volume 6

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRIAN STUDIES

women in Austria

Edited by

Günter Bischof

Anton Pelinka

Erika Thurner

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Contemporary Austrian Studies

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Introduction

Social and historical studies reflect social realities. In our male-centered society, women were and are underrepresented in academia. As a result of male domination (androcentricity) within the academic fields, gender has not sufficiently been taken into account as a category of investigation. Only within the last decade have Women's Studies and Gender Studies gained significant ground in universities and other scholarly institutions—in Austria even later than elsewhere. These gains coincided with the feminist engagement on the part of women in academia and in society as a whole.

In Austria, the number of women entering the ranks of political, historical, and social scientists is rising, but their academic publications—especially on topics relating to Women's and Gender Studies—are often ignored by the mainstream (that is, the patriarchy). This is true despite the fact that gender, as a structuring characteristic and as an important category of investigation, enriches and differentiates scientific discourses and results.

These are the reasons for assembling this volume. These articles it contains provide a glimpse into historical and political events involving and affecting women. Thus, they offer insight into the conditions of life and the terms of existence for women in Austria during the twentieth century.

The first four articles, written by historians, were originally presented at the German Studies Association Conference in September 1995 in Chicago. For this volume, the papers have been expanded. The intention was to trace several threads running through the fabric of Austrian history form the First Republic to the post-World War II era, in order to illuminate previously neglected aspects of the roles played by women.

In the first essay, *Helga Embacher* examines the problematic question of the assimilation of Jewish women in Austria during the 1920s. By looking at the categories middle class, liberal, intellectual, and Jewish, Embacher shows that the year 1938 witnessed the expulsion from Austria of not only "masculine rationality," but of the vast

majority of female intellectuals and artists as well. Embacher also discusses the political involvement of these women in left-wing parties. She concludes that intellectual life in Austria came to a temporary end in 1938, and that the female role models present in the First Republic were largely absent in postwar Austria.

Doris Gödl provides an overview of "the contribution made by women to the political policies of National Socialism." Gödl begins with the debate which originated during the 1970s in the field of Women's Studies in Germany. This debate surrounded the question of whether women during the Nazi era could properly be considered solely as victims, or whether women must also be considered as collaborators, supporters, and enthusiastic advocates of this system. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Gödl discusses and analyzes "processes of seduction" which were targeted at women by National Socialist propaganda and policies.

The article by *Erika Thurner* sheds light upon "female resistance against Nazi fascism." This study discusses the reasons why women and their commitment to the fight against National Socialism have remained generally ignored or accorded scant attention in the research of resistance movements and society. The specific topic of investigation is the work of anti-fascist Austrian women and girls who were living in Belgian exile. Belgium was not a major center of Austrian emigration, but this small and unattractive land of exile represents one of the rare cases where a specifically female form of resistance existed.

Ingrid Bauer investigates another—or an opposite—group of "insurgent women," the "GI brides," who were scorned as "chocoladies," "dollar floozies," and "Yankee tarts." As a topic for historical examination, the relationships, liaisons, and love affairs between Austrian women and girls and U.S. soldiers was taboo for a long time. In contrast, it was the leading conversational topic during the early postwar years. While analyzing the emotionally-charged, often irrational discussions of the "GI brides," Bauer reveals the state of mind and unconscious fears of postwar Austrian society.

In accordance with the traditional approach of *Contemporary Austrian Studies* to look at broad questions from an interdisciplinary perspective, three other researchers (one historian and two political scientists) were invited to examine "Women and Politics" during democratic periods in twentieth-century Austrian history. Taken together,

they analyze and comment on the discrimination against and equality of women in Austria during the First and Second Republics. In addition, they discuss the efforts of female (and male) politicians to gain equality for women and to restructure lifestyles and conditions for both sexes, in order to create a more equitable society. It is hardly surprising that, during the periods of dictatorship in Austria, there was no equality between the genders. Highly remarkable indeed are the continuity of and persistent tendency toward patriarchalism which remained dominant in the aftermath of these drastic political shifts. These authors show how the refusal to grant equal political and social rights to women have persisted through the era of democratic government as well.

The historian *Gabriele Hauch* sheds light upon the first generation of female members in the Austrian Parliament. These nineteen National Councilwomen—out of a total 408 representatives—shared one important stance in common: they defined themselves according to their gender as females and regarded the link between their gender and their political function as self-evident. Following this central thesis, Hauch develops a broad theoretical discourse around the so-called prosographical approach. She calls for a gender-oriented historiography as a corrective to a type of political science which, because of its limited points of departure, has failed to focus on women's contributions as well as the nature of gender construction in research.

Once more, it becomes clear that a scholarly analysis, which acknowledges and takes into account gender as a structuring characteristic and as a category of investigation, delineates historical breaks and watersheds far differently than studies which presume to be gender-neutral. For example, in the following contributions which illuminate Austrian society (or its political culture) in the Second Republic, it becomes clear that the phase of stable democratic development proved to be resistant to a democracy of the genders. Viewed from this perspective, antiquated, "old-fashioned" laws "*Gesetze aus der Postkutschenzeit*," such as the patriarchal marriage and family rights provisions, overshadowed the onset of economic upturn and modernization of a society emerging in the 1950s. Thus, stable democratic development, based on—or corresponding with—stable undemocratic gender discrimination, shaped modern Austria. Therefore, an historical break cannot be recognized earlier than in the 1970s.

In her survey, *Erna Appelt* reflects upon the conditions of women in Austria's economy over the past five decades. Because of the importance of the "Social Partnership" as the basis for the Austrian economy since 1945, Appelt focuses her main investigation on this topic. In describing and analyzing the strict hierarchical manner and the paternalistic fashion of the male-dominated organizations involved in the Social Partnership, Appelt examines the ways in which women have reacted to their subordinate status in the realms of economy, politics, and society as a whole. She shows current changes and women's responses to new challenges.

One reaction to current changes was the Women's Referendum in April 1997, in which independent women demanded not less than "half of the money, half of paid jobs, half of political life." This is the conclusion of *Sieglinde Rosenberger* in her contribution "Politics, Gender, and Equality." She examines the activities and strategies undertaken since the 1970s to enhance female participation in politics. She then analyzes the legislation for social equality in the private sphere, anti-discrimination legislation and policies for working women, as well as controversial legislation and political efforts to reconcile the dual roles of women as mothers and as members of the work force.

In 1918, women were finally given the right to vote in the newly proclaimed Austrian Republic; this was the logical starting point in gaining equal rights. Almost eighty years later, real equality is still a goal, although gender relations have become less patriarchal over the past decades. What becomes clear in discussions about this broad topic are the restrictive conditions and specific limitations (including self-limitations) which are applied to women in this society whose structure is still essentially patriarchal.

Last, but not least, my thanks to an anonymous American reviewer. She is an expert on women in Austria. Her thoughtful suggestions were very important and useful to all the authors.

Erika Thurner
Salzburg, April 1997

Middle Class, Liberal, Intellectual, Female, and Jewish: The Expulsion of "Female Rationality" from Austria

Helga Embacher

Historical research in Austria has only recently turned its attention to the problematical issue of emigration and exile, or, to formulate it more concretely, the deportation of its Jewish population.[1] Whereas the "overthrow of masculine rationality" has been treated and gradually worked through since the 1980s, such that regret for the losses thereby occasioned for Austria has become an increasingly common sentiment even in the speeches of politicians, the expulsion and murder of Jewish women as well as the deep cleft produced by the loss of 'female rationality' has been generally ignored up to now even by feminist scholars.[2] One explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the fact that feminist scholars have desired to write a history of women during the time of National Socialism with which they themselves could identify. For far too long, they have proceeded from the assumption of woman as the eternal victim, so that not only the history of Jewish women, thus the history of the "true" victims, but also the problematical subject of complicity by women or the phenomenon female anti-Semitism had to be left out of consideration.[3]

The following article traces the path of intellectual Jewish women from bourgeois backgrounds to the Socialist or Communist parties. This may essentially be regarded as the effort to achieve assimilation within non-Jewish society by means of culture and politics.[4] The term intellectual as used here is understood to include scientists, artists, physicians, and attorneys, as well as women active in politics. The source material is autobiographies, biographies, and life history interviews of women born between 1900 and 1925.[5]

German *Kultur* and Faith in Progress as a New Religion

In 1910, 46 percent of the female students at Viennese *Lyzeum* and 30 percent of those enrolled in *Gymnasien* in Vienna came from Jewish families. At the University of Vienna, which first began accepting women in 1900, the proportion of Jewish women quickly rose to 68.3 percent, a figure which does not include those with no denominational affiliation who came predominantly from the liberal Jewish bourgeoisie. In 1919, with the opening of the university's School of Law to women, Jews made up 50 percent of the female students. During the course of the Austrian First Republic, with the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy and the ensuing economic crisis whose impact was felt most acutely by the bourgeoisie, a gradual retrograde trend can be noted.[6]

Studies which have examined female contributions in the spheres of art and science have clearly shown that Viennese Modernism was by no means created and fostered by Jewish men alone, rather, Jewish women contributed a disproportionately high share as co-creators of this culture.[7] By 1938, at the latest, they were forced to flee Austria or were murdered in concentration camps. Only a handful came back after 1945—women were called upon to return to Austria even more infrequently than their celebrated male counterparts. Reconstruction took place in the absence of this "female rationality." Women who had spent their adolescence in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* served as role models for the postwar generation.[8]

What accounts for the extraordinarily high degree of participation by Jewish women in Austrian cultural and intellectual life? Why did the Jewish bourgeoisie place such high value upon educating their daughters? Answers to these imposing questions must undoubtedly be sought in the relationship of the Austrian, Jewish bourgeoisie to German *Kultur*. The path out of the *shtetl* in a world characterized by both Catholicism and anti-Semitism led to an identity crisis demanding a new definition of Jewish identity. The gradual renunciation of traditional Judaism through the acceptance and cultivation of German *Kultur* represented one possibility of acquiring a new Jewish consciousness and thereby gaining assimilation into non-Jewish society. Striving to immerse oneself in German *Kultur* was frequently coupled with the abnegation of traditional Judaism and the rejection of the

Yiddish language and culture.[9] It was only after her return from emigration that Stella Klein-Löw became aware that she had a "false conception of the difference between Yiddish and cultivated High German."[10]

It is very frequently brought out in biographical material that the exaltation of German *Kultur* displaced Jewish tradition and that the belief in progress became an ersatz religion. Simon Wiesenthal's grandmother reached first and foremost for her volume of Goethe rather than for her prayer book to rebuke and admonish her grandson.[11] As Stella Klein-Löw wrote, she was already being weaned on poetry by the time she was two years old and at the age of three she was familiar with names like Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and Grillparzer. The future representative in the Austrian national legislature read Karl Kraus' *Die Fakel* as religiously as her pious ancestors had read the Bible.[12]

Women were inculcated with these liberal values, but participation in public life was still denied to educated women in the nineteenth century. They had been raised for the salon and had to struggle slowly for the right to take part in the public forum of the cultural and political discourse of the day. Jewish women played leading roles in the bourgeois as well as the proletarian women's movement of the nineteenth century, which centered on the issues of the right to higher education, access to the universities, and women's suffrage.[13] A conspicuously high number of Jewish women were active in social work which, connecting with the Jewish tradition of charitable works, enabled them to break out of the narrow confines of the household to a more fulfilling existence. For example, Anne Fried described how her extremely highly-educated mother revolted against the decrees which prohibited her from practicing her profession: she and several female friends founded a charitable association to care for orphans.[14]

With the opening of the Viennese universities at the outset of the twentieth century, the daughters of these were the first to be accorded the opportunity to pursue the complete path of female intellectual emancipation. Biographical sources show that at least a segment of the liberal Jewish bourgeoisie had quite progressive attitudes toward higher education for women. In interviews, women who attended college during the 1920s—thus, the female pioneers in their respective fields—describe their studies as something taken for granted,

encouraged and promoted by their parents. However, it is also necessary to dispel the long-accepted myth that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population provided the same opportunities to their daughters as they did to their sons. Numerous women report that they had to fight for their right to study. As girls, they obtained the best possible education; however, study at the university level was regarded as superfluous, even by intellectual fathers. "In those days, when the father said no, it meant no," reported Anna Weiss, born in 1911, the daughter of Nobel Prize winner Otto Löwy. She wanted to follow in her father's footsteps and study medicine. Her father, however, was of the opinion that women would get married anyway and their education would turn out to have been a wasted effort.[15] By the time she finally prevailed upon him to concede, it was too late—the seizure of power by the National Socialists forced her to break off her studies prior to completion.

The Way to the Party

The sudden end of Austrian liberalism at the end of the nineteenth century left many Jews politically homeless. As early as the 1890s, the German Nationalist bourgeoisie had been progressively excluding Jews from their social spheres by means of *Arierparagraphen*; in Vienna, the Christian Social Party, under Karl Lueger, gained control of the municipal government by espousing a Christian petit bourgeois-tinged anti-Semitism.[16] The majority of Viennese Jews, often contrary to their own economic and religious interests, were therefore closely aligned with the Social Democrats. During the First Republic, communism or socialism exerted a strong attraction, above all upon many young, intellectual Jews, even those from bourgeois backgrounds. They regarded this political involvement as an opportunity to "lose themselves" in a mass movement and thus to complete the process of emancipation which had been begun by their parents.

Numerous Jewish women were actively involved in the Communist party and the Socialist party in Austria—if not as leading party officials, at least as functionaries, journalists, social workers, physicians, and as representative in city councils and in the Austrian national legislature. Virtually all artists and scholars were associated with the political left. In biographies as well as interviews, the path from the Jewish bourgeoisie to the party can be clearly traced. Despite all

assimilative efforts on the part of their parents, their relationship to Judaism was highly contradictory. While, on one hand, Judaism retained hardly any significance within the family, and the place of Jewish tradition had been occupied by German *Kultur* and rationality, these Jews nevertheless perceived themselves as outsiders in the non-Jewish society, due, above all, to the pervasive anti-Semitism. This topic, however, was not permitted to be discussed in order to avoid calling into question the subject of assimilation itself; religious questions as well were frequently regarded as "hot potatoes" that were better left untouched. Women frequently emphasize that they experienced their Judaism as a flaw that they were glad to be rid of.[17] "As for the religion, I didn't want to belong. But my resignation was rather childish. That's just the way we all were—we believed we were going to bring about a revolution and introduce Socialism," was Hilde Koplenik's analysis of her resignation from the Viennese Jewish community.[18]

The identification with communism or socialism, promising a future of greater justice and rejecting all religions equally, finally enabled them to resign from the Jewish community and to join the party. Women saw in these ideologies, moreover, the hope for an end to sexist discrimination. The Social Democratic municipal government which held power in Vienna until 1934 had made women's liberation a central element of its platform. They fought for reform in the areas of divorce and family law, sex education, and abortion, they also sought innovations to ease the burden of housework. The "comrade" replaced the housewife as the new role model for women.

However, in retrospect, many women have raised the issue of the numerous contradictions which they had to be prepared to accept in exchange for membership in a putative community. While they professed to see the future embodied in the proletariat, whom they regarded as "new and better" human beings, the anti-Semitism which was extremely widespread among men and women of the working class also had to be overlooked or reinterpreted as anti-intellectualism or anti-bourgeois prejudice. "We were so convinced that our cause was the only right way, that we would triumph, that we had to triumph. We didn't see what was going on all around us, and everything that disturbed our concept was sloughed off and repressed," wrote Hilde Koplenik after the war.[19]

Despite the fact that Jewish men and women, through their emotional relationship to the party, believed that they had at last found acceptance and a sense of belonging, in the final analysis, they generally remained among themselves. As Jewish intellectuals within the party, they formed—even if unconsciously—a closed group. Thus, in certain municipal districts in Vienna, the socialist high school students' organization was composed almost entirely of Jews, mostly from bourgeois backgrounds; a similar tendency can be noted in the socialist and communist organizations for college students. Even their intimate circle of friends was made up predominantly of Jews.

The attitudes toward and treatment of women within the party is seldom the subject of criticism in the biographies and interviews studied. In this regard, however, it must certainly be kept in mind that women in the 1920s and 1930s proceeded from a much different model of emancipation than did women in the 1970s. While modern feminism has called into question, above all, ascriptive role assignment with respect to women, this was widely accepted by earlier feminists. These women sought to emancipate themselves by, on one hand, appropriating so-called "male rights," while on the other, they strove to improve the situation of women by means of technical innovations and through progressive education. Despite the fact than women were increasingly able to break into formerly exclusively male domains, raising children and managing the household were still considered women's work.

1934: The End of All Illusions

Politically left-wing Jewish men and women frequently describe the year 1934 as the major turning point in their lives. With the establishment of the Austro-Fascist dictatorship and the outlawing of their parties, they felt politically homeless. Their hopes for a better future had proven to be illusory. Left-wing intellectuals, especially the Jews among them, were excluded from many professions and careers even before 1938. Women, moreover, were effected by the *Doppelverdienergesetz* which meant that the wife of a two-income couple lost her job.[20] Thus, many pioneering female students could no longer apply their learning in practice. Following the Nazi's seizure of power in Germany, Jewish actors and actresses could no longer pursue their careers in Austria, since the Austrian film industry also produced for

the German market. "There was no future in acting or film and theaters as well and I left in 1937 to New York," wrote Fini Littlejohn.[21] The well-known author Hilde Spiel wrote that she had already left Austria in 1936 out of disgust for the system by which she did not want to be affected.[22] Intellectual Jewish women also left Austria to fight against Francisco Franco in Spain or to seek a better future in the Soviet Union. Several of them fell victim to the Stalinist purges.[23] As a result of insensitivity or bureaucratic heavy-handedness, all those who had left Austria before 1938, usually due to the anti-Semitic climate or the unpromising outlook for the future, continue to be denied "indemnification payments."[24]

Intellectual life in Austria came to a temporary end in 1938. This era of emancipation and participation in public life had lasted less than twenty years. Of these 130,000 Jews, only a few thousand returned to Austria after the war. They included a relatively high proportion of Communists and Socialists. It was precisely these Socialists and Communists who displayed so much enthusiasm in helping to construct a new Austria, a process which would later prove to be such a disappointment to so many of them.[25]

Women—often counter to their own interests and needs—also followed their husbands who desired to return or had been recalled by their parties. As one returning woman put it, "I didn't want to come back under any circumstances...I am also the victim of my husband."[26] Female returning emigrants also longed for "normality," for a family and children, and among the things they overlooked in the course of this were their own interests. "We both wished to study and to then have children. My husband ultimately earned two doctoral degrees, and I raised two children," Gundl Herrnstadt remarked rather cynically.

To live as a Jew in Austria after the *Shoah* meant looking away, repressing, and constructing one's own illusions which, nevertheless, continually threatened to collapse. Even those returning emigrants who actively participated in building a new Austria had to maintain a cleavage between themselves who had been expelled and those who had remained. For many Austrian Jews, *There's No Going Home*, as was so clearly illustrated by the title art historian Hilde Zaloscer gave to her autobiography.

NOTES

1. Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb, and Albert Lichtblau, eds., *Schwieriges Erbe, Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 1995).

2. Meike Bader, "Unschuldsrituale in der Frauenforschung zum Nationalsozialismus," *Babylon, Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* 9 (1991): 140-45.

3. Lerke Gravenhorst and Carmen Tatschmurat, eds., *Töchter-Fragen. NS-Frauen-Geschichte* (Freiburg: Kore, 1990).

4. Another way—Zionism—was less attractive in comparison to Socialism and will not be treated in this article.

5. Edith Foster, *Maturatreffen, 50 Jahre danach* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1989); Helene Deutsch, *Confrontations with Myself* (New York: Norton, 1973); Marie Langer, *Von Wien bis Managua. Wege einer Psychoanalytikerin* (Freiburg: Kore, 1986); Minna Lachs, *Warum schaust du zurück. Erinnerungen 1907-1941* (Vienna: Löcker, 1986); idem, *Zwischen zwei Welten. Erinnerungen 1941-46* (Vienna: Löcker, 1992); Hilde Zaloscer, *Eine Heimkehr gibt es nicht. Ein österreichisches curriculum vitae* (Vienna: Löcker, 1988); Hilde Spiel, *Rückkehr nach Wien. Ein Tagebuch* (Frankfurt, Main, Berlin:Ullstein, 1989); idem, *Welche Welt ist meine Welt?* (Hamburg: Reinbek, 1990); Elisabeth Freundlich, *Die fahrenden Jahre. Erinnerungen* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1992); Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben. Eine Jugend.* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992); Stella Klein-Löw, *Erinnerungen* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1980); Henriette Mandl, *Cabarett und Courage. Stella Kadmon - eine Biographie* (Vienna: WUV-Universitätsverlag, 1993); Gertrude Trincher-Rutgers, *Das Haus im Mias. Odyssee einer Kinderärztin.*(Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1993); Jola Zalud, *Einem Arbeiter gibt man nicht die Hand. Erinnerungen einer unfreiwilligen Kommunistin* (Vienna: Löcker, 1995); Gina Kaus, *Von Wien nach Hollywood* (Baden-Baden: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1990; Anne Fried, *Farben des Lebens. Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, Weimar: Kiepneuer, 1991); Robert Streibel, ed., *Eugenie Schwarzwald und ihr Kreis* (Vienna: Picus, 1996).

Additional sources were unpublished manuscripts and approximately forty biographical interviews conducted by the author in Austria, Israel, France, England, and the United States.

6. Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Die Juden Wiens, 1987-1914. Assimilation und Identität* (Vienna-Cologne-Graz: Böhlau, 1988), especially the chapter, "Erziehung der Mädchen"; Waltraud Heindl and Marina Tichy, eds., *"Durch Erkenntnis zu Freiheit und Glück..." Frauen an der Universität Wien, ab 1897* (Vienna: Schriftenreihe des Universitätsarchivs, 1990), 151 f.

7. Helga Embacher, "Außenseiterinnen: bürgerlich, jüdisch, intellektuell - links," *L'Homme, Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 2 (1989): 57-76.

8. Helga Embacher, "Unwillkommen? Zur Rückkehr von Emigrantinnen und Überlebenden aus den Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagern." in: *Frauenleben 1945 - Kriegsende in Wien.* Katalog zur 105. Sonderausstellung des Historischen Museums der Stadt Wien, September-October 1995.

9. See, e.g., Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Harriet P. Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna 1918-1938* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Bruce Pauley, *Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Antisemitismus. Von der Ausgrenzung zur Auslöschung* (Vienna: Kremayr und Scheriau, 1993); Rozenblit, *Die Juden Wiens.*

10. Klein-Löw, *Erinnerungen*, 199; Siehe auch George Clare, *Letzter Walzer in Wien. Spuren einer Familie* (Frankfurt a. Main-Berlin-Vienna: Ullstein, 1984), 109 f.

11. Interview with Simon Wiesenthal, Vienna 1992.

12. Klein-Löw, *Erinnerungen*, 26.

13. Naomi Shepherd, *Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993); Andreas Lixl-Purcell, ed., *Erinnerungen deutsch-jüdischer Frauen 1900-1990* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992); Marion A. Kaplan, *Die jüdische Frauenbewegung in Deutschland. Organisation und Ziele des jüdischen Frauenbundes 1904-1938* (Hamburg: Hans Christians, 1981); Meike Sophia Baader, "Grenzgängerinnen zwischen den Welten. Jüdische Frauen in Geschichte und Gegenwart," *Babylon, Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart 13/14 (1991)*: 140-45.

14. Fried, *Farben des Lebens*, 49 f.

15. Interview with Anna Weiss, Menschenbilder, ORF, Ö1, 1995.

16. Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 121-185.

17. Embacher, "Außenseiterinnen," 71f.

18. Hilde Koplenig, unpublished manuscript, 69; also see Langer, *Von Wien bis Managua*, 85. Membership in the Jewish Community is a formal process, like church membership for Catholics or other Christians, which entails payment of a yearly tax.

19. Koplenig, manuscript, 78.

20. Irene Schöffmann, "Frauenpolitik im Austrofaschismus," in *"Austrofaschismus." Beiträge über Politik, Ökonomie und Kultur 1914-1938*, ed. Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer (Vienna:Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik,1988).

21. Fini Littlejohn, letter to the author dated 25 November 1996.

22. Hilde Spiel, Im Gespräch, ORF, Ö1, 1989. See as well Video-Interview with Gundl Herrnstadt-Steinmetz, Salzburg 1995.

23. Quittner, *Weiter Weg*; Rosa Puhm, *Eine Trennung in Gorki* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1980); Meinhard Stark, ed., *"Wenn Du willst Deine Ruhe haben, schweige" Deutsche Frauenbiographien des Stalinismus* (Essen: Klartext, 1991).

24. Brigitte Bailer, "Der NS-Opfer-Fonds: Enttäuschte Hoffnungen der Betroffenen," *Informationen der Gesellschaft für politische Aufklärung* 45 (1995): 7-8.

25. Helga Embacher, *Neubeginn ohne Illusionen. Juden in Österreich nach 1945* (Vienna: Picus, 1995); idem, "Unwillkommen? Zur Rückkehr von Emigrantinnen und Überlebenden aus den Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagern."

26. Embacher, "Außenseiterinnen," 73.

Women's Contributions to the Political Policies of National Socialism

Doris Gödl

The point of departure for my considerations is the debate which originated in the early 1970s in the field of women's studies in Germany. This debate surrounded the question of whether women during the era of National Socialism could properly be considered only as victims, or whether women had not also been collaborators, supporters, and enthusiastic advocates of this system. Who were the twelve million women who, both before and after 1933, supported National Socialism and worked together with it?

The initial public discussion of this issue was tantamount to the breaking of a taboo, since the majority of women had, until then, been considered victims of National Socialism and/or regarded themselves as such:

> Even as recently as a few years ago, the very idea that women collaborated in, or even bore criminal guilt for, National Socialism was virtually a taboo subject in historiography relating to both women as well as to the so-called Third Reich. Whereas one side completely closed its eyes to female collaborators and perpetrators in order to focus upon the victim's role of women in the patriarchy, the fixation of the other side upon the person of Hitler and his role in the male-dominated *Führerstaat* led to women being generally ignored as irrelevant within this framework.[1]

Nevertheless, there were women who, in a variety of ways, permitted themselves to be seduced by National Socialism into collaboration. The use of the term "seduction" in this context seems to me to be legitimate since it refers to an active decision reached by a subject performing an action—in this case, women. According to Michel

Foucault, the significance of seduction lies in the process whereby the seduced individual, at a certain moment, crosses a threshold to obtain a share of power or to come to an arrangement with it.[2] What, then, were the policies pursued by National Socialism to seduce women to support its political program, to activate their willingness to take part?

In my opinion, this process of seduction can be identified on three separate levels:

1. On the political level, "Aryan women" experienced an enhancement of their status in National Socialism as a result of the public statements and activities of the Nazi women's association and its representatives.
2. A significant factor was the individual career chances which National Socialism opened up for many women—as a political functionary in the women's association, with a position of responsibility in the system of social services, as a mother awarded the "Mother's Cross."[3]
3. On the personal level, relationships to the political *Nomenklatura* (through marriage, party membership, or "having given birth to a child on behalf of the *Führer*") were capable of forging such close ties to the movement that wives or children were prepared to denounce their own husbands or parents.[4]

The Seducer and the Seduced

In the following section, I would like to provide a few examples in order to put the relationship between the seducers and the seduced on the political and individual levels in concrete terms.

The Political Level of Seduction

The National Socialist Women's Association (NSF) was founded in 1931. It was quickly able to assert its claims to leadership within the League of German Women's Clubs, a confederation of bourgeois and liberal women's organizations and associations, so that those member groups whose policies and goals did not conform to those of the NSF were successively excluded from the league. Until 1935, the NSF could "operate relatively freely" as an independent organization. This changed after 1935, when the NSF relinquished its autonomy and became part of the Nazi party (NSDAP). Girls and young women continued to be organized within the Federation of German Girls

(BDM) up to the age of 30, at which point they could apply for membership in the NSF. Since the NSF wished to remain an elite group, only a limited number of members were accepted. Women now had to undergo an examination of their qualifications and convictions in order to gain admission. From this point on, acceptance by the NSF meant automatic membership in the NSDAP, and thus constituted a change in women's attitudes toward the party as well as their position within it: in place of an "autonomous" women's organization, there emerged "subordination" in a clear party hierarchy. Instead of being free to take independent positions, as had previously been the case, the group now had to conform to the dictates and expectations of the "top party leadership," for whom the areas of women's responsibility consisted primarily of providing unskilled labor and health care services for the party and its members, pursuing educational and cultural activities, as well as offering economic training for German housewives. The goals established within these areas of responsibility are impressively illustrated by a call to action issued by NSF leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink:

> Our entire struggle and all of our labors in recent years have been devoted to improving the living conditions of the German people. This striving will now reach its fulfillment in the mightiest exertion of effort the world has ever seen. Our men have taken up arms, and we women will provide them with the weapons they need until final victory has been achieved. Along with the inner strength which we are naturally prepared to commit, this effort demands putting into action the full industriousness of the German woman, a force which can be matched by no nation in the world. Victory must be ours![5]

This example reveals the methods by which Nazi ideology had to be formulated and staged in order to gain access to the everyday life of women and led to, among other things, women's accession to power as agents of exclusion, persecution, and destruction. The activities of women in the areas of community welfare and childbearing were instrumentalized by the movement, which publicly construed them as a means of serving "a good cause." This issue clearly reveals the political and ideological tension between autonomy (publicly participating in a cause) and subjugation (being reduced to traditional women's roles). This was a tension which had to remain unconscious so that the

political/ideological centers of power would not be called into question, and the arrangement between the genders which was integral to it would not be disturbed. Furthermore, it is probable that this relationship of tension could be maintained intact only because a segment of the female population remained steadfast in their support of Nazi ideology and tolerated no deviations. This can be clearly seen by reviewing essays and texts published by the NSF. Thus, in a 1933 newspaper article, Guida Diehl proclaimed the goals of the NSF's political work:

> We are fighting to preserve the purity of the Aryan race and, therefore, to free the German *Volk* from influences which are foreign to it. ...We recognize...the necessity...[of] education of women and the integration of all the powers women possess on behalf of the greatest good of the whole nation, to the extent that they are not performing their service to the *Volk* for their immediate kin in marriage, family and motherhood. ...Therefore, the female citizen of the coming Third Reich is that German woman who commits all of her vital energies as a wife and mother or as a female worker on behalf of her *Volk* and Fatherland. To advocate these fundamental principles publicly throughout the land, to remain loyal to this struggle and to fight with unflagging energy, this we National Socialist women solemnly vow to our *Führer*, Adolf Hitler.[6]

In this way, "Aryan women" experienced an enhancement of their social status as a result of the public activities of the Nazi women's association—a form of enhancement whose significance, although highly relative, women found quite convincing. Thus, they became highly visible (staged), even if this visibility did not correspond to their actual political influence. Of prime significance was obtaining an integral share of *Führer, Volk und Vaterland*, and the submersion in the collective narcissism and megalomania which was connected with it. In this enhanced status as "Aryan woman," it is precisely those qualities which are enhanced and mystified which have been so highly characteristic of the conflict of genders which has taken place since the eighteenth century, with which women have been essentially defined, and now essentially define themselves. Simultaneously, this enhancement, as an element of racism, inherently demands the debasement of that which is foreign. In excluding others, one's own

self-worth stems from one's not having been excluded. However, this type of exclusion, in the form of anti-Semitism and racism, hardly gave rise to the slightest protest. A few female historians, such as Claudia Koonz, for example, have identified an important aspect of perpetration on the part of women in this very connection. Women offered resistance when women's interests were at stake; when it was a matter of racism and anti-Semitism, however, they offered none or very little.

These highly ambivalent conditions between enhancement and debasement of women by Nazi ideology also acted to restrict the commitment of women to the cause of National Socialism and their readiness to work together with it. Although women were basically indispensable, they were denied access to Hitler and his inner circle. Thus, women indeed belonged to the so-called "master race," which endowed them with a certain enhanced status, which they were nevertheless then deprived of as members of an inferior gender. In this way, women readily accepted racial prejudices and venerated the Führer; they disavowed, however, any claim to a voice in political matters or to a share of political power. While swearing their obedience to men, they labored under the cloak of subjugation on the glorification of those spaces in which their own female life was played out: children, kitchen, church, culture, and hospital. Although women thus assumed responsibility for reproduction—the production of the "new generation"—as well as remaining available as a supplementary labor force, they were ultimately excluded from real political power:

> The National Socialist state was based just as fundamentally upon the separation of the genders as it was upon the exclusion of the Jews. A totalitarian society without its female half would not have been in the position to function. Therefore, the process of writing the history of this society cannot be finalized as long as the role and the significance of women in this society has not been thoroughly investigated.[7]

The Individual Level of Seduction

I have chosen the story of Trude Mohr-Bürkner to exemplify this level, since, in my opinion, her case makes very clear the connection between political seduction and individual benefits in the sense of personal career opportunities.

Trude Mohr was born in 1902 to parents whose political convictions were German nationalist. In the 1920s, she was actively involved in the German nationalist youth organization, the forerunner of the Hitler Youth (HJ). An NSDAP party member since 1928, she was entrusted with the assignment of establishing a BDM organization in the Brandenburg district by the HJ in 1930. In 1933, she was furloughed from her position in the national postal administration to be able to devote full-time attention to the organization and expansion of the BDM in the districts of Brandenburg and Berlin. When the HJ was outlawed for a few months in 1932, the ban of course applied to the BDM as well. This imposed illegality elevated Trude Mohr's sense of her own importance:

> *Ach*, that was a lot of fun. I had been in South Tyrol (Northern Italy) and had a stopover in Berlin on my way to Masuren (East Prussia). A woman on my staff was supposed to meet me at the train terminal to bring me a suitcase packed with clean clothes. In the meantime, the ban had be decreed, and she met me at an out-of-the-way station disguised in civilian clothing. But, of course, the BDM's work went forward, and no one paid the slightest attention to the ban.[8]

In 1934, as a result of feuding and internal intrigues in the organization, Trude Mohr was appointed national chairwoman of the BDM by *Reichsjugendführer* Baldur von Schirach, a position she held until 1937. Her most important goal was to try to bring about a change in the appearance of female youths. This had assumed importance following Hitler's horrified reaction to the "girls" who marched past him on the occasion of the 1932 national youth day celebration.[9] Heinrich Himmler had also expressed serious doubts about the attractiveness of German girls. "I regard it as a catastrophe. If we continue to masculinize women in this way, it is only a matter of time until the difference between the genders, the polarity, completely disappears."[10] Mohr then attempted to postulate a new type of German girl based upon this critique:

> Our *Volk* needs a generation of girls which is healthy in body and mind, sure and decisive, proudly and confidently going forward, one which assumes its place in everyday life with poise and discernment, one free of sentimental and rapturous emotions, and which, for precisely this reason, in sharply-

> defined femininity, would be the comrade of a man, because she does not regard him as some sort of idol but rather as a companion! Such girls will then, by necessity, carry the values of National Socialism into the next generation as the mental bulwark of our people.[11]

On the personal level as well, Trude Mohr's actions met party expectations; her marriage to *SS-Obersturmführer* Bürkner was in accordance with provisions requiring BDM leaders to marry members of the SS. This wedding almost did not take place, however, as a result of a motion submitted by the Central Office for Racial and Settlement Policy (RuSHA). Mohr's "certificate of proof of Aryan origin" was indeed impeccable; her extreme shortsightedness, however, diminished her genetic-biological value in the eyes of the defenders of racial purity. It was only after heavy pressure was applied by the party's district administration upon the RuSHA that permission to marry could be obtained. Quite striking in this connection is the fact that the responsible RuSHA official seems to have been completely unimpressed by Trude Mohr's high rank as national chairwoman of the BDM. However, despite coming into conflict with the regime in this existential question, Trude Mohr-Bürkner, like many others, did not draw the obvious conclusion from this incident, and her loyalty toward the regime remained undiminished. By 1937, when she stepped down from her leadership position in the BDM as a result of her pregnancy, the combined national organization for girls had grown to nearly 2,758,000 members.[12] By fully acceding to the educational demands of the state, she participated in the regime's project of placing German youth into the service of the party and the state, or, to be more precise, the person of Adolf Hitler. The "total commitment" which she demanded would later find its concrete expression for BDM girls in the form of war.

Although she no longer appeared in public life after 1937, Trude Bürkner did not take complete leave of the political stage. She was assigned the task of setting up a system to provide social welfare services for plant workers at the Hermann Göring Works which had been opened in the summer of 1937. If, up to this point, she had seemed to have gone about her job with little regard for public recognition, this matter now took on great importance for her. At least she wanted to obtain a lower party membership number. Until then, she had not had to document to the public at large her key position within

the party by means of a low membership number, but her new assignment changed that. "Is there a possibility," she inquired, "that I could assume a lower membership number that has subsequently become free? This would mean a great deal to me, since, as can well be imagined, a membership number over one million gives a completely false impression of the circumstances of my membership in the NSDAP."[13] The party bureaucracy rejected her application, and Bürkner was once again forced to capitulate. The fact that she knew that such backdating was a common practice in the case of prominent male party members must have made this even harder for her to accept. But thereafter as well, the level of her approval and her commitment was undiminished. In fact it had the opposite effect of spurring her to redouble her efforts (for example in the NSF and in the national civil defense organization) in order to make up for the lack of a low membership number. Not much is known about the job she did at the Hermann Göring plant complex, other than the fact that she performed her social service work for the so-called "foreign and Eastern European laborers" in an exemplary fashion. These "presumably exemplary social services, provided at all such plants throughout the entire *Reich*, helped to insure that, of the 1.3 million such slave laborers recruited to work in these plants, at least 523,000 did not survive their terms of employment."[14]

Trude Bürkner was imprisoned by the British in June 1945. Following her release, she neither granted interviews nor did she express herself in print. It was not until 1980 that Martin Klaus was able to convince her to go on record. In this interview, she summed up her life as follows: "It certainly makes a big difference if, from out of the abundance of experiences one has in life, one devotes one's entire self with complete commitment and total effort to a single idea, or whether one follows events from the sidelines, smiling maliciously and observing with cool irony. I belong to the first group and I'm not ashamed of it.[15]

Women as Active Subjects

Proceeding from the investigative perspective that women were active subjects in the National Socialist system, the discussion formed around two leading criteria. The first of these was the highly relevant fact that National Socialism had been possible only through having

secured wide popular consent. This means that this system cannot be comprehended without taking into consideration the significance of the mass basis of support organized by the regime. The second point weaves the question of the operative effectiveness of gender relationships into the context of meaning, if one proceeds from the assumption that a totalitarian society would not have been in the position to function without the female half of the population. The history of this society, therefore, can not be definitively concluded as long as the role and importance of women in this society have not been thoroughly investigated.

From the point of view of the present, however, it does not seem to be so easy to arrive at differentiated points of view and patterns of interpretation which avoid the pitfalls both of forgiving women *en masse* or accusing them all in retrospect. It is necessary to navigate between each of these two extremes.

The emerging public discussion surrounding this issue constituted the breaking of a taboo, since the majority of women had long been regarded as victims of National Socialism and/or saw themselves as such. The subsequent discourse became a process of developing a consciousness in which the National Socialist past was expressly conceived as a part of the history and continuity of their own lives. This, however, could only take shape along highly defined lines of conflict, whereby the conflict has been and continues to be a function of the diverse approaches of scholars working on this issue. One common denominator among the numerous interpretational differences, though, seems to be the emotionally charged nature of the topic, which finds expression in moral judgments and the question of guilt. The denial or repression of guilt on the part of women in National Socialism, as well as the complete taboo placed upon the subject of anti-Semitism, was clearly demonstrated in the work carried out by Gisela Bock on the subject of forced sterilization by the Nazis. She contrasted the patriarchal policies of the National Socialists with the "historic innocence" of women.[16] Among other consequences, this had the effect of placing the sole burden of responsibility upon white German men. The "Aryan" woman, whose elevated status was a fundamental principle of Nazi ideology, did not even come into consideration as bearing a share of the guilt, neither did the category of anti-Semitism appear even once in the entire work. Early in the 1990s, a task force

against anti-Semitism began to increasingly criticize the "victim thesis" within women's studies in Germany, though it must certainly be remarked that there was no accompanying inquiry into women as perpetrators.[17] That does not mean, however, that the victim question does not continue to be of importance; rather, it is a matter of criticizing the writing of history within women's studies which derives a concept of victim that is characterized by the psychoanalytic process of identification, in which all women are indiscriminately labeled as victims.

In order to escape the polarization of victim and perpetrator—as well as the question of guilt which is always implicit in it—the American historian Claudia Koonz has developed the concept of the "historical agency" of women in the preparation and formation of fascistic power relationships.[18] This concept is, in my opinion, particularly appropriate to provide a way out of the "victim-perpetrator dilemma" and to advance a realistic process of coming to terms with the responsibility of women, because as long as we remain trapped within a traditional frame of thought—a system of "above" and "below" in which politics is identified with violence and masculinity must be proven through violent acts—the question of the joint involvement and shared responsibility of women will continue to be purely an act of denunciation. However, by differentiating between the concepts of power and violence—as was put forward by Hannah Arendt, for example—a line of reasoning emerges in which the concept of collaboration finally attains practical significance.[19]

Violence and Gender Difference

Let's return to the question of the extent to which women, both historically and in the present, have been involved in the commission of violent crimes. How do we deal with the fact that women may no longer be seen as peaceable and nice, and thereby as being free from guilt and absolved of responsibility? Which conceptual models do we have at our disposal in addressing this question? The central core of this topic seems to be the question of violence. It continues to be the dominant conceptual and perceptual pattern that women suffer from, rather than commit, acts of violence and it continues to be seen as the breaking of a taboo to reflect openly upon the possibility of breaking out from this cliché. It is, thereby, clear that a simple reversal of this

construction—that is, to imagine women in positions of violence—does not constitute a way out of this dilemma. Therefore, the question of co-responsibility on the part of women remains a matter of denunciation as long as we pose it within a traditional framework, in a system in which there is always an "above" and a "below," in which politics is identified with violence and masculinity must be proven through violent acts. A possible way out of this dilemma is, in my opinion, differentiating between the concepts of power and violence, whereby a line of reasoning emerges in which the concept of collaboration finally attains practical significance. The decisive point in this differentiation lies in the gain of a rational conception of power in contrast to one which admits only an "above" and a "below." Reciprocities of action and the consent of the involved parties are relevant for this rational conception of power. This differentiation, which can be traced back to the work of Hannah Arendt, constitutes an important argument against the prevailing tradition of political thought. She juxtaposes the conception of "the demand to exercise power over others" with its diametrically antithetical construction "the refusal to allow the exercise of power over oneself," whereby Arendt assesses the manifestation of submissive acquiescence as politically relevant.

In my opinion, it is only by means of this differentiation between power and violence as undertaken by Hannah Arendt that a scope of potential action opens up as a precondition to an investigation of the subject of complicity. If the refusal to make use of one's power also becomes visible as implicit acquiescence, then the motives that stand behind this tacit approval also become relevant. For Arendt, this use of power means, in the final analysis, the assumption of responsibility. In this respect, complicity can exist in a case of delegating responsibility and thus not making use of one's own power.

It is, of course, no simple matter to measure in retrospect the scope of potential action which women had in the National Socialist system. Nevertheless, it was obviously much larger than has been previously assumed, which has also been shown by contemporary historical investigations.