

*In and Out of the Kitchen: Women's Resistance in Nazi Germany*

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## **Abstract**

During World War II in Nazi Germany, not everyone was happy with what was going on in their country. While women were discriminated against due to Nazi party policy, this did not stop them from attempting resistance efforts, psychological and physical acts, in the public and private spheres. While some women were more bold and chose to protest publicly or make anti-Nazi leaflets and pass them out on college campuses, others made their difference in the privacy of their own homes. They carried shopping bags in both hands to avoid having to salute officers or hid Jews within their homes and made certain that their day to day needs were met entirely. All acts of resistance on the part of females in 1930's and 1940's Germany was important and helped save countless lives and maintain a level of mental freedom in their own homes.

## **Introduction**

Resistance comes in many forms and happens on different scales. Resistance can be individual or collective, widespread or local. The target of resistance can also range from one individual to an entire group or nation with goals of achievement varying as well<sup>1</sup>. Some acts of opposition are physical, such as working slowly, faking sickness, or wearing particular kinds of clothing. Other acts of resistance are psychological or symbolic. Hawaiian women chose to speak in their native language, published traditional stories in newspapers, and practiced dance in order to protest the annexation of Hawaii. Women in Northern Ireland used silence as a resistance weapon when they remained silent during police raids<sup>2</sup>.

The unfortunate misrepresentation of Germany during World War II is that every German supported Hitler and the Third Reich and blindly went along with the party plans for a better Germany. While Germany at the time had been suffering from the aftermath of World War I, not everyone saw Hitler as the solution to Germany's economic problems, which included skyrocketing inflation and owing foreign powers one hundred and thirty two billion marks. Presumably, not all German citizens wanted the extermination of the Jewish people or a government in which they could not voice their opinion.

When it comes to World War II, the largest form of resistance primarily focused on is Jewish resistance to the Third Reich. Hans Scholl tends to get the credit for the

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<sup>1</sup> Hollander, Jocelyn A., and Rachel L. Einwohner. "Conceptualizing Resistance" *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (December 2004): 533-54, 536.

<sup>2</sup> Hollander, Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", 536

White Rose Resistance while no one mentions his sister Sophie, who was instrumental in helping get the movement going. Emilie Schindler's husband received the primary recognition for saving Jewish factory workers, while no one mentions what she did to contribute in many dangerous ways. Women's contributions have tended to be ingored by men's.

While the resistance of German citizens has been documented since after World War II ended, its primary focus has been on the males who resisted the Third Reich, women who went up against the Nazis have not been shown a lot in history. One reason for this is the fact that men's resistance tactics were more public than woman's. A woman's place at that time was in the home. They were expected to be homemakers and not much more. If the family had a business she would be allowed to help out with that, but not for pay.<sup>3</sup>

If women wanted to resist, they had to do it in different ways from men. The chances that they could lead underground revolutions were slim. They also couldn't be in public, although a few women were brave enough to do that. Women had to use their femininity as a resistance tool. Females did make a difference to the resistance effort, however the majority of women had to do it in their homes. Women in both the private and public spheres did mental and physical acts of resistance against the Third Reich, both adding up to make a change in history and people's lives. Drawing on five case studies of different women and their stories this paper will convey different resistance strategies used by women in their contained atmospheres.

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1975), 16.

## **Third Reich's View of Women**

Women were prized in Germany for being able to conceive and give birth to children. The Nazi message to women was: be a mother, first, foremost and always, preferably a married mother of several children<sup>4</sup>. In fact, women deemed to be “worthless” such as prostitutes or lesbians, were prevented from reproducing.<sup>5</sup> Their children would not be viewed as good Germans. Women were viewed as the nurturer of the Aryan race and biologically that was all they were equipped to do. The Nazi party was even concerned that farm work would be too strenuous for women and small children, but were eventually persuaded that women would thrive in fresh, country air.<sup>6</sup> It wasn't just the Nazi Party that held these views. In 1930's Germany and throughout Europe, many conservatives and extremists also felt the same way about women.

Nazi policy regarding women was deeply revolutionary because it aimed at having the family unit as an intervention. The family could be used as a tool to serve the state. If parents reinforced Nazi ideals to their children, the future of Germany could continue on with strength. Problems could now be attributed to home life experience instead of blaming the government. The family was now seen a solution to help Germany into a brighter future. Family happiness was a means to serve a national purpose.<sup>7</sup> Hitler said at a 1935 party rally that “The reward which National Socialism

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 16

<sup>6</sup> Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 18

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1987), 180

bestows on women in return for her labour is that it once more rears men, real men, decent men who stand erect, who are courageous, who love honor”<sup>8</sup>. Women were meant to bring up the strong Aryan men who would lead Germany into the future. The family was now essential to the future of the German empire. Women were encouraged to develop an identity in relationship to their family, and not to a profession or career.

In pursuit of this idea and vision of motherhood, after the Nazis took power nearly half a million women started studying home economics mixed in with courses on National Socialism, race, and national aims<sup>9</sup>. Childbearing was now highly encouraged with the Marriage Loan Program, that for each child born to a couple the government reduced the principal by twenty-five percent. Parents could also deduct fifteen percent per child of their gross income from taxable income. Parents of six children or more paid no personal income tax. Birth control was outlawed, and marriage counseling centers were closed and replaced with “eugenic counseling” facilities<sup>10</sup>. However with all these incentives, the birth rate failed to increase as dramatically as the Third Reich had hoped. Even though abortions were outlawed, and doctors who chose to perform them were punished severely if caught. To deal with aryan women, non-Jewish Caucasians, who were single and pregnant or mothers with nowhere else to go, Lebensborn homes were made an option. Lebensborn homes were part of the anti-abortion solution. These were residential homes where “racially valuable” women could go and stay and be taken care of.

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<sup>8</sup> Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 180.

<sup>9</sup> Koonz Mothers in the Fatherland, 180.

<sup>10</sup> Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 186.

The Nazis also began to enforce the Wilhelmine legal code, which guaranteed husbands inalienable rights.<sup>11</sup> Women could contribute their opinions about the household to their husbands, but they were not allowed to make the final decisions. Men could stop their wives from seeking outside employment or from keeping her own earnings. If a divorce occurred, the husband still had the final say in what the children's schooling and children would be. Marriages actually deteriorated with this legal code in place, and divorce rates increased faster than marriage rates<sup>12</sup>. In 1938 there were now new grounds for divorce: adultery, refusal to procreate, immorality, VD, a three-year separation, mental illness, racial incompatibility, and eugenic weakness. In thirty-thousand divorces under the new grounds, husbands left wives eighty percent of the time.<sup>13</sup>

Women who were unmarried were still expected to contribute to society. It was seen as selfless, in the same way married women were selflessly raising upright Aryan children for the good of the people. Unmarried women were expected to participate in service projects dictated by the government, as well as make time for a Nazi woman's organization<sup>14</sup>. Feminism was seen as selfish, because it was seen as putting oneself and social status above everyone else, including the state. In reality, the Nazis were afraid to have such radicalism in the country. If women were thinking for themselves, controlling them would become difficult and they might start questioning governmental decisions.

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<sup>11</sup> Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland 191.

<sup>12</sup> Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 192.

<sup>13</sup> Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 192.

<sup>14</sup> Stephenson, Women in Nazi Germany, 18.

Women in Nazi Germany were second class citizens to men. Not encouraged to seek outside employment or higher education, they were expected to be the breeding stock for future Aryan generations to lead Germany. They were expected to be submissive and devote themselves to a greater cause; the future of their country.

## **Historiography**

While men have always had a prominent spot in history women traditionally took a backseat. They were not the ones in charge or making important decisions for people. Rarely were they starting revolutions or starting wars with other countries. Instead they were at home. But what historians of the past failed to realize that women could be making a difference from their home. They could make history, just in different ways from men.

Before discussing women's resistance in Nazi History, looking at books about the topic of resistance in general is where the historiography on the topic really begins. One important book in the topic of Slave resistance is *Africa in America: slave acculturation and resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831*<sup>15</sup> by Michael Mullin. In slavery it was common for slaves to work slower and force resistance upon their masters in order to get out of working. They were never going to be free, so the assumption was why work hard? Mullin's book goes into great detail on specific slave types of resistance and its effectiveness. Starting with this book allows us to think about what constitutes resistance and how it might differ depending on the situation.

Women in Nazi Germany were not always up front about their opposition to the Nazi party. In a few cases, such as the Rosenstrasse protest in Nazi Germany in February and March of 1943, when Christian women in Berlin married to Jewish men protested the arrest and detainment of their husbands and demanded they be returned,

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: slave acculturation and resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

women did leave the home and publicly voice their anger about their government.<sup>16</sup> And Hitler did give in to their demands to let their Jewish husbands free. While at the same time Sophie Scholl and her brother Hans Scholl were the leaders of an underground movement in Munich, The White Rose, which was against the Third Reich and their politics.<sup>17</sup>

Women like the ones at the Rosenstrasse protest and Sophie Scholl fought small battles for what they believed were right. The Rosenstrasse protest were Aryan women fighting for the return of their Jewish husbands in Berlin. Sophie Scholl fought for democracy to be returned to her country. Other women fought to keep Jewish citizens safe and for the end of a dictatorship; for their country and what they believed was right.

After the war autobiographies were written, but the focus was kept mainly on men and their resistance efforts. After the women's movement in the United States during the 1960's, more and more efforts were put into understanding and focusing on women's history and gender studies. Women in the 1970's were still fighting for equal rights and treatment, but the feminist movement was still prominent and this kept historians attention.

The first major book that really examined women in Nazi Germany was Jill Stephenson's book *Women in Nazi Society*, published in 1975. She took a close look at how women were viewed in society, what life was like for those that were forced to enter the workforce, at home, in higher education, and those that were allowed to be a part of

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<sup>16</sup> Nathan Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Herman Vinke, *The Short Life of Sophie Scholl* ( New York : Harpers and Row Publishers, 1980).

the Third Reich.<sup>18</sup> While she does not discuss women's resistance, this was an important book for discovering what life was like for women, not just men, in Germany during Hitler's rule. As this was the first book of its kind, Stephenson was forced to rely heavily on primary sources and Hitler biographies to write her book. She leaves a firm foundation for others to build on in the field of Women's history.

In 1977 Leila J Rupp published an article in *Signs* journal by the University of Chicago Press entitled *Mother of the "Volk": The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology*. Rupp claimed that Stephenson's book discussed Nazi policy towards women, but did not discuss the ideology of the Third Reich regarding women.<sup>19</sup> Rupp gives a brief overview of what Hitler and the Nazi party actually believed about women and what they wanted from them. Hitler believed that the Aryan race would have to repopulate the world and encouraged women to stay home and have as many children as was possible.<sup>20</sup> Women were actually given prizes based on how many children they could produce. Rupp has the ability to go into more depth than Stephenson on what women's roles were "supposed" to be. Her article also takes the topic in a different direction.

A lot of issues that women in the 1970's were facing were similar to those faced by women in Nazi Germany. They were both trying to break into the work force, but were not always welcomed there by men. Their bodies were not always their own, with politics on both sides encouraging their agendas. Women in the 1970's were fighting for the legalization of abortion to control how many they could have because the

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<sup>18</sup> Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*.

<sup>19</sup> Leila J Rupp, "Mother of the "Volk": The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology", *Signs*, 3, no. 2: 362-379(Winter 1977), 362.

<sup>20</sup> Rupp, "Women of the "Volk" "Signs, 362.

republican party and religious parties were against it, while women in the 1930's in Germany were being told to have as many children as possible for the good of their country and race. Both women's reproductive rights were being decided for by men. However in 1930's Germany, women's roles were being exaggerated pushed into a more confined role than they had previously experienced.

By the 1980's women were firmly situated into the workforce. While the need for feminism wasn't over, things were better for women. This was when more writing on women's resistance came into light. In 1980 Herman Vinke published the book *The Short Life of Sophie Scholl*, which was important because normally she and her brother Hans were lumped together in the history books.<sup>21</sup> Since both siblings had taken part in the resistance movement of the White Rose, this made sense. But to only focus on Sophie was Vinke taking part of women's history. He uses secondary and primary sources in his book detailing Scholl's life. He focuses heavily on interviews given to him by Hans and Sophie's sister, Inge. Vinke paints Scholl in a positive light and gives a nice background on those in the Third Reich who found Sophie and Hans threatening. A political history of the Third Reich is woven into Scholl's story to help the reader understand the climate of the time.

Another important book in the 1980's was edited by three women, Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan and entitled *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*<sup>22</sup>. The book discusses women in society at the time and how the Nazi Party was frightened at how fast feminism was hitting

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<sup>21</sup> Vinke, *The Short Life of Sophie Scholl*.

<sup>22</sup> Renate Bridenthal, Anita Grossman, Marion Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

Germany. A male dominated society could not afford to have women free thinking and going against their policies, so they rushed to try and put more women back into the home and producing an Aryan race to help push Germany into a Superpower position as quickly as possible.

*When Biology Became Destiny* discusses specifically what Germany did in order to keep women down, and how they got to doing it. It is one of the most important books in the literature field of women in Nazi Germany because it deals specifically with policies to keep women down and the events leading up to it. While Stephenson focused on policies, she lacked telling what exactly lead the Nazis to implement policies against women.

By the end of the 1980's more and more women had pushed themselves into the workforce and thus into academia positions as well. Following this, in 1987 Claudia Koonz published one of the most vital books to the field *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*<sup>23</sup>. Her book is considered one of the most important for feminist literature concerning women in Nazi Germany. She goes into great depth on women who were actually allowed into the inner circle of the Third Reich and that encouraged women to go along with policies that were sexist and kept them confined. Even with this sexist behavior, Koonz says that women in Nazi Germany helped confine themselves by assuming a "motherly" state and role in society. She goes into great detail on the backlash against women and how frightened men were that women were becoming independent and they were losing control.

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<sup>23</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*.

Bridenthal, Grossman, and Kaplan discussed this as well in *When Biology Became Destiny*, but Koonz goes into a much greater detail on the subject. She goes into medical racial profiling and experimentation the Nazis did and how vital women were to this. Since they were the ones giving birth and reproducing, they had to be strong and with the correct Aryan partner. They wanted women to take care of themselves and see it as a service to the state. Koonz's book was a great addition to the literature in the field due to the amount of topics covered and the great depth and detail she covers.

The 1990's saw more detail on primary sources of women in Nazi Germany being written and published, but a decline on the amount of secondary sources finding their way to publishers. This has continued into the 2000's. However, a major book published in 2001 concerning the Rosenstrasse Protest. Nathan Stoltzfus published *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany*<sup>24</sup>. This book was the first of its kind, giving a specific example of women's protesting and resisting Nazi policies and having a positive outcome. The women of the Rosenstrasse Protest were resisting in a public manner that contrasted from the usual secretive way others were typically done, this was highly unusual.

Stoltzfus brings up the point that since the women were successful in getting what they wanted from Hitler, who was all about public image, what if they had done more to protest what was happening to them? What if other, ordinary Germans had done the same? Could Hitler have gone as far as he did? This book was a book

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<sup>24</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*.

breakthrough for the resistance movement literature of women in Nazi Germany. While other books had chapters dedicated to resistance, this was an entire book on the topic.

At times literature has revealed women's resistance during World War II was different from men's. They were secretive, working against the system, but doing it from the means of their home confinements. For this paper, the focus is on women's contributions to the resistance efforts with a large focus on women's own stories.

## **Public Sphere**

In Nazi Germany, women who chose to resist in the public sphere were not afraid to let others know that they were upset with their government and wanted to demonstrate that. The Third Reich did not take lightly to people, especially women, going against the grain and publicly defying them. By speaking out women were putting themselves and their families in a dangerous position. However, this did not stop many women from doing what they believed to be right. Two of the most famous examples of this are Sophie Scholl's involvement with the White Rose Society, and the Rosenstrasse protest of 1943.

One of the most publicly known women who stood against Nazism was Sophie Scholl who participated in The White Rose, a Nazi resistance group in Munich from 1942-1943. Scholl from an early age was quite resistant to Nazi ideology. In 1933 at the age of twelve she reluctantly joined the League of German Girls in her hometown of, as did most of the girls in her class at school.<sup>25</sup> She became increasingly uncomfortable with the anti-Semitism being sprouted by the League of German Girls because of a close Jewish friend. Her father was also very against National Socialism, which had an effect. Being somewhat of a Tomboy, Scholl kept her hair in a short bob, going against the view of a "decadent" female interest in cosmetics and elegant hairdos.<sup>26</sup> Girls her age were expected to keep their hair long and in braids. She was also very firm in her belief that she did not want to be only a wife and mother.<sup>27</sup> This was quite the opposite

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<sup>25</sup> Dumbach, Annette E., and Jud Newborn. *Shattering The German Night: The Story of the White Rose*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Dumbach, Newborn, *Shattering the German Night*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Dumbach, Newborn, *Shattering the German Night*, 49.

of what the Nazis expected from females. Girls were encouraged to stay home and give birth to as many German children as possible. In the classroom she would laugh out loud at what she considered absurd ideology, causing her teacher to consider her frivolous<sup>28</sup>.

Scholl was sometimes brought before the school administration to be punished for her insolence to go along with Nazi teachings in the classroom, and was suspected of being in a clandestine league<sup>29</sup>. She was told that in order to graduate high school she must start behaving. Scholl's small acts of resistance irritated and worried the authority figures outside of her anti-National socialist home. In a letter to her boyfriend Fritz she wrote "If one believes in the victory of might, one has to believe that men are on the same level as animals"<sup>30</sup> She eventually graduated and was forced to spend six months working as a kindergarten teacher and a year doing labor for the Nazi party before being allowed to go study biology at the University in Munich along with her older brother Hans in 1942. Sophie Scholl strongly disliked her year doing labor on a farm and wrote to her sister saying "We live like prisoners; not only work but leisure time is turned into duty-hours. Sometimes I want to scream '*My name is Sophie Scholl! Don't you forget it!*'"<sup>31</sup>

While in Munich before Scholl's arrival, Hans and some of his friends had written four leaflets denouncing Hitler and National Socialist policies, entitled "*The Leaflets of*

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<sup>28</sup> Dumbach, Newborn, Shattering the German Night, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Vinke, Short Life of Sophie Scholl, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Scholl, Hans, and Sophie Scholl. *At the Heart of the White Rose: Letters and Diaries of Hans and Sophie Scholl*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Dumbach, Newborn, Shattering the German Night, 62.

*the White Rose*<sup>32</sup>. While there had been talk at the University for about a year on Hitler's faults and resisting him, there had been nothing done about the situation. The leaflets were the first solid form of resistance at the university and the first one was distributed in the mail in the summer of 1942 with Sophie Scholl's help.<sup>33</sup> The first leaflet tried to appeal to a sense of German Culture and to get the general sense that what the Nazis were doing was morally wrong. The next three leaflets gave more specific examples, such as "The fact is that since the conquest of Poland 300,000 Jews have been bestially murdered in that country"<sup>34</sup>. Scholl's gender made it easier for her to help distribute leaflets because women were not seen as suspicious as their male counterparts. After her first year in Munich, Sophie Scholl was forced to do farm labor in the summer on a farm run by the Third Reich and her brother Hans was sent to fight in Russia. They returned in October of 1942 and continued to hand out the third set of leaflets. The fourth and final sets were distributed in January and February of 1943 at the University by Scholl and her brother. They were caught by the University janitor scattering leaflets around a classroom on February 18, 1943.

Scholl and Hans were turned in to the local Gestapo, and interrogated for four days. While the Gestapo searched their apartments, they found several hundred new eight-pfennig postage stamps, evidence sealing their fate<sup>35</sup>. The Gestapo also managed to arrest two more members of the White Rose within a few days of Scholl's arrest. Scholl insisted that she was trying to prevent the deaths of hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>32</sup> Vinke, Short Life of Sophie Scholl, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Scholl, Inge. *Students against tyranny; the resistance of the White Rose, Munich, 1942-1943*. Translated by Arthur R. Schultz. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1970, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Venke, Short Life of Sophie Scholl 117.

<sup>35</sup> Vennke, Short Life of Sophie Scholl 161.

German soldiers and people<sup>36</sup>. At their five hour long trial, Scholl and Hans were sentenced to death by guillotine by reason of high treason. They were killed on February 23, 1943.

Scholl paid the ultimate price for her contribution to the resistance effort. By simply helping to make and distribute anti-government leaflets, she was seen as dangerous and a threat that needed to be taken down. Her option to take her resistance to the public was daring and helped to put the idea into people's minds that what the Nazis were doing was wrong. To the Nazis, nothing was more powerful than an idea, when the basis of their government was their firm belief in their own ideology. Scholl's small acts of resistance before her involvement with the White Rose Society were equally important. By keeping her hair short, she was showing individuality and resisting feminine ideals of beauty. She openly made her opinion known of her indoctrinated high school curriculum. These small acts lead to her agreeing to be a part of a much bigger form of resistance.

Another well-known act of public resistance was the Rosenstrasse protests of 1943. Throughout the war, Jews that were married to Christian, German women had been left alone. They had been "protected" by their marriages to Aryan women.<sup>37</sup> However, on the morning of February 27, 1943 in Berlin, 10,000 Jews were arrested and taken into custody by the SS.<sup>38</sup> Many of these were men married to non-Jewish

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<sup>36</sup> Vennke, *Short Life of Sophie Scholl* 166.

<sup>37</sup> Gruner, Marcum, *Sixty Years Later*, 180.

<sup>38</sup> Wolf Gruner, and Ursula Marcum. 2003. *The Factory Action and the Events at the Rosenstrasse in Berlin: Facts and Fictions About 27 February 1943: Sixty Years Later*. *Central European History*. 36, no. 2: 179-208. , 179.

women, and Mischlings<sup>39</sup>. These categories of about fifteen hundred to two thousand men were taken to a small street, Rosenstrasse, and held at the Jewish community center, where they were to be deported to concentration camps.<sup>40</sup> This was all a part of Hitler's final solution to rid Germany completely of the Jews.

Many women were not informed of what had happened to their husbands if they were not home when he was arrested. They had to rely on each other for information. On the first night of the arrests, about two hundred women gathered on Rosenstrasse to protest the arrests of their husbands. The next day and following week over six thousand women showed up to the tiny street to protest nonviolently the release of their loved ones.<sup>41</sup> They frequently shouted "We want our husbands back!", and refused to leave even when threatened. The protest surprised the Nazis, who were not used to large, negative displays of action. They attempted to close off the street and the nearby subway station. Having large numbers of people, particularly women, showing their distaste for the government was dangerous for the Nazis and their public image, which was of a united, content Germany. This was also going against one of the most important part of the Nazi party platform, racism. These women were admitting publicly that they willingly married a Jewish man, and wanted to keep him alive. This resistance was also very dangerous. One woman who attended the protest said "One has to remember that we could have been arrested...This was a real protest, of course. It was a call for help, a request for consideration. We had to be cautious"<sup>42</sup>. While shots were

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<sup>39</sup> A Mischling is what Nazis called half Jewish citizens

<sup>40</sup> Gruner, Marcum, *Sixty Years Later*, 197.

<sup>41</sup> Gruner, Marcum, *Sixty Years Later*, 181.

<sup>42</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, 231.

fired at the women, they courageously went right back to the jail within minutes. There was safety in numbers.

The SS was concerned that more public brutalities towards non-Jewish citizens would upset the people and cause them to question the regime's claim that Jews were being sent to work camps<sup>43</sup>. They arrested ten women, and ended up deporting twenty-five intermarried men without children on March 5 to strike back at the protesters. However by this time, the crowd now included those women who were not married, and the people were now growing angry. The chants now included "Murderers!". The Nazis were growing scared that they were losing control. On March 6, 1943 Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich minister of propaganda, gave orders for the release of intermarried Jews and Mischlinge as the best way to dissolve the protest<sup>44</sup>. However to the public he gave an excuse about timing. He was afraid of the protest setting off other protests, but he did not want his credibility shaken. The Nazis had to have the upper hand in all situations.

These women's public resistance resulted in the saving of their husband's lives. They also put fear into the Nazi party that a group of women, who were supposed to be quiet and compliant, could become angry and question what the government was doing to people. They were not shouting revolution, but if the protests had gone on longer, there was a fear that it could happen. Stoltzfus argues that if more people had protested the way these women did, the Nazi party would have had a harder time rounding up Jewish people and sending them to concentration camps. If a protest of six thousand

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<sup>43</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, 232.

<sup>44</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, 244.

women could cause the very sexist Nazi party to give in to their demands, what could a multi gendered, larger, non-violent group could have accomplished? These women used their words instead of violence to get their point across and succeed. In 1944 Adolf Hitler was quoted as saying “Women’s political hatred is extremely dangerous”<sup>45</sup>. He said this knowing that women in Germany were choosing to try and keep their families together instead of calling for the collapse of the government<sup>46</sup>. Hitler supported Goebbels when he refused to cut women’s cigarette rations in order to increase those for the men on the war front. To bring to the attention of the most powerful man in the country that women were a group not to be ignored, is quite the accomplishment.

Scholl and the women of the Rosenstrasse protest group resisted in ways that involved large groups of people. They weren’t working alone to get their ideas across to people. While Scholl tried to hide her identity from the Nazi party, the women of the Rosenstrasse did not. Two different ways of public protesting, yet both trying to get the same point across that not everyone would stand by while injustice was being served.

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<sup>45</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, 237.

## **Private Sphere**

Women who resisted in the private sphere had to be much more secretive in what they were doing to defy their government. The private sphere is one in which women had more freedom to be themselves. This includes their home life, and personal relationships. If found out they would be punished in ways ranging from work camps to immediate death. No matter how slight the infraction, the Third Reich would make sure punishment was swift, ensuring that others would not follow in their footsteps. However, many women were willing to take the risk. The multiple acts of defiance all made a difference in the resistance effort against the Nazis, no matter how small. Resistance can come in two forms, psychological and physical. Even simply thinking anti-Nazi thoughts is resistance in a society that was being taught exactly what to think through party ideology. For many of the women resisters, a personal connection and selflessness was a driving force to help others. Having Jewish friends gave many the strength to fight on. They had a strong sense of what was right and wrong, and they felt what the Third Reich was attempting to do went against their moral code. Another common thread among resisters was growing up in a household that was anti-Third Reich. Seeing someone they trusted completely such as a parent go against the government had a profound effect on children.

Just by talking back to Nazi officers or dropping bread where Jews could pick it up, were tiny acts that added up. Other small acts that added up were women carrying two shopping bags so they could avoid having to give the “Heil Hitler” salute<sup>47</sup>. Such a small act of defiance, yet a large one in their mental state. Listening to Allied radio

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<sup>47</sup> Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 109.

frequencies was another form of resistance that could be done from the privacy of one's home. Reluctantly hanging the Swastika flag is also a small act, but a mighty one. Knowing mentally that they were resisting gives a sense of freedom in a harshly closed off world during war time.

Some women worked on their own in the resistance movement without help from men, but for some women their contribution was helping men in their resistance efforts. Freya von Moltke's husband was part of a resistance group called "Kreisauer Kreis" located in Silensa, Germany<sup>48</sup>. Von Moltke and her husband Helmut were upset with what was happening with the Nazis. They had numerous Jewish friends, and did not consider them to be inferior. She said "they [Jewish friends] were human beings like us, and the treatment contradicted what we thought civilization stood for...we had personal ties to Jewish human beings. Many Germans did not."<sup>49</sup> Having personal ties made it easier for von Moltke and Helmut to want to fight back.

Helmut von Moltke was a founding member of the Kreisau Circle. Members met and discussed a need for a society without a dictatorship, and what they could do to help other resistance groups. It was a blend of socialists and capitalists, as well as Protestants and Catholics.<sup>50</sup> They also helped many Jews get out of Germany early on.<sup>51</sup> Helmut von Moltke had contacts in American and in the United Kingdom, where the von Moltkes helped Jews escape to as early as 1934. In 1939 Helmut von Moltke

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<sup>48</sup> Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, (1994; Rutgers University Press), 245.

<sup>49</sup> Owings, *Frauen*, 249.

<sup>50</sup> Owings, *Frauen*, 254

<sup>51</sup> Owings, *Frauen*, 245.

traveled to London and committed espionage by telling the British Parliament what Hitler was planning to do.

While he was gone, Freya von Moltke was in charge of making sure the secret meetings on their estate remained unknown to the outside world. While Helmut was traveling the couple corresponded through letters, which would have been deadly had they been intercepted by the Nazi Party. Freya Von Moltke kept him updated on meetings and what was happening on their farm.<sup>52</sup> Not far from their farm was a work camp, the lower end of concentration camps. At these camps people were not exterminated, but worked for the state by farming and other miscellaneous tasks. German citizens were forbidden from having any contact with these people, but Freya von Moltke and her sister in law Asta would sometimes “accidentally” drop bread or food while passing by.<sup>53</sup>

While the Kreisau Circle was more of an intellectual meeting group, than a forceful resistance group, being able to risk being committed of treason for even writing down their thoughts of a democracy was brave. Even getting a few Jews out of Germany before Hitler started rounding up the Jewish people made a difference in the lives of the few. For Freya von Moltke, keeping a large secret of her husbands and never turning him in was treason as well. She was aware of his dealings with the British government and encouraged him. While many criticized the Kriseau group for being pro active enough saying “We have to kill Hitler and it’s all the same what you think besides

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<sup>52</sup> Owings, Frauen,254.

<sup>53</sup> Owings, Frauen, 257.

that. [Your plan] is much too theoretical. It won't work"<sup>54</sup>. Freya von Moltke felt there was room for theory as well as an assassination. No matter the gender, symbolic and psychological resistance efforts were imperative to the movement against the Nazi Party. For Freya von Moltke, her limited position in society as a mother and housewife had the Nazi party viewing her as simply a breeder for the next generation. Thinking for herself was quite radical.

Helmut von Moltke was eventually arrested when a fellow member of the circle was arrested and gave up his name. His wife was allowed visits to the prison an hour away from Berlin. While there Helmut gave her instructions on who to warn of upcoming Nazi arrests.<sup>55</sup> Her warnings helped give people time to run away to Switzerland. They had a code within letters to keep Freya von Moltke updated on what Helmut's situation was. When she was allowed visits she helped Helmut von Moltke and other prisoners create a defense and smuggle in information from the outside resistance force.<sup>56</sup> Freya Von Moltke had a particularly dangerous mission in which she was sent by her husband to meet with Heinrich Himmler's second in command, Heinrich Muller, to help convince him that Helmut had nothing to do with the assassination attempt on Hitler's life. The Third Reich was convinced that even though Helmut was in jail at the time, he had ties to the attack on Hitler. Freya Von Moltke met with Muller, and said that Muller criticized her husband, yet praised her, and even invited her back to join the Nazi party after "everything was over".<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Owings, Frauen, 255.

<sup>55</sup> Owings, Frauen, 260.

<sup>56</sup> Owings, Frauen, 263.

<sup>57</sup> Alison Owings, Frauen, 263.

Von Moltke said “They offered money, maintenance, to many wives because they actually respected them for having the courage to be against them. They wanted to win over the wives and above all to make the children Nazis.”<sup>58</sup> The Third Reich was concerned with what women thought of them because they naturally assumed a good German wife would supply them with strong German children and have a support system for their husbands, even if he was wrong. Their main concern was for the children who would grow up to be a strong German nation and continue their dominance. If women started teaching their children to go against state law, the Third Reich would have a large problem on their hands. The Nazis felt if Helmut was out of the way, Freya von Moltke and her two children would be easily swayed into joining them if they gave her money, even though Freya and Helmut von Moltke were wealthy anyway. They were not about to arrest her even though they were aware she was helping her husband, a traitor to Germany and the Nazi party. Unfortunately Helmut was killed in January of 1945. After his death von Moltke took her sons to South Africa, and eventually Vermont where she became a United States citizen.

Freya von Moltke’s contributions to resistance were all in secret, and with the support of her husband. Starting off by simply keeping quiet about the resistance group meetings on her farm and dropping bread close to a work camp and working up to passing on secret messages and information for and to other resistance group members and even speaking to a high ranking official in order to get her husband out of jail. Von Moltke’s might not have changed the Nazi Party, but for the lives she helped save or make a difference in, they mattered. Without her silence and willingness to have

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<sup>58</sup> Owings, Frauen, 263.

a resistance party in her home, the Kreisau Circle couldn't have survived. Like Scholl and the Rosenstrasse protesters, she believed in what she was doing and danger never stopped her.

Single women in World War II were also capable of making a difference from their home without the support of others. Erna Dubnack was twenty-six years old, a Christian, and lived in Berlin in 1935, right around the time anti-Semitism was starting to be spread more heavily by the Third Reich. Dubnack's best friend, Hildegard Naumann, was an intellectual librarian, and also Jewish. In 1935 the Nuremberg race laws were put into effect, banning friendships between Jews and Christians.<sup>59</sup> This did not stop their friendship, although they had to be careful in public, and avoid certain parades and demonstrations going on in Berlin at the time. A simple friendship had now taken the shape of resistance now. The mentality of resistance was firm within both women. They discussed immigrating to Canada, but Dubnack was afraid to leave her family behind, and Hilde could not get the paperwork necessary to leave the country. They both knew the risk of continuing their friendship, but never questioned what they were doing. Erna's husband was drafted in 1942, leaving her home with a small child, while she was required to keep working. Nazis ordered women to keep working unless they had two small children.<sup>60</sup> In January of 1943, Naumann's sister and mother were taken in the middle of the day by the Nazi Officers, and she moved in with Dubnack and her son.

While in hiding, Naumann felt a sense of freedom, and walked around without her required Jude star, but tried not to bring any attention to herself. She rarely left

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<sup>59</sup> Owings, Frauen, 434.

<sup>60</sup> Owings, Frauen, 437.

home during the day, taking care of Dubnack's son for her. There was the fear that a small child could be the demise of all of them, but Dubnack's son Peter never gave them away. As the war went on, Naumann didn't dare leave the home, and Dubnack had to hide her from the neighbors in her apartment complex. The ration cards Dubnack received during the war were sparse, and feeding three instead of two proved difficult. Dubnack and Naumann both went hungry many nights in order to feed Peter. After two SS officers moved into the women's apartment complex and started to take notice that Naumann might not be Christian, Dubnack lied to a friend saying Naumann was widowed and her home had been bombed and needed a place to stay. She was given a room, and Dubnack visited every day, ensuring her safety by bringing food. Had Dubnack been caught, she and Peter would have been sent to the concentration camps. But when asked about the dangers, Dubnack said "I didn't concern myself with it at all."<sup>61</sup> She added that "Above all, we were young".<sup>62</sup> Knowing that she was keeping her friend safe from death was far more of a comfort than to think about what would happen if they were found out. Many women resisters just did not concern themselves with the danger. Freya von Moltke, Sophie Scholl, and the Rosenstrasse protests also understood the dangers of what she was doing yet, none of them stopped what they were doing in the name of fear.

Dubnack's family eventually found out Hilde was staying with her, but said nothing. Her father was a member of the SPD, Germany's working class party, and opposed Hitler's rule from the beginning. Having a family that does not support the Nazi party is a commonality among many women who resisted, such as Sophie Scholl and

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<sup>61</sup> Owings, Frauen, 438.

<sup>62</sup> Owings, Frauen, 438.

Emilie Schindler. When important authority figures go against what is popular, it puts the mentality of resistance was in her head before she had to make some serious decisions. She had no support system outside of Naumann, and she kept her friend's existence in her home a secret from her husband who was away fighting in Russia. Naumann survived the war, but was killed shortly after the war ended by an Allied car while going to visit her boyfriend at night, a man not willing to take the risk Dubnack was.<sup>63</sup> Offering to shelter a friend and risking her life as well as her son's, was a private resistance, but no less important than the men who tried to assassinate Hitler.

Some women in Nazi Germany, while helping their husbands, ended up taking the cause for themselves. Emilie Schindler's husband, Oskar Schindler is well known for saving the lives of Jews in his factory during World War II. Emilie's contribution to the resistance effort have consistently been overshadowed by her husband. In 1942 Oskar Schindler was talked into buying The Enamelware Factory in Cracow. The factory workers were Jewish from the Krakow Ghetto. Every day the SS was on site at the factory making sure things were running smoothly, and to supervise the Jewish workers. While Schindler was forbidden to have contact with the workers, this did not stop her from trying to help in any way that she could. When a young, unmarried girl confided in Schindler that she was pregnant and knew that serious consequences faced her if her secret got out, Schindler convinced a local doctor to give the girl an abortion. Schindler said that "Even though I have always been against abortion, I thought then that there was no other possible solution"<sup>64</sup> The girl would have been seen as an unfit worker and

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<sup>63</sup> Owings, Frauen, 449.

<sup>64</sup> Emilie Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, (1996, W.W. Norton & Company), 57.

killed. Anyone deemed as unfit to work was exterminated.<sup>65</sup> When a worker's glasses broke, Schindler made sure he got a new pair quickly. Schindler was not afraid to stand up to SS officers either. The everyday life problems of broken glasses or unplanned pregnancies could be deadly for factory workers and solutions were vital. When Emilie Schindler forced one of the Nazi Officer's dogs that was attacking someone to the side, she was reprimanded harshly. Her reply was "If you take one more step, I will show you exactly who I am"<sup>66</sup>. For anyone to say this to a member of the Third Reich, let alone a woman, was incredibly courageous.

As the continued, and The Final Solution of exterminating all the Jewish people instead of continuing to abuse them in concentration camps was being put into action, the Nazi Party was growing weary of Oskar using Jewish workers for labor. Oskar was forced to pay large sums of money and give "gifts" such as diamonds, caviar, cigarettes, or cognac in order to keep their workers.<sup>67</sup> These gifts were only sold on the black market and very difficult to come by. In order operating the factory, a permit from the local quartermaster was required, as well a list of the thirteen hundred names of workers. Since there was a very anti-Semitic attitude at the time, this would be difficult. However, Schindler offered to go for her husband and negotiate for a permit. When she got there, it turned out the quartermaster was an of Schindler's swimming instructor from her childhood. He readily turned over the permit to her, in turn saving thirteen hundred Jewish lives.

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<sup>65</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 57.

<sup>66</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 59.

<sup>67</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 61.

In the spring of 1944, a train that was supposed to be delivering the wives of the workers in Krakow from did not arrive, and was instead delivered to Auschwitz. Schindler and her husband had a female friend go directly to Auschwitz and assist in getting the women out of there and back to the factory. When they returned Schindler assigned herself the daunting task of restoring them back to health by giving them extra food and getting them medication.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the Jewish workers, there were a few Czech and Polish workers at the factory. They were given less food rations by the Germans because they were not doing as much heavy lifting. Schindler made sure to try and slip them extra food when the SS officers were out of sight<sup>69</sup>. Schindler and her husband also had to be very careful of Typhus. They took extra care to boil all of the workers clothing in order to avoid a sickness that could close the factory.<sup>70</sup>

Noticing that a lack of food was causing emaciation among the workers, Schindler decided to take matters into her own hands. Not far from the factory was a mill owned by an aristocratic woman, Frau von Daubek. Emilie Schindler requested a meeting with von Daubek, where she begged for extra grain for the Jewish workers.<sup>71</sup> This was risky, because allowing someone outside of her spouse to know that she was trying to help out Jewish workers could mean death. Luckily von Daubek was sympathetic to her cause, and allowed Schindler to take whatever she needed. One night when Oskar was away on a business trip, there was a knock on the door. A man in charge of transporting Jews from the concentration camp to outside mines had two hundred and fifty Jewish people waiting wagons. While en route to the mine,

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<sup>68</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 69.

<sup>69</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 85.

<sup>70</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 84.

<sup>71</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 86.

officials changed their minds about needing more workers. The man begged Schindler to accept the workers into the Brunnlitz factory. If she turned them away, all of them would be shot<sup>72</sup>. Schindler quickly made a phone call to Oskar, and then accepted all two hundred and fifty of them. After they arrived, the workers were near death.

Schindler worked around the clock to help get them healthy. This required a lot of spoon feeding and sneaking medicine in to them. After their health was restored, they went to work in the factory.

In May of 1945 World War II ended. All of the Jewish factory workers were free to go as they pleased. Once word had gotten out that the Schindlers had worked to protect Jews and were praised by the Americans, they were seen as traitors to the German people and they made the decision to move to Argentina. They received a thousand German marks for their war efforts in keeping the factories open. Emilie's resistance to the Third Reich made a difference to the thirteen hundred people she helped save. While her husband is mostly credited with the resistance work, he never could have succeeded without the help of his wife. Schindler risked her life every day, going above and beyond to help Jewish workers stay alive and out of concentration camps. She resisted even when SS officers were in her factories daily watching her and could kill her at a moment's notice did they know what she was really doing. Her private resistance saved thirteen hundred people from death. While it was not simply keeping the factory open for Jews to work, it also involved their day to day activities such as fixing their glasses and making sure they received enough to eat. Keeping up a normal day to day lifestyle was key to survival and a lot of Emilie Schindler's resistance

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<sup>72</sup> Schindler, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*, 90.

revolved around it. This was also the case with Dubnack, while keeping her best friend alive and safe from the Nazis was a day to day upkeep. This daily resistance pounded into their heads that their acts were important and now a large part of their life.

While these three women's contributions to resistance were larger and long term, there were also small, everyday things that added up. Just by talking back to Nazi officers like Emilie Schindler, or dropping bread where Jews could pick it up like Freya von Moltke, were tiny acts that added up. Day to day acts were key in the resistance movement. For women hiding Jews like Dubnack, keeping up with the normal activities such as finding enough food and shelter for one more person in their household became a challenge, but one that was taken on. Women had the disadvantage of a constrained social and home environment due to their government, but they chose to see past it and work it to their advantage while resisting using physical or psychological tactics.

## **Conclusion**

For women in Nazi Germany, choosing to take part in resistance no matter how large or small was a courageous act. While their government viewed them primarily as a sort of breeding stock for the next aryan generation, select females were empowered enough to rise above their limited position in society and act out against their fascist government. For most women in Germany it was the small day to day acts of resistance that were just as powerful as the larger and more public acts. While hiding a Jewish friend in her spare bedroom was a large act, it was the daily grind of keeping up with making sure no one found out Dubnack was hiding someone and making sure there was enough food to go around. For Freya von Moltke it was allowing a secret society to meet in her living room and allow it to continue after her husband was imprisoned. Emilie Schindler had the daunting task of making sure nothing happened to the Jewish workers in her husband's factory and keeping them safe on a daily basis. All of these acts were just as important as the Rosenstrasse protest of women showing they would not back down and White Rose Society getting out the anti-Nazi message to the public.

The female contribution to the World War II resistance movement has continually been ignored in favor of men's, but when brought to attention what they achieved was monumental. Lives were saved, but what was also important was not allowing the Nazi Party to run their lives inside and out. While they were forced to follow the law in the outside world, their private lives were their own. They still achieved a level of freedom mentally. Females didn't have to save lives in order to take part in the resistance and

make a difference. The Nazi ideology focused heavily on influencing the minds of the people in Germany, and to push against that was a great feat. Resistance can be used as a political tool, but many of these women used it as a tool of identity. They used it to identify as a Jewish supporter or as Anti-Nazi, or even simply as someone willing to do the right thing when no one else will. Their contributions helped shape their own lives as well as make history and they should not be overlooked in Germany's history.

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