The Female Narrative: German Women in Post-War Germany
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When war ceased in May of 1945, Germany was in ruins. The cities that had suffered bombardment from the air were reduced to rubble. Most people lived out a precarious existence in bomb cellars. Even those in the parts of Germany that had managed to evade the worst of Allied attacks suffered their own demoralizations. The commonality among all of these experiences was that they were predominately experienced by German women. Women worried about husbands, sons, and other male family at the front lines. Women were the ones preoccupied with accessing basic necessities such as food and clothing for themselves and their children. Finally it was women who dealt with the transition that accompanied Germany’s new title as an occupied nation. It is questionable then, why so little scholarly inquiry has gone into evaluating women’s post-war experience and the memorialization of their experiences. To fill in the gaps, this essay aims to explore the universalization of the stereotypically female experience in German collective memory of the Second World War. To do this, it begins by examining a diverse collection of artistic sources of memorialization, focusing on monuments and “official” memory, but deviating where official examples are lacking. The representation in these monuments of to two stereotypically female experiences, victimization and triumph, will be examined. Depictions of the first experience, victimization, included allied bombings, rape by advancing Soviet armies, and the loss of loved male soldiers. The second experience, that of heroic feminine triumphs, included depictions of a case of active protest against the Nazi regime (the Rosenstrabe protest) as well as the rebuilding of a physically devastated Germany by the “Women of the Rubble.” Although these experiences were felt only by a portion of Germany’s population, both quickly came to define the “home front” and the suffering of the entire wartime
population regardless of gender. In this collective memory, Nazism and its soldiers were cast into the abstract, existing in the past as alien elements that had inflicted terrible atrocities on various innocent people including its own. The American and Soviet powers were also depicted as perpetrators.

Historian Martin Broszat suggests, “in their reference to history, monuments may not remember events so much as bury them altogether beneath layers of national myth and explanation.” ¹ Germany’s historical memory of the Second World War and its aftermath, as reflected in public and official remembrance, exposes an unresolved tension between a discourse of guilt and that of national suffering and victimization. It marks a continued preoccupation with national suffering and a inclination to view Germans as innocent victims of historical circumstances. Embedded in this dynamic was an explicit distinction between the ‘innocent German’ versus the ‘evil Nazi,’ but was not restricted in incorporating other political adversaries such as the American Allies.²

This paper does not aim to argue that various other identities and experiences (as will be spoken at length subsequently), became marginal in memorialization while the female experience became dominant. Neither does it aim to suggest that German women were not in fact victims of the Nazis. The representations of stereotypically female experiences in monuments and memorials did not offer or produce a more egalitarian view of the gendered order. Instead they provided a convenient version of popular representations of the past, offering a more

palatable German national identity. The appropriation of a feminine viewpoint in various memorials commemorating German genocidal history is important in respect to what it offers the formation of a German collective and national identity that implies victimhood or at the very least, innocence. Therefore the national identity that resulted in both East and West Germany, cannot be fully comprehended without an acknowledgement and understanding of this feminization process.³

Elizabeth Heineman recognizes that there were alternatives to this feminine representation when she notes how various cohorts such as refugees and veterans, “all offered histories that claimed simultaneously to explain their unique situations while representing, in some way, an experience that was characteristically German,”⁴ so why choose the feminine form to remember German experiences of war? As Heineman explains, the stories of those who were persecuted as “a-socials” by the Nazi regime seemed to fall short in representing the “average German” experience because of how truly exceptional their narratives had been.⁵ At “Zero Hour” all that had been left of the past German national identity had died with its Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler. German people from that hour forward were haunted by a Nazi past that had to a large extent tainted any form of new identity formation for the German nation. Older Germans were criticized by younger ones for not confronting their Nazi pasts more aggressively. A majority of the German people were looked upon as co-conspirators in atrocity, to such an extent that a German national identity of honour and respectability failed to reconcile with their recent wartime activities. Enforcing this sentiment was the realization that Germany’s men had been

³ Heineman, 358.
⁴ Ibid., 357.
⁵ Ibid.
associated not only with a crippling military defeat, but also, with support for an ideology which encouraged mass genocide and terror. Feelings toward Germany’s men began changing. A journalist who recorded her own experiences and the experiences of women who surrounded her in bomb shelters in the face of Soviet aggressors, notes:

These days I keep noticing how my feelings towards men – and the feelings of other women – are changing. We feel sorry for them; they seem so miserable and powerless. The weaker sex…the Nazi world… is beginning to crumble, and with it the myth of ‘man.’ In earlier wars men could claim that the privilege of killing and being killed for the fatherland was theirs and theirs alone. Today we women, too, have a share. Among the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex. 6

The understanding of German men’s involvement in war was also changing. Immediately after the war it was clear that the SS, SD and the Gestapo had been perpetrators of persecution. Until 1987 when the Topography of Terror presented a photograph collection of Wehrmacht soldiers witnessing, mocking, and even participating in, the brutalizing and hanging of Jewish partisans between the years of 1941 and 1942, a myth had predominated of the “innocent German draftee.” This draftee or professional soldier, who was said to be fighting diligently at the frontlines alienated from the atrocities havocking innocent civilian populations, became a discredited male image that could no longer be utilized to convey German nationhood. Coupled finally with the fact that at “Zero Hour” women dominated the numeric composition of Germany’s population, it is clear how a feminine experience came to dominate Germany’s commemorative landscape.

George Mosse argues that the changing significance and meaning of death in battle marked the increasing illegitimacy of the male front-line experience.\textsuperscript{7} Since the Napoleonic wars, there had been a cultural sentiment that rationalized the death of the citizen-soldier as a sacrifice for the higher good of the fatherland.\textsuperscript{8} It sanctified the death of a soldier as an imitation of the passion of the Christ.\textsuperscript{9} During the immediate post-war years of the First World War, national commissions took over the burial of war dead and the commemoration of war in Germany. They tended to remember the glory rather than the horror of war, symbolizing the purposefulness rather than the tragedy of the experience. Drawing from this heroic soldier ideology which idealized fighting and sacrifice, Germany actively sought to justify its involvement in war, while simultaneously martyring its soldiers.\textsuperscript{10} It these glorified monuments to German soldiers after World War One became what James Young referred to as “monuments sustaining illusions”\textsuperscript{11} and Mosse termed the “myth of the war experience.”\textsuperscript{12} These monuments looked back on the war as a meaningful, even sacred event: “the myth of the war experience helped to transcend the horror of war while at the same time supported the utopia which nationalism sought to project as an alternative to the reality of postwar Germany.”\textsuperscript{13} War memorials after the First World War in Germany then, tended to disguise the reality of the war through the “Myth of the War

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, 225.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}, 225.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, 6; Young, 95.
\textsuperscript{11} Young, 95.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, 6; Mosse, 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Mosse 106.
Experience” not only in the details of the iconography but also in the images of soldiers which projected notions of, “youth and manliness, sacrifice and comradeship.” 14

Since the conclusion of the Second World War however, casualties of global warfare were understood to include various victims, including innocent civilians like the Jews, children, and women to list a few. No longer clearly for the betterment of the fatherland, Germany’s behaviour in the war left a deeply problematic legacy. Memory of Germany’s recent past, the actors who had participated in that past, and the victims of that past, had changed significantly and it would become a change that Germany’s memorialization would reflect. Mosse notes that when, “the old symbols have lost their power is not merely a sign of changing tastes, but is an expression of [the changing] attitudes towards war.”15 Because of this growing association of the German soldiers with the loss and horror of war, Germans suggested that new war memorials should no longer contain inscriptions honouring national martyrs. Instead, they believed that war memorials should act as reminders of the devastating costs of war.16 Heroic poses were replaced with subjects mourning their dead. Young notes how German “art and literature after the Holocaust [were] pointedly anti-redemptory of both themselves and the catastrophe they represent[ed].”17 Because monuments reflected both their socio-historical and aesthetic contexts, they underwent a metamorphosis from the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the late nineteenth century, which tended to celebrate national ideals and triumphs, over to antiheroic, often ironic, self-effacing representations of the post-Holocaust period.18 Germany no longer

14 Ibid., 102.
15 Ibid., 224-25.
16 Ibid., 213.
17 Young, 5.
18 Ibid., 93.
idealized “youth and manliness, sacrifice and comradeship,” and instead turned to the German woman’s experience that seemed to personify emerging trends of victimization. As a result, female representations in commemorative landscape became the alternative to remembering Germany’s coloured past through masculine imagery.

Collective memory of three moments in German women’s history between 1942 and 1948 played a crucial role in the development of a German national identity. The death of women as a result of Allied bombings, their rape by advancing Soviet soldiers, and their loss of loved ones at the front lines, each conveyed a specific experience of female victimization during the latter part of the war. These came to used to represent collective German suffering. One cannot deny that millions of German women lost their homes, members of their families, and even their lives to the war. Arnold suggests that somewhere between three hundred sixty thousand to four hundred ten thousand German non-combatants died in the strategic air war between 1940 and 1945. In a week long raid of Hamburg in the summer of 1943, it is estimated that somewhere between forty and one hundred thousand people perished, leaving approximately sixty percent of the city destroyed and seven hundred and fifty thousand people homeless. A fourteen-year-old schoolgirl from Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin remembers her own experience in a bomb shelter in 1945, writing, “the small children entwined their little arms around the necks of their mothers and buried their fear-stricken faces in their mother’s coats. The mothers petted their toddlers’ heads with trembling hands…everyone felt lonely and destitute; however,

19 Jorg Arnold, “Beyond Usable Pasts: Rethinking the Memorialization of the Strategic Air War in Germany, 1940 to 1965,” in Memorialization in Germany since 1945, ed. Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27.
20 Heineman, 362.
everyone had only one thought: hold on, be strong, and survive.”21 Aerial bombardment was just another facet of everyday life for a German woman: “an image from the street: a man pushing a wheelbarrow with a dead woman on top, stiff as a board… Hardly anyone gave her a second glance. Just like they use to ignore the garbage being hauled away.”22 This image is emblematic of not only how hard hit civilian populations were, but how aerial bombings affected first and foremost women and their children. It is no surprise then, how many memorials erected to German victims of Allied bombings took shape in the female form. But these overwhelming cases of female casualties were only the catalyst to the domination of the female figure in German memorial. Instead, it was what these images were portraying which was the determining factor of this domination. In this case, that was the experience of victimhood and pain.

On 5 March 1945 the Allies bombed Chemnitz, taking a total of three thousand seven hundred fifteen lives. In the early 1950s, the city planned a monument to the victims of the attack and aimed to erect it in the municipal cemetery. Designed by Hans Dietrich in 1960, the monument consisted of a wall in the form of a triptych with two pictures engraved on either side.23 In front of the wall, directly center, a statue stands of a woman holding a dead child. On the left panel, a reconstruction of what a bombing attack may have resembled is accompanied by an inscription that reads, “once again, the awful wounds the barbarian has inflicted on humanity will heal.”24 On the right side, an image is presented of a possible reconstruction of Chemnitz

21 Margalit, 49.
23 Hans Dietrich, Untitled monument to bombing victims of Chemnitz, 1960, Chemnitz municipal cemetery, [from Margalit, Figure 21, page 167].
after Nazism. In it an East German flag flies high, and those who survive look forward to a hopeful ‘Soviet’ future.

Here, the decision to bomb German cities is not perceived as critical act of the Allied campaign to stop the Nazis, but rather as a criminal act of terrorism against the city’s inhabitants. The terminology used in its inscription, for example, has similarity in words used to reference the Nazis.  

By emphasizing the suffering of the Germans and equating their crimes with the attacks of the Nazis, the Communist leadership in East Germany attempted to draw lines linking the Allies with Hitlerism, “reminders that the ‘enemy,’ American or Soviet, had harmed innocent women and children, were if nothing else, effective wartime propaganda.” The use of the female form and its insistence on collective German victimhood then, tended to distort the fact that Germany had been the first country to use the strategy of aerial bombings against civilian targets during World War Two effectively overshadowing what it sought to: German’s role in the destruction of World War Two. The Luftwaffe began attacking cities across Europe during some of the first days of warfare, targeting countries like Poland, Holland, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Britain.  

In overshadowing German’s own aggression in war through female memorialization, Germany took its first steps towards issuing itself a new legitimate national identity. As Kramer puts it, in trying to transcend their own guilt by displacing it onto other parties such as the Allies, the Germans “like everybody else, wanted to be exonerated from their choices…German’s want their pasts to have happened to them. They want to have suffered from

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25 Ibid.
26 Heineman, 365.
27 Margalit, 147.
themselves, the way everybody else suffered from them.”28 Juxtaposed with the right panel engraving looking forward to a glorious ‘Soviet’ Germany, a clear narrative is being endorsed where national blame for German atrocities were solely accredited to West Germany and their American occupiers, leaving East Germans to take the tile of victimized peoples.

But going back again to the inscription, “the awful wounds the barbarian has inflicted on humanity will heal,” a clear universalization of the German identity is being employed. Though in the physical portrayal, the sculpture and images engraved utilizes the feminine form to convey a message untainted by the heinous actions in warfare perpetrated by German men, the inscription fails to invoke reference to women and rather generalizes to “humanity.” This terminology has two implications: the first is that ‘humanity’ tends to imply people of a whole rather than a certain demographic; therefore becoming a message and event applicable to German people as a collective, rather than to German women specifically. Secondly, the term ‘humanity’ has connotations in its translations of virtuous people, lacking in barbarity. ‘Humanity’ can be defined as holding compassion or kindness for others or a virtuous people. In essence then, the message this inscription seems to put forth is that such experiences were felt by a German population collectively, successfully blurring the lines of gender, while also providing an image of this “collective German people” as righteous and pure in their wartime actions. This portrayal then offered a perfect collective national identity for an East German people moving forward from their genocidal histories.

The rape experience, similarly, was utilized by West Germans to cast criminal attention onto Soviet Cold War adversaries, just as the bombardment experience was used by the East

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Germans against the Americans. During the Nazi campaign, German officials instilled a growing fear in German women against the ‘Red Hordes,’ ‘Tartars,’ ‘Huns,’ and ‘Asiatics.’ As the war came to a close, this image of the foreign barbarian interloper had become an all too tangible reality. Estimates cited by Elizabeth Heineman suggest that somewhere between ten thousand and two million women were raped at the hands of Soviet soldiers. Rape was a danger from which many women did not survive. For those who did survive, the social death was equally enduring; women were often times ostracized and stigmatized by their communities, friends, and even their families.

The female experience of rape was appropriated by West Germany, which utilized it to provide an image of collective victimhood. Since monumental examples of German women’s rapes are understandably non-existent, a move to representation in political post-war propaganda will be employed to assert a continuing trend in spite of this lacking public/official record. Here, a Cold War era poster of the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union portraits an Asian-looking man lurking in the shadows, hands outstretched, reaching not for a woman, but rather for a piece of West German territory. Rather then being an event experienced solely by German women, as historian Antony Beevor states in his introduction to A Woman in Berlin, “rape in war is a ‘collective experience’…as opposed to in peacetime, when it is individual.” Rape no longer existed in a gendered form; rather it came to be explained in

29 Heineman, 364.
30 Ibid.
31 CSU poster, 1949, [from Ibid., see Figure 5, p. 371].
32 Ibid. 370.
33 Anonymous, A Woman in Berlin, xxi.
political, national, and even racialized terms to convey an image of collective West German suffering.

The rape experience also offered much the same for West Germans in their search for a new national identity, as aerial bombings offered East Germans. The image where Western civilizations, not women, were violated by contexts of warfare and militaristic occupation successfully inflicted a binary opposition where a heinous East confronted a civilized west. In casting the Soviets into the role of inhumane rapists, Germany was subsequently able to legitimate its war effort as highly justifiable. This redistributed the blame of the atrocities of the war onto Soviet parties, while giving West Germany an accessible passage to a new credible identity, presented an image that West Germans too, were victims of barbaric warfare. What is especially notable, however, is how such an understanding of the rapes allowed Germans, male and female, to recall the collapse of the eastern front as an event in which Western civilization was violated by a brutal Soviet or Asian culture, rather than women alone being the victims.34

One might expect then, that with the ending of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany that the ending of the ideological rivalries between various players within the war would follow. Yet German preoccupation with its own suffering remained strong even after this key chapter in German history. One key example of this is chancellor of unified Germany, Helmut Kohl’s decision, to create a national memorial site for the ‘victims of war and tyranny.’ The Neue Wache, the site of this memorial, featured a large replica of the statue of a mother holding her dead son by Käithe Kollwitz.35 The statue is a take on the Christian icon, the Pieta, and was inspired by Kollwitz’s loss of her son in the First World War. The frame of reference

34 Heineman, 370.
35 Käithe Kollwitz, *Mother with her Dead Son*, Neue Wache, Berlin, [from Margalit, 225].
then is immediately narrowed to be applicable solely to German Christian women who had lost
soldiers at the front lines, while rejecting most other narratives of loss during the Second World
War.

The inscription to the statue reads: “to the victims of war and tyranny.” In the memorial
tradition of Germany, the term “victims of war” was reserved solely for civilians killed during
warfare, rather than soldiers who fell on the battlefield.36 But the agents of post-war German
memorial culture broadened the term to encapsulate German soldiers who had died during
service. Such inclusiveness has certain implications. The first, as Bartov states, was that “both
the murder of the Jews and the victimization of the Germans were described as acts perpetrated
by a third party.”37 After a vague commemorative reference to “those who had suffered through
the war,” the plaque makes reference to the fallen of the two world wars, and also to those who
had lost their lives ‘in the homeland,’ ‘in captivity,’ and ‘when being driven out of the
homeland.’38 German victims then, not only reduced Jews to second-rate victims of Nazism, but
also encouraged visitors to understand the war as a natural catastrophe removed from the sphere
of human responsibility, in the way everyone can be declared a victim.39 It promoted a
widespread trend in German historiography that regarded war crimes as exceptional rather than
everyday experiences of soldiers. This not only collectively exonerated German soldiers of the
Crimes they committed against humanity, but also had the ability to depict German soldiers as
victims of the Nazi regime.40

36 Ibid., 3.
37 Bartov, 789
38 Bill Niven, Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Nazi Past (London and New
39 Ibid.
40 Margalit, 3.
To do this Germans conveyed a suffering which surpassed all others - one of a mother’s grief over the loss of a child. Just like it had presented this suffering in the female form for the experience of aerial bombings, so did the Kollwitz’s *Mother and her Dead Son* represent grief and loss from the female vantage point. In choosing a perspective of maternal loss, Kohl encouraged an undifferentiated view of war; for any mother who losess a son to war is always a victim, no matter what side he fought on or for what cause.\(^{41}\) This suffering is then abused for purposes of engendering uncritical sympathy for Germans who seem to also have suffered from the ideology of National Socialism just as everyone else had.\(^{42}\) But once again like the case of aerial bombardment, women are never alluded to in the inscription. Rather a collective German experience becomes the message taken away from an entirely feminine representation. As a result, the image once again fits within the emerging trends of memorialization that idealize grief and sorrow (put forth by an untainted female experience), while simultaneously incorporating all Germans under the auspices of victims, rather than simply just German women.

German suffering was not the sole image utilized by the nation who sought to escape its murderous past however. German women’s heroism too, would offer an image of sacrifice, strength, and virtue that could provide credibility and legitimacy to the German national identity. By 1946, there were seven million more women in occupied Germany then there were men. Millions had lost their homes to devastating bombings, food was in short supply, and for the few men who did return from war, most were physically, emotionally, and psychologically broken, that they offered very little in the way of productive aid. Women became the nation’s source of strength. They took to black markets in the West, stood in endless food lines, and bartered for

\(^{41}\) Niven, 200.  
\(^{42}\) *Ibid.*
livelihood. While men were fighting a murderous and morally corrupt war, women acted as the true heroines of survival. “Women of the Rubble” became the personification of this quality and various German memorials dedicated to these women began taking form all across Germany. In 1954, the "Aufbauhelferin" (Reconstruction Helper) by Fritz Cremers in front of the City Hall in Dresden was displayed,43 followed not long after by the "Trümmerfrau" by Katharina Singer in the Volkspark Hasenheide.44 While the youthful socialist ‘reconstruction helper’ heralds progress and an air of vigorous new beginnings with a heroic undertone, the western ‘woman of the rubble’ pauses to think about a future beyond “Zero Hour.” The plaque accompanying Dresden’s "Trümmerfrau" memorial in front of city hall reads, "The memorial is dedicated to the women of Dresden who, in a difficult period, laid the groundwork for the reconstruction of the destroyed city with the work of their hands." Credited as being responsible for literally dragging Germany out of its horror and devastation, these women became memorial representations of Germany’s strength and perseverance, “the survival of ordinary German families and the economic recovery of Germany as a whole were united in one figure: a woman who devoted her days to cleaning bricks and her evenings to feeding her family.”46 These strong-willed and courageous women were memorialized in sculpture, poem, and even today, Der Spiegel, a popular German magazine, has an online gallery dedicated to them and their work.47

46 Heineman, 375.
The image of the “Women of the Rubble” was differentiated from images of loss. This image depended less on an “enemy” other than on a positive understanding of Germany’s human resources and economic success. Focusing on national strength, rather than German failure, the image of the ‘Trümmerfrau’ made it easier for Germans to avoid thinking about the troubling characters of their nation and its history, while shifting attention to those accredited to reasserting Germany’s strength and beauty. This representation appeared to put forth an image of women as heroines and saviours, but only rarely alluded to the possibility of women being perpetrators or benefactors of the Nazi regime. The motif of German triumph, conveyed through various feminine German commemorations of World War Two detracts from the enormous support German women gave the regime and the benefits they received from this support. Women were generously provided family allowances by the government, which allowed many to leave paid employment. Others, enjoyed short-term involvement in paid employment and military participation; domains in which women had never been permitted access to previously. Others capitalized on opportunities to travel. Women then, had a lot to gain from actively supporting Hitler and his regime, a reality that a focus on female heroines seems to obscure.

Nevertheless, the “Woman of the Rubble” quickly came to suggest a story that began with the bombing of German cities, focused on terrible hardships, and promised renewal by the cooperative efforts of ‘ordinary’ Germans. In the words of a 1946 pamphlet,

There is no picture that characterizes the results of a catastrophic politics more impressively and graphically, but at the same time more movingly, than these untiring women working in the rubble in all weather. Of all the boasting promises that were once made to them, nothing remains but rubble and piles of stone, which they must literally clear away with their own hands so life can go on. They do not

48 Heineman, 374.
hide their disappointment over their fate, but whatever may happen, they want to put these hard times behind them. 49

Rather than revisiting the past, it was suggested that the “Women of the Rubble” wanted to "put hard times behind them" so "life could go on," an attractive idea for most Germans of the time. Recovery of Germany demanded so much. In West German, it required a quick retreat from Nazism and supplication to the United States in order to invigorate the economy. The concept of “Women of the Rubble,” by contrast, required no such complication and humiliation for economic recovery. Instead, it projected an image of political neutrality and rebuilding on a humble scale. Thoughts of “Zero Hour” then, no longer remembered as a time of national shame and humiliation became dominated by visions of “Women of the Rubble” who presented themes of national unity and pride.

Feminine strength had manifested itself in various ways during the war, including active protest against the Nazi regime. In the twenty-first century the Rosenstrabe protest has come to signify an event of German-Jewish solidarity and camaraderie during the Third Reich. The protest began at the end of February 1943 in response to the arrest and presumed deportation of intermarried Jewish Germans arrested during the nationwide ‘factory action.’ Some fifteen hundred Jewish, men who were married to German women and were therefore exempt from deportation, were detained in a former Jewish community building on Rosenstrabe. Immediately after their detention, many non-Jewish partners, predominately women, protested on the street outside, resulting in all but 25 detainees being released.50 Between 1992 and 93, Ingeborg

49 Ibid., 376.
Hunzinger’s sculpted a re-enactment of the event.51 “Block of Women,” a five piece sculpture, features in its center two women embracing in front of a large block portraying the Babylonian-like exile of Jewish men under Nazism. Various symbols of mourning permeate the surroundings of this block. An inscription reads, “1943, the power of civilian unrest, the power of love beats the violence of dictatorship, give us our husbands back. Wives stood here. Conquering death. 600 Jewish men were free.”52 H.J. Potter states, that despite the protest being predominately female, some men did advocate the release of their Jewish wives that night.53 The inscription however, makes no reference of this component. It is clear from the inscription that the focus is on German women’s strength and perseverance. It implies unity and courage in the face of Nazi barbarity. The expression on each woman’s face is pure anguish, playing directly into the victimhood narrative.

The memorial also conveys a domestic resistance narrative that further accommodates the binary image of innocent Germans opposed to German Nazi “others.” These women not only saved their families, but they actively played an active role in saving German Jewry, or so it was constantly asserted within this resistance narrative. Therefore, both the Allies and the Germans seemed to have recognized that memory of past triumphs or victimization often served to unify nations, and capitalized on the possibility to do just that with commemoration of Rosenstrabe. This established images that though there were bad Germans, when times demanded, there were also good ones. The only problem then, was that the image of the ‘good’ German tended to

52 Potter, 219.
53 Ibid., 215.
dominate commemoration, while the bad Germans were left to linger in the shadows of obscurity.

The profile of German women during the nation’s collapse and occupation, whether as victims or heroines, was crucial in shaping Germany’s national and collective identity. Sympathetic images of feminine victimization and rebuilding provided vital alternatives to a lapsing militaristic and genocidal male experience, which helped to deflect attention off the troubling moral questions surrounding the immediate German past. Not only then, had this feminine character deflected attention off the culpable Germans, but also effectively redirected attention to what was an emerging criminal Allied powers. In the Federal Republic, the Third Reich's population was seen as the victim of both Hitler's terroristic regime and Joseph Stalin's no less criminal Communist order. In the East, Germany had been presented as victims of American and Western military might and imperialistic policies that threatened the ‘German’ way of life. In essence then, narratives put forward with the memorialization of the female experience seemed to suggest that renewal of Germany’s moral character could only come as a result of national sovereignty. This highlights the importance of contextual consideration. As James E. Young states, “[memorials] juxtapose, narrate, and remember events according to the tastes of their curators, the political needs and interests of their community, the temper of their time.”54 But feminine memorials went beyond just a deflection of guilt and culpability; it also acted as a means of acquiring German victimization of its own. Through images of female aerial bombardments, rape, and mourning, German’s themselves could be legitimately argued as amongst the many victims of National Socialism. But rather than existing solely as passive
recipients to this moral collapse, German women were also active resistors. Through appropriation of experiences of the “Women of the Rubble” and the Rosenstrabe Protest, women presented an image of strength and prosperity which juxtaposed a physically and emotionally devastated Germany. Though German women did in fact experience all these things, the primary motivation for the solidification of this memory into memorial arose out of a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers through memory. In the end then, “society obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complicate them so that, however convinced that we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not poses.” 55 In the end, when it came to the overwhelming task of rising above a legacy of Nazi injustice and atrocity, women and men’s experiences were merged as one, women’s being appropriated as dominant because of its triumphant, encouraging, and lacklustre Nazi past.

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