

THE HOME FRONT

WORLD WAR II DAILY CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN IN HITLER'S EUROPE TO THE GOLDEN STATE

Jennifer L. Keil



Frau Scholtz-Klink with a group of her staff leaders. Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938), 79.

Society typically associates wartime memories with battlefield experiences, but women endured an entirely different dimension of the war—the home front. Jennifer Keil argues oral histories reveal women faced another “home front.” Food shortages, foreign soldiers in their own homes, and constantly vulnerability to air raids transformed women’s lives. International governments reinforced traditional gender roles, encouraging women to embrace the private sphere. In postwar consumer society, mechanisms of “liberation” such as appliances appeared disguised as time-saving devices for domestic duties. Yet these objects reaffirmed old ideologies and increased the workload capability of women.

Society typically associates wartime memories with battlefield experiences, but women endured an entirely different dimension of the war—the home front. During World War II, women's lives became disrupted by food shortages, obligatory home economics training, housing foreign soldiers in their own homes, and constantly being vulnerable to air raids. Society expected women to maintain their gender roles of cooking, cleaning, and childcare despite the wartime conditions. The bombing raids and movement of troops caused families to lose their homes. Even in these dire circumstances, women continued to provide stability by creating an impromptu home-like atmosphere. German interviewee Margo Delp shared,

I think it was very hard for the women especially if they had kids. First of all the living conditions were so bad and they lived wherever they could live. There was no place. It was very, very hard for the women I am sure. Food, then secondary, we didn't have any food. We were cut off from everything and all the other nations. [We] just [ate] what we had in Germany and in our fields. That was hard. That was really hard.¹

After the war, traditional homemaking roles remained largely unquestioned both in Europe and in the United States. Having spent their formative years under European fascism, these women often viewed California as a land of abundance and opportunity. However, multinational gender expectations reinforced a woman's role in the private sphere. Within their new homes in the US, females preserved part of their culture with cuisine and purchasing habits. In postwar-consumer society, mechanisms of "liberation"—such as appliances—appeared disguised as time-saving devices for domestic duties. Yet, these objects reaffirmed old ideologies and increased the workload capability of women.

Analyses of women contribute valuable insight into daily living. Studying the media does not provide a sufficient source to gather an every-

¹ Margo Delp, interview by Jennifer Keil, April 11, 2013, OH 5180, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

day individual's perspective. As historian Joanne Meyerowitz notes,

Many historians today adopt a different approach in which mass culture is neither wholly monolithic nor unrelentingly repressive. In this view, mass culture is rife with contradictions, ambivalence, and competing voices. We no longer assume that any text has a single, fixed meaning for all readers, and we sometimes find within the mass media subversive, as well as repressive, potential.²

However, oral histories reveal different viewpoints and validate individuals. Alessandro Portelli states, "Interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events; they always cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic classes."³ German interviewee Edith Erickson illustrated this point by directly connecting the war with her home experiences. She stated:

I recall when the war started. I was sitting in our kitchen. My mother insisted that I had to drink the warm milk and I was sort of kneeling at the table. I said, "I'm not drinking this. I can't drink this. It's yucky; it has the skin on top." She said, "You're going to sit here and drink this milk. You can't get up." She had the radio on and got suddenly very upset and said, "The war has started. The war has started." I always connect drinking milk with the war.⁴

Sometimes an individual will summarize the overall feelings of a group. Mass-Observation, a British volunteer group that consulted everyday residents with questionnaires and assigned a Birmingham correspondent named Alice Bridges for research. She recalled, "Everyone I have met since our three night bombardment all had the same expression on their lips—namely, 'Wasn't it awful?'

² Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 231.

³ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 67.

⁴ Edith Erickson, interview by Jennifer Keil, March 27, 2013OH 5179, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

A strained looking-ahead expression as much as to say, ‘Will it be my turn next?’”⁵

This impending fear interrupted daily life. Alice also shared, “Always I like everything ready to go straight down to the shelter if there is a warning. If there is a meal imminent I lay it on the tray as I prepare it.”⁶ Priscilla Feare, a British Mass-Observer who collected wartime experience data, relayed the conditions for women in December 1940. She insisted, “The material, ever-present things of life—prices, blackout, running a home, evacuating her children, worrying about her men—these things are the first impacts of war.”⁷ Priscilla described the household environment, which gave women “constant worry as to how to make ends meet: economic worries about prices, wages, shopping, psychological anxieties about blackout, parting from husbands and children.”⁸ Women of this era possessed international pressure to retain their traditional homemaking roles. These daily narratives enrich the oral history collections related to commonplace events. Oral historian Valerie Yow states, “Women could recall the dishes they prepared for a Sunday dinner as well as the things the family ate during the week ... These were details of daily life—humdrum, yes, but important to survival.”⁹ Without their stories, the historical record would remain incomplete.

Nazi Germany’s Ideals for Women

Nazi Germany created the Mother Service Department in 1934 to monitor and aid women with the central roles of motherhood.¹⁰ The Bu-

⁵ Dorothy Sheridan, ed., *Wartime Women: An Anthology of Women’s Wartime Writing for Mass-Observation 1937-45* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 93.

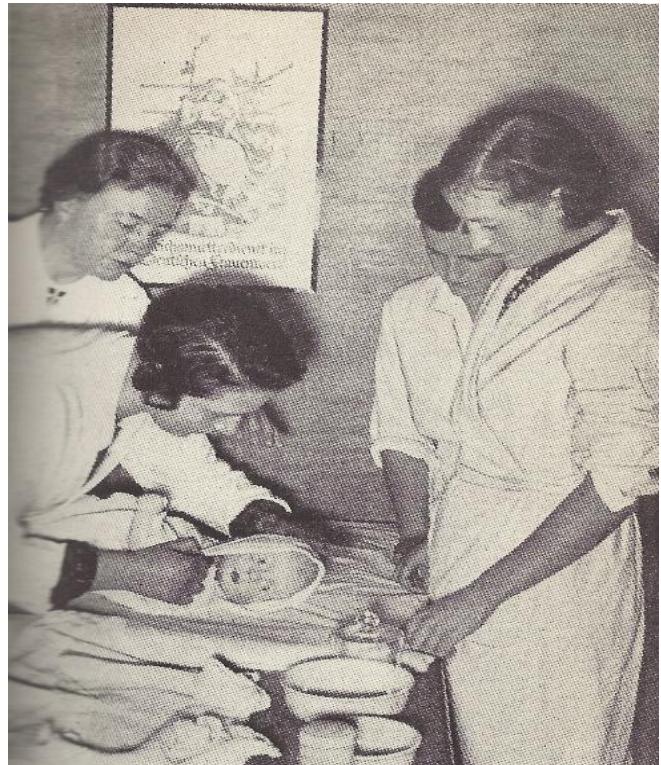
⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2005), 42.

¹⁰ Kiara Lönnies, “Reichsmutterhelfsamt-Reichsmütterdienst” *Die Ärztin* 10, no. 2 (February 1934): 33-38, in Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938), 73; W. Frick, “Runderlass des Reichs und Preussischen Ministers des Innern über Mutterschulung des Reichsmütterdienst im



Instruction in child care by the Mother Service. Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938), 131.

reau of Women’s Affairs proclaimed in April 1934, “We must make clear to the German women that the renunciation of a vocation, of self-determination and the larger freedom is no loss when she takes over the duties of wife and mother which are more important for society at large.”¹¹ Poetry posted in Berlin reinforced this ideology: “To the Employed Woman ... A job will not bring happiness near, the home alone is your proper sphere.”¹²

Mothering-schools developed to “train mothers to be physically and mentally competent and aware of the duty and dignity of motherhood; teach them care and training of children, make them adequate to meet household problems.” The adjacent caption reads, “Instruction in Child-care

Deutschen Frauenwerk, vol. 1, Feb. 1935,” *Reichsgesundheitsblatt* 10, no. 12 (March 1935), in Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 73.

¹¹ Käthe Raumer, “Frauenarbeit-Frauenbestimmung,” *Informationsdienst* (April 1934), in Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 210.

¹² Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 211.



Edith Erickson and her mother in Germany, circa 1938.
Photograph, c. 1938, in Edith Erickson, interview by Jennifer Keil, March 27, 2013, OH 5179, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

by the Mother Service.” This demonstrates one of the many courses provided at the motherhood schools. By 1936, the state established nearly 150 such schools. The curriculum consisted of courses requiring “about twenty-four hours each in (1) household administration, including cooking and sewing, (2) hygiene, including care of infants and general nursing, [and] (3) education, including child training, folk customs, and homemaking.”¹³ German authorities found it necessary for potential SS wives to complete this household education before approved the marriage.

Based on participant reports, about a million women went through womanhood course-training in the first three years of the program’s implementation.¹⁴ An American woman visited one of the Nazi teaching facilities in Berlin. In her notebook, she wrote, “We then went into the kitchen to see where mothers are taught cooking

and diet-making for babies. There too were the old coal stove and the modern electric range. I must open the door and look into the wonderful electric refrigerator. I forbore to mention that such electric refrigerators were common in practically every modern apartment in America.”¹⁵ When asked about these mothering schools, German interviewee Gisela Bandurraga commented, “Later on when Hitler came in, he told them how to mother.”¹⁶ Germany enforced these homemaking skills through cultural tradition and state-education training.

Nazi officials asked Gertrud Scholtz-Klink to create “a sort of ladies’ auxiliary” for the Party in which she stated the essential duties of a patriotic mother and wife.¹⁷ “Members of her staff refer to her as the supreme head of all the women’s organizations including the Frauenwerk, the Woman’s League of the Red Cross, the Woman’s Bureau in the Labor Front and the Woman’s Labor Service.”¹⁸ According to American historian Mary Beard, by 1941, Nazi women’s social leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink “was governing some thirty million German women and tightening her grip on some twenty million other women in the lands occupied by German troops.”¹⁹ Scholtz-Klink stated, “You have to start influencing women in their daily lives. And women still live for their families, now just like then. You young women just don’t know what it means to create an entirely female world.”²⁰ Scholtz-Klink further propelled this message during a Party rally when she stated, “Though our weapon be but a wooden spoon, it must become as powerful as other weapons.”²¹ This rhetoric matched the public prose in Berlin—

¹⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶ Gisela Bandurraga, interview by Jennifer Keil, March 6, 2013, OH 5061.1, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

¹⁷ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 177.

¹⁹ Mary Beard, *Woman as a Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Collier, 1971), 23.

²⁰ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxv.

²¹ Ibid.



Margo Delp with her brother, Horst, and mother in Germany, 1942. Photograph, c. 1942, in Margo Delp, interview by Jennifer Keil, April 11, 2013, OH 5180, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

addressed “To German Girls—to “Grab pot, broom, and pan, So all the sooner get a man.”²²

German homemaker Gisela Bandurraga expressed this message in her own words when she said, “In those days women were there to wash and cook for their husbands. The husband was there to earn a living and came home for a good meal.”²³ Edith Erickson, also from Germany, thought her mother took child-caring courses. Erickson shared how home economics integrated into her elementary school curriculum and how her household trained future homemakers.

Maybe it was part of the elementary school where young girls, age thirteen and fourteen, were then sent into households where the woman knew how to cook and how to be a good housekeeper. They had to learn housekeeping there. We always

had somebody who learned to cook in our household and take care of a house.²⁴

Margo Delp also recalled how she received this homemaking training: “My grandma crocheted. We learned in school. Every week for an hour or two you’d do it at home if it’s cooking, sewing, crocheting, or knitting. You have to do something you would do in the home life as a mother.”²⁵ When asked how she reacted to this instruction, Margo responded she enjoyed this training since she already aided her mother at home with similar tasks.²⁶ Multi-generational convictions transmitted these gender specific tasks. The courses reinforced this ideology in practicing household chores. However, not all individuals embraced this training. When asked if she received homemaking instruction at school, Juliane Hodjera, a German from Sudenland, shared that “there were some that we were such snobs in our high school and [we thought we] were better people. You’re right; we called these places where they could learn homemaking at the wooden spoon academy, *Kochlöffeleakademie*. That was quite a derogatory term. We thought we were the elite [laughter].”²⁷

Many women accepted their position in the private sphere and embraced homemaking ideology. Juliane Hodjera recalled German mothering propaganda: “That was very much emphasized, the German mother. Motherhood was glorified. That was the idea to have families. Give Hitler some children.”²⁸ Women who bore children under the Nazi regime received the cross of honor for motherhood, called the *Mutterkreuz*. During Erickson’s childhood, her best friend’s father “was a big Nazi. They had one child after another. She got the *Mutterkreuz*, the cross for mothers. I’m sure she was trained.”²⁹ Juliane Hodjera recalled, “I know of some grandmothers who got the so

²⁴ Edith Erickson, interview by Jennifer Keil, March 27, 2013, OH 5179, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

²⁵ Delp, interview by Keil., April 11, 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Juliane Hodjera, interview by Jennifer Keil, May 8, 2013, OH 5181, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

²² Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 211.

²³ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, March 6, 2013.

called Mutterkreuz that was like a medal for having ten or eleven children [laughter]. That was very much emphasized. The German women stayed in the home and was [sic] just bringing up children.”³⁰

Bandurraga stated, “In Germany ... you were a work horse and served the husband. In short terms, you did your thing as a wife and a mother and had children for your husband. You wash the dishes for him, you cooked for him, you cut the firewood, and a few other things.”³¹ Women maintained a social responsibility during war to challenge their husband’s activity when they returned from assignment. Rather, they created a relaxing, pleasurable home that did not question the heinous wartime crimes. As historian Claudia Koonz argues, “Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and millions of followers created a social side of tyranny. Busily administering welfare services, educational programs, leisure activities, ideological indoctrination, and consumer organizations, Nazi women mended while Nazi men marched.”³²

Loss of Status

For those European females who migrated to the US, the transition proved quite challenging. German-Jewish woman Hertha Narthorff’s lifestyle changed radically different in America. As a physician in Germany, she earned financial accessibility to servants. In a diary entry dated 14 November 1938, she writes, “The cook was in the kitchen, my housekeeper had gone out for an hour to do errands.”³³ Hertha’s move to America led to her loss of practice. A New-York social worker scolded her by stating,

Furniture, housewares—what’s the point? You’re too attached to your fancy lifestyle and elegant apartment in Germany! You don’t need them here. You want to be a doctor again? Get that crazy idea out of your head. We have enough doctors here, we don’t want any more, and especially

not any lady doctors. Your husband and you should take a job as domestic housekeepers. That way you’ll have a roof over your heads, some food in your stomachs, and on top of it you’ll have a salary and can start saving.³⁴

Her diary entry from 7 December 1941 explains her personal frustrations with not being able to perform her medical profession in America. She claims,

A small French woman, a dermatologist, visits us from time to time so that my husband can explain a few things about the state board exam. With the patience of an angel he tries to teach this dull-witted woman while I, busy with the laundry in the bathroom, turn on the water as loudly as possible. No, I don’t want to hear anything, I don’t want to learn anything if one forbids me.³⁵

Hertha not only lost her career status, but performed degrading chores for others, as well as her own household. On December 2, 1942, she wrote, “In addition to my domestic work, helping out in my husband’s growing practice, and part-time jobs—at the moment I’m working nights taking care of an invalid.” America did not provide the economic and social freedom it promoted internationally; rather, it reinforced the same rigid gender roles of female homemaking. Hertha mentioned “the once-so-finely manicured surgeon’s hands. What a sight they are now—coarse, red, worn out, witness to the labor I’ve done for my loved ones.”³⁶

Bandurraga worked as press secretary for Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the first postwar chancellor of West Germany and former mayor of Cologne; the Nazis imprisoned by him during the war. Yet Bandurraga always dreamed about “American freedom.” She recalled, “Well, for me there was a lot of anxiety involved because I did not know how life would be here when you were a young mother with a small child. Your husband was working, but with only one income like normal people actually have. I didn’t know if it

³⁰ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

³¹ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, March 6, 2013.

³² Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, xxxii.

³³ Mark Anderson, ed., *Hitler’s Exiles: Personal Stories of the Flight from Nazi Germany to America* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 73.

³⁴ Ibid., 217.

³⁵ Ibid., 302.

³⁶ Ibid., 307, 309.

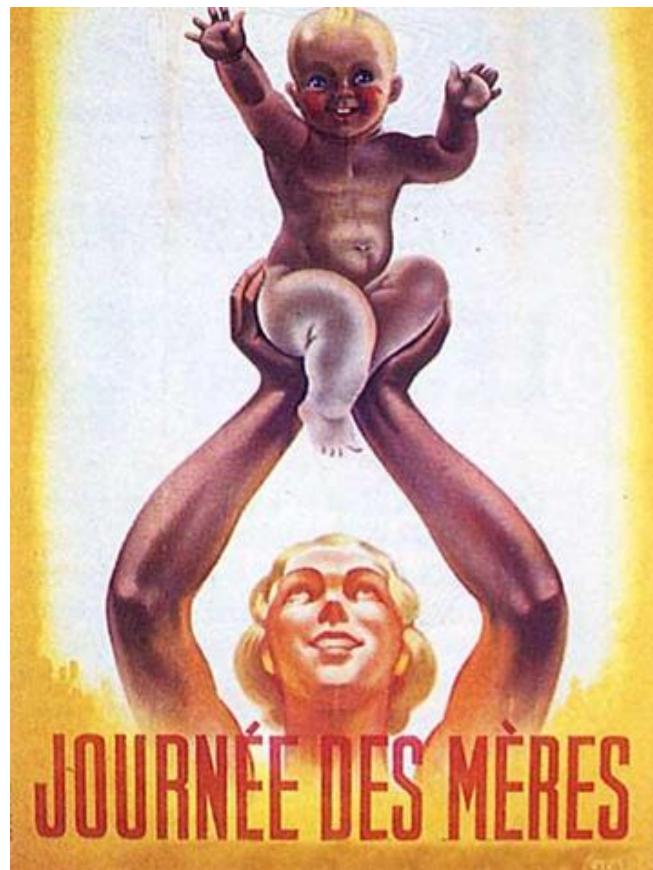
worked liked this and ... I left [Germany] with a salary that's unspeakable. It involved a lot of anxiety.”³⁷ Bandurraga said she left her financially secure journalism position in order to establish a more liberating life in California. Yet, her daily conditions as wife and mother mimic the same lifestyle she experienced at home in Germany.

Margo Delp served as a professionally trained beautician in Germany. She wanted to continue this career in America, but no one honored her license. Margo shared, “No, I couldn’t because they wouldn’t let me. I would have had to make a new license and I wanted to go so bad that I could work as a beautician, but I had two little kids and I was alone. I was at home for eight years. Those eight years that I was alone, I had to get a job.”³⁸ Rather than a source of liberation, American culture seemed more repressive than European culture by “sentencing” her to an everyday life of a housewife.

Contrary to conditions for women who left for America, Russian aristocrat Marie Vassiltchikov experienced World War II in Berlin with domestic help. She wrote about her experiences in a diary dated from 1940 to 1945. As a wealthy woman, she could afford a housekeeper during the war. On November 20, 1941, she wrote, “I live alone, except for a little Italian maid called Bettina, who comes up from the village every morning to clean up and to prepare my breakfast and run my bath.”³⁹ Those with access to wealth did not perform domestic work since it appeared demeaning and time consuming. In contrast to Vassiltchikov’s European experience, Narthoff, Delp, and Bandurraga’s migrant journey to America caused their loss of careers and status.

The Vichy Regime’s Ideals of Women

Similar to Nazi Germany, the French Vichy government promoted the ideal woman who embraced her traditional role as homemaker. As European sociologist Francine Muel-Dreyfus



Mother's Day, Sunday, May 31, poster from Secretariat d'Etat à la Famille et à la Santé. Pierre Philippe Grach, artist, "Journée des mères," poster (Paris : Office de Publicité Générale, 1942).

notes, “The establishment of the family as one of the key elements of the new French State was, inseparably, a process of female subjection that inflicted on women a subordinated identity restricted to the domestic sphere.”⁴⁰ *L'Actualité sociale* created “ninety-nine laws, decrees, [and] orders concerning the Family” from October 1940 to December 1941. In order to reinforce these family values, France passed another law on July 23, 1942, related to “the abandonment of the family, which extended this notion well beyond financial abandonment and made abandonment of the conjugal home for more than two months a criminal offense subject to imprisonment of from three months to one year.”⁴¹ Although the Vichy regime

³⁷ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, March 6, 2013.

³⁸ Delp, interview by Keil, OH 5180, April 11, 2013.

³⁹ Marie Vassiltchikov, *Berlin Diaries: 1940-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 60.

⁴⁰ Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 173.

⁴¹ Ibid., 177, 181.

exercised its political and social power over a shorter time-frame than Nazi Germany, its gendered ideology permeated and transformed everyday life.

Young French girls needed specific curriculum to prepare them as homemakers. The Carcopino Decree passed on August 15, 1941. Article 4 states, “the education of girls comprises special disciplines that conform to their aptitudes and to their role: in correlation, the programs of other disciplines have been lightened.” Administrators adjusted girls’ baccalaureate exams to accommodate this law. Young ladies selected music or home economics courses as an elective while boys needed to take an additional math portion. The Carcopino Decree declares, “Girls will receive a special education suited to their dispositions and to their role that gives special attention to sewing, cooking, hygiene, and child care.”⁴² This educational regulation reinforced traditional values and reduced women’s opportunities to exit the private sphere.

Women’s education adapted to meet the cultural demand of producing homemakers. From October 1940 to June 1941, an education survey called *L’Éducation des Filles* emerged to review student education. It states, “Woman’s place is at the center and at the heart of the home. If she does not occupy this place, everything will be finished for this national renovation to which we are invited, but which we will not achieve if we do not take the means to do so. In times of crisis, citizens are conscripted.” Home economics became legally mandated on March 18, 1942. Girls needed to take courses “in all the lycées and collèges for seven years for at least one hour per week; in vocational collèges, national vocational schools, and women’s vocational business, industry, and artisanal courses, the requirement was three years on the basis of one hundred hours per year.” These women received “an apprenticeship in home-keeping and in making simple clothes and linens. Laundering and ironing. Cooking with several concepts pertaining to diet.”⁴³ The Commissariat General for the Family

spoke boldly about how to remedy the lack of preparation in order to become a future homemaker. He attributed these problems to girls’ lack of early exposure to the skill sets needed to manage a home:

What was responsible for these condoned desertions of the homemaker’s life? The almost total lack of basic actions. The thimble, the scissors, the iron, and the kitchen knife were no longer present at this age when fingers are nimble and reflexes are learned; for the love of certain tasks requires natural ease in performing them, and ease supposes a prior plasticity that little girls really only have between the ages of eleven and fifteen.⁴⁴

Young women also learned household skills by mimicking their mothers. Girls acquired these abilities in a natural environment. The French publication *Éducation* provided a forum to discuss family and school education.⁴⁵ It featured an article that recognized this learning environment: “A whole series of other apprenticeships involving domestic life succeed the apprenticeship of sweeping. That of washing laundry, when a little girl positions herself near her mother to imitate her in these delicate operations, by dipping her doll into the laundry tub herself.”⁴⁶

By contrast, in an oral history interview, French woman Michèle Cooke remarked that during her childhood, she never learned to prepare a meal—“We had a butler and a cook.”⁴⁷ This reflected her social-economic status. During the war, she still possessed access to restaurants. “When you go out for lunch, some of the big restaurants, sometimes you had a valet who parked your bicy-

Women’s education adapted to meet the cultural demand of producing homemakers.

⁴² Ibid., 232.

⁴³ Ibid., 237, 240.

⁴⁴ Stanislas de Lestapis, “Réhabilitation de l’éducation familiale et ménagère,” in Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine*, 242.

⁴⁵ Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine*, 238.

⁴⁶ “Expériences éducatives, comment s’y prend une mère de dix enfants,” in Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine*, 245.

⁴⁷ Michèle Cooke, interview by Jennifer Keil, November 15, 2012, OH 5089, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

cle. But even when you went to a restaurant, you had to give them (a) coupon because they didn't have any more food than we did. Each meal was worth so much coupon [sic] in meat, bread.”⁴⁸ When asked how she adjusted to cooking with such limited resources, she replied, “Well, I don’t know. I didn’t cook. We had a cook.”⁴⁹ This changed when she prepared herself for marriage.

To start with, my aunt owned the school of Cordon Bleu in France. When she knew that I was going to get married she told me, “You come here and I want to teach you how to at least boil an egg.” I had no idea. I was with my grandmother and never in the kitchen. I went there for 6 months and learned the basics of cooking and I kinda liked it. It was kinda fun. During home and raising kids I did the best. I had four sons. You know, cook like every woman does the best you can.⁵⁰

Ironically, it wasn’t the war, but marriage that forced her into the kitchen.

The Transitional Homemaking Experience

Women faced expectations to maintain their gender roles of cooking, cleaning, and child-care despite wartime conditions. The bombing raids and troop movements caused families to lose their homes. As a young girl, Amy Sanders experienced World War II in Antwerp, Belgium. Due to the turmoil, her family relocated to De Panne, France: “We sort of settled into a rented room with minimal cooking and shared bathroom facilities, and Mama took up housekeeping as well as she could. Little did she dream that she would have to repeat this procedure many more times.”⁵¹ Amy’s family moved to Highbury Park in London with other refugees. They “all shared the one

kitchen and bathroom on the floor … that made for close quarters and communal living, something very foreign to us.”⁵² Eventually, the Sanders moved closer to Amy’s school, settling into the Makepeace Mansions apartment homes. “I also loved the new gas heaters, easy to open windows, our private bathroom and kitchen. The smell of the new electric range, when first turned on, is still with me. I became obsessed with clean-ing that beautiful oven until it was spotless. Maybe, because Mama never asked me to help with household chores, I thought it was a fun distraction from the usual schoolwork.”⁵³

Wartime conditions challenged women’s roles as managers of their homes. Bandurraga’s mother, a German wartime homemaker, adjusted to housing soldiers in her own home; seven American GIs occupied her residence. Her family found themselves confined to the kitchen and one bedroom. During the interview, she remembered how her mother cried when the GIs used her handmade feather bed and disregarded their personal property. They became distraught at foreigners invading their home and needing to rearrange the living conditions. Bandurraga lived as a frustrated resident of her own home. She stated, “We couldn’t get out of Germany.”⁵⁴ Michéle recalled how in France, “We were very, very occupied.” A German colonel’s surgeon invaded Michéle’s basement in her city house. Oddly, in the same home, Americans hid in the attic and her grandmother did not even know.⁵⁵ These unusual living conditions caused women to lose their positions as directors of everyday activity.

As a refugee student in London, Sanders recalled that taking “home economics was a totally new experience for me.” In this particular classroom, young girls learned old methods of using appliances. “Although Mama was already using an electric iron, in class we still had to heat the heavy little black irons on top of an oven, pick them up with pads and hope they were the right tempera-

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Amy Sanders, “Oriental Rugs, Ballet Slippers, Rope Ladders, and Pillows: Childhood Memories of World War II,” in Gary Shumway, *An American Dream and Wartime Memories* (Fullerton: California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program, 1991), 5.

⁵² Ibid., 16.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ Gisela Bandurraga, interview by Jennifer Keil, October 10, 2012, OH 5061, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

⁵⁵ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

ture for ironing. We were supposed to test them by quickly touching the bottoms with a wet finger. They were reading for ironing if they sizzled.”⁵⁶ Girls also enrolled in culinary courses as part of their daily curriculum. “In cooking class, we made boring things like a tasteless beef stew consisting of bits of gristle and tired looking vegetables. With food rationing, we were lucky to get the leftover scraps that we did for classroom use.”⁵⁷ Amy desired to emulate her mother’s work and sought her mother’s approval for the new skills sets she acquired at school. She recalled how she “was terribly proud of my culinary accomplishment and rushed home to show them off to Mama.”⁵⁸

Rationing

Women experienced the home front in the kitchen. Meal preparation became extremely difficult with wartime conditions. Bandurraga remembered some of her survival strategies, such as taking potatoes from a neighbor’s field. Delp also gathered food from local fields. She recalled, “Again, I didn’t go to school but I went at six or seven o’clock in the morning we went with the streetcar out where the farmers lived and we went in the fields. I had a knapsack and went in the fields. We picked whatever we could until he came with a pitchfork and chased us off.”⁵⁹ Despite her family’s extreme change in diet due to the war, Delp helped smuggle what little food she had to Jewish neighbors. She recalled, “Evidently I was old enough to have a push buggy for dolls and my mother put food under there. We put the doll on top and went for a walk to Mrs. so and so. I went over there and we gave her food to Jewish people.”⁶⁰ Bandurraga’s mother went to a village seven miles away to barter with her husband’s former patients. They exchanged their window curtains for eggs and milk. During the interview, Gisela contrasted the rationing system in Germany to the American experience:

⁵⁶ Sanders, “Oriental Rugs,” in Shumway, *An American Dream*, 27.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.



Gisela Bandurraga and Jennifer Keil at the Old World Village in Huntington Beach, CA. Photograph, May 22, 2013, in Gisela Bandurraga, interview by Jennifer Keil, May 22, 2013, OH 5061.1, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

When I came here and I was told about the hardship of rations, I asked somebody, and she said ‘Oh, you have no idea! We couldn’t get Colombian coffee anymore. We had to drink, what coffee, maybe from Africa or something’ And to her was [sic] ration too, but I was thinking you don’t know what rationing means...

Certain commodities became difficult to find during the war. Bandurraga’s mother “was the only one who could get butter.”⁶¹ This remained a valuable wartime commodity. Michèle commented that “butter was very rare. It was one of the things we missed the most.”⁶² In France, the imports stalled and left citizens with few options.

We had coupon [sic] for food, anything that was important didn’t come. We didn’t have any coffee, we didn’t have any sugar, we didn’t have any tea. There was no coco, chocolate. All those things are imported where not there because there was no shipped [sic] going through. We coupon for everything, we had coupon for clothes.⁶³

⁶¹ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, October 10, 2012.

⁶² Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

⁶³ Ibid.

Erickson aided her mother with meal preparations. She recalled needing to collect food rations despite her extreme fatigue.

Oh yes. Well we never had enough with the rations. Since we were living up on a hill, it was hard to know sometimes when meat would be delivered, for example. So I would be sent down to stand in these long lines to get a little piece of meat for the rations or get some milk. I remember a couple of times I just about fainted. I was just vomiting yellow gall because I hadn't eaten. I would get terrible headaches. We always had to work stretching these rations. It was never enough.⁶⁴

Women needed to adjust to living conditions and retain their roles as cooks despite the lack of resources in order to meet expectations. Muriel Green, a British woman, wrote in her diary on January 20, 1940, that she and her sister Jenny "Spent morning cooking. We always make Yorkshire tea-cakes with yeast now because they have no butter in them like other cakes."⁶⁵ On January 31, Muriel noted that "we have run out of coal. We have no garage fire and are burning wood in the house. We have had no meat this week, as the butcher has not come. He had hardly any last week. A customer bought us 2 rabbits on Monday, so we are not starving."⁶⁶ Michèle commented how homemakers "tried to survive. We are in the '40s and the women were not so accustomed to work out of the home than they are now. The women stayed home and they tried to survive. They tried to do the best with what they had."

Marie Vassiltchikov recalled how "yoghurt [sic] is still unrationed and, when we are at home, it constitutes our main dish, occasionally supplemented by porridge cooked in water. We are allowed approximately one jar of jam a month per person and, butter being so scarce, that does not go very far."⁶⁷ Despite these drastic changes, as an aristocrat, she still enjoyed fine dining and interacted with some of Europe's most notable people. On July 2, 1940, she wrote, "Dinner with Otto von

Bismarck, the Bennazzos, Helen Biron and a young Swede, von Helgow, for their Legation here. We spent the rest of the evening in his flat near the Tiergarten, which is full of Wedgwood bric-a-brac—dangerous in times like these."⁶⁸

For many European women, the abundance of food in the US became a source shock for them upon. As a 1946 war bride, Cooke's life radically transformed because of her migration experience. Her boat docked in New York and she reconnected with her husband. During this trip, they went out to dinner with a French woman named Jacqueline and her husband. Cooke said she ordered a steak big enough to feed at least four people. Due to this abundance, the women cried, "How could they possibly give us something like that when there are starving people in France?"⁶⁹ Delp also reacted to the food abundance in America. She claimed "it was quite a bit of transition in a lot of things a little bit. Start off from the way you eat [laughter]. There was so much food I had never seen in my life. That was nice."⁷⁰

Adapting to a New Culture

European women traveled to America with different expectations, but all needed to learn survival skills in a foreign land. Amy Sanders moved to England as a refugee, but didn't know the language. Not only did she suffer culture shock, she also lacked basic communication skills. "I remember the first time Mama and I set out on our own. We still couldn't converse in English, but our hostess had written on a piece of paper, things like, 'Could you please tell me where to get off,' our address, and where we were heading."⁷¹ Similarly, Cooke moved to California as a war bride in 1946 and boarded a ship not knowing if she would ever return to her country, France.

I must say that was one of the hardest things I did was to stand on that ship and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁵ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

⁶⁶ Delp, interview by Jennifer Keil, April 11, 2013, OH 5180, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

⁶⁷ Sanders, "Oriental Rugs," in Shumway, *An American Dream*, 15.

⁶⁴ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁶⁵ Sheridan, *Wartime Women*, 79.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁷ Vassiltchikov, *Berlin Diaries*, 13.

to see my country move away from me. Not knowing if I would ever come back. Not knowing where I was going. I knew I was going as far as possible in California. That was as far as I could go. I didn't know anything about my in-laws. I didn't know anything about the American life. It really was very difficult thing.⁷²

She depended on her mother-in-law for basic survival techniques. She commented, "I don't think I could have done it if it was not for her. I didn't know where to go. She lived in Hollywood when Hollywood was a nice city. I was kinda afraid. Nobody spoke my language."⁷³ For the first two years of marriage, Cooke and her husband lived with his parents. Her mother-in-law also taught her American consumerism: "Yes, I went to the market with her. I went to buy clothes with her so I would know what to do." Juliane Hodjera immersed herself in a new culture. When asked if she assimilated to American practices, she stated, "Oh yeah. I think it's inevitable because everybody [does] this and that on certain holidays."⁷⁴

Foreigners described their ability to embrace American culture and integrate European aspects into their new lives. Cooke expressed the way she assimilated into the culture: "I was very anxious to please. I had no choice. I could not go back. I had nothing to go back to, so I had to adjust or die. So I just simply adjusted. Some things were easier than others."⁷⁵ French cuisine became one area in which she did not relent. She continued preparing French food at home, which later defined her career because she provided cooking lessons. Once Bandurraga left the country, she preserved the aspects of German culture she wanted to remember: "Wherever I go, I have to have a little German corner. I have it now." She continued to describe her heritage center, which "has a picture of my husband and myself [sic]. There, I

⁷² Michèle Cooke, interview by Jennifer Keil, November 15, 2012, OH 5089, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

⁷⁵ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

have my clock that gongs. Underneath, I have to have a goose or a geranium—that's the big flower of Germany. I have to have a kind of a little German corner. When I'm in bed, I can hear it gong and I can see the pendulum."⁷⁶

Cooking as Means of Cultural Preservation

For Europeans transplanted from their native lands, preserving traditional meals and passing these traditions on to their children represented a way of keeping their culture. Edith Erickson's favorite meal was "a German dish called Rouladen which is a rolled, very thin meat with a little bit of bacon and pickles in it and onions."⁷⁷ Bandurraga remarked how her children and grandchildren "should know the good things ... Her children have learned through me how to make a Christmas cookie that has a

high standard that's called Spitzbuben."⁷⁸ This desire to preserve cultural diets influenced Bandurraga's career as a German food importer and exporter. She supplied meals to businesses from San Diego to Santa Barbara, including Old World in Huntington Beach. Margo Delp maintained certain food traditions, too: "I'm from the Rhineland. They have their sauerkraut every New Year's Eve. You've got to have sauerkraut on New Year's Eve. That means your pocket is not going to be empty this time next year. My husband, he loves sauerkraut. I fix it the German way, not just warm it up. No way. It's got to cook for a while."⁷⁹ Delp also preserved these traditions by sharing German recipes with her daughter: "She doesn't know the recipes so I give it to her."⁸⁰ Erickson shared her food culture views on America. She thinks the US wastes food resources unconsciously:

They had steak in the evening and you know what they did with the bones? They threw them in the trash. I said, "What with

⁷⁶ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, October 10, 2012.

⁷⁷ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁷⁸ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, October 10, 2012.

⁷⁹ Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the bones in the trash? It's unheard of." You would never do that in Europe. You would make a soup. You don't waste anything. To them, they probably didn't even think about it twice.⁸¹

Erickson's prudent cooking style varied from the conventional methods she found in California.

Early postwar America experienced different food traditions than Europe: "By the turn of the century, canned goods were a standard feature of the American diet: women's magazines contained advertisements for them on nearly every page, standardized recipes routinely called from them, and the weekly food expenditures of even the poorest urban families regularly included them."⁸² Cooke stated, "I think in the '50s and '60s, they used an awful lot of cans. I remember that I had some recipes that I cut out of the *Los Angeles Times* and they always seemed to have a can of Campbell's mushroom soup or a can of Campbell's something."⁸³

European women not only learned new recipes, but also utilized a novel system of measuring the ingredients. Erickson commented that she "had to learn how to cook the American way. I got the *Fannie Farmer Cookbook* and had to figure out ounces, cups, pints. We have the metric system in Europe."⁸⁴ Although she adjusted to these cooking techniques, she commented on the forced nature of the change: "I had to go to the ounces and pints. I preferred the German system of liters."⁸⁵ Erickson shared that her and her husband's "favorite show was Julia Child. I was just riveted with the television for all these cooking shows."⁸⁶ This particular program demonstrated the French influence on American cooking techniques and possibly reminded immigrants of European cultural practices.



NBC local show with Michèle Cooke called "Cooking with an Accent," circa 1977. Photograph, c. 1977, in Michèle Cooke, interview by Jennifer Keil, November 15, 2012, OH 5089, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

Cookware Store and Lessons

Cooke embraced American consumption, but modified this ideal to suit her French traditions. During the 1970s, her friend established a cookware store in Bakersfield, California. Her friend invited Cooke to work at this new location and provide cooking lessons. She recalled, "So we started putting [on a] cooking-school kitchen in the back of the store and we built the stove, oven and then it started. And because I guess it was at the time, cooking lessons became very popular and I did well. I did mostly French cuisine."⁸⁷ Her ability to translate food traditions to an American audience led an NBC-Bakersfield station to approach her to host a show called "Cooking with an Accent." She explained, "They came to the store and photographed in the store when I was giving cooking lessons." Since the store offered cooking lessons, one of the interview questions asked if Cooke promoted the cookware objects she used to prepare meals. She replied,

During the cooking lesson, if you bought some utensil maybe you got 10 percent off. It definitely brought lots of people to the store and of course I tried to use all the things that we had in the store. They had a new something for the Cuisinart, I would use it. A new frying pan, I would use it. I

⁸¹ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁸² Ruth Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 73.

⁸³ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

⁸⁴ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

always used something new there. That was at the store and it was fun for me. It helped me do the two things I liked best to do. I like people and I like cooking, so I could do both things at the same time.⁸⁸

The gadgets, advertised as time-saving-devices, did not always offer the most practical method. Cooke said she used the ones "I thought were useful I did. Some I didn't."⁸⁹ Kitchen appliances sometimes slowed down the cooking process. A utensil could sometimes prepare food faster and require less cleaning than a kitchen gadget. Michèle shared how she preferred using a fork instead of a kitchen tool to zest a lemon for these reasons.⁹⁰

Mechanization of the Household

During Erickson's childhood, she did not possess modern appliances standard American households contained. She indicated that in Germany, "we had refrigerators, of course, but my parents never had a washing machine or dryer. [It was a] very small refrigerator. In the beginning when I grew up we didn't have a refrigerator. We did our laundry in a huge kettle. We'd boil the laundry, rinse it all, and then hang it up on the line."⁹¹ Delp also shared that she "had to wash everything by hand. I don't think they had the washing machine. I never saw a washing machine in Germany. I know they only had those big kettles there and the washboards."⁹²

European women typically acquired their first appliances in America. Asked if her home in California came preinstalled with an oven and dishwasher, Cooke answered, "My first house didn't have a dishwasher. I didn't have a dishwasher until about the 50s. It was done by hand."⁹³ German and French women kept their European frugal purchasing habits in America. When Delp responded to the question of whether advertisements motivated her to purchase items,

she replied, "No really. When I have it and it's still working fine and I'm used to it, just leave it alone."⁹⁴ Edith Erickson commented on the cultural and technological differences she observed in her American mother-in-law, who asked what she wanted for her birthday. Edith replied,

'A huge pot.' She said, 'what are you going to do with a huge pot?' and I said, 'I need an enormous pot.' She didn't understand. I explained [it] was for the diapers. We rinsed diapers in Germany and we boil them. That's how they get clean and then we rinse them. It's our big pride to be the first ones in the neighborhood to have the diapers out on the line having the wind go through them. She thought I was out of my mind. I got a huge enamel pot that was used for canning, she found one. I boiled the diapers.⁹⁵

Moving to America and buying appliances did not immediately lead to assimilation. Rather, it often highlighted the varying homemaking practices. Ultimately, the interviewees all utilized standardized equipment in a similar manner. The American workplace created standard expectations that these international women embraced.

When asked if these new technologies reduced the workload, she said, "You bet. They sure did. Especially the dishwasher—definitely."⁹⁶ Erickson also thought appliances lightened the burden of housework: "I think I felt it was helping and that I had more time for the garden and the children. I also worked part-time ... We usually had used appliances, we didn't have money for new ones. It helped tremendously, especially the washing machine and dryer."⁹⁷ Hodjera stated appliances "made me very free to do things rather than spending hours washing dishes or something. Of course, I thought that was wonderful."⁹⁸ Contrary to these positive reactions, Delp only embraced home technology to a certain degree. She claimed, "I think it's pretty great, up to a point. Everything has to have a limit. Like that little scooter that goes around, that cleaner that cleans. I

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁹² Delp, interview by Jennifer Keil, April 11, 2013.

⁹³ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

⁹⁴ Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

⁹⁵ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁹⁶ Cooke, interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

⁹⁷ Erickson, interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

⁹⁸ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

haven't tried that yet. It walks off by itself and around. I don't know if it does a good job. My daughter had one and I don't think she cared too much for it.”⁹⁹ When asked if she preferred performing a task by herself or with a machine, Marugo responded, “Oh yeah, I rather do it myself.”¹⁰⁰

Interviewees tended to view technology as a source of liberation. Women relied on time-saving products to help them operate a home. Contrary to popular understanding of technology easing the burden of housework, Bandurraga thought appliances created additional chores. She stated, “It increases my workload. That's why I don't iron. Dishwasher was not very economical for me because I was one person and I had one dish. I didn't want to save eight dishes before I could make half of a load. I washed my two or three dishes without using my dishwasher.”¹⁰¹ Delp realized how ironing increased her workload: “In Germany, first of all they ironed everything. They ironed the nightie, underwear, everything. I got laughed at when I came from Germany because I ironed my husband's undershirts. I'm glad that I don't iron anything anymore.”¹⁰²

Although women acquired appliances and gained access to more resources in the postwar era, this abundance added another facet to women's work. Rather than making simple, one-pot meals, these commodities allowed women to prepare multi-stepped entrées. The stove became an indispensable element in the transformation of these cooking styles. “The stove, in short, augured the death of one-pot cooking or, rather, of one-dish meals—and probably increased the amount of time that women spent in preparing foodstuffs for cooking.”¹⁰³ However, the interviewees generally viewed appliances as a form of aid, which added to their efficiency. Bandurraga's mother informed her daughters, “Don't tell your husbands what you

can do because you have to do it all the time.”¹⁰⁴ With the advent of domestic technology, women performed more tasks at home and increased their workload. Rather than hiring a laundress or cook, a mother became responsible for these tasks.

Women's Marketing

Women's magazines depicted popular American ideals. “Magazines and advertising offered readers and, by the nation's homemakers, a particular twentieth-century, capitalist version of democracy defined by each citizen's ability to acquire goods—the many wares of-

fered in the pages of the magazines as well as the magazines themselves.”¹⁰⁵ Since women managed the home, marketing campaigns targeted this demographic: “Women were the purchasing agents in the nation's homes. In the 1920s, researchers estimated, women purchased at least 80 percent of the total goods accumulated in the families.”¹⁰⁶

Bandurraga recalled that when she lived in California, she made purchasing decisions for her family: “I went a place where they advertised five rooms for 600 something dollar. I remember I had a couch, pink and grey. I believe you could lift it up and let it down and make a sleeper couch. [Bandurraga's daughter, Christine] had a gorgeous bedroom set which was this kind of [light olive green] with pink and it was a big room for a little girl.”¹⁰⁷ Marketing shapes an individual's identity. The images and text transmit societal perspectives. French professor Leah Hewitt stated, “For better or for worse, in the contemporary period, the media have frequently taken on the task of transmitting and/or creating collective memories that confirm but sometimes challenge national identi-

Rather than hiring a laundress or cook, a mother became responsible for these tasks.

⁹⁹ Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, March 6, 2013.

¹⁰² Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

¹⁰³ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, March 6, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 170.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, October 10, 2012.

ties.”¹⁰⁸ These women participated in cultural consumption by purchasing American appliances and adapting some of their homemaking skills.

The US experienced an economic boom in the aftermath of World War II. Consumption became synonymous with American living. Delp commented, “first of all, I think most of the Germans were used to if we don’t have the money you don’t buy it. If you can’t pay for it, you don’t have it. You just don’t. Therefore you’re never in a bind that you owe somebody something … Lot of American people buy more than what they need and some fancy stuff.”¹⁰⁹ Erickson expressed American consumption in terms of lacking frugality. She insisted, “It is so wasteful Americans don’t even realize how they waste.”¹¹⁰ She critiqued the misappropriation of US goods and remembered her childhood practices of using all resources. Hodjera noted that “European consumerism is catching up with America,” and thus recognized the differences in livelihoods.¹¹¹ At times, these European women’s frugal mindsets clashed with an American push for consumption.

Asked if American consumerism denoted assimilation—and if they embraced it to fit into the culture—the women offered intriguing answers. For example, Delp resisted this pressure. She shared, “Because the neighbors have it, they have to have it too. I don’t look at it that way. I just like limited things and I’m happy with it.”¹¹² Desiring to assimilate, Cooke learned the language and American purchasing habits. The interactive shopping experience shocked her when consumers selected and touched produce at grocery stores. In French open markets, vendors handled the items for the consumer. She recalled, “I had to reinvent myself in many things.”¹¹³ She was shocked by the hearty American breakfast comprised of eggs and meat. Accustomed to toast and coffee, she found this eating style odd.



Margo Delp at her residence with Jennifer Keil. Photograph, April 11, 2013, in Margo Delp, interview by Jennifer Keil, April 11, 2013, OH 5180, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

Cooke experienced discrimination since she did not adopt all American cooking practices. As a newlywed, she attended a party and made a lemon cake. The hostess told her, “I can see you’re not American [or] you would have brought us a chocolate cake.”¹¹⁴ Cooke indicated how this prejudice affected her. She attributed these remarks to her noticeable cultural differences: “I didn’t eat the way they did. I didn’t dress the way they did. I brought some clothes from France that were maybe not as casual as the American wear. So I felt sometimes a little strange.”¹¹⁵

Gender Roles

¹⁰⁸ Leah Hewitt, *Remembering the Occupation in French Film: National Identity in Postwar Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Delp, interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Erickson interview by Keil, March 27, 2013.

¹¹¹ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

¹¹² Delp interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

¹¹³ Cooke interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.



Juliane Hodjera gracefully standing by her home gallery. Photograph, May 8, 2013, Juliane Hodjera, interview by Jennifer Keil, May 8, 2013, OH 5181, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

Both European and American society expected women to fulfill rigid gender roles. “One line of research argues that the allocation of domestic work is based on *time availability*. Becker (1991) argues that the domestic division of labor reflects rational arrangements between partners who specialize in either domestic or market production, based on evaluations of potential earnings of both partners in the labor market.”¹¹⁶ The women in question appeared to embrace their positions as wives and mothers, possibly due to Germany and France encouraging strong projections of an ideal woman. These females viewed America as the land of opportunity, but it too reinforced rigid gender roles. Hodjera explained, “It was the ideal

¹¹⁶ Claudia Geist, “One Germany, Two Worlds of Housework? Examining Employed Single and Partnered Women in the Decade After Unification,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 40, no. 3 (2009): 417.

country for us [and] we thought that was the ultimate.”¹¹⁷ Delp added, “I had a good feeling about the United States. I thought it must be the super country in the world.”¹¹⁸ When asked if her husband assisted with housework, she replied, “Not really. Actually I didn’t want him to. It was so small where we lived. I just wanted to keep it clean and nice.”¹¹⁹

European sociologists Letizia Mencarini and Maria Sironi found that “if they live in a country where doing almost all the tasks within the household is perceived as ‘normal’ and fair, it could be that housework has not a large impact on their happiness.”¹²⁰ As these women shared their homemaking stories, they suggested they embraced these roles. Cooke recalled, “My husband was absolutely useless when it come [sic] to domesticity.”¹²¹ In response to a question as to whether he attempted to help her with housework, she replied, “No, he didn’t try. That was a husband of those times. That was a woman’s stuff. He left that to his mother and his wife.”¹²² Hodjera responded to this same question by saying, “Never, never [laughter]. That was European. Husbands didn’t do a thing.”¹²³ When asked if her husband assisted with chores, Erickson replied, “Very little, he was always studying. He would mow the lawn.”¹²⁴ She also explained her husband’s limited help due to his cultural and economic upbringing. As she put it, “He was not raised with doing any work around the house. He came from a well to do family and went to boarding school, so we were never raised with that.”¹²⁵

Bandurraga also recalled how her husband did not assist with housework:

No, he was not much on this. [Christine] was the only child. She learned to shoot

¹¹⁷ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

¹¹⁸ Delp interview by Keil, April 11, 2013.

¹²⁰ Letizia Mencarini and Maria Sironi, “Happiness, Housework and Gender Inequality in Europe,” *European Sociological Review* 28, no. 2 (2012): 417.

¹²¹ Cooke interview by Keil, November 15, 2012.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

¹²⁴ Erickson, interview by Jennifer Keil, March 27, 2013.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

the gun, and she learned to fish, she learned to sail, and she learned all these things. That was about the extent he called housework. He took the fish and brought them in and I didn't want to clean them. Then he would do it.¹²⁶

Women responded positively to their homemaking roles despite them representing social constructions of proper home management. Hodjera acknowledged her embrace of gendered tasks.

The funny thing, it's a little thing it's ridiculous, I loved to do the housework. I *loved* to do *everything*. I put my whole self into it as much as I did it into studies. I could do that on the floor and do a wonderful job. But I never like to put the vacuum cleaner away. That he did for me. I could do everything, but I didn't like to put the cleaner away for some reason. These are the little quirks.¹²⁷

Women's identities must form independently without government and cultural coercion into an ideal role. Historian Ruth Cowan offers her perspective reducing the workload for women "by helping the next generation (and ourselves) to neutralize both the sexual connotation of washing machines and vacuum cleaners."¹²⁸ Modern marketing campaigns appear to recognize this needed shift in gender ideology. Recently, Frigidaire released a commercial titled "More than 90 Years of Innovation," which includes men utilizing appliance technology.¹²⁹ Women entering the workforce prompted this change. "Consistent with exchange-bargaining theory, women decrease their housework as their earnings increase, up to the point where both spouses contribute equally to income."¹³⁰ Yet according to economists, "Women's employment outside the home is not necessarily accompanied by an increase in the amount

of housework done by her husband."¹³¹ Removing gender-based perceptions of chores and providing a more equitable household represents the only solution to ameliorating women's plight.

Women operated within gender-specific roles as wartime refugees, housewives, and residents of new countries. The European interviewees grew up with the same rigid gender roles despite coming from different countries. They needed to combat the educational training they once received as children, but most accepted their roles. Ultimately, when they arrived in California—which they expected as a land of freedom—it too maintained female-specific standards. These international women emerged from wartime experiences capable of using any food commodity and caring for their families despite major challenges. The home front and beyond represented experiences women silently endured due to international pressure to become an ideal woman.

¹²⁶ Bandurraga, interview by Keil, October 10, 2012.

¹²⁷ Hodjera, interview by Keil, May 8, 2013.

¹²⁸ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 216.

¹²⁹ Frigidaire, "More than 90 Years of Innovation," September 2012.

¹³⁰ M. Bittman, "When Does Gender Trump Money? Bargaining and Time in Household Work," *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 1 (2003): 186.

¹³¹ Francine Blau and Marianne Ferber, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 46.



Jennifer L. Keil is an MA history candidate with an emphasis in oral and public history at California State University, Fullerton. As a member of the Oral History Association, she presented at their 2013 conference on the “German and French Women on the Home Front in Europe and the US.” Keil received the 2013 Lawrence B. de Graaf Outstanding Graduate Student Award. She worked as Managing Editor of graphic design and layout for the 2012 *Welebaethan*. Keil interned for Dr. Cora Granata’s project, “From Hitler’s Europe to the Golden State,” and serves as Vice President for the European Studies Society. She conducted research for the Nixon Presidential Library & Museum’s Centennial exhibit. Keil also produced the 2012 summer exhibit on “Home-Making in Brea” for the Brea Museum and Heritage Center. She hopes to earn a PhD in public history.