Gerd, who had returned from the eastern front was, “Amazed I’m here in one piece. When I told him about my starvation rations, he shook his head and claimed that from here on out he’d take care of getting what was needed.” Despite Gerd’s reclaiming of the role as provider, his lack of knowledge with rationing created tension between him and the female author. She wrote,

> All sorts of people who were on the march with Gerd came by and that lead to constant friction. He wanted the guests to be fed. I wanted to save as much bacon and potatoes as I could for the two of us. If I sat there and didn’t speak, he yelled at me. If I was in a good mood and told stories of our experiences over the past few weeks, then he got really angry. Gerd: “You’ve all turned into a bunch of shameless bitches, every one of you in the building. Don’t you realize?” He grimaced in disgust. “It’s horrible being around you. You’ve lost all sense of measure.” What was I supposed to say to that? I crawled off into a corner to sulk. I couldn’t cry, it all seemed so senseless to me, so stupid.

Gerd longed for a return to the prewar years, unaware of the irrationality of his wish, and unable to understand or sympathize with the experience of women.\footnote{Anonyma, \textit{Eine Frau im Berlin}, 274, 275.}

One of the clearest examples of the disconnect between the returned German men and German women revolved around the issue of rape, especially in
those areas of Germany that had been invaded by the Soviet Union. Men’s 
traditional social roles had assigned to them the role of provider and protector. 
The rape of a woman entrusted to a man brings into sharp relief the inability of 
the male to adequately protect the female and fulfill his proper role as a man. On a 
large scale, German men reacted negatively to the rape of German women. Rather 
than admit to the fact that they had left German women vulnerable to violence, 
many German men preferred to view rape as consensual sex, perhaps to conceal 
their feelings of guilt and deficiency. The anonymous author was the victim of 
repeated rapes by Soviet Union soldiers. In her diary, she wrote,

I gave Gerd my diaries...He sat down with them for a while and then 
returned them to me, saying he couldn’t find his way through my 
scribbling and the notes stuck inside with all the shorthand and abbreviations. “For example, what’s that supposed to mean?” he asked 
pointing to “Schdg.” I had to laugh: “Schändung,” of course—rape. He 
looked at me as if I were out of my mind but said nothing more.

The author laughed, not out of hilarity, but from a sense of incredulity that Gerd 
could not understand that rape had come to exemplify many women’s wartime 
experience. His silence indicated surprise, embarrassment, and an unwillingness 
to acknowledge her suffering and his failure in fulfilling his role as her supposed 
male protector. Her account of Gerd’s discovery of her rapes typifies the 
experience of many other German women in similar circumstances.66

Nazi marriage policies and wartime conditions had strained many 
relationships. Couples that married during the war often did not know each other 
very well when they were married and were virtual strangers once they had been 
reunited. Women had become accustomed to the absence of men, and in some

66 Anonyma, Eine Frau im Berlin, 276.
cases, men’s returns did nothing but further complicate women’s survival and family life. For their part, men had difficulty understanding wartime conditions on the home front, which contributed to their inability to sympathize with women’s struggles and achievements during the war. Many relationships ended in divorce and abandonment. Gerd’s relationship deteriorated typical of many relationships during the immediate postwar years. In June of 1945, the diary’s author wrote, “Yesterday, [Gerd] left again. He decided to go with one of his anti-aircraft buddies, to visit that man’s parents in Pomerania. He said he’ll bring back some food. I don’t know if he’s coming back at all. It’s bad, but I feel relieved. I couldn’t bare his constant craving for alcohol and tobacco.” The author of this diary wrote what many other women thought and experienced.67

Single, widowed, and divorced women witnessed the strain between reunited couples and felt little motivation to seek marriage for themselves. The married life apparently did not provided economic or emotional security, and many German men proved to be burdensome. To be sure, the absence of men did not negatively affect the idea of marriage and family; in fact, it worked to idealize the nuclear family. The presence of men, on the other hand, did much to disillusion some women with married life. The women’s magazine, Constanze, ran articles about the debilitated state of marriage and supported divorce with statements such as, “Those who divorce faster have more from life!” Other women’s magazines argued that marriage frequently disadvantaged women, and

67 Anonyma, Eine Frau im Berlin, 276.
also addressed the issue of husband infidelity, essentially telling women to get used to the idea.\textsuperscript{68}

The issue of fraternization between American occupation troops and German women created more controversy than the rising divorce rates and infidelity between German men and women. German women’s interest in American GIs developed based on the practical and emotional benefits American soldiers offered German women. Many women appreciated the fact that U.S. soldiers gave German children chocolate, tipped generously, projected positive attitudes, and had money. For women, who had been supporting their families with very little money and food, nothing could be more practical than to form a relationship with an American GI who could provide necessary resources. Many women also formed genuine love bonds with American GIs. Desire for long-absent affection often progressed from casual relationships into marriage, and evidence of this devotion can be seen in the patience and persistence American-German couples displayed as they endured bureaucratic red-tape to secure their marriages. West German leaders and U.S. military occupation leaders, however, took a negative view of relationships between “GIs and Fräuleins.”\textsuperscript{69}

U.S. concerns over fraternization resulted from pragmatic, political concerns. While many American-German relationships followed the proper course of courtship and resulted in official marriages, postwar U.S. occupation zones also saw a rise in illegitimate births. U.S. officials gave orders prohibiting

\textsuperscript{68} Heineman, \textit{What Difference Does a Husband Make?}, 108, 128, 129.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 97, 106.
German youth and welfare program officials from recording any children that resulted from American-German relationships. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which had risen among U.S. troops ten times the rate of 1939, continued for the duration of U.S. occupation and deeply concerned U.S. military leaders. For example, letters from resident officers in the Wetzlar and Hersfeld areas reported their concerns to the Intelligence Division of the Land Commission for Hesse. While officers admitted that the large number of female camp followers during the winter may have resulted from U.S. bases having efficient heating systems, they referred to these women as “illegal inhabitants” who did not “help the cause any” by maintaining contact with U.S. soldiers. By 1949, officers determined that the number of known cases of syphilis and gonorrhea had risen to 5,407; that these cases could be largely attributed to women; and that the rate of infected children continued to rise. As far as U.S. occupation leaders were concerned, the situation had become “critical.”

U.S. military occupation officials encouraged American soldiers to avoid relationships with German women. U.S. and German officials created a term and image for German women who entered into relationships with U.S. occupation soldiers. *Veronica Dankeschöne (Veronika Thank-You Very Much)* or VD for short (also an abbreviation for Venereal Disease), carried a negative sexual connotation as it was applied to those women who were responsible for spreading

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STDs to American GIs. In a 1946 issue of *Stars and Stripes*, a cartoon displayed U.S. concerns with VD women (Figure 11). In the illustration, an American soldier introduces his scantily-clad, obviously German, female companion to a sergeant. The caption reads, “Sarge, I’d like ya to meet the sweetest little gal in Deutschland—Miss Veronica Dankeschön.” Not only did the image and language of the German woman make it apparent that she potentially carries STDs, her dress and hair ribbon bear swastika images, connecting German sexuality to Nazi war guilt. STDs became a symbolic way to discuss Nazi ideology and fanaticism that had “spread” across Europe, “infecting” other cultures and inflicting suffering on innocent civilians.  

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71 *Stars and Stripes*, 1946.

72 Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*, Figure 11.
In addition to the high cost in personnel hours the disease prevention and treatment cost, concerns over the bad press this situation could present in the United States compelled occupation leaders to maintain the good name of U.S. army discipline by controlling the spread of STDs. The United States conducted a series of STD “vice raids” throughout the western zones, overwhelmingly targeting female German civilians for medical examinations in order to determine if they carried STDs. Medical records included brackets to record areas where the suspect women were found. Two brackets allowed examiners to label the woman as a wife or girlfriend. The other four brackets labeled her as a pickup, streetwalker, brothel employee, or a call-girl. For example, the report for Virginia Lockes indicated that she was a pickup who had contracted an STD at a hotel and then passed it on at another hotel. Remarks at the bottom of her paperwork stated that she “[hung] around Shauman [Hotel’s] bar.” German medical records, however, determined that Miss Lockes’ STD could not be verified, which led to protests over the legality of targeting women for STD tests.73

In fact, many women arrested in raids did not carry diseases and did not frequent establishments where they would be likely to contract STDs. Raids to control the spread of venereal disease disproportionately targeted German civilian women not because they were sicker than men, but because they had become the German target for reform. The U.S. military occupation government ordered and

73 U.S. High Commission for Germany, U.S. Land Commissioner for Hesse Public Affairs Division/Public Health and Welfare Branch, Correspondence and Other Records Relating to Public and Welfare Programs, Communicable Diseases through Exchanges Program, Report of a Contact of Venereal Disease (27 July 1950), RG 466, Box 2; Letter from Der Minister des Innern by Dr. Eller 26 October 1950), RG 466, Box 2.
oversaw the STD control program, but German officials actually performed the raids. Some U.S. occupation leaders actually objected to the unfair targeting of women as an obstruction of civil liberties. But for many Germans, women who contracted STDs stole penicillin and other medicines from more “deserving” Germans. More importantly, fraternization epitomized Germany’s moral decline and shaped German hopes for the possibility of reconstructing a “new,” sovereign western Germany.74

From the perspective of western Germans, fraternization defied traditional social mores, had a demoralizing affect on German men, increased the presence of STDs, and exposed children to illicit relationships. Fraternizing women became portrayed as backstabbers, seeking to emasculate the German nation by robbing German men of their traditional social roles. In the space of 1945, public discourse transformed German women from victims of rape and invaders to willful fraternizers, who committed “national treason” against the German State and German men, for the sake of material goods and satisfying sexual cravings. For all intents and purposes, western Germans considered fraternizing women as prostitutes.75

Western German leaders intently focused on the idea of German women as prostitutes, reflecting their complicated view of American occupation. Certainly not all German women who formed relationships with American


75 Ibid., 97; Schissler, introduction to The Miracle Years, 20; Ferenbach, “Of German Mothers,” in The Miracle Years, 167.
soldiers could be considered prostitutes. One in eight American GIs married a German woman, and yet even bona fide relationships faced skepticism. Many Germans often placed the words “fiancé” and “engaged” in quotation marks. Social workers and the German press also sometimes referred to women engaged to GIs as prostitutes. This discrimination becomes all the more interesting given the fact that prostitution did not result from the postwar conditions, although prostitution continued at a high rate throughout reconstruction. Many women had come to use themselves as currency on the black market during the war, sometimes in order to provide for themselves and their dependants. Traditional German definitions of prostitution changed as well. Generally, prostitution depended on the exchange of some form of payment for sexual activity, but Germans considered engaged GI’s and German women, who did not sell themselves, as prostitutes nevertheless. In other words, Germans had come to define prostitution based on the nationality of the man in the relationship and not on a payment transaction.76

The fact that German-German relationships, under any circumstances, would be less likely to be referred to as prostitution and German-American relationship, regardless of the circumstances, more likely to be referred to as such revealed German leaders concerns over sovereignty. The presence of the American GI meant more than competition for German brides and lovers; it also symbolized and highlighted Germany’s loss of independence. GIs infuriated German leaders with their profits from the black market, which hindered the

76 Heineman, What Difference Does a Husband Make?, 98; Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 23.
rehabilitation of the German economy. The relationships between African-American GIs and German women recalled memories of German occupation by Algerian soldiers following World War I. In the minds of many Germans, hard times did not justify fraternization, and discussions of fraternization led many Germans to feel insulted by American GIs and their German women. These couples insulted German masculinity, cheapened German femininity, and further destroyed the German sense of sovereignty.77

Figure 12. Fraternization by Erin Oehl, 1946.78


78 Erin Oehl, Fraternization, 1946.
German media popularized the denunciation of female, German fraternizers. Erwin Oehl’s 1946 painting, Fraternization, dramatically expressed how many Germans viewed fraternization (Figure 12). In this painting, a young, luridly dressed German woman accepts an occupation soldier’s touch, while also kicking a disabled German war veteran in the back. This painting expresses German distress at the relationships between American soldiers and German women, which further degrades German men, all against the backdrop of a destroyed Germany. Clearly, fraternization intensified and prolonged Germany’s suffering.79

Western German conservative’s concerns about the behavior of single women eventually developed a stigma that made her not only an enemy of German reconstruction, but also an enemy of the traditional German family. This stigma ignored the reality of what World War II had done to the institution of the German family. Adultery and illicit sexual activity increased during World War II and women’s magazines bluntly acknowledged illegitimate children and argued that single mothers deserved financial support. Women’s magazines like Costanze and Die Frau von Heute openly addressed divorce and suggested couples end their rocky marriages. Women who witnessed tension in marriages increasingly found the idea of singleness and divorce appealing, which also resulted in a decline in sexual abstinence and a rise in childbirth.80

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79 Heineman, “The Hour of the Women,” in The Miracle Years, 41.
Deciding to cope with marital infidelity, divorce, separations, and illegitimate childbearing over marriage did not necessarily promise women solutions to their daily struggles; they did, however, threaten the institution of marriage and the traditional family structure. Western German leaders faced a dilemma. They believed that the success of reconstruction, especially economic reconstruction, depended on the restoration of the family and relationships between men and women. They had to find a way to encourage women—and men—to return to the prewar, idealized nuclear family, despite the postwar conditions. The first step in that process lay in reinstating the male German as the breadwinner and the head of the household.81

German officials encouraged the Allies to release all German POWs and send them back to Germany, arguing that the influx of German men would stabilize the economy and German families. France, Great Britain, and the United States returned most of their German POWs during 1946, and the Soviet Union released all but “convicted war criminals” by 1949. The challenge for German policymakers lay in integrating these POWs back into their roles as fathers and breadwinners, roles from which they had long been absent. The first step in this direction required turning the POW image of a rag-tag group of victims into survivors, endowing them with moral virtues and strengths needed by the German family. Rather than acknowledging returned POWs as strictly POWs, that is, men taken as a result of military defeat, German policymakers praised German POWs for preserving their humanity in the midst of inhumane chaos—especially if they

had been detained in Soviet camps—simply based on the fact that they had survived. Government-sponsored exhibits opened throughout western German displaying art that attested to German soldiers’ fidelity to traditional German values of *Heimat* (homeland) and *Familie* (family). The narrative of POW survival equipped German men to reestablish a new, anticommuist, western Germany, while also maintaining a safe distance from the ever-encroaching American culture.82

Many images of POWs meant to portray the soldier in the context of the

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84 Ibid., 97.
Soviet camps. One image from a 1950 POW exhibit depicted a German POW with a barbed wire crown of thorns (Figure 13). The POW clearly symbolized the preservation of religiosity and Christian values despite the heathen environment of the Soviet Union. Another example comes from a 1953 traveling exhibition by the Association of Returning Veterans (Figure 14). This image displayed a German POW, with a shaved head, behind a barb wire fence. The caption on this image read, “We Admonish: The Prisoner of War Camp Experience and Lesson.” This image indicates that western Germans did not associate shaved heads and barbed wire with the experience of concentration camp victims. Rather, the imagery of Nazi victims became a way to express the suffering of German POWs in Soviet captivity.85

The transformation of POWs from victims to survivors allowed western German policymakers to reintroduce men back into traditional social roles. Businesses increasingly tried to replace women workers with returning men, especially in “male” professions like construction. In fact, this practice eventually led to the 1950 “POW law,” in which returned POWs could return to their former jobs and those POWs who returned after 1948 received the same treatment and help in finding employment as the “victims of fascism.” Western German policymakers provided men with these resources, hoping that these potential husbands and fathers could make “incomplete” families “complete.”86


86 Beis, “Survivors of Totalitarianism,” in The Miracle Years, 70.
The moral virtues apparently possessed by returned POWs naturally designated them as the solution to the moral confusion and familial crisis resultant of World War II. Consequently, western German leaders encouraged women to relinquish their roles as the head of their families in favor of the returning men. The move to place men in the roles as restorers of the German nation and culture also allowed western German leaders to distinguish their Germany from eastern, Soviet occupied Germany where, western policymakers argued, German POWs had been transformed into anti-democratic communists. Western German policymakers hoped that this distinction could earn western Germany the militaristic and economic benefits of belonging to the Western Alliance.87

The reintroduction of POWs into western Germany actually met little resistance by women because despite their struggles with men, few of their complaints translated into abolishing the traditional family structure. While abortion rates rose from one abortion in every twenty births in 1942, to one abortion in every 2.2 live births in 1949, this rise indicated that women did not want to raise children on their own. Many women protested the lackadasical approach women’s publications took on the issues of adultery and bigamy. The growing presence of irresponsible children stimulated conservative German efforts to reestablish the nuclear family. Many women reconsidered and actively sought marriage as men recovered from the affects of the war and their companionship became more appealing, as did their salaries, which had risen to a level guaranteeing women a more comfortable life than did the single life. And in

87 “Survivors of Totalitarianism,” in The Miracle Years, 71, 73.
all the social upheavals of World War II, the idea of a stable family and a subordinate wife provided many Germans with the comfort of what they envisioned as the prewar years. Conventional marriages increased into the 1950s.88

The postwar conditions between 1946 and 1957, however, did not decrease as quickly as marriage rates rose. How did the traditional family reassert itself, despite all the complications that made married life at worst unappealing and at best very difficult? Women can largely be held responsible for the reinstating of the family and their traditional social roles. The vilification of Veronika Dankeschön, German policies that supported the family, and consumerism and the attendant advertising all worked in tandem to create a western Germany where single women felt discriminated against simply for being unmarried. Single women’s wages became insufficient for comfortable living. And alternatives to the traditional family unit did not present themselves. In the end, many women believed that they could best serve themselves in situating themselves in traditional social roles.

A New Family in a New Germany

Why did the model of the traditional family receive so much support in western Germany during the postwar years as opposed to any other social model? A few members of the Bundestag petitioned for the legitimization of homosexual and lesbian relationships and parenting, but these types of relationships did not receive consideration in the reconstruction of western German society. The ideal family, which many western German leaders remembered from the interwar period, did not, in fact, exist. Yet the vision of a two parent, heterosexual family remained at the forefront of discussions of reconstruction. The reason for this lies in the fact that the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) came to be the dominant political party. In 1945, the CDU established its goals, with one being the “return to the Christian and occidental human values that once ruled the German people and made it great and respected among the people of Europe.” Western Germany had a large Catholic and Protestant population, and the majority of Catholics and Protestants derived their predilection for the traditional family unit from the Christian tradition of the West.  

Western German politicians in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and CDU generally agreed that the German family had suffered “more than any other societal institution”; that the family had become the “central problem of the postwar era”; and that “the family and women needed special attention.” Members of the Free Democratic Party (FPD) identified the “surplus of women”

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as disastrous. One representative said, “It is completely undesirable for a
citizen to be unmarried. There can be no form of existence less resistant to crisis
than that of the individual who remains unmarried.” This statement typified the
general sentiment that the *Frauenüberschuss* and single women’s efforts to
support their families constituted abnormalities in German society and only
demanded temporary solutions. Consequently, single-parent families came to be
viewed as temporary crises, whereas “normal,” nuclear families demanded lasting
policies, as their needs “were here to stay.”

The emphasis that policymakers placed on the German family had its
origins not only in pre-established ideas of the ideal family, but also in postwar
attempts to depart from National Socialism. Unlike the Nazis, who pursued the
idea of *Lebensraum*—the manifest need for increasing living space for the
German population—in conquering physical territory, postwar western German
leaders encouraged citizens to hope and work for a strong and stable Germany
within the family. Helmut Schelsky, director of the Academy of Communal
Economics, argued in 1948 that a large enough number of stable families
survived, despite the immediate postwar chaos. This feat, he argued, earned the
traditional family a place of central focus and immediate action in postwar
policymakers’ considerations. Western German leaders emphasized the
importance of families and called on married couples and parents to aid the
fledging Bundestag (1949) in reconstruction. In Schelsky’s estimation, by the late
1940s the family “was safe from catastrophe” because “motherly care for the life

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90 Richard Hammer, *Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestags*, [1.] Deutscher
of future generations” ensured the survival of many families during the war. Gregor Dettermann, a member of the Bundestag, said in 1950 that the Germans did not “need to fight a war to gain more space.” The family would provide Germany with the resources for stability. Änne Brauksiepe, a member of the Bundestag and German Catholic Women’s Association, built on these ideas when she spoke in 1952 at the CDU’s third party congress and said, “Next to men’s politics, [which is] securing and developing power, is the politics of women, [which is] securing and developing peace.” In supporting family policy, married mothers and fathers could help establish Germany’s sovereignty, peace, and freedom.91

Western German leaders believed that the traditional—and consuming—family could help rebuild the economy. Leaders also thought that regenerating the German economy offered the most practical route to reestablishing German sovereignty, as opposed to pursuing unification with the eastern zone of Germany. Thus, economic and family policies developed for and through each other. Family policies attempted to bring the family into a consumer culture and economic policies worked to make shopping a family function where more families could purchase as many consumer goods as possible. By supporting the nuclear family, policymakers hoped that they could also ensure the success of the western German economy.92


92 Carter, How German is She?, 22, 34.
Economists and reconstructionists immediately faced the problem of developing policies to benefit the public sector without overtly invading the ideally private sphere of the family. In light of National Socialist family policy, it became essential for western German leaders to demonstrate western Germany’s departure from Nazi tendencies. Members of the CDU claimed that Nazi policy reduced German women to breeding machines and that, “National Socialism…did everything possible to tear [the family] apart.” Western German leaders asserted that the “new Germany” would be different from National Socialism in that western Germany would support and protect families. Media images and outlets supported the drive to reestablish the traditional family. In fact, the same magazines that had suggested divorce began publishing articles in 1949 on the strength of marriage and advised German women on “How To Catch A Husband.”93

Social Democrats and members of the CDU believed that the German economy depended on the traditional family and “healing power of the motherly sphere of life.” The western German Bundestag, however, constantly debated what kind of policies would most effectively reestablish the German family. No matter how much policymakers supported the idealized family unit, realists within political parties acknowledged that the postwar conditions would prohibit many women from marrying and required their employment. Thus, policies and consumer advertising developed out of concession to the presence of working

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women with an eye towards how to increase the number of stay-at-home consumer mothers.94

Conservative German leaders’ first step lay in developing a family allowance for the patriarchal, “complete” families which would allow for a male’s paycheck to support the “complete” family. This kind of policy hearkened back to the nineteenth-century Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (Bourgeois Civil Code), which approached marriage and family from a distinctly patriarchal perspective and granted the male legal priority over the marriage and family. Defending the traditional family unit became a main tenet of the CDU platform as early as 1945. As eastern Germany became the reference point for all things “undemocratic,” western CDU politicians declared that the choice between democracy and socialism amounted to a choice between the “right” and “wrong” social and economic system. And because western leaders placed such an emphasis on the family’s role in the economy, the choice between capitalism and socialism determined one’s conception of the family. Western leaders argued that eastern Germany’s centralized planning was destroying the economy and that the mobilization of women into the workforce “destroyed the family” and opposed Christian values. For CDU leaders, the family provided a means of national identity, and the “right” kind of family had a working father as its head and a stay-at-home mother as wife and primary educator of children.95


Conservatives believed that a “return to normalcy”—that is, the idealized vision of a peaceful and prosperous pre-World War II era—depended on creating an environment in which the “right” kinds of families could expand and prosper. In this way, single women were an abnormality, and the institution of the family became the means of upward mobility. The family could then be a primary focus in postwar policy. If the family and children—future laborers—promised a quicker reconstruction, it was essential that politicians support their “most powerful asset” and create policies to support and encourage the institution of the nuclear family.  

The CDU focused on the importance of children as future contributors to social security and proposed policies that would guarantee wages which could support families with children. In the 1950s, CDU politicians also recommended a system of lessening taxes in proportion to the number of children in each family, known as “money for children.” Political leaders from all parties readily accepted this policy. SPD members took issue with “money for children” only insofar as it unfairly disadvantaged women with few to no children, a situation compounded by the Frauenüberschuss. The CDU rationalized its position based on the view that single parent households would eventually fade from social concern. Working and single women were a consequence of the war. Families that CDU

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leaders looked to as the future were those composed of a father, a mother, and more than two children.⁹⁷

Social Democrats believed patriarchal-oriented family policy to be unrealistic because economic conditions in postwar western Germany could not guarantee that a man’s income would support a “family of four.” Gehard Makenroth, a professor of national economy in Kiel (1934-1941) argued that focusing on the family created class distinctions between those with and without children. In fact, he argued that such policies created class distinctions within the

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⁹⁷ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 121, 125, 126, 127.

⁹⁸ SPD electoral poster, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz.
working class, between those who supported “incomplete” and “complete” families. He believed that tax breaks for families with more children might actually encourage individuals to shirk work as soon as they realized that they could live better on state support. Rather, Social Democrats believed that the family allowance should be offered to lower income families and also those families headed by women, referred to as “incomplete families,” because Social Democrats believed that these families deserved recognition as families, rather than marginalization as temporary social “problems.” The SPD sought votes from working women with the claim that of all the political parties, the SPD sympathized the most with women’s postwar circumstances (Figure 15).99

The emphasis the CDU placed on women’s roles as homemakers made working women’s situation more difficult in that they found they could not collect their unemployment compensation as easily as German men. Registered unemployment rates rose with the western German 1948 currency reform, reaching 42.5% for men and 70% for women. Western German officials apparently thought that women’s household “duty” made them unavailable for unemployment and concentrated more on finding work for men. Consequently, many of the women who kept the German economy running during World War II experienced critical levels of unemployment and poverty through the 1950 economic boom.100

99 Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 115, 120, 121; Gerhard Makenroth, “Die Reform der Sozialpolitik durch einen deutschen Sozialplan,” Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik, n.s. 4 (1952), 49.
An additional complication for working women came from Allied reconstruction policy, which developed independently of the CDU and Social Democrat’s’ views of women. Social Democrat’s’ worked to develop legislation that would benefit unmarried women and women who worked more than one job, in order to help them manage the double burden of the family and employment outside the home. The CDU wanted to predominantly aid Germans who fit the description of the “right” kind of family, that is, the nuclear family. The United States occupation leaders just wanted to get their occupation zone functioning as soon as possible. The CDU and SPD first collided with Allied attempts over the issue of maternity leave. Established in the late 1800s under Bismark, maternity leave allowed for eight weeks excused absence, but only for women in industrial employment. The benefits increased in 1929 with an absence allowance of up to twelve weeks and increased health insurance from 50% to 75%. Most women did not take advantage of these benefits because the costs of staying away from work outweighed the benefits of resuming work immediately following birth. Nazi policy did nothing to improve maternity leave as long as state circumstances allowed them to adhere to the ideal of the stay-at-home mother.101

Wartime conditions in 1942, however, compelled National Socialist policy to offer more equitable benefits to pregnant women, not only to encourage future pregnancies, but also to mobilize women into the work force. Maternity leave and compensation expanded drastically, offering paid leave six weeks before and six

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100 Heineman, “The Hour of the Women,” in The Miracle Years, 37; Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 142.

101 Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 155.
weeks following birth. These benefits also unprecedently included women in the agricultural employment. Much to the CDU and Social Democrats’ chagrin, the Allies abolished these benefits in 1945, arguing that the compensation emanated out of National Socialist ideology. More practically, U.S. military leaders did not think that the western German postwar economy could continue to support this type of state support.¹⁰²

U.S. occupation policies concerning working women frustrated SPD members more than the CDU, because the two groups did not agree on the issue of discouraging or encouraging women to remain out of paid employment. The Allied forces fully expected to mobilize women more fully into the workforce in order to rejuvenate the western economy, but the western German CDU labor ministry vigorously opposed all Allied attempts to bring women into “men’s jobs.” The Allies conceded to conservative views of working women not because they believed it to be the most pragmatic route to reconstruction, but because of political concerns that the United States establish a congenial relationship with the CDU, which appeared to be the most likely new governing body in western Germany. Konrad Adenaur strongly opposed Communism and the Soviet Union, and U.S. leaders believed he would be an effective buffer to Soviet expansion in Europe. Thus, in 1948, U.S. occupation officials wrote concerning their attempts to mobilize working women, “Our policy must inevitably be subordinated to [western German] economic considerations.” In other words, the CDU believed that employed women would only be favorable as long as the male population

¹⁰² Moeller, Protecting Motherhood, 156.
remained at a critical low. With the return of POWs, however, by 1948 western policymakers believed women in the workforce to be superfluous and tried to make room for male workers.¹⁰³

Policies that worked against SPD efforts for single women and single parent households did not come as a crushing blow to women who supported the SPD because the SPD differed only slightly from the CDU in policies. Even though Social Democrats argued that they represented women’s equality, few thought that women would want to work outside the home if offered the opportunity to live the ideal nuclear family life. One Social Democrat, Käte Strobel, said

The particularity of female nature, conditioned by her bodily and moral constitution, requires that we fulfill our roles as housewives and especially as mothers. Those roles cannot, under any circumstances, be neglected. Just the opposite. Social and moral recognition of these most basic and natural roles of women is also a demand for equality.

The SPD acknowledged that women’s work and experiences during the war had rightly earned them consideration, but they did not translate this sentiment into conceptions of the family beyond the traditional family.¹⁰⁴

Women’s support for the CDU led women activists among the Social Democrats to conclude that the majority of women voters concerned themselves less with gender equality and more with explicit signs and promises of economic recovery and security. Much like the election of the Center party in the Weimar


period, CDU success depended largely on the religious vote, as indicated by female voter polling. In the Protestant and Catholic areas of U.S. occupation zones, the CDU enjoyed support from a high percentage of women (Figure 16). The Frauenüberschuss aided the CDU in creating a greater pool of eligible women voters over male voters. Women’s votes coalesced with their voting patterns of the 1920’s, where women voted based more on party loyalty, than on specific issues. For example, the CDU’s Christian values almost automatically

Figure 16. “Christian Women, Where do You Stand? Vote CDU.”

105 CDU electoral poster, Hoover Institute Archives, Poster Collection.
implied that religious women would vote for the CDU. For a Catholic woman, voting for the CDU could generally be considered a foregone conclusion.\textsuperscript{106}

Christian Democrat and Catholic leaders worked for policies which would support the traditional family of the breadwinner father and stay-at-home mother. In addition, both groups supported policies that would increase the rate of childbirth, offsetting politicians concerns over population decline. As far as women’s equality concerned Christian leaders, they believe that marriage policies should reflect the idea that the differences between males and females emanated not so much out of their designated social tasks, but primarily out of a “natural order,” which was firmly based in religious doctrine.\textsuperscript{107}

Konrad Adenauer and his CDU cabinet of Protestant and Catholic Christian Democrats won the 1953 election with a great margin over the SPD and the West German Communist Party (KPD). Adenaur and other western German leaders immediately made use of marriage and family policy as a means of creating opposition towards eastern Germany and the Soviet Union. The choice for the traditional family was a choice between “slavery and freedom.” Western German leaders perceived “slavery” not only in the military culture of the Soviet Union, but they extended it to “Russian conceptions” of gender equality, which brought women “into the mines” of industry, created “orphans of technology,” and destroyed families. Establishing a strong military presence in western

\textsuperscript{106} Moeller, \textit{Protecting Motherhood}, 81, 100, 101.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 137.
Germany and reestablishing the patriarchal family could defend democratic Germans from the "eastern menace."  

Conservative and Christian Democrats focused so heavily on the institution of the family that they neglected the fact that Germany still had a large population of single and working women. Indeed, conservatives believed that "the task before us is not so much to restore broken or fragile marriages and families, but rather to reorient society at large in ways that stabilize the very constitution of the family." Western leaders viewed the problems in marriages and relationships as temporary issues and looked to the family, "the source (\textit{Pflanzstätte}) of life [and]…the decisive site of shaping humanity," as the future of western Germany.

The idealized family with clear traditional gender roles, which had not even existed before World War II, became a symbol of German tradition and a means of helping western Germans normalize their country. Reconciling equality and "normalcy" resulted in men reestablishing their roles in the public sector and women confirming their place in the home. Women of the \textit{Frauenüberschuss} were not viewed as women who freely chose to support themselves, but had been unfortunately deprived of a male spouse. The main social organizations of the Church, workers’ unions, political parties, some women’s organizations, and

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public opinion confirmed the ideal family as that of the working husband and father and the nurturing and ever-present wife and mother. This sentiment gained legal recognition and protection in the 1957 Basic Law. Article 3 of the Basic Law stated, “Men and women shall have equal rights. The state shall promote the actual implementation of equal rights for women and men and take steps to eliminate disadvantages that now exist.” Article 6, however, mandated that, “Marriage and the family shall enjoy the special protection of the state.” Thus, the 1957 Basic Law, while attempting to establish a democratic and equal society, betrayed CDU policymakers’ preference for the social model of the traditional family unit.110

Western Germany’s 1957 Basic Law became one factor in cementing the split between western and eastern Germany. CDU leaders proclaimed that socialism and eastern Germany’s mobilization of women laborers fragmented the family. Soviet Union and eastern German leaders protested against the Basic Laws’ prioritizing of the nuclear family, saying that, “One can impose nothing more dishonorable on a woman than to expect her to be her husband’s unpaid maid.” While western German leaders extensively debated women’s equal rights, eastern Germany abolished all laws that violated sexual equality by 1950 and claimed the superiority of their social model. Both eastern and western German leaders exaggerated in their accusations of the other. Women in eastern Germany did not enjoy equal rights in the workforce to the extent that the law entitled them.

Working women in western Germany continued to be marginalized and paid different wages than men. Eastern Germany, however, did not enjoy the material and economic benefits that western Germany received from being allied with the United States. As western Germany regained sovereignty and established its legal code in 1957, eastern German leaders prepared for a battle over social models and German citizens, which eventually lead to the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.111

Many CDU politicians and conservatives declared that women could best help western Germany by raising German families because women “[were] not born into work.” At best, western German policymakers and the general public viewed women employment as a necessary—but temporary—evil. Women’s experiences during the war years had earned them unprecedented attention in the reconstruction of western Germany. But women’s emancipation rhetoric did not call for the abolition of the traditional family. Indeed, it was within the state-supported nuclear family that postwar women gained greater recognition and representation.112


Conclusion: Remembering the Hour of the Women

The phrase, “The Hour of the Women,” expresses the immediate postwar experiences of women, including their waged employment, rubble clearing, rape, and protection of their dependants. Narratives by women who lived through World War II and the postwar years often focus more on men’s roles and less on the independent choices of women. While this thesis has emphasized women’s independence and argued that policies targeted women, the “Trummelfrauen,” (Rubble Women), the “Frauenüberschuss,” and the “alleinstehende Frau” (a single woman, but literally a woman standing alone) became kinds of universal ways to express the totality of the postwar western German era, and not strictly the experiences of women. Literature on the role of German women has only in recent years researched and expanded on the ideas contained in this thesis because immediate postwar literature deemphasized the wartime trauma of women and prioritized the reconstruction of the “normal” lives of “normal” families.

One of the most obvious instances of western policymakers appropriating the effects of the war on women concerned the issue of rape. Leaders used the physical rape of women to express Germany’s defeat and occupation, allowing them to depict their nation as a victim, perhaps a convenient way to detract from Nazi war crimes and war guilt. Whatever the case, the fact that rape became a nationalized metaphor had significant affects on women. The western German government refused to recognize rape by the Soviets or U.S. occupying forces as a criminal offense, unless the rape resulted in demonstrable permanent injury. The ministry of labor ignored petitions to aid raped women under the Law to Aid
Victims of War, refused to grant rape victims state-funded child support, and justified itself by condescendingly reminding women that children naturally resulted from sexual intercourse. “Rape” became a way of describing Germany’s loss of sovereignty, rather than a woman’s loss of honor.\(^\text{113}\)

Working women held the western German economy together, as they made up the greatest population of the workforce but they faced great difficulty in shifting their wartime achievements into fairer treatment in the workforce. Single women and women who worked by necessity followed the German guidelines for embracing citizenship through creating and spending wealth, but “these women were seen as victims of a period and political context that were characteristically to be repressed from 1950s public life.” Political and religious leaders assumed that married women did not need to work if their husband could support them and that women should certainly not work if they had children. Consequently, these ideas vilified the working woman and labeled unmarried women as an anomalous byproduct of the war. In addition, the economic miracle of the 1950s gave proponents of the nuclear family what they considered proof of the needless presence of married women in the workforce. With a successful economy, many western Germans believed that the male wage would support a family. Women did not need to work and households could function on a single income.\(^\text{114}\)

\(^{113}\) Heineman, “The Hour of the Women,” in *The Miracle Years*, 32.

The importance of Christian values and beliefs, discussions of the inherent differences between men and women, and the western German government’s anticommunist stance guided the consideration of German women in the 1950s. In order to distance themselves from Nazi family policy, western German policymakers attempted to “restore” the family and establish gender equality, albeit in an anti-Marxist fashion. Thus, Bonn politicians applauded the necessary presence of the woman in the home as “equal partner” with her bread-winning husband, and recommended that she refrain from paid employment. In the minds of Bonn republic leaders, the Soviets may have claimed that integrating women into the economy as laborers exercised women’s equality, but it actually enslaved women and destroyed their families. Bonn politicians preferred that their female citizens contribute to the western German economy as consuming housewives.\(^{115}\)

Western German leaders’ preoccupation with fraternization also conveniently drew attention away from Nazi War crimes and subsequent trials. By identifying German and American co-mingling as the most evident example of German national deterioration, Germans could ignore the larger issue of war guilt. Germans could overlook the issue of returned soldiers, who had “served” the German nation in performing crimes against humanity, and the “proper” housewife, who had betrayed Jewish neighbors to the SS. In this way, fraternizing German women became a national scapegoat, which also explains why the narrative of fraternization is more enduring than the stories of the “rubble

women,” “women of the hour,” and “women standing alone.” Germans oftentimes remembered women more for the phenomenon of fraternization than for their work of rebuilding Germany’s landscape, economy, and families.116

Perceptions of working women and stay-at-home mothers evolved out of public perception and opinion. The negative view of fraternization encouraged many women to distinguish themselves from STD-infected women by not only condemning fraternization, but by also supporting political parties and policies that promised to “restore” women’s dignity through the revitalization of the traditional family. Media images extorted women to strengthen and aid the German economy by giving up jobs for men and shopping. German policymakers’ message told women that the best way they could serve their nation lay in serving their families.117

Despite the emphasis placed on traditional mothers and the social unacceptability of working women, many women chose to continue or seek employment throughout the years of the Bonn republic, and contrary to public opinion, working women did not disenfranchise men. Granted, in some cases the consistently high number of single women resulted from the fact that women had trouble finding spouses if they wanted to marry, and had to work by necessity. More importantly, however, this fact indicates that advertising and political efforts to place women within the context of the ideal family did not solely create the role of women, marriage, and family in western Germany. Economic

116 Heineman, “The Hour of the Women,” in The Miracle Years, 39; Schissler, introduction to The Miracle Years, 20.

conditions and women’s own memories of family life affected their perceptions and expectations of the married or single life. The continued presence of working women in western Germany’s Bonn republic indicates the autonomy of German women in accepting or rejecting appeals to the traditional *Hausfrau*. Women did not return to the home or remain in employment because policies and attendant advertising manipulated them to do so. Women internalized and embraced the lives they chose, as either paid employees or as wives and homemakers.118

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Die NSDAP Sichert Die Volksgemeinschaft.

Hilf auch Du mit!

SPD Electoral Poster

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