

JENS IVO ENGELS

Gender roles and German anti-nuclear protest

The women of Wyhl

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In October 1986, not long after the accident at the Tchernobyl nuclear power plant, a group of women met at Cologne to discuss the issue of "women and ecology". Several participants presented papers, outlining a position that women in general, and the women's movement in particular should take considering the endangered planet. The speakers did not present a pragmatic scheme of behaviour, but tried to link ecology and feminism in a broad sense. Petra Kelly, one of the political "stars" of German ecology, stated that feminism, ecology, and pacifism were one and the same. She underlined that these movements all fought for the "abolition of power, as we know it by now and as we are suffering it. "Power over" (*Macht über*) has to be converted into "power shared by all"².

Another participant, Christa Wichterich, warned her sisters about the dangers of the popular argument that world population growth should be slowed through birth control. She argued, that through this argument male science would try to control women's bodies, just as it tried to manipulate nature as a whole. If birth control functioned, the western model of the nuclear family would be put in place all over the world, reducing women to nothing more than "dependent

1. Thanks to Coinneach MCCABE for reading this text.

2. *Frauen & Ökologie. Gegen den Machbarkeitswahn* (Dokumentation zum Kongreß vom 3.-5.10.1986), Köln, 1987, p. 21.

housewives"³. All the women present agreed that the exploitation of nature could not be understood without its close relationship to the exploitation of humans in general and particularly of women. Capitalism, industrialism, sexism, and militarism seemed to be one complex entity, a kind of illness the world suffered from. Modern society had gone wrong because it was concerned only with "dead" things, that is money, technology, and machines. *Life* on the other hand had no value, being subjugated to many kinds of exploitation, of which labor is only one. Consequently, modern society was perverted, and women were obliged to resist.

According to this remarkable mix of class struggle, feminism, and ecology, women needed to behave like a social class. Further, Petra Kelly underlined that in spite of common belief, women were in no way more peaceful than men. Their anger was only disciplined by the bonds of women's place in society. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen went on to argue that women were not alarmed by Tchernobyl because of their role as mothers and as providers of food for their families. Women knew that Tchernobyl mirrored the dangers of male "potency-mania" (*Potenzwahn*)⁴.

Eco-feminism as a school of thought has inspired an outpouring of writing and theoretical developments⁵. Naturally, environmental history has not been untouched by its ideas. One of the most prominent American historians of the environment, Carolyn Merchant, has tried to explain the exploitation of the planet through a specific modern-rationalistic-male conception of nature⁶. Regarding the environmental movement, may we conclude that women took up arms against pollution in order to fight patriarchy? Did eco-feminist ideas influence women engaged in ecological resistance movements?

In order to answer this question, this chapter takes a closer look at one of the most important environmental conflicts in recent West German history: the controversy over the nuclear power plant at Wyhl. The Wyhl protest is considered to have created the founding myth of the West German anti-nuclear movement. This perception is so prevalent that in February 2000, a monument in honor of the activists was unveiled. An expression in the local dialect was chiselled into

3. *Ibid.*, p. 54-56.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

5. Warwick FOX, "The Deep Ecology - Ecofeminism Debate and Its Parallels", in *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989), p. 5-25; Greta C. GAARD, *Ecological Politics. Eco-feminism and the Greens*, Philadelphia, 1998; H. Patricia HYNES, *Als es Frühling war. Von Rachel Carson zur feministischen Ökologie*, Berlin, 1990; Karen J. WARREN, *Ecological Feminism*, London, 1994.

6. Carolyn MERCHANT, *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, 1983.

the memorial stone, representing the force of "indigenous" resistance: *Nai hämmer gsait* ("We said no"). Since the tradition of ecological resistance has received official approval with the accession of the Green Party to government, the commemorative address was made by a federal secretary of state (*Staatssekretärin*)⁷.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the following three questions. What part did women play in initiating and carrying out citizens' actions? How can we describe women's motivation and the way they saw themselves? Finally, how did environmental protection activities influence their gender roles? Fortunately, there are many sources available on the self-image of the local activists. First, many leaflets and press releases have been conserved in a specialized local archive⁸. Second, many books on the Wyhl movement have been published immediately following the events to document the motivations of the activists. If carefully read and interpreted, these publications enable the historian to take a close look at contemporary ideas and representations⁹.

The Wyhl protest movement

In February 1975, some one hundred farmers and winegrowers blocked excavation works near the village of Wyhl (in Baden-Württemberg) and occupied the construction site. At this location, the state government of Baden-Württemberg and the energy industry wanted to construct a nuclear power plant. For the first time in German history, such a project was encountering serious resistance¹⁰.

7. "Denkmal für den Wyhler Widerstand", in *Badische Zeitung*, 21.2.2000.

8. Archiv für Soziale Bewegungen in Baden, Freiburg.

9. *Der Bauplatz in Wyhl. Bürger wehren sich gegen ihren Staat. Dokumentation, Berichte und Kommentare 1972-1974, vollständig 1975, der [...] Badischen Zeitung [...]*, Schönau (without year of publication); Christoph BÜCHELE (ed.), *Wyhl. Der Widerstand geht weiter. Der Bürgerprotest gegen das Kernkraftwerk von 1976 bis zum Mannheimer Prozeß*, Freiburg, 1982; Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv. Wyhl: Bauern erzählen [...]*, Berlin, 1976; Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung ist hellwach! Erfahrungen aus dem Kampf der badisch-elsässischen Bevölkerung gegen ein Atomkraftwerk in Wyhl und ein Bleiwerk in Marckolsheim", in *Kursbuch*, 39, 1975, p. 129-153; Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret de WITT (eds), *Wyhl. Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends. Betroffene Bürger berichten*, Freiburg, 1976.

10. On Wyhl resistance movement in general: "Anfänge der Anti-AKW-Bewegung", in *Kassiber*, 12, 1995, p. 2-13; *Bürgerinitiativen im Bereich von Kernkraftwerken. Bericht für das Bundesministerium für Forschung und Technologie (= Batelle-Studie)*, Frankfurt a.M., 1975; Jens Ivo ENGELS, "Geschichte und Heimat. Der Widerstand gegen das Kernkraftwerk Wyhl", in Kerstin KRETSCHMER, Norman FUCHSLOCH (eds), *Umwelt und regionale Identität*, Freiburg, 2002; Ulrich LINSE (et alii), *Von der Bittschrift zur Platzbesetzung. Konflikte um technische Großprojekte. Laufenburg, Walchensee, Wyhl, Wackersdorf*, Berlin/Bonn, 1988; Rainer OBST, *Wyhl - Analyse einer Bürgerbewegung gegen Kernkraftwerke*, Frankfurt a.M., 1976; Margot

The story began at nearby Breisach, where half a decade earlier this little town on the banks of the Rhine river had been chosen as the site for the nuclear power plant. When local residents began to demonstrate publicly and to collect petitions against the plant, the government tried to avoid conflict. It decided to move the plant to an even more rural and isolated area.

At Wyhl, the same structures of resistance immediately came into being. Action groups were founded all over the region, publicly articulating harsh criticism against the government project. They organized acts of civil disobedience, culminating in the occupation of 1975. For nine months, the building site remained under the protesters' control. They built a village of wooden houses and established an improvised "cultural centre", called the "house of friendship" (*Freundschaftsbüß*)¹¹. From all over the Federal Republic, tens of thousands of protesters came, as on a pilgrimage to Wyhl. Through their presence at meetings and demonstrations, they articulated fears about nuclear energy and concern about ecological problems and the politics of energy-based economic development. Wyhl became a symbol of people's opposition to a state that was characterized as "antidemocratic" and "despotic".

The Baden-Württemberg government tried to dissolve this clear demonstration of obstructing the state, but it did not dare to clear the construction site through the use of force. The reason was simple: not only were some isolated extremists refusing to accept its energy policy, but a whole region was rising in rebellion. During the previous years, the government had terribly underestimated the will and the vitality of the local population, which had always been very conservative. In addition, the administrative court (*Verwaltungsgericht*) at Freiburg annulled the government's construction permit just a

POPPEHUSEN, *Legitimität ohne Subjekt? Überprüfung der Legitimationstheorie von Niklas Luhmann anhand der Antiatomkraftbewegung Wyhl*, Diss. Berlin, 1990; Dieter RUCHT, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben. Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung*, München, 1980; Peter WAGNER, "Contesting Politics and Redefining the State. Energy Policy-Making and the Anti-Nuclear Movement in West Germany", in Helena FLAM (ed.), *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements*, Edinburgh, 1994, p. 264-295; Hans-Helmut WÜSTENHAGEN, *Bürger gegen Kernkraftwerke. Wyhl - der Anfang?*, Reinbek, 1975. On the history of nuclear power in West Germany, cf. Joachim RADKAU, *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Atomwirtschaft 1945-1975. Verdrängte Alternativen in der Kerntechnik und der Ursprung der nuklearen Kontroverse*, Reinbek, 1983; Wolfgang D. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der Kernenergie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, vol. 1: *Anfänge und Weichenstellungen*, Stuttgart, 1990, vol. 2: *Auf der Suche nach dem Erfolg - Die Sechziger Jahre*, Stuttgart, 1996. On the "new social movements", see Werner BRAND, Detlef BÜSSER, Dieter RUCHT, *Aufbruch in eine andere Gesellschaft. Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik*, Frankfurt a.M., New York, 1986.

11. Ulrich BELLER, "Bürgerproteste am Beispiel Wyhl und die Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald", in Heiko HAUMANN (ed.), *Vom Hotzenwald bis Wyhl*, Köln, 1977, p. 269-290.

month after the occupation began. Citizens' groups had filed the lawsuit, arguing that the government did not take into account all possible dangers. The government was ultimately forced to enter into negotiations with the activists, reaching a compromise in 1976. Although the government did not officially declare the Wyhl project cancelled, it never again tried to carry it out. Over the following years, Wyhl remained one of the most important symbols of the anti-nuclear and ecological movements in West Germany. Wyhl had shown that non-violent but determined protests could be successful. The strategies of the Wyhl citizens' groups had set the example for subsequent ecology and peace movements.

The "Wyhl-Resistance-Movement" took place in a very rural setting. Often it has been described as a resistance movement of farmers and winegrowers. Wyhl is located in the upper Rhine valley, approximately half the way from Strasbourg to Basel. It was (and still is) a village of about 2,500 inhabitants, located near the Kaiserstuhl hills, a well known centre of wine production. The nearest town of notable size is Freiburg im Breisgau, twenty kilometers away, at the edge of the Black-Forest. The core of protest was maintained by local citizens' initiatives.

The social composition of the protest movement extended beyond the often mentioned peasants and winegrowers. Farm workers, industrial workers working in small enterprises in nearby Riegel or Emmendingen, the local élite of doctors, innkeepers, teachers, clergymen, and student protesters most of whom lived in Freiburg, also participated. Nevertheless, rural structures dominated life at Wyhl and its environs.

Typically, activist groups in the Kaiserstuhl regions did not organize according to political preferences, as was sometimes the case in Freiburg. Instead, they assembled the nuclear power opponents of each village into a village-based organization, called for example "Citizens' group of Weisweil". In this way, traditional local identity as well as traditional structures of behaviour dominated the organization forms of protest. At least initially, the citizens' groups appeared very similar to other local organisations, such as singing associations, carnival societies and so on. Contemporary observers have underlined this resemblance, noting that protest groups were influenced by the same people, rituals, and language, just as in all other aspects of *Vereinsleben* (life in local societies)¹².

12. FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen erklären Atom und Blei den Krieg*, München, 1975 (without page numbers), Archiv für Soziale Bewegungen; Wolfgang STERNSTEIN, "Die badisch-elsässischen Bürgerinitiativen", in Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds) *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 232; Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung...", *op. cit.*, p. 140.

The women's commitment

Not surprisingly, women did not play an important public role in this activism, only rarely speaking during official meetings or political demonstrations. The "public sphere" remained reserved to men. During the first years of political mobilization in the Kaiserstuhl area, rural women behaved very cautiously in political matters. One activist recalled his experiences early in the protests, walking from door to door, collecting signatures on petitions. Many women refused to sign the petition while they were alone at home, explaining that they first had to ask their husbands in order to avoid "wrong doing"¹³.

During this period, women's activities were nonetheless very important for the anti-nuclear resistance movement. Citizens' groups strategies were founded on the principle of public information campaigns, warning people about the dangers of nuclear power and trying to mobilize more and more inhabitants of the region. Much work was required to research, edit and copy posters, open letters, information booklets, and press reports. Often, leaflets had to be distributed to households, and donations and signatures had to be collected door to door. Information about the technology of nuclear plants had to be found out and edited. Last but not least, the protest infrastructure had to be organized, including maintaining good communication between the village groups, and providing food and drink for the meetings. Women did most of these jobs because they were done at home, corresponding very well to traditional roles¹⁴. Along the way, women also invented new forms of protest immediately linked to their occupation as housewives. Most of them observed "shopping boycotts", avoiding all shops whose owners supported the nuclear plant¹⁵.

Women's social behaviour changed under the influence of the political discussions. A Kaiserstuhl woman reports that she was "fascinated" by the meetings of the citizens' groups and by the way in which political issues were discussed. In contrast, when women had previously met, the subjects of conversation had been child and kitchen matters. At this point, she felt that the kitchen could not be as important as the question of the nuclear plant: "I thought at this moment it was important to women as well [as to men] to take care of what happened and what kind of future was being planned for our children"¹⁶.

13. "Bevor ich unterschreib, muß ich erst den Mann fragen, ob ich's recht mach oder nicht", in Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, op. cit., p. 86.

14. Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wyhl...*, op. cit., p. 104.

15. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, op. cit., p. 38.

16. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, op. cit., p. 87.

Consequently, women became active in politics. They proved to be the driving forces behind their men and furthermore behind the evolution of the whole resistance movement. In the beginning, economic arguments had dominated the winegrower's protest¹⁷. Several contemporaries believed that it was women's influence which motivated the citizens' groups to widen their argumentation and to criticize the dangers resulting from nuclear energy in general¹⁸. The dangers of radioactivity, the destruction of the environment, and the insecurity of their children's future were the subjects women often dealt with.

One woman reported the founding myth of a group: "I never minded about politics. Housekeeping and the children, the garden and working in the fields —this was my world. And then, by chance, I got a medical conference magazine, reporting the dangers resulting from radioactivity. I read it and I was very alarmed". Later, she talked with her husband about the issue. First, he did not want to agree, but in the end he read the text, confessing: "Yes, I think I have to change my opinion; we have to get more information". Following this event, the couple began to organize a citizens' group¹⁹.

With the growth of the resistance movement came an increase in women's activism. In short, there are three major kinds of public women's participation in the resistance.

A women's movement? The "Baden Women's Group"

In October 1974, the "Baden Women's Group" (*Badische Fraueninitiative*) was founded. For the first time during the Wyhl conflict, women took part in politics without men's participation. They appeared as a single group and articulated some gender-specific issues. The women tried to overcome the former principle of "one village/one group". And they were successful. The first meeting had been quickly organized by a handful of women who knew each other personally²⁰. They had discovered that discussions in a purely female group were very fruitful, so they announced the foundation of a women's group. Some days later, on October 10th, forty women met at a Sasbach inn. Calling for all women of the region to meet with

17. The nuclear plant needed a water based cooling system including giant cooling towers. The winegrowers feared that the clouds of steam emerging from the towers would cause fog, diminishing the force of the sunlight needed by the vines; cf. Rainer OBST, *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. On economic motivation for resistance, *Bürgerinitiativen...*, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

18. Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung...", *op. cit.*, p. 141.

19. Nina GLADITZ (ed), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

20. FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*

them to articulate female interests, they wrote a public appeal, entitled: "Women Sound the Alarm"²¹.

On October 15th, more than two hundred Kaiserstuhl women met at Sasbach. The assembly passed the text of a petition that was to be sent to the *Ministerpräsident* (the head of government) of the state Baden-Württemberg. During the following months, the women assembled again and again, discussing public action, writing petitions, inviting scientists and experts to inform them about the dangers of nuclear energy. The press reported their activities and consequently, the group was integrated into actions taken by the other groups.

According to one eyewitness, it was not easy for the women to "organize" their participation. Few of them possessed a car or had a driving licence, their children had to be supervised during their absence, and housework was often neglected²². The women's group was not only a mouthpiece of women's political convictions, it also made possible new kinds of activity for women by allowing them to transgress the bounds of female everyday life as it commonly existed in Kaiserstuhl society in the mid-1970s.

The battle over the woman's sphere: occupying the construction site

Occupation of the nuclear plant's construction site would not have been possible without women's participation. The occupation was organized by "guards". Each village citizens' group had to guarantee the presence of a "guard" during a specified period of time, so that the site was controlled twenty four hours per day. Women's presence was necessary during the day, while their husbands were at work.

In addition, women did not only act as the men's auxiliaries, they also tried to gain some control over daily life on the *Bauplatz* (construction site) viewing that as belonging to their traditional domain.

Besides the local activist "guards", a group of young people, called the "long-term occupants" (*Dauerbesetzer*), settled down on the site, living there for weeks or months. Most of them were students or apprentices who came from outside the Kaiserstuhl area. Additionally, a handful of unemployed young Kaiserstuhl men lived on the site. The *Dauerbesetzer's* motivations to engage in the occupation were different —many of them had socialist or communist convictions, others

21. "Frauen schlagen Alarm", Leaflet, 1974, Archiv für Soziale Bewegungen.

22. Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

only wanted to enjoy the taste of adventure. They all sought to live a somewhat anarchistic way of life on the site²³.

The relationship between the long-term occupants and the Kaiserstuhl women was not an easy one. On one hand, the women provided them well with food and clothes or let them take a shower at their homes. Seemingly, some women competed with their sisters from the other villages in preparing the most luxurious meals for the *Dauerbesetzer*²⁴. On the other hand, the occupants' style of life and behaviour seemed unacceptable to local women, and men as well. Local inhabitants often suspected the young people of being parasites, antisocial elements, or troublemakers. Residents claimed the sole right to define what kind of life and manners were permitted on the site.

Ida Tittmann, a 56 year-old housewife, is a good witness to this issue. She complained about the occupants' lack of neatness and the presence of rubbish all over the site. Kaiserstuhl women in general tried to brighten up the place and planted flowers. She also disapproved of the sexual promiscuity among the young people. At the outset, when it became obvious that the occupation would last for a long period, village women decided to establish a feminine order. Claiming a mission to guarantee that life on the construction site was well-ordered, Kaiserstuhl women pointedly took over the kitchen hut, cleaning and discharging the food that they found. Only then could "a woman [...] call this room "fit for human beings" (*menschenwürdig*)"²⁵.

As did men, Kaiserstuhl women defined the occupied site as a part of their homeland, a place in which traditional life had to be respected. They considered themselves as legitimate mistresses of the site. This attitude caused several conflicts between the long-term occupants and the citizens' groups. In the eyes of the farmers and wine-growers, the long-term occupants remained an alien element at the heart of the protest²⁶. But, as Ida Tittmann reports, in the case of serious conflicts, women tried to negotiate between the occupants and

23. On this matter Wolfgang STERNSTEIN, "Der Alltag des Widerstandes. Probleme einer langandauernden Platzbesetzung", in Theodor EBERT, Wolfgang STERNSTEIN, Roland VOGT (eds), *Ökologiebewegung und ziviler Widerstand. Wybler Erfahrungen*, Stuttgart, 1978, p. 34-50, p. 42; Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 108-109; Gabi WALTERSPEL, "Wyhl. Platzbesetzung von innen beobachtet", in *Graswurzelrevolution* 14/15 (1975), p. 1-2.

24. See Walter VÖGTLE in Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

25. Ida TITTMANN in Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 202-203.

26. Wolfgang STERNSTEIN, "Der Alltag...", *op. cit.*, p. 50; Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung...", *op. cit.*, p. 139.

the citizens' groups' leaders. In short, Kaiserstuhl women looked after long-term occupants and tried to educate them, claiming the authority of mothers over their children.

This phenomenon was not limited to the Wyhl resistance movement. In fact, we can observe it in other movements. The situation was similar in the 1980s, for example, during the occupation of the famous site at Frankfurt airport (*Startbahn West*), where once again residents were in conflict with outsiders living on the site²⁷. The same kind of conflicts arouse and women took up the same kind of activities, like the famous "kitchen brigade" (*Küchenbrigade*). Women behaved in the same way like "mothers" of the long-term occupants²⁸.

The status of the occupied site at Wyhl oscillated between a battlefield of public politics and a private living place, or extended household. If Kaiserstuhl women interpreted their social tasks in a traditional way, it is reasonable that they considered themselves responsible for private life. Consequently, women's activities on the site can be interpreted as part of a struggle to assure female authority.

First, women tried to impose a "private" character onto the site. Good arguments were on their side. During the day, the women stayed there for hours at a time, accompanied by their children and often doing typical women's work such as knitting. But the best argument was in fact the presence of long-term occupants. Therefore, women were interested in supporting them. Once the private nature of the site was accepted by men, the women had to gain influence over the "outsiders". The non-conformist manners of long-term occupants seemed to be a challenge to traditional women's authority. There was a similar, very ambiguous relationship between women and long-term occupants at *Startbahn West*²⁹. Female strategies in local resistance movements seem to be almost the same. In struggling for a well-ordered camp, women were fighting for the integrity of the female sphere of power. At the same time, they also influenced the public image of the resistance movement.

Woman's touch

As certain women pointed out, they were often more courageous than men, going "to the front" during clashes with politicians or with the police. Some sources indicate that the first occupation of the con-

27. The citizens' groups initially tried to dominate the occupation with the presence of a large number of local young men. But the number of strangers increased until the locals became marginal; Ulrike GÄTHGENS-MEIER (ed.), *"Bevor das Leben unerträglich wird..." Frauen erzählen von ihrem Kampf gegen Natur- und Umweltzerstörung*, Essen, 1986, p. 18-19.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 18-19, 21-22, 31-35, 40, 42-43.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

struction site had been led by women who climbed on the construction equipment and machines in order to stop the work. We do not really know if this is true, but it is clear that on February 18th, 1975, many women were present.³⁰

For simple tactical reasons, women marched at the forefront of demonstrations. The government alleged publicly that the Wyhl protest was headed by young urban communists and anarchists. The Kaiserstuhl movement reacted by putting in prominent view the kind of people who might represent opposite values from those of young long-haired radicals: women, especially old women, and mothers with their children³¹. The high visibility of the women demonstrated that the resistance was serious, honourable and respectable.

As one woman describes, "in our family we made the decision that I would participate in the occupation of the building site, because no one could fire me. And a mother with five children would not be so quickly locked up"³¹. These tactics were successful. Policemen hesitated to face angry grandmothers during the eviction of the first occupation. Using force against a woman was unthinkable in the eyes of Kaiserstuhl men as well as many policemen. When one woman was slightly injured during the eviction, this fact was highly publicized as a scandal by the press. Half a decade later, during the conflict over "Startbahn West", near Frankfurt, the same tactics were used³².

Women also used their traditional image to fight for peace. In their letter to the head of the Baden-Württemberg government, the members of the Women's Initiative portrayed themselves as weak, submissive, and peace loving: "We implore you, revise your decisions, before our men become murderers"³³. According to the rhetoric of this sentence, women only could plead facing a development that would lead their husbands to disaster. Seemingly, they were sentenced to passivity. Like anxious mothers they implored the father of the people to calm their infuriated husbands, as if they were his sons. Nevertheless, this letter contained a threat.

30. FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*

31. "Es war in unserer Familie beschlossene Sache, daß ich zur Platzbesetzung gehen würde, denn mich könnte niemand entlassen, und eine Mutter von fünf Kindern würde man auch nicht so rasch einsperren", Maria KÖLLHOFER in Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

32. During the clearing of the *Startbahn West* site, a woman moved between her husband and a policeman who wanted to beat him seriously. The policeman hesitated and withdrew; Ulrike GÄTHGENS-MEIER (ed.), *Bevor das Leben...*, *op. cit.*, p. 64-65.

33. "Wir flehen Sie an, Ihre Entschlüsse zu revidieren, bevor unsere Männer zu Mördern werden"; cf. Rainer OBST, *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

When the members of parliament of the Baden-Württemberg Christian Democrats met at Kiechlinsbergen, their meeting spontaneously was besieged by local winegrowers and farmers. Among them there was a large contingent of women, armed with carpet-beaters. Half seriously and half jokingly they threatened to give the politicians a thrashing³⁴. When Annemarie Griesinger, Baden-Württemberg minister of Health, paid a visit to the Kaiserstuhl in 1975, local women found out where she was staying and called on her in order to talk. Obviously, they made a threatening impression, as the vicar who was the house owner, felt obliged to urge them to avoid violence. They replied, filled with indignation, that they were only "harmless women"³⁵.

At first glance, women's behaviour could be seen as contradictory or as oscillating between two poles. On the one hand, they claimed to be more radical and more courageous than men. On the other hand they consciously tried to profit from their status as the "feeble sex" —the police would never beat a woman because she could not really endanger public order, they thought. But perhaps there is no contradiction. Women laid claim to a kind of "fool's licence", that permitted them to be more radical than men, without having to fear serious punishment or serious injuries. The presence of women with carpet-beaters at Kiechlinsbergen was a threatening gesture, but it would not be prosecuted as an act of violence. Women gained from a certain moment of surprise, because no one expected such a "radical" involvement. If women's threats did not have to be taken seriously, their demands were somewhat ennobled by the wisdom of the "mother".

Feminist liberation in the provinces?

The politization and mobilization of rural women was in no way part of a welcomed process of long awaited liberation. Women were very reluctant to address an assembly, as we learn from participants of the first meetings of the Women's group³⁶. Like many of their husbands, women initially considered political protest against the state and the government as an emergency measure, in no way fitting in with their political world view³⁷. If women spoke at meetings and demonstrations, they hardly did it with pleasure. It was rather an act of despair. They even wondered about the fact that "honest country

34. Reported in FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*

35. The dialogues of the incident are documented in Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 122-125.

36. FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*

37. Jens Ivo ENGELS, "Geschichte und Heimat...", *op. cit.*

women of all ages were not at all intimidated, either by police nor by anyone else"³⁸.

Maria Köllhofer, a 50 year-old Kaiserstuhl housewife, when talking about her first participation in a public demonstration against the nuclear power plant at Wyhl, declared:

My indignation about the fact that it was necessary to go into the streets for the preservation of our living space choked me and brought tears into my eyes. I had been sure it would be sufficient that our husbands declared publicly the will of the population [...] in order to prevent such a project³⁹.

Maria Köllhofer interpreted the public political activities of women as a kind of last resort, a necessary response to immediate dangers. She considered the local population as being forced to summon up all its strength. The resistance to the power plant seemed to her to be a general uprising, and only in this extreme context, could women take part. In time, women's participation became more and more generalized. Maria Köllhofer, for example, ended up taking part in the illegal occupation of the plant's construction site, where she was arrested.

Like Köllhofer, Ida Tittmann interpreted women's activities above all as a kind of support provided to their husbands. "When the struggle became more and more severe, all women were forced to back the men of the citizens' group". According to her statement, this was exactly the goal of the "Baden Women's group". The evening of its first meeting, the women talked about their fears. In the end "we knew that through joint action we could provide effective assistance to our husbands"⁴⁰. The women's cohort remained an auxiliary one.

After the end of the Wyhl conflict, the majority of women went "back home" and continued to play their traditional role as housewives. Only a few women changed their lives in a long-lasting way. One was Lore Haag, who had been the heart of the "International Committee of the Citizens' Groups of Baden and Alsace". She continued to be a major representative of the Baden ecology movement, keeping up contacts with other organizations⁴¹ and travelling around

38. Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 201 (Ida TITTMANN).

39. Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wyhl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Similar hesitations formulated by Margot HARLOFF, *ibid.*, S. 26.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

41. The International Committee still is member of the BBU (Federal Union of the Citizens' Initiatives for Environment Protection), represented by Lore Haag.

the world⁴². Other women decided to participate in local politics, becoming for example municipal councillors⁴³.

Most of the Kaiserstuhl women did not question seriously their traditional status as housewives. Nonetheless, they had undergone a kind of change. It was now seen as perfectly natural for women to have their own political convictions, to be informed and to talk openly about politics. They knew as well as their husbands that their public and political activities had greatly contributed to the successful resistance to the construction of the nuclear power plant. They had made themselves heard and respected in a public setting. Old restrictions to women's competences had melted down⁴⁴.

But Kaiserstuhl women never acted with the intent of destroying "patriarchy". Feminist rhetoric is not to be found in the sources. The common enemy of all members of society was the state and the nuclear power industry, but not the culture of patriarchy.

The women's job

Women became political activists once they were convinced that they had a special mission as women. How did they define their political competence and how did they back up their activities? The foundation of the Women's Group indicates that Kaiserstuhl women were not content with the opportunities they had within the structure of the male-dominated citizens' groups.

Kaiserstuhl women were convinced that they bore the main responsibility to fight the dangers of nuclear power. This responsibility was linked to their traditional role as mothers, housewives and providers of food to their families. In short, it was life they were responsible for. As in their eyes life was endangered seriously by a nuclear power plant, women had to become active in the battle against it. In their first leaflet, the Women's Group justified its foundation with the following argument: politics could no longer be left to the men because the health of families and the future of children were jeopardized. At this moment, all women had to accept their responsibility. Resistance had to become more important than the daily care of their households⁴⁵.

42. Lore HAAG, "Eine Fahrt nach Japan", in Christoph BÜCHELE (ed.), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 127-132.

43. Annemarie SACHERER, "Zehn Jahre danach", in Christoph BÜCHELE (ed.), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 38-39.

44. Cf. Wolfgang BEER, *Lernen im Widerstand. Politisches Lernen und politische Sozialisation in Bürgerinitiativen*, Hamburg, 1978, p. 65-66, who nonetheless overestimates the "breakdown" of the gendered distribution of tasks in every-day life.

45. Leaflet "Frauen schlagen Alarm", ASB 12.1.10.I.

Typical women's statements supporting this view were: "As women, we are responsible for young life, so we are particularly active"⁴⁶. Or, our motivation is "the will to protect health for [our] posterity and [our] homeland"⁴⁷. An old woman reproached the female minister of health, Annemarie Griesinger: "What you are planning here is like murder. Many little children will die. And it is written: 'Thou shall not kill!'"⁴⁸. Indeed, biblical allusions were often formulated by Kaiserstuhl women as well as by men⁴⁹.

In a certain manner, womens' argumentation was both more radical and more fundamental than that of men. Facing serious threats, certain women declared that the feeble sex was brave and would fight to the end⁵⁰. During a public hearing, a woman demanded of federal minister Werner Maihofer that not job creation, but human beings themselves had to be the focus of politics⁵¹. Women questioned the concept of progress as it had been defined through industrialisation⁵².

As Kaiserstuhl women explained their participation in the resistance movement by traditional responsibilities resulting from their gender role, so they demanded a society that was concerned with the fate of its children, not only economically but also in terms of health and well being. They did not accept what they called "profit making" and "technocracy". To sum up, they called for more humanity. The human being and his or her environment ought to be the criteria for political and economic decisions.

This was precisely one of the most important arguments of the environmental movement. We might even say that at the heart of the environmental movement's world view we find strong links to *traditional* concepts of femininity.

Men's reactions

How did men react to women's behaviour? On the one hand, Kaiserstuhl men were proud of women's activities and they knew very well that many tasks could not be fulfilled without their com-

46. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

47. Ida TITTMANN, in Bernd NÖSSLER, Margret DE WITT (eds), *Wybl...*, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

48. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

49. Cf. the famous "Open letter" of the "Baden Women's Initiative" to Ministerpräsident Filbinger; reprinted in Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

50. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 87: "The female sex is the strong sex"; cf. Letter to the editor of the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" by "Baden Women's Initiative", 22.1.1975, copy, Archiv für Soziale Bewegungen, 12.1.10.I.

51. Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

52. Cf. Letter to the editor of the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" by "Baden Women's Initiative", 22.1.1975, copy, ASB 12.1.10.I.

mitment. But on the other hand, they were irritated about the evolving gender roles. Once when during a gathering on the occupied site a woman expressed her opinion about a political subject, contradicting her husband's ideas, the latter said: "Come, wife, we're going home, politics are not a woman's job"⁵³. The foundation of the Women's Group seemed a strange thing to some people. On the evening of its second meeting at Sasbach, the male leader of a citizens' group wandered around, saying again and again: "Two hundred women at Sasbach, two hundred women!!"⁵⁴.

Citizens' groups, dominated by men, initially did not welcome the "Baden Women's Group". The Weisweil innkeeper Ehret, himself a prominent leader of the Weisweil citizens' Group, combated the women by intentionally sending wrong information about their gatherings to the press. He clearly feared that the Women's Group would compete with the village citizens' groups, and he did not accept the women's success. When some of them questioned him, he answered: "Women should behave more modestly". He conceded that the women's leaflet was good. But was it necessary to make it so big?⁵⁵.

Urban feminists

Not only were Kaiserstuhl women involved in the Wyhl resistance movement, but in nearby Freiburg several citizens' groups existed and were in contact with the rural groups. One of them was the "Freiburg Citizens' Group Nuclear Power Station No" (*Freiburger Initiativgruppe KKW NEIN*). This group was almost exclusively composed of female members who thought that ecology had to be part of feminist politics⁵⁶.

As a citizens' group, it took part in meetings where the local groups interacted, and it tried to become an integral part of the resistance movement. This was not very easy. The leaders of the local movement accepted the presence of the "modern" women. But if serious matters had to be decided, they wanted to discuss them only with male representatives. In the eyes of the Kaiserstuhl men, the urban women, who often wore trousers, were single and spoke like men, seemed to be "birds of paradise". The Freiburg feminists com-

53. Cited in Nina GLADITZ (ed.), *Lieber heute aktiv...*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

54. "Zwaihundert Wiiber in Sasbach, zwaihundert Wiiber!!"; Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung...", *op. cit.*, S. 141.

55. FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*: "Die Frauen sollten sich erst mal bescheiden verhalten. Unser Flugblatt, das sei ja ganz gut gewesen, aber ob es unbedingt so groß hätte sein müssen?"

56. All informations about this subject in FRAUENKOLLEKTIV FREIBURG (ed.), *Frauen...*, *op. cit.*

plained that they were treated like interesting sex objects, but not as partners in resistance⁵⁷.

This relationship improved over time and Kaiserstuhl activists learned to accept the urban activists, as their own wives became active in politics. It was thought that the Freiburg group played a part in the forming of the "Baden Women's Initiative".

In fact, the urban women understood very well that the Women's Group was not at all a feminist organization. When a Swiss anti-nuclear group⁵⁸ wrote a letter to them, asking how they had founded a "women's movement" in only seven days, Freiburg women answered their friends that this was by no means a feminist phenomenon. Somewhat surprisingly, Freiburg feminists accepted the traditional motivations and behaviours of their Kaiserstuhl sisters, declining attempt to change them. Perhaps they had tried it before without success, or perhaps they remembered how ungraciously communist propagandists had been treated by the resistance movement. In any case, they seemed content to build up the self-confidence of Kaiserstuhl women. In one booklet, the feminists declared it was a big step forward simply to "shake the age-old bounds" of rural women.

Conclusion

Kaiserstuhl women did not stand up against the nuclear based energy concept of the Baden-Württemberg government in order to fight patriarchy. Certainly, when they became engaged in environmental protection, their field of public and political action widened, and women understood and accepted this. But their self-portrayal and their initial motivation have to be understood in terms of traditional gender role values. It is possible that the Freiburg feminists were right and that Kaiserstuhl women did undergo a kind of moral and social modernization. But it seems that this was only a very individual phenomenon, depending on reactions in the immediate social environment. Rural gender roles mostly remained unchanged.

Many political activities of women in the Wyhl resistance movement are at the same time transgressions *and* affirmations of the traditional feminine role. Many women did the cooking on the occupied site because they looked for recognition as housewives. They met at Sasbach because they wanted to confirm their "age old" competence in matters concerning family and life.

Acting the way, without realizing it, they practiced new patterns of behaviour. The same might be said for the whole movement. The

57. Cf. Walter MOSSMANN, "Die Bevölkerung...", *op. cit.*, p. 140.

58. *Gewaltfreie Aktion Kaiseraugst*, struggling against a nuclear energy plant at Kaiseraugst, near Basel.

main motivations of the winegrowers and farmers were highly conservative: protecting of the homeland and warding off foreign influences⁵⁹. Looking for strategies, for good arguments, and for allies, the character of the movement changed and in the end seemed very unconventional, if not leftist. It is not possible to define ultimately whether the movement was traditional or not, because the forms of resistance created an order of their own. We have to accept the contradictory character of the Wyhl movement.

This case-study may serve to elucidate some aspects of the general "environmental movement". Why could this movement attract people so massively that within a decade it had altered the course of German politics? Its attractiveness for women may lie in "environmental" values, such as humanity, life and its protection, and safeguarding future generations, which have a close relationship to what women have perceived as familiar and traditional female competences. Even if gender roles have begun to dissolve, they still exercise a large influence. These traditional values have been attractive to many women. In Wyhl, some women only wanted to strengthen old convictions. These some, increasingly popular demands, were interpreted by others as a means to improve society through the rule of feminine orientations. Female values and a feminine reform of society, seemed to promise a solution of the problems that threatened industrialized nations. For this reason, the eco-feminists of the 1980s could at least have some hope that women would be able to change society.

If the principles of ecology and nature protection became so popular during the 1970s and 1980s, it was because they appealed to the values of a wide range of social and cultural groups. Conservative rural women and urban feminists are only two examples. Insisting on ecological thinking could mean in fact very different things: the protection of health and the protection of the homeland, resistance *against* "modern" conceptions of technical progress, and the *demand for* a modern political culture. It is this openness which is at the heart of the wide popularity of ecological thinking.

59. Jens Ivo ENGELS, "Geschichte und Heimat...", *op. cit.*