

# FEMALE STORIES UNHEARD.



## European Remembrance of Women in Resistance Against National Socialism



ESSAY CONTEST  
COLLECTION



**Female Stories Unheard.  
European Remembrance of  
Women in Resistance  
Against National Socialism**

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## **Trinational Essay Contest "Female Stories Unheard. European Remembrance of Women in Resistance Against National Socialism"**

**May - August 2024**

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

Our project “Female Stories Unheard. European Remembrance of Women in Resistance Against National Socialism” – short “Women in Resistance” – is a trinational essay contest with participants from Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic. It aimed at shedding light on the often overlooked contributions of women to the resistance against National Socialism in Europe. This EU-funded project sought to honor and remember the untold stories of these courageous women, their invaluable contributions and sacrifices made by these women, highlighting their resilience, strength, and unwavering determination.

The essay contest was open to participants between the ages of 18 and 29. It aimed to encourage young people to engage with the history of women’s resistance and to reflect on its relevance for contemporary struggles for justice and equality in Europe. The essay contest’s central theme revolved around amplifying the voices of those who were often marginalized and overlooked during this tumultuous period of history. It strives to bring attention to the unique experiences, challenges, and acts of resistance carried out by women in three European countries who fought against the tyranny, discrimination, and persecution imposed by the National Socialist regime.

Overall, our project “Women in Resistance” seeks to challenge the dominant narrative of resistant fighters during World War II as predominantly male and to highlight the crucial role that women played in resisting fascism and building a more just and equitable world. The essay contest stands as a testament to the resilience, courage, and strength of women who defied oppression, risked their lives, and fought for justice, freedom, and human dignity in the face of tyranny. It is a call to remember, honor, and celebrate their extraordinary contributions to our shared history.

Therefore, we are happy to present to you the three winning and seven finalists' essays, honored at the Prize Ceremony on October 25, 2024, at the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig. We hope you will gain new insights and thoughts, and have, in general, a pleasant reading!

FOREWORD BY  
MICHAEL  
KRETSCHMER

MINISTER  
PRESIDENT  
OF THE FREE  
STATE OF  
SAXONY



# Dear interested reader,

this year, we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and commemorate the massive demonstration in Leipzig on October 9, 1989, where 70,000 people, women and men, young people and even children took part.

Historical events like this one leave their mark on the lives of those involved. They are retold and thus resonate over generations, becoming at once very personal and very much shared stories of liberation. While major historical events find their way into school textbooks, individual decisions and acts of heroism are what touches and moves us more deeply. Perhaps because we can better understand what was at stake for the individual by relating to them on a more personal level.

The essay competition “Female Stories Unheard – European Remembrance of Women in Resistance Against National Socialism” shines light on the diverse forms of resistance by women during the National Socialist regime and in the countries it occupied, such as Poland and the Czech Republic.

Resistance and civil courage take many forms. Overlooking any of these stories of resistance will limit our understanding of resistance itself. Every single act of defiance is a defense of human dignity and freedom against fear – the willing servant of every dictatorship.



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Sächsische Staatskanzlei

This volume collects the ten best essays of the competition. It offers an idea of the many women who resisted dictatorship and violence, cleverly obstructed the regime, undermined its claim of total power or protected others from harm.

This exploration thus makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of resistance and the fearlessly pursued possibilities for freedom. I thank all the essayists, whose efforts help complete our understanding of resistance by finally giving voice to the many testimonies of female resistance

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'M. Kretschmer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Kretschmer  
Minister President of the Free State of Saxony



# WINNING ESSAYS

# FIRST PLACE

## Invisible Resistance: Batsheva's Story

Shania Timpe (Germany)

- For Batsheva -

It never mattered whether Batsheva put up resistance against the Nazis. That is why I never asked her. Batsheva Dagan survived the Shoah. We met in Magdeburg, where she told her story. She was 93 years old at the time; at least she said so. I was immediately impressed by her. By the way she told her story and by the warmth she radiated. It did not take long for me to hold a special place for her in my heart. We met several times over the next six years, whenever she visited. I listened to her telling her story, and afterwards we talked and we laughed.

From the very beginning, I saw Batsheva as a courageous person, but I never imagined her as a resistance fighter. She never talked about it herself, and no one ever asked about it. Neither did I. I simply did not associate such a big word with her. That was a mistake. Given the way we talk about resistance, I am not surprised by my ignorance. We only talk about a few people who came to represent the resistance. Everyone knows the big names, and they shape how we talk about resistance in general. Critical aspects of their biographies are usually ignored. Claus von Stauffenberg is the best example, as his membership in the Wehrmacht is often omitted. Their actions are considered timeless and placed on a pedestal. They are smoothed over and decontextualized. It is not about representing resistance in all its existing groups and forms, but about heroization. The people's desire to identify with persons who resisted is met by this offer of identification. The contributions of Jews

and women in the resistance are talked about far too rarely, despite their crucial roles in the fight against Nazi oppression. Batsheva would certainly not have wanted to join the ranks of the great heroes. For her and many others, resistance was something ordinary, something small but powerful.

Today, I recognize many aspects of her biography that we should address as a form of resistance. Batsheva processed her experiences of her life under Nazi oppression in poems and published them in a book. They describe her time in Auschwitz through the eyes of a young woman. She writes about her menstruation, the fear of never becoming a mother, or how difficult it was for her to lose her hair. These are topics that are missing in the traditional discourse about the camps because too often only the male perspective is considered. The poetry collection is unique because some of the poems were composed in Auschwitz. Lacking even simple things like pen and paper, she memorized the poems. She kept them in her mind, enabling her to write them down after liberation. The poems were one of the few things bringing hope to her and the friends she made in the camp. They created them together or for each other, mostly in their minds. Thanks to Batsheva, not only her own texts survived but also those of her friends.

However, what impresses me most are not the poems alone. It is the fact that Batsheva managed to form friendships in the hell of Auschwitz that makes me speechless. Those women helped each other, shared their food, cheered each other up, and supported each other until those who survived were liberated. Some of their friendships lasted for the rest of their lives.

Together, they looked for a way out of the horrors around them and found it in friendship, writing, creating and dreaming together. Her friends made Batsheva miniature slippers in the camp, which she kept with great effort until her liberation. All of them resisted the dehumanization that the Nazis tried to force on them. They fought them in their minds, creating a mental distraction that allowed them to persevere. Batsheva clung on to her life despite the constant confrontation with death. She believed in a life after the camp and that she would be free again. Batsheva herself always said that she was searching for

meaning in Auschwitz.

Surrounded by many languages, she decided to learn French. Batsheva managed to learn French completely in Auschwitz – without access to a textbook or even paper.

When I did more research about her after her death, I discovered resistance in Batsheva's life even before Auschwitz. She was born in Łódź and moved to Radom with her family to avoid ghettoization in her hometown. A short time later, however, a ghetto was also set up in Radom, where Batsheva now had to live with her family. I found out that she smuggled newspapers into the ghetto. She secretly traveled to Warsaw and brought the newspapers back to the ghetto. It may sound like a negligible act, but here too there is great significance behind her actions: She risked her life to ensure that information reached the ghetto. Staying informed was important; information could be powerful; it could spread hope or be a warning. For Batsheva, this part of her biography was not worth telling. I see it differently.

To escape deportation, Batsheva fled “into the lion's den” to Germany and worked under a false name as a Polish housemaid. She hid her Jewish origins in order to improve her situation and fight for survival. Working every day around people who curse your existence must have been a great burden for the still young Batsheva. One day, when a man showed up at the door and had a list with her real name written on it, she realized that there was no point in lying anymore. It might seem like a panic reaction to us, but I think there was great courage behind her decision. She ended the game of hiding and confessed her Jewish identity. The consequences were immense: six prisons, three concentration camps and two death marches lay ahead of her.

These examples show that Batsheva did not bow to the Nazis' will to dehumanize and break her because of her Jewish descent. She fought to improve her situation, for her right to self-determination and for a future in freedom. However, her resistance did not end in 1945; it continued through her survival. It was a combination of pure luck and her strong inner will. The Nazis' goal was to destroy everything Jewish. They did not succeed, partly because people like Batsheva persevered and survived.

Batsheva has advocated for her story to be told: through her poems, her books, through interviews, through countless conversations with young people and through the slippers made by her friends, which can now be seen in the Auschwitz Museum. As an educator, she developed methods suitable for children so that they can get answers to their questions about the Shoah. In 1946, she moved to Israel and walked 6 kilometers each day for three years to learn Hebrew. She has 2 sons, 10 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren.

Batsheva died on January 25 of this year. I was able to say good-bye to her, but there is still so much I would like to ask her. After her death, I found out that she was two years older than she had told us. Batsheva, in her own words, took back the two years that Hitler stole from her. So I met her not at 93, but at 95, which means that she died at the age of 100. For a whole century, she enriched the world with her unique way.

Batsheva showed me that the small, invisible acts of resistance together with empathy and kindness are just as important as the great acts of heroism. Her resistance was about maintaining empathy, making friends and creating hope – even in the cruelest of places. It was a resistance of survival, of holding on to one's identity and humanity. A resistance that was not loud or spectacular but quiet, persistent and characterized by deep inner strength. This invisible resistance should not be invisible. We must integrate it into our culture of remembrance.

By telling Batsheva's story, we broaden our understanding of resistance. We realize that it is not only the big names that matter, but also the small acts of resistance that remind us of what it means to be human. Batsheva's story is a testament to the fact that resistance can come in many forms and that every act of self-assertion in the midst of barbarism has immeasurable value.



# SECOND PLACE

## Dolly. Buried in time.

Amelia Maj (Poland)

Dolly is a decoration of the living room in my grandfather's house. She has no name. She has big blue eyes, dark hair and a blue dress with crinoline. She looks ahead with a blind look. Rigid and majestic, she does not want to cuddle; she just sits, passive and slow, so I did not even try to play with her as a child. And as I learned the story she could tell if she could speak, I realized that what we see and assume is not always the truth.

It was September 1938. Wawrzyniec Wróblewski, recently an independent gamekeeper, and his wife Anna were moving into a new house. It was not their own house, but a service gamekeeper's lodge on the edge of the village of Biadoliny near Tarnów, but they were both very happy, especially since a group of their own children was following them: the oldest 8-year-old Michal and younger: Mietek, Ela, Marysia and Janek, my grandfather, then less than 3 years old. The Wróblewskis were also expecting another child.

The new inhabitants of the grove were no longer very young. Wawrzyniec turned 35 years old and Anna was even older than he was. Nevertheless, they played and were as happy as children when Wawrzyniec took Anna in his arms and carried her over the threshold of the new house. They were going to be very happy in it, and they would actually be, if it were not for the fact that it was no longer safe in the village, people divided themselves into supporters and opponents of National Socialism.

Wawrzyniec and Anna tried to live normally. He took care of the forest, made sure that nearby inhabitants did not steal wood and did

not poach in the forest. Anna, as always, took care of the house and children. Wawrzyniec often talked about the fact that he could not imagine that he could give up defending his own homeland, if something bad threatened her. “That’s what it takes” – he said to his wife, and she repeated after him: “that’s what it takes”. This does not mean that she was exclusively “wife of her husband”. She always had her own opinion and always tried to take her fate into her own hands, although in those times when women actually had no rights, it was not easy.

Unfortunately, it seemed that the homeland was in danger. The war was near and there were more and more Nazi supporters in the countryside. Not only the gamekeepers from the nearby Wojnicz and the surrounding area, but also many residents organized themselves into para-military troops, gathering weapons and ammunition and hiding them in forest anthills and other clever caches. Women also joined this movement, but only the achievements of men have been preserved in historical memory.

A year later, when the youngest son of Wróblewskis – Bronek, was only a few months old, war broke out. The organization of the inhabitants of the village and the surrounding area became associated with the Union of Armed Struggle (in Polish: Związek Walki Zbrojnej - ZWZ), which later became part of the Home Army. Wawrzyniec took the pseudonym “Ciar” and took a military oath on September 27, 1939, but was soon arrested and deported to Auschwitz concentration camp, from where he later was transported to Buchenwald camp.

Anna thought her world had collapsed. She was left alone with the children, but she never remained passive in the face of the ongoing war, against the occupant, against violence. She continued her participation in women’s troops. Resistance to violence was not only passive military participation, but it also required concrete action. Along with other women, Anna was involved in collecting, storing and hiding dressings and because she was trained in the military, she also dealt with the concealment and maintenance of weapons. Above all, Anna transferred information to other ZWZ units and partisans of troops hiding in the forest, carried reports and other materials hidden inside

the dolly, which was held by her younger daughter Marysia. No one suspected that a five-year-old girl with golden hair, holding a porcelain dolly with blind glass eyes, could carry conspiratorial materials. Anna trembled for her life and that of her daughters, as well as the other children left at home in the care of her eldest daughter, at that time only 11 years old. Trembling, she repeated to herself the words of Wawrzyniec: “that’s what it takes, Anne, that’s what it takes”. She believed that a woman is not a soulless doll who looks at the world and although she sees everything – remains passive and rigid. If women leave for themselves only the role of a doll observing reality and do not take part in real life, they will not resist all violence, they will not prevent evil – they will not be able to decide not only about the fate of the world, but even about their own fate. Anna also organised secret teaching, teaching not only reading and writing, but also history and giving the population a sense of responsibility for themselves and for their country.

Once the occupiers raided Anna’s house, stole all the small supplies of food for the whole family, and they beat Anna hard. Anna never returned to full strength, but she did not give up. She continued to serve, carrying messages, reports, and conspiratorial material, opposing the violence her family and homeland experienced. “That’s what it takes” – she told especially daughters, so that they once did not become passive dolls, which are only a decoration of the house.

After the end of the war in 1945, convinced that Wawrzyniec had died in a concentration camp, Anna made another difficult life decision and moved to Lower Silesia with her children, like many inhabitants of Biadolin and that region of Poland. She chose a small town – Konary near Udanin. There were too many memories related to her husband in Biadolin, additionally the area was not rich, she could no longer live in a service gamekeeper’s lodge, and in Lower Silesia it looked like a better life, which ailing Anna needed. In 1948, Wawrzyniec knocked on the door of the house, who escaped from the concentration camp and for nearly 3 years searched for Anna – first in Biadolin, and then in Lower Silesia, Poland, knocking on every door in every village.

However, Wróblewski's happiness did not last long, ill Anna, infected with tuberculosis, died in 1949. Wawrzyniec 9 years later. They both rest in the cemetery in Konary, but only on the side of Wawrzyniec there is a plaque on the grave with the inscription "Member of the resistance movement, soldier of the Home Army (in Polish: Armia Krajowa - AK)". Despite granting rights to women, they often remain only a wife, a decoration of the house, an addition to a man. Have I already mentioned that my great-grandmother Anna, by joining the ZWZ, took the pseudonym "Lalka", meaning – "Dolly"? What Anna did stays only in memory of our family. This dolly has a name, but many do not. Because it is not a story of only one woman, there probably have been hundreds of similar stories, buried in time.

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# THIRD PLACE

## **I am a woman – I know. A lesson on femininity.**

**Weronika Dobrucka (Poland)**

I get up in the morning. I brush my hair so that it flows gently down my back in waves. I apply makeup so that imperfections and dark circles under my eyes are not visible. I dress to accentuate the assets of my silhouette. I scent myself with a perfume that everyone around me could smell. Perhaps someone on the street will compliment me, which brightens my day. And I feel good about it, because after all, what is wrong with a woman wanting to feel beautiful? Moreover, delicate, innocent, modest, not imposing with her presence, but nevertheless eye-catching. Pleasant in conversation, but not too loud, so as not to accidentally drown out those who should be heard more than I am. Intelligent, but not too much so as not to take anything away from those who have more opportunities to excel. The fair sex, right? Apparently, that is what they say about us?

I am a woman – I think.

It is an automatic programming of the brain, an assignment to those values that are supposed to define our place in society, but most importantly, to be an opposition to how the opposite sex is defined. All of this, perpetuated over decades, has led us to develop our defense mechanisms. Since everyone thinks we do not have that strength, steel muscles and outstanding agility, we will have something else. Something perhaps more secretive, quieter, less obvious, but just as

important, just as courageous and just as necessary to remember. During the fight against the Nazis, all available opportunities and methods were used to defeat the enemy. All tricks were allowed. Cunning, courage and every possible skill of the people, those brave and those less so, were the basis for conducting operations against the Nazis. And also the women of war, the warriors of the resistance, stripping themselves of particles of dignity, used what they could to help their homelands, extract information, exterminate their oppressors, or rescue their comrades.

An unnamed nurse from the southern Czech town of Trebon, who was raped and infected with a sexual disease by members of Hitler's army after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, decided to use that same lost femininity against them. She began romancing wounded Germans, who disappeared or died after interacting with her. Unacknowledged for many years, labeled a prostitute, rejected by her own community, she was shot by the Gestapo.<sup>1</sup>

Beautifully made-up, with lips drawn in bright red lipstick, Truus Oversteegen, Freddie Oversteegen and Hannie Schaf, so young they could have been my peers, also sacrificed their femininity to win the war. Picking up Dutch collaborators and German soldiers in bars, pretending to be drunk and eager for romantic escapades, they led them into the woods to their deaths.<sup>2</sup> Later excluded when they collaborated with the Communist Party and their homeland became anti-Soviet.<sup>3</sup>

The form of using your body as a weapon against your oppressors is, in my opinion, one of the most painful ways of resistance. This is when your body becomes a foreign body, each limb detached from the rest and artificial, as if you had never seen or felt it before. Devoted to a higher good. You want to tear them away from you so that the memories of what you had to do are gone. You will never be able to bring it back again. We cannot ignore it; we cannot forget it, because this sacrifice is as painful as any other.

However, their female identity was not just a weapon. It could also become a target. Stripping women of their dignity, by the Nazis, was one of the steps in climbing the rungs on the ladder of humiliation of the other. The clearest and perhaps one of the most symbolic exam-

ples of this was the shaving of women's heads (as well as men's). In Auschwitz alone, some 7,000 kg of hair was found after its liberation.<sup>4</sup> This was done not only to prevent the spread of the already brooding insects in the camps or to use them for fabric, but also to cruelly deprive them of identity. European culture equated long hair with beauty, attractiveness and femininity. Without them, they were destined to become just an impersonal, subservient and intimidated mass. *"As it turns out, among the many dramatic experiences in which incarceration in the camp abounded, women's memory all too often chose those associated with the body. Among the recorded memories, hair-related experiences stand out, and it is easy to see that they are intense, deep, sharp. They are on the borderline of intimacy or already on the side of it"*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the acts of women's resistance in the camps resonate even more intensely. "Camp families" at Majdanek<sup>6</sup> or the delivery of pregnancies at Auschwitz are, after all, so closely associated with femininity, which was supposed to be crushed.

I remove my makeup in the evening; brush my hair, put on my pajamas. Routine activities. This time, however, I sit in front of the mirror and think how lucky I am. I am grateful that I never had to use my femininity to survive. I am grateful that I can decide whether I want to cut my hair or leave it long as it is. That my body remained mine and did not become a weapon. I think about where they got such courage. I think about the forgotten ones whose sacrifices we do not even know, and those rejected by their own communities they protected. I think about how much I wish this would never happen again. I see how strong we are.

I am a woman – I whisper.

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# FINALIST ESSAYS

IN ALPHABETICAL  
ORDER



# A Tribute to Women!

Yasmin Altmann (Germany)

My great-grandmother Inge was born in 1931. She grew up in Nazi-Germany.

One day, when she was just a child, she witnessed an event that forever changed her view of the regime. Her older sister had missed a flag roll call unexcused due to illness and was publicly humiliated when she returned the next week. The NSDAP-Ortsgruppenführer had slapped her and shamed her in front of all her classmates, sisters and friends. This senseless violence, sparked by a simple absence, opened Inge and her sisters' eyes to the dark reality of the world they were living in.

Inge and her sisters were just children, too young to fully comprehend the horrors around them, yet they knew something was wrong. They began to resist quietly, like many others. Can you really blame them? If a simple absence could result in public humiliation and violence, then what could open resistance lead to? How brave were those who actively fought against the regime? Who were the women that did so?

One woman who dared to challenge the Nazis openly was Sophie Scholl, a young student only ten years older than Inge, born in 1921. Sophie initially was a member of the Hitler Youth,<sup>1</sup> but eventually started to question and criticise the system as well. She joined the White Rose resistance movement, which ultimately led to her execution by Nazi officials due to her courageous acts of defiance, namely distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. Sophie Magdalena Scholl was murdered on February 22, 1943. While Sophie Scholl is perhaps the most well-known female resistance fighter in Germany, she was not the only one.

Female opposition was regarded as less dangerous than male opposition to the NS state because women usually did not fight with

weapons;<sup>2</sup> however, women were not merely supporters or helpers. They provided provisions, care, hideaways, and knowledge. What proves to be more important and far more threatening than weapons is the fact that people began to think critically, uncovering the atrocities that happened, and decided to raise their voices. 20% of the members within resistance groups were women.<sup>3</sup> Among them Daughters. Students. Girlfriends. Wives. Mothers. We rarely hear their names. It is time we give them names and honour their legacy. They acted selflessly, knowing that due to the gender expectations and social roles of the Nazi institutions, they may have never been known to have resisted. It is time to acknowledge women in history, as they, just like men, were ready to potentially lose their lives, fighting for what they believed in. They fought fights without weapons – but with great impact, nonetheless.

So this essay is to Liselotte, to Freya, to Libertas, to Maria, to Sophie, to Dora, to Hilde, to Sofka, to Suzanne, to Jeanne, to Johanna, to Irena, to Klara, to Anna, to Elisabeta, to Ludviga, to Lois, to Antonina, to Caecilia, to Bronislava, to Sofia, to Karolina, to Irena, to Miep, to Cor-rie, to Anne, to Magda, to Ilse, to Lina, to Luise, to Ella, to Charlotte, to Erna, to Amalie, to Gretel, to Erika, to Margit, to Helga, to Ursula, to Martha, to Centa, to Lotte, to Emma, to Annedore, to Hildegard, to Lucie, to Noor-un-Nisa, to Cato, to Margarethe, to Elisabeth, to Irmela, to Orli, to Katharina Käthe, to Therese, to Philomena, to Emmy, to Gretha, to Elsa, to Sala, to Elvira, to Marion, to Alice, to Helene, to Gertrud, to Gisela, to Gerda, to Antje, to Marie to Louise, to Rosemarie, to Weiße Rose, to Kreisauer Kreis, to Rote Kapelle, to Rosenstraße protest.<sup>4567891011</sup>

To all the women who were silenced and erased from history books.

To all the women who resisted in silence.

To all the girls who could have grown up to be resistant.

To all the girls and women who teach us to think critically, to question authorities and to raise our voices against inequality and injustice.

Thank you for your unmatched courage and the way that you have proved that solidarity has a greater impact than violence.

Thank you for being strong and resilient. Thank you for setting great examples for the great women to come!

Also, thank you to those who do take their time and research these heroines – most of you are women as well. We know the struggle that every woman faces. We know that we are often belittled and regarded as weak. But we are not! We can be the change. We can enable change. We can rewrite history by giving previous generations of women the voices back that have been taken from them.

Lastly, thank you, Oma Inge. You have told me many stories about your youth, and you have taught me to always be curious and cautious. You may not have been able to fight against fascism in your childhood, but you did when you grew into the woman that you became. Thank you for your time. I will forever miss you and honour your legacy. I will keep your thoughts and feelings close to me wherever I go, and I will remember your warnings, always. I loved you. Still do.

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2 Amesberger, Helga. Halbmayr, Brigitte. „1938–1945: Widerstand von Frauen gegen das NS-Regime.“ Hdgö - Haus der Geschichte Österreich, [hdgoe.at/widerstand-frauen](http://hdgoe.at/widerstand-frauen). Zugriff: 19. Juli 2024.

3 Hasenauer, Carolin. „Mut und Widerstand: Frauen gegen das NS-Regime“. BR24, 19. Januar 2024, [www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/mut-und-widerstand-frauen-gegen-das-ns-regime,U1Vu6sh](http://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/mut-und-widerstand-frauen-gegen-das-ns-regime,U1Vu6sh). Zugriff: 19. Juli 2024.

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5 Cf. Schielke, Mandy. „Weiblicher Widerstand - im Schatten Sophie Scholls“. Deutschlandfunk Kultur, [www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/weiblicher-widerstand-im-schatten-sophie-scholls-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/weiblicher-widerstand-im-schatten-sophie-scholls-100.html).

6 Cf. Wetzel, Jakob. „Frauen machen Politik: Widerstand gegen die Nazis“. Süddeutsche.de, 4. Januar 2019, [www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/widerstand-nationalsozialisten-frauen-machen-politik-1.4270962](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/widerstand-nationalsozialisten-frauen-machen-politik-1.4270962).

7 Cf. Harmsen, Rieke C. „Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus | Sonntags“. Sonntagsblatt, [www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/kultur/frauen-im-widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus](http://www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/kultur/frauen-im-widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus).

8 Cf. Ott, Tanya. „Frauen gegen Hitler: Widerstand in der Nazi-Zeit“. dw.com, 16. Juli 2024, [www.dw.com/de/frauen-gegen-hitler-widerstand-in-der-nazi-zeit/a-69664279](http://www.dw.com/de/frauen-gegen-hitler-widerstand-in-der-nazi-zeit/a-69664279).

9 Cf. „Haltung zeigen und handeln - Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus“. GWeb Solutions, [www.dsj.de/news/haltung-zeigen-und-handeln-frauen-im-widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus#:~:text=%E2%80%9EIm%20Nationalsozialismus%20haben%20Frauen%20aktiv,Regimes%20entsprochen%20%E2%80%93%20auch%20im%20Sport](http://www.dsj.de/news/haltung-zeigen-und-handeln-frauen-im-widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus#:~:text=%E2%80%9EIm%20Nationalsozialismus%20haben%20Frauen%20aktiv,Regimes%20entsprochen%20%E2%80%93%20auch%20im%20Sport).

10 Cf. Amesberger, Helga. Halbmayr, Brigitte.

11 Hasenauer, Carolin.

# Reclaiming the Memory of Milena Jesenská

Charlotte Boreham (Czech Republic)

Born at the turn of the 19th century, Milena Jesenská belongs to the same circle of German-Jewish intellectuals as Max Brod and Franz Kafka. Jesenská worked as a writer, journalist, and translator, however in the Western world is best known for a publication not by her own hand; Kafka's Letters to Milena. Years after her untimely and unjust death, there is a moral imperative to shed greater light on her anti-Nazi resistance work and represent a fuller picture of her life than romance alone.

Jesenská's will to go against the grain stretches back to her youth; in her early 20's, Milena was arrested for the crime of picking state-owned flowers and ultimately placed in a mental hospital in 1917. This came in the context of disputes with her fathers, ultimately dampened by her marriage to Ernst Polak. Striking here is the gendered subjugation prevalent in the early 20th century; rather than being conventionally imprisoned for pushing the boundaries of the law, Jesenská was labelled as mentally ill and reliant on the choices of men to become liberated. Jesenská's writing itself had an emancipatory focus, writing in *Lidové Noviny* and *Národní Listy* on women's lifestyle, fashion, and housing design. With the growing threat of Nazi Germany towards Czechoslovakia, Jesenská pivoted towards political journalism, writing for the paper *Přítomnost*. As noted, however, Jesenská is too often known only for her correspondences with Franz Kafka. Himself an excellent author – his Letters to Milena some of the most tender and evocative of his writings – there is a distinct shame and sadness to the unintentional overshadowing of Milena's lifetime by her lover's words.

In the autumn of 1938, the Czech borderlands were annexed by Nazi Germany. She took the political stance of staying in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia rather than escaping as she helped others do. From today's perspective this calls to mind brave resistance fighters such as Alexey Navalny; the choice to fight for one's own cause and country at the cost of life itself. It was at this point where Jesenská's work shifted from journalism alone to risky, life-saving action. In consort with a wider group of anti-Nazi activists, Jesenská helped persecuted Jews and anti-fascists to flee the country to safety. Following the annexation of wider Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939, Jesenská joined the resistance organisation Obrana Národa and published articles in the underground newspaper *V boj*. She was arrested in Prague in November 1939, however was not convicted due to a lack of evidence. Following a period of arduous repression and upheaval, Jesenská was deported to Ravensbrück women's concentration camp in August 1940 where she was held for another four years until her death.

The two most notable biographers of Jesenská's life are Margarete Buber-Neumann, a friend of Milena's also imprisoned at Ravensbrück, and Jesenská's own daughter, Jana "Honza" Krejcarová. Krejcarová's biography *Adresát Milena Jesenská* was completed under rushed conditions; with Alexander Dubček newly in power, the conditions in 1960's Czechoslovakia were such that the book was scarcely printed and only a handful of copies were preserved outside of the country. Here we see three key representations of Milena in differing subjectivities: Kafka the lover, Buber-Neumann the fellow political prisoner, and Krejcarová the daughter. Chronologically these also meet Milena at differing points, from her youth, to imprisonment, to post-mortem martyrdom. This essay seeks to establish Milena Jesenská as an accomplished writer and intellectual in the post-war period; her success predates many feminist advances that may be taken for granted today.

Jesenská's memory is shrouded in the dual tragedy of her persecution and her warped memorialisation. Through acknowledging her acts of resistance that saved innocent lives under Nazi repression, we in the modern day can help do justice to her memory.

The act of subverting her narrative as the subject of affection to instead perceive her as an active moral agent is in itself resistant to common assumptions about women in history. Additionally, a significant proportion of efforts to memorialise and document Jesenská were undertaken by the women in her life. By reframing the memory of Milena Jesenská, we today are able to reclaim the story of female resistance and establish new subjectivity on the legacy of female activists. It is through this practise we can strive to keep the flame of anti-fascist resistance alight.

# Courage and Capital: Dual Forces Behind Women's Resistance

Natalia Cubała (Poland)

Historical education too often overlooks the role of women during World War II. It is only in recent years that women involved in direct wartime activities between the Polish Underground State and the German occupier found their rightful place in the Polish historical memory. Not only trending historical books but a simple Google search illustrates this well – when we type in (in Polish) “women during World War II”, we can learn about women soldiers, couriers, women who hid soldiers, and those who manufactured explosives. However, my feelings stay a bit mixed. For a moment, I began to think that war is a woman.

When you search for “women during Nazism”, the results mostly feature the mistresses of prominent Nazi figures. Apparently, there is no third option. Women’s history during the war, to be considered interesting, is often subjected to a masculinized heroism (“they fought just like men”). While some stories confirm this narrative, it is troubling that women are viewed exclusively through the lens of male ideals—or their stories are sexualized. It is like a historicised male gaze.

Naturally, the best way to gain insightful historical understanding is to read a well-regarded historian’s book (and their adversary). But national historical awareness is not so much built on structural knowledge as it is on a network of broad associations.

The heart-touching stories say about a young girl picking up a rifle (which, in reality, was nearly impossible to get) and taking down the German occupier through a heroic act. I still remember how, in

school, we were taught that the perfect example of civil courage was a girl who left her sick mother at home in the first days of the Warsaw Uprising and had gone to fight. She most likely died without a weapon in hand (at the start of the uprising, less than 10% of fighters had guaranteed access to arms – information that most findings confirm).

Some noble acts can only achieve their full impact when carried out in silence. Some meticulously planned, others made in the heat of crucial moments. Yet, many of these actions were only possible due to the financial, or money-related, resources behind them. Money could not eliminate the risks of being captured, raped, or killed, and it is difficult to call any relative wealth (or rather remainings of pre-war wealth) a true safety net in the world of underground resistance in occupied Poland. Nevertheless essential means of aid like supplied food, medical aid, secret education networks, and organizing safe houses for hidden Jewish families were largely made possible by material backing.

The link between resources and opportunities, whether through connections, education, or simply having the funds beforehand is still a historical blind spot for surviving in years of National Socialism in Poland. Maybe it is because of post-communistic fails to recognize that many opportunities never materialize without financial backing of people willing to make a change, even in times of severe crisis. Many women made their mark not only through heroism but by working with resources and connections quietly behind the scenes.

## Courage vs. Capital

It always takes willpower. Heroism, altruism, and acts of resistance never happen accidentally. Yet, just as wealth without good intentions accomplishes little, so too does will without the material means. Scholarly glorification of the willpower only often does not teach us about the necessity for creating conditions that enable such actions.

Helena Radlińska's underground education program was focused on social sciences, which demanded both bravery and substantial



resources. Her work before the Nazi occupation was made possible by the wealth and connections of her family, who hosted for Poland's leading artists and co-established the National Philharmonic. Radlińska herself developed friendships with the most influential figures in independent Poland, worked in the Ministry of Education, and built institutions to beat widespread illiteracy.

The secret education efforts during 1939-1945 were a steady continuation of her commitment to teaching. It was her way of ensuring a better life for the next Polish generation and creating a just social system. However, Radlińska's actions were not just anyone's—they were the efforts of someone who had received an exceptional education and the opportunities made possible by her family's wealth and connections.

Maria Tarnowska was another notable figure, like many other Polish women, who made resistance meaningful. A leading activist and board member of the Polish Red Cross after World War I, Tarnowska's leadership during the Warsaw Uprising enabled her to negotiate with the Nazis and safely evacuate around 20,000 people from the city. During the war, she was imprisoned for her efforts to ensure the organization's aid remained tangible rather than to fade into a phantom tool, improving the occupiers' image.

While she did not come from a wealthy background – her father, a January Uprising participant, had his noble title taken away – her marriage to an aristocrat was not misalliance. Her noble social standing enabled her to make influential connections and obtain the best education under the given circumstances. All her experience made her the right person in the right place in September 1944. Wealthy years in her life turned out to be essential in gaining the broad experience necessary for giving effective aid and showing meaningful resistance.

These are stories among many, which show that while good intentions and determination are crucial, capital might enable women to take meaningful and lasting action during a time of crisis.

In modern society, the financial empowerment of women remains just as important. It not only grants women the freedom to act, but

also helps them achieve economic independence. By reducing the gender wealth gap, we strengthen women's ability to grow businesses, lead and provide support when it matters most. We need to keep fighting injustice and stopping inequalities from growing, especially in the post-COVID European context and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. As with any crisis, women stay disproportionately impacted, followed by those with any type of special needs or struggle.

We all want an economy, which rewards hard work, creative approaches and a thriving to excellence, but in recent years, balance seems to have drifted further from the model we believe in. For women money has to be there to become truly free and make a lasting change in communities that we live with. It is why I believe that solid financial education, along with historical discourse that openly addresses relevant attitudes, is vital to grow a democratic society.

# For those we have forgotten.

Hannah Lindner (Germany)

When a motion was adopted by the German Bundestag in 2019 to “expressly recognize the courage and achievements of women in the resistance against the National Socialist dictatorship”,<sup>1</sup> Annedore Leber's book “Das Gedächtnis steht auf. 64 Lebensbilder aus dem deutschen Widerstand 1933-1945”,<sup>2</sup> published 1954 on the tenth anniversary of the attempted assassination on 20 July 1944, was already 65 years old.<sup>3</sup> Both the book and the author seem unknown to the public today. Yet this seems so obviously antithetical to the aforementioned motion in the German Bundestag. The motion was followed by the statement – in front of the clearly thinned-out rows of the auditorium – that the desired commemoration is desired on the premise that this did not happen sufficiently, especially immediately after the Second World War. Annedore Leber's (1904-1968) postwar activities as a publicist, publisher and social democratic politician may now appear to us as a *corpus delicti* for the fact that women were indeed commemorated by women just a few years after the end of the National Socialist dictatorship. Admittedly, Annedore Leber does not explicitly address resistant women on the premise of the fact that they were women. But not even ten years after the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht, she does what politics, society and academia still struggle with to this day: she recognizes the resistant activities of women for what they are: part of the resistance against National Socialism. As a Social Democrat and together with her husband Julius Leber, she was in contact with the Kreisau Circle. After the war, she dedicated her work to the memory of German resistance, especially political resistance, out of her own concern.<sup>4</sup> The historian Frauke Geyken sees her as the “executor of the German resistance”. It is interesting to note that she does not mention herself or the other women of the Kreisau Circle in “Das Gewissen steht auf”.

It therefore remains unclear whether she saw herself as a resister.<sup>5</sup> What is certain is that even after the war, she was active both as an author with her own publishing house and as a politician for the memory of resisters, as well as being active together with Freya von Moltke in what is now called political education. They visited schools together to give talks about the resistance.<sup>6</sup> Her political commitment led to her accompanying US Attorney General Robert Kennedy on a state visit to Berlin-Plötzensee, the execution site of many of those active in the resistance, in 1962.<sup>7</sup> Although she received numerous honors for her life's work, hardly anyone knows her name today. Annedore Leber's work is closely interwoven with the political life's work of her husband, Julius Leber. The two saw themselves as acting together in a social democratic spirit. It is precisely this explicitly joint action that leads almost provocatively whether the two differed in this respect and, if so, how? Is Julius Leber's work more of a resistance struggle because he was first imprisoned for it and later paid for it with his life, than the work of his wife, who was involved in all the plans, fought for his release several times, worked alone to support the family, supported Julius Leber in all resistance activities, kept in touch with the resistance herself and had her office act as a point of contact? Does that make him a resister and her just a wife of one? Or, if we grant her the medal, does his political activity make him a resister of social democracy and her only a woman in the resistance? Because if you believe almost every standard reference on German resistance to National Socialism, such as an anthology published in 2004 by the Federal Agency for Civic Education and edited by a well-known male German historian, the picture is quite clear: one of a whopping twenty-seven contributions deals with "resistance by women". Female resisters and the articles that deal with them, of course, do not fit into the male-coded categories: resistance from the labor movement, during the war, religiously motivated, attempts at subversion or as resistance by Jews as well as help for the persecuted. Women are only granted to participate in everyday resistance. Political women, religiously motivated, even armed women – Wrong!

One might get the impression that we want to deal with aliens who are not involved in any socio-political context.<sup>8</sup> And it is probably precisely this coincidence that only four out of the twenty-nine authors of this anthology are female.

A clear picture emerges from this: the norm of resistance is male. Against this background, female resistance appears as a deviation from this norm. If we listen to female resisters at all, then we want to hear stories about women who were self-sacrificing, courageous, brave and strong - true heroines. We want to believe that there were also those individual, heroic women who stood up to the evil system while belonging to this system. We want to like them, identify with them, discover similarities because we want to reassure our conscience that we would have behaved just like them. This can also be deduced from a study published in 2018 by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence Bielefeld (IKG) with the Foundation Remembrance Responsibility Future (EVZ), the Multidimensional Remembrance Monitor. In the survey, 69% of the 1016 respondents aged between 16 and 92 stated that none of their ancestors had been perpetrators during the Second World War. When asked whether their ancestors had helped potential victims during the Second World War, 18% answered "yes" and 36% "don't know".<sup>9</sup> The former chairman of the foundation, Andreas Eberhardt, contextualizes that in the current state of research the number of actual resisters can be estimated at around 20,000-200,000. With a population of around 70 million, an optimistic 200,000 people in the resistance would be a whopping 0.3%. According to Eberhardt, this discrepancy is based on the desire to act morally correct in challenging times.<sup>10</sup> This is also reflected in the historical investigation of the resistance. German middle-class biographies, whose actions appear comprehensible to the masses, are well known. What is striking here is that it is mostly women who remember women. Women who resisted have only become the subject of research since the 1980s in the context of the second women's movement. It was only through female academics that questions about gender-specific aspects of the National Socialist dictatorship were raised for the first time, which began to call into

question the image of the passive, powerless woman under National Socialism that had long prevailed – also in research.<sup>11</sup>

Despite or perhaps because of all the efforts that have already been made, it seems more than necessary to listen more closely to women's experiences of resistance – especially beyond those of the classic, German, middle-class resistance. After all, the German, bourgeois resistance is not the only case of resistance, but rather the visible tip of the iceberg that Germans have cultivated. So, if we want to take it seriously and want to pay tribute to women, as decided in the Bundestag in 2019, then we must broaden our perspective, overcome our internalized racisms and the myth of the German cult of victimhood in order to truly hear all those who opposed fascism with all the strength of their bodies and minds. Käthe Anders, a survivor of the Uckermark concentration camp, put it like this: "Keeping together safely, not harming each other, not betraying anyone, organizing things together, sharing bread – all of that is resistance".<sup>12</sup> The women and their legacy are there, but we must also want to listen to them.

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1 Rendering into English: „ausdrücklich den Mut und die Leistungen der Frauen im Widerstand gegen die nationalsozialistische Diktatur [zu würdigen]“. Deutscher Bundestag, Bundestag würdigt Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw26-de-frauen-widerstand-646432>, last accessed on 19/08/2024.

2 Rendered into English: "The memory stands up. 64 biographies from the German resistance 1933-1945. 3 Annedore Leber, Das Gedächtnis steht auf. 64 Lebensbilder aus dem deutschen Widerstand 1933-1945, Berlin/Frankfurt am Main 1954.

4 Frauke Geyken, Wir standen nicht im Abseits. Frauen im Widerstand gegen Hitler, München 2014, page 161.

5 Initially Mosaik-Verlag, renamed Annedore-Leber-Verlag at the beginning of the sixties.

6 Geyken, page 257.

7 Geyken, page 258.

8 Peter Steinbach (ed.), Widerstand gegen die nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933-1945 (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, Schriftenreihe 438), Bonn 2004.

9 Andreas Zick/Jonas Rees/Michael Papendick/Franziska Wäschle, Multidimensionaler Erinnerungsmonitor (MEMO). Studie I/2018, Bielefeld 2018.

10 Jana Hensel, Opa war kein Held, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2018-03/holocaust-gedenken-nationalsozialismus-erinnerungskultur-essay-jana-hensel>, last accessed on 19/08/2024.

11 Claudia Fröhlich, Widerstand von Frauen, in: Widerstand gegen die nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933-1945 (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, Schriftenreihe 438), Bonn 2004.

12 Rendering into English: „Sicher zusammenhalten, einander nicht schaden, niemand verraten, gemeinsam was organisieren, das Brot teilen ↔ das alles ist Widerstand“. Initiative für einen Gedenkort ehemaliges KZ Uckermark, Instagram-Post am 12.04.2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C5qx6kjsQ9b/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C5qx6kjsQ9b/?img_index=1), last accessed on 19/08/2024.

# reSIEstance<sup>1</sup>

Lea-Sophie Marcus (Germany)

Unworthy treatment and demise in the course of time.

For decades, this was the fate of most women who were active in the resistance against National Socialism. For a long time, women were mainly seen as victims of the Nazi regime and its ideology, and while this is of course true given the sexism that was propagated, it is not the only factor that characterised women at the time. It would be unfair and would not do them justice to continue to limit them to this and not recognise what each individual woman resister achieved and what she had to risk and sacrifice to do so.

When you think of women in the resistance, the first name that comes to mind is Sophie Scholl in connection with the 'White Rose' resistance group, perhaps you have also heard of Elise Hampel (together with her husband, she distributed handwritten postcards with anti-Nazi messages in Berlin) or Mildred Harnack (member of the 'Red Orchestra'), but this is where most people's knowledge ends. What these three women have in common is that they were all executed by the National Socialists. Does it really take such a tragic outcome for us to remember these women? For us to recognise their courage, their conviction and their self-sacrificing behaviour?

Resistance, i.e. action against injustice, begins much earlier and should be recognised and appreciated in equal measure. In the Nazi state, conformity, subordination and adaptation were considered the highest priority, so that even the slightest criticism, the smallest act of resistance could entail enormous consequences ranging from reprisals, imprisonment and concentration camps to execution. Every woman who did not bow to the National Socialist ideology and did not behave as part of the 'Volksgemeinschaft'<sup>2</sup> therefore took a high personal risk, as at the same time for her family.

They were threatened with ‘Sippenhaft’,<sup>3</sup> accusations and convictions of complicity and the children being placed in a children’s home run by the National Socialists. In addition, they had to fear social exclusion due to the stigmatization associated with resistance and the fellow humans’ fear of being punished too.

All the more impressive is every woman who secretly gave food or medicine to prisoners of war and forced labourers and thus disregarded the strict, far-reaching inhumane prohibitions of the National Socialists. Every woman who continued to consume ‘Degenerate Art’, read banned books or sang songs that did not conform to the regime and thus maintained tradition and cultural diversity. Every woman who refused to become involved in or even join one of the National Socialist organisations. Every woman who did not perform the ‘Hitler salute’, did not participate in propaganda events such as NSDAP meetings or marches and thus proved herself disloyal to the Nazi regime. Every woman who listened to foreign radio stations and thus took a critical look at Nazi propaganda. Every woman who spread jokes about the regime and thus subversively criticised it. Every woman who continued to wear religious symbols, cross necklaces or even ‘Jewish stars’ and thus took part in the silent protest against the National Socialists’ Gleichschaltung and racist ideology. Every woman who did not denounce her family members, friends, work colleagues, neighbours or even just casual acquaintances and passers-by and thus limited the Nazi regime in its violent omnipresence. Every mother who raised her children not in the sense of National Socialist ideology, but to become mature, critically thinking people who stand up for human rights and thus ensured the continuation of fairness, justice and humanity.

All the more impressive is every single woman who put up moral resistance (and more) and thus weakened the National Socialist regime, even if only slightly.



One could easily deny the existence of the women described here, as there is no evidence that they ever lived and acted as depicted here, and yet these women must have existed – simply because they were human in a time of inhumanity that desperately demanded acts of humanity.

We cannot assign a name to these women because it is not written in any (still existing) letters or files. We cannot assign a story to these women because no one can tell them anymore. These women are forgotten or have long since been. And while there is unfortunately nothing we can change about the first two circumstances, we can and must keep alive the memory of what these women achieved. We must honour all the acts of resistance, no matter how small, because in the small lies the foundation of all great things.

And that is what we can learn from the actions of the many women who are unknown today: any kind of action against injustice means standing up for one's own beliefs, means change, means doing good, means being human.

That is what defines us.

That is what makes everyone of us worthy to remember.

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1 'SIE' means 'SHE' in German: because resistance is female and even the smallest action against injustice has an enormous significance.

2 Community of mind, which on the one hand required a commitment to the world view of National Socialism and, on the other hand, belonging to narrow characteristics, it therefore has a strongly inclusive and exclusionary effect.

3 Liability of a family for the (usually political) crimes or activities of one of its members, so that usually all of them have to go to jail and the children are sent to live in children's homes.

# In solidarity with all those in political imprisonment and in pursuit of a fairer world

Mila Rick (Germany)

We all have to make decisions. Some may make them quickly and impulsively, others may take days, weeks, or even years. However, what always forms the basis of our decisions is the information we receive. Without information about the context, the options and the consequences, we cannot make free and independent decisions.

Today, the right to an informed choice holds true for decisions about one's own body and health. It applies to citizens' rights to information from state institutions, and it is the basis of one of the most elementary components of our democracy: voting. Without comprehensive and balanced information, we are not in a position to form decisions that are good for us and our surroundings.

However, getting information is not and has not always been an easy endeavour. During the National Socialist era in particular, access to information was severely restricted. Just a few days after Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor, the "Emergency Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the German People" drastically restricted freedom of the press.<sup>1</sup> In the years that followed, this was supplemented and extended by many decrees, laws and targeted bans.

Consequently, one of the most common forms of protest during the Nazi dictatorship was the printing and distribution of leaflets to incite the wider society. These acts of protest, which were intended to publicise information about the deportation of Jews or the actual course of the war, very often took place at the risk of the authors' and distributors' own lives, as the prominent example of Sophie and

Hans Scholl shows. Nevertheless, there were women who, against all odds, made a contribution to the resistance against the Nazi regime through their journalistic work. One of them was Eva Mamlok, who was born in Berlin in 1918 to Jewish parents. At a very early age, she began her political resistance against National Socialism, and in particular against her fellow citizens who saw and ignored, denied or even approved of the injustice happening around them. In 1933, when she was 14, she sprayed “Down with Hitler” in white paint on the wall of a Berlin department store. The fact that, although she was arrested after this action, she soon carried out the next acts of protest indicates her conviction that people could be persuaded to wake up. Her disbelief, that people could condone and accept these injustices and the hope that this could change if only people were given the appropriate information and were sufficiently reminded of them, remained unshakeable.

Even after being sent to Moringen concentration camp for six months for several public acts of resistance, she tried to spread information and persuade people to resist fascism and the war with the help of leaflets as soon as she was released. She is regarded as the head of an anti-fascist, Jewish girls’ and women’s group that, in addition to distributing flyers, also circulated literature banned by the National Socialists, and ran a so-called forbidden library until 1941. Even after her arrest and deportation to the ‘Riga ghetto’, Eva Mamlok did not give up her resistance and continued her fight for solidarity. She had her aunt send her a miniature camera hidden in a cake, which she passed on so that the atrocities of the Nazi regime could be recorded.<sup>2</sup>

The desire to document injustice and bring it to the attention of the public, to be heard and to shake people up was not only Eva Mamlok’s driving force. Even today, there are numerous female journalists who report on the injustices of this world at great risk. The Iranian journalists Niloofar Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, for example, reported on the death of the Kurdish woman Jina Mahsa Amini and the police attack during her funeral and were subsequently sentenced to prison.

Without their work, however, the feminist protests in Iran that followed Amini's death would probably not have materialised. It was only through Hamedei's pictures showing Jina Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the morality police and her research at the hospital that such attention could be drawn to the issue.

This example illustrates what can be achieved through good journalistic work, the desire for justice and courage in the face of impending consequences. This applies to everyone and especially to female reporters, who are even more frequently exposed to hostility due to gender-based discrimination.<sup>3</sup> All the more impressive is the work they do and the dangers they take in order to inform us about abuses. And just as Eva Mamlok denounced injustice and called for solidarity, just as Hamedei and Mohammadi informed the public about injustice happening right in front of their eyes, there are journalists all over the world, who put their lives on the line every day for a fairer world and want to inform us about injustices. We just have to decide to listen to them.

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1 The original text of the law is in the Austrian National Library and can be accessed at <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=dra&datum=1939&size=45&page=1913> (last viewed in August 2024).

2 Eva Mamlok's detailed biography can be found at <https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/de/neuenburger-str/1/eva-mamlok> (last viewed in August 2024).

3 A study on this topic by the organisation Reporters Without Borders is linked here: [https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/Berichte/2021/RSF\\_Frauentag\\_2021\\_Sexismus\\_Journalismus.pdf](https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/Berichte/2021/RSF_Frauentag_2021_Sexismus_Journalismus.pdf).

# Women in resistance – Condemned to remain unheard?

Leonie Weber (Germany)

It was not until 2019 that the German government honoured the commitment and courage of women in resistance against National Socialism and set itself the goal of further deepening the study of this topic and raising public awareness of it.<sup>1</sup> The year 2019 seems to be little late for this purpose, considering that their male comrades-in-arms have largely represented the resistance against the National Socialist regime, whether in research, on anniversaries or in the media, for the past decades. It would be naive to believe that women were not involved in the resistance against National Socialism. They also resisted – both individually and in networks and for a variety of reasons and beliefs.<sup>2</sup> But why were women not seen in this role for so long and why are some of them still not? Are they condemned to remain unheard and forgotten? What can we do about it and why is it still so relevant to address this topic today?

First of all, it should be noted that a critical examination of National Socialism and thus also of the history of resistance was approached very hesitantly both socially and academically in the FRG and the GDR.<sup>3</sup> Especially in the first years after the end of the war, society's judgement of resistance fighters was negative.<sup>4</sup> With the emergence of women's history as a research field in the 1970s/80s, the role of women in National Socialism became increasingly the focus of historical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Despite that, this only partially recognised the commitment of women. In 2003, Jana Leichsenring noted that research was still focussing primarily on men.<sup>6</sup> Methodological questions, such as the definition of resistance, also influenced the research

debate and still engage us today.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Christl Wickert emphasises that all forms of resistance differ in terms of their possibilities and limits as well as their chances of success.<sup>8</sup> This aspect is particularly relevant when we talk about women in resistance. It seems that sometimes we not only tend to personify certain acts of resistance and attribute them to one person by proxy, but, and this should be particularly emphasised, we also ignore the gender-specific obstacles that women faced under the National Socialist regime. When looking at Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, for example, we must consider the opportunities he had in National Socialist Germany simply because of his gender. We must take the fact that he had different limits, which offered him different opportunities, especially politically, which also brought different prospects of success with them, into account.

With that it seems comprehensible why, in addition to the aspects mentioned, we have focussed on men in particular for a long time. It is therefore important to ask what opportunities women had in a male-dominated political system,<sup>9</sup> what limits they faced in contrast to men, what room for manoeuvre/opportunities for action there were and how they utilised them. It is therefore not a question of comparing and evaluating the concrete results of different acts of resistance, but of seeing the process that preceded them for its own sake and understanding it in its gender-specific context. That does not indicate that only men were able to resist and offer systemically relevant resistance or that the participation of women should be reduced to nothing but their gender<sup>10</sup> or to the role of exclusively helping male resistance fighters.<sup>11</sup> That this does not correspond to reality is shown by the actions of women such as Liane Berkowitz, Mildred Harnack-Fish, Libertas Schulze-Boysen and Ilse Stöbe. Nevertheless, it is important that we understand the preconditions and limits of women's actions under the Nazi regime<sup>12</sup> in order to get closer to the overall picture and understanding of resistance.

One aspect that seems to be fundamental, is the exclusion from all areas of economic, professional and political life, pushing women back into the supposedly private sphere.<sup>13</sup> One decisive step was to

exclude women from all professions: the Nazis created restrictions for female doctors if they were married,<sup>14</sup> massively restricted access to university studies for women,<sup>15</sup> banned women from working as lawyers or judges<sup>16</sup> and dismissed women from the civil service.<sup>17</sup> This restricted women not only in their personal freedom, but also in their room for manoeuvre in the context of resistance. Above all, however, the deprivation of women's passive right to vote should also be mentioned.<sup>18</sup> They were generally denied the right to participate in the NSDAP.<sup>19</sup> This denied them any possibility of political participation. Instead, the role of women was to become a different one: taking care of the children, the husband – the family and household in general.<sup>20</sup> This isolation in the domestic sphere<sup>21</sup> and thus the increasing restriction of personal contacts and networks certainly also contributed to a reduction in their opportunities for action. Regardless of the family policy measures taken by the National Socialist government, the topics of 'family' and 'children' were certainly aspects that influenced women in their decisions. The ideal of the woman as a wife and a mother had already existed before.<sup>22</sup> For women in particular, the question presumably arose as to whether caring for the family would be compatible with resistance work and the associated dangers. Working in the resistance not only jeopardised the life of a child due to the absence of the mother, for example due to a possible arrest or imprisonment in a concentration camp. Mothers and children were also sometimes sent to camps together, where they ran the risk of being murdered, as they were unable to work to the same extent as others.<sup>23</sup> Above all, it should be noted that the escape of women from these areas of life politically assigned to them had particularly negative connotations for the Nazis and could lead to harsher punishments.<sup>24</sup>

If we now consider the specific dangers to which women were exposed and the restrictions they experienced, especially in the political sphere, it becomes clear that the question of the possibilities of resistance must be posed in the context of gender-specific structural differences.

Nevertheless, it should be noted: women have resisted. In doing so, they either remained within the rooms for manoeuvre and consci-

ously used them, for example by utilising the image of females, that supposedly have nothing to do with politics, to keep themselves and their actions undetected.<sup>25</sup> By that, they gained agency at the same time. Or they transgressed these rooms for manoeuvre without questioning gender boundaries,<sup>26</sup> which also points out women's agency in a different way. What is important is that they gave their all in all forms of resistance despite the impeded opportunities for action. Even though the public often tends to focus on 'big actions' and primarily male figures, women are not condemned to be unheard and forgotten. Projects by the German Resistance Memorial Centre and the research camp addressing this topic have already contributed to this. We must remember to reflect on the circumstances of the time they lived in, without reducing them to only those. With that, we recognise that what they achieved in every form of resistance is of priceless value. This is why it is important to remember those women, their courage and their commitment that enabled a better life for their contemporaries and for us today. Not only can they be seen as role models in context of women's empowerment, but also as cautionary examples for every single one of us. They teach us that the courage to stand up against injustice can have a decisive and lasting impact on the lives of many people and that it is up to each of us to become active.

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1 Cf. Deutscher Bundestag (CDU/CSU; SPD): Frauen im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus würdigen [25.06.2019], pp. 5-6, URL: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/110/1911092.pdf> (retrieved on 19 Aug. 2024).

2 Cf. Kleßmann, Christoph: Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland, in: Albrecht, Richard i.a. (Ed.): *Widerstand und Exil 1933-1944*, Frankfurt am Main, New York 1986, pp. 11-38, here pp. 25-27.

3 Cf. Wolfrum, Edgar: Geschichte der Erinnerungskultur in der DDR und BRD, in: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Ed.): Dossier „Geschichte und Erinnerung“ [26.08.2008], URL: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/erinnerung/geschichte-und-erinnerung/39814/geschichte-der-erinnerungskultur-in-der-ddr-und-brd/> (retrieved on 19 Aug. 2024).

4 Cf. Tuchel, Johannes; Albert, Julia: Die Wahrnehmung des Widerstands nach 1945, in: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Ed.): Dossier „Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus“ [17.08.2016], URL: <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/izpb/widerstand-gegen-den-nationalsozialismus-330/232811/die-wahrnehmung-des-widerstands-nach-1945/> (retrieved on 19 Aug. 2024).

5 Cf. Gehmacher, Johanna; Hauch, Gabriella: Einleitung, in: Gehmacher, Johanna; Hauch, Gabriella (Ed.): *Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte des Nationalsozialismus. Fragestellungen, Perspektiven, neue Forschungen*, Wien i.a. 2007, pp. 7-19, here pp. 8-9.

6 Cf. Leichsenring, Jana: Einleitung, in: Leichsenring, Jana (Ed.): *Frauen und Widerstand*, Münster 2003, pp. 10-12, here p. 10.

7 Cf. Wickert, Christl: Widerstand und Dissens von Frauen – ein Überblick, in: Wickert, Christl (Ed.): *Frauen gegen die Diktatur – Widerstand und Verfolgung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, Berlin 1995, pp. 18-31, here pp. 20-21. Also: Cf. Kleßmann: *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland*, pp. 13-15.



Every one of us, no matter how small or large the act of resistance we perform, can achieve change. With that, it becomes desirable to keep their actions seen, their names remembered and their stories heard.

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8 Cf. Wickert: Widerstand und Dissens von Frauen – ein Überblick, p. 22.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 18.

10 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

11 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22.

12 Cf. Kundrus, Birthe: Handlungsräume. Zur Geschlechtergeschichte des Nationalsozialismus, in: Leichsenring (Ed.): Frauen und Widerstand, pp. 14-35, here p. 15.

13 Cf. Wiggershaus, Renate: Frauen unterm Nationalsozialismus, Wuppertal 1984, p. 16.

14 Cf. Hervé, Florence: „Wir fühlten uns frei“. Deutsche und französische Frauen im Widerstand, Essen 1997, p. 61.

15 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61-62.

17 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61.

18 Cf. Wagner, Leonie: Ein Ende mit Schrecken. Die Frauenbewegung wird „gleichgeschaltet“, in: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Ed.): Dossier „Frauenbewegung“ [08.09.2008], URL: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/gender-diversitaet/frauenbewegung/35269/ein-ende-mit-schrecken/> (retrieved on 19 Aug. 2024).

19 Cf. Wickert: Widerstand und Dissens von Frauen – ein Überblick, p. 19.

20 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

21 Cf. Wiggershaus: Frauen unterm Nationalsozialismus, p. 16.

22 Cf. Schüler, Anja: Bubikopf und kurze Röcke. In der Weimarer Republik veränderten sich die Frauenrollen und die Frauenbewegung kam in die Jahre, in: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Ed.): Dossier „Frauenbewegung“ [08.09.2008], URL: <https://www.bpb.de/themen/gender-diversitaet/frauenbewegung/35265/bubikopf-und-kurze-roecke/> (retrieved on 19 Aug. 2024).

23 Cf. Wickert: Widerstand und Dissens von Frauen – ein Überblick, p. 27.

24 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 27-28.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

26 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 28.

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