MOTHERS IN THE FATHERLAND

Women, the Family and Nazi Politics

Claudia Koonz

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Volume 24

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1987

This edition first published in 2013
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-53409-3 (Set)
eISBN: 978-0-203-10425-5 (Set)
ISBN: 978-0-415-63272-0 (Volume 24)
eISBN: 978-0-203-09544-7 (Volume 24)

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What is past is not dead; it is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it;
we preferred to be strangers.
—Christa Wolf, *Model Childhood*

For my parents,
Oliver W. and Edna Kingston Koonz

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From the very beginning of my study of women in Nazi Germany, I knew that I would depend upon the close collaboration of archivists, colleagues, and friends. The scarcity of published documents and secondary works in the mid-1970s meant that before even beginning this undertaking I needed the advice of dozens of curators at state, local, church, and organizational archives. From the very first, too, I received vital feedback from other historians who shared their specialized knowledge about sources and also forced me to relate information about women to the wider perspectives of the history of inter-war Germany. Gathering information about so dismal a period becomes depressing. The historical figures I admired were nearly always killed and the women Nazis I deplored virtually always thrived, even after 1945. Without the friends who helped me think through my responses to the unrelieved tragedy of the Nazi period, I might have succumbed either to a professional callousness that blotted out empathy or despaired completely and abandoned the project altogether.

I have looked forward to writing this acknowledgment as a tribute to the many individuals who helped me out in so many ways. My first thanks go to colleagues who encouraged me to begin my forays into archives from the Nazi period. Renate Bridenthal, Rudolf Binion, Hannah Papaneck, Fritz Ringer, Carl Schorske, and Joan Scott read and commented on my earliest proposals for this research in the mid-1970s. More recently, the late Warren Susman, John Gillis, Peter Gay, Charles S. Meier, and Ismar Schorsch helped me to rethink my conclusions and consider new dimensions of my findings.

Without substantial aid I could never have completed extensive archival research in Germany. Most of all, the College of the Holy Cross has supported me with not only a sabbatical year, but a one-semester Faculty Fellowship, unlimited computer time and a VAX terminal, and generous annual grants to defray expenses for travel, interviewing, and Xeroxing. The German Marshall Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation each granted me yearlong fellowships to pursue research and writ-

ing. The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded me a Travel-to-Collections grant so I could carry on interviews with Jewish Germans living in Germany.

Because the success of this study depended upon my discovering little-known source material, I want to acknowledge my special debt to the dozens of staff members of archives in Germany, France, England, and the United States who gave so generously of their time and shared their immense knowledge of their respective collections. Agnes Peterson early on directed my attention to the valuable autobiographical essays in the Abel Collection at the Hoover Institution for War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University. I continued my search for individual records at the Berlin Document Center, where Herr Pix and William Simon patiently provided me with files and new "leads." In my search for background information and periodicals, Frau Lorenz at the German Institute for Social Questions in Berlin provided me with hours of thoughtful assistance. In the process, she allowed me access to the papers of Helene Lange Collection. Frau Rasch at the library of the Verband Weiblicher Angestellte in Berlin allowed me to spend days reading in the organization's extensive periodical collection.

Dr. Rumschöttel at the Munich State Archives opened up to me the extraordinary collection of women's papers and memos in the Ministry of Education and National Socialist Teachers' Union (NSLB) files. For material on women in the early part of the century, I am grateful for the guidance of Dr. Cecile Lowenthal-Hess of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Dr. Eberhard Heyl of the Bavarian Hauptstaatsarchiv IV, and Herr Teichmann of the Siemens Archives in Munich. Elke Frölich at the Institute for Contemporary History shared with me her study of police files and gave me valuable guidelines to the Institute collections. Frau Brigitte Emmer helped me out with procedures and catalogues. Blanche Wiesen Cook called my attention to the Robbins papers at the Roosevelt Library.

Dr. Neugebauer shared with me his extensive knowledge of the Federal Military Archive in Freiburg holdings related to women's participation in wartime labor mobilization. Herr Scharmann supplied me with relevant information about the Federal Archives in Koblenz. At the Munich State Archives, Fräulein Booms brought me files and explained procedures. The staff of the North Rhineland Westphalian Gestapo Archives in Düsseldorf supplied me with access to organizational files in their collections. In the Nuremberg State Archives, Frau B. Bauerschäfer guided me through the indices related to local and regional government. Frau Pietrowski introduced me to the Lower Saxony Hauptstaatsarchiv in Pattensen. At the Hessian State Archives Herr Hel-

fer and Frau Dr. Löwenstein explained the holdings and suggested I investigate the extensive Nazi Party membership applications. At the Kalkum branch of the Düsseldorf State Archives, Herr Reuter patiently supplied dozens and dozens of folios on local and regional social history.

Herr Wolfgang Strecker clarified the extraordinarily rich organizational records of Catholic organizations at the Deutscher Caritasverband Archives in Freiburg, and Herr Dr. Hans-Josef Wollasch allowed me access to the social work and educational library at the Caritas Fachhochschule in Freiburg. In the Archbishopric Archives in Freiburg, Frau Ulrike Dehn spent hours with me pouring through catalogues and files related to women, Archbishop Gröber, and local educational organizations. At the office of the League of Catholic Women Teachers in Essen, Frau Dr. Pflug and Frau Emmerich gave unstintingly of their time to share with me their collection of teachers' autobiographies from the Nazi period. Maria Prym and Frau Klöpper made me feel at home by not only allowing me to read in their collection at the Catholic Women's League in Cologne, but also by their willingness to discuss their organization's history.

In Berlin two wonderful collections and their personnel sustained me through several months of research into Protestant women's organizations. Frau Helge Tonges on several occasions explained the holdings of the Protestant National Archives in Berlin and over the years has provided me with much vital information on women's organizations. Hans-Jochen Kaiser has for a decade shared with me his writings and his extensive knowledge about Protestant women's organizations under Nazism. At the Protestant Archives in Karlsruhe, Frau Sakdowski invited me to use the excellent collection related to the Neuland Organization and Protestant associations. I want especially to thank Dr. Helmut Tlasko, Herr Deppe, Frau Dohmke, Frau Schwetlinski, Frau Pohl, and Frau Erdmann, whose good humor and efficiency made working at the Diakonisches Werk Archives in Berlin so rewarding.

The staff of the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, at the University of Paris, Nanterre, has sustained me with their efficiency, knowledge, and good humor. Working at the Centre de documentation Juives Contemporaine in Paris inspired me with awe at the collections and with a strong sense of continuity with the past they describe. Dr. Monika Richarz, of the Germania Judaica in Cologne, prodded me forward with sharp questions and suggestions for further reading. Michael Riff, Frank Mecklenberg, Sybil Milton, and Allan Divack have for years helped me in my research and made the days I have spent at the Leo Baeck Institute among the highlights of my archival searches. Dr. Fred Grubel introduced me to a network of scholars re-

searching the history of Jewish organizations in Nazi Germany. Marion Kaplan told me about dozens of files and articles and asked me vexing questions that made me rethink my assumptions about Jewish women in Nazi Germany. My search for photos was aided by Fräulein Ledder at the Ullstein Photo Service, Frau Klausener at Prussian Picture Archives, and Frau Dr. Mahnke at the Prussian State Library in Berlin. The Peter Hammar Press generously mailed the only copy in its possession of the photo of Hitler with the mother of a Nazi martyr, which I used as the last illustration in this book.

To Rabbi Stanley Davids and the members of Temple Emanuel in Worcester who lived in Germany before 1939, I am grateful for their willingness to explore painful memories. Lilli Kretzmir's retrospective wisdom and sharp questions opened up new dilemmas and insights into how it felt to be betrayed not only by one's "Fatherland" but also most of one's neighbors and friends. Dr. Robert Salomon shared his extraordinary knowledge of Jewish history and, together with his wife Johanna Salomon, Charlotte Blaschke, Ilse Rothschild, Annie Bader, Magda Meyersohn, Harold Rogers, Helen Sachse, and Ilse Wischnia, participated in a collective exploration of the years they had spent in Germany. Elisabeth do Pazo's honesty made me aware of the moral ambiguities of resistance.

My deepest gratitude goes to a host of friend-colleagues. Joyce Engelson, my editor at St. Martin's during the early stages of this book, gave me her precise reactions to every chapter and invariably sent me back to the drawing board. Just two of her many terse questions, "What about Jewish women?" and "Did no women resist?" resulted in over a year of additional research, thinking, and writing. I owe much to her enthusiasm, unfailing good judgment, and patient determination. Thomas Dunne gave his thoughtful commentary on the final version. As the manuscript took its final form, Betsy Williams, with steady nerves and good humor, guided it across the finish line, and Amelie Littell carefully checked the result as it arrived.

Lois Brynes and Serena Hilsinger unfailingly offered me their comments and hospitality, especially during the weeks when I almost lived in front of the word processor screen in my office. In Munich Eva Kollmar Krell and Eberhardt Kollmar held "debriefing" sessions after long days in the archives, and in Berlin Gudrun Schwarz, Karin Hausen, Annemarie Tröger, Gisela Bock, Dagmar Schultz, Ursula Kirchner, and Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen offered their hospitality and conversation. Max and Miriam Awerbuch drew me into spirited discussions about life among Jews in Israel, Berlin, and the United States. My colleagues at the College of the Holy Cross gave me sharp criticisms and good-

humored encouragement at every stage. Especially I want to thank Ross Beales, Robert L. Brandfon, Randall K. Burkett, Ann Flynn, Karen Gottschang, William Green, Anthony J. Kuzniewski, Theresa M. McBride, and James F. Powers for their collegial support. Rachel S. Degutis, aided by Paula McGrail, answered dozens of bibliographical inquiries. Barbara Puddister found every missing book. Rev. Joseph F. Pomeroy and Ellen Keohane helped out with all word processing crises.

Bonnie Anderson read the penultimate draft and returned it full of marginal comments and pages of valuable notes. To Mary Ellen Capek, Temma Kaplan, and Harriet Lutzky I am grateful for questions and detailed reactions on the chapters they read. In an important sense, my largest debt is to Charlotte Sheedy, who was the first person to urge me to expand my focus beyond women Nazis and to address the panorama of German women as Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and resisters. Since our initial conversations in 1980, she has piloted this manuscript through the publishing process, given me unsparing feedback, and cheered my way.

Each time I completed a chapter, I gritted my teeth and distributed it to nine friend-colleagues who I knew would dissect it, call for more evidence, dispute its fundamental thesis, and suggest at least ten alternative organizational approaches. The relentless cross-questioning and spirited discussions that resulted were the high points of my work on this manuscript. Thank you, Bonnie Anderson, Renate Bridenthal, Jane Caplan, Atina Grossman, Amy Hackett, Deborah Hertz, Marion Kaplan, Molly Nolan, and Joan Reuterschan. Françoise Basch perused every chapter, unfailingly welcomed me in Paris after archival forays to Germany, and constantly warned me about the difference between *tout comprendre* and *tout pardonner*.

PREFACE

As I waited for Gertrud Scholtz-Klink to walk through the door of a cluttered editorial office in the prosperous suburb of a quaint German university town, I tried to imagine how she might have changed in the forty years since I had lost her trail in the archives. In the early 1940s, American historian Mary Beard had been awestruck at the power of this woman, whom she had described as "spectacular and utterly ruthless."

> By 1941 she [Gertrud Scholtz-Klink] was governing some thirty million German women and tightening her grip on some twenty million other women in lands occupied by German troops. The dictatorial authority of this "Lady *Führer über Alles*" was vividly described by Peter Engelmann. . . . "Frau Klink," wrote Engelmann, "rules the lives of women in all things. She tells them how many children they must have, and when; what they shall wear, what they shall cook and how. What they shall say, laughing to their husbands and sons marching to war. How they shall behave, smiling, when their men are killed. Here is the responsibility for the home spirit, the core of national morale."[1]

She had impressed William Shirer, on the other hand, as "particularly obnoxious and vapid."[2] This woman was about to walk through the door, and I wondered again what I would say, what I might learn. What had brought me here?

Curiosity? Of course. But I also felt a sleuthlike need to follow up on every clue related to the role of women in Nazi Germany. I had already gathered evidence from books and archives on women who embraced Nazism and joined the Party, on Catholics and Protestants who expressed reservations but welcomed the arrival of an authoritarian state in 1933, on women who opposed Hitler, and finally on Jewish women who defended themselves against incremental and ultimately lethal danger. This was not, as my friends and colleagues were quick to point out, "happy history."

"How," my friends asked, "can you live with such a depressing topic?" Like all historians, I had a ready-made response. " 'Those who don't

know their history are condemned to repeat it.' " Was that a feeble excuse? Americans today see no swastikas on their political horizons. Uniformed, goose-stepping militarism surely died out after the advent of missiles and guerrillas. Still, underneath the unique and dated style of Nazism lurked a more universal appeal—the longing to return to simpler times, to restore lost values, to join a moral crusade. What needs drove those millions of "good Germans" willingly into dictatorship, war, and genocide? Did those needs exist in other nations at other times? Could what Susan Sontag has called "the drama of the leader and the chorus" continue to play a role after the demise of the fascist hero?[3] During the Great Depression, Germans rallied to one-man-one-party rule, uniforms, flags and rifles, mass rallies, racial hatred, and appeals to national glory. What would happen in other countries if small businessmen, housewives, artisans, white-collar workers, and students felt betrayed by an alien political establishment, a fraying welfare net, and chronic economic dislocations?

I thought back on the years I had spent in Germany during the late 1950s and early 1960s—to innumerable hitchhiking conversations, when I stumbled onto my own interview format with my standard opener, "What wonderful highways you have here."

"You like our autobahn?"

"Oh, yes, it seems very fast, and scenic, too."

"You would never guess who built it." I never once gave into the temptation to say, "You bet I would!"

And we would slide into conversation about the glorious 1930s, when a dynamic leader pulled his nation out of the Depression (more successfully than "your" Roosevelt) and inspired people with a new idealism. I don't know if a random sample of Germans stopped to pick up foreign hitchhikers. I asked why they gave rides to students, and they invariably told me that they had begun the practice during the war years, when sharing seemed more important than privacy. After the war in the days before Eurail passes, kindly European drivers routinely gave students not only lifts to the next town but allowed them an intimate glimpse into their values and culture. In my case, hundreds of Germans shared with me their memories of a Nazism without genocide, racism, or war. They recalled a social world of close families, sports activities and vacations, a strong community spirit, high moral standards, and economic security. Men and women looked back with fondness, sad only about the war—that is, the defeat, not the brilliant military victories before the Battle of Stalingrad. Since visions of Hitler as evil incarnate had colored my childhood, I wondered that people would be so open in their defense of the Nazi state. Especially I asked the women with whom I spoke how they

had felt about so militaristic a regime. "Politics, police, the army—all those bad things—they were men's concerns," they answered. History recorded the "bad things"; memory preserved a benign face of fascism.

Fifteen years later I returned to the question of women's participation in the Third Reich and realized that I would have to find the documents because so little had been published about women. The endeavor led me to search for memos, orders, letters, and articles, by and about one Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the chief of the Women's Bureau under Hitler. Never had it occurred to me that one day she would emerge from the historical shadows, take on human form and speak. Political scientists meet their subjects; but normally historians study dead leaders. One day in 1980 I noticed Scholtz-Klink's book, *The Woman in the Third Reich,* in a feminist bookstore in Berlin, and picked it up. Upon leafing through it, it became clear the the contents were speeches and articles written by Scholtz-Klink and her staff during the 1930s. The dust jacket announced the collection as "a pioneering work of supreme importance" and a testimonial to Scholtz-Klink's "extraordinary achievements as well as great suffering during fateful bitter times." The publicity promises that Scholtz-Klink's writings will demonstrate how women "came naturally to form the 'biological middle point' " of a new society, driven by "nationalist and racial powers. . . . Without the courage, power and steadfastness of women, girls, and mothers in the Third Reich, the Germany of today would be unthinkable." Such a book, I thought to myself, in a women's bookstore. Although its essays carried a deeply anti-feminist message, the bookstore stocked it because its author was female. Richard Evans' excellent history of German feminism, by contrast, had been ruled out because its author was male. Biology still counted more than opinion in Berlin. My ideological doubts subsided, however, as the historian in me realized that Scholtz-Klink might still be alive. Not really expecting a reply, I wrote a polite note to the publisher and forgot about it. She would of course refuse my request to speak with her, but then I could include a footnote saying I had tried.

One day as I returned from a research trip, I found a letter addressed in a familiar hand. The postmark, Tübingen, meant nothing to me; I knew no one who lived there. Then I felt a chill travel up my spine. How many times had I seen that regular, graceful hand at the end of letters and documents. *"Sehr geehrte Frau Dr. Koonz,"* the letter began. I had always met my subjects through their records; now a ghost rose out of the archival mist and addressed me. The leader of millions of Nazi women under Hitler had decided to talk to me. What did she want? What did I want from her?

When I embarked on this research project, the paradox of the topic

riveted my attention. In the Nazi state, women had received the opportunity to create the largest women's organization in history, with the blessings of the blatantly male-chauvinist Nazi Party. Here was the nineteenth-century feminists' vision of the future in nightmare form. The earliest crusaders for women's rights had believed passionately in their distinct female nature and concluded that their political participation and legal equality would elevate the level of public debate, redirect the government toward more humane concerns, and calm male leaders' warlike predisposition. While fighting for equality, women defended their difference, vowing never to become "masculinized." The dream lived on even after war, revolution, and Depression had sapped the nation's idealism. As "man-made" institutions pitted worker against capitalist, socialist against nationalist, rich against poor, a nostalgia for the natural grew.

The myth about a past that never was increased in beauty as it became more remote from modern society. At the heart of this vision lay a dream of a strong man and a gentle woman, cooperating under the stern guidance of an orderly state. The image did not die with the German surrender in 1945, but lives on in memory. Often it finds brilliant artistic expression, as for example in Edgar Reitz's fifteen and a half hour film *Heimat*, which recreates a Nazi past unfiltered by ethical questions and unmarred by unpleasant references to victims or violence. National Socialism, as a movement before 1933, a state for twelve years thereafter, and a memory since 1945, embodies the myth of an orderly world dominated by men and a gentle world of love preserved by women. Hundreds of scholars had investigated the etiology of the regime that extended from the SA and SS at the grassroots to the desk murders in Berlin. But what about the women? That question brought me to Tübingen.

The woman who bore the major responsibility for creating a separate female sphere in Nazi society was about to walk through the door. I had followed her bureaucratic maneuvers, watching her establish a mammoth organization spanning virtually all aspects of German social life. She had developed her own style of administration and cultivated an intense loyalty among her followers. Often I had stared at photographs of her modest figure surrounded by overdressed and overfed Nazi leaders. Because Scholtz-Klink's duty was to inspire other women to follow her example, she always appeared as the peahen surrounded by plumed ostentation. I recalled an American woman's account of a meeting with the Führerin.

> One meets her surrounded by Nazi flags and uniforms. Her gentle femininity is a startling contrast to the military atmosphere. She is a friendly woman in her middle thirties, blonde, blue-eyed, regular featured, slender.

> She sits in her wicker chair on her little balcony and chats with her visitor. Her complexion is so fresh and clear that she dares to do without powder or rouge. She talks, and one notices that her firm, capable hands have known hard work. . . . How does she feel about the possibility of Germany's going to war? She glances up at the swastikas and across at the black boots of the uniformed men beyond the doorway and she turns quickly away to hide the tears in her eyes. "I have sons," she says quietly. Her eyes are as sad as the eyes of so many other German mothers who know so well the German Labor Camp motto which says so plainly that sons must "fight stubbornly and die laughing."[4]

What would the Führerin say in 1981 about her massive organization that indoctrinated a generation of young women and girls to "be brave, be German, be pure"? After decades of silence, would she impart to a new generation words of guidance and contrition? From the archives I knew her as docile, self-serving, and rather noncommittal. For all her slavish devotion to the Führer, I had not encountered anti-Semitic prejudices in her orders or memos. Perhaps after so many years, she had decided to speak out to warn the world or simply to atone for her complicity.

Without really understanding why, I felt overcome with anxiety. I intended merely to listen and to record, occasionally to insert a probing question. Oral historians must remain faceless and value-free in order to capture the full truth. Still, I had never interviewed an ex-Nazi since those hitching conversations of my student days. Gazing out at the dismal garden, I wondered; my worries began to shift from the list of questions in my head to my image. Had I dressed appropriately for this encounter? What *was* the proper image for an ex-Nazi? Could I win her trust if I wore an A-line skirt (light gray), simple shirt (also light gray), hand-knit Irish cardigan (blue), sensible shoes (also blue)? Would my hair stay neat in its Germanic bun? Certainly, I thought guiltily, I had the right coloring for an "Aryan" image. These anxieties, I realized, masked my deeper forebodings. Why did I even want to win the trust of an ex-Nazi?

The door opened. A wiry, vigorous woman strode in and took my hand, smiling openly. "I'm very pleased to meet you," we both said. She, in an A-line skirt (dark green), a Black Forest hand-knit cardigan (also dark green), prim blouse (white) with a tiny brooch, and sensible shoes (brown), shook the rain from her umbrella. A hair net kept her white braids twisted neatly around her head. I had dressed so very correctly (and so instinctively), a shudder passed through me. Except for forty years of aging, Frau Scholtz-Klink looked just as she had in the photos —proud, athletic, and trim.

I had followed her trail through the fall of Berlin and knew that she and a small band of followers had been captured by the Russians at a bridgehead in Spandau. She had escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp and traveled secretly to the estate of an old friend, one Princess Pauline zu Wied, who offered her and her family a safe hiding place in her castle in the Black Forest. She and her husband worked as bakers in a small village nearby until 1948, when a local peasant reported their presence to the police.

During the intervening years, Scholtz-Klink was to tell me, she had lived in pleasant obscurity, wanting to forget the past and adapt to a new world. But then Albert Speer spoke out, openly confessing his role as the "Devil's architect." Frau Scholtz-Klink began to reconsider. As it turned out, she, too, wanted to speak out to a new generation, but not in the way I had anticipated. The newspapers, she said, had presented "such a biased view of the Nazi years." German youth of today should have the right to reclaim those aspects of Hitler's state of which they can be proud. Angered at the hypocrisy of the West German censorship of "unbiased" material, which depicted the Nazis in a favorable light, Scholtz-Klink rankled. She resolved to speak the truth about her past. I had anticipated a Speer-like contrition; she had been, after all, like Speer, very young and extremely ambitious. Instead I listened to pious excuses that reminded me of the rationalizations given during the war-crimes trials at Nuremberg. "How could I have known? We had our duty. You must remember the other side. . . ." Memories of these splendid autobahns filtered through my mind.

I had not been invited to hear a confession, and this was not an *ex*-Nazi. She remained as much a Nazi now as she had been in 1945 or 1933. This woman, who for twelve years imposed utter orthodoxy on her staff and dispatched Nazi propaganda to millions of German women, now castigated the current German government for limiting her freedom to extol the Nazi past. She did not care about preventing the rise of another murderous political system, but felt, on the contrary, deeply committed to vindicating the one she had supported.

As I evaluated the situation, I realized that I had come to get information and she intended to give me a sanitized version of Nazism that would normalize the Hitler state in the minds of contemporaries. She saw the chance to share her views with an American as a way of taking her message to not only a younger generation, but a new audience. I resolved to concentrate on the facts and resist the temptation to argue. Four decades and de-Nazification courses had not convinced her; it was unlikely that I would.

She talked on, dispensing advice for contemporary leaders, complain-

ing that no one listened to her anymore. I found it difficult to concentrate.

"You know, if our politicians learned from the past, they would not have to complain about the unruly youth of today. Why don't they ask us for advice on social problems? We senior citizens could tell them a thing or two. In the Depression, we sponsored a national labor service that took teenagers off the streets and taught them patriotism," she said proudly.

"The organization that taught German boys to 'die laughing'?" I asked.

Dodging the question, she reminded me that our "great American President" had initiated similar programs. Then she offered her proposals for that other unruly segment of the population, women. "The new French President, Mitterand, is on the right track, but he doesn't go far enough. He created a ministry for women's rights. My own women's division concerned itself with women's responsibilities. We formed almost a state within a state. In my ministry I directed departments of economics, education, colonial issues, consumer affairs and health, education and welfare. No man ever interfered with us; we did as we pleased." Her decision to create a separate bureaucracy for women had "nothing to do with feminism," she insisted, but sprang from her own intense pride in being a woman.

I remained mute, my reactions in disarray. Unconcerned, she pursued her own stream of thought.

Within her own sphere, Scholtz-Klink smugly recalled, she had insisted on democratic principles. Did that mean elections and voting? I asked. Not at all. If two staff members differed, for example, she did not make a ruling, but told them to sit down and discuss their argument over a cup of tea. "My women and I functioned as one big happy family. They knew they could always count on my support. In all my years in office, no one ever resigned, and I fired no one. Now that record shows how harmoniously we cooperated. No man ever represented us in the outside world. We spoke for ourselves." Without a trace of irony, she recalled, "If you could have seen the women of Berlin defending their city with their lives against the Russians, then you would believe how deeply German women loved our Führer." Even today she and her co-workers (like SS veterans) meet regularly to reminisce, share news of their families over *Kaffee und Kuchen*. Her whole bearing radiated satisfaction at a life well lived.

"But, Frau Scholtz-Klink, you may have done exactly as you pleased within your realm, but do you seriously believe you exerted the slightest influence over the major policies you were supposed to carry out?"

"Of course I did. We enjoyed continual informal contacts with the

highest officials. Göring, Rosenberg, Hitler, Himmler . . . I knew them all. Just before his death Goebbels admitted that he wished he had paid more attention to the women's division. Now, that's the mark of a real person, a *Mensch*. He admitted his oversight and, in the end, repented. You can't imagine what gentlemen they all were."

"But surely their manners didn't give your office power."

"You younger people always look for written records. You don't understand that Hitler did not make decisions on paper. I did just what all the other leaders did. When I wanted something, I spoke to Hitler. Or rather, I listened patiently as he rambled on and on. Eventually, he would get tired, usually after about an hour. Then, when his energy was spent, he would listen quietly. Then I had a receptive audience. You Americans have a saying about striking iron while it is hot. But I always knew to stay away from 'hot iron'—topics that made him angry. I waited until the iron had cooled off, until I knew I could count on persuading him, before making a formal suggestion. Sometimes that made my younger co-workers impatient."

"Then you were satisfied with Hitler's policies on women?"

"Absolutely. When we disagreed, I told him so. My voice was not loud but we accomplished much in silence. You historians always look for written words; but Hitler's style was to make it known that he wanted this or that and allow us to translate it into policy."

"Can you give me an example of a particular policy you changed?"

The answer came without hesitation. "Yes, it was in 1944, when my women were ordered to put on uniforms and volunteer for military service. I told them that I already had sons at the front and I was not about to send my daughters. My women did not put on military uniforms."

"But other women did."

"That was not my concern."

"And what do you feel your greatest contribution was?"

Again no hesitation. "Our job (and we did it well) was to infuse the daily life of all German women—even in the tiniest villages—with Nazi ideals. At least once or twice a month our local leaders would gather women together in small groups to inform them about our goals and to give them a chance to meet as women—without men. How often they told us with shining eyes, 'No one has ever talked to us like this, except, possibly, in religious services.' But the national purpose had never been brought home to them like this. We wanted to incorporate all women into the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). We didn't waste time trying to boss men around. You know, men today have not changed at all. And women have changed very little. When a man comes home for dinner, he wants to relax and maybe share the problems of his day at the

office. He does not want to listen to her talk about *her* office. Men weren't interested in our offices."

For an instant I recalled Hitler had expressed similar views. "A highly intelligent man should take a primitive and stupid woman. Imagine if on top of everything else I had a woman who interfered with my work! In my leisure time I want to have peace."[5]

Scholtz-Klink mastered the art of the possible; a transformation of male nature lay beyond her control. Since men would not adapt, women did. After all, they always had. And she thought "we" should, too. "All your feminist efforts have placed a woman or two here and there in conspicuous places. But have you touched the lives of average women? We did. You have to start influencing women in their daily lives. And women still live for their families, now just like then. You young women just don't know what it means to create an entirely female world." She and her network relinquished claims over the sphere beyond their influence and directed their efforts at upgrading "their" own space. As Scholtz-Klink once put it at a Party rally, "Though our weapon be but a wooden spoon, it must become as powerful as other weapons."

"You young women think that you can tell average housewives they have wasted their lives. You presume to inform *them* their world is empty. And *then* you expect them to follow you gratefully. Take it from me, you have to reach them where their lives are—endorse their decisions, praise their accomplishments. Start with the cradle and the ladle. That's what we did."

Was that evil? Was it Nazi? The advice sounded very much like words I had heard so often from a community leader I admired on New York's Lower East Side. The conversation had drifted into platitude. Surely Scholtz-Klink could not think that I had sought her out only to hear her views on life in general and women in particular. I realized also that Scholtz-Klink could filibuster indefinitely on topics of motherly concern. Then, as now, she saw herself as a pragmatic bureaucrat, taking pride in a job well done. Like Albert Speer, she claimed that Nazi ideology had held few allures for her. She felt challenged by the task at hand. Speer years later admitted to his "blind ambition" and regretted that he had never concerned himself with Party doctrine. Looking back on his earliest association with the Nazi Party, he concluded,

> At this initial stage my guilt was as grave as at the end. . . . For being in a position to know and nevertheless shunning knowledge creates direct responsibility for the consequences—from the very beginning. . . . By entering Hitler's party I had already, in essence, assumed a responsibility that led directly to the brutalities of forced labor, to the destruction of war, and

> to the deaths of those millions of so-called undesirable stock—to the crushing of justice and the elevation of every evil.[6]

Thinking of Speer, I asked, "Have you any regrets?"

"Only a few. I am sorry now that I was too busy in the early days of our movement to concern myself very much with ideology. I never mastered the intellectual underpinnings of the doctrine."

"But your job was to indoctrinate German women to be good mothers and loyal subjects." At least Speer, obsessed with buildings, did not need ideology to function. Scholtz-Klink must have.

"My day-to-day work unified all German women. I had so little time for reading theory."

"In subsequent years have you caught up?"

"Yes, afterward I did more reading. I understand much better the real core of the ideas that inspired us. Rosenberg, the kindest of men. But I did not often have time to read his books."

"And now that you have time, what do you think?"

"Of course, some notions seem extreme. But people today ignore the idealism that inspired us."

"What seems extreme?"

"Some of the aspirations were just unrealistic." She dodged again. Arrogant and bigoted and unreconstructed.

"To what do you attribute your success?"

"Rudolf Hess, Hitler's right-hand man, always said it was my charm and diplomacy. I never agreed with him on that. I feel I had influence because of my brain (*Geist*)." She glanced modestly at her hands folded quietly in her lap. Later I read of a very different career pattern than the one she described. Peter Englemann, exiled editor of a major German newspaper, recalled that he had interviewed Scholtz-Klink, who had told him about a meeting between Scholtz-Klink and Hitler that Nazi novelist Marie Diers had arranged in 1932. He credited Scholtz-Klink's behind-the-scenes maneuverings for her success.[7]

She chatted on, mouthing the phrases I had read dozens of times in archives. My own attempts at "charm and diplomacy" had not succeeded in breaking the surface. Scholtz-Klink talked on freely. But I did not like what I heard. Maybe this was not surface; maybe her innermost convictions had been frozen at the end of the war. As she relaxed, she began to speak more openly about the past, and proclaim her views more stridently. Normally, steadfastness is a virtue; in Scholtz-Klink's case it seemed more like arrested development. As my mind wandered, she worried about young Germans' need to be proud of their past, by which she meant Hitler. "You see, we genuinely believed in our ideals."

"Which ones?"

"National greatness, pride, our heritage."

"How did you become interested in National Socialism?"

"Oh, I never cared much for politics, although I supported my husband's views. During the 1920s I had all I could do to keep house, raise the children, and provide a good home. But one day my husband, who was an ardent SA man, did not return from a rally. They told me that in the excitement of the demonstration, he had suffered a heart attack and died. That's all anyone said." Angered and bent on vengeance, she reported at once to the local Nazi district leader and volunteered her services. Odd, I mused, that she blamed the enemies of Nazism, rather than the movement under whose banner he had marched to his death. "I wanted to replace him, to devote myself to the movement for which he had been martyred." When the district leader suggested that she organize the women in Baden, a tiny Catholic and liberal state in southwest Germany, she energetically set to work. The next years, during the depths of the Depression, saw her rallying women to provide the social services that played a crucial role in making every Nazi feel a sense of belonging to a subculture. They may have been scorned and ostracized by mainstream German society, but they created for themselves their own alternative to the materialistic and liberal culture from which they felt so alienated.

"Did you get on well with local Catholic leaders?"

"Oh, yes," she beamed. "We respected one another and soon became fast friends."

Odd, I thought, for I knew that in memos from 1932–33 those "friends" looked with deep suspicion at one "Frau Scholtz-Kling," whose name they did not even bother to spell correctly and whom they suspected of interference in their plans for a girls' volunteer labor corps.

With the Nazi takeover in January 1933, her position in Baden shifted rapidly. Instead of being repudiated by the community, she enjoyed the full backing of the new state. Efficiently, she established liaisons with non-Nazi women's organizations to provide jobs for unemployed women, food and clothing for the poor, and a volunteer labor corps for young women. Once, in late 1933, she had shared the speakers' podium with one of Hitler's adjuncts, who subsequently invited her to direct the national women's labor corps and establish headquarters in Berlin. From then on, she rose quickly to prominence. By February 1934, she had been named chief of women's affairs for the nation. I inquired about her bureau. She rummaged in her pocketbook, intent on discovering something. It turned out to be an organization chart of her realm.

Boredom hovered. *Bored?* I asked myself. How can you be bored? This

may be the only Nazi leader you ever meet in your lifetime. All the same, this interview seemed interminable and oddly predictable, once it had become clear that the Reichsfrauenführerin had not changed at all in the years following Hitler's defeat. Boredom masks depression, and under depression, lowering rage.

Of course, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink presented the perfect image of a woman leader. Hitler, who consciously modeled his movement on Catholic organization and symbolism, discovered a mother of many children who had been the widow of a Nazi martyr and who swore total obedience to the *Vaterland*. Fertile and pure, she looked like a Holbein madonna. Annoyed at having lived the second half of her life in obscurity, in 1981 she wanted to take her place among Hitler's other ex-deputies who were beginning to grant interviews, publish their memoirs, and reenter the limelight to which they had once been so accustomed. I decided this madonna would lose her halo.

"Then you were not concerned about Hitler's policies on the Jews?"

The gentle smile did not fade. "Of course, we never intended that so many Jews would disappear. I had grown up in an anti-Semitic family, so the ideas did not seem unusual. We belonged to the upper civil service (*Beamtenbürgertum*), you know. Besides, until the war with Russia, all of our policies were strictly legal." I half expected her to blame the victims for their own demise by insinuating that because the Jews had overthrown the Czar in 1917, they provoked Hitler into invading Russia in 1941. She, however, shifted to new ground. "We always obeyed the law. Isn't that what you do in America? Even if you don't agree with a law personally, you still obey it. Otherwise life would be chaos."

"When a law passed by the government contradicts our personal moral code, and the Constitution, I would hope that we and all citizens of any state would refuse to obey."

"But, Frau Koonz, you don't seem to understand. We women stayed remote from the Jewish community. Our job was to direct welfare programs to help German people. As a leader I welcomed women from all political backgrounds, as long as they expressed a willingness to do the work at hand."

"Even Jewish volunteers?"

"None volunteered."

"What about those organizations you personally outlawed because they refused to expel their Jewish members?"

"When I arrived in power, I received letters from all major national women's organizations—all thirty-six of them—requesting to participate in our great work. If they had misgivings, why didn't they speak out? Do you know that the most important women's-movement periodical, *Die*

Frau, continued to publish right through 1944? Not even the paper shortage suspended publication." She had me there. I knew that Gertrud Bäumer, the leader of the middle-class women's rights movement before Hitler's takeover, had declared in a job application in the summer of 1933 that she had always subscribed to national socialist ideals. The officials must have believed her, for during the next twelve years she continued to lecture on the Woman Question, write articles, and lecture. After the war, she implied she had resisted inwardly and had never printed a word that contradicted her basic beliefs.

"Did you ever meet Gertrud Bäumer?"

"No. It was a disappointment. She must have known our door was always open. She never visited us. We gave her no trouble and still she never came." Scholtz-Klink gazed pensively out the window as a gust of wind drove a torrent of rain across the garden. "What right do those women have to complain now? Just because we lost the war, they become brave. We stick to our principles."

"After about 1937 you began to commemorate the birthdays of the leaders in the pre-1933 women's rights movement. Yet in the early years you had attacked them for being 'un-Germanic' and divisive."

"In the old days, when we were surrounded with enemies on all sides, they seemed to present a threat. But after a few years in office I learned a thing or two about the world. We began to rethink our position."

"When you took office, what seemed important?"

"At first, the men (when they thought about us at all) wanted us to form merely an auxiliary—a sort of ladies' aid. . . . I was determined to create a dignified and independent women's organization. To really accomplish something." Composed and smiling and looking intently into my eyes, she offered me tea and cakes. What a pro, I thought. Strike while the iron is hot, indeed! She just rambles on and on, keeping her cool. High time, it seemed, for an interruption from me. Before I asked, she moved of her own accord directly on to "hot iron."

"Of course, whenever I heard of injustices being done to Jewish women, I helped out. But what could I do if I did not know?" Tea and cakes first and the Jewish question next; like eating supper and watching the TV news about starvation in Africa or atrocities in El Salvador.

Once she had sent money to a Jewish woman who went into exile. Frau Scholtz-Klink became agitated at the memory. "What ingratitude! After I helped her out as best I could, she publicly accused me after the war of disloyalty." On another occasion, Scholtz-Klink said she had heard too late that a Jewish acquaintance had been deported.

I recalled Adolf Eichmann on trial. He also claimed to have saved the lives of two Jews in Vienna, but later regretted it. In fact, those two acts

were the only acts he regretted. They revealed a chink in his moral armor. If a law was right, then it had to be obeyed uniformly. If a moral precept held, then it, too, had to be kept—without sympathy. Eichmann had expressed himself very clearly on this point when he told his officers they must feel no pity when the orders came down to arrest and deport Jews–and ultimately to kill them. He himself had urged other Nazis to show no sympathy whatsoever to individual Jews. Eichmann had incorporated Himmler's warning to his men: "It's easy to say, 'Sure, that's in our program, we'll take care of it.' And there they come trudging in, eighty million Germans, and each one has a decent Jew. Sure, the others are swine, but this one is an A-1 Jew."[8] Behind the contorted thinking lay some consistency. Frau Scholtz-Klink, however, defended her actions by claiming to have broken the law while insisting that the treatment of the Jews was legal. The exception salved her conscience, but also proved the moral rule.

And I recalled Emmy Göring's autobiography, *At My Husband's Side*, in which she criticizes Germans who, after 1945, "pulled out their Jew to brag about (*Renommierjude*)" whenever it was politically correct.[9] I remembered, too, the cynical protagonist in Heinrich Mann's *Mephisto*, who went out of his way to protect one "enemy of the state" just in case the future did not turn out well for the Nazis. Studies of concentration camps report that guards and commandants typically declare they had saved at least one Jew.

"Then you must have had some doubts about the laws concerning Jews," I said. "Why did you not help more?"

"I did not know any." And, once again, a diversion.

"If you had, would you have helped them?"

"It's hard to say. I didn't. You know," she changed the subject, "in about 1938 we all knew something big was about to happen . . . perhaps a major shake-up in the Party leadership. We suspected a change. But not that." She took a lace handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbed her eyes. She had not changed the subject after all. As early as 1938, she knew. Maybe her eyes were moist. Maybe not. "Before the Russian war, everything was legal."

"Do you mean that whatever a government decrees must be obeyed because it is 'law,' even if that law violates a constitution or common notions of decency? After Germany began to lose, what changed?" This line of inquiry produced only obstinate detours. Time to change course. "What did you think when one day in 1941 you saw so many of your fellow Berliners appear with yellow stars sewed on their coats?" The sight of so many condemned and helpless human beings must surely have moved her. It did, but not as I had expected.

"I don't know how to say it. There were so many. I felt that my aesthetic sensibility was wounded."

"*Aesthetic*" concerns. No regret. Certainly no pity. Just the barely veiled variation on the "Jewish vermin" theme so vividly conveyed in Nazi propaganda. For her, Jews had ceased to count as human beings at all. When the yellow stars disappeared, Berlin must have seemed a cleaner place to live. Today *Heimat* reminds them of the pleasant side of a world without Jews. But Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* preserves for us the memory of that day as seen by the people who had to wear the yellow stars. Inge Deutschkron told Lanzmann, "I remember the day when they made Berlin *Judenrein*. The people hastened in the streets; no one wanted to be in the streets; you could see the streets were absolutely empty. They didn't want to look, you know. . . . They had herded the Jews together, from factories, from houses, wherever they could find them. . . ."[10]

I poured more tea. Silence broken by rain pelting down on the roof. I repressed my only reaction: a fantasy . . . her face turning blue as hands closed tightly around her throat. She continued. I gulped the tea. "Some comrades after the war hesitated to admit they had been Party members." From a newspaper clipping, I knew that her husband, an SS general who supervised the schools designed to train the future elite, vigorously denied having belonged to the Nazi Party. Not his wife. "Of course I told the Americans I had belonged to the Nazi Party. I made a choice when I joined and I'm not ashamed." There was that steadfastness again. "The time has come for all of us decent Germans who served our people during the Third Reich to speak out. We must also salvage the memories of those comrades who did not live long enough to defend their honor." Again she went on about how they could not have imagined what happened in Poland.

Then she repeated the German maxim that I was to hear many times in subsequent interviews. "The soup is never eaten as hot as it is cooked." At the very gates of the gas chambers, guards calmed their victims by saying "What? How could you be suspicious? *This* is a civilized nation in the twentieth century! How could you think any harm will come to you here?" Who today can conceive of total nuclear destruction? I made another effort to break the dreary tone of our conversation.

Five decades of unfailing faith had insulated Scholtz-Klink in her Nazi world. Having sworn allegiance to the Nazi hierarchy, she simply went on about her business. "Do you mean that your Nazi women never knew about concentration camps? You thought they did not exist just because you never happened to see one?" My inquiries produced diversions. Stubborn, simpleminded, and self-righteous. But I had taken a long and

expensive trip to hear this litany. Bury the rage and keep talking. Historians keep the record, they take notes. Maybe one day someone will decide how guilty the Germans were. Will unswerving loyalty to an immoral state count as guilt? If so, Scholtz-Klink stood guilty as accused (and proud of it). In *1984* George Orwell had described "crimethink." Scholtz-Klink's smug satisfaction suggested the possibility of "crimefeel." Where, I wondered, had pity gone? What kind of moral hardening had enabled this paragon of womanliness not only to participate in the Nazi state, but to defend it so mindlessly four decades later?

"But surely you knew about concentration camps."

"Yes." Her eyes strayed absently to the cup and saucer on the table. "Yes, once I visited a camp near Berlin. You know, just a normal inspection visit. Some of my women worked there as social workers. They had been sent to care for the asocial women inmates. As I toured the premises, everything appeared quite normal. In good order. After the inmates had been reeducated, they would be released to return to productive roles in society. Just as I was about to depart, a young woman pulled me aside and implored me to listen carefully to what she had to say. 'How can we rehabilitate them, Frau Scholtz-Klink, when we have not so much as a deck of cards or adequate soap? How can we do social work without handicraft materials? And the inmates seem so depressed. They don't seem to go home.' That young woman risked her job to warn me that something sinister was going on. I ordered that all my women be transferred from that assignment at once. And they were. We would not participate in something like that."

Once again, a chasm might have appeared in the defenses. Did she think it tolerable that other German women, not "hers," worked in concentration camps? Remember, she said, that the Catholic Church did not protest on behalf of non-Catholics or object when life-long Catholics with Jewish ancestors were banished. I thought of Dr. Edith Stein, a young theologian, admired by Heidegger, and a convert to Catholicism, who had become a nun. When the Gestapo investigated the nuns in her convent, she was reported as Jewish and deported.

"But surely women under your supervision participated in eugenics programs, turned unwilling people over to forced sterilization, and singled out 'undesirables' such as schizophrenics, alcoholics, and mentally retarded children for euthanasia."

"You know, I visited the mentally retarded child of my cousin the other day. And I wondered . . ."

But the racial laws? Again a pat response. Germans had been inspired by sterilization laws in many American states, American immigration quotas, Harvard quotas, eugenics research, hate propaganda against German-born Americans in World War I, and . . .

And the breeding programs? Germans applied biological discoveries to improving human life. Don't we Americans have genetic engineering? she asked. And isn't it humane to establish care for unwed mothers?

"Do you not think . . ." She peered intently at me, leaned forward in her chair and paused. ". . . that I committed a crime by believing in my ideals?" I knew she had indeed been brought to "justice" after being discovered. She told me proudly what I already knew: how she had outwitted her Russian captors and found refuge in the Black Forest.[11] She faced charges of assuming a false identity between 1945 and 1947. In 1949, Occupation officials pronounced her de-Nazified, and she continued her life, drawing a civil servant's pension after retirement age.

A well-known West German novelist, Ingeborg Drewitz, spoke to a group of Americans recently about her girlhood as a member of the Hitler Youth. She often wonders about "those concentration camp matrons: their brutal and tense faces. When they were arrested they pushed their chins forward, staring into nothingness. . . . Was the education of girls geared to producing such women?" Although Drewitz (unlike Scholtz-Klink) is horrified by her earlier faith in Nazism, like Scholtz-Klink she denies the connection between Nazi education and concentration-camp matrons. After all, she notes, Sophie Scholl and other girls in the Hitler Youth organizations rebelled against their training. Since a tiny minority did, anyone could have, Drewitz reasons. What could one say to Scholtz-Klink?

Pointless to argue. I sat face-to-face, over tea and cakes, with the everyday banality of evil, gazing at a woman who had embraced an ideology and surrendered responsibility to a closed system that left no doubts—or at least none that she would admit to. Never had she overstepped her bounds. Always she had followed the law. Never did she admit to pondering the ramifications of anything. She translated orders from above into obedience from below. And she had not broken the criminal code or the Geneva Convention. Thinking back on the archives I had visited, a new picture of the Third Reich began to take shape. Next to the dominant motif of male brutality, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and millions of followers created the social side of tyranny. Busily administering welfare services, educational programs, leisure activities, ideological indoctrination, and consumer organizations, Nazi women mended while Nazi men marched.

Hitler's Eichmanns committed unspeakable acts in the name of an evil cause for an evil dictator. They acted. They dehumanized and killed. This woman, kindly and decent, sweet and hospitable, said she had committed no crime. Wherein lay her guilt? Adhering to the ideology subscribed to by millions of fellow Germans, she followed the paths trodden by women for centuries. No matter what, she did not doubt, but

tried always to "make nice." Here at the tea table sat the Angel in the House—honored by John Ruskin, admired by Joyce Brothers, and praised by Germaine Greer. Virginia Woolf strangled her.

> The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took up my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: 'my dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.' . . . I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. . . . Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.[12]

Living by the Angel's maxims was essential in the life of Hitler's Reichsfrauenführerin.

Can we speak of "spectator guilt?" Such a category might be increasingly appropriate in a technological age or bureaucratized society where no one gives the orders and everyone performs only a tiny part of any given task. Scholtz-Klink and an army of bureaucrats helped to integrate racially "acceptable" women and girls within the Nazi network by 1939—three million girls in the Hitler Youth; eight million women in Nazi associations under her rule. Over a million women subscribed to her journal directed at the most loyal Nazi women.

I knew as I looked at this composed and graceful grandmother that she had been guilty by choosing to serve a regime founded on war and racism. No one coerced her. Nazi officials tempted her. With what? She would not say. Perhaps by public accolades, the office, access to powerful elites, and influence over an entire administrative network. Philosopher Karl Jaspers reflected on *The Question of German Guilt* shortly after the German surrender. How, he asked, can we evaluate the moral guilt of "outward compliance, of *running with the pack* [italics in the original]?" While not actually committing a crime, had Germans been guilty of sin because of their "inner indifference toward the witnessed evil?" But Scholtz-Klink did not quite fit conventional categories. In addition, after 1945 she demonstrated no remorse. And before 1945, she directed a gigantic camouflage operation that flattered the famous men of the Nazi state and transformed the personal values of millions of women. In league with Goebbels' powerful propaganda machine, she dispatched speakers, community organizers, social workers, educators, mothers' helpers, and consumer experts. No less than Albert Speer, she directed Germans to harmonize their lives with state priorities: at first mother-

hood, and later, as Hitler rearmed the nation, working at farm and factory jobs as well as mothering while the men went to war.

Perhaps even worse, Scholtz-Klink was guilty of unrepentance. She introduced her book of essays with glowing praise for the glorious days when she enjoyed prestige and influence at the Nazi "court." Since she actually wrote only a small fraction of the book, she might well have blamed the articles on the women on her staff (most of whom were dead) who actually wrote them. But no. The layout gives the fraudulent impression that Scholtz-Klink herself wrote the essays. At the conclusion, fourteen photographs of racially pure "Aryan" women appear under the caption "German Fate in Woman's Face." In some German states the sale of Scholtz-Klink's book has been challenged in court because the Allied occupation authorities ordered in 1945 that freedom of the press shall not include the right to publish Nazi and neo-Nazi literature. But Scholtz-Klink's volume was "just" a women's book about the "positive" aspects of Nazi rule.

As I faced her that day—in a posh editorial office, with tea growing cold on the table—this book began to take shape. In it, I would bring to light the contribution to evil made by Scholtz-Klink and other women leaders, find out what they had done, what they *believed* they were doing, and why. I would ask how "normal" people (women, in this case) brought Nazi beliefs home in everyday thought and action. Above all, I would record the history of average people without normalizing life in Nazi society. This would mean examining the lives of Nazism's victims and opponents to recapture the picture of how Scholtz-Klink's women looked from outside their womanly sphere. How did "decent" people adapt to a state that inverted morality, perverted civilized traditions, and imposed distrust on all forms of social life? At what points did Hitler's charisma wear thin? When did Nazi policy contradict loyalty to religion and family? As I formulated these questions, I made a second decision. Although my book would depend upon archival research, I resolved to frame that material in a broad context and to write for an audience beyond academe, for people concerned about women's status in modern society, social history, and the impact of misogyny and anti-Semitism on public life.

Women's history during the Third Reich lacks the extravagant insanity of Hitler's megalomania; often it is ordinary. But there, at the grassroots of daily life, in a social world populated by women, we begin to discover how war and genocide happened by asking who made it happen.

1

INTRODUCTION: LOVE AND ORDER IN THE THIRD REICH

The state is based on the contradiction between public and private life, between general interest and private interest.

—Karl Marx

[T]he public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; . . . the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other.

—Virginia Woolf

After the publication of fifty thousand books and monographs about Hitler's Germany, it seems scarcely conceivable that any facet of those nightmare years remains unexplored, much less undiscovered. But in fact, half of the Germans who made dictatorship, war, and genocide possible have largely escaped observation. The women among Hitler's supporters have fallen through the historian's sieve, unclaimed by feminists and unnoticed by men. To be sure, Nazi leaders' lovers and wives receive their due (along with Nazi chiefs' sexual proclivities), and women as statistics appear in analyses of Nazi social policies and economic programs. A few historians note women only to blame them for Hitler's victory. A West German journalist comments, "Women discovered, elected, and idolized Hitler,"[1] and an East German historian draws the same conclusion: "Never in German history had so many women streamed into any political party, and never has a party so degraded women as the National Socialist Party."[2] But women do not appear as historical actors. If we think of women at all, we imagine masses of plain Eva Brauns with a Leni Riefenstahl here and there or perhaps an Irma Griese (the infamous "bitch of Auschwitz") in riding boots and SS uniform.

Historians have dismissed women as part of the timeless backdrop against which Nazi men made history, seeing men as active "subjects" and women as the passive "other," quoting Simone de Beauvoir's terms. However, this bifurcation encompasses only part of the complexity of Nazi society. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote *Anti-Semite and Jew* while de Beauvoir was working on *The Second Sex*. Although neither Nazi women nor Auschwitz figured in either book, together they analyze the fault lines that split the Nazi world. A double dyad rent asunder male from female, Jew from "Aryan." From the earliest beginnings of his Party, Hitler promised to eliminate Jews from "Aryan" society and expel women from public influence. Within the "master race," policy and ideology divided man and mother. These parallels, of course, did not merge Jews and women as victims, for there can be no comparison between the Nazis' drive to first ostracize and then eliminate Jewish citizens and Nazi social policy that relegated women to becoming bearers of children and poorly paid workers in the lowliest jobs. Women who decided to support Nazism accepted their inferior status in exchange for rewards, while cooperation for Jews was ultimately out of the question. Restrictive roles, no matter how severe, cannot compare with genocide. Yet in the model of Nazi society that inspired racial policy, ideology linked race and gender.

Because Nazi contempt for women was so blatant from the beginning, it would be easy to assume that women ought not share in the question

of German guilt. Perhaps women remained pure and powerless, repelled by the racism, violence, and masculine élan of the Nazi Party. But did women really remain immune to what Erich Fromm called "the craving for submission and lust for power" that had engulfed the nation? Voting statistics provide the evidence. Thanks to electoral officials' curiosity about how women would vote in the 1920s, German men were given gray ballots and women, white. We don't have to estimate—we know that women nearly as strongly as men supported the Nazis during the years of their spectacular rise to power between 1930 and 1932.[3]

Women do not appear to have played a role in the Nazi movement before 1933 or the Nazi state thereafter because historians have not defined women's support for Nazi Germany as a historical problem—i.e., a question that needs explaining. After all, the image of politically inert women reinforces cherished myths about motherhood. A fantasy of women untouched by their historical setting feeds our own nostalgia for mothers who remain beyond good and evil—preservers of love, charity, and peace, no matter what the social or moral environment. Against the encroachments of the modern state, we extol women who somehow keep the private beyond the reach of the political. When "feminine" ideals of love and charity flickered and were extinguished in the Third Reich, we assume this occurred because of a masculine assault against women as victims of either force or hypnosis, or of their own masochism. Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" reverberates still.

> Not God but a swastika
> So black no sky could squeak through.
> Every woman adores a fascist.
> The boot in the face, the brute
> Brute heart of a brute like you.[4]

The Third Reich, which left no serious ideological heritage or political admirers, has bequeathed a powerful reservoir of metaphors to the culture. When Plath hated her father, an image was available. From Riefenstahl to Wertmuller, filmmakers have exploited the erotic tension between the beauty and the brute, creating what some call a fascist aesthetic and others label fascist kitsch. The threat of violence barely contained by fastidious uniforms and martial discipline evokes hatred and love, terror and trust. But we must be wary. The symbolic language of Nazi propaganda, so alive in erotic culture today, misrepresents the real experiences of men and women who lived in Hitler's Germany.

Every woman Nazi in Germany did not "adore" a brute-hearted fascist. The women who followed Hitler, like the men, did so from convic-

tion, opportunism, and active choice. Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns they defined as motherly. The fact that women bore no responsibility for issuing orders from Berlin does not obviate their complicity in carrying them out. Electoral statistics charted their enthusiasm, and Party propaganda depicts swooning women as well as marching men. But women did more than faint and vote for the only violently antifeminist party in Weimar politics. And they received more than a "boot in the face."

What did this overtly misogynist movement offer to women? Nazi men inadvertently gave women Nazis a unique opportunity because they cared so little about the women in their ranks. Men allowed women considerable latitude to interpret Hitler's ideas as they wished, recruit followers, write their own rules, and raise funds. In other parties male leaders welcomed women officially, but then curtailed women leaders' independence and chastised them at the slightest sign of separatism. In the service of womanly ideals, Nazi women sometimes behaved in most un-"ladylike" ways: managing the funds they raised, marching, facing down hecklers, making soapbox speeches, and organizing mass meetings, marches, and rallies. While espousing women's special nature and a reactionary view of the family, these women never thought they would retreat to the household. True, they crusaded to take women out of politics, but they did so in order to open up other areas of public life to women. Before 1933 Nazi women viewed the world around them in pessimistic terms, actively working in the public but not the political arena to preserve their nostalgic vision of a world that never was.

What, then, did women do for the men who ignored them? Before 1933, they provided men with an ambience they took for granted, complementing the stridently masculine élan of the Nazi movement and cultivating a homey domestic sphere for Hitler's motley and marginal band. They gave men Nazis the feeling of belonging not just to a party but to a total subculture that prefigured the ideals of the Nazi state for which they fought. Women kept folk traditions alive, gave charity to poor Nazi families, cared for SA men, sewed brown shirts, and prepared food at rallies. While Nazi men preached race hate and virulent nationalism that threatened to destroy the morality upon which civilization rested, women's participation in the movement created an ersatz gloss of idealism. The image did not, of course, deceive the victims, but it helped Nazis to preserve their self-esteem and to continue their work under the illusion that they remained decent.

To a degree unique in Western history, Nazi doctrine created a society structured around "natural" biological poles. In addition to serving spe-

cific needs of the state, this radical division vindicated a more general and thoroughgoing biological *Weltanschauung* based on race and sex as the immutable categories of human nature. The habit of taking psychological differences between men and women for granted reinforced assumptions about irrevocable divisions between Jew and "Aryan." In place of class, cultural, religious divisions, race and sex became the predominant social markers. To people disoriented by a stagnant economy, humiliated by military defeat, and confused by new social norms among the urban young, these social categories provided a sense of safety. The Jew and the New Woman, conservatives believed, had become too powerful in progressive Weimar society. The Nazi state drove both groups, as metaphors and as real individuals, out of the "Aryan" man's world.

For women, belonging to the "master race" opened the option of collaboration in the very Nazi state that exploited them, that denied them access to political status, deprived them of birth control, underpaid them as wage workers, indoctrinated their children, and finally took their sons and husbands to the front. The separation between masculine and feminine spheres, which followed logically and psychologically from Nazi leaders' misogyny, relegated women to their own space—both beneath and beyond the dominant world of men. The Nazi system rested on a female hierarchy as well as a male chain of command. Of course, women occupied a less exalted place in Nazi government than the men, and Reichsfrauenführerin Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, who stood at the pinnacle of the women's hierarchy, wielded less real power than, say, a male district chief or deputy minister. Standing at the apex of her own sphere, the woman leader minimized her lack of status vis-à-vis Nazi male leaders above her and instead directed her attention to the battalions of women under her command. As in wartime, women believed their sacrifices played a vital role in a greater cause. Scholtz-Klink saw herself as the chief of a lobby for women's concerns and as the leader of women missionaries who would bring Nazi doctrine "home" to every family in the Reich. Far from remaining untouched by Nazi evil, women operated at its very center.

As a politician and diplomat, Hitler remained within the limits of what we consider normal for a twentieth-century dictator. It is his racial schemes that evoke our horror and disbelief. When I spoke to Scholtz-Klink, I did not believe her disavowal of any role in the immoral facets of Nazi society. Hitler's plans for a racial revolution called for the extirpation of pity, empathy, and love toward those whom the Nazi leaders deemed unworthy. While Scholtz-Klink exalted gentle "feminine" virtues among "Aryan" women, Hitler's racial revolution depended on the elimination of pity for "subhumans." During 1933, the Nazi social plan-

ners who outlawed birth control and increased punishments for abortion among "Aryans" also decreed the laws that deprived Jews of their rights and forced the "racially unfit Aryans" to submit to sterilization. It fell to women to put all of these edicts into practice. Scholtz-Klink's social workers, teachers, and nurses turned over the names of the mentally retarded, schizophrenics, alcoholics, and misfits to Nazi sterilization agencies. Brides left the labor market in order to receive state loans and bear many children; housewives boycotted Jewish businesses and cut lifelong Jewish friends out of their social lives; women professionals founded eugenic motherhood schools and educated young women for housewifely careers; and women organizers carried on missionary work to convert the unconvinced. It fell to women to report "suspicious" strangers in the neighborhood, send their own children to the Hitler Youth, and finally to close the door firmly if anyone who looked "dangerous" begged for mercy.

How, I asked myself, could a political regime extinguish compassion and decency? Any ultimate meaning of Hitler's war and genocide must elude us. We cannot grasp "why," but thousands of studies have explained "how." They tell us that probably in any nation of sixty million people, several hundreds or even thousands can be recruited to carry out crimes on a horrifying scale. But the day-to-day callousness of ordinary people—how can we explain that? Millions of average women, no less than average men, contributed to the inversion of time-honored moral injunctions like "Thou shalt not kill," and "Love thy neighbor." Lotte Paepke, who survived in Nazi Germany as a Jew married to a non-Jewish husband, recalled how little life had changed in 1933 for the respectable people among whom she had always felt at home.

> Back then Germany was full of spotlessly clean sitting rooms, with pillow covers embroidered by the lady of the house. Germany was full of plush, overstuffed furniture and fringed window shades, with lonely Iphigenias on the wall and geraniums in the window boxes, a lot of righteousness, and unknowing innocence. . . . For the most part they were not inhuman, . . .[5]

The everyday brutality of the averted gaze, the firm insistence that "Jews are not welcomed here," or the ridicule of a frightened and hungry Jewish child fit comfortably into the life of the "lady of the house." Before the Gestapo summoned Jews to deportation centers, "Aryan" friends and neighbors had excised Jews from their society. Although the last stages of the "final solution" remained entirely within Himmler's authority, women as well as men delivered up the victims. Ordinary people, men

and women in their separate ways, gutted compassion and made pity selective. Our understanding of the Third Reich will remain incomplete until these women have been restored to the historical record.

In 1978, I embarked on a research project to fill the lacuna. With generous aid from The College of the Holy Cross, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the German Marshall Fund, I spent the better part of the subsequent three years looking for the missing half of Nazi social history. Several concrete methodological problems made it difficult to obtain the sources from which to generalize about women in the Third Reich. During earlier trips, I had researched other topics in the West German Federal Archives in Koblenz, a modern building with massive holdings, meticulous indexes, and a cooperative staff. Monday through Friday, from 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M., one can read memos and policy statements regarding men leaders' decisions *about* women; there, and at the equivalent centers in East Germany, "important" papers have been cataloged and preserved. But scarcely a woman's signature can be found among party leaders' biographies, cabinet protocols, military dispatches, personal papers (*Nachlässe*), police files, and economic reports. Public man had left an archival trail, but where might I find the voice of private woman?

The task appeared formidable, but the potential reward lured me on, for records of private life from Nazi Germany are rare. How often I recalled Goebbels' quip, "The only individual with a private life in Germany is the person who is sleeping." Women's records would, I hoped, reveal the contours of a forbidden world. Non-Nazi organizations had, of course, been outlawed in 1933, which typically meant the destruction of offices, libraries, and records. Printed sources, too, became rare after the infamous book burnings of 1933. During the last years of the Third Reich, Nazi offices themselves were partially destroyed by Allied bombing raids. In 1945, the Allied victory, in turn, created new lapses in the chronicle as individual Nazis expunged the evidence of their loyalty to Hitler. Documents that had been treasured before 1945, overnight became targets for the flames. Archivists everywhere in Germany received a ration of kerosene with orders to burn the records they had meticulously copied, cross-referenced, and preserved for twelve years. How they must have hesitated! Loath to destroy over a decade's meticulous labor, thinking about the price kerosene would fetch on the black market, how many archivists disobeyed the orders that could never be enforced? I asked Gertrud Scholtz-Klink how she used her kerosene. She hardly understood the question. Of course, she had obeyed, soaking the files and lighting the match herself.

All of these considerations helped to explain why few women Nazis'

voices spoke from the past or, more precisely, from the sources in national archives. Acting on the assumption that perhaps less important archives would have the papers of less important people (such as women), I sent out dozens of letters to regional and local government archives in West Germany, asking if by chance they had papers relating to women in the 1920s and 1930s. Many responses seemed promising. I bought a map of Germany and plotted my trail. Before setting out, however, another idea occurred to me, so simple I had overlooked it. Women have never played a salient role in government institutions about which state archives provide so much information. Instead, for centuries the church has played the role for women in public life that politics has played for men. Men talked high theory and traded low gossip at the local *Stammtisch* (neighborhood pub); women gathered at the rectory to organize community projects and mind the parish's business. While men led political parties, served in cabinets, and ran for office, women organized nationwide religious, charitable, patriotic, civic, and social networks with their own leaders and goals. Naturally, these women's associations wielded less overt power than political institutions. Their lack of political clout proved to be a boon for historians, because when non-Nazi men's political and occupational organizations became illegal in 1933, women's associations were invited to participate in the Nazi state. This meant that their records ought to have remained intact; and perhaps because women's activities had been deemed unimportant, they had even been spared a post-1945 purge. Another round of letters to church archives brought more promising responses and more underlined cities on my map.

The idea of securing a place in history for their organization tempted some respondents. As one Catholic leader from the 1930s and 1940s confessed, "When we look around at the world today and see how young women fall from the faith, and how people rush around with scarcely a thought of God, we wonder if our life work was really important at all. Then a young historian comes along and tells us what we did mattered, and we feel proud once again." Ironic, I thought, as their work becomes meaningless to the modern world, we restore it by saving their reputation and consigning it to the past. I thought of myself fleetingly as a dealer in antique memories, enhancing value by upgrading "obsolete" and "old-fashioned" to "historical treasure."

A few of the people to whom I wrote resisted the temptation of being included in history, or perhaps they preferred to leave certain memories in the "obsolete" category. In my initial requests for information, I had avoided any hint that I specifically wanted to find sources about the Nazi period. "Have you material that relates to the impact of the Great

Depression on women's organizations?" One national Catholic welfare office told me curtly, "We regret to inform you that we cannot be of service. We, in *our* association, treat all people equally regardless of changing material circumstances." Others sent me an open invitation, and later reconsidered. A liberal Protestant women's organization, for example, invited me to their Hanover headquarters only to tell me, as soon as I arrived, that the papers seemed so disorganized the older members would have to arrange them after they retired. They wanted, they said, to spare me the aggravation of searching through unindexed files. Since historians Richard Evans and Amy Hackett had both used this excellent collection in research relating to the pre-1914 years, I knew that disorder had not precluded historical investigation that focused on material from a "safe" period. Judging from this organization's letters that I found later in other archives, I suspect that these valuable files will be purged before they are catalogued. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of the associations and state archives I contacted cooperated with my every request. Ten months in Berlin, with its Inner Mission (social services) and Protestant Church archives, the Berlin Document Center, and the immense Prussian State Library, followed by itinerant searching in Freiburg, Cologne, Munich, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf, Münster, and Hanover, produced pounds of Xeroxes and note cards.

When I began the project, I had assumed I would discover semi-public proclamations laced with heavy doses of propaganda, or private correspondence written on the assumption that a censor or zealous superior would read it. Of course, this sort of effusive praise was not lacking. But letter writers often communicated openly. "We returned from the rally this evening. As we ate stew on our balcony, we heard the Schmidt family (all red-blooded Nazis) playing a Schubert string quartet, and we knew our cause was just. *This* is what we're fighting for," wrote one woman Nazi during the Depression.

But in addition to enthusiasm (both fake and genuine), I discovered a very different sort of record. Hundreds of women leaders in religious and state-sponsored associations who perceived themselves as dedicated followers of Nazism knew that their own effectiveness depended upon accurate feedback and exchange of proposals. A complaint about morale, a lament about official corruption, or an admission of failure in one program did not, in their view, add up to disloyalty. This sort of commentary produced archival gems. "Dear Frau Polster," a letter might begin, "We are doing something here in our town that is not right." Or a neighborhood leader might tell her superior, "We have a problem here. On one hand we tell women to devote their time to their families; but on the other, husbands complain that their wives spend all their time on

Party activities. What can we tell the men?" A high-ranking administrator would complain to her male chief, "How can you expect us women to carry out our Nazification program among women teachers when you deprive us of adequate funds and treat us so arrogantly?" Nazi women saw themselves as strong-minded members of an elite. Emboldened by their genuine devotion to the cause, they spoke out clearly when they experienced conflicts.

Of course, women were not the only ones to evaluate programs frankly. Men Nazis, too, needed to assess morale, set goals, and confess errors; but they commanded more prestige, which, in turn, translated into railway passes and expense accounts for high-level conferences and secret discussions. Women labored under chronically inadequate budgets and had little money to travel or even to make long-distance telephone calls. But they did employ hundreds of clerk-typists, at very low salaries, who dispatched and filed memos together with carbon copies. On occasion, too, the contradictions inherent in any high-ranking woman bureaucrat's life produced extraordinary collections. For example, the highest woman official in the Nazi Teachers' Union, Frau Dr. Auguste Reber-Gruber, could not relocate to live near her job because her husband's desire for a wife at home took precedence over the state's needs. Thus, she conducted business by mail from her home and produced thousands of written "conversations" about daily routine that would normally have been lost to history. Such collections enliven the more typical fare of endless reports, bureaucratic debates about who would fund a particular activity, or what theme was to be featured on the national radio network's *Housewife's Week* program. Still, even the rather dull local and regional monthly activity reports tell us about both the types of work women accomplished and the sort of thing they knew their superiors wanted to hear. Interspersed among official letters one finds telling side comments about Marxists, specific Nazi programs, general mood, or personal experiences.

After working in public and private archives, I confronted a discontinuous narrative. Like an archaeologist who unearths the handle of a jug or the shard of a bowl, I had stumbled on fragmented records. I might discover hundreds of memos concerning a particular woman dissident or "Nazified" organization, enabling me to follow the minutest details of a feud, squabble, rivalry, or friendship. But then I would confront a complete blank. The paper trail would vanish. This could mean that the principal correspondents stopped communicating entirely—or, equally likely, they might have begun seeing one another on a daily basis and not written at all. Perhaps a circumstance described in the records was typical, or it might as easily have been unique.

As I began to organize my material, the last vestiges I might have had of a typical Nazi woman vanished, and I relinquished my initial expectation that chapter headings would spring naturally from my notes. German woman varied in both support and opposition, as victims and perpetrators. Even the blindest fanatics and crassest opportunists could on occasion protest a specific policy or take a great risk to protect a friend. The staunchest skeptics of Hitler's rule might comply with certain directives. Archives had (as they always do) broken up the monoliths with which I had begun my work. No one woman conformed to either the passive-docile or the heartless-brutish model. Few vapid Eva Brauns or cruel Irma Grieses. Instead, troops of Leni Riefenstahls—ambitious, determined, opportunistic—marched along, caught up in the Nazi tide. Far from fitting Plath's masochistic image, they imbibed an ideal of womanhood ubiquitous in the Western tradition and hoped to use it for their short-term advantage. The division between Nazi men and Nazi women had become very sharp in my thinking, but my archival explorations blurred the distinctions between non-Nazi and Nazi women. Women with a nostalgic vision of motherhood from either camp applied survival strategies that were as old as misogyny itself.

As I read, for example, Frau Dr. Auguste Reber-Gruber's description of women's special concerns and talents, I thought of nineteenth-century feminists who extolled women's uniquely humane influence. I remembered, too, the argument that women must preserve idealism and tenderness, because if they do not, who will guard socially necessary virtues like maternal love, religious faith, idealism, cooperation, and charity? Mothers, as mythical angels in the house, have preserved idealism, love, and faith while men made war, killed, and exploited. Even women's rights advocates' zeal for equality had dimmed after a decade of experience in the Weimar Republic. They reasoned that access to politics had not endowed women with political influence. Men would never relinquish their power, women could never wrest it from them; hence many concluded that the only effective women's strategy lay in cooperating with men and reaping protection as a reward. Experience had taught them that competition with men did not pay but compromise might. According to this logic, when the New Woman participated effectively in the man's world, she became like a man and relinquished her last bargaining chip in the sexual politics of everyday life.

Freedom, so essential to the confident, terrified the insecure. A decade of avant-garde experimentation during the Weimar period frightened conventional people. Long before Hitler came to power, many women called for "emancipation from emancipation." The new freedoms, which had exhilarated a few during the flapper era of the 1920s, unsettled the

majority of women, for whom new opportunities meant loss of protection. "Emancipation," declared one woman, "threatens to emancipate our sons, daughters, and even husbands from our control." Women who conformed to traditional expectations demanded recognition in the motherly roles for which their childhood and education had prepared them. Viewing themselves as an endangered species in an abrasive modern world, they called for a virile patriarchy which, they believed, would protect them from emancipation. Democracy and choice had surrounded them with chaos, anomie, and competition. Women demanded their right to withdraw from that world, to devote themselves to familial concerns, and to be economically secure. Authoritarian rule would, they hoped, impose order and health on the nation and tie fathers to their families. Such an inchoate longing did not necessarily impel women to vote for the Nazi Party before 1933, but it did prepare them to welcome the Nazi state. Nostalgia about women and the family contributed to the Nazi appeal no less than other components of a proto-Nazi heritage, such as nationalism, fear of Marxism, hatred of the Versailles Treaty, and contempt for democracy.

The terms of women's discourse reflected the extent to which the notion of an exclusively female territory permeated their thinking. Catholic women called their periodical *Women's Country* (*Frauenland*), and a group of pro-Nazi Protestant women named their magazine *New Land* [*Neuland*]. Fearing that the individual mother in her home stood powerless against the forces that threatened her, middle-class women formed national associations to defend woman's interests as mother, consumer, homemaker, producer, and churchgoer. Traditionalist women dreamed of organizing a vast women's world within an essentially female space—under men's guardianship, to be sure, but beyond the surveillance of prelates or politicians. Beginning in the 1920s, they began to refer to their world as their own "living room." Hitler used the term as a fraudulent pretext for military conquest of the rich agricultural lands in eastern Europe. *Lebensraum* to women meant a peaceful social sphere within which women of all classes and ages would cooperate to revive the gospel of love and harmony. Such a "place" had, of course never existed. Women had never been so pure or men so protective. What alternative vision was there? Some socialists and stalwart feminists during the 1920s had fashioned a utopian landscape in which women and men would live equally together, sharing in families, in communities, and on the job. Facing two dreams, most women took refuge in the one rooted in a familiar past.

Nazi women adapted the dream of a separate space and forswore claims to "masculine" public power and in exchange expected greater

influence over their own social realm. Health care, education, reproduction, folk traditions and handicrafts, social work, and religion all fell into the sphere women called their own social space. Scholtz-Klink told me smugly, "Men will always be self-centered, arrogant, and ambitious." Women will never wield power *as women*, although you will see a Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi. "If you want to help women, then you need a women's bureau, not a woman president." But while Scholtz-Klink's "state within a state" reflected an important tradition, it also perverted two central principles. Whereas most conservative women viewed the family as an emotional "space" and bulwark *against* the invasion of public life, Nazi women saw it as an invasion route that could give them access to every German's most personal values and decisions.

Women's remoteness from public life, in the nineteenth-century view, endowed them with a certain moral leverage. They were supposed to remain aloof from corruption and injustice, admonishing their husbands, sons, and fathers to remain true to their principles. The ideal Nazi woman, by contrast, retained the remoteness from power, but forfeited her moral influence because she yielded to the state and enjoyed the rewards. Claiming that their work elevated women's status, Scholtz-Klink and her deputies intruded into previously personal choices related to issues as diverse as childbearing, education, consumer purchases, religious faith, menu planning, ethical values, and social life. Backed by state funds and lavish propaganda campaigns, Nazi women invaded family life with eugenics, ideological indoctrination, and anti-Semitism. Thus, they differed from the conservative tradition in their open retreat from politics and active entry into personal life. Whatever their doubts and disillusionments, women in other Weimar parties realized that they needed access to formal political power to defend their interests, even if, paradoxically, their major concerns revolved around preserving a private "space" in which a mother's influence predominated.

Motherly love in its separate sphere, far from immunizing women against evil, fired women's dedication to the Führer's vision of an "Aryan" future and expanded opportunities for women to reign in their own *Lebensraum*. Nazi women thought they ruled this "living room." But the state, which had supported its construction in 1933, began in the late 1930s to destroy it. The need for workers in strategic industries conflicted with official views of women's role. SS breeding programs violated customary views about marriage, as did a divorce reform that made it easy for husbands to abandon wives. Women Nazis felt betrayed when the state attacked both religion and the family. After German armies were defeated at Stalingrad, deception became threadbare and willful ignorance flaccid. Since Karl Jaspers in 1947 first spoke of Ger-

mans as "victims" of Hitler and his wars, the term has become commonplace. But it is misleading. Most people touched by war lost control of their choices, whether as soldiers, prisoners, factory workers, or widows. They suffered. They became victims of Allied attack, but average citizens did not become the targets of their own government's murderous plans. Jews did.

During the early stages of my research, I had seldom come into contact with information about non-Nazis and victims. I had researched the women's world, which (to borrow a metaphor they often used) was contained by the walls around Catholic, Protestant, and Nazi organizations. These walls remained invisible as long as women did not venture too near the borders. But when a woman leader expected to participate with men in decision making (even in issues related to women), the alarms went off and she faced a storm of ridicule. Autonomy existed only in relationship to the women within her sphere and did not translate into bargaining power in male administrations. Women felt free only as long as their wishes were congruent with Nazi demands. Obviously, male Nazis faced constraints, but men's roles as wielders of power were not discordant with Nazi notions about gender-appropriate behavior.

Scholtz-Klink boasted, "My women and I did as we pleased," because she had so thoroughly internalized the Nazi leaders' definition of what pleased them. Self-esteem, for Scholtz-Klink and her underlings, depended upon never approaching the limits of their power. By blinding themselves to their own irrevocable second-rate status, they established their own satrapies on the margin of men's realm. Compiling the chronicle of this morass of self-deception and opportunism proved to be depressing work. What, I occasionally wondered, did these women look like from the other side of the social and legal wall that cordoned off "Aryan" from Jew and resister from Nazi?

One voice in particular jolted me out of the protective layer of indifference I had developed while perusing hundreds of documents depicting a grim topic. Erna Becker-Cohen spoke powerfully from the pages of her 1942 diary. Reading her words, written on yellowed paper, I began a new search that has not ended. A Catholic with Jewish ancestors and a Catholic husband, Erna Becker-Cohen needed desperately to communicate the pain she experienced under Nazi rule. Not trusting friends and reluctant to burden her already worried husband, she recorded her anguish in a diary remarkable for its restraint and honesty. Her straightforward, often telegraphic comments bear witness to the experiences of millions of women who risked (and usually lost) their lives because they did not fit into Hitler's schemes for a thousand-year Reich.

During the winter of 1942–43, Frau Becker-Cohen went to the store

in Berlin at which she had shopped for years. The owner ordered her to get out. A sign said, JEWS ARE NOT WANTED. At first, the proscription took Becker-Cohen aback; then she adjusted quickly. Nothing, but nothing, could ever hurt as deeply as the day two years earlier when members of her parish had told her that "Aryan" Catholics found it unseemly to attend Christmas services in the presence of a Jew. How they had rejoiced at her conversion so many years before, and welcomed her and her husband into their community! Then, after 1933, these same Christian neighbors no longer greeted her on the street. Her disillusion with Catholics, however, did not diminish her faith in Catholicism, but she stopped attending the local church and traveled every day to a downtown cathedral where people would not identify her as Jewish. When the bombing raids began, her neighbors in the shelters behaved so crudely that she preferred to risk allied bombs rather than descend into the subterranean world of hatred and bigotry. She had learned to avoid ostracism and to pray alone. But how would she buy milk for her four-year-old son? She decided to send him to the store. Seeing the child with an empty milk container and ration book, the shop owner turned to her friends. "Just look at that Jew-woman, sending her son because we won't let *her* in!" They sent the boy home without milk. That night the mother confided in her diary, "How very hard people are! Not even mothers offer sympathy to me in my sorrow. Where," she asked, "can God be if his spirit does not live in the hearts of his faithful?"[6]

Where, I asked myself, did the spirit of resistance live if not among women? Somewhere within that society saturated with terror, someone must have preserved a humane tradition. German culture had, after all, produced Goethe, Schiller, and Heine; Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.

And the old question returned. Where had the women been? Germany, unlike Nazi-occupied countries during the Second World War, had not inspired any military resistance. Nor had terror played a significant role. That meant opposition depended upon skills that women have traditionally possessed in abundance, like the ability to "pass"—to shed any overt behavior that might attract the attention of Nazi officials, neighbors, teachers, policemen, or relatives, while holding on to an inner self-respect. Among Jewish Germans, too, I speculated, these womanly talents must have played a vital role. How did women, whom psychologists credit with sensitivity to others' needs and weaknesses, perceive sources of danger and safety?

Where Nazi power reigned, men and women remained separated by function, personality, and responsibilities. Beyond the limits of Hitler's authority, however, in small islands of opposition, women and men

formed integrated communities, unified by trust and integrity. After the first wave of isolated and failed protests in 1933, resisters prepared for a long fight. Jews, devastated at their friends' betrayal, created new sources of support that likewise bound together men and women, young and old, rich and poor. To "resist" meant first of all to survive emotionally. It required the inner strength to cut oneself entirely loose from external systems of rewards and punishments and fashion a balance between conformity and opposition. Looking backward, evaluation of very limited information becomes extremely difficult. A wholehearted Nazi might be moved to perform one act of kindness toward a Jewish neighbor, or a diehard opponent would habitually give the "Heil Hitler" (called the "German greeting") salute to avoid suspicion. Next to fear of arrest, apathy was the worst threat. Immobilized rage turned inward produced political depression. Ruth Andreas-Friedrich and her husband, both members of the resistance, wrote: "The time of the lone wolf had passed. . . . Strength no longer depended upon those who appeared powerful. We had to build our own troops . . . what one person needs the other will supply. Everything depends upon our ability to divide up the roles intelligently."[7] We still do not know if hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands preserved communities of integrity against Nazism, because courage among opponents and victims had to be hidden if it was to exist at all.

Looking back at Nazi Germany, it seems that decency vanished; but when we listen to feminine voices from the period, we realize instead that it was cordoned off. Loyal Nazis fashioned an image for themselves, a fake domestic realm where they felt virtuous. Nazi women facilitated that mirage by doing what women have done in other societies—they made the world a more pleasant place in which to live for the members of their community. And they simultaneously made life first unbearable and later impossible for "racially unworthy" citizens. As fanatical Nazis or lukewarm tag-alongs, they resolutely turned their heads away from assaults against socialists, Jews, religious dissenters, the handicapped, and "degenerates." They gazed instead at their own cradles, children, and "Aryan" families. Mothers and wives directed by Gertrud Scholtz-Klink made a vital contribution to Nazi power by preserving the illusion of love in an environment of hatred, just as men sustained the image of order in the utter disarray of conflicting bureaucratic and military priorities and commands.

Over time, Nazi women, no less than men, destroyed ethical vision, debased humane traditions, and rendered decent people helpless. And other women, as victims and resisters, risked their lives to ensure Nazi defeat and preserve their own ideals.

2

WEIMAR EMANCIPATION

War falls on the women most heavily, and more so now than ever before. This war should be a good argument for suffrage. It shows that men, as I have always believed, are as hysterical as women, only they show it in a different way. Women weep and men fight.

—Carrie Chapman Catt
The New York Times
August 6, 1914

An account of Hitler's Germany must begin with a survey of the Weimar Republic that preceded it, and here historians alternate between two perspectives, one myopic and the other omniscient. Opting for the first means portraying the 1920s as the people who lived then experienced them—depicting a relatively placid political landscape on which Adolf Hitler was a very small blot on the horizon. But the Third Reich casts a deep backward shadow that skews that perspective and places Hitler squarely in the center. We know what most Germans in the 1920s could not suspect: that a small band of fanatics who swore total allegiance to their Führer would after 1933 hold the fate of the nation in its control. Brutality, terror, and genocide from later decades intrude upon the picture of Weimar Germany as contemporaries saw it. This shadow calls for a retrospective double vision that encompasses both the prospect of emancipation and progress held out by Weimar democracy and the etiology of a disreputable and insignificant movement which spread, undetected, through the body politic and was diagnosed only after it could not be halted.

Because this is a book about women in a man's state, a second doubling in our perspective superimposes itself upon the first, for male and female worlds do not always harmonize, and frequently they do not even touch. Standard histories focus on the public sphere in which men determine foreign policy, negotiate economic deals, and declare social policy. Historians of Weimar Germany have often analyzed this world of their fathers, defining its turning points, diagnosing its structural faults, and singling out its heroes and villains. But behind and beneath the political chain of events that brought Hitler to power, the world of the mothers also underwent a transformation. Women's suffrage, the emergence of the economically and socially emancipated New Woman, the panic about falling birth rates, shifts in employment patterns—all sent tremors through society. The cataclysms of public life—war, defeat, revolution, and Depression—occurred against an emotional substructure torn by confusion, despair, and anxiety.

Formally, Weimar Germany began with the cataclysmic winter of 1918–1919, which irrevocably changed men's and women's lives. During the previous four years they had directed their efforts against foreign enemies. Then, in October 1918, when propaganda promised a quick military victory, German generals told their Kaiser to surrender or face invasion. He called for an armistice. Rebellion broke out, much as it had in Russia during 1917. The Kaiser abdicated and fled into exile. Just when Germans least expected it, the republic had been born. Just when women least anticipated it, universal suffrage became law. During the

last weeks of 1918, an interim Socialist cabinet initiated a series of sweeping reforms. Because of Socialists' commitment to women's emancipation, German women became the first women to vote in any major nation. Neither democracy nor women's equality, however, found much support in war-torn Germany. President Wilson made it clear during the peace negotiations at Versailles that Germany could not end the war until its citizens had drafted a democratic constitution and elected their government. Refusal would have meant renewed war and an even more humiliating defeat. Germans elected a National Assembly that drafted the constitution. Because they feared revolution in Berlin, the lawmakers met in Weimar, gracing the new government with the name of Goethe's city.

No wonder observers watched German politics with intense interest. What would become of a liberation that owed its very existence to military surrender and Socialist victory? How would the beneficiaries use their new rights? In English, French, and United States history, political reform has often come as the result of victorious national revolution. But Germans had experienced their first taste of liberalism when Napoleon's armies invaded, and again in the wake of surrender in 1918. The high point of German history in the eyes of most citizens had come with the unification in 1871. That triumph had been achieved not by progressives, but by Otto von Bismarck and the reactionary Kaiser Wilhelm I. In some ways the Russian monarchy offers a comparison, for it, too, had provided a bastion against liberal reform. But after Nicholas I abdicated, moderates lost control in 1917. As in Germany, Russians suffered chaos after defeat, but Lenin's government relied upon military strength and not elections. Moderate Socialists in Germany defeated the Communists and pledged to uphold basic freedoms.

The sudden granting of women's suffrage likewise had no precise parallel. True, American and British women received the ballot during the 1920s, but their movements had been closer to success in 1914, and their nations emerged victorious in 1918. In France and Italy, women had contributed to the war effort, but received no rewards in the form of rights or suffrage until the end of World War II. In Germany, women's suffrage, like democracy, came as a by-product of chaos and defeat rather than as the immediate result of a long and hard-fought battle. What would emancipated women do with the promise of equal rights? A Socialist, Maria Juchacz, proclaimed, "The Woman Question in Germany no longer exists in the old sense of the term. It has been solved."[1] But other, more somber voices could be heard. Feminist Alice Rühle-Gerstel commented, "The war emancipated women; it is now up to women to emancipate themselves."[2]

The vote alone, she believed, meant little. Feminist-pacifist Lida Gustava Heymann predicted that women would encounter disillusionment: "Oppression that has lasted thousands of years leaves deep traces, which will not be erased overnight by women's suffrage. We have to bear those burdens for generations because it takes time to deprive the man of woman who has been cultivated to give him his comforts."[3]

In the 1920s Germans asked, Would the nationalists who dominated the Kaiser's regime concede victory to a coalition of liberals and moderate socialists? Would men allow women to take their place in public life as legal and economic equals?

The winter of 1918–1919 makes a convenient point of departure in any chronicle of Nazism. The trauma of surrender, economic hardship, and political revolution defined the real world in which most Germans lived. But emotionally they lived in the aftermath of wartime glory, on chauvinist slogans, images of brave soldiers and strong women, hymns to a national spirit, and appeals to sacrifice that persisted even as reality left them behind. As Germans experienced hunger, fear of invasion, revolution, and economic disaster, they clung to dreams created by wartime propaganda. Memories of the joyous upsurge of patriotism from 1914 alternated with the bitter shock of humiliation from 1918. The history of Nazism, thus, begins six years before Hitler took control of an insignificant party, with a war that galvanized Germans to action in the name of patriotic honor and imperialist greed.

On the last day of July 1914, Germans heard the news that their nation had been wantonly attacked by Russia, France, and England. The Kaiser called for a domestic truce between warring political parties, interest groups, and economic classes. Socialists, instead of launching an international workers' uprising as they had threatened, rushed to the recruiting tables. Women heard themselves summoned to save the Fatherland. As the troops marched to the front, Germans at home thrilled to the battle call and anticipated instant victory. The image of uniformed glory pulled citizens out of the daily humdrum into the vortex of flags, slogans, drives, and crusades. But "the boys" did not return victorious for Christmas in 1914, and the promise of instant glory became mired in the blood and mud of the trenches. Four years of mechanized slaughter at the front and desperate shortages at home, accompanied by fraudulent propaganda about German military triumph, sapped the fervor of civilians and veterans alike.

Fighting a common enemy, citizens experienced the thrill of national unity and a shared destiny. But men and women lived through very different wartime realities. After the defeat, soldiers returned—disillu-

sioned, defeated, and bitter. Like Paul, the hero in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, they could not face "normalcy."

> All that meets me, all that floods over me are but feelings—greed of life, love of home, yearning of the blood, intoxication of deliverance. But no aims. Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experience we might have unleashed a storm. Now, if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more.[4]

Soldiers' accounts of the war vividly chronicle their lives in the trenches and also depict their remoteness from civilian life. Their alienation from women (even the women they loved) haunts this literature. Paul, in *All Quiet*, discovers "a terrible feeling of foreignness" that severs his connection to the world back home. Even on leave, he cannot bridge the gulf, not even when his mother asks for his trust. "Mother, mother! You still think I am a child—why can I not put my head in your lap and weep? . . . I would like to weep and be comforted, too. Indeed I am little more than a child."[5] But Paul cannot weep, and mourns the loss of his ability to feel. Another author, far more popular in Germany, glorified this experience of being cut off from peaceful, "womanly" life. Ernst Jünger wrote best-sellers about his experiences at the front where he felt bound by profound ties of love and death to his fellow soldiers. "Though I am no misogynist, I was always irritated by the presence of women every time that the fate of battle threw me into the bed of a hospital ward. One sank, after the manly and purposeful activities of the war, into a vague atmosphere of warmth."[6] War, the "silent teacher," hardened a generation of soldiers against the seductive temptations of home, tenderness, and femininity. Remarque's soldiers experienced terror, madness, and grief that "feminize" them; Jünger's *Storm of Steel* preached vengeance, blood, and glory. The war had endowed Jünger's restless life with meaning and a higher purpose. Exhilarated, he marched with his battalion into Belgium, intoxicated by the "smell of blood and roses." The experience gave birth to the "new man," who was very different from the Weimar democrat or Remarque's burned-out veterans.

> War, the father of all things, is also our father. It has hammered us, chiseled us and hardened us into what we are. And always, as long as the swirling wheel of life revolves within us, this war will be the axis around which it will swirl. It has reared us for battle and we shall remain fighters as long as we live. . . . Under the skin of all cultural and technical progress we remain naked and raw like the man of the forest and of the steppe. . . .

> That is the new man, the pioneer of the storm, the hero of Central Europe. . . . This war is not the end but the new ascendancy of force. . . . New forms will be filled with blood and might will be seized with the hard fist.[7]

An insignificant trench soldier, Adolf Hitler, experienced the war in much the same way. After his first encounter with the enemy, he wrote, "Four days later we came back. Even our step had changed. Seventeen-year-old boys now looked like men. The volunteers of the regiment may not have learned to fight properly, but they knew how to die like old soldiers. This was the beginning."[8] After 1919, a few pacifists called for international disarmament, but most Germans remained in the thrall of wartime propaganda and anticipated the day when a new army would have a second chance to win the glorious victories promised by the Kaiser's propaganda.

Because they experienced the war differently, women faced special problems in the post-war world. War pulled women out of their families and into public life, giving them a stake in the nation that most had not previously felt. In 1914, women organized across political and religious divisions to knit, nurse, collect scrap material, and donate to charity. After 1916, as German generals realized the war would not end soon, the government recruited women to take the soldiers' places at strategically vital jobs. Overnight, it seemed, women were not only permitted but begged to mine coal, deliver the mail, drive trucks and trams, keep account books, and work in heavy industry—as well as continuing to roll bandages, nurse veterans, and perform charitable work. Suddenly a system that, until 1908, had made it illegal for women even to attend gatherings at which politics might be discussed and barred women from earning university degrees, told women the nation's very survival depended upon their taking up jobs previously done by men. A woman who joined the Nazi Party a decade later recalled, "It was a magnificent and holy time for us, it made us feel tied to the front and our homeland (*Heimat*). I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that those first war years pulled us all together in a true spiritual community."[9]

Ironically, the war, which slaughtered millions of young men, "emancipated" millions of young women by giving them the status and autonomy women's rights advocates had demanded for decades. The director of German women's wartime efforts, Maria E. Lüders, admitted, "In a certain sense, the war came at the right time for women."[10] Women demonstrated their patriotism, energy, and skills, but they did so in a topsy-turvy world that resembled antifeminists' worst nightmares: While brave men marched to their deaths, women "stole" their jobs, took their