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Joyce Marie Mushaben
mushaben@umsl.edu

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Coming to Terms with *Mittäterschaft*:
Feminism, Nationalism and Identity
Politics in Unified Germany

Joyce Marie Mushaben

COMING TO TERMS WITH *MITTÄTERSCHAFT*:
FEMINISM, NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN UNIFIED GERMANY

Joyce Marie Mushaben
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, and
Institute for Women's and Gender Studies
Research Associate, Center for International Studies
University of Missouri-St. Louis

November, 1995

Abstract

The process of rendering the German nation whole again appears to have precipitated a significant paradigm shift among FRG-feminists intent on analyzing current as well as historical manifestations of sexism, racism and anti-Semitism. This study focuses on linkages between *gender identity* and *national consciousness* as they are being played out at opposite ends of the political spectrum, among anti-national feminists whose primary socialization coincided with the late 1960s/early 1970s, and a new breed of ultranational female extremists who have come of political age since 1989. It situates women in the discourse over the Third Reich and "the nation" before and after unification, exploring a number of systemic and ideological factors in the FRG and the GDR which prevented feminists from undertaking such analyses prior to the Turn-Around of 1989. Their rejection of all manifestations of "nationalism," as well as their ostensible inability to cultivate a positive sense of identification with the Federal Republic, is seen to rest with an outdated concept of national-citizenship defined in terms of *jus sanguinis*.

Coming to Terms with *Mittäterschaft*:

Feminism, Nationalism and Identity Politics in Unified Germany

... I know her: when I lay unconscious
last night, she climbed into bed with me
calling my name
she insists we are
sisters under the same skin.

*** Michèle Roberts
the fascist, when female

While postwar feminists in the FRG have never sought to deny or downplay atrocities committed in the name of *das deutsche Volk* under Hitler, they have, until quite recently, failed to confront their own relationship to national history with the same degree of theoretical profundity with which they have excoriated patriarchy's role in those developments. One of the ironic consequences of unification, a process many Germans would like to embrace as the peaceful finale to a particularly traumatic chapter of national history, is that feminists' persistent reluctance to see themselves as full-fledged members of *das Volk* can no longer be sustained. Indeed, the process of rendering the German nation whole once again appears to have precipitated a significant paradigm shift among FRG-feminists intent on analyzing current as well as historical.

manifestations of sexism, racism and nationalism.

In an earlier work I developed the concept of *Femi-Nazis* [expropriated from Rush Limbaugh] to suggest that there is a unique connection between three decades of feminist mobilization in the FRG and the self-conscious embrace of far-right orientations among female adolescents in united Germany (Mushaben 1996a). . . . Females of the New Right have embraced a concept of *equal rights* at odds with the essentialist elements of ultranationalist ideology; yet select members of the successor-generation are opting to use their self-assertive *women's consciousness* to benefit extremist and exclusionary political agendas.

The aim of this essay is not to offer a "representative sample" of women's orientations towards German history before and after unification, but rather to shed light on new efforts to "conquer the past" called forth by a wave of ultranational activism over the last five years. It does so by concentrating on linkages between *gender identity* and *national consciousness* as they are being played out at opposite ends of the political spectrum, that is, among two groups of German women one hardly expects to have anything in common: anti-national feminists whose primary socialization coincided with the late 1960s and early 1970s, and a new breed of ultranational female extremists who have come of political

age since 1989.

At first glance, the New-Right's misogynist rhetoric and ideals renders female participation in extremist movements something of a paradox. It is generally assumed that women will exclude themselves from violence-prone groups due to their own socialization (Ogrzall 1990). Yet if one accepts the oft-repeated argument that feelings of social inferiority and economic insecurity among the "losers" of unification are the driving forces behind the extremist cause, then women should be even more attracted to these movements (Meyer 1993). New data generated by feminist scholars indicate that young women are attracted to ultra-right ideologies for reasons not found among their male counterparts. One survey of nearly 300 apprentices in Lower Saxony found that a majority of the female participants evinced xenophobic, as distinct from nationalistic, tendencies. Experts in Niedersachsen concluded that intolerant, anti-foreigner sentiments may be the means by which female extremists vent their frustrations over gender inequality *per se* (*The Week in Germany*, December 10, 1993).

Ironically, many women of the New Right see their own behavior as the logical extension of feminism's *self-empowering* legacy. German Women's Front (DFF) leader Lisa Wohlschläger insists:

I see myself as a National Socialist. But at the same

time I am... emancipated through and through.... Look at the '68 wave. I mean, for us it was positive, we profit from it, participate through it.... But you can't, like many radical *Emanzen* want to imagine, give into the illusion, that you can overthrow the patriarchy over the next few years. It will take thousands of years...

(Tenner 1994, 193-194).

It is equally ironic that this "emancipated" neo-Nazi echoes the ambivalence of many feminists concerning women's relationship to war and environmental destruction:

if women could determine the world order, then we would all live with much greater environmental consciousness, that more social justice would prevail.... I am convinced that we would have been able to skip several wars, if women had been in power.... On the other hand, I tell myself that women have also contributed to a certain degree. Wars were also fought because of women

(Tenner 1994, 194).

In attributing to women a special sensitivity to ecological preservation, as well as a unique capacity for *Friedfertigkeit* or peacefulness (Mitscherlich 1985), Wohlschläger overlaps with feminists who rallied in opposition to nuclear energy and the NATO

nuclear deployments of the 1980s (Schenk, 1983). A willingness among prominent *Femi-Nazis* to recognize their debt to the feminist movement raises the intriguing question as to what responsibility the latter might bear for women's participation in this new *Extra-Parliamentary-Opposition* movement (Mushabenz 1996). If feminist scholars admit that women of the New Right--young enough to be their daughters--are motivated by forces of little relevance to men, and if they stand by their assertion of the 1970s that women are to be viewed as *subjects* capable of pursuing their own political agenda, then they must necessarily re-examine questions of *agency* and *self-interest* with regard to women of the Old Right--the generation of their mothers.

Pre-Unity Barriers to Feminist *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

A persistent reluctance on the part of German feminists, until recently, to initiate a dialogue with women of extremist bent, is rooted in the ambivalence most have long felt towards *the national question* itself, with its inexorable ties to the Third Reich. Verdery (1993, 41) maintains that *nation* is most appropriately understood "as a construct, whose meaning is never stable but shifts with the changing balance of social forces." Yet for most German feminists, the meaning of *nation* was permanently inscribed on the memorial plaques of former Nazi concentration camps after

1945.

Given the overwhelming significance of the Third Reich for German historical consciousness, FRG-feminists, along with New Leftists and GDR-dissidents, have long neglected to distinguish between two modes of *nationalism* recently highlighted by Joppke (1995), *ethnic nationalism* and *civic nationalism*. Just as "the recourse to the German nation had become inconceivable for democratic movements" (Joppke, 218) in the Eastern state prior to 1989, the precepts of *nation* and *democracy* were construed as antithetical in the West--although they need not be. Democracy establishes the parameters within which "the struggle over the meaning of nation" takes place; emphasizing plurality and tolerance of societal differences, civic-nationalism deliberately seeks to transcend the (imagined) unity of identities imposed under ethnic nationalism. In order to forge a more perfect, fundamentally democratic union of citizens, anti-sexist and anti-racist activists must ally themselves with the principle of civic-nationalism. German feminism has regularly overlooked the fact that *nationalism* can also serve as "the force that [withstands] the force of organized forgetting" (Joppke 1995, 215).

It was clearly necessary for the Germans to make a radical break with the *ethnic nationalism* of the past, in order to promote

their own moral renewal and political rehabilitation after 1949. Without a sense of fundamental national continuity, however, "no mastery of the past [would be] possible because the subject of guilt and remembrance [would have] vanished--the complete denial of continuity would amount to exculpation" (Joppke 1995, 221). The two rump-states carved out of the former nation opted to pursue mutually exclusive courses with regard to the treatment of German guilt and responsibility. The strategies each has employed since 1949 have had a distinctive impact on the "national consciousness" of Eastern and Western feminists.

Physical division, socialization of the means of production and *verordneter anti-Faschismus* [officially imposed anti-fascism] served as the GDR's official vehicles for *organized forgetting vis-à-vis* the darker side of German history. Socialism made-in-the-GDR became the historically indigenous alternative to fascism, a dogma precluding dissidents from drawing parallels between the Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships. Western politicians' tendency to equate the two only intensified GDR-citizens' problem of historical isolation *qua* negative demarcation from *the other Germany*. Opposition forces, mindful that many SED leaders and Communists had personally suffered at the hands of the Nazis, were driven into "critical loyalty" (Joppke 1995).

The GDR's founding as a *new socialist nation* (the label used after 1968), added to crippling reparations to the Soviets, was perceived by its confined residents as an act of collective absolution and atonement. The FRG, by contrast, left many questions of remorse and expiation to "the moral discretion of individuals" (Joppke 1995, 221); though it admitted to collective responsibility by way of state compensation to select victims and its *special relationship* to Israel. The Nuremberg Trials became "the great symbolic disposal site for all Nazi-garbage" as far as systematic mass-atrocities were concerned, while de-Nazification posited various degrees of guilt and complicity at the individual level (Koppert 1991, 220). The manner in which the latter was executed induced a defensive rather than an introspective response; many citizens re-imagined themselves as the victims of war, especially after the mass expulsions from the Eastern territories [May 8, 1945 as a day of *occupation* and *banishment*, not *liberation*]. The collective-guilt question was occasionally played out beyond government chambers, as evidenced by the New Left protests of the late 1960s and the *Historians' Controversy* of 1986. Richard von Weizsäcker eased the West German conscience further by recognizing all victims of fascism in his commemorative speech of May 8, 1985.

Both states claimed to be the only legitimate postwar German

state--the FRG as the judicially-designated successor to the 1871 Reich, the GDR as the morally "purged" alternative to the Nazi regime. Eastern leaders were particularly selective in their approach to reclaiming German history prior to the mid-1970s, along the lines of *our Münzer/your Friedrich, our Thälmann/your Goebbels*. Most official debates over "what it meant to be German" left average citizens untouched.

Members of the '68 Generation interviewed by this author during the 1980s were the ones who most adamantly denied "feeling like a German" (Mushaben 1996b). Feminist activists of this era not only regularly critiqued "the system's" failure to process the collective past but also faulted the older generation for its refusal to accept full personal responsibility for fascist atrocities. Few seemed to recognize the contradiction inherent in their own "distance" from *die Nation*; insofar as "[the inclination] to shame oneself for belonging to the nation, the German one, stems from the same mythical consciousness as pride in being German it is senseless to want to try to ditch one's feelings of unjustified shame and guilt by denying one's German heritage" (Koppert 1991, 227). Nor did they anticipate the extent to which a refusal to transmit a sense of personal accountability towards the Federal Republic itself might lead to a rise in ultranational sentiment,

two decades later, among the first *Post-Wall Generation*.

Several other factors precluded an unrestricted confrontation with some of the issues now being raised by feminist scholars, likewise connected to existence of two separate states prior to 1990. Children of the Founding Generation were taught throughout the 1950s not to ask too many questions at home, but women, curiously, remained less inclined to deflect feelings of guilt; according to a 1950/51 survey, 60% of the women but only 44% of the men polled admitted to feelings of personal or collective responsibility (Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung, in Koppert 1991, 221). Out of this era, two groups emerged: constituting the first were those who embraced the parental forces of memory-suppressed (though a few sons attacked their fathers through literature, while daughters went into therapy, Koppert claims). Then there were those who rebelled thoroughly against the parental denial of responsibility, though even this group reserved its most vehement attacks for "the system."

The links between the Western women's movement and the New Left of the late Sixties promoted a focus on *global liberation*, that is, from patriarchy *inter alia*, presenting itself in the guise of monopoly capitalism. In retrospect, one can argue that

the '68 Generation, and that applies to feminists, wanted

to push through a radical world-change, for which their own process of growing up in the reactionary '40s, '50s and 60s had not prepared them internally. The fixation of the "elders" with organs of authority, with *Führer* and State was related through and through to the stance of the 68ers to ideologies and Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Che; now as then one did battle against the "deviants," one was always fighting over the right line; the path to a more free and humane society was plastered with crass intolerance and self-righteousness (Koppert, 225).

Second-Wave feminism's roots in the NL-movement also rendered it vulnerable to a desire to attack any and all semblances of nationalism as automatically equivalent to resurgent fascism. In addition to undercutting their positive identification with a democratized Federal Republic, in lieu of the old authoritarian state, this linkage produced a new historical paradox:

that simply out of the permanent pressure to learn from history...that one slipped past the entire phenomenon of Stalinism with vague language, because one was always afraid that one had to guard the Bundesrepublik against neo-fascism, that this so-to-speak was the main task...Claudia Wolff, cited in Koppert, 226).

The orthodox-Stalinist left in the GDR, meanwhile, targeted monopoly capitalism as the root-cause of fascism, but ignored its own manifestations of patriarchy by insisting that socialism had achieved the full emancipation of women. There was no extensive communication between the women of East and West (a communication which FRG-feminists clearly would have had a better chance to initiate) that might have fostered an understanding of linkages between the forces of industrial production (whether capitalist or socialist), the power of patriarchy, and the socio-cultural roots of fascism.

Secondly, special ties to the *new social movements* of the 1970s enabled FRG-feminists to "think globally, act locally"--blessed as they were with the time, money and rights to travel and protest. GDR-women were increasingly occupied with the deterioration of the socialist economy; what time and energy remained was used to cultivate their own eco-peace movements at the expense of building an autonomous feminist movement (with a few exceptions, such as *Women for Peace*). Feminism's NL and NSM linkages provided both groups with important vehicles for obscuring and/or avoiding the troublesome *National Question* altogether prior to 1989.

Last but not least, the feminist rule, "the personal is the political" sets a very difficult standard for any scholar seeking

to explore her relationship to German *qua* national identity, plagued as she may be by a laming guilt-consciousness. *Guilt* implies, "at least theoretically, that one's self or the others could have behaved differently" (Koppert 1991, 219). The larger political context prior to 1989 shielded German feminists against this standard; they thus developed their own denial strategies, grounded in the same dichotomous thinking--nationalism as an all-or-nothing proposition--for which they have long castigated the patriarchal powers that be.

Situating Women in the Discourse over the Nazi-Past

Early explorations of female roles under the Third Reich rested on a presumption among feminist scholars that, to the extent that women were involved in promotion of Nazi ideology, they did so not out of self-interest but in an adaptive response to masculine notions of racism and anti-Semitism. While the second generation's desire for self-exoneration may be psychologically understandable, a primary emphasis on women's victim-status obscured deeper questions of female motivation--perhaps in reaction to the claim that women had played a significant role in bringing Hitler to power (Tröger 1976).

German history does show "that women were never particularly immune to nor did they actively struggle against racism and anti-

Semitism, either in times of colonialism or National-Socialism" (Rommelspacher 1994, 32). Many profited from Third Reich social policies as well as from the expropriation of Jewish homes and businesses. For women deemed "worthy," Nazi-intervention in family life afforded a wedge against the power of husbands and provided many individual career opportunities, including leadership positions. Acquiescence to the collective *Größenwahn* also put Aryan women in the possession of *multiple-identities* as Christians, Germans, industrial workers, and mothers for the Fatherland. This aided them in coping with cross-cutting status losses at the time (Rommelspacher 1994) and, one could argue, later shielded them against postwar feelings of guilt through their ability to re-identify with victimized groups.

FRIGGA HAUG's *Opfer-Täter* thesis (1980), arguing that women necessarily consent to structures of oppression, earned her the title of *Nestbeschmutzerin* [one who "dirtyies the nest"] in some feminist quarters (Büchner 1995) but opened the door to a qualitatively new debate over the Nazi-era in others. Haug's analysis began to chip away at the traditional *Victim-Perpetrator* dichotomy, albeit without challenging the fundamental premise of male agency. A persistent need to define anti-Semitism as a *male sickness*, rooted in a classical oedipal complex (Mitscherlich 1985), neither

questioned the significance of the Mother-Daughter relationship in generating support for the fascist regime, nor did it offer sufficient explanation for cases of active female engagement.

Christine Thürmer-Rohr's conceptualization of *weibliche Mittäterschaft* [female collaboration] added another dimension to the discussion in 1983. Thürmer-Rohr (1983, 1987) set out to contemporize female "co-complicity" by raising the prospect of a global concentration camp under the reign of nuclear weapons, curiously drawing upon the Hiroshima experience while ignoring women's response to real death-factories under the Nazis. The essence of women's culpability lay not in self-propelled deeds but in capitulating to men's designs, a form of active self-victimization. Though men were still bore the primary burden of guilt, women were recognized to have their own interests in the rewards of compliance.

The assertion that women's co-responsibility stems largely from having said yes to men too facilely suggests that the next generation need only turn its back on the evil deeds of men, or abandon men altogether, in order to redress the guilt of mothers, aunts and grandmothers. It is necessary to distinguish not only between different degrees of self-subordination to Nazi dictates but also among various modes of engagement, for example, as primary

organizers, collaborators, secondary accomplices, alleged "know-nothings," and resistance fighters. In short, German historians might have made earlier use of categories already identified by the Occupational Powers for the purpose of de-Nazification.

Karin Windaus-Walser (1988), a Swiss scholar residing in the FRG, was the next to rattle the foundations of feminist analysis through her repudiation of "the blessing of female birth." Portraying women as eternally-subordinate reinforced the social constructions of gender and ignored their specific motivations. Scholars could no longer ignore the premiums women accrued for "good behavior," opening up "spaces" for the pursuit of their own interests. Windaus-Walser addressed the potential driving force of a "female logic" separate from the ideological incentives and power-motives of men. The "murderous normality" witnessed under fascism did not owe solely to the self-propelled evil of men and the reactive accommodation of women, she insisted; rather, the self-conceived interests of men and the self-conceived interests of women mutually influenced each other. There had never been an historical situation in which men were able to act completely free of women's influence. Defining *patriarchy* as the domination of women by men led feminists to address only the power of the father, and thus to ignore the potential power of the mother. The lack of

a thorough confrontation between Mothers and Daughters during the late 1960s, in her judgment, amounted to an *Ent-Schuldigung* [exculpation and excusing] of the Perpetrator-Generation.

Windaus-Walser pinpointed a number of fundamental weaknesses inherent in the feminist approaches of the 1980s. One was an ostensible tendency to affirm the apolitical nature of women by focusing on their personal qualities of strength and endurance, such as the *Trümmerfrauen* [rubble-women], seeking to "sweep away" the proof of their own anti-Semitism. Gerda Szepanzky (1986), for instance, had depicted her sample of *hero-mothers* and *war-widows* as conquering multiple adversities, suggesting that their struggle for survival after 1945 overrode the importance of their actions during the war itself. In presuming a female capacity for *nurturing*, feminists neglected the role nurses and medical assistants had played in the forced sterilization and racial hygiene campaigns. Gisela Bock (1986) offered an account of 400,000 persons involuntarily sterilized over eleven years; by stressing that 95% of target groups were "Aryan" and 90% who died were female, she reduced Nazi *race-politics* to *gender-politics*. Women who supported racialized natalism were not seen as collaborators (Frauen gegen Antisemitismus AG 1993).

Researchers moreover seemed motivated by a need to profile all

women as the victims of fascism through attacks on the Nazi *Frauenbild* [women's image] *qua Frauenpolitik* [women's policies]; the two were not equivalent, since certain projects pursued by female Nazi leaders (e.g., equal pay) had a progressive component. Select women accrued atypical political influence by promoting an ostensibly anti-feminist *Frauenbild*. Angelika Ebbinghaus (1987) had already testified to high levels of identification with the Nazi cause among women in powerful positions, though, ultimately, even the punishment meted out to prominent NS-women connoted their secondary status. Gertrude Scholz-Klink, who enjoyed Ministerial status, was the only member of the Hitler Government not sentenced to death at Nuremberg; she was released after two years in prison (she now lives from donations made by post-1990 neo-Nazi groups).

Windaus-Walser stressed the perils of presupposing a "shared identity" grounded in repression among Aryan and Jewish women, noting with regard to Bock: "The 1% who were victims among women become a *potential* 100 percent--the millions of *actual* dead in the concentration camps recede into the background" (1988, 106). Women embraced Aryan images of men producing death, women producing life, yet millions had sent their sons and husbands into war (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), implying they had their own "logic" for doing so.

Yet another dimension critically absent from German feminist research throughout the 1980s was a treatment of national character *per se*: what was "typically German" about women's stake in, their support of, or their opposition to the Nazi regime? Pre-1990 writings exuded a deafening silence over the nature of female anti-Semitism; Bock's 600-page text on forced sterilization, for example, ignored the issue altogether. If mentioned at all, anti-Semitism was depicted as "an incarnation of masculine megalomania" (Rommelspacher 1994, 40), nourished by polarized gender-roles. Yet men of other nations set out to combat German anti-Semitism in its most barbaric form, with a vigor not witnessed against fascist Italy and despite anti-Jewish strains in their home countries. A few questioned whether feminist-theorists might have followed a subconscious desire to blame Jews for patriarchy, as opposed to some mythical matriarchal *Germanentum* (Frauen gegen Antisemitismus AG 1993). Pre-1945 women's organizations proved quite willing to put up a fight when it came to defending their own turf, that is, in demanding "equal rights" (albeit unsuccessfully) for specific female groups in the labor force. They were not willing to struggle in areas where fundamental rights of non-Aryan women were at stake, as evidenced by their outright rejection of Jewish women's organizations after 1933 (Kaplan 1984).

In the GDR, women's efforts to process the Nazi past were more likely to surface under the cloak of "literature," the most prominent of which included works by Christa Wolf (1976) and Anna Seghers (1941). Treatments of this sort hinted at questions of personal responsibility: in *Kindheitsmuster*, for example, the Communist asks the young Nelly, *Just where were you all living?* Yet they did so in ways that did not infringe upon the official definition of fascism's root causes. One outstanding exception was a study of German anti-Semitism across several centuries, published by Rosemarie Schuder and Rudolf Hirsch (1987); the larger framework allowed a degree of relativization reconcilable with the SED's self-exoneration.

Across the Atlantic, Claudia Koonz (1988), Renate Bridenthal, Marion Kaplan, and Attina Grossman (1984) pursued questions of women's agency, not only in relation to the war but also with regard to female anti-Semitism in the decade preceding fascism. Koonz argued that the smooth functioning of the Nazi apparatus depended upon women's full cooperation; housewives' boycotted Jewish stores, shunned non-Aryan neighbors, allowed their children to join the *Hitler Jugend*, and reported regime-critical acquaintances to authorities. The forces of internal resistance had similarly depended upon women's performance of their day-to-day

roles, e.g., delivering contraband literature packed into baby-carriages. The Victim-Perpetrator thesis poses a special dilemma for feminist analysts once the question of resistance is raised: if there are gender-specific sources of "good," resulting in courageous acts of *Widerstand* among women, then they must also possess some independent capacity for "evil." To claim that women simply caved-in to the orders of Nazi men would otherwise imply that they had also largely followed men's demands when it came to acts of resistance.

In summary, a select group of 1980s experts challenged earlier feminist theories that women bore no unique responsibility for the Nazi exterminations, and that all women were the ultimate victims of fascist oppression (some more directly than others). These challenges to the prevailing analytical frameworks seemed to provoke no "great debate" at the time. For better or worse, no women featured prominently in the revisionist *Historikerstreit* of 1986-87, characterized by Charles Maier (1988) as an intellectual confrontation between fathers-turned-grandfathers and sons-turned-fathers. Their non-involvement can be partially explained by way of Gerda Lerner's (1979) thesis on *placing women in history*: analysts of the 1980s had reached the second phase of feminist historicization, that of *conceptualizing* women's "contributions" to

history in a narrative still dominated by male actors. By the 1990s we find them advancing to the third stage, that of *reconfiguring* and *reconstructing* the larger narrative, based on a better understanding of the complex ways in which gender interacts with other independent variables.

The argument here is not that German feminists as a whole deliberately sought to avoid a much-needed confrontation with the reality of women's accommodation to the Nazi regime, but rather that the alternative explanatory frameworks just outlined would have retained their marginal character throughout the 1990s--at which point the forces of generational change might have dramatically intervened--had unification not occurred. Unity has,

to the same extent for the Germans of East and West, shattered their self-perceptions as Germans... for the ugly German can no longer be made out on the other side of the Wall. If the Westerners, for example, saw the tradition of German militarism and the authoritarian state living on in the East, the Easterners saw in the West a society that continued after Nationalism without a single break, without distancing itself. Now that is not so simple any more. The projections have to be taken back... (Rommelspacher 1994, 36).

Feminist self-understanding can and must be put into question through *die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten* [the return of the repressed]. The need to reinfuse German his-/herstory with a common "meaning" for citizens in the old and new Länder has forced questions of female responsibility on to the center-stage.

Which German Nation? A New Crisis of Herstorical Identity

GDR women were less enthused about the prospect of rapid unification than their male counterparts in 1990 (Mushaben 1995) and still have more trouble "feeling German" at present: 30-40% of the females, versus 40-60% of the male respondents recently polled by ISDA, perceive themselves as *deutsch*, first and foremost (Schröter 1995, 37). A post-unity study of youth attitudes towards extremism in Nordrhein-Westfalen came to a similar conclusion: *national pride* plays a subordinate role among female adolescents, even among those with anti-foreigner tendencies. Describing her national feelings, one such sympathizer responded: "Proud, I don't know, yeah well, I am a bit proud, or let's say, I've been pretty lucky: Germany is a rich country" (Utzmann-Krombholz 1994, 30).

This is not to say that East German women evinced any more love for the old Father-State than for the new one. Consider the reflections of three women interviewed after 1992. One surmised:

It is usually men, the ones who are in power, who

express themselves regarding the state of the nation....

I, a woman, without power---and on top of that, one from the East---would sooner have to intone a lamentation.

One expects me to be happy about belonging to the bigger

Germany, so experienced in democracy and the market

economy. But I feel alien in this nation, in this

Fatherland... (Schröter 1995, 38).

Another maintained, "When I now hear all this national clanging,

this *Deutschland über alles*, I don't feel like I belong to it. I

don't want to belong to it but I belong to it. Sometimes I think

I just have to endure it, being German" (Schröter, 38). A third

Eastern resident put an even more negative spin on her new status

as an FRG citizen: "Suddenly to be German, to be involuntarily

jobless, possibly remaining childless or without grandchildren---

these things mark the biographical breaking-points to which East-

women are now subject (Schröter, 38).

Women in the new Länder are on the defensive, fending off

Western criticisms over their "failure" to develop an autonomous

women's movement prior to 1989 and coping with the loss of their

real-existing social rights (daycare, legal abortion) by way of

"democratization." GDR women had ostensibly fewer grounds to

mobilize around feminist themes than their FRG-peers prior to the

SED's collapse, given the many public policies which had enabled them to combine career and family (though the state's intentions were more pro-natalist than emancipatory in character). They also had fewer grounds to challenge their relation to *the national question*, having paid the price for fascism in ways that western feminists often failed to count, such as the deprivation of fundamental political freedoms in exchange for collective exculpation. At no time was democratic opposition in the GDR ever predicated upon a belief in the "moral superiority" of the FRG-historical paradigm. Unification was embraced not as an end *per se* but as a means for attaining other intensely desired changes. As far as the unity question is concerned, "The FRG citizens did not make the Turn-Around happen, nor did they ever want one" (Schröter 1995, 35).

Feminist reactions to rapid unification may well have sprung "from a rational perception that the civic and the national dimensions of the East German revolution did not coincide" (Joppke 1995, 230). GDR-opposition groups, swayed by years of TV-exposure to New Social Movements on the other side, hoped to secure a brand of grassroots, Round-Table democracy clearly at odds with a top-down, all-or-nothing imposition of Western institutions. FRG-feminists who perceived their own political and economic institutions as

patriarchal to the core could not have welcomed their imposition on East women. This did not stop them from hoping that once the merger had occurred, the GDR experience might provide a few institutional correctives (e.g., legalized abortion)--since most were not well-informed as to the real nature of anti-fascism imposed from-above or the duplicitous nature of equal-rights policies [verlogene Gleichberechtigung] prior to the Wall's collapse.

Women on both sides are now absorbed with the disadvantages each group has itself encountered as a result of unification. A general polarization of West and East identities [codeword: *the Wall in one's head*] and particular tensions between the identities of Eastern and Western feminists [codeword: *Step-sisters*] confirm my ten-year hypothesis that *the German nation* had indeed become little more than an "imagined community" by 1990. Feelings of ethnic-solidarity are perhaps a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition for nationhood, since identity is never unidimensional. The significance of *blood and soil* pales when compared to the importance of societal context in defining the contours of a collective, national identity. Perceived differences between the identities of East and West women underscore the spurious nature of blood-based notions of *citizenship*. While ethnic-identities require no specific historical beginning and end-

point, national identity depends upon a shared culture, a common past and the desire for a common future. While the Germans of East and West may "share" a national past, they do not ascribe to a common interpretation of that history. A *national community* defined in terms of the law of blood [*jus sanguinis*] should immediately invoke the resistance of feminists, for maintaining "the purity of the race" is a task inevitably delegated to the nation's women (see Bosnia).

The *discourse of nationalism* could not be utilized to oppose an authoritarian GDR-state owing, in part, to the benefits which derived from *organized forgetting*. As the case of Christa Wolf illustrates, the existence of two states deprived Eastern women of a language enabling them to "think in alternatives," insofar as the Nazi experience cast its shadow over all references to a non-socialist nation (Joppke 1995, 215-16). Atrocities committed not only *in the name of* but also with the ostensible acquiescence of *das deutsche Volk* served as the one dimension of national-consciousness East/West feminists shared over a span of four decades. Given the quintessentially negative character of their "common reference point" (Joppke 1995), feminists will find it hard to cultivate a positive identification with the nation-united as long as they refuse to seek new linkages between *nationalism* and the

precept of democratic self-determination.

The Paradigm Shift and Problems of German Feminist Tolerance

The period 1990-1993 has brought a plethora of articles exploring gender-specific forms of participation and resistance during the war years. One text published by GDR-author Helga Schubert shortly after the *Wende* met with hefty West-feminist critique. It involved a literary reconstruction of the trial files of ten women convicted for denunciation after the war, labeled *Judas' Women*. Schubert countered the theme of women's "private" powerlessness by turning the image of male perpetrators/female victims on its head (in nine cases, men are the ones denounced). Questioning the "statistically representative" nature of the cases presented, Sigrid Weigel (1992) was vexed by Schubert's attempt to use examples from daily-life under the Nazis as a means of exploring lessons from the GDR past--allegedly without examining her own "complicity" in the latter. Schubert does treat the logic of juridical reality (more accurately, the logic of *victor's justice*) rather than *women's logic per se* (beyond the stereotype of the female gossip). Yet perhaps more troubling to feminists than Schubert's "moral condemnation" of the denouncers, divorced from larger questions of power and violence against women, is her depiction of women handling out of petty or banal motives, rather than

on behalf of some greater cause. This type of contemporizing, in contrast to Thürmer-Rohr's use of the Hiroshima case, locates the question of women's complicity too close to home, now that German women are no longer physically divided. Neither the remnants of fascism, nor questions of female acquiescence to authoritarian rule, can be "safely located on the other side" (Joppke 1995, 226).

Rommelspacher (1994) was one of the first to link new patterns of racism and ultranationalism among post-Wall women to diversity-problems among German feminists at present, as well as to their fundamental identity-complex vis-à-vis the national past. This not to argue that FRG women had eschewed any and all discussion of racism in their midst prior to 1989. Commencing in 1981, that highly divisive debate also evinced a marginal character until the 1990s, however (Lennox 1995). Post-unity racism inside the ultra- and anti-national women's movements shares the same strong anti-Semitic component:

Through Jews and Jewesses one does battle against the remembrance of national-socialist history, for they are the ones who remind [us] of it. So their memorials must also be destroyed, in order to erase the remembrance. This destruction nonetheless has a symptomatic character, that is, it points exactly to that which it would like to

have un-happen. Thus the sickness connected to it is continuously reproduced. And this is countered with a spiteful declaration "I am proud to be a German."

Or, one's Germanness is totally negated: I am no German. Such denials are also part of a leftist or even feminist history-suppressed which refuses to admit the true significance of national identity out of fear that unadulterated national pride might be the only answer to this question... the consequence of an unprocessed history is a polarization, in the form of a forced identity, on the one hand, and a denial of one's *Deutsch-sein* to the point of self-hatred, on the other. And in this polarization contradictions mutually exacerbate each other, deflecting a confrontation with one's own history and with one's self-understanding (Rommelspacher 1994, 36-37).

Fransiska Tenner's post-1990 experiences testify to the deflective consequences of polarization. Abandoned by her own leftist friends for investigating the political motives of neo-Nazi women since unification, she closes the circle with the argument, "As the consequence of an insufficient and incomplete processing of history, because of the [rest of German society's] dishonest confrontation with German fascism, the Nazis today are able to

claim for themselves the right to doubt all existing historical [re]presentations" (Tenner 1994, 242).

The rhetoric of German feminists has not remained untouched by far-right discourses reinvoking categories of ethnicity and nationality. Their increasing use of the term *the white German women's movement* (Uremovic and Oerter 1994; Wlecklik 1995), intended to accord recognition to *diversity*, seems quite problematic. This is a construct "borrowed" from US feminists, as indicated by frequent references to Audre Lorde and bell hooks. US racism, symbolically grounded in *skin color*, is rooted in the unique experience of institutionalized slavery. The latter classification can no more be applied to a German treatment of Afro-Germans or Third-World asylum-seekers than the prolonged if haphazard extermination of Native Americans can be equated with the concentrated, systematic atrocities of the Holocaust. The real debate that has to take place among women within the enlarged Federal Republic is rooted in the age-old, spurious *blood-based* distinction between Germans and foreigners. It is doubtful that refugees from Bosnia, or even Roma and Sinti women, consider themselves *people of color*.

Equally problematic is their emerging self-recognition as white-German-Christian feminists *vis-à-vis* the Islamic women in their midst; few are practicing members of any (allegedly patriar-

chal) institutionalized religion. A stress on the *Christian* component of European culture opens the door to the irreconcilability of Jewish/German identities; it moreover underscores the historical fact that women did not resist the collaboration of "their" churches with the Nazis. This hasty effort to accommodate multiple or multicultural gender identities before they have come to terms with their own *Germanness* leaves feminists no more exculpated than before: "It is also no solution to now elevate black, Jewish or other women as messengers of truth..., that is to new organs of conscience, in order to overcome, finally, German confusion, guilt and ignorance" (Koppert 1991, 228).

At least two post-*Wende* conferences illustrate how quickly old feelings of "shame" and "guilt" are rekindled when Jewish, black or migrant women carve out their own spaces in the contemporary German debate. One such meeting took place outside of Würzburg on January 5-7, 1990, involving 60 participants from the FRG, GDR and Austria. The climate of the conference mirrored an "almost forced effort" to create a false sense of harmony, as researchers were confronted with "what they didn't want to thematize," albeit in ways "devoid of factual content" (Komann 1990, 143). A second conference convened in Köln during November 1990 [*Women against Nationalism, Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism*] was also marked by division and

denial. Black women marched out of the plenary session, in order to protest the presenters' concentration on East-West division and their neglect of North/South differences. "White German women" reportedly responded with rationalizations, irritation, and "helpless silence," not real dialogue. Verbal reactions that seem to blame or exonerate the dominant group intensifies the painful nature of the confrontation, which rapidly takes on a personal-as-political character; this process engenders further responses along the lines of "I have problems with you attacking us like this" or "German? I don't want anything to do with that" (Koppert 1991, 218).

Women in the new Länder may experience different feelings of guilt and responsibility towards the national past--and the national present--confronted now by the need to work through two authoritarian eras. One conference participant noted, "Duplicitous equality - the abandonment of emancipation - anti-fascism imposed from above - repressed history, and now on top of it, discredited anti-fascism - water for the mill of neo-fascism. One has to endure these contradictions, and allow no more repressing... (Schaefer 1992, 145). But a processing of the GDR past cannot be confined to Eastern women, for Western feminists, committed to a leftist utopia far removed from GDR-daily-life, did little to

combat the state-oppression faced by their "sisters" next door prior to 1989. New Left support for the Prague Spring of 1968, for instance, was virtually non-existent, owing to a self-absorbed interest in the FRG/USA/Vietnam connection.

Conclusion: The German Question as Gretchenfrage

Ongoing tensions between Eastern and Western feminists underscore the inadequacy of research-paradigms limited to a critique of patriarchy for exploring women's role under authoritarian regimes. It is not the Germans' collective *incapacity to mourn* (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1967) but rather their unwillingness to identify directly with the negative as well as with the positive components of the national past--made easy by division--which has undercut FRG-feminists' *ability to empathize* either with women in the East or with women of other cultures living in their midst.

National unification has brought to the fore three distinctive *Gretchenfragen*¹ for the core of the movement, women undergoing "the years of change" in both a political and biological sense. First and most difficult for feminists now in their forties and fifties is the question, how do I stand regarding the guilt of my mother, relative to that of my father (Jacobi 1992, 141-45)? Translation: What would I have done in her place? Secondly, what steps have German women undertaken since capitulation, distinct from those

initiated by men, to address questions of collective guilt and responsibility? And finally, to what extent and in what ways have women in both parts of Germany passed on to the next generation their own devices for avoiding/supressing questions of national guilt?

The lessons emerging from this preliminary analysis is that feminists in the nation-united will have to accept their identity-- and the historical continuity that implies--as **German women** [of course, it is easier for an American to urge them to embrace this identity than it would be for me, were I German, to follow my own advice.] *National identity* is more than an accident of birth, embraced instrumentally in order to secure civil-service jobs and state-pension rights. Historical analyses exonerating women from "national" responsibility can be used to discriminate against women as well as to position them for rewards.

Individuals constituting the *Second-Wave* of German feminism came of political age during the era of détente, when both postwar states felt certain that they had shed the aggressively ethno-national components of their respective identities and, hence, could begin to transcend the pulls of history by way of a future-oriented *community of responsibility* rooted in a commitment to peace (Mushaben 1987). It was also the period during which the

respective citizens of the GDR and the FRG began to accept their new, quasi-national identities tied to the existence of separate states (Mushaben 1996c).

Female mobilization on behalf of right-extremist causes over the last five years, coupled with the phenomenon of unification itself, has contributed to an historical paradigm-shift among German feminist scholars. It is no coincidence, however, that many investigations on women of the New Right are being conducted by members of the first *Post-Wall Generation*.² Nor is it coincidental that this research is taking place under the direction of self-avowed feminist professors of the *Long March Generation*. The former may not feel particularly blessed by virtue of their having been born either "late" or female, but they do evince a quality some have labeled *the New Unencumbered-ness*. Among the latter, "The guilt-blocking mechanisms still function... The past continues to have its effect on individual and collective subconsciousness..." (Koppert 1991, 217). German feminists who reject an opportunity to reconsider the actions of women under the fascist Reich by way of a dialogue with the new *Femi-Nazis* will face the greatest difficulties in finding their way back to the Nation. For as Christa Wolf (1976) learned by way of her own examination of that earlier era, *the past is not dead; it has not even passed*.

Endnotes

1. The "Gretchen Question," used metaphorically to imply a question of ultimate moral responsibility, derives from Goethe's rendition of *Dr. Faustus*. Faust impregnates then abandons his young-love Margarete, who then drowns the child and is herself eternally damned.

2. I raised this point in a discussion with Christine Holzkamp at the TU Berlin in June 1995. She agreed that there was such a trend and named two ongoing *Diplom-arbeiten* she is directing together with Rommelspacher, who teaches at the Alice Solomon Fachhochschule für Sozialpädagogik. Both Birsl and Büchner initiated their projects as students.