

ISSN 0259-7446

€ 4,80

# *medien & zeit*

Kommunikation in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart

**Thema:  
Journalism as  
a female profession**

**The Field of  
Feminine Journalism**

**Eine unbekannte Journalistin im  
Ersten Weltkrieg**

**Rediscovering Ernestine Evans**

**The First Lady of Israeli  
Journalism Hanna Semer**

*2/2009*

**Jahrgang 24**

# medien & zeit

## Inhalt

The Field of Feminine Journalism An unwritten history.....	4
Hatty Oliver	
„... in die Gesellschaft von Helden passe ich nicht rein.“ Eine unbekannte Journalistin im Ersten Weltkrieg: Friedel Merzenich (1879–1956) und ihre Arbeit für die „Liller Kriegszeitung“.....	15
Lucia Hacker	
“Not nearly enough use is made of women” Rediscovering Ernestine Evans.....	24
Annie Rudd	
The First Lady of Israeli Journalism Hannah Semer (1924 - 2003) Quest and discovery: The story of an exceptional woman.....	40
Einat Lachover	
Rezensionen.....	55

## Impressum

### Medieninhaber, Herausgeber und Verleger:

Verein „Arbeitskreis für historische Kommunikationsforschung  
(AHK)“, Schopenhauerstraße 32, A-1180 Wien

<http://www.medienundzeit.at>

© Die Rechte für die Beiträge in diesem Heft liegen beim  
„Arbeitskreis für historische Kommunikationsforschung (AHK)“

### Vorstand des AHK:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Duchkowitsch (Obmann),  
a.o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Fritz Hausjell (Obmann-Stv.),  
Mag. Gaby Falböck (Obmann-Stellvertreterin),  
Mag. Bernd Semrad (Geschäftsführer),  
Mag. Fritz Randl (Geschäftsführer-Stv.),  
Mag. Christian Schwarzenegger (Schriftführer),  
Dr. Erich Vogl (Schriftführer-Stv.),  
Mag. Marion Linger (Kassierin),  
Dr. Norbert P. Feldinger (Kassier-Stv.)

### Redaktion:

Wolfgang Duchkowitsch, Christian Schwarzenegger

### Gastherausgeberschaft:

Susanne Kinnebrock

### Layout:

Christian Schwarzenegger

### Redaktion Buchbesprechungen:

Gaby Falböck

### Korrespondenten:

Prof. Dr. Hans Bohrmann (Dortmund),  
Prof. Dr. Hermann Haarmann (Berlin),  
Prof. Dr. Ed Mc Luskie (Boise, Idaho),  
Prof. Dr. Arnulf Kutsch (Leipzig),  
Prof. Dr. Markus Behmer (Bamberg),  
Prof. Dr. Rudolf Stöber (Bamberg)

### Druck:

Buch- und Offsetdruckerei Fischer,  
1010 Wien, Dominikanerbastei 10

### Erscheinungsweise:

*medien & zeit* erscheint vierteljährlich

### Bezugsbedingungen:

Einzelheft (exkl. Versand): € 4,80  
Doppelheft (exkl. Versand): € 9,60

### Jahresabonnement:

Österreich (inkl. Versand): € 17,60  
Ausland (inkl. Versand auf dem Landweg): € 24,00

### StudentInnenjahresabonnement:

Österreich (inkl. Versand): € 12,80  
Ausland (inkl. Versand auf dem Landweg): € 19,20

Info und Bestellung unter [abo@medienundzeit.at](mailto:abo@medienundzeit.at)

### Bestellung an:

*medien & zeit*,  
Schopenhauerstraße 32, A-1180 Wien  
oder über den gut sortierten Buch- und Zeitschriftenhandel

**ISSN 0259-7446**

## Editorial

Der Anteil von Frauen im Journalismus hat beständig zugenommen. In westlichen Demokratien ist inzwischen mindestens jeder dritte Journalist genau genommen eine Journalistin. Versucht man die Berufsgeschichte von Journalistinnen zu rekonstruieren, dann tut sich allerdings ein eigentümlicher Widerspruch auf: Während Standardwerke der Berufsgeschichtsschreibung oft suggerieren, dass Frauen seit der ‚Take-off-Phase‘ des modernen Journalismus im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Nachkriegszeit hinein eine *quantité négligeable* darstellen, finden sich in zeitgenössischen (medialen) Quellen zahlreiche Hinweise auf weibliche Autorinnen. Doch in den Fokus der Forschung sind diese frühen Journalistinnen bislang selten geraten. Allenfalls spektakuläre Ausnahmejournalistinnen sind als Einzelfälle biographisch untersucht worden – und dies häufig mit primär (geschlechter-) historischer oder literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive. Unser Wissen über die frühen Journalistinnen ist nach wie vor fragmentarisch.

Diese Forschungslücke veranlasste *medien&zeit*, einen Call for Papers zu initiieren, um aktuelle und internationale Forschungen zu frühen Journalistinnen zusammenzuführen. Aufgrund der großen Resonanz auf diesen Call for Paper und der positiven Reviews der Peers, entschloss sich das Editorial Board, zwei Hefte dem Thema „Journalismus als Frauenberuf“ zu widmen. Das erste Heft reflektiert die Frage, warum es sich bei der Journalistinnengeschichte um eine ungeschriebene handelt, und führt mit seinen Beiträgen Erkenntnisse und Perspektiven aus unterschiedlichen Ländern zusammen: aus den USA, Großbritannien, Israel und Deutschland. So heterogen diese Länder, ihre Journalismuskulturen und vor allem auch die behandelten Zeiträume erscheinen mögen (sie erstrecken sich über das ganze 20. Jahrhundert), es zeigen sich doch klare Parallelen hinsichtlich der Vorstellungen darüber, was der Kern des Journalismus ausmache (nämlich ‚hard news‘) und wo Frauen zu platzie-

ren seien (in der Peripherie des Journalismus, weit entfernt vom ‚harten‘ Nachrichtenjournalismus). Bezeichnenderweise scheinen sich berufspraktischer und akademischer Diskurs wenig zu unterscheiden, wenn es darum geht, die Grenzen des Journalismus zu ziehen und journalistische Normen zu perpetuieren. Hatty Oliver arbeitet in ihrem theoretischen Beitrag heraus, wie normative Vorstellungen und ein ‚gender bias‘ die gängigen wissenschaftlichen Journalismusdefinitionen durchziehen – mit gravierenden Folgen für die Aufarbeitung der Journalismusgeschichte. Feminin konnotierte Felder jenseits des hehren Kerns des Journalismus blieben ausgeblendet und mit ihnen ein großer Teil derjenigen, die im Bereich des „feminine journalism“ tätig waren: überwiegend Frauen.

Ins Zentrum der (historischen) Kommunikationsforschung gerät eher der Kern des Journalismus und so mag auf den ersten Blick ein Beitrag über eine Journalistin naheliegen, die während des Ersten Weltkriegs an die französische Front zog, um für die *Liller Kriegszeitung* zu arbeiten. Lucia Hacker widmet sich der „unbekannten Journalistin“ Friedel Merzenich (1879-1956) und ihren Publikationen während der Kriegszeit. Dabei arbeitet sie heraus, wie fern von der kriegserischen Realität Merzenichs Oeuvre damals war, wie es an Konventionen des „feminine journalism“ anknüpfte und wie Merzenich letztlich scheiterte, im Kern des Journalismus Fuß zu fassen.

Ähnlich wie Friedel Merzenich war die US-Amerikanerin Ernestine Evans (1889-1971) eine Journalistin, die sich an den Grenzen des Journalismus bewegte – zur Schriftstellerei, zum Verlagsmanagement und zur politischen Öffentlichkeitsarbeit. Allerdings, dies sei hier vorweggenommen, gelangt es dem Tausendsassa Ernestine Evans besser, auch im Nachrichtenjournalismus ihren Platz zu finden. Evans Karriere wird von Annie Rudd nachgezeichnet, wobei sie Evans Netzwerke, ihre Vielseitigkeit und vor allem ihre

Fähigkeit, jede sich bietende Chance zu nutzen, herausarbeitet. Flexibilität scheint Frauen im Journalismus Chancen ermöglicht zu haben, wenngleich es erstaunt, dass Evans trotz eines beachtlichen Oeuvres, ansehnlicher Erfolge und eines exzellenten Netzwerkes stets im Hintergrund wirkte und nach ihrem Tod völlig in Vergessenheit geriet – ein Schicksal, dass sie, nebenbei bemerkt, auch mit Merzenich teilt.

Der letzte Beitrag dieses Heftes widmet sich hingegen einer Starjournalistin, der „First Lady“ des israelischen Journalismus Hanna Semer (1924-2003). Einat Lachover arbeitet hier zum ersten Mal Leben und Werk dieser in Bratislava geborenen Ausnahmejournalistin auf. Semer, die sich zwar selbst nicht als Feministin sah, wird hier aber aus einer feministischen Perspektive analysiert. Denn zweifelsohne kann ihr eine gewisse Vorreiterrolle zugesprochen werden, weil sie in Feldern des Journalismus aktiv wurde, die ansonsten Männern vorbehalten waren, und weil sie als Chefredakteurin von *Davar* die vielfach konstatierte gläserne Decke durchbrach.

„Frauen in einem Männerberuf“, so betitelten Irene Neverla und Gerda Kanzleiter ihre 1984 publizierte Pionierstudie zur Berufssituation von deutschen Journalistinnen. Und der Balanceakt zwischen männlicher Berufs- und weiblicher Geschlechterrolle scheint die gesamte Journalistinnengeschichte zu durchziehen – nicht nur im deutschsprachigen Raum, auch in anderen westlichen Ländern.

*medien&zeit* wünscht, dass dieser Streifzug durch die nicht mehr ganz ungeschriebene Geschichte der Journalistinnen zur anregenden Lektüre gerät,

SUSANNE KINNEBROCK  
WOLFGANG DUCHKOWITSCH  
CHRISTIAN SCHWARZENEGGER

# The Field of Feminine Journalism

An unwritten history

Hatty Oliver

This issue of *medien & zeit* asks why and how women have been systematically removed from the history of the press, how it has come to pass that their contribution to journalism has been largely ignored. I will attempt to answer this question not through historical analysis, but by considering the ways in which both the profession and the academy define journalism. I will examine journalistic discourses through the lens of my own research into contemporary women journalists. I am currently examining the professional identity of women working in a sub-field of contemporary British journalism, which I define as feminine journalism<sup>1</sup>. This sub-field is composed of market-driven journalism aimed at women, is organised around consumption and the body and is found in women's magazines and in the sections of newspapers aimed at a female audience. My inquiry into the professional lives of journalists working within this field has revealed the partial, gendered nature of both the professional and academic constructions of journalism. The universal figure of the journalist in both the industry and the academy is a man engaged in news journalism. This figure is of limited efficacy when applied to large areas of the profession that have historically been produced by and for women. The limitations of these constructions leave us with an incomplete image of journalism both past and present and go some way to explaining the absence of women from its history.

## Journalism as a Profession

The history of journalism and the construction of the figure of the journalist have been conducted through a discourse of news. Certain areas of journalism have come to define the pro-

fession while others specialisms are ignored; these exclusions are largely due to the professional codes that inform the journalistic discourse. Within an Anglo-American journalistic tradition notions of objectivity and impartiality have become a defining professional norm and a way of demarcating what journalism is, both for the profession itself and for the academy. A professional identity organised around objectivity has privileged certain types of journalism over others, meaning that while the journalistic profession is characterised by huge variety, incorporating everything from trade journals to glossy women's magazines, its self-image and reflection in academia have both been firmly centred in news journalism.

In her 2001 study of women's role in the history of American journalism Maurine Beasley drew attention to the limitations of the existing definition of journalism and called for its extension to include other forms arguing,

*A wider definition of journalism itself is needed than the traditional one that involves reporting and commenting on conflicts and controversies mainly of interest to a male-run world. A broader definition more appropriate to women's experience, has to include the presentation of informative material that has wider popular appeal.*<sup>2</sup>

A study of journalism as it really is, rather than, as scholars would like it to be, necessitates the inclusion of popular and commercial forms and entails a move away from the normative Habermasian model, which currently dominates scholarship.

femininity represented within the field and the commercial imperatives behind this construction. Furthermore I am not suggesting that women's interaction with journalism, either as professionals or readers, is confined to this type of journalism, but rather that where journalism is explicitly coded as female it will usually fall within this sub-field.

<sup>2</sup> Beasley, Maurine: *Recent Directions for the Study of Women's History in American Journalism*. In: *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 2, 2/2001, pp. 207-220, p. 208.

<sup>1</sup> For ease of discussion I use the term feminine journalism throughout, but I am aware this title is problematic implying as it does an acceptance of a pre-existent group of 'feminine' journalists and readers with a shared set of innate interests. While the sub-field presents itself as organic and natural, and many of those employed within it discuss their work using essentialist and even biological discourses, I do not wish my use of the term feminine journalism to denote acceptance of the field's self-definition, merely a description of its characteristics. My research sets out to illustrate the constructed nature of the

Academic consideration of the Anglo-American journalistic tradition has moved from an early consideration of the personal biases and idiosyncrasies of individuals<sup>3</sup> to more nuanced scrutiny of the professional identity of an entire occupation. Scholars led by Michael Schudson have discussed the emergence of “a professional class of reporters in the context of the development of professional objectivity”<sup>4</sup>. Such work while not necessarily accepting the validity of this professional objectivity norm has nevertheless taken it as the key to understanding the profession as Schudson and Anderson suggest, “explain the reasons behind the emergence of objectivity as an occupational practice, fix a date at which it emerged, and you have gone a long way towards uncovering the “secret” of professional journalism.”<sup>5</sup>.

Journalism's status as a profession is not unproblematic, either amongst practitioners themselves or within academic discourse. The term “professional” is hard to define and has many meanings but the journalist's lack of specialist knowledge and training is normally what stands between him and an easy application of the term. Exponents of “classic” professions such as medicine and the law “are considered to be a select group of high-status practitioners administering specialised services to members of the community. They generally undergo a lengthy period of training in their speciality and when admitted to practice normally enjoy a share in a monopoly in the performance of their work”<sup>6</sup>. Journalism, does not share this clearly demarcated and licensed identity, its borders are far more permeable and claims to professional status more tenuous. ‘Journalist’ can mean many different things and be claimed by many different people, in a way that ‘doctor’ or ‘lawyer’ can not, as Jeremy Tunstall notes when he describes “journalist” as a “label which people engaged in a very diverse range of activities apply to themselves”<sup>7</sup>.

## The Objectivity Norm

Questions of occupational identity, within journalism, appear to coalesce around a series of codes rooted in the notion of objectivity. In this context objectivity encompasses notions of fairness, balance and accuracy and a presumption of rational professional disinterest with an attendant banishment of the subjective and the emotional and it has become the chief occupational value in the Anglo-American journalistic tradition<sup>8</sup>. “Objectivity is at once a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing”<sup>9</sup>

and this occupational practice and moral norm has in many ways come to define journalistic identity. Such professional codes also segment the profession drawing the boundaries between “news” and features or entertainment. The division of “fact” from values or opinion marks a line between different types of journalism, placing fact and news at the centre of the profession and subjectivity and emotion at its borders. This demarcation makes the leaky boundaries of the profession more impermeable. As Schudson points out such group norms have several purposes, encouraging ritual solidarity, defining the group in relation to other groups, inculcating institutional norms and controlling group behaviour and all these uses have been ascribed to the journalistic occupational norm of objectivity.

Journalism's troubled process of professionalisation is agreed to have begun in the 19th Century and its pretensions to professional status are deeply entrenched in the empiricist trends that characterised the period. Adopting the norm of objectivity was one way for journalists to affiliate themselves with powerful discourses of science, efficiency and progression. Journalism as a distinct occupation is then bound up with these discourses as Jean Chalaby puts it,

<sup>3</sup> White, David M.: *The Gatekeeper: a Case Study in the Selection of News*. In: *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 7, 4/1950, pp. 383-390.

<sup>4</sup> Schudson, Michael / Anderson, Chris: *Objectivity, professionalism and truth seeking in journalism*. In: Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin; Hanitzsch, Thomas (eds.) *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*. New York / Oxford 2009, pp. 88-102, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Tumber, Howard: *Journalists at work revisited*. In: *Javnost-*

*the public*. Vol. 13, 3/2006, pp. 57-68, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Tunstall, Jeremy: *Journalists at Work*. London 1971, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Chalaby, Jean: *Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention: A Comparison of the Development of French and Anglo-American Journalism, 1830s-1920s*. In: *European Journal of Communication*. Vol. 11, 3/1996, pp. 303-326 and Schudson, Michael: *The objectivity norm in American journalism*. In: *Journalism* Vol. 2, 2/2001, pp. 149-170.

<sup>9</sup> Schudson, *The objectivity norm*, p. 149.

*Journalism is an invention of the 19th Century. The profession of the journalist and the journalistic discourse is the product during this period of a specialised and increasingly autonomous field of discursive production, the journalistic field. Progressively, the journalistic discourse became a distinctive class of texts: agents in the journalistic field developed their own discursive norms and values, such as objectivity and neutrality.*<sup>10</sup>

Writers such as Chalaby and Schudson have traced the history of objectivity as a defining professional discourse and attempted to explain its functions. Chalaby uses a comparison of the French journalistic tradition, as compared with the Anglo-American, to illustrate the growth of a fact-based, information centred journalistic norm which went on to become “a global discursive genre”<sup>11</sup>. Chalaby maps this discursive genre through the growth of newsgathering illustrated by foreign and political reporting. While the French press still garnered most of its foreign news from the London press until late in the 19th century, their British and American counterparts employed a sizeable cohort of foreign correspondents. Chalaby points out that by 1857 *The Times* had nineteen foreign correspondents and by 1870 it had the same number of parliamentary reporters. Chalaby sees the growth of the objectivity norm as intrinsically linked to these two specialisms, which underpin the “news” genre and mark its separation from other forms of writing. He uses the French experience of a journalistic practice more firmly embedded in a literary tradition to illustrate that objectivity is a practice that has gained currency within a particular journalistic tradition rather than an intrinsic part of the profession. In France the objectivity norm did not accrue the same kind of capital and the journalistic profession employed a “hierarchy of discursive practices”<sup>12</sup>, which did not privilege the strict separation of fact and commentary that marked the Anglo-English experience.

Schudson questions Chalaby’s treatment of the American and British cases as completely parallel

preferring to see British journalism as “a kind of half-way house” between American professionalism and continental European traditions of partisan journalism with literary ambition. Nevertheless his treatment of the history of objectivity as a professional norm in the American press is still relevant to the British experience as he attempts to examine how this norm can be used both to define and control an occupational group. He suggests that as journalists came to feel themselves part of a distinct and separate occupation, complete with “their own clubs and watering holes, and their own professional practices”, they sought to generate their own identity. This occupational character, organised around “analytical and procedural fairness”<sup>13</sup> came to fruition in America in the Twenties when journalists “developed loyalties more to their audience and to themselves as an occupational community than to their publishers or their publishers favoured political party”<sup>14</sup>.

**Academic discourse has seen journalists as in the business of constructing a reality rather than accurately reflecting one.**

Schudson sees objectivity as both an “industrial discipline”<sup>15</sup>, which enabled editors to keep reporters in check and as way of forming a group identity distinct from

the new profession of public relations. Faced with a growth in public relations and the manipulation of information journalists “felt a need to close ranks and assert their collective integrity”<sup>16</sup>. Journalists sought to distinguish themselves by “a scrupulous adherence to scientific ideals”<sup>17</sup>. As Schudson says, at this point

*the objectivity norm became a fully formulated occupational ideal part of a professional project or mission. Far more than a set of craft rules or fend of libel suits or a set of constraints to help editors keep tabs on their underlings, objectivity was finally a moral code.*<sup>18</sup>

While it might be the case that the objectivity norm is most deeply embedded in America, journalistic cultural notions of objectivity, balance and truth have also become integral to British journalist’s self image and professional practice.

<sup>10</sup> Chalaby, *Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention*, p. 304.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 323.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 315.

<sup>13</sup> Schudson, *The objectivity norm*, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* 161.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* 162.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* 163.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*



Even if such norms are not adhered to they act as a model for the “best” professional practice and impose their own hierarchies even amongst journalists working in areas where such norms are irrelevant. Most studies have found “a shared professional ideology of objectivity” at work within news production. For Tumber and Prentoulis “objectivity is the main ideological commitment of the profession its claims provide professional identity and journalism’s unique selling point. As they put it,

*journalistic skills rest on the abstract imperatives defined in the code of journalistic practice. The notions of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality, operating in the background of the problems and tasks associated with the profession provide the abstract system of knowledge that allows the differentiation of journalism from other crafts.*<sup>19</sup>

Academics have been sceptical of these claims to truth and objectivity recognising them as labels, which guide professional practice rather than absolutes. Academic discourse has seen journalists as in the business of constructing a reality rather than accurately reflecting one. So in Gaye Tuchman’s 1972 study of American ‘newsmen’, “the word objectivity is being used defensively as a strategic ritual”<sup>20</sup>; the term stands between the journalist and his critic and is invoked as a kind of magic protective talisman. Journalists use their putative status as objective professionals to ward off the numerous pressures they face, or as Tuchman puts it “the newsmen need some working notion of objectivity to minimise the risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits, and superiors’ reprimands”<sup>21</sup>. Tuchman sees the practices of newspaper production, which are treated by the newsmen as self-evident, as so many strategies to protect themselves and create occupational identity. As she puts it “It would appear that news procedures exemplified as formal attributes of news stories and newspapers are actually strategies through which newsmen protect themselves from critics and lay professional claim to objectivity”<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Tumber, Howard / Prentoulis, Marina: *Journalism and the making of a profession*. In: De Burgh, Hugo (ed.): *Making Journalists*. Oxford 2005, pp. 58-74, p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> Tuchman, Gaye: *Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen’s notions of objectivity*. In: *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 77, 4/1972, pp. 660-679, p. 678.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* 662.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* 676.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas, Jürgen: *The Structural Transformation of the*

## Journalistic Hierarchies

Despite the scepticism with which the academy has greeted journalistic claims to objectivity and impartiality, academic study has implicitly accepted the hierarchies that an adherence to objectivity as a guiding principle has imposed upon the journalistic field. Chalaby’s work demonstrates that notions of objectivity are created around foreign and political reporting and its separation from commentary or opinion. The ostensible strictness of this separation has led to rigid demarcations between types of journalism such as news and features. Academic study has followed these demarcations concentrating its efforts on news and foreign reporting. The professional distinctions between news and features, and the implicit privileging of the former over the latter, are reflected in the proliferation of work on ‘news’ production.

Study of the journalist’s role in the production of newspapers has usually come under the auspices of a consideration of news. While newspapers are actually subdivided into numerous types of writing, ranging from entertainment, through mixed features, to the “pure” news reporting of the foreign and political pages, academic study has tended to consider them mainly in their role as the purveyors of “news”. A normative, Habermasian ideal of the newspaper as “the public sphere’s pre-eminent institution”<sup>23</sup> encouraging the “rational, critical debate of private people”<sup>24</sup>, casts a long shadow over academic work on the genre. As Michael Schudson notes “most studies regardless of the approach they take, begin with a normative assumption that the news media should serve society by informing the general population in ways that arm them for vigilant citizenship”<sup>25</sup>. Within this frame journalism is considered with reference to its “role in maintaining an active healthy body politic, and its impact on the public good”<sup>26</sup>.

According to most studies the putative goal of newspapers is to inform and educate the public in their role as citizens, but as Michael Schudson

*Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge / Oxford 1989, p. 181.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 160

<sup>25</sup> Schudson, Michael: *Four approaches to the sociology of news*. In: Curran, James; Gurevitch, Michael (Eds.) *Mass Media and Society*. London 2005, pp. 172-197, p. 191.

<sup>26</sup> Zelizer, Barbie: *The Culture of Journalism*. In: Curran / Gurevitch, *Mass Media and Society* 198-214, 2005, p. 208.



acknowledges, though this maybe, “one goal, the news media in a democracy should try to serve it is not a good approximation of what role the news media have historically played – anywhere”<sup>27</sup>. In reality the goals of news organisations are much more mixed than this normative model would suggest, although they may encompass elements of these public service goals. However, whatever the emphasis within news organisations themselves, academic study has concentrated on the work of the news reporter, particularly the foreign or political correspondent, considering the work of journalists through the lens of the public sphere, objectivity and professionalism. This emphasis leads to a partial analysis as Simon Cottle points out

*“ideals of ‘objectivity’ and its closest correlates ‘balance’, ‘impartiality’ ‘fairness’, ‘truthfulness’ and ‘factual accuracy’ – do not exhaust the epistemological claims of journalism. Tabloid and populist forms of journalism, for example, underwrite their particular claims ‘to know’ and the ‘truthfulness’ of their news stories by a more subjective epistemology”*<sup>28</sup>.

Many types of journalism are excluded from this kind of analysis, and as a result are written out of journalism’s history, not just journalism from other mediums such as tabloid or popular forms, but also journalism produced for sections of the newspaper that do not conform to an objectivity norm. It is often journalism produced by and for women that fails to conform to these professional codes and so women are found in greater numbers in the areas of journalism that have received the least attention.

## A History of Feminine Journalism

From the late Victorian period onwards it is possible to demarcate a distinct field of journalism aimed at women readers and largely produced by female journalists. In their 2004 book *Women in Journalism* Chambers et al., consider early women journalists from the period 1850–1945 and identify a genre which they term

“women’s journalism” and define as a specialism which; dealt with what were considered to be light topics such as fashion, the arts, domestic issues and society gossip. Male journalists dealt with the serious and higher status news of political and economic issues”<sup>29</sup>. They link the birth of this “women’s journalism” to changes in newspaper financing connecting a new reliance on advertising revenues from the 1880s onwards to a search for women readers. So from the first advertising revenues were prioritised and women were addressed simultaneously as reader and consumer. While this double address is common to many forms of journalism it is particularly striking within this feminine sub-field.

Historically women have been particularly associated with acts of consumption. As Victoria de Grazia found in her history of gender and consumption, “in Western societies acts of exchange and consumption have long been obsessively gendered, usually as female”<sup>30</sup>. Both the routine tasks of purchasing and provisioning that constitute housework and the more spectacular consumption of “shopping sprees and domestic display”<sup>31</sup> are traditionally associated with women. The relationship between femininity and consumption has structured the sub-field of feminine journalism since its inception.

In Britain the final decades of the 19th Century saw an alignment of economic and cultural change, new ideas about consumption, femininity and notions of public and private acted upon one another to give a unique importance to the female consumer<sup>32</sup>. During the same period innovations in print technology, changes in the structure of the publishing industry and the repeal of onerous taxation on advertising produced a new model of finance for newspapers and magazines and advertising began to dominate the production of print journalism. The field of feminine journalism was born as a result of the confluence of these forces. The peculiarly significant female shopper became the primary target of advertisers and marketers and so obtaining her readership was crucial. Newly powerful “press barons” such as Harmsworth, Newnes and Pearson catered to

<sup>27</sup> Schudson, *Sociology of news*, p. 191.

<sup>28</sup> Cottle, Simon: *Ethnography and news production: New(s) developments in the field*. In: *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 1 1/2007, p. 1–1.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers, Debora et al: *Women and Journalism*. London / New York, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> De Grazia, Victoria; Furlough, Ellen: *The Sex of Things*:

*Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Berkeley: 1996, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> De Grazia / Furlough, *The Sex of Things*; Rappaport, Erika: *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*. Princeton 2000.

the female reader foregrounding magazines specifically for women and creating women's pages in newspapers. It is during this period that "magazines for women moved to the place they have ever since occupied at the centre of popular publishing"<sup>33</sup>. As women's magazines took centre stage the style of writing they had fostered and the reader they had constructed also found a place within newspapers.

The connection between women, consumption and advertising revenue endures and in my current research respondents from both newspapers and women's magazines often found it impossible to differentiate between the twin goals of attracting women readers and advertising revenue. This association between women and consumption continues to structure women's role in journalism and it is in part this association that has forged the gendered divisions between news and lifestyle. As Linda Steiner points out "marketing concerns drive the sex binary packaging of news and the construction of women (readers and reporters) as interested in lifestyle issues and domesticity"<sup>34</sup>.

## Demarcating a Field of Feminine Journalism

This gendered division between hard news and soft news and news and lifestyle content has become something of a truism, but it is often somewhat vaguely defined. I have used work by Jeremy Tunstall<sup>35</sup> and Liesbet Van Zoonen<sup>36</sup> to arrive at a more precise definition of the particular area of popular journalism, which has traditionally provided career opportunities to women journalists. Jeremy Tunstall's 1971 book *Journalists at Work* is helpful in this regard as it distinguishes the goals of different subject specialisms within newspapers. Tunstall made a study of specialist journalists on all 23 general news organisations at a national level in Britain. The book was "an attempt systematically to investigate specialist news-gatherers at work and to compare specialists from different fields of news"<sup>37</sup>

Tunstall divided his subject into selected fields, these fields were politics (lobby), aviation, education, labour, crime, football, fashion and motoring and foreign correspondents working for London news organisations but stationed in, four foreign cities. Tunstall identified three major goals for news organisations which were, (a) advertising revenue goal, (b) audience (or sales) revenue goal (c) non-revenue (or prestige goal). These goals related to the "unusual financing"<sup>38</sup> of news organisations and in Tunstall's view were resolved into an overriding "coalition goal" which was the "audience revenue goal".<sup>39</sup> Although this goal was not pursued with the same vigour by all it was a "common denominator" to which most working in news organisations consented.

Tunstall defined his fields in relations to these goals. By considering the self-image of the specialists in a particular field, the views of other specialists about those in a particular field and the views of senior executives, he determined the over-riding goal of each specialist field. These ranged from the non-revenue prestige goals of the foreign correspondent and political lobby, through the audience goals of crime and football reporting to the advertising goals of fashion and motoring.

While only 18% of the selected specialists were prepared to see their own field as having an advertising interest, 42% were prepared to acknowledge circulation/audience interest. This demonstrated for Tunstall the "greater legitimacy within journalism of audience interest"<sup>40</sup>; journalist's view of their own and other fields reinforced this. Here Tunstall found that "occupational pecking order is inversely related to the revenue goal emphasis in particular fields"<sup>41</sup>. So when specialists were asked about those working in other fields they universally placed either Foreign or Political Lobby in the highest regard and Motoring in the lowest.

*The specialists acknowledge a status order,  
which accords the highest status to non-revenue  
foreign correspondence, followed by the political*

<sup>33</sup> Beetham, Margaret: *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800 – 1914*. London / New York, 1996, p. 122.

<sup>34</sup> Steiner, Linda: *Gender in the newsroom*. In: Wahl-Jorgensen / Hanitzsch, *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, p. 116-130, p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Tunstall, Jeremy: *Journalists at Work*. London 1971.

<sup>36</sup> Van Zoonen, Liesbet: *A professional, unreliable, heroic*

*marionette (M/F): Structure agency in subjectivity in contemporary journalisms*. In: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 1/ 1998, pp. 123-143.

<sup>37</sup> Tunstall, *Journalists at work*, p. 3

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p. 108.

*lobby, the mixed fields, then the audience fields, the motoring correspondents have a lower relative opinion of themselves than does any other field about itself.*<sup>42</sup>

The operating norm of objectivity means that the further away from the economic revenue goal journalists are placed the higher they will be regarded within their industry.

Gender is missing from Tunstall's analysis, but Liesbet Van Zoonen attempted to rectify this omission in her 1998 paper, *A professional, unreliable, heroic marionette*. Van Zoonen drew on Tunstall's divisions in her own attempt to demarcate different domains in journalism, but while Tunstall's study was gender blind, Van Zoonen uses "two prominent distinctions within journalism: goals and gender".<sup>43</sup> She separates the goals of journalism into those "that have to do with the status of journalism as a prime institution of democratic societies and goals that have to do with the journalistic organisations' need to satisfy and serve their audience"<sup>44</sup>. These goals map onto Tunstall's prestige and audience and advertising goals, although Van Zoonen names the first "institutional" and compounds the second two into "audience". She claims that an orientation towards the audience goal,

*produces a frame of reference for journalists that is said to be characterised by interesting (as opposed to 'important') issues, convenient and practical information, commitment and emotionality (rather than objectivity and rationality) and a mode of address that assumes audiences as consumers.*<sup>45</sup>

Van Zoonen then maps gender onto this operational frame of reference, pointing out that masculinity and femininity help to define audience target groups and determine the composition of the workforce of the various journalistic subfields. By "projecting the particular goals of journalism and its gender features onto each other and placing journalism's genres in them"<sup>46</sup> Van Zoonen produces a cruciform diagram with the poles of masculinity and femininity intersecting with those of institutional and audience. So institution-

nal masculine journalism comprising financial, foreign, news and the quality press amongst others is opposed to audience feminine, which includes human interest, women's pages and women's magazines. Van Zoonen characterises audience feminine as sharing a "profound sense of community amongst their audiences" and while the gendered composition of their journalists and audiences vary within this domain "women have a higher visibility"<sup>47</sup> than in the two masculine domains.

Overlaying Van Zoonen's demarcation of different journalistic domains on Tunstall's goals adds the final gendered element necessary to define the subfield of feminine journalism. The field is characterised by its largely female readership and staff. The goals of the field are a combination of audience and advertising. These goals determine the content of the field, which is marked by categories, which foster consumption such as fashion, beauty and lifestyle and human-interest stories in a subjective and emotional register. Women's magazines lie at the heart of this journalistic subfield and fully conform to all the criteria I have identified but so too do huge swathes of newspaper journalism both past and present.

## Feminine Journalism and the Public Sphere

The adoption of objectivity as journalism's defining operating principle has had particular effects on women's place both in the profession and in historical accounts. While women have been present throughout the history of journalism the areas in which they have dominated have not played a part in the profession's self-definition. The division between public and private, which structures journalism's objectivity norm, and attendant dichotomy between news and features, explain this exclusion. This division is one link in a chain of hierarchical dualisms, which function within specific cultural contexts to gender status and positions. Feminist thought has illustrated the gendered nature of dichotomies such as private/public, nature/culture, body/mind, subjective/objective, emotion/reason and particular/universal<sup>48</sup> and these polarities

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 110

<sup>43</sup> Van Zoonen, *A professional, unreliable, heroic marionette*, p. 126.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Ortner, Simon: *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?* In: *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 1, 2/1972, pp. 5-31; Strathern, Marilyn: *No nature, no culture: the Hagen case*. In: *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Cambridge 1980.

function to create and reinforce journalism's androcentric hierarchy of values. Female dominated journalistic specialisms such as features, lifestyle, fashion and gossip, fall into this oppositional structure, failing to meet the objectivity norm and instead organising around the opposing principle of embodied subjectivity.

The seeming impossibility of separating women and consumption means that while women have always contributed to newspaper journalism and been targeted as readers their inclusion comes, not as the disembodied rational and critical debaters of the public sphere, but as consumers and immanent representatives of the private sphere. This has a detrimental effect on the inclusion of women journalists in Habermasian inflected scholarship. The Habermasian public sphere

has a conflicted relationship with commerce and consumption. Commodity exchange, free trade and free competition are conceptualised as the preconditions of a public sphere, but it is these same forces that eventually overrun and degrade it. This conflict is also present in Habermas' analysis of the press, which he sees as developing through the "needs of commerce"<sup>49</sup> to its 18th Century high point as a "genuinely critical organ of a public engaged in critical political debate", only to fall prey to commercialisation and "a flood of advertisement"<sup>50</sup>. In Habermas' view while 'the commercialisation of cultural goods had been the precondition for rational critical debate'<sup>51</sup> in the modern press this debate has become commodified and so debased. The public sphere found both its genesis and destruction in commercial culture and commercial spaces, existing for "one blissful moment"<sup>52</sup> before being corrupted by the same forces, which brought it into being.

While free trade is deemed to be a precondition for the liberal public sphere, consumption itself is

relegated to a private sphere, which is coded female. The development of Habermas' public sphere depends for its existence on a parallel private sphere, indeed the "public sphere evolved from the very heart of the private sphere itself"<sup>53</sup>. This private sphere is 'a realm of necessity and transitoriness'<sup>54</sup> devoted to "the cycle of production and consumption that is to the dictates of life's necessities"<sup>55</sup>. The banishment of life's necessities to a private realm is what makes possible the universalism of the public realm. A separation between "affairs that private people pursued individually each in the interests of the reproduction of his own life and, on the other hand the sort of interaction that united private people into a public"<sup>56</sup> lies at the foundation of the Habermasian public sphere.

### However as numerous feminist critics have pointed out the interdependent public and private spheres are fundamentally gendered

Habermas' analysis is gender blind he acknowledges that his ideal public sphere was the domain of property owning men, but does not make it explicit that its attendant private sphere was the domain of women. However as numerous feminist critics have pointed

out the interdependent public and private spheres are fundamentally gendered<sup>57</sup>. Women's exclusion from the public comes as part of their association with "life's necessities" and the role of consumer, which comes with this association. Habermas defines the public sphere as springing from the intimate sphere of the 'patriarchal conjugal family'<sup>58</sup> and its ideas of 'freedom, love and cultivation of the person'. At the centre of this intimate province are women and their duties as consumers and it is precisely these duties that exclude them from participation in an ideal public sphere. This public/private split and its relationship with consumption has implications for a consideration of the media. For, as Peter Dahlgren says, "Any attempt to develop a perspective on the mass media and the public sphere must come to terms with the larger ramifications of the categories of public and private"<sup>59</sup>. One of the ramifications of the category is the exclusion of women from the

<sup>49</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p. 164.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 160.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 160.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Pateman, Carole: *The Sexual Contract*, London 1988; Fraser, Nancy: *Rethinking the public sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*. In: Calhoun, Craig (ed.): *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge 1999, pp. 109-142.

<sup>58</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Dahlgren, Peter: *Television and the Public Sphere*. London 1997.

political realm and their inclusion in area associated with the private, intimate realm. Habermas argues that the mass media has degenerated due to commercialisation and the erosion of the foundational split between public and private. He claims that the public sphere in the world of letters has been replaced by a “sham-private world of culture consumption”<sup>60</sup>. In his analysis this world of consumption levelled the split between public and private and produced a sphere that is by definition apolitical because of “its incapacity to constitute a world emancipated from the immediate constraints of survival needs”<sup>61</sup>. So life’s necessities have broken free from the individualised private sphere and infiltrated the universal public sphere and its press. Clearly the gendered subtext here is that the female concerns of the private sphere have infiltrated, and debased, the masculine public sphere.

Habermas doesn’t consider these gendered implications, just as he never defines the role of the consumer as a female. However, the areas of journalism that he characterises as bringing about its decline are those most associated with women, so for example his definition of “human interest topics” as “romance, religion, money, children, health and animals”<sup>62</sup> is implicitly gendered. The relationship between women, the private sphere and consumption means that the commercialisation he bewails offered new opportunities for women journalists as Erika Rappaport points out:

*At the same time that the papers sought new ways to advocate consumerism, they also hired greater numbers of women journalists. Ironically, female writers made their way into the public sphere by selling a utopian commodified view of both the public and private spheres.*<sup>63</sup>

Habermas’ despair at the decline of the public sphere and the waning of importance of the political realm within print journalism has the unfortunate by-product of condemning the inclusion of women. Although ostensibly gender blind his analysis is actually profoundly gendered and as Rappaport says:

*Habermas’ account of the decline of a liberal sphere of rational discourse into a mass-produced public of passive consumers does not adequately capture women’s experience of the public, and it inadvertently positions women’s presence in any manifestation of the public as a sign of its collapse and corruption.*<sup>64</sup>

## Scholarship and the Field of Feminine Journalism

While the field of feminine journalism has always been important to news organisations in terms of revenue and audiences, its foundations in consumption, embodiment and subjectivity mean it cannot conform to professional norms and doom it to a continuing low status. The academy replicates the journalistic profession’s low opinion of feminine journalism by excluding it from study. There is very little scholarship on women’s magazine journalism as Linda Steiner says, “journalists and feminists worldwide have disdained and distanced themselves from women’s magazines”<sup>65</sup>. Academic work on magazines is patchy, petering out after a burst of activity in the Eighties and Nineties. The little scholarship that does exist, with a few notable exceptions<sup>66</sup>, is focused on either the text or the reader. The production of women’s magazine journalism and the occupational identity of agents within this sub-field of journalism have been largely ignored.

Mainstream scholarship on news production has not engaged with the gender exclusions produced by its concentration on the objectivity norm and the public sphere. While the inappropriate nature of objectivity as a defining occupational norm for non-Western journalism is acknowledged<sup>67</sup> the same problems are elided when it comes to gender. Therefore most of the work on news organisations and news production has ignored gender and when it has been considered the focus has been on “counting men and women, identifying positions and mapping employment patterns”<sup>68</sup>. Once again the focus has been on news and

<sup>60</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p.160.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for pleasure*, p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Steiner, *Gender in the newsroom*, p. 123.

<sup>66</sup> Ferguson, Marjorie: *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines*

*and the Cult of Femininity*. London / New Hampshire 1983; McRobbie, Angela: *The Return to Cultural Production Case Study: Fashion Journalism*. In: Curran, James / Gurevitch, Michael (eds.): *Mass Media and Society* (3rd ed.), London 1993, p. 255-268.

<sup>67</sup> Schudson / Anderson, *Objectivity, professionalism and truth seeking in journalism*.

<sup>68</sup> De Bruin, Marjan: *Gender organisational and professional identities*



women's encroachment into and influence on its production. The field of features and lifestyle and its production has been largely ignored in the work on women in journalism where the emphasis has been on women's efforts to be taken seriously within prestige categories. Feminist studies of news production are rare and have been keen to avoid reproducing essential categories of "maleness" and "femaleness" by focusing on lifestyle journalism instead they concentrate on women working within 'hard' or foreign news. Again this has implicitly reproduced the professional hierarchy implying that 'soft' journalism is not of a high enough status to merit consideration. This tendency is illustrated by Chambers et al's 2004 book *Women in Journalism*. Chambers et al. draw attention to the fact that foundational journalistic notions "of objectivity and impartiality" were "anchored within a partial male oriented construction of knowledge"<sup>69</sup>. However, at times they appear to reproduce this paradigm dismissing gossip and fashion as trivial and so not worthy of attention and focusing instead on "serious" news. While it's hard to argue with their disapproval of the ghettoisation of women in certain areas of journalism, there does appear to be a normative framework underpinning their analysis. One is left with the distinct impression that only very particular types of female journalist are worthy of serious consideration. This is encapsulated by the attention they pay to female war reporters, particularly Kate Adie who they quote from at some length. A focus on the most stereotypically macho of journalistic specialisms risks an implicit acceptance of male news values and hierarchies of importance. What Van Zoonen terms "the low social status"<sup>70</sup> of popular journalism aimed at women is often reproduced in the assumptions and priorities to be found in media research even when feminists conduct it.

Much of the academic work on newspapers and journalism seems to have accepted the professions own self-definition even while ostensibly questioning its operating norms. As Barbie Zelizer has pointed out in her illuminating work, "journalism is a world of contradiction and flux, held in place by those with central access and stature while challenged by those on its margins"<sup>71</sup>. She suggests that the study of journalism is incomplete and not mindful enough of its internal contradictions and disparities. Liesbet van Zoonen has also noted these kinds of omissions suggesting that it is part of journalism's own mythology to bewail the advent of entertainment, consumption and popular culture into newspapers when in fact they have been present from the beginning of the genre. This mythology appears to be largely accepted by the academy, which also regrets the advent of popular culture and consumption into the public sphere. This reproduction of media industry hierarchies within the academy means that lifestyle journalism is only considered within the ghetto of feminist media studies where it seems doomed to meet with only textual analysis.

**Professional norms and hierarchies within the journalistic profession and attendant biases within scholarship have left the field of feminine journalism unexamined.**

## Conclusion

Professional norms and hierarchies within the journalistic profession and attendant biases within scholarship have left the field of feminine journalism unexamined. This failure to include a large area of journalism, produced by and for women, within professional and academic discourses has resulted in a partial picture of journalism both past and present. While the feminine field is by no means the only area of journalism in which women have found employment, it is the area of journalism which has been constructed as female and its absence from scholarship leaves a gap in the history of women in the profession and in a wider understanding of gendered structures of exclusion and inclusion. While it is important to consider how women have succeeded within prestige categories governed by the objectivity norm, we will never understand their experiences without a full and detailed study of the way the category of femininity has operated in a journalistic context. Only then will we understand the "historical constraints, limitations and opportunities available to women in journalism"<sup>72</sup>. The field of feminine journalism has always been a part of journalism's history and its presence

in journalism. In: *Journalism*, Vol. 1 2/2000, pp. 217-238, p. 225.

<sup>69</sup> Chambers, Deborah et al.: *Women and Journalism*, p. 7

<sup>70</sup> Van Zoonen, *Structure agency in subjectivity in*

*contemporary journalism*, p. 132

<sup>71</sup> Zelizer, *The Culture of Journalism*, p. 198.

<sup>72</sup> Beasley, *Recent Directions*, p. 209.

shows no signs of diminishing in fact quite the reverse. Certainly in a British context as a beleaguered newspaper industry searches desperately for new readers and advertising revenues commercial feminine journalism grows more dominant and more and more features and supplements aimed at female readers are produced. There is much to criticise within this field both from a feminist and journalistic perspective, it reduces women's experience to a narrow and normative femininity compatible with the demands of commerce and its relationship with advertising and PR leaves it with very low levels of independence and autonomy. However, we should not

confuse analysis with acceptance or endorsement and it is important that scholarship engages with the realities of the entire journalistic profession rather than exclusively focusing on those areas that hold the promise of an elusive ideal public sphere. Only when we understand how and where women have been accepted into the journalistic profession, can we fully understand how and where they have been excluded. This understanding entails a more detailed and thorough study of the working lives and occupational identities of women working within the field of feminine journalism, both past and present.

**Hatty OLIVER (1972)**

Hatty Oliver is in the final stages of a PhD at Goldsmiths College University of London. Her research considers gendered professional identity within the UK media. She previously worked for ten years in the British newspaper industry.



# „... in die Gesellschaft von Helden passe ich nicht rein.“

Eine unbekannte Journalistin im Ersten Weltkrieg: Friedel Merzenich (1879–1956) und ihre Arbeit für die „Liller Kriegszeitung“

Lucia Hacker

Eines der Phänomene des Ersten Weltkriegs auf publizistischem Sektor waren die sogenannten Feldzeitungen, Soldatenzeitungen, Frontzeitungen, Kriegszeitungen oder Schützengrabenzeitungen.<sup>1</sup> Sie sollten den Soldaten, deren zeitnahe Versorgung mit deutschen Zeitungen an den langen Frontlinien erschwert oder unmöglich war, Informationen und Lesestoff bieten. Überdies verfolgten solche Kriegszeitungen das Ziel, die Truppen in ihrem Alltag abzulenken, sie zu beschäftigen und zu unterhalten. Fast alle Zeitungen wurden auf Befehl der Heeresleitung gegründet; es gab jedoch auch kleine, von den Einheiten selbst produzierte Blätter. Dementsprechend war die militärische Zensur mehr oder weniger stark ausgeprägt.<sup>2</sup> Allen diesen Neugründungen gemeinsam jedoch war der Anspruch, eine Zeitung von Soldaten für Soldaten produzieren zu wollen.

Eine dieser Zeitungen ist die *Liller Kriegszeitung*. Schon zwei Monate nach der Besetzung der nordfranzösischen Stadt Lille durch die Deutschen im Oktober 1914 wurde sie als Armeezeitung der 6. Armee auf Befehl des Kronprinzen Rupprecht von Bayern gegründet. Der Nachrichtenoffizier der Armee bekam den Auftrag, die Druckerei der französischen Zeitung *Echo du Nord* zu belegen und sich einen Herausgeber sowie Druckereipersonal zu suchen.<sup>3</sup> Karl Arnold (1883–1953), Karikaturist, Mitarbeiter und späterer Herausgeber des *Simplicissimus*, der als Kartenzeichner vor Ort war und bis 1917 mit großem Engagement

und Erfolg für die *Liller Kriegszeitung* arbeitete, berichtet über diese Gründungsphase an seine Eltern:

„Nun hat man mir zu meiner verantwortungsvollen Tätigkeit noch eine andere Arbeit zukommen lassen – ich soll eine illustrierte Zeitung herausgeben. Nun erscheint in allernächster Zeit – direkt hinter der Front – eine Zeitung mit illustr. Beilage für die Kameraden. [...] Den textlichen Teil übernimmt der Schriftsteller Oskar Höcker (Hauptm. der Res.) – auch ist

Freiherr von Ompteda  
(Oberltn.) noch da.“<sup>4</sup>

**Die Liller Kriegszeitung entwickelte sich schnell zur deutschen Soldatenzeitung mit der höchsten Auflage und dem größten Bekanntheits- und Verbreitungsgrad**

Die *Liller Kriegszeitung* entwickelte sich schnell zur deutschen Soldatenzeitung mit der höchsten Auflage

und dem größten Bekanntheits- und Verbreitungsgrad. Ende 1916 brachte sie es zu einer Spitzenauflage von 110 000 Exemplaren, normalerweise lag die Auflage bei etwa 80 000. Die anderen (größeren) Feldzeitungen brachten es auf 30000 bis 50000 Exemplare. Die *Liller Kriegszeitung* wurde kostenfrei an die Soldaten verteilt; in der Heimat konnte sie über ein Abonnement bezogen werden, der Preis belief sich auf 3 Mark monatlich.<sup>5</sup>

Der große Erfolg der *Liller* lässt sich sicher zu einem Teil auf die Karikaturen von Karl Arnold

<sup>1</sup> Insgesamt gab es mehr als 100 deutschsprachige Soldatenzeitungen. Die aktuelle Bestandssituation dieser, meist in nur geringer Auflage und auf schlechtem Papier gedruckten Zeitungen ist keine besonders gute. Als Ergebnis eines Projekts stellt die UB Heidelberg eine kleine Auswahl von ihnen digitalisiert der Forschung zur Verfügung. Siehe: <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/feldzeitungen.html> [10.03.2009]. Vgl. weiter: Nelson, Robert L.: *Soldatenzeitungen*. In: Hirschfeld, Gerhard (Hrsg.): *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg*. München, Wien, Zürich 2009, S. 849–850 sowie: Kurth, Karl O.: *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen des Weltkrieges*. Leipzig

1937 (Wesen und Wirkungen der Publizistik 8). Kurths Dissertation von 1937 ist aufgrund ihrer Vollständigkeit in der Beschreibung der einzelnen Zeitungen auch heute noch relevant.

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. Nelson, *Soldatenzeitungen*, S. 850.

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. Kurth, *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen*, S. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Arnold an seine Eltern 05.12.1914, Deutsches Kunstharchiv, Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg (im folgenden DKA), NL Arnold, Karl, II, C-10. [Unterstreichungen im Original. Anm. L.H.]

<sup>5</sup> Vgl. Kurth, *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen*, S. 31.

in den beigegeführten *Kriegsflugblättern* zurückführen, die die Zeitung weit über den üblichen Verbreitungskreis hinaus bekannt machten. Doch unterscheidet sich die *Liller Kriegszeitung* auch im Aufbau und vor allem in der Häufigkeit ihres Erscheinens von anderen Soldatenzeitungen. Der bestellte Herausgeber Paul Oskar Höcker (1865–1944) war Schriftsteller und Redakteur, er brachte als langjähriger Herausgeber von *Velhagen & Klasings Monatsheften* genügend Erfahrung und vor allem den Ehrgeiz mit, der *Liller* eine sehr anspruchsvolle und auch eigenwillige Note zu verleihen. Dadurch wurde sie in vielerlei Hinsicht zum Vorbild für später gegründete Soldatenzeitungen.<sup>6</sup> Das Blatt erschien in einem Umfang von vier Seiten alle drei Tage, bzw. zehnmal pro Monat. Die Mischung aus aktuellen Kriegsnachrichten und -kommentaren sowie feuilletonistischen Beiträgen war eindeutig zu Gunsten der belehrenden und unterhaltenden Beiträge ausgerichtet. Es finden sich Abhandlungen naturwissenschaftlicher wie auch geisteswissenschaftlicher Art, ebenso praktische und medizinische Hinweise, kulturgeschichtliche, juristische oder technische Artikel. Die feste Rubrik *Unterm Strich* war reserviert für kurze Erzählungen, Novellen, Gedichte, Skizzen und andere unterhaltende Beiträge. Das doppelseitige illustrierte *Kriegsflugblatt* sollte mit seinen Karikaturen, Bildergeschichten, Witzen, einer Rätselcke etc. vor allem den „Soldatenhumor“ ansprechen.<sup>7</sup>

Und noch etwas unterscheidet die *Liller Kriegszeitung* von den über hundert anderen deutschsprachigen Frontzeitungen: Vom Frühjahr 1915 bis zum Ende der Zeitung im Oktober 1918 war in ihrer Redaktion eine Frau beschäftigt: die Schriftstellerin Friedel Merzenich (1879–1956). Diese Frau hat sich in einer Ausnahmezeit – dem Krieg – gleich einer mehrfachen Herausforderung gestellt: Über drei Jahre lang lebte und arbeitete sie in einer besetzten Stadt unter Kriegs-

recht und in Frontnähe. Die Zeitung, für die sie arbeitete, war gedacht von Soldaten für Soldaten; somit war die Männerdomäne, in die sie eindrang, eine doppelte: als Schriftleiterin in einem Bereich, in dem Frauen damals erst begannen Fuß zu fassen, und zugleich als einzige Zivilistin unter lauter Soldaten.

Im Folgenden soll versucht werden, Arbeitsalltag und Motivation dieser – wohl ersten – Redakteurin in einer deutschen Soldatenzeitung zu reflektieren. Da ihr Name heute in keinem gängigen Nachschlagewerk mehr auftaucht und auch ihre Arbeiten nicht mehr gelesen werden, war es einigermaßen schwierig, ihren Spuren zu folgen. Im Nachlass des schon erwähnten Karikaturisten Karl Arnold fanden sich etliche Briefe von ihr und ihrem zweiten Ehemann Paul Weiglin.

Die drei hatten sich offensichtlich in Lille kennengelernt und hielten noch bis in die 50er Jahre hinein Kontakt. In einem der letzten Briefe schreibt Weiglin, dass kurz vor Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs ihr Haus in Berlin von einer Bombe getroffen wurde und fast völlig ausbrannte, was vermutlich erklärt, warum kein Nachlass mehr erhalten ist. Die im Folgenden angeführten Daten setzen sich aus verschiedenen publizierten und unpublizierten Quellen zusammen sowie aus einigen der biographisch motivierten Texte Merzenichs.

Als Tochter eines rheinischen Industriellen hatte Merzenich – wie viele andere Mädchen bürgerlicher Herkunft auch – bei ihrer frühen Eheschließung (um 1897) mit Ernö von Katinszky keine andere Ausbildung erhalten, als die übliche Schulbildung einer „höheren Tochter“. Über diese Zeit ihrer ersten Ehe ist wenig bekannt; es ist jedoch anzunehmen, dass Friedel Merzenich an verschiedenen Orten in Ungarn gelebt hat, da sie ihre drei Söhne Hans (\*1898–?), Ernö (\*1900–?) und Joachim (1904–1943) dort zur Welt brachte.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Höcker, Paul Oskar: *Ein Tag bei der Liller Kriegszeitung. Feldpostbrief*. In: *Velhagen & Klasings Monatshefte* 29 (1914/15; Bd. 2.), S. 525–530. Paul Weiglin (1884–1958), Mitarbeiter sowohl bei den *Monatsheften* als auch bei der *Liller*, beschreibt Höckers Engagement später so: „Er war auch der erste, der bei Beginn des Stellungskrieges den später dutzendfach nachgeahmten Typus der Soldatenzeitung in der ‚Liller Kriegszeitung‘ schuf, einem Blatt, das unter seiner taktvollen Leitung bis in das verhängnisvolle Jahr 1918 hinein sich des Ver-

trauens der Armee erfreute. Mit Schmerz mußte Höcker sehen, wie sein Werk von einer nervös werdenden Heeresleitung bürokratisiert wurde, und hat sich bis zu seinem Ausscheiden im September 18 gegen die Absicht gewehrt, das Blatt in völlige Abhängigkeit von der Feldpressestelle zu bringen.“ Weiglin, Paul: *Paul Oskar Höcker zum 60. Geburtstag*. In: *Velhagen & Klasings Monatshefte* 40 (1925/26; Bd. 1), S. 445–448, hier S. 446.

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. Kurth, *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen*, S. 33f.

Als diese Ehe kurz vor Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs geschieden wurde, war Merzenich offensichtlich darauf angewiesen, den Lebensunterhalt für sich und ihre drei Söhne selbst zu verdienen. In einer Kurzbiographie, die Paul Oskar Höcker für sie an Franz Brümmer zwecks Aufnahme in sein Schriftstellerlexikon schrieb<sup>8</sup>, liest sich dieser Abschnitt ihres Lebens so:

*„Nach Lösung ihrer Ehe gezwungen, mit drei Söhnen den Kampf ums Dasein aufzunehmen, widmete sie sich zuerst dem Gesang, dann dem Kunstgewerbe. Mit ihren ersten Skizzen, die durch Humor u. gute Menschen- und Naturbeobachtung auffielen, trat sie erst kurz vor dem Kriege in Tageszeitungen u. Wochenschriften hervor.“*<sup>9</sup>

Musik, Kunstgewerbe und Literatur – Friedel Merzenich bewegte sich mit ihren Versuchen, Erwerbsmöglichkeiten zu finden, im üblichen Bereich der Fähigkeiten einer „höheren Tochter“. Auch wenn Genaueres über diese Versuche nicht bekannt ist, kann man davon ausgehen, dass sie sich mit den mageren Honoraren für Feuilletonbeiträge, kleinere Skizzen usw. einen Broterwerb zu schaffen versuchte und bemüht war, sich einen Namen zu „erschreiben“.<sup>10</sup> Friedel Merzenich befand sich also im Sommer 1914 in einem sehr gewöhnlichen Entwicklungsprozess einer angehenden Schriftstellerin oder Journalistin, der nur durch ein ungewöhnliches Ereignis – den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs – unterbrochen wurde.

Die Euphorie des Kriegsbeginns war verbunden mit einer Flut von Publikationen. Die Zeitungen und Zeitschriften rissen sich um Berichte, Neuigkeiten, Gedichte oder sonstige Beiträge, die das Kriegsgeschehen betrafen. Was auf den ersten Blick wie eine Belebung des Geschäfts aussieht,

war jedoch in mehrfacher Hinsicht für die professionell Schreibenden von Nachteil. Eine ganze Gesellschaftsschicht fühlte sich plötzlich dazu berufen, ihren Gefühlen schriftlichen Ausdruck zu verleihen, und überschwemmte die Zeitungen und Zeitschriften mit ihren vom Krieg motivierten Beiträgen – natürlich ohne Honorar. Auch die Verlage erwarteten im Zuge dieser inflationären Entwicklung immer häufiger, dass Beiträge als „Liebesgabe“ unentgeltlich zur Verfügung gestellt wurden. Professionell arbeitende Autoren und Autorinnen waren unter diesen Bedingungen kaum noch in der Lage, ihre Existenz zu sichern. Um einen Eindruck von diesen – häufig sehr emotional geführten – zeitgenössischen Debatten um Honorare und Nachdruckrechte zu bekommen, genügt ein Blick in *Die Feder*, das Organ des *Allgemeinen Schriftsteller-Vereins*. Der Schriftsteller Otto Ernst, der sich in einem offenen Brief gegen das Verhalten der *Leipziger Neuesten Nachrichten* in Bezug auf die Honorierung wehrt, versucht mit einer kleinen Rechnung die brisante Situation zu verdeutlichen:

*„Das normale Honorar für einen Artikel, ein Feuilleton ist in Deutschland noch immer 20 bis 25 M. [...] Kein Mensch aber kann normaler und gesunder Weise, wenn er nicht Schludern und Schablonenarbeit liefern will, mehr als 50 solcher Arbeiten im Jahre liefern; schon dann muß er recht fleißig und produktiv sein. Das macht im Jahre 1000 bis 1250 Mark. Wenn er Glück hat [...] bringt er es durch Nachdruckshonorare vielleicht auf 2000 Mark. [...] Das ist heutigen Tages für einen Familienvater und Geistesarbeiter ein Hungerlohn und eine deutsche nationale Affenschande!“*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Franz Brümmer, dessen siebenbändiges Lexikon der deutschen Dichter und Prosaisten in 6. Aufl. 1913 erschienen war, sammelte autobiographische Selbstzeugnisse, um eine neue Auflage vorzubereiten. Diese siebte Auflage ist aber nie erschienen, da Brümmer 1923 starb. Sämtliche Materialien zu den verschiedenen Ausgaben des Lexikons sind in der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin erhalten. In einem Projekt werden derzeit die Materialien der letzten (unpublizierten) Auflage in einer Digitalen Edition aufbereitet. Vgl. <http://bruemmer.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/nlbruemmer/> [08.06.2009]

<sup>9</sup> Paul Oskar Höcker an Franz Brümmer 06.06.1918, Nachlass Brümmer, Suppl. I, Merzenich, Friedel, Bl. 3r. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz [im Folgenden NL Brümmer]. In welcher Beziehung P. O. Höcker zu Friedel Merzenich stand, wird aus den Quellen nicht ersichtlich. Zumindest scheint er sich öfter für

Merzenich eingesetzt zu haben und war an ihrem Fortkommen interessiert. Außer dem Lebenslauf, den er an Brümmer schrieb, fand sich ein Brief, in dem er sich für ein Theaterstück von ihr ausspricht. (Brief vom 27. Oktober 1916 an Fritz Rémond, dem damaligen Leiter des Schauspielhauses in Köln; Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, Universität zu Köln.)

<sup>10</sup> Hinsichtlich der Erwerbsstrategien von Schriftstellerinnen in dieser Zeit vgl. Hacker, Lucia: *Schreibende Frauen um 1900. Rollen – Bilder – Gesten*. Berlin, Münster 2007 (= Berliner Ethnographische Studien; Bd. 12), S. 92–102.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst, Otto: *Patriotismus und Honorarersparnis*. In: *Die Feder. Halbmonatsschrift für die deutschen Schriftsteller und Journalisten*, 385, 1. Juli 1915, S. 4027–4029, hier S. 4029. Vgl. hierzu auch: Scheideler, Britta: *Zwischen Beruf und Berufung. Zur Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Schriftsteller von 1880 bis 1933*. Frankfurt am Main 1997, S. 114 ff.

Aus der kleinen Rechnung wird deutlich, dass Friedel Merzenich, die vor Ausbruch des Krieges gerade erst begonnen hatte „erste Skizzen“ zu veröffentlichen, mit ihren daraus resultierenden Einkünften nicht einmal annähernd in die Nähe dieses „Hungerlohns“ gelangen konnte. In dieser Situation muss es für sie ein unglaublicher Glücksfall gewesen sein, im Frühjahr 1915 eine feste Anstellung in einer Zeitungsredaktion zu erhalten. War solch eine Anstellung – vor allem für eine ungelernete Kraft und Anfängerin wie sie es war – in dieser Zeit an sich schon ungewöhnlich, so wird sie es um so mehr, wenn man die Umstände und den Ort bedenkt. In den ersten Kriegsjahren war es quasi unmöglich, dass eine Frau ohne Sondergenehmigung in das Kriegsgebiet reisen oder dort arbeiten konnte. Einzige Ausnahme waren die Krankenschwestern und Pflegerinnen. Erst ab Frühjahr 1917 wurden Frauen auch außerhalb des pflegerischen Bereichs, z.B. als Sekretärinnen eingesetzt. Die Situation dieser Etappenhelferinnen war häufig schwierig: zum einen wurden sie von den Soldaten als Bedrohung wahrgenommen, da es das Ziel ihrer Anwesenheit war, Männer für die Front freizustellen, zum anderen löste ihre Beteiligung an der „Männerdomäne“ Krieg sowohl unter den Soldaten als auch in der Heimat heftige – zumeist auf die Moral bezogene Diskussionen aus.<sup>12</sup>

Wie Merzenich an diese Stelle kam, lässt sich nicht mehr belegen, aber es ist davon auszugehen, dass Paul Oskar Höcker ihr dazu verhalf. In der schon erwähnten, für Franz Brümmer verfassten Biographie spricht Höcker von einer „erfolgreichen Mitarbeiterschaft“ Merzenichs für die *Liller Kriegszeitung*, schon bevor sie dann im April 1915 in deren Schriftleitung berufen wurde.<sup>13</sup> Friedel Merzenich selbst äußert sich kurz nach ihrem Dienstantritt im Feuilleton des *Berliner Tageblatts* folgendermaßen:

*„Ich sitze an dem breiten Fenster, das auf die Grand' Place von Lille mündet, und helfe Korrekturen lesen, Manuskripte sichten, Briefe schreiben. Und bin immer noch ganz verwundert, mich wirklich hier in der eroberten Stadt als Korrespondentin der ‚Liller Kriegszeitung‘ zu sehen. Deutschen Frauen ist der Einzug in das Festungsgebiet sonst noch streng verwehrt. Unendliche Paßschwierigkeiten und Impfungen gegen allerlei gehässige Seuchen waren zu überwinden. Aber jetzt hat mich das atemlose, immer auf Überraschungen eingestellte Zeitungsleben dieses eigenartigen Kriegsunternehmens gepackt, mit seinem bunten Wechsel von Redaktionsdienst und Kommüß, Künstlergeist, Verleger- und Buchdruckersorgen. Und ich freue mich, als Frau an dieser Stelle ein bißchen Kriegsdienst leisten zu dürfen.“*<sup>14</sup>

Aus verschiedenen kurzen Anmerkungen in Beiträgen, die Höcker über die Arbeit in der *Liller Kriegszeitung* publiziert hat, lässt sich schließen, dass Friedel Merzenichs Arbeitsbereich hauptsächlich in der Betreuung des Feuilletons und des humoristischen Teils der Kriegsflugblätter lag. Charakteristisch für ihre Arbeit sei gewesen, dass sie

*„[...] mit unzähligen stimmungsvollen und lustigen Beiträgen den Inhalt der ‚Liller‘ bereicherte und mit Takt und Feinsinn einem allzu ungebundenen Soldatenton den Eingang in unser Blatt zu verwehren wußte.“*<sup>15</sup>

Ganz so „unzählig“ sind Merzenichs Beiträge freilich nicht. Tatsächlich finden sich von ihr insge-

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. hierzu: Schönberger, Bianca: *Mütterliche Heldinnen und abenteuerlustige Mädchen. Rotkreuz-Schwestern und Etappenhelferinnen im Ersten Weltkrieg*. In: Hagemann, Karen; Schüler-Springorum, Stefanie (Hrsg.): *Heimat – Front. Militär- und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*. Frankfurt am Main, New York 2001 (= Geschichte und Geschlechter; 35), S. 108–127 sowie Harnack, Agnes von: *Etappen-Helferinnen. Ein Nachwort*. In: *Die Frau. Monatschrift für das gesamte Frauenleben unserer Zeit*, 26 (1918–1919), S. 270–275.

<sup>13</sup> Vgl. Paul Oskar Höcker an Franz Brümmer 06.06.1918, NL Brümmer, Suppl. I, Merzenich, Friedel, Bl. 3r. – Durch einen Brief von Paul Weiglin an Karl Arnold aus dem Jahr 1918 wird deutlich, wie sehr Merzenichs Stelle an Höcker gebunden war: Höcker, der immer wieder Ärger mit der Heeresleitung hatte (vgl. FN 6), wollte schon im Mai 1918 die Redaktion der *Liller Kriegszeitung*

abgeben, da seine Anwesenheit in der Berliner Redaktion der Monatshefte erforderlich wurde. Offensichtlich kam er nur nach Lille zurück, um Friedel Merzenich die Arbeit noch eine Weile zu erhalten! – „Die L.K. bleibt in Lille, aber Höcker u Frau Merzenich werden in der Tat in absehbarer Zeit aus Stadt- und Zeitungsbild verschwinden. [...] Eben habe ich die Herrschaften zur Bahn gebracht [...]. Beide werden noch einmal auf kurze Zeit zurückkehren, er nur widerstrebend u in Rücksicht auf Frau M., denn es hat wieder allerlei lächerlichen Krach mit vorgesetzten Dienststellen gegeben.“ Paul Weiglin an Karl Arnold 03.05.1918, DKA, NL Arnold, Karl, I, C-308.

<sup>14</sup> Merzenich, Friedel: *Von der "Liller Kriegszeitung"*. In: *Berliner Tageblatt*, 15. Mai 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Höcker, Paul Oskar: *Drei Jahre Liller Kriegszeitung. Eine Denkschrift z. 2. Dez. 1917. Mit den Bildnissen der Mitarbeiter*, Lille 1917, S. 50.



samt 29 Beiträge in der Rubrik *Unterm Strich*. Pro Nummer wurden hier meist ein längerer Prosa-Text sowie Gedichte, Rätsel, Aphorismen etc. abgedruckt. Wenn man nur mit einem längeren Beitrag pro Ausgabe rechnet, sind in den drei Jahren, in denen die *Liller* erschien, rund 360 solcher Texte *Unterm Strich* gedruckt worden. Damit erscheint Merzenichs Anteil mit weniger als 10% nicht mehr sehr hoch. Interessant ist jedoch, dass in der *Liller Kriegszeitung* im Unterschied zu anderen Kriegszeitungen häufiger – oder besser: überhaupt regelmäßig Texte von Frauen publiziert wurden. Im gesamten Erscheinungszeitraum der Zeitung sind es – inklusive der Arbeiten von Friedel Merzenich – gut 50 Beiträge. Bei der Durchsicht anderer Kriegszeitungen fanden sich hingegen nur sehr selten bis gar keine Beiträge von Frauen. Inwieweit Friedel Merzenich Einfluss auf die Auswahl der Texte für das Feuilleton der *Liller Kriegszeitung* hatte, ist leider nicht mehr nachzuweisen, deshalb bleibt offen, ob dieser Befund ein Ergebnis ihrer Arbeit ist.

Der Aufgabenbereich Friedel Merzenichs lässt sich demnach so beschreiben: Ein großer Anteil ihrer Tätigkeit lag vermutlich in dem heute nicht mehr sichtbaren redaktionellen Arbeitsalltag. In erster Linie war sie für die Auswahl und Betreuung der Beiträge für das Feuilleton und der *Kriegsflugblätter* zuständig, und war als Mitarbeiterin an den verschiedenen Kalendern, Anthologien etc. beteiligt, die Höcker publizierte, um das Budget der Zeitung aufzubessern. Hier war sie im Wesentlichen für Auswahl und Zusammenstellung der Texte verantwortlich:

„Im Frühjahr 1915 entschloss ich mich dann, aus den ersten 40 Nummern [der *Liller Kriegszeitung*, Anm. L.H.] eine ‚Auslese‘ vorzunehmen und diese einem deutschen Verlag zu übergeben. Es war die erste Arbeit der im April

### Neben der Herstellung der *Liller Kriegszeitung* hatte das Redaktionsteam noch andere kriegswichtige Aufgaben zu bewältigen.

1915 in die Schrifteleitung eingetretenen Schriftstellerin Frau Friedel Merzenich, das mächtig angeschwollene Material dieser 40 Nummern zu sichten, das Wesentliche herauszugreifen, in wirkungsvoller Folge aneinanderzureihen und dem Buch durch den lustigen Bildschmuck, über den wir verfügten, eine bunte Abwechslung zu geben.“<sup>16</sup>

Neben der Herstellung der *Liller Kriegszeitung* hatte das Redaktionsteam noch andere kriegswichtige Aufgaben zu bewältigen, z.B. wurden täglich die *Letzten Kriegsnachrichten*<sup>17</sup> herausgegeben, wöchentlich erschien das Blatt *Nouvelles de la dernière Germaine*, das an die französische Bevölkerung gerichtet war, und zusätzlich mussten – oft unter massivem Zeitdruck und Materialmangel – Extrablätter, Broschüren, Plakate, Aushänge, Kartenmaterial und Formulare entworfen, gedruckt und ausgeliefert werden.<sup>18</sup>

Zusätzlich zu all diesen Aufgaben, die ihren Arbeitstag in der Redaktion gewiss ausfüllten, verfasste Friedel Merzenich ihre schon erwähnten Beiträge für das Feuilleton der *Liller*, sie schrieb aber auch noch für andere Zeitungen und Zeitschriften. So publizierte sie z.B. in den Kriegsjahren außer in der *Liller* auch in *Die Woche* und im *Berliner Tageblatt*.<sup>19</sup> 1916 veröffentlichte sie ihren ersten Roman *Das Tor der Wünsche*<sup>20</sup> und 1917 ein Lustspiel *Der Hahn im Korb*.<sup>21</sup> Darüber schreibt sie an Karl Arnold nach München:

„Ja und nun muss ich Ihnen doch noch erzählen, dass mein Lustspiel, von dem ich Ihnen, als es noch im Embryozustand war, erzählte, fertig ist und bereits an 2 Bühnen angenommen wurde! Hoho! Wie ist es mit München? Sie haben doch Beziehungen zu

<sup>16</sup> Höcker, *Drei Jahre Liller*, S. 61. Die beschriebene Tätigkeit bezieht sich auf: Höcker, Paul O. (Hg.): *Liller Kriegszeitung. Eine Auslese aus Nummer 1–40*, Berlin u.a. 1915.

<sup>17</sup> Das Blatt wurde in einer Auflage von 23 000 bis 30 000 Exemplaren an die Front geliefert.

<sup>18</sup> Vgl. Merzenich, *Von der "Liller Kriegszeitung"* sowie Höcker, *Ein Tag bei der Liller* sowie ders.: *Eine Erinnerung*. In: *Liller Kriegszeitung* (Hrsg.): *Lille in deutscher Hand. Mit Beiträgen von Arnold, Höcker, Merzenich, Schroeder,*

*Weiglin u.a.*, Lille 1915, S. 161–180.

<sup>19</sup> In *Die Woche* brachte Merzenich 1915 zwei Erzählungen unter, für das *Berliner Tageblatt* setzte sie mit dem schon erwähnten Beitrag *Von der Liller Kriegszeitung* den Auftakt für eine kleine Reihe von Artikeln, die von Mai bis Dezember 1915 erschienen.

<sup>20</sup> Merzenich, Friedel: *Das Tor der Wünsche*, Berlin 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Vgl. Eckhardt, Albrecht: *Repertoire einer Provinzbühne im Kaiserreich. Die Spielpläne des Großherzoglichen Theaters in Oldenburg 1870–1918*. Göttingen 1983, S. 452.

*Hund, Katz und Biber – kennen Sie einen  
Direktor dem ich das Lustspiel einreichen kann?  
Ein Wort von Karl Arnold in die Wagschale  
gelegt, würde Wunder wirken.*<sup>22</sup>

Die Texte, die Friedel Merzenich für die *Liller Kriegszeitung* und für das *Berliner Tageblatt* geschrieben hat, sind größtenteils Plaudereien, Erzählungen, Humoresken oder Skizzen über Lille, meist in Form von idyllischen Landschafts- und Naturbeschreibungen, in denen sie ihre Spaziergänge im jahreszeitlichen Ablauf skizzierte.<sup>23</sup> Eine zweite Gruppe bilden ihre Beschreibungen von Straßenszenen. Hier arbeitet Merzenich mit den Mitteln des Flaneurs, sie lässt sich treiben und versucht, spezielle Charaktere und Typen festzuhalten und zu skizzieren.<sup>24</sup>

Zu einer dritten Gruppe könnte man ihre kleinen Erzählungen zusammenfassen, die meist den (Kriegs-)Alltag in der Heimat thematisieren und oft durch Begebenheiten aus dem Leben ihrer Söhne angeregt wurden.<sup>25</sup>

Merzenich versuchte sich auch als Theaterkorrespondentin und berichtete über das deutsche Theater und die Theaterarbeit in Lille.<sup>26</sup> Ihre eher journalistischen Texte beschränken sich auf drei Arbeiten, in denen sie den Besuch einer Gerichtsverhandlung, die Explosion einer Munitionsfabrik in Lille und einen Tag in der Liller Passzentrale schildert.<sup>27</sup>

Die meisten dieser Arbeiten hat Friedel Merzenich mehrfach verwertet: fast alle genannten Texte wurden 1918 in ihrem Sammelband *Liller Guckkasten* nachgedruckt.<sup>28</sup>

Es ist auffällig, wie selten der Krieg bzw. die Nähe zur Front in Merzenichs Arbeiten für die *Liller*

*Kriegszeitung* thematisiert wird. Die Erklärung hierfür liegt nahe: Natürlich erschienen in der *Liller* immer wieder Erfahrungsberichte oder Kriegserzählungen, die von Männern verfasst wurden. Und Merzenich konnte als Frau – zumindest für die Soldaten an der Front – nicht über den Krieg aus erster Hand berichten. Für die Leser in der „Heimat“ hingegen versuchte sie sich auch in der Rolle als „Kriegsberichterstatterin“. Zum Beispiel brachte *Die Woche* einen Bericht von ihr, in dem sie über ihre Ankunft in Lille schreibt und über das Unbehagen, das sie fühlt, als sie in ein von einer französischen Familie verlassenes Haus einquartiert wird. Während ihres ersten Rundgangs durch die Zimmer des Hauses kommt es zu einem Fliegerangriff auf die Stadt:

*„Ich eile die Treppe hinauf in ein Dachzimmer,  
um den kühnen Feind zu beobachten. Klar hebt  
sich die „Tauben“ vom blauen Himmel ab. Bum  
– da fliegt der erste feurige Fluch in ihre Nähe.  
Wie ein schöner Schneeball steht ein Wölkchen  
für wenige Augenblicke in der Luft, dann zer-  
fließt es. Bum – bum – die Abwehrkanone lässt  
sich nicht viel Zeit, und nun setzt auch noch  
das Taktaktaktak des Maschinengewehres ein.  
Der Flieger steigt höher und höher. [...] Die  
Schnapnelle flattern wie Vögel um ihn.“*<sup>29</sup>

Und später, als sie in ihrer ersten Nacht in Lille schlaflos im Bett liegt und von Ferne den Artilleriedonner der Front hört, reflektiert sie:

<sup>22</sup> Friedel Merzenich an Karl Arnold 04.11.1917, DKA, NL Arnold, Karl, I, C-308. In dem schon erwähnten Brief von Höcker an den Leiter des Schauspielhauses in Köln (vgl. FN 9) heißt es: „Hoftheater Oldenburg und Stadttheater Bremen haben Ihre Annahme schon ausgesprochen.“ Paul O. Höcker an Fritz Rémond 27.10.1916; Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, Universität zu Köln.

<sup>23</sup> Siehe zum Beispiel: *Novemberspaziergang im Zitadellenuäldchen*, 39 (24.11.1915); *Was mir der Schnee erzählte*, 72 (02.03.1916); *St. Nikolaus in Lille*, 42 (03.12.1916); *Ein Februar Märchen*, 66 (12.02.1918) oder *Liller Baumblüte*. In: *Liller Kriegszeitung* (Hrsg.): *Lille in deutscher Hand*, S. 204–211. [Die Titel ohne zusätzlichen Angaben sind, auch im folgenden, aus der *Liller Kriegszeitung*.]

<sup>24</sup> Zum Beispiel: *Liller Straßenbildchen. Pommes Frites. Der Geldschrank*, 37 (18.11.1915); *Was man auf Liller Straßen hört*, 44 (09.12.1915); *Von Liller Hunden*, 81 (29.03.1916) oder *In der Markthalle*. In: *Liller Kriegszeitung* (Hrsg.), *Lille in deutscher Hand*, S. 191–196.

<sup>25</sup> Zum Beispiel: *Meine drei Jungen und die Kriegszeit*, 51

(19.05.1915); *Militärmaß*, 8 (23.08.1915); *Wie wir den eisernen Hindenburg in Berlin nagelten*, 16 (16.09.1915); *Der Kanzleidiener. Skizze aus einem ungarischen Dorfe*, 26 (16.10.1915); *Die Jagd auf schlummernde Werte*, 77 (18.03.1917); *Frau Doras Kriegslügen*, 12 (03.12.1917) oder *Lotte spart*, 40 (26.11.1917).

<sup>26</sup> Zum Beispiel: *Feldgraue Arbeit hinter den Kulissen*, 64 (07.02.1916) oder *Deutsches Theater Lille*, 54 (08.01.1916).

<sup>27</sup> Feldgericht. In: *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5. November 1915; *Ein Stündchen auf der Passzentrale zu Lille*, 67 (16.02.1916) und *Die Explosion am 11. Januar 1916*. In: Merzenich, Friedel: *Liller Guckkasten. Stimmungsbilder*, Lille 1918, S. 65–72.

<sup>28</sup> Auch schon in der Sammlung *Lille in deutscher Hand* von 1915 sind acht dieser Beiträge enthalten.

<sup>29</sup> Merzenich, Friedel: *In Feindesland. Federzeichnungen einer Frau*. In: *Die Woche* 17 (1915), S. 724–725, hier S. 725. Diese Erzählung übernimmt Merzenich auch für den *Liller Guckkasten*, unter dem Titel *Das verlassene Haus*. Die Texte sind weitgehend identisch, lediglich am Ende ist der Beitrag in *Die Woche* etwas gekürzt.

„Da steht er nun, der Riese, der Krieg, und  
rührt seine Trommel; und sein Ruf bringt Tod,  
Verderben und Not. Es erfaßt mich ein tiefer,  
grimmiger Schmerz, da ich zum erstenmal die  
Donnerstimme des Krieges vernehme, daß ich  
ganz verzweifelt die Hände ineinander presse.  
[...] Und jeder Schuß zeigt mir Bilder, die  
mich erbeben lassen. Ich sehe nicht Freund,  
nicht Feind, ich sehe nur Menschen, verwundete  
schuldlose Menschen, in deren Augen ein großes  
Fragen steht [...]. Man muß fern von zu Hause  
sein, um das Wort ‚Krieg‘ in seiner ganzen  
Furchtbarkeit zu erkennen.“<sup>30</sup>

Dies ist ein seltenes – wenn nicht das einzige – Beispiel dafür, dass Friedel Merzenich so direkt über den Krieg, über die Nähe zur Front und vor allem über die Auswirkungen und Folgen des Krieges schreibt. Es scheint fast, als hätte lediglich der Schrecken der ersten Konfrontation sie dazu gebracht.

Die von ihr gewählten Bilder und Motive, mit denen sie das Erlebte beschreibt, waren durchaus gängig, um dem Leser ein möglichst nahes visuelles und akustisches Erlebnis zu übermitteln<sup>31</sup>, wie etwa auch der folgende Text eines „offiziellen“ Kriegsberichterstatters zeigt, der für das *Berliner Tageblatt* aus Lille schrieb:

„Bis herein in das Herz von Lille dröhnt die  
laute Brandung der Schlacht. Die Geschütze  
pochen und wuchten, sie schlugen heute Nacht,  
daß die Luft bebte [...], laute, kurze Knalle als  
fahre der Kork aus einer Riesenflasche [...].  
Zwischen den Wolken zerplatzten die Schrap-

nelle zu giftgrünen Wölkchen: ein Flieger [...].  
Automobile mit Leichtverwundeten rasseln  
durch die Straßen, Kolonnen trappeln. Die  
Stadt fiebert.“<sup>32</sup>

Die meisten der Beiträge, die Friedel Merzenich im *Berliner Tageblatt* publizierte, sind jedoch ihre üblichen Erzählungen und Plaudereien. Einzige Ausnahme ist die Skizze *Waldesfrieden*“, die allerdings nicht in der *Liller Kriegszeitung*, sondern nur noch in ihrem Sammelband *Liller Guckkasten* erschienen ist. Hier schildert sie ihren Besuch in einem „echten“ Unterstand. Auch wenn man dem Umstand Rechnung trägt, dass dieser Beitrag natürlich der Zensur unterlag, irritiert die fast schon übertriebene Verharmlosung Merzenichs, vor allem, da im Oktober 1915, nach einem sehr blutigen ersten Kriegsjahr, auch in der Heimat die schrecklichen Folgen der Stellungskriege bekannt und sichtbar waren.<sup>33</sup> Durch den Bezug auf ihre „Jungs“ wird ein spielerischer und abenteuerlicher Charakter betont, der in keinem Verhältnis zur Realität des Krieges steht.

„Mitten im Wald bei X. [...] liegen die Erdbauten. Idyllischer, malerischer gibt es nicht leicht etwas. Möglich, dass bei nasskaltem Wetter der Aufenthalt nicht ganz so verführerisch ist, aber an diesem klaren warmen Herbsttage hätte ich am liebsten selbst so eine Erdhöhle für mich und meine Jungens mit Beschlag belegt. [...] Und ich kann mir diese Welt des bewaffneten Friedens auch gar nicht in kriegigerischer Unruhe vorstellen, trotz des Donnergrollens in der Ferne. So heimelt mich das ganze Wäldchen an. Vielleicht denke ich an Merlin, oder Hänsel und Gretel [...] – aber gewiss nicht an eine feuerspeiende Batterie mit grausamen Verwundungen.“<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Merzenich, *Liller Guckkasten*, S. 13–15.

<sup>31</sup> Vgl. hierzu auch: Köppen, Manuel: *Das Entsetzen des Beobachters. Krieg und Medien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg 2005 oder Paul, Gerhard: *Bilder des Krieges – Krieg der Bilder. Die Visualisierung des modernen Krieges*, Zürich 2004. Es wäre sehr interessant, diese „Sprache des Krieges“ genauer zu untersuchen. Leider kann dies im gegebenen Rahmen dieses Beitrags nicht geleistet werden.

<sup>32</sup> Kellermann, Bernhard (Kriegsberichterstatter): *Im Kampfgebiet von Lille*. In: *Berliner Tageblatt* 3. Oktober 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Z.B. schrieb fast zeitgleich die Schriftstellerin Emma Vely

(1848–1943) in ihr Tagebuch: 9.6.15 [...] Heute in dem nachgemachten Schützengraben am Reichskanzlerplatz mit Tete. Gott – was ich da empfand für unsere armen Tapferen! Und an Ekel über eine Zeit, die sich eine kulturvolle genannt. Ein armer Mensch, dem sein linker Arm abgeschossen war – führte uns. Ich habe immer innerlich geweint.“ Emma Vely, 09.06.1915; Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach (DLA); Nachlass Emma Vely; A: Vely; Versch.; Autobiograph. Tagebuch (1914–1917).

<sup>34</sup> Merzenich, Friedel: *Unterstand Waldesfrieden*. In: Dies.: *Liller Guckkasten*, S. 139–144, hier S. 139. Die Skizze wurde erstmals am 15. Oktober 1915 unter dem Titel „Waldesfrieden“ im *Berliner Tageblatt* abgedruckt.



Ganz sicher konnte es sich Friedel Merzenich in ihrer Position nicht erlauben, kriegskritische Töne in ihren Texten zu positionieren. Dennoch war der Spielraum innerhalb der Vorgaben der Zensur durchaus nicht so eng, als dass damit erklärbar würde, warum sie sich dem Thema Krieg, obwohl sie in vorderer Reihe stand, überhaupt nicht stellte. Offensichtlich entschied sie sich – aus welchen Gründen auch immer – gegen eine realitätsnahe Darstellung dessen, was sie in Lille vom Krieg zu sehen bekam.

Wie Merzenichs Beiträge in der *Liller Kriegszeitung* bzw. in den Tageszeitungen, für die sie schrieb, bei den Lesern ankamen, lässt sich kaum mehr feststellen.<sup>35</sup> Wie sie bei einem Kollegen ankam, kann man dem Artikel *Ein weiblicher Schmock*<sup>36</sup> aus der sozialdemokratischen *Münchener Post* vom Dezember 1915 entnehmen, in dem eine Skizze Merzenichs heftig kritisiert wird. Der Beitrag selbst (*Was man auf Liller Straßen hört*) ist eines ihrer üblichen Straßenschilder, in dem Zeitungsverkäufer von Lille charakterisiert werden, und m. E. wird Friedel Merzenich hier unnötig hart angegriffen. Schon durch die Wahl der Überschrift ist jedoch davon auszugehen, dass dieser Angriff des (anonymen) Autors vermutlich weniger den journalistischen Leistungen Merzenichs geschuldet war, denn ihrem Geschlecht.

*„Friedel Merzenich sitzt seit der Besetzung der Stadt in Lille und ‚sammelt Eindrücke‘ [...].*

*Jedenfalls möchte man der Verfasserin, deren affektierte, lieblose, parteiische und selbst gehässige Berichte uns öfter im Berliner Tageblatt aufgefallen sind, anraten – wenn derlei empfindsame, ästhetisierende Damen schon in Feindesland in die ernste Atmosphäre des Krieges müssen – sich frei mit Antigone zu sagen: Mit zu lieben, nicht mit zu schmocken bin ich da...“*<sup>37</sup>

Dies ist allerdings bisher der einzige Hinweis darauf, der sich während der Recherchen für diesen

Aufsatz fand, dass der Aufenthalt Friedel Merzenichs in der besetzten Stadt Lille von ihren Zeitgenossen überhaupt wahrgenommen und kommentiert bzw. ihre Rolle als Journalistin in einer Kriegszeitung in Frontnähe thematisiert wurde. Auch in der Forschungsliteratur wird der Umstand, dass eine Frau drei Jahre lang in der Redaktion einer Soldatenzeitung gearbeitet hat, nicht oder nur im Nebensatz erwähnt.<sup>38</sup> Auch in der schon erwähnten Dissertation von Kurth aus dem Jahr 1937 wird sie lediglich als Mitglied der Liller Redaktion aufgezählt, obwohl Kurth in seinen Ergebnissen explizit darauf hinweist, dass nur eine einzige Frau in den über hundert deutschen Feldzeitungen beschäftigt war.<sup>39</sup>

Dieser Befund zeigt mit Gewissheit eines: Zwar hätte ihre singuläre Tätigkeit als Frau für die *Liller Kriegszeitung* für Merzenich auch ein Sprungbrett in die publizistische Professionalität werden können; insofern war sie in der Tat eine „Ausnahmefrau“. Allerdings war sie sicherlich keine „Ausnahmepersönlichkeit“ und so schaffte sie es nicht, aus dieser Situation beruflich einen dauerhaften Vorteil zu ziehen. So schreibt Merzenich im Juni 1918 an Franz Brümmer:

*„Ihre freundliche Aufforderung hat mich nach einige Irrfahrten doch noch glücklich erreicht. Aber als ich sie durchlas, stand ich ihrer Bitte doch ziemlich hilflos gegenüber. Es liegt mir so gar nicht, über mich selber etwas erfreuliches zu berichten. Dies: 'liebe Menschheit, nun pass mal auf, was Friedel Merzenich für ein besonderes Tierchen in Gottes grossem Zoo ist', wird mir wohl immer wesensfremd bleiben.“*<sup>40</sup>

Hinzu kommt, dass Merzenich Anfängerin war, sowohl im schriftstellerischen als auch im journalistischen Bereich. Ihre Beiträge zeigen, dass sie zwar versuchte, sich in das ein oder andere Neuland vorzuwagen, aber letztlich blieb sie bei ihrem „Plauderstil“ und damit die „humorbegabte Schriftstellerin“, als die Höcker sie klassifizierte.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Es fanden sich keine Leserbriefe oder ähnliche Hinweise.

<sup>36</sup> N.N.: *Ein weiblicher Schmock*. In: *Münchener Post*, 17. Dezember 1915. Als „Schmock“ wurden nach dem gleichnamigen Protagonisten in Gustav Freytags Komödie *Die Journalisten* (1853) gesinnungslose und käufliche Zeitungsschreiber betitelt. Vgl. hierzu z. B. Gubser, Martin: *Literarischer Antisemitismus*, Göttingen 1998, S. 178.

<sup>37</sup> N.N.: *Ein weiblicher Schmock*.

<sup>38</sup> Vgl. hierzu exemplarisch Hardt, Fred B.: *Die deutschen Schützengraben- und Soldatenzeitungen*. München, 1917 (Kulturdokumente zum Weltkrieg 1), S. 149; Schramm,

Albert: *Deutsche Kriegszeitungen*. In: *Archiv für Buchgewerbe* 54, Jg. 1917, H. 1/2, S. 16, Rieger, Isolde: *Die wilhelminische Presse im Überblick. 1888–1918*.

München, 1957, S. 191 sowie Lipp, Anne: *Meinungslenkung im Krieg. Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914–1918*. Zugl.: Tübingen, Univ., Diss., 2000, Göttingen 2003 (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 159), S. 43.

<sup>39</sup> Kurth, *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen*, S. 216.

<sup>40</sup> Friedel Merzenich an Franz Brümmer 06.06.1918, NL Brümmer, Suppl. I, Merzenich, Friedel, Bl. 1r.

<sup>41</sup> Vgl. Höcker, *Drei Jahre Liller*, S. 50. – Dieser Ausdruck

Nachdem 1916 ihr erster Roman erschienen war, schrieb sie einen Brief an den Journalisten Rudolf Presber (1868–1935), in dem sie sich beschwert, dass er sie nicht bespricht:

*„Wieso frage ich – wieso wird P. O. Höcker mir vorgezogen. Ist mein erster Roman nicht auch bei Ullstein erschienen? Bin ich nicht auch im Felde? [...] Soll ich Ihnen etwas über die Freuden in Lille schreiben? Ich glaube ich schreibe gar nichts, in die Gesellschaft von Helden passe ich nicht rein. Haben Sie meinen Roman gelesen? Nicht? Na ich danke für die Freundschaft. Man muss junge Autoren ein bisschen loben und fördern.“*<sup>42</sup>

Es reichte demnach für sie nicht aus „im Felde zu sein“, um Aufmerksamkeit auf sich zu ziehen. Trotz ihrer Versuche, beim *Berliner Tageblatt* mit einer Reihe von „Kriegsberichten“ Fuß zu fassen, blieben ihre Arbeiten weitestgehend unbeachtet. Auch die Protektion durch Höcker half ihr nicht, sich als Schriftstellerin zu etablieren.<sup>43</sup> Man kann sagen, dass die drei Jahre in Lille der Höhepunkt zumindest ihres journalistischen Schaffens waren, denn nach dem Krieg war sie nur noch einige Jahre (bis 1927 publizierte sie noch neun Romane) belletristisch tätig. Wieder zurück in Berlin

hatte sie offensichtlich große Probleme, überhaupt eine Anstellung zu finden, und es ging ihr finanziell nicht besonders gut. Diese schlechte Lage war auch ein Grund dafür, dass Paul Weiglin und sie erst 1923 heiraten konnten, obwohl sie schon seit Lille ein Paar waren. Ob die beiden sich schon vor dem Krieg kannten – immerhin arbeitete Weiglin als Redakteur bei Höcker – ist nicht sicher. So schreibt Paul Weiglin 1922 an Karl Arnold:

*„Unsere liebe Frau [d.i. Friedel Merzenich, Anm. L.H.] ist seit einigen Wochen auch dem Teufel der Erwerbsgier verfallen, was in Anbetracht der teuren Zeiten nützlich u rührend aber ansonsten tief zu beklagen ist.“*<sup>44</sup>

Nach der Hochzeit ist Merzenich dann – außer als freischaffende Schriftstellerin – nicht mehr berufstätig.

*„Friedel geht schon lange nicht mehr in die Linkstraße, die Damen dort haben die veränderte Lage begriffen u ihr ein Nudelbrett u Quirle u Löffel mit einem langen Nudelgedicht gestiftet. Sie ist jetzt in der Küche u zaubert die kostbarsten Sachen.“*<sup>45</sup>

### Lucia HACKER (1963)

1999–2006 Studium der Europäischen Ethnologie, Geschichte sowie Neueren deutschen Literatur an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Thema der Magisterarbeit: Schreibende Frauen um 1900. Rollen – Bilder – Gesten (2007). Zur Zeit Arbeit an einer Dissertation zum Thema: Schreiben an der literarischen Heimatfront. Die weibliche Sicht auf den Ersten Weltkrieg.

wurde von fast allen Autoren, die später die Kriegszeitung erwähnten oder bearbeiteten, übernommen.

<sup>42</sup> Friedel Merzenich an Rudolf Presber 18.06.1916, Autograph F. Merzenich, Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Handschriftenabteilung, Frankfurt am Main.

<sup>43</sup> Die einzige Literaturgeschichte, in der sie erwähnt wird, ist eine, die ihr Ehemann Paul Weiglin mit herausgegeben hat: Vgl. Koenig, Robert; Weiglin, Paul: *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, Bielefeld 1930, S. 534: „Von harmloser Fröhlichkeit sind viele Romane der Rheinländerin Friedel Merzenich (geb. 1879) erfüllt. [...] Doch hat sie auch Kraft

zu ernster Tragik. Ihr während des Krieges entstandener und aus dem Leben deutscher Zivilgefangener schöpfender Roman 'Der fremde Vogel' (1919) behandelt den Konflikt, den eine französische Frau in eine deutsche Familie und in das Leben ihres Mannes trägt.“ In dem erwähnten Kriegsroman ist der Krieg allerdings nur unwichtige Rahmenhandlung für eine ansonsten sehr oberflächliche Liebesgeschichte mit klischeehaftem Franzosenbild.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Weiglin an Karl Arnold 28.12.1922, DKA, NL Arnold, Karl, I C-308.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Weiglin an Karl Arnold 11.10.1923, DKA, NL Arnold, Karl, I C-308.

# „Not nearly enough use is made of women“

Rediscovering Ernestine Evans

Annie Rudd

The history of American journalism, as it tends to be taught today, presents its students with a fairly homogeneous syllabus as far as gender is concerned. Women journalists, if they appear at all, are few and far between; they are particularly scarce in the first half of the twentieth century – as if there was a kind of interregnum between Nellie Bly and Joan Didion – in spite of growing numbers of women entering the profession of journalism during these decades. Our growing realization, today, that there were women journalists in considerable numbers – and that they did not all fall within the rather uniform categories of society writer, suffrage crusader or “stunt girl” that stick out in the historical record – serves as a compelling reminder that our “histories” are a cumulative process, not a product; they are subject to revision. The more we seek historical accounts of the careers, and the quotidian activities, of “average” female journalists, the more we realize just how rare such accounts are: omissions from the historical record may not look like omissions to begin with, but in time, we may realize that they are glaring ones. A healthy suspicion, then, of the existing “history of journalism” is important – is, in fact, essential to the project of reinstating women. It is only in interrogating and interrupting the historical record that we can work towards rectifying it, reintroducing women into the equation, however incremental that process might be.

How might we begin to disinter these forgotten women and their careers? In the case of early female journalists, the question is an especially thorny one. Ethel Colson Brazelton, in a 1927 manual for fledgling woman journalists, speaks of the “amazing rapidity with which young women slip in and out of [journalism] jobs,”<sup>1</sup> which, she says, makes it difficult to maintain any statistics on the profession. Denied facts and figures, we must settle for fragments and anecdotes, and we

must work to piece together these lives and achievements considered unworthy of inclusion in the initial historical record. The archive, that storehouse of information and experience from which histories are assembled, can provide a fruitful entry point.

Ernestine Evans, a prolific and cerebral American journalist, editor and literary agent active in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, who today has been all but forgotten, offers an instructive example.<sup>2</sup> In her service as a foreign correspondent and political reporter, her accomplishments were legion, her writing was eloquent and her life experiences – distilled, often, in her eloquent prose in long-form pieces in some of the top magazines and newspapers of her time – demonstrated a continued imperviousness to the limitations that were placed on her because of her gender. Evans' largely-forgotten impact – and our ability to rediscover her through the archive – serve as potent reminders of the discursive, necessarily incomplete nature of the historical record, and of the importance of continually questioning its exhaustiveness.

## Evans' early life

Ernestine Evans was born on August 9, 1889 in Omaha, Nebraska. Her Colorado-born father, Arthur, and Californian mother, Allie, lived a decidedly transient lifestyle during Evans' early years: by the time her younger brother, Ward, was born in 1893, the family had moved from Nebraska to Illinois, and by 1900 they were living in a rented house on North Fifth Street in Elkhart, Indiana. Evans and her younger brother attended school in Elkhart, while her father, a lawyer, endured periods of unemployment, and her mother coped with serious illness. Stability was something that would elude the Evans family: recalling her holidays as a young child, Evans

<sup>1</sup> Ethel Colson Brazelton: *Writing and Editing for Women* New York 1927, 199.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the primary sources cited in this piece come from the Ernestine Evans Papers, an archival collection held by Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. All of Evans' correspondence, notes or manuscripts that the paper references have come from this collection, although the paper will also discuss published writings and

public records external to Evans' personal archive. The author, who was also a Graduate Student Intern in charge of processing this collection at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, offers her thanks to Andie Tucher, Director of Columbia's Communications Ph.D. program, for her invaluable guidance on this project, as well as Alix Ross, of the Graduate Student Internship Program, for connecting her with Evans' fascinating archive.

would later write that her family rarely remained in the same dwelling for more than a year. "What with papa's being away, and mama being ill so often, and the children [Evans and her brother] shipped away to the relatives, December and the holidays were often terrifying. Aunt Lou lived in a city flat and had no fireplace. Once we went to visit papa in a hotel,"<sup>3</sup> she remembered.

In this instance and others, the times were decidedly hard for the Evans family, but they did not lead inexorably in the direction of a sob story. Instead, her extended family devised a holiday tradition called "Parcels for the Stranger," in which Evans and her brother would prepare gifts for neighborhood residents who were in dire straits than they. Christmas, Evans later recalled, was spent delivering a set of hand-hemmed towels or a corn-cob pipe in a burnt-wood box to an impoverished neighbor who would otherwise go without a gift. Evans' early acts of community outreach – informal and small-scale though they were – were likely an important formative

activity for her. At the very least, the significance of looking beyond social difference and learning about a diverse array of people stayed with her long after this childhood tradition concluded; critically important to Evans throughout her life was her belief in the interconnectedness of humankind, in spite of cultural, social and economic disparities. In her twilight years, Evans would remark in a letter to a friend, Harvey Klemmer, a diplomat and writer, "The point about ever having been a journalist and publisher, a book scout, and a civil servant, is that one doesn't ever want to give up [on the] continued story about people."<sup>4</sup>

While little is known of Evans' life in the years leading up to her time at university, the mere fact of her matriculation – at a competitive institution, where women were a distinct minority during her time there – suggests that Evans was an unusually bright and intellectually ambitious young woman. Evans attended the University of Chicago for her undergraduate studies, probably beginning in 1908. The institution itself was fairly green at this time, having been established as

recently as 1892. Here, Evans studied for a Bachelor of Philosophy degree with concentrations in English and Economics, and took a journalism course taught by the sociologist George Edgar Vincent.

### **"Only the frills and fringes": Women and journalism in the early twentieth century**

As Evans undertook her education, journalism as an academic field was in, if not exactly its infancy, then certainly its early stages: the world's first journalism school had been established at the University of Missouri as recently as 1908, although journalism education courses had been offered at other American universities since the 1860s. Journalism schools were, at this point and

**As Evans undertook her education, journalism as an academic field was in, if not exactly its infancy, then certainly its early stages.**

in the decades that followed, largely circumspect about admitting women, and many institutions placed quotas on the proportion of female students they would accept; these restrictions stemmed from the concern that the

schools would have difficulty placing a large number of women in journalism jobs once they graduated. Edwin L. Shuman, one of the era's authorities on journalism – as well as a defender of its status as a male preserve – observed in his 1903 manual, *Practical Journalism*, that while American journalism might accommodate a few exceptional women here and there, "on the whole it is rather grudging of its favors to the fairer sex."<sup>5</sup> When Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism opened in 1912, the school's Board of Directors was initially opposed to admitting women at all, though they eventually relented and permitted women to attend; however, quotas limiting the number of women who could matriculate remained in place as late as 1968. James Boylan, an alumnus, wrote in the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1986: "Our class [of 1964] included only eight women, the survivors of an admissions policy that deemed women poor employment prospects and thus mercifully shielded them from disappointment."<sup>6</sup>

During the era when Evans was getting her start in journalism, then, the field – like most profes-

<sup>3</sup> Ernestine Evans, "The Way It Was: Those Christmases of Long Ago." Manuscript, undated. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 8, Folder 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Harvey Klemmer, January 5, 1961. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 4, Folder 13.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin L. Shuman, *Practical Journalism* New York 1903 147.

<sup>6</sup> James Boylan, "Declarations of Independence," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 1986, 30.

sional fields other than nursing and teaching – was a decidedly inhospitable place for women. Shuman wrote: “The newspaper is a distinctively masculine institution, offering women, with few exceptions, only the frills and fringes of journalistic work.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, early examples of journalism undertaken by women tended to be of a specialized nature: when women were granted entry into the field, they often received access on the assumption that they would write expressly for “the fairer sex.”

Most commonly, women journalists in the early twentieth century were relegated to traditionally “feminine” spheres, like a newspaper’s society pages or ladies’ supplements, or magazines with exclusively female readerships. These norms were something of a departure from the journalism of the 1880s and ’90s, in which “stunt girls,” Nellie Bly most famously, did reportage that tested, and stretched, the limits placed on women’s writing, investigating social issues like the conditions of prisons.<sup>8</sup>

Early accounts of women’s growing presence in the world of journalism, and instructional texts for emerging female journalists – the 1920s saw a bumper crop of these – tended to code women’s journalistic writing as a separate sphere, an area of journalism distinct from the “hard” news of the politics and international affairs sections. Genevieve Jackson Boughner, in her 1926 manual, *Women in Journalism*, counseled her readers to aim for jobs in “feminine” areas of the newspaper, where they would have a better chance of success. “While there will always be women who prefer and are specially equipped to compete with men in newspaper work,” she wrote, “there remains a great majority who can succeed more quickly and be of more service by making a distinctly feminine contribution – one in which they may capita-

lize their tastes and instincts rather than oppose them, as they are called upon to do in many lines of newspaper writing in which they duplicate men’s work.”<sup>9</sup> This separation of women’s writing, while it was by no means an inviolable law, largely continued even as growing numbers of women entered the profession. As Brazelton observed in her 1927 book, United States census figures reported that the number of women working as full-time journalists rose from 4,000 in 1910 to 12,000 by the end of the 1920s, representing one out of every four journalists in America.<sup>10</sup> However, even as women came to comprise a considerable proportion of journalists, they still tended to be restricted to the traditionally “female” areas of “women’s pages...feature writing, stunt and ‘sob sister’ reporting.”<sup>11</sup> Very few women managed to break into the male-dominated, “hard” news arenas.

As early as her undergraduate degree, Evans was treated as one of the few. As she later recalled, one of the University of Chicago’s deans, the pioneering social worker and activist Sophonisba Breckenridge, “excused me from a course on Domestic Science and gave me a one-student course writing a paper on Lloyd George’s social budget campaign.”<sup>12</sup> Breckenridge was an exceptional woman herself: she held a doctorate in political science and a law degree from the University of Chicago, and, after spending time at Chicago’s Hull House with its founder, Jane Addams, had started the University of Chicago’s School of Social Work. Evans’ undergraduate years were not only a point of entry into journalism and progressive politics, two of her lifelong passions, but a time of voracious reading: she later remembered her “subscriptions to eight English newspapers, which flooded my dormitory room.” It was in this atmosphere, Evans

<sup>7</sup> Shuman, *Practical Journalism*, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Stunt girl reporting was not, however, a categorically “manly” enterprise: stunt reporters also undertook projects such as exposés of the experience of the department store shopgirl. Indeed, in many instances, stunt girls used their gender to their advantage, taking on projects that allowed them to penetrate and expose the hidden conditions of life for women.

<sup>9</sup> Genevieve Jackson Boughner, *Women in Journalism* (New York 1926) viii. Boughner conceded: “Unfortunately, there is, and always has been, a measure of opprobrium attached to this distinctly feminine contribution – this so-called ‘woman’s stuff,’” (viii), but the content of her manual seems to suggest that women should be deaf to these criticisms; she spills considerably more ink on *The Writer on Home-Making* (fully 67 pages) than she does on *The Political Writer* (a scant 10). But if this decision of Boughner’s strikes contemporary readers as a bit intellectually insulting – a privileging of frippery over

substance – we must remember that in her time, it was also a function of pragmatism. Discussing *The Political Writer*, Boughner reminds readers that “the right to vote has by no means worked the miracle of adding a woman political writer to the staffs of newspapers throughout the country. There are few women attached to newspapers who devote their time to political writing except during election campaigns and conventions” (249).

<sup>10</sup> Brazelton, *Writing and Editing for Women*, 67.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ernestine Evans, “*Autobiographical Notes*,” undated. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 8, Folder 6. Evans’ archive contains autobiographical information in the form of a several-pages-long typed account of her early life and career, as well as an application for a Guggenheim Fellowship. These notes on her life, though they are not extensive, are a particularly important part of Evans’ archive, as the correspondence available therein appears to date almost exclusively to the late 1930s and after.



wrote, that “I got my taste for ‘All the questions unanswered’ rather than ‘All the answers.’”<sup>13</sup>

Evans’ first paid writing position came during the later stages of her bachelor’s degree. During the last two years of her studies, she paid her tuition by taking on the role of Assistant to Henry Gordon Gale, the Dean of Science at Chicago and the editor of its *Astrophysical Journal*. Evans was charged with ensuring that “a record of no misprints in articles of mathematical tables for ten years remained untarnished.”<sup>14</sup> But her duties here were not strictly of a fact-checking nature; Gale, apparently cognizant of Evans’ exceptional talent with words, gave his young assistant an uncommon level of autonomy with the journal. Looking back on this job in 1958, Evans characterized her role as “what would now be called a Girl Friday.”<sup>15</sup> Her invocation of this idiom hints at the increasing availability of “jack-of-all-trades” occupations for willing women, which, unglamorous as they might have been, afforded a considerable degree of flexibility and creative freedom.

This opportunity, like many others that would shape the path of Evans’ career, came not in the form of an official title or designation, but rather an informal, extemporaneous “gig” – an “off-the-books” chance to demonstrate her talent and polish her journalism skills. This seems a fitting start to the career of a freelance journalist in an era when many periodicals eschewed bylines. “The editor used to give me letterhead with his name signed at the bottom, and leave it to me to write a sort of column about Ryerson and its projects and its visiting physicists,” wrote Evans of this initial foray into professional writing. “The copy came hither with almost too much speed, and Dean Gale used to laugh and warn me never to learn stenography.”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the mere presence of the typewriter in Evans’ workplace may have been more significant than she or her boss realized. As Friedrich Kittler has observed, the very word “typewriter” had, in those days, a double meaning: it referred to both the typing machine and the (nearly always) female typist who operated it. In mechanizing the act of writing, and thus loosing it from its previous,

largely unquestioned correlation to the male gender, Kittler argues, the typewriter – a fairly recent invention during Evans’ time at university – “invert[ed] the gender of writing,” and in so doing, “invert[ed] the material basis of literature.”<sup>17</sup> Quickly, typing and stenography became overwhelmingly the province of women: according to Kittler, in these fields, women went from representing 4.5% of the labor force in 1870 to 95.6% in 1930.<sup>18</sup> With the materiality of writing no longer expressly the province of men, women could no longer “remain an ideal abstraction,”<sup>19</sup> a “white sheet of nature or virginity”<sup>20</sup> waiting to be colonized by male authorship. To be sure, this “inversion” did not lead inexorably to a spike in female authorship: many female typists were just that: typists. But the shift was a significant one nonetheless. “Only as long as women remained excluded from discursive technologies could they exist as the other of words and printed matter,” Kittler contends.<sup>21</sup> In entering the writing process by these means, women implicated

themselves in the sphere of written work as never before, even though their role within it was often of an administrative rather than generative nature. Evans’ first writing opportunities seem an apt illustration of this shift: through the mechanization of writing that the typewriter afforded, Evans was granted the material means of creating written work of her own, albeit written work that relied on the ventriloquistic participation of her well-respected male boss for publication. But ventriloquism or not, this was an auspicious beginning for the young writer.

Soon after her graduation, Evans found a job as assistant editor at the *New York Press*, a daily one-cent newspaper that had been launched in 1887 and that was ultimately incorporated into the *New York Herald* in 1916. (In 1924, the *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune* would merge to form the *New York Herald Tribune*, a paper that Evans would contribute to later in life.) The *Press* was owned by Frank Munsey, a prominent, frequently inflammatory figure in New York’s newspaper industry. Munsey had a tendency to orchestrate large mergers among the many newspapers

**Gale, apparently cognizant of Evans’ exceptional talent with words, gave his young assistant an uncommon level of autonomy with the journal.**

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford

1999, 183.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 214.

he owned, eliciting rancor from those papers' employees, and the news community in general, in the process. (Oswald Garrison Villard, in his 1969 history of newspapers, *The Disappearing Daily*, would title one of his chapters "Frank A. Munsey, Destroyer of Dailies.") In spite of the *Press*' checkered reputation – it was considered something of a lowbrow, sensational rag – Evans' job there was an enviable one, particularly for such a young woman. Brazelton, in her 1927 manual, posited that among the totality of women working in journalism in the United States, "the ultimate goal of two-thirds [of them] is a job on the staff of a New York paper."<sup>22</sup> Evans, at age 24, had already realized the career goal of legions of female journalists.

At the *Press*, she helped edit a 12-page women's Sunday supplement, and as her boss tended to govern with a hands-off approach – as Evans later recalled, rather curtly, "the editor was a great beauty and busy with her own affairs,"<sup>23</sup> apparently at the expense of her attention to the newspaper – Evans was once again granted a greater level of creative freedom than her title let on. Here, she led a staff of four women; the writers she supervised included Djuna Barnes, who would go on to become a prominent modernist writer, authoring the novel *Nightwood* in 1936, as well as Barnes' rumored lover, Mary Pyne. If Evans was not exactly enamored of the publication that employed her, or the typical content of the Sunday supplement – this section of the newspaper tended to be devoted to the sorts of "frills and fringes" that Edwin L. Shuman disparaged – then she was at least getting a political education on the side: she later recalled that during her time at the *Press*, "I used to spend hours....poring over [Margaret] Fuller and Marx in the morgue."<sup>24</sup> Evans remained at the *Press* for about a year.

### **"I was definitely a noticer": Evans as a foreign correspondent**

Shortly after her time at the *Press* ended, Evans was approached by the editor of *The Independent*, a Boston-based weekly journal, who proposed that she travel to Eastern Europe, to "go to Rus-

sia and write about the effort to stamp out drunkenness and see the opening of an American hospital in Kiev."<sup>25</sup> Evans was not offered any travel money for the assignment, but she had some leftover pay from previous writing jobs, as well as a great desire to see the world that lay beyond her country of birth. Around the same time, she was offered a domestic job on the staff of the *New York Tribune* – certainly an attractive opportunity for a young journalist – but she opted for the more adventurous of her two options. "Why not, I said," she later recalled, "and in October I was one of two first class passengers on the [British ocean liner S.S.] Dwinsk," bound for the territory that is now Latvia. The only other passenger

on board was Mary Isabel Brush, "a former *Chicago Tribune* correspondent who had got the idea from me."<sup>26</sup> (Brush's account of Russian prohibition, and of her interview with Finance Minister Pierre L. Bark, went on to be published in the Saturday

Evening Post in February 1915). Evans' first transatlantic voyage was a memorable and at times harrowing one, and it lent itself well to her capacity for writing compelling, richly detailed prose: she remembered, "*The SS Dwinsk found the Baltic closed and took 15 days to reach Archangel,*" adding that "*my first sight of Europe [was] the Drina River full of amber colored blocks of ice...no docks, just long side frozen earth; a Canadian ice breaker from the St. Lawrence the other foreign ship; 1100 Russians in steerage...one of whom died, and we buried him in the Arctic Ocean.*"<sup>27</sup> Evans herself was not immune to perilous situations; she also wrote of "a one-eyed pawing customs officer [who] insisted I must be Jewish, not Welsh-American, Scotch and French, but the Minister of the Interior who had come up to greet the Canadian ice breaker came to the rescue...and he took me to Petrograd."<sup>28</sup>

To be sure, a young woman traveling alone – particularly to a region experiencing political turmoil – was, in these years, a risky proposition, and the notion of a woman engaging in business travel was virtually inconceivable. Emily Post's now-iconic etiquette manual of 1922, which includes a section on travel, helps illustrate just how constricted young, unaccompanied women were in

<sup>22</sup> Brazelton, *Writing and Editing for Women*, 199.

<sup>23</sup> Evans, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



their overseas travels. Significantly, they were to carefully avoid almost any contact or conversation with men. "In fashionable society," Post counsels, "an 'escort' is unheard of, and in decent society a lady doesn't go traveling around the country with a gentleman unless she is outside the pale of society, in which case social convention, at least, is not concerned with her."<sup>29</sup> Post spends much of this section counseling women on how to travel with their reputations intact, noting that even if she had a male friend or colleague on board, "A lady traveling alone on a long journey, such as a trip across the continent... would be more prudent to take her meals by herself, as it is scarcely worth running the risk of other passengers' criticism for the sake of having companionship at a meal or two."<sup>30</sup> One can safely assume that Evans – whose correspondence offers ample evidence of dinner plans and myriad other social interactions with her male acquaintances and associates, and whose decisions during her travels tended to be guided by a desire to "get the story" rather than an inclination to preserve her feminine virtue – rejected Post's advice. Unfortunately, though, at the end of Evans' extensive travels, these particular fruits of her labor never found their audience. The Russian censor refused to pass Evans' work, and ultimately, she returned to the United States with little to show for her firsthand experience of Russian political upheaval. Her experiences, however, would lend themselves to later writings: she would recount her travels through the country, and offer her reflections on Russian culture, in a piece about train travel called "South to the Caucasus," published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in April 1928. Evans would also write literary, long-form pieces for the *Review* about her travels in Berlin, London and Paris. Perhaps more significantly, Evans' first overseas journey, and the time she spent immersed in a culture distinct from her native one, led to some personal reflection on her role within the world of journalism. Considering its impact later, she wrote, "I began to understand myself as not a spot news writer, or a propagandist, but just a very personal journalist, a footnotist...I was definitely a noticer."<sup>31</sup> It may have been precisely these qualities that differentiated Evans from her peers in the field of journalism, male and female alike. Chiefly concerned with topics that tended

to figure prominently in "hard news" rather than the women's pages, namely international affairs, American politics and economic policy, Evans had an interest in relating the important events of her time in a more complex, meditative, belletristic way than the terse and telegraphic style of traditional, "male" news reporting typically permitted. Shuman, writing in 1903, insisted: "The only real staples of journalism are news, politics and business. In none of these can women compete on even terms with men. The work of news-gathering, as a rule, is too rude and exacting for them."<sup>32</sup> Evans' journalistic writing largely obviated the imperative of traditionally male, "hard" news-gathering by taking a consciously different approach. Never one for conveying "just the facts," Evans was more interested in nuance; one complaint that she had about the journalism that prevailed during the course of her career was that "Nobody remembers the curious little things."<sup>33</sup> Evans' literary approach to journalism, which frequently featured first-person narrative and tended to focus on the human side of events of global significance rather than attempting to provide a detached, "objective" account, had much in common with the New Journalism that would come into vogue later in the century. A piece she would publish in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1941, recounting her time in Paris during the war, exemplifies Evans' writing style:

*I moved to a studio on the rue Gazan overlooking the Parc Montsouris. Out of the window one could see swans and ducks swimming on the icy pond, and rime frost on the trees. The war never seemed real at all except on the days when the American mail came in. We looked at the home papers and said cynically, "Well, in New York they are having themselves a war," and sympathized with the ambulance drivers who were still in Paris and often more than a little drunk. In the métro, when I would see some permissionaire pressing his girl to him as if every moment counted and life was terribly short, a sense of shame would rise in me.<sup>34</sup>*

Evans' fortuitous career shift – from ladies' supplement editor to foreign correspondent and, more specifically, sensitive chronicler of ways,

<sup>29</sup> Emily Post, *Etiquette: in society, in business, in politics, and at home*. New York 1922, 594-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 595.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, *Autobiographical Notes*

<sup>32</sup> Shuman, *Practical Journalism*, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Ernestine Evans, "Now That One Looks Back," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 17:1, 1941:Winter, 49.

means and experiences her readers would consider “foreign” – was among the most significant professional moves she would make. Following her Russian sojourn, she remained in Europe for several months, continuing to work as a freelance writer. As an American reporter in Eastern Europe, Evans was something of a rarity in these tumultuous years, and was able to secure some impressive opportunities: in one instance, the 25-year-old Evans conducted a three-hour interview with Eleonore, Queen of Bulgaria. “The American consul had appeared at my Sofia hotel to ask me if I were going to interview the Queen,” Evans later recalled, “and when I said no, he was indignant. The next morning I received word that the King’s second best motor car would arrive for me at ten o’clock and take me into the mountains to an American school” where the Queen was visiting.<sup>35</sup> Evans’ time spent with the monarch yielded an unexpected embarrassment of riches: the Queen divulged “enough [information] to make it plain that Bulgaria had perfected plans for entry into war.” Her editor “told me that one interview was worth the thousand dollars in gold he had advanced.” The resulting article appeared on page two of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* – a formidable scoop, in an area of the newspaper not usually populated by women writers.

Evans embarked on her next trip to Europe from August 1915 to March 1916, writing dispatches for the *New York Tribune* on the conditions of politics, and of life, in Germany, France and Switzerland. For the next few years she would split her time between the United States and Europe; in those periods when she was back in the United States, she resided in Washington, D.C., writing and working for the American Red Cross. She made further trips to Russia throughout the decade as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune* and *Asia magazine*. She was in Moscow for the Russian Revolution in 1917, and would later recall hiding behind a curtain in her hotel room as gunshots rang out in the streets below.

## Evans and “the woman question”

To simply say that Evans worked as a foreign correspondent during the 1910s would be to offer an incomplete picture. Around this time, Evans also involved herself with a domestic political cause whose urgency was, at the time, pro-

bably unequaled, particularly among young, career-minded women like herself: she became a suffragist. In the years bookending the United States’ federal decision to grant women the vote in 1920, Evans wrote for *The Suffragist*, the “Official Organ of the National Woman’s Party,” which changed its name to *Equal Rights* once American women achieved suffrage. The journal was a weekly publication with the express goal of promoting women’s political rights. Evans, an associate editor, was charged with penning a lengthy meditation on the significance of the passage of suffrage in the Democratic Congress in 1918. “The woman’s movement is a great slowly developing movement for human freedom,”<sup>36</sup> she wrote; her inclination to situate women’s rights in the discourse of human rights would be a common feature of her suffragist writing. Although Evans did not discuss the specific nature of her suffragist affiliations, or speak much about her involvement in the movement *tout court*, Evans probably fell under the umbrella of the “moderate” suffragist, eschewing the more radical measures taken by the far-left Suffragettes, but also largely avoiding the essentialist formulations of “women’s role” that some of the more conservative proponents of suffrage employed. Ultimately, Evans’ writings during this period demonstrate an interest in greater gender equality, and better career opportunities for women; she continued to write eloquently about issues of interest to career-oriented, inquisitive women throughout her career.

Evans’ suffragist activity was not limited to the pen. Speaking before the United States House of Representatives at the January 1918 hearings of the Committee on Woman Suffrage, where she was introduced as a war correspondent who “has traveled extensively...and knows at first hand the effects that war has upon women and the burdens they are expected to bear in wartime,”<sup>37</sup> Evans offered her testimony of the conditions of life for women abroad based on the time she had spent in Russia and England. Evans stressed the importance of women’s participation in the labor force in these countries, underscoring the usefulness of women in the world of work. Inez Haynes Gillmore, in her 1921 book, *The Story of the Woman’s Party*, recalled that Evans’ address and others like it signaled, at these hearings, “a different sound to these Suffrage arguments. Women had discovered for the first time in the history of the world that

<sup>35</sup> Evans, “Autobiographical Notes.”

<sup>36</sup> Ernestine Evans, “The Democratic Congress is Forced to Pass Suffrage,” *The Suffragist*, February 6, 1918, pp. 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Committee on Woman Suffrage, Extending the Right of Suffrage to Women: *Hearings Before the Committee on Woman Suffrage*. Washington 1918, 148.

they were a national necessity in war, not only because they bore the soldiers who fought, not only because they nursed the wounded, but because their efforts in producing the very sinews of war were necessary to its continuance.”<sup>38</sup> Evans would echo this sentiment in subsequent writings on women's role in society: if women were not denied the chance to work, they were every bit as capable as men of being useful constituents of the working world, so why deny them the opportunity?

Evans, as a working woman, felt that her place within the field of journalism was inextricably connected to her political leanings on “the woman question,” and her activities in the late 1910s bore this linkage out. In February 1917, she spoke to an audience of 400 at a Philadelphia conference on journalism and publishing work for women, discussing the evolving nature of women's place within the field. “Years ago women reporters were always looked upon by editors as ‘sob sisters,’ and relied upon for emotional work only,” Evans told her audience. “Now, women are

sent out on all kinds of jobs, even to politics, but they still are expected to write from the woman's point of view, whatever that may be.”<sup>39</sup> At this early stage in her career, Evans' apparent uncertainty about – and rather flippant attitude toward – the meaning of “the woman's point of view” distinguished her from the many female journalists who considered women's writing a separate, cloistered sphere, deserving of a separate, cloistered section of the newspaper.

With experience came insight, and later in life, again during wartime, when the absence of large masses of men cast in stark relief the status of working women, Evans revisited the question of women's role in journalism. (She had, of course, been implicitly responding to the question throughout her career by the mere act of *being* a female journalist, but she did not reflect on her gender – or on her unique status as a woman in this male-dominated profession – very often.) In a 1943 letter to her close friend, Eleanor Anderson, then the Industrial Secretary of the Young

Ultimately, Evans' missive concluded, in the field of journalism, “not nearly enough use is made of women, old and young”

Women's Christian Association and the spouse of the novelist Sherwood Anderson, Evans outlined some changes that, she felt, needed to occur in American journalism. Among the imperatives Evans laid out: the “use of more women reporters” who were “observers of little details, women of judgment, good humor and dignity, who know how to share experience.” She also lamented the fact that “too many reporters exploit their privileged view to build themselves into celebrities.”<sup>40</sup> The overall impression one is left with, reading Evans' remarks, is that she felt women journalists should not in any way be considered an aberration or a curiosity. If she did not think that women's journalistic contributions should necessarily be *identical* to men's, she certainly felt that society should consider them equally valuable and instructive. Ultimately, Evans' missive concluded, in the field of journalism, “not nearly enough use is made of women, old and young.”<sup>41</sup>

### Evans' investigation by the Department of State

Evans continued to travel abroad regularly for writing assignments, and in 1918 was commissioned to travel to England to write a series of syndicated articles for the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* discussing England's first elections in which women were to exercise their right to vote. The approval of her travel visa was slowed, however, by the Department of State's thorough investigation of her activities and political leanings. Evans' reputation had apparently been sullied by whispers that she was “reported to have spread Bolshevik propaganda and literature in the Publicity Department of the American Red Cross” during her time there, and was “described as being a socialist, suffragette, and ‘literary nut,’” according to correspondence between officials at the Department of State and the Department of Military Intelligence. The Directory of Military Intelligence staff member, M. Churchill, ultimately reported: “After talking with one of the men in the Red Cross, we have rather come to the conclusion that the reports on Miss Evans were more or less gossip.”<sup>42</sup> The situation rectified, Evans left

<sup>38</sup> Inez Haynes Gillmore, *The Story of the Woman's Party* (New York 1921), 300.

<sup>39</sup> Theodora S. Butcher, “News Notes from the Bureau of Occupations,” *The Journal of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae*, Vol. III, No. 3, March 1917, 498.

<sup>40</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Eleanor Anderson, March 6,

1943. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 6, Folder 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> M. Churchill, letter to R. W. Flournoy, Jr., November 21, 1918. Appended to Ernestine Evans' passport application, 1918. Accessed via ancestry.com.

for England in late 1918, but accusations of anti-American sentiment would continue to follow her. A note appended to a passport application that she filed in 1922 states that she “has been the subject of considerable investigations by the Department of Justice, American Red Cross, and the British Secret Service.”<sup>43</sup> Considering some of Evans’ relationships over the years, it is perhaps unsurprising that she would have continued to be the subject of these investigations: in the later years of the 1920s, as we will see, she was closely involved with a number of political radicals, including Kenneth Durant, a known communist, and Diego Rivera, a revolutionary and a politically divisive figure in America. Evans was also responsible for commissioning a novel by Josephine Herbst, titled *Nothing Is Sacred*, for publication by Coward-McCann in 1928; Herbst would go on to work as a propaganda writer for the United States Office of the Coordinator of Information, a precursor to today’s Central Intelligence Agency, but would lose her job when a Federal Bureau of Investigation background check found her to be a “great admirer” of Joseph Stalin.<sup>44</sup> Evans would again be investigated by the Department of State decades later, in the early 1950s, for having been friends with a Communist some twenty years earlier, as McCarthyism reached its high-water mark in the United States, but these accusations, too, would be dropped.<sup>45</sup>

### From reporter to editor: Evans in the 1920s

In 1920, perhaps feeling a bit of travel fatigue, Evans returned to the United States and secured a job as features editor of the *Christian Science Monitor*. This newspaper, which was published daily Monday to Friday, had been launched in 1908 by Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the *Church of Christ, Scientist*, in order to provide a chaster counterpoint to the scandal- and sensation-heavy penny papers of the day. Evans’ position at the *Monitor* offered her some of the stability that her freelance writing jobs lacked, but it also demanded a great deal of hard work. Her responsibilities, though perhaps not quite as intellectually rigorous as her various and sundry freelance writing jobs, were staggering: with the

help of one assistant, she was responsible for buying eleven columns per day, as well as many illustrations. Aside from her assistant, Evans was the only person on staff who was not a Christian Scientist, a considerable difference that effectively meant that she was working, as she put it, “inside incredible taboos,”<sup>46</sup> although the *Monitor* has consistently, throughout its history, trodden lightly on religious topics and avoided explicitly advocating the church with which it is associated, presumably for fear of alienating secular readers. Evans’ unattributed work here – she was not given a byline – served as good preparation for her future work as a literary agent, in that the large volume of articles she was responsible for commissioning meant that she bore a constant burden of responsibility for scouting and procuring new work. Indeed, despite the lack of glamour and the low wages associated with this job, Evans felt that she benefited from the experience: she developed scouting skills that would later serve her well. When her article solicitations brought in submissions that she knew would not be a proper fit for the *Christian Science Monitor*, she sent the stories to *The Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, and various other weekly publications, “and in a whole year only one article failed to land somewhere, and it was fun to see a two-column, 15-dollar piece come out for a hundred dollars elsewhere and surprise [the] contributor.”<sup>47</sup>

During these same years, Evans also made a life decision a bit more characteristic of women in her time: she married. Evans’ archival papers, which are substantial, contain virtually no information about her brief marriage, or its demise; not even her husband’s name is provided. Her obituary, skirting the issue, curtly concludes, “Miss Evans was unmarried. She leaves no surviving relatives.” The conspicuous absence in Evans’ substantial archival papers of more than a few oblique references to her marriage – most of which come in the form of quick, dispassionate mentions of her divorce – could have a number of explanations. Perhaps the most obvious (and innocuous) explanation is that Evans’ archival papers, and particularly her correspondence, come mostly from her later life, dating from the early 1940s until her death in 1967. By the beginning of that period, her marriage and its termi-

<sup>43</sup> Schooley, note appended to Ernestine Evans; passport application, December 1, 1922. Accessed via [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).

<sup>44</sup> Darlene Harbour Unrue, Katherine Anne Porter: *The Life of an Artist*. Jackson 2005, 189.

<sup>45</sup> It is entirely conceivable that these allegations

compromised Evans’ career opportunities, but because Evans was in almost every instance employed as a freelance writer, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which her livelihood may have been affected.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, “Autobiographical Notes.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

nus, which had happened almost a decade earlier, were probably far from her mind; it may also be the case that the marriage or the divorce had been so unpleasant that she chose to push them from her mind. Another distinct possibility, however, relates to what Nancy K. Miller, the feminist literary scholar, has called “proleptic posthumousness.”<sup>48</sup> With this phrase, which calls to readers’ minds both archival practice and the literary trope of prolepsis, and in so doing, underscores the unavoidable narrativity of the historical record, Miller alludes to the tendency on the part of people whose archives will be maintained after their death, or those people’s executors, to “clean up one’s act” in anticipation of posterity. The absence of details about this particular, possibly unsavory aspect of Evans’ personal life from her archive invites questions about the incompleteness that necessarily characterizes the telling of any life story.

Census records from 1930 state that Evans married in 1924, at the age of thirty-five, and they suggest that she remained married for at least six years. While

Evans’ archive offers no clues as to the identity of her husband, James R. Mellow mentions in passing (in a biography of her colleague, Walker Evans) that Ernestine Evans was married to a man named Kenneth Durant,<sup>49</sup> and the 1930 census corroborates this statement: at the time of this census, she was listed as married, and lived on Manhattan’s East 30th Street with Durant, also 35, who hailed from Philadelphia and had graduated from Harvard College in 1911. Durant was probably quite an interesting character to live with: having worked as an assistant at the Committee on Public Information during World War I, serving the American bureau of publicity censorship, he was later the American representative of the Soviet newswire *Tass*. During these years, as Donald Ritchie, an American political historian, reports, “The wealthy Durant handled American public relations for the Bolshevik government.”<sup>50</sup> Durant’s career choice probably did not help Evans’ reputation in the eyes of the already-wary Department of State. Evans and Durant spent the first years of their married life in Greenwich Village, in an apartment on St. Luke’s Place, one of

the neighborhood’s many winding, tree-lined streets. The Village’s now-venerable reputation as a hotbed of bohemian creativity was just getting underway during their time there. Evans, a suffragist, a political progressive, and, to borrow the words of her detractor at the Department of State, a “literary nut,” was well suited to the neighborhood.

During the mid-1920s Evans continued to piece together a career as a freelance journalist, writing articles for *The Nation*, *Century Magazine*, the *Virginia Quarterly*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and others; additionally, she served as Paris correspondent for Reynolds News Agency. Moreover, during these years she produced a substantial, well-received children’s book review supplement for *The New Republic*. This supplement, which was probably first published around 1925 and

had at least two follow-ups, in 1926 and 1927, was Evans’ brainchild, and it represented perhaps the first example of a serious-minded consideration of children’s literature in a periodical aimed at adults. Called “*Children and Their Books*,”

it contained articles and book reviews by luminaries like Bertrand Russell, Katherine Anne Porter, Genevieve Taggard, and Lewis Mumford, along with Evans herself. Evans’ work on these volumes was but one demonstration of her lifelong love of children; her years soliciting and editing children’s books were another. To be sure, the world of children’s literature was more welcoming of women than the other spheres of journalism that Evans had inhabited. Statements Evans made in her correspondence suggest that her interest in this field, with its decidedly “feminine” cast, stemmed largely from her belief in the importance of education. In discussions of children’s literature in her letters, she would often proclaim, “*To children, everything is news*,” the implication of that statement being that children, sponge-like in their consumption and retention of information, should be exposed to instructive and useful information that would help them grow into educated citizens. In Evans’ mind, nothing was innately irrelevant or boring; knowledge about the world was inherently a positive good, and in order for it to reach the greatest possible number

**During these same years,  
Evans also made a life decision  
on a bit more characteristic  
of women in her time:  
she married**

<sup>48</sup> Nancy K. Miller, “*Collecting and being collected*” (paper presented at Archiving Women conference, Center for the Critical Analysis of Social Difference, Columbia University, New York, USA, January 30, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans*. New York 1999, 173.

<sup>50</sup> Donald Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington*. New York 2005, 100.



of people, it had to be presented to readers in an engaging and accessible way. Evans was interested in considering how media – media in the broad, McLuhanesque sense of the word – could bridge seemingly unbridgeable gaps.

In addition to her freelance writing and editing during the 1920s, Evans secured a job at the Whitney Studio Club, a meeting place for artists living in the Village, which had been established by the New York art-world fixture Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Whitney, a sculptor and heiress, would go on to found the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1931. The club, situated adjacent to Washington Square Park, was just a short walk from Evans' abode, and she spent time there, learning about painting and becoming involved in the art scene. Her involvement with the Whitney Studio Club steered her toward a career of a markedly different nature. Whitney funding had gone to create a new publishing firm, Coward-McCann, and Evans, hearing about its establishment, "decided it would be more fun to buy books than to sell them."<sup>51</sup> Tim Coward, co-founder of the firm, hired Evans as an assistant editor, and his decision was rewarded with an instant classic: the first book Evans brought to the firm was a children's title, *Wanda Gág's Millions of Cats*, which is held, today, to be the oldest English-language picture book still in print. *Millions of Cats* was an auspicious start to Evans' publishing career: a spectacular success upon its publication, the book has enjoyed steady popularity for over eighty years. In her relatively brief time at Coward-McCann, Evans brought in a number of other successful books: she later observed, "When the firm printed a list of the books they were proudest of ten years [after my departure], half the titles were ones I had dug up."<sup>52</sup> These included *Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons*, a wildly popular series of children's nature books. In 1928, after several more fruitful years as a book scout, Evans generated a book of her own: a children's picture book entitled *The Story of the Harbor*, published by Harper & Brothers. The book, part of the firm's "City and Country" series, described the bustling life of the harbor in New York.

The following year, Evans authored another book, this one intended for a more mature audience. Her second book, *Frescoes of Diego Rivera*, was a large-format volume featuring the work of the Mexican artist. Evans, who had traveled to

Mexico and written about its frescoes for *The New York Times* in 1926, touting the working-class appeal of Rivera's work, came up with the concept, edited the material and wrote the introduction, and the book that resulted was the first published work on Rivera. Issued by Harcourt, Brace, Evans' book represented an important stepping stone to the popularity and artistic renown Rivera later enjoyed in the English-speaking world. The following year, Rivera was invited to the United States for the first time, and was commissioned to paint murals for several institutions in San Francisco, including the San Francisco Stock Exchange and the California Institute of Fine Art. And in 1931, Rivera was the subject of a large retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which effectively established him as a household name in the English-speaking world. With all of these successes in mind, it is safe to say that Evans was performing laudably both at her day-to-day job with Coward-McCann, and at her publishing pursuits external to the firm. But her tenure at Coward-McCann was cut short by, in Evans' words, her "melancholy divorce,"<sup>53</sup> which happened around 1930. Her archive offers no additional details about the divorce, but records show that a few years later, in 1935, Durant married the poet Genevieve Taggard, Evans' acquaintance and former colleague on the *New Republic* children's supplement. With the dissolution of her marriage, Evans hastily moved to Philadelphia, taking a job with Lippincott, another publishing house. Much like her position at Coward-McCann, Evans' Lippincott career allowed her to travel extensively in search of new books that the firm could publish. Along the way, she joined forces with a small group of her fellow Lippincott employees, Florence Codman and Walter Goodwin, and formed a small private press, named Arrow Editions, "as avocation, an uncommercial enterprise." With this foray into independent publishing, Evans and her colleagues, themselves still relatively new to the publishing industry, typically printed small press runs of 300 to 500 editions, and "mainly experimented with broadsheet poems à la Faber, and [reprinted] George Ade and [Ernest] Fenollosa"<sup>54</sup> – a rather odd coupling, considering the former was a humorist known for his sympathetic renderings of the common American man, and the latter was an Orientalist Italian-American literary scholar and aesthete. Evans' firm's interest in

<sup>51</sup> Ernestine Evans, "Autobiographical Notes," undated.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Hugh Shaw, October 7, 1958.

*Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 4, Folder 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

republishing Fenollosa was prophetic in at least one respect: Fenollosa's work would soon after become the object of the modernist poet Ezra Pound's immense interest. But this side project of Evans' never became a full-fledged career, and she continued to work for Lippincott from abroad, scouting new work and overseeing the firm's children's publications.

### **"Taking relief or giving it": Evans, government work, and national identity**

Upon her return to the United States, Evans' career path took yet another new turn, this time in response to her country's economic turmoil. She moved to Washington, where she had lived in brief spurts during her years as a foreign reporter. The Great Depression was underway, and Evans was finding it increasingly difficult to scrape by. She later wrote that like masses of Americans during these years, "I too went broke and had to choose between taking relief or giving it, and went to work for [Rexford] Tugwell."<sup>55</sup> Tugwell, a former advisor to Franklin D. Roosevelt, was the head of the Resettlement Administration (RA), a landmark initiative established in 1935 as part of the New Deal, which was aimed at easing the adverse effects of the Depression on Americans by relocating struggling families to government-planned communities. It was ultimately folded into the Farm Security Administration, another federal organization with similar aims, which operated until 1942. The RA position was a natural fit for Evans, given her interest in social outreach and progressive economic reform. It was at this point that Evans' exceptional talent for connecting artists with projects – a skill honed during her years as a literary agent – shaped the course of one of the most significant developments in American art. Tugwell allowed Evans to hire the photographer Walker Evans (no relation) to help report on the accomplishments of the RA up until that point, and Evans came to realize that both the grinding poverty Americans faced, and the federal government's efforts to assuage it, would be best illustrated by photographs. She had previously employed Walker Evans, then a fledgling photographer, on two books for Coward-

McCann, and she proposed that he should assist with this RA initiative.

Evans, the writer, later recalled that Evans, the photographer, seemed like an ideal candidate because "he could both understand building and tradition, and spot people who told what was happening without captions."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it was precisely his acute ability to capture his subjects' images in a way that "told what was happening without captions" – through his stark, intimate, frontal portraits – that eventually earned Walker Evans his iconic status within the canon of photography. Evans was also responsible for the hiring of several additional photographers, among them Ben Shahn, to undertake similar documentary photography work for the RA. These photographers were part of a team led by Roy Stryker, a longtime acquaintance of (Ernestine) Evans', and they were given the task of reporting on the various labor projects across the United States that fell under the umbrella of the RA. Later in life, Evans reflected upon her role in the genesis of this social-realist school of documentary photographers, noting that the coterie of chroniclers she selected for the RA represented about half of the photographers whose work appeared in the first issue of *Life* magazine – "and some of whom are now [in 1958] with Magnum."<sup>57</sup> The photographers she hired, too, credited Evans with connecting them with the assignments that would launch their careers. In a 1971 interview, speaking of his RA experiences, Walker Evans recalled, "I went down there at the suggestion of Ernestine Evans," and when asked if he considered his RA work rewarding, he responded, "Oh, gosh, yes!...a subsidized freedom to do my stuff! Good heavens, what more could anyone ask for?" For Walker Evans, the project meant a "whole hot year tremendously productive. I developed my own eye, my own feeling about this country...that was great for me!"<sup>58</sup> Shahn was similarly enthusiastic about the experience of working for the RA, and gave Evans credit for connecting him with the project. "At that time I had gotten very hipped on the subject that if I can create an intense reality, it will generate some broad generalities," he recalled in an interview later in his life. "I was primarily interested in people, and people in action,"<sup>59</sup> he remembered; his RA work presented him an unparalleled

<sup>55</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Bill Sloane, undated. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 4, Folder 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Hugh Shaw, October 7, 1958. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 4, Folder 4.

<sup>58</sup> Walker Evans interviews, 1971 Oct. 13–1971 Dec. 23, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>59</sup> Ben Shahn interview, 1965 Oct. 3, *Archives of American Art*, Smithsonian Institution.



opportunity to realize this interest. These two photographers' ideological leanings dovetailed with Evans': like them, she was fascinated by the rhythms of everyday life, and saw the broad appeal of stories about individual "real people."

Even beyond positing documentary photography as a novel means of representing the hardship of the Depression-era poor, and helping to assemble what Americans would come to remember as an iconic group of photographers, Ernestine Evans was also responsible for the memorandums within the RA that suggested the Works Progress Administration Guides, a series of guidebooks to regions of the United States that were part of the Federal Writers' Project. "In the early days of the New Deal...before WPA took over, and the papers were full of raking leaves as a relief job," Evans recalled that she paid a visit to the RA executive Jake Baker and said, "Why don't you invent some research jobs for intelligent people, set something up at the Congressional Library for people scurrying off frightened from the cities...guide books to other states and places and climates, and let people do as people did

in my middle and far west parts of the country, migrate on their own steam."<sup>60</sup> While initially Baker was dismissive – Evans recalled that he "spat upon" the idea when she first proposed it to him – he, along with his superior, Harry Hopkins, eventually relented and ended up proposing a \$6 million budget for the initiative. The result was the American Guide Series, a large collection of books and pamphlets offering an extensive and diverse picture of America. There was a guide for each American state, as well as several guides dealing with a specific city or region. The project employed hundreds of out-of-work writers and researchers, who generated books somewhat akin, in their structure and function, to travel guides. Praised for their insights into local folklore, architecture, music and myriad other aspects of American life, the guides are still in print.

But irrespective of Evans' central role in these projects, her tenure at the Resettlement Administration came to a close, and in the later years of the 1930s she returned to her joint career as freelance writer and literary agent. She returned, too, to the globe-trotting lifestyle to which she'd become accustomed before her government work. She

went to London as a book scout, but ended up working as a researcher for *Fortune* magazine, conducting extensive research on Germany's entry into World War II with another *Fortune* reporter, Joe Barnes. Next, she conducted research on Finland for a "March of Time" newsreel about the country. "March of Time" newsreels were a popular early iteration of documentary film reporting on current events, which grew obsolete as daily television news became commonplace. Evans, ever the vagabond, departed Finland once the project was done, and moved next to Paris. Eventually, though, the rising tide of World War II conflict forced her to flee, and she returned to the United States in 1941. By this point, Evans' status as a world traveler was an integral part of her identity. Having spent a considerable part of her life living abroad and writing about foreign cultures for American audiences,

**Having spent a considerable part of her life living abroad and writing about foreign cultures for American audiences, Evans considered herself something of an intermediary between nation**

Evans considered herself something of an intermediary between nations: as she accumulated familiarity with cultures other than her own, Evans was able to defamiliarize the "American

way of life" for herself, gaining a more developed understanding of the foreign perception of her nation's character.

She was soon able to put this learning to productive use. She again went to work for the government in 1943, securing a job with the Office of War Information (OWI). With this position, Evans assisted in efforts to engineer America's image for domestic and foreign audiences. Although her specific title is unclear, she worked with Archibald MacLeish, the assistant director of the OWI, and journalistic writing was among her duties. In a piece written for the New York *Herald Tribune* entitled "*The War of Ideas*," Evans sought to explain and justify the mission of the OWI in the face of criticism from Americans, "too many [of whom] cannot understand that by sabotaging the weapons of ideas they are condemning just so many more American soldiers to die under the weapons of the enemy."<sup>61</sup> Evans' writing during this period presents a powerful counterpoint to the Department of State's insistent suspicion of her commitment to her country. Her interest in the foreign perception of American identity would persist beyond her job

<sup>60</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Bill Sloane, undated. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 4, Folder 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ernestine Evans, "*The War of Ideas*." Manuscript, dated November 4, 1943. *Ernestine Evans Papers*, Box 8, Folder 5.

at the OWI: in 1956, she exchanged a series of letters with then-Senator Hubert Humphrey, lamenting the poor quality of United States Information Agency propaganda abroad, and suggesting the incorporation of some new ideas – namely, American Indian art and content relating to America's long tradition of immigration. Humphrey, impressed by her suggestions, forwarded them to the USIA, and remarked to Evans, “*Obviously your experiences in living abroad have added immensely to the development of your understanding of the mentality of other countries and the kind of ideas to which they are most receptive.*”<sup>62</sup>

### Until she could write no more: Evans' twilight years

Beginning around 1944, Evans had a regular job as a book reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune*, contributing copiously to the paper's weekly supplement. The *Herald Tribune* book review, over which a woman, Irita Van Doren, presided for 37 years, is a particularly interesting case. Brazelton, in her 1927 study, notes that “the entire magazine section of that paper – which is owned by a woman who takes active part in its management – is ‘manned’ by women, both on the literary and executive sides.”<sup>63</sup> While this gender homogeneity was no longer intact by the time Evans joined the staff of the book review, it was, to say the least, a very hospitable environment for female writers. Freer than ever from the obligation to engage in any predetermined modality of “women's writing,” Evans reviewed books by male and female authors alike, of genres ranging from international politics to autobiography. Her reviews for the *Herald Tribune* showcase Evans' eloquence and insight, her capacity for snappy prose and incisive criticism. Her skill for writing book reviews was exceptional enough to earn her at least one piece of fan mail. In 1953, in response to one of Evans' pieces, John Morris, executive editor of Magnum Photo, wrote in a letter to Van Doren: “Never before have I written a fan letter for a book review, but I can't resist praising the magnificent job Ernestine Evans did on *The Freya Stark Story*...seldom do people write with both journalistic and literary quality. This piece had both – and compassionate wisdom, too.”<sup>64</sup> Evans, with her vast cache of accumulated experi-

ences, may have been a more skilled writer than ever, but around this time, she was beginning to feel the financial strain of a lifetime of freelance work. The steady stream of writing, editing and scouting assignments began, in Evans' sixties, to slow to a trickle. Her income suffered concomitantly. Perhaps most significantly, her regular job with the *Herald Tribune* book review ended in the early 1950s, as the declining newspaper underwent a restructuring that many consider the beginning of the end for the once-illustrious organ. The termination of this steady job was distressing to Evans not solely for financial reasons, however. In a letter to her longtime friend, Jessie Heckman Hirschl, with whom she exchanged hundreds of letters over the years, she described the feeling of futility that came from a life without regular work. “As I don't even write reviews, I might as well be dead.”<sup>65</sup>

Much of Evans' career had been spent working as a “stringer,” a journalist who contributes to a particular publication (or several of them) on an ongoing basis, but is paid for each piece of work individually. This kind of freelance employment offers great flexibility and freedom, but very little in the way of stability or job security. For a person like Evans – knowledgeable on a variety of topics and apparently unsuited to a consistent, high-security writing job – such a post seems fitting. However, as Evans grew older, the jobs began to come in with less and less frequency. Evans' inevitable old age, and her attendant slew of health problems, meant that as the years passed, she was simply less able to generate the large volumes of thoughtful, well-researched, often personal experience-based prose on which she had established her reputation. She was forced to have several operations for cataracts, which left her unable to read or write for long stretches of time, and which caused not a little agitation for Evans. Compounding these health troubles was her increasingly dire financial situation, which was “like an extra disease.”<sup>66</sup>

At precisely the moment in her life when some comfort about her ability to pay her next month's rent, even at the expense of a more predictable day-to-day schedule, might have been immensely valuable, Evans was unable, in spite of her vast network of colleagues and collaborators, to find the sort of steady, reliable job that she had spent

<sup>62</sup> Hubert Humphrey, letter to Ernestine Evans, July 26, 1956. Ernestine Evans Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.

<sup>63</sup> Brazelton, *Writing and Editing for Women*, xvi.

<sup>64</sup> John Morris, letter to Irita Van Doren, November 21, 1953. Ernestine Evans Papers, Box 5, Folder 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Jessie Hirschl, undated. Ernestine Evans Papers, Box 7, Folder 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ernestine Evans, letter to Helga Greene, April 10, 1956. Ernestine Evans Papers, Box 4, Folder 5.

large chunks of her life scrupulously avoiding. As it was, she continued, with varying success, to cobble together a living working as a stringer and as a freelance literary agent, into her retirement years. Evans' financial records offer an apt demonstration of her pecuniary stresses: haphazardly scribbled balance sheets scattered throughout her archive – in which miniscule deposits do little to offset her growing debts – suggest that Evans was in the red for the last several years of her life, and was perpetually scrambling to get out.<sup>67</sup> Beginning in the late 1950s, a group of Evans' close friends, worried about her money troubles, began contacting her many acquaintances and colleagues around the world, soliciting financial donations for Evans' maintenance in as tactful a way as such a thing can be done. While Evans was in many respects a concertedly self-reliant person, she accepted the donations that her friends had collected for her.

Evans largely gravitated toward career paths that depended on ample communication and collaboration – what might today be classed as “networking.” The thousands of letters Evans sent and received

demonstrate her dedication to working with others and establishing relationships. Evans' correspondence did not, however, come in the form of the innocuous, polite communiqués that tend to be ascribed to letter-writers of her era; Evans' letters skirted niceties and delved into topics that might have been considered inappropriate for women to discuss with one another, including progressive politics, religion, work, money problems, and illness. Her correspondence – some of it personal, some of it professional, and much of it somewhere in between – offers insight into her relationships with her many friends, confidantes and collaborators. For the historian, though, Evans' correspondence presents some challenges: a great deal of it is undated, and the vast majority of it dates to the 1940s and later, so there is a disproportionate emphasis on the bonds that Evans developed later in life. This imbalance also makes it difficult to ascertain when and how Evans established the important relationships in her life; in this way, her archive leaves an essential human element lacking; it is possible to observe the chronology of her long and varied career,

but considerably harder to get a sense of whom she was communicating with, influencing, and being influenced by during the various stages of her life. She wrote frequently to Gertrude Emerson Sen, an American-born woman who was a former editor of *Asia* magazine and the head of the Society of Women Geographers, of which Evans was also a member. Emerson Sen, who like Evans had done extensive traveling as a young journalist, resided in Almora, India with her husband, the scientist Basiswar (Boshi) Sen. Late in her life, as Evans was less able to travel, Emerson Sen's colorful accounts of life in India provided her with a prospect of the world outside North America. Evans also corresponded frequently with Robert Flaherty, a documentary filmmaker who produced the popular film *Nanook of the North* and his wife, Frances Hubbard Flaherty, a writer. Evans and the Flaherties had worked together on *Louisiana Story*, a 1948 documentary,

and the three remained close; in their letters, they frequently discussed their shared interest in the educational possibilities of documentary film. Evans was a confidante of Katherine Anne Porter, the writer, who

**The thousands of letters  
Evans sent and received  
demonstrate her dedication  
to working with others and  
establishing relationships**

in a letter dated August 10, 1945, wrote to Evans of her horrors at the deployment of the atomic bomb. Evans discussed photography with Cornell Capa, founder of the Magnum Photo agency, who would go on to found New York's International Center of Photography, as well as his fellow Magnum photographers, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Marc Riboud. She corresponded with the French filmmaker Jean Renoir, imploring him to consider writing a book; Evans and Pearl S. Buck, the author and expert on China, exchanged letters, discussing political affairs in America and abroad.<sup>67</sup> In spite of her eyesight, in spite of her failing health, Evans kept on writing voluminously until she could write no more. On her death, in 1967, she was penniless; she had no surviving relatives to leave behind. All that remained was her work.

<sup>67</sup> The author acknowledges that this article does not do justice to the vastness and diversity of Evans' network of

friends and colleagues; the discussion of Evans' coterie could virtually warrant a paper of its own.

## Towards a complicated history: what Ernestine Evans can teach us

Why has Evans, a remarkable woman important to the history of journalism, been forgotten? The circumstances of her life when she died, a function of the piecemeal nature of her work in the field of journalism, as well as her status as a single woman with no heirs, certainly worked against our remembering her: most of the people to whom she was closest died around the same time she did, so there was nobody with a personal interest in adding her to the historical record. The difficulties of reinscribing journalism history with the experiences of women like Evans are further compounded by the ephemeral nature of journalistic production and journalism institutions: a newspaper or magazine, as the current, imperiled moment of print journalism amply demonstrates, can be a powerhouse one day and a specter the next. This transitoriness of journalism institutions – and libraries' reluctance to bother preserving "old news"<sup>68</sup> – presents the historian with some challenges

Nancy K. Miller has recently contended, "You may write a woman's life by archiving it."<sup>69</sup> With this statement, Miller draws attention to the doubly discursive nature of biography: the archive, as Evans' story demonstrates, is invariably the product of a selection process; the story of a person's life, as told by the biographer, is more selective still. As Hayden White has observed, "Every narrative, however seemingly 'full,' is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out."<sup>70</sup> The foregoing

account of Ernestine Evans' life and work, then, is far from exhaustive, and it is most definitely incomplete. That, of course, does not mean it is valueless; on the contrary, to demand definitiveness from this telling of Evans' life would be to shortchange her vast array of lived experiences, which would be impossible to encapsulate on these pages. And, as Carolyn Heilbrun has said, "Safety and closure, which have always been held out to women as the ideals of female destiny, are not places of adventure, or experience, or life."<sup>71</sup> Evans, it is probably clear at this point, would have wanted neither.

What can Evans' life, and her archive, tell us? Stories, whose power to teach and delight Evans believed in so passionately, are the frames through which we remember the past and render the world intelligible. But the world is not story-shaped. There is no better way for contemporary readers to come to terms with this fact than to undertake a bit of piecework themselves. Evans and her peers cobbled together journalism careers – formidable ones, even – out of the small, odd, and frequently uncredited opportunities that they were able to seize. Contemporary readers may have to operate by similar means, engaging in a bit of extemporaneous and unglamorous legwork, dirtying their hands in the document boxes of the archives, in order to acquire a more developed understanding of the past. The history that they piece together, which will incorporate some of the historical record's outliers and misfits, like the many forgotten early female journalists, will be more complicated and haphazard than the version that preceded it, and also, most probably, more true.

### Annie RUDD (1985)

is a student in the Communications Ph.D. program offered by Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. For the 2008-2009 academic year, she worked as a Melton Graduate Student Intern at Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where she first became acquainted with the archive of Ernestine Evans, the subject of her article in this volume. Her fields of research include American journalism history and the history of photography, especially early photojournalism and documentary photography.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholson Baker's New Yorker piece, "Deadline," on the grim state of historical newspaper preservation, is illuminating here. It appeared in the July 24, 2000 issue, pp. 42-61.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, "Collecting and being collected."

<sup>70</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1990) 10.

<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York 1989, 20.

# The First Lady of Israeli Journalism: Hannah Semer (1924-2003)

Quest and discovery: The story of an exceptional woman

Einat Lachover

This biographical essay tells the life story of Hannah Semer for the first time<sup>1</sup> and from a feminist perspective. Semer is the first lady of Israeli journalism, a woman who managed to reach the top of Israel's journalistic elite and whose accomplishments are remarkable in the global context as well. According to Shlomit Reinhartz, feminist biography is a form of protest against the discrimination manifest in the forgotten role of women in our common culture.<sup>2</sup> In writing Semer's biography, I do not claim that Semer herself was discriminated against. To the contrary. Semer is a rare example of a woman whose voice was not silenced and whose persona was not excluded. Unlike most women of her generation, she was a major player in the Israeli public discourse, upon which she left her mark. She wrote, edited and lectured in debates and forums at the heart of Israel's public discourse, particularly on political, social and economic issues, traditionally thought of as exclusively male territory. Her unusual story exposes the inequality for women at that time and can serve as a source of inspiration and a model for female journalists and other professionals.<sup>3</sup>

The historian Anita Shapira claims we are able to communicate with a biographical subject through the materials he or she has left behind.<sup>4</sup> Semer left behind copious and diverse materials, both public and private, from her more than fifty years of creative work. The bulk of her work is public: the news items, reportage, opinion columns and books she wrote, the television and radio programs she participated in, and the academic and other lectures she gave in Israel and

worldwide. Semer's writing style was matter-of-fact, sparse and personal. Therefore, her public work reflects a frankness and spontaneity offering access to her personality. The private materials comprise various documents preserved in her home, primarily the raw materials she used for her investigations and the notebooks in which she jotted down impressions and experiences from work meetings and assignments along with personal notes. On the same page, for example, she may have scribbled a grocery list next to quotes from world leaders she had met. This article is based on an initial perusal of these public and private materials, though more comprehensive archiving is clearly called for.

My many informal discussions with Semer's daughter during my search for documents provide an additional source in bringing this story to light. Together we burrowed through the heaps of papers left in Semer's study, arranged in some logical order known only to her.<sup>5</sup> Working in Semer's home alongside her daughter enhanced the intimate acquaintance that develops in writing any biography and also facilitated what Anita Shapira refers to as "intuitive understanding"<sup>6</sup> of the subject's inner code rather than simply a logical analysis of his or her character. Other sources for this article include a short documentary film about Semer produced at her daughter's initiative<sup>7</sup> on the fifth anniversary of her death and the computerized archives of the mass distribution daily newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, which helped me in finding relevant events and remarks made by Semer during her career.

<sup>1</sup> No biographical essays have been written about Semer, though her name does appear in two lexical compilations: (1) a short entry in a Hebrew lexicon of communication: Yehiel Limor, Hanna Adoni and Rafi Mann, *Media and Communication Lexicon* (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Sfarim, 2007), 192; and (2) an online archive: Danny Rubinstein, *Hanna Semer*, in *Jewish Women Encyclopedia*, retrieved 24/3/2009 <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/Semer-hanna>.

<sup>2</sup> Shlomit Reinhartz, *Feminist Biography: The Pains, the Joys, the Dilemmas*, in *Exploring Identity and Gender: The*

*Narrative Study of Lives*. Eds. Amia Lieblich and Ruthellen Josselson, (Thousand Oaks 1993), 37-82.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion about feminist biography see Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*, (Oxford 1999), 127-162.

<sup>4</sup> Anita Shapira, *New Jews Old Jews*, (Tel-Aviv, Am Oved publishers) 287.

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, Semer's private archives.

<sup>6</sup> Shapira, *New Jews*, 286-287.



## 1924-1950: "Words can never do justice to what happened there."<sup>8</sup>

Hannah Semer, daughter of Ella and Shlomo Halevi Haberfeld, was born in 1924 in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, to a family that was ultra-Orthodox yet modern as well. Her father came from a family of rabbis and scholars who were prominent members of the city's ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>9</sup> Even though Semer was raised in an atmosphere of religious belief, the title of her third book, *God Does Not Live There Anymore* (1995), indicates that as an adult she had her doubts about religious faith. The book describes her 1990 visit to the Ravensbruck concentration camp 55 years after she had been a prisoner there:<sup>10</sup>

*On my travels abroad, and especially my trips to Germany, I am very careful not to eat food that is not kosher. It's a demonstration of solidarity of sorts. But here at the doorway, at Ravensbruck, I would have eaten pork if I could have eaten at all. I would have eaten fried bacon to avenge my uncles and cousins who sacrificed themselves on the altar of Torah study, who adhered to the strictest interpretation of the law, who prayed three times a day to the God of the Jews, and then that God turned his back on them and abandoned them to evil and cruelty. I would have eaten steak with cheese to take revenge on God for the deaths of my aunts and cousins, who counted the days after menstruation and separated challah from the dough according to the law, ran to the rabbi with questions about a spot on a slaughtered goose, and read from the women's version of the Torah every free moment—and what was their reward? To be*

*humiliated and tortured until they perished.*

*Five minutes from Ravensbruck, I would even*

*have eaten a baby goat cooked in its mother's*

*milk!<sup>11</sup> Instead, I took a Valium.<sup>12</sup>*

Semer grew up among a fascinating clash of contradictions. Despite being religious scholars, the Haberfelds were also businessmen and professionals. Unlike her father's conservative family, her mother's family had its share of artists and revolutionaries, Communists as well as Zionists. In her book, Semer calls attention to the tolerant atmosphere in her parents' home, noting that their home was open to non-Jews and to Communists. As was typical in the Bratislava Jewish community, the family strictly observed the commandments of Judaism yet led a modern life, going to the movies, the theater and the opera.<sup>13</sup> After the third grade, Semer was transferred from a Jewish religious school for girls to a Slovak public school.<sup>14</sup> It may be that the contradictions of her childhood helped prepare her to cope with the dynamic changes in store for her as an adult. Semer had a sweet childhood, both figuratively and literally, for her father was a national sales representative of a chocolate factory. Yet very quickly her sheltered childhood came to an end. Her father died before she turned 11. When she was 15, she was expelled from high school due to discriminatory legislation and began studying at the Bais Yaakov Teachers Seminary, where she acquired a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew. In the spring of 1942, as Jews from Slovakia began being transported to Germany, she completed her teaching certificate.<sup>15</sup>

During the war, Semer and her mother stayed together, hiding and doing manual labor at the brick factory in Nitra, Slovakia. Towards the end of the war in the spring of 1944, Semer was separated from her mother, who was sent to the Terezienstadt camp. Semer was sent to Ravensbruck, the largest concentration camp for women in Germany,<sup>16</sup> where she remained for five months.

<sup>7</sup> *A Thing or Two About Semer*, 2008. A Short documentary movie about Semer by Peter Sela.

<sup>8</sup> This quote from Semer was found written on the manuscript of Nahum Barnea's eulogy for Semer, March 9, 2003. Barnea was a journalist at the now-defunct Davar and Semer's protégé. The eulogy with the quote in the handwriting of Barnea's wife Tamara was found in Semer's private archives.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*. Tel Aviv 1995, 23-25.

<sup>10</sup> Her account of this visit, along with the other chapters in the book, was first published in *Davar* close to the time of

the visit. The article on Ravensbruck: Hanna Semer, *Devar Hashavua*, December 22, 1990, 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> Refers to a Jewish Kosher Torah law: "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk";

<sup>12</sup> Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> From the transcript of an interview with Semer conducted by R. Amir for the *Beit Avi* (My Father's House) radio program, unknown year. Semer's private archives.

<sup>16</sup> Shmuel Spector, "Ravensbruck," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman, Tel-Aviv 1990, 1147-1149.

During the last two months of the war, she was transferred to Malkov, an auxiliary camp where, according to her, conditions were less harsh so she was able to survive.<sup>17</sup>

Semer admits she never devoted herself to commemorating the Holocaust, either publicly or privately.

*I never cultivated my memories of the Holocaust. I did not write about them, nor did I tell my daughter about them [...]. It seems to me that I am one of the only prisoners who forgot my prisoner number right after the war.*<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the Holocaust chapter in her life is evident in everything she did and wrote throughout her lifetime. For example, during the Lebanon War in 1982, Semer wrote the following in one of her articles criticizing the war:

*And I say with the moral authority of a Holocaust survivor that the blood spilled in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps is no less red than Jewish blood, and this blood cries out to the heavens, and it is etched into the hearts of the Jews of Israel.*<sup>19</sup>

“Why, then, have I returned to Ravensbruck?”<sup>20</sup> Semer asked upon her return visit to the camp. Her answer: “Something compelled me. Perhaps an emotional need to pick at this sore in order to pay back some of my debt for surviving, after this became possible.”<sup>21</sup> In her book, Semer reveals a few personal memories from that time, though it is the general historical perspective rather than her personal story that is the book’s focus. At the Ravensbruck museum, she looked through a bibliography listing various published works about the camp. Her sharp editor’s eye noted that the words “hell” or “inferno” in different languages appeared in the titles of many of the books. Semer felt these words were inadequate to express the horror and only confirmed the paucity of human language.<sup>22</sup> Hence, for many years she avoided writing about her memories from that time. “Words can never do justice to what happened there” was her answer whenever she was asked why she had not written about her Holocaust

caust memories.<sup>23</sup> After her visit to Ravensbruck, Semer began working towards setting up a memorial at the camp for the Jewish women who had been imprisoned there. Her efforts came to fruition in 1992 when the memorial room was established.<sup>24</sup>

Semer also sought to promote German-Jewish and German-Israeli dialogue, and encouraged this in her writing. For example, in 1983 she wrote an article in support of the turnaround in Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s policy regarding relations between Germany and Israel and of his willingness to meet with the Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Kohl:

*If we could ask them [the Holocaust victims], they would advise us to do this. I believe that their “yes” would be stronger and clearer and more decisive than the “yes” we are capable of saying. I feel they are not satisfied with the role of miserable victim that Israel has relegated to them in our memories, for the truth is that their suffering and their Holocaust contributed to the revival of Israel no less than the one hundred years of Zionism and the War of Independence.*<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, even though in this article she mentions her own Holocaust experience, she describes the Holocaust victims in the third person, thus differentiating herself from them. Semer wrote and acted to foster a balanced and realistic perception of Germany in the eyes of the Israeli public. For example, after visiting Germany in 1984, she wrote:

*It is true that the Germans are responsible for their past in general and for the Holocaust in particular, and that this is an unavoidable component of German-Israeli relations. Yet this component must not be the only one if we want to ensure the future of these relations. We must find places in the present where young people from both countries can meet.*<sup>26</sup>

In 2002, the president of Germany granted Semer an award of excellence in appreciation for

Nahum Barnea, *Davar* journalist and Semer’s protégé, on eulogy manuscript, March 9, 2003. Found in Semer’s private archives.

<sup>24</sup> Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Hannah Semer, *Davar*, August 26, 1983, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah Semer, *Davar Hashavua*, January 13, 1984, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*, 89.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Semer, *Davar*, September 24, 1982, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> Quote, in the handwriting of Tamara Barnea, wife of

these efforts. In bestowing the award, Rudolph Dressler, then ambassador of Germany to Israel, said the following: "*If the Israeli media today present a balanced view of modern Germany, it was Hannah Semer who paved the way for this several decades ago.*"<sup>27</sup>

After the war, Semer returned to Bratislava, where, unlike most Holocaust survivors, she was reunited with her mother, her brother and her sister, who had also survived the camps.<sup>28</sup> Until immigrating to Israel in 1950, Semer took care of her sick mother while she completed high school and studied economics at the university.<sup>29</sup> During this period she also married Milan Zomer, a Holocaust orphan.<sup>30</sup> Fate had looked kindly upon her and her immediate family so she felt obligated to marry someone who was lonely and had not been so lucky. When she was 26, her mother died, and she and her husband immigrated to Israel.

In 1983, thirty three years after leaving Bratislava, Semer once again visited her home town. It was not the longings for her childhood home that drew her back to the city, but rather her parents' graves.<sup>31</sup>

## 1950-1970: Journalism is not a hobby, but rather a way of life<sup>32</sup>

Semer arrived in Israel in 1950 and began teaching Hebrew. She was soon followed by her brother and sister. Semer also had a very brief stint in the army, cut short by being too smart for her own good. Semer's commanding officer gave her a stack of envelopes to mail. She was sure there was a spelling error on the envelopes, which she took it upon herself to change. It turned out that the addresses were acronyms used in a military drill. When the commander asked her why she had changed them, she said, "I thought

that..." The commander interrupted her, shouting, "With me you do not think!"<sup>33</sup>

In Israel, Semer divorced her husband, and in 1958 she remarried. Her second husband was David Zuta, an economist. Their daughter Shlomit was born in 1960 and continued living with Semer after the couple separated.

Toward the end of her university studies in Bratislava, Semer had taken her first steps in journalism as editor of *Tribuna*, a Zionist Jewish weekly printed in Slovakian.<sup>34</sup> In Israel, she did not attempt to get a job with any of the leading news media<sup>35</sup> due to her limited Hebrew. She therefore began her journalistic career as editorial coordinator for two pedagogical journals, *Urim* and *Urim Lahorim*, and also worked as a night editor for *Yedioth Hayom*, a German language newspaper published in Israel.<sup>36</sup>

## Toward the end of her university studies in Bratislava, Semer had taken her first steps in journalism

In 1951, Semer was hired as a roving reporter for *Omer*, a new daily evening newspaper published from 1936 to 1942 by the Histadrut Labor Federation. The paper was written in easy Hebrew for new immigrants, thus giving Semer a chance to get to know her new country. After a year, she was named *Omer's* parliamentary correspondent and took her first steps into the intricacies of Israeli politics.<sup>37</sup> "Her excellent reportage abilities very quickly stood out. She was a quick and competitive reporter who knew how to distinguish and quickly identify important news items, and her language was rich and fluent."<sup>38</sup> A year later, she was hired for the editorial staff of the daily newspaper *Davar*.<sup>39</sup> The paper, which first came out in 1925 during the British Mandate of Palestine and continued to be published through 1996, was owned by and politically aligned with the Histadrut Labor Federation. The first edition of *Davar* declared the paper to be "the workers' newspaper," but in practice it was identified with the

<sup>27</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 6, 2002, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Quoting Semer from the movie *A Thing or Two about Semer*.

<sup>29</sup> From the curriculum vitae sent to the *Israel Prize Committee*, Ministry of Education and Culture, August 3, 1992. In Semer's private archives.

<sup>30</sup> Her married name was Zomer, which she later changed to Semer (pronounced Zemer).

<sup>31</sup> Semer, *God Does Not Live There Anymore*, 16. Her account of her visit to Bratislava first appeared in *Devar Hashavu'a*, October 16, 1983, 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Semer to Barnea, in Nahum Barnea, *Number One Journalist*, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 10, 2003, 9.

<sup>33</sup> According to Semer's daughter comment.

[http://www.mouse.co.il/CM.articles\\_item,1050,209,24684.aspx](http://www.mouse.co.il/CM.articles_item,1050,209,24684.aspx) (accessed April 7, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> From curriculum vitae August 3, 1992. Found in Semer's private archives.

<sup>35</sup> Roni Caspi, *Every Period is Interesting for Journalism*, *Bamachaneh-Israel Defense Forces Magazine*, Vol. 33-34, April 12, 1995, 78.

<sup>36</sup> From the curriculum vitae August 3, 1992. Found in Semer's private archives.

<sup>37</sup> Haim Izak, *First and Last – New Face at the Mirror*, *Davar Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, May 30, 1975, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Rubenstein, "Hanna Semer."

<sup>39</sup> In Hebrew, *Davar* means "word"

Mapai party (Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel or Land of Israel Worker's Party, a Zionist socialist party in power until 1977), and later with the Labor party.<sup>40</sup> Like other party organs, Davar was totally controlled by the party, which was even responsible for appointing the editor in chief and all the other senior position holders. Moreover, the paper's advertising policies, topics, news stories and opinion pieces were all geared to party needs.<sup>41</sup> Semer reported from the Knesset and was appointed political correspondent responsible for covering the parties during elections. In this position, she established many contacts among politicians. From 1957 through 1961 she was the paper's foreign correspondent in the United States, stationed in Washington and the United Nations. She served during the Eisenhower administration and one year into Kennedy's administration,<sup>42</sup> and she was fascinated by the changes in America when Kennedy took office.<sup>43</sup> Semer returned to Israel at the end of 1961, and shortly thereafter was named manager of Davar's editorial board in Jerusalem and the paper's chief writer. In 1966, she was appointed deputy to the editor in chief, and four years later was appointed editor in chief, a job she filled for twenty years until her retirement in 1990.

## 1970-1990: Hannah Semer the editor

Semer was appointed editor in chief at a time when the influential and eminent newspaper Davar had already lost some of its glory. Party journalism had begun to ebb in the 1960s, and this gradually had an impact on Davar as well. The paper's circulation continued to drop, advertising dried up, and the Histadrut Labor Federation had trouble supporting the newspaper due to its own financial crisis.<sup>44</sup> In appointing Semer to the job, Itzhak Ben Aharon, then secretary general of the Histadrut, thought she was just the right person, or to be more precise, just the right woman, to give the newspaper the shakeup it needed. This is how he explains this appointment, almost forty years later:

*The idea was to infuse some new blood, not*

*someone from the same old stable, and to give things a fresher and perhaps more aggressive nature, [...]. These were my expectations, and that's why I appointed her. It was also clear that eventually there would be a woman editor. She was an extremely productive and successful publicist [...] I think that at that time Davar actually needed to be shaken up, needed to be given a new, fresher and more independent direction than before. It needed to be less a party organ and more an independent organ of the workers.<sup>45</sup>*

Semer became editor in chief after Davar's financial fortunes had already begun to wane, and she never managed to extricate the newspaper from major financial crisis until it closed in 1996. Nonetheless, she is identified as the person who generated a journalistic revolution<sup>46</sup> for she turned Davar into a dynamic, creative and ambitious newspaper.<sup>47</sup>

What changes did Semer introduce as editor? Coincidentally, her first day as editor was also the first day the paper used a new printing press that introduced color printing in Israel for the first time. Until then, the format of daily papers in Israel was not something even considered by the editor in chief but rather was determined by night editors, typographers, and mainly by print limitations. Semer attempted to set principles for the paper's design, appointing two young graphic artists, Arik and Dani Kerman, to give the newspaper a fresher appearance. Not everyone was happy with these changes.<sup>48</sup> The typographers' response to the addition of two red lines to the paper's logos was as follows: "If the editor is a female, does this mean it is okay to smear the newspaper with lipstick?"<sup>49</sup> This statement became an idiom for expressing the young and feminine (?) spirit introduced by Semer.

Over the years, the best of Israel's writers wrote in Davar. Semer added Yizhar Smilansky, Haim

<sup>40</sup> Caspi and Limor, *The Mediators*, 44.

<sup>41</sup> Dan Caspi and Yechiel Limor, *The Mediators: The Mass Media in Israel 1948-1990*. Tel-Aviv 1992, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Rubenstein, *Hanna Semer*.

<sup>43</sup> Semer, *Half Tea*, 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> Caspi and Limor, *The Mediators*, 44-46.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Itzhak Ben Aharon on March 20, 2006 at his home in Givat Haim by Roni Shtern. Initial transcription found in Semer's private archives.

<sup>46</sup> Oz Almog, *Farewell to 'Srulik'. Changing Values among the Israeli Elite*. Haifa 2004, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Nahum Barnea, *Allegory in Acapulco, Davar – Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 8; Nahum Barnea, *The Number One Journalist, Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 10, 2003, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Dany Kerman, *Is It Possible to Stop the Progress, Davar-Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 37.

Gouri, Aharon Megged, Amos Oz and Haim Be'er, and their articles in *Davar* were an important step in their literary careers. In the 1980s, the newspaper continued to develop, with most of the changes focusing on the Friday supplement *Devar Hashavu'a*. The supplement's editors, Ohad Zamora<sup>50</sup> and his successor Tuvia Mendelson, gave the supplement's design a facelift, added new sections, and recruited talented journalists.<sup>51</sup> The climax of Semer's innovations was the popular satirical supplement, *Davar Acher*, which was introduced in 1983 and continued its satirical biting in other venues even after *Davar* closed down, until it too shut down in 2004. The supplement's writers were aware of the symbolic significance of *Davar Acher* being part of *Davar*, the organ of socialistic Zionist culture. They did not miss any opportunity to hurl abuse at the icons of socialism,<sup>52</sup> while being granted a free hand and full support by the editor.<sup>53</sup> That being the case, under Semer's leadership, the paper adopted a sharp writing style previously unknown at the conservative *Davar* or in Israeli journalism in general. This style quickly became a benchmark that was imitated by other newspapers as well.<sup>54</sup>

As editor in chief, Semer offered opportunities to young and talented male and female journalists, many of whom eventually became trailblazers in Israeli journalism at other newspapers. According to journalist Doron Rosenblum, one of Semer's protégés: "*The newspaper 'gave a platform to young people' who at their first opportunity had run away from this paper, from the epithet 'comrade,' from the rebukes of the old-timers, and from the aroma of lemon tea.*"<sup>55</sup> Many of these journalists value her tutelage greatly. According to her protégé Nahum Barnea, who became one of the leading Israeli publicists and won the 2007 Israel Prize for communication:

**As editor in chief, Semer offered opportunities to young and talented male and female journalists, many of whom eventually became trailblazers in Israeli journalism at other newspapers.**

*She was not a teacher in the usual sense of the word. She did not lecture about professional secrets and she did not reproach or reprimand us. She taught through her personal example.*

*Watching her in action was equivalent to being taught by a master.*<sup>56</sup>

Journalists who worked under her claim Semer liked to work in a group, knew how to join in when her employees burst into laughter in the hallways,<sup>57</sup> and even made jokes about herself.<sup>58</sup> Yet she still could be tough with her employees, demand of them what she demanded of herself, and make painful and unpopular decisions, thus making enemies as well.<sup>59</sup> Her reporters often benefitted from information she received from her contacts,<sup>60</sup> for even when she was invited to official functions, dinners and festive receptions, she remained first and foremost a reporter. She would gather information, call the right reporter, tell him what she learned and ask him to check it out and report back.<sup>61</sup> The scoops were actually hers, though she gave the credit to her reporters.<sup>62</sup> Though she would sometimes inflict terror on her employees, they all knew she was human, for better or for worse, and that she would always back them up.<sup>63</sup> As editor Semer was responsible for editorial matters and matters of content. Nevertheless, the newspaper's troubles often required her to attend to the managerial side as well.<sup>64</sup> She initiated a number of marketing steps, such as entering the local newspaper market at the end of the 1970s when this market was just getting started, and forming a merger with the Jerusalem Post to be sold to a group of investors, initiatives halted by the Histadrut.<sup>65</sup> Semer never managed to ensure *Davar's* financial stability, and the newspaper was unable to extricate itself from its decline. Semer

<sup>50</sup> In the future Ohad Zamora would become one of the leading publishers in Israel.

<sup>51</sup> Almog, *Farewell to 'Srulik'*, 135.

<sup>52</sup> Almog, *Farewell to 'Srulik'*, 136.

<sup>53</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, *Davar Aher Supplement*, March 14, 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Rubinstein, *Hannah Semer*.

<sup>55</sup> Doron Rosenblum, *Davar-Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Barnea, *Number One Journalist*.

<sup>57</sup> Nahum Barnea, *Allegory in Acapulco, Davar – Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, *Davar Aher Supplement*, March 14, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Tali Lipkin-Shahak, *Hannah Semer Changes Gear, Davar*, 14.9.1990, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Dany Bloch, *Davar Acher, Haeir*, Issue 1, 172, 13.3.2003, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Rubinstein, "Hannah Semer".

<sup>62</sup> Bloch, "Davar Acher", 29.

<sup>63</sup> Lipkin-Shahak, "Hannah Semer", 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>65</sup> Bloch, "Davar Acher", 29.



attributed the paper's decline to its unsuccessful business management,<sup>66</sup> and she was very disturbed by its closure. She spent the newspaper's last working night with her past employees, who the next day would be forced into the job market.<sup>67</sup> A number of years before the newspaper closed, when Semer was 66, she relinquished her position as editor in chief to her successors, though she continued to work. From 1991-1996 she wrote one to four opinion pieces for *Davar* each month. When the newspaper closed, she still wrote from time to time in the daily newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, almost up to the time of her death. During those years, she also published her third book and taught journalism at Bar Ilan University.

### Semer's professional doctrine: An independent, critical and free press

In the early 1970s when Semer became editor in chief, *Davar* was still strongly identified with Mapai. Semer had already begun to develop personal relationships with Mapai leaders when she was a parliamentary correspondent. Her wisdom and her understanding of the political system made her the confidante of many politicians.<sup>68</sup> Political leaders opened their doors to her. She had close personal ties with Levi Eshkol, Itzhak Rabin, Haim Zadok, Pinhas Sapir and Moshe Sharett,<sup>69</sup> as well as more strained relations with Yisrael Yeshayahu, Labor party secretary-general from 1971-72,<sup>70</sup> and with Golda Meir, prime minister from 1969-1974.<sup>71</sup> From time to time, Semer was offered key positions. She was mentioned as a Labor party candidate for the seventh Knesset in 1969<sup>72</sup> and as a candidate for information minister in Rabin's government in 1975,<sup>73</sup> but she chose to remain in the media.

Although Semer was a political animal, she considered her professional identity to be more important than politics. According to journalist Nahum Barnea, she "understood the political system like a politician, and reported on it like a journalist."<sup>74</sup> Unlike the previous editors of *Davar* (Berl Katz-

nelson, Zalman Shazar, Haim Shurer and Yehudah Gottthelf), who were first and foremost party members, ideologues and politicians and only then journalists, Semer was promoted based upon her journalistic abilities and talents. While Semer did belong to Mapai and later to the Labor party, she never considered herself a political go-getter, teacher or ideologue but rather a journalist whose primary obligation was to maintain her professional integrity.<sup>75</sup> Ben Aharon of the Histadrut, who had appointed her editor in chief, points out Semer's independent thinking. "She was not influenced by power and esteem, and she did not respect people merely for the sake of their status."<sup>76</sup>

Even as a reporter, Semer was an independent thinker who chose professional over establishment considerations. For example, when on assignment in the United States, she was given a special expense account to cover the speech made by Pinhas Lavon, Histadrut Secretary-General, at the AFL-CIO conference on the west coast. Semer did fly to the west coast, but instead of covering Lavon's speech she decided to cover Krushev's celebrated visit. She was almost fired for that.

*Lavon was furious with me [...]. Haim Shurer, Davar editor, also moaned in a letter to me, "What have you done to me?" Obviously Lavon had blamed him for my failure. I answered Shurer's letter, with a copy to Lavon, saying that to the best of my professional judgment I did the right thing. Davar's readers often get firsthand reports about the Histadrut's secretary-general. But when has a Davar reporter had an opportunity to be part of the entourage of the leader of the powerful Soviet nation?*<sup>77</sup>

Under Semer's leadership, *Davar* became an open-minded newspaper expressing diverse positions.<sup>78</sup> According to Barnea, *Davar* "is black and white and endless other colors as well."<sup>79</sup> Further-

<sup>66</sup> Hannah Semer, "On the Death of Journalism", *Otot*, 192, June 1996, 34.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>68</sup> Barnea, *Number One Journalist*.

<sup>69</sup> Rubenstein, *Hanna Semer*. Eshkol was prime minister from 1963-1964, Rabin was prime minister from 1974-1977, Zadok was justice minister in the 1970s, Sapir was finance minister in the 1960s and 1970s, and Sharett was prime minister from 1954-1955.

<sup>70</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 28, 1971, 3.

<sup>71</sup> For examples of her political and professional clashes with Meir, see *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 11, 1972, 8, and Bloch, *Davar Acher*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 6, 1969, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Bloch, *Davar Acher*, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Nahum Barnea, *Eulogy*, March 9, 2003. In Semer's private archives.

<sup>75</sup> Bloch, *Davar Acher*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Itzhak Ben Aharon, March 20, 2006, at his home in Givat Haim by Roni Shtern. Transcript in Semer's private archives.

<sup>77</sup> Hannah Semer, *Davar – Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 20.

<sup>78</sup> Yoram Peri, *Golda Gets Angry Every Morning*, *Haaretz*, March 11, 2003, p. 2B.

<sup>79</sup> Barnea, *Number One Journalist*.

more, she transformed *Davar* into a newspaper that expressed controversial positions.<sup>80</sup> The following was noted among the reasons she was awarded the Sokolow Prize in 1972: "As editor in chief, she has transformed *Davar* into a dynamic, fighting newspaper, one that does not hesitate to criticize and shatter conventions."<sup>81</sup> In 1990, to mark 20,000 editions of *Davar*, Semer formulated her doctrine regarding the newspaper's role:

*Davar came into being as the Histadrut's newspaper and remains the Histadrut's paper. It was created as a free newspaper and even then sought to express all opinions, including those that are out of the ordinary. Today the paper is free of all intervention and censorship other than military censorship. It is open to any opinion, but it also maintains its own opinion, its own standpoint of seeking social justice and human equality, promoting culture, and pursuing peace.*<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, under Semer's leadership, *Davar* more than once drew criticism from the Histadrut and from Mapai. In this regard, the newspaper's critical stance toward the failure of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and toward the party leaders responsible for this failure should be mentioned. This critical stance gave rise to tense relations with party and Histadrut leaders.<sup>83</sup> On such occasions, Semer pointed to the paper's independence. "We are not *Pravda*. We do not intend to stifle freedom of speech at *Davar*." Moreover, the editorial staff, under her leadership, put out the following statement: "*Davar reserves the right to freedom of expression in the future as well, and articles by journalists expressing their opinions will not be rejected.*"<sup>84</sup>

At the beginning of the First Lebanon War in 1982, Semer, along with most of the Israeli papers, gave the Begin government her full support.<sup>85</sup> Yet within a few days, this support was replaced by censure, with *Davar* and *Haaretz* lea-

ding the protest.<sup>86</sup> Already in July 1982, Semer called for "a last-minute turnabout."<sup>87</sup> With respect to the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, she wrote, "I look at my reflection—at our reflection—and I am shocked. I see the face of a monster."<sup>88</sup>

Major journalists who worked with Semer state that *Davar* under her leadership stood out for its "total freedom of expression, condemnation of cover-ups, journalistic truth, devotion to conscience over any commercial or political interests."<sup>89</sup>

The extent of *Davar's* independence during Semer's regime deserves in-depth examination, to be based not only on interviews with major journalistic and political figures at the time, but also on systematic analysis of the newspaper's editions from that period. This independence was undoubtedly the focus of Semer's professional perspective, and she stressed it in numerous contexts, for example the special edition marking *Davar's* seventieth anniversary:

*Sometimes there were attempts to exert political pressure on me, because, as I said, I was somewhat of an outsider. I have no complaints. Applying pressure is permissible, but giving in is unacceptable. The friction between Ben Aharon and me is quite well known. Although I very much valued his enthusiasm and his passion, I was not willing to bind the newspaper to his economic policies, and we still argue about this today [...]. I had my disputes with others as well.*<sup>90</sup>

Freedom of expression and freedom of information constitute a major issue in Semer's professional doctrine not only with respect to *Davar's* status, but also in the general public context. Indeed, throughout her career she frequently made mention of this subject in her journalistic writing, in her lectures at professional and academic conferences, and at public forums in the Isra-

<sup>80</sup> Rubinstein, *Hanna Semer*.

<sup>81</sup> *Davar*, February 23, 1972, 16.

<sup>82</sup> *Davar*, April 9, 1990, 13.

<sup>83</sup> Dany Bloch, *Eulogy at the meeting of the Labor party's central committee*, minutes from March 13, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 27, 1972, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Davar*, June 11, 1982, 15. Note that even in the days leading up to the Six Day War when Semer was the paper's deputy editor and political correspondent, she, like many other Israelis, supported a military campaign. In an opinion piece dated May 26, 1967, p.3 she wrote: "We are

on the brink of having no choice," and in another article on May 29, 1967, p.3 she wrote, "Waiting won't make things any easier."

<sup>86</sup> Almog, *Farewell to 'Sru'lik*, 126

<sup>87</sup> *Davar*, July 15, 1982, 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Davar*, July 15, 1982, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Bloch, *Eulogy*.

<sup>90</sup> Hannah Semer, "Growing Hashish in the Mountains of God Succeeded," *Davar—Seventy Years*, June 16, 1995, 22. Other examples can be found in the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, 64-65, and on the day she retired as editor, *Davar*, October 1, 1990, 2.

eli media. She attributed great importance to public discourse on this topic:

*This complex issue does not need to be a professional secret kept from the general public. Mature media consumers must be familiar with these problems in order to strengthen their powers of judgment and to properly evaluate the opinions presented to them.<sup>91</sup>*

Hence, she regarded “the public’s right to know” as “the public’s obligation to know.”<sup>92</sup>

According to Semer, the press in Israel, as in other democratic countries, enjoyed a large degree of freedom of expression limited only by minimal restrictions, which she believed to be justified, related to individual respect and privacy and to national security interests. Starting in 1979, Semer joined other newspaper editors in their struggle against the opening of a commercial television channel. Her reasons were related to her perception of freedom of expression. She was concerned about the implications a commercial station would have on newspapers, and in particular she

worried about the closure of newspapers that would lead to the monopolizing of ideas.<sup>93</sup> After the revolution in the Israeli media, Semer claimed the increase in the number of channels led to healthy competition and exposed the Israeli public to foreign press coverage,<sup>94</sup> though she continued to caution against the dangers to democracy posed by monopolization and cross-ownership.<sup>95</sup>

Yet Semer was sure that the freedom of access to information in Israel was still limited although becoming less so, and that it was the job of journalists to promote this freedom. She was critical of the role of the press, seeing it not only as a mir-

ror of reality but also as something that constructed reality:

*When a newspaper informs its readers of daily events, it provides them with more than a photograph of reality. It is their eyes and their ears. It gathers and explains the news to them. Clearly in the process of feeding readers information, it also influences their opinions.<sup>96</sup>*

Despite the above, Semer objected to the role of newspaper as educator:

*I am aware that a newspaper inevitably influences people’s opinions and does educate in one form or another. But I unequivocally reject the notion that a newspaper is supposed to educate.*

*I fought against this before I was editor, and I tossed it into the trash can the moment I took over the job.<sup>97</sup>*

**Semer was sure that the freedom of access to information in Israel was still limited although becoming less so, and that it was the job of journalists to promote this freedom.**

Semer’s professional identity was a major part of her life, and over the years she held various public professional positions, both nationally and internationally. Her most important post was managing the Editor’s Committee of the Israeli press

and media in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>98</sup> She also served as chair of the Israel Press Council.<sup>99</sup> In 1968 she served on a public commission on pornography and was one of only a few individuals who objected to a legislative ban on pornography in the media and even more strongly to censorship.<sup>100</sup> She expressed a similar opinion as chair of a special public commission on restricting sex advertisements in the press. The commission decided upon a number of rules regulating the publication of this type of ads, but Semer objected to legislation that would force newspapers not to print sex ads. “It’s important that the press be clean, but it is also important that no indictments be served on the editors,” she stated.<sup>101</sup>

main Israeli print and electronic media. Until the 1970s, it was quite prestigious and its members were given important information on condition it not be published. After the Yom Kippur War, the committee began to be criticized for its role as the media’s internal censor, and its status declined significantly. Limor, Adoni and Mann, *Media and Communication Lexicon*, 184.

<sup>99</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, September 7, 1989, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Almog, *Farewell to ‘Srulik’*, 1149-1152.

<sup>101</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, June 14, 1995; Haaretz, July 13, 1995, 6A.

<sup>91</sup> Hannah Semer, “Towards the Second Jubilee,” *Davar—Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, May 30, 1975, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, January 2, 1990, 11.

<sup>93</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, July 5, 1979, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Caspi, *Every Period*, 78.

<sup>95</sup> Semer, *On the Death*, 51.

<sup>96</sup> Haim Izak, “The First and the Last—New Faces in the Mirror,” *Davar Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, May 30, 1975, 63.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> This committee comprises the editors and owners of the

In the international arena, Semer was Israel's representative to the *International Press Institute*<sup>102</sup> for eight years, during which time she often brought up the issue of freedom of expression for Palestinian journalists. In 1982 she was chosen as a member of the organization's directorate. She was also a member of *The Next Century Foundation*, an organization whose goal was to promote peace in the Middle East through responsible dialogue and responsible media.<sup>103</sup>

## Semer as publicist

Semer broke through the glass ceiling blocking women journalists not only by becoming the editor of a major daily newspaper, but also because for many years she was a major publicist. Writing opinion pieces has always been a sought after journalistic area due to the role of such articles in the public discourse. As the print media declined, this genre of writing actually gained importance. The electronic media have taken over the job of reporting, while the opinion pieces printed in the newspaper do the interpretation.<sup>104</sup>

Due to its prestige, for years this type of opinion writing was the exclusive preserve of male journalists, while women were usually relegated to writing about the home and the family and in women's supplements. In the early 1970s, as more and more women entered journalism, they began appearing on the opinion pages as well, though their writing still focused on areas considered "soft."<sup>105</sup> Even at the end of the 20th century, not too many women are found among the ranks of serious opinion column writers in the American press.<sup>106</sup> In Israel the picture is not

much different. Women constitute only 23% of the opinion columnists in the print media, compared to 40% women among all journalists, but in fact they do only 13% of the writing. Moreover, the topics they cover also reflect gender segregation. Women opinion columnists usually focus on topics identified as socially relevant, while men concentrate on politics, security and economics.<sup>107</sup>

Semer was the first editor at Davar who was originally a reporter and not an opinion columnist, and she emphasized news at the paper.<sup>108</sup> "Up until today I have remained a reporter at heart, and I believe this is also the heart of journalism," Semer said in a television interview on the eve of her retirement.<sup>109</sup> Yet over the years she wrote many opinion pieces and was considered a brilliant, astute and sometimes controversial writer.<sup>110</sup> For example, after the massacre at Sabra and Shatila during the 1982 Lebanon War, she wrote an article titled "Removing the Government of Evil from the Land"<sup>111</sup> opposing the Likud government. The article was criticized in the Knesset by then Prime Minister Menachem Begin.<sup>112</sup> As a result of this article, the Likud faction of the Histadrut called for Semer to step down or be fired, and she received numerous telephone calls and threats from government supporters. In the article she wrote in response, Semer supported the right to protest against a journalist: "Those who do not like cooking smells should not enter the kitchen. Journalists do not have any special immunity." Yet she did not back off from her criticism.<sup>113</sup>

In this study, Semer's opinion pieces during the period she served as editor in chief (1970-1990)

<sup>102</sup> The global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists, dedicated to the furtherance and safeguarding of press freedom, the promotion of the free flow of news and information, and the improvement of the practices of journalism.

<http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/>

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.ncfpeace.org/drupal/index.php>

<sup>104</sup> Maria Braden, *She Said What? Interviews with Women Newspaper Columnists*. (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-8.

<sup>106</sup> Norma M. Schulman, *Wrinkling the Fabric Of The Press: Newspaper Opinion Columns in a Difference Voice, in Women And Media. Content, Careers, Criticism*, ed. Cynthia M. Lott, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company), 58-59.

<sup>107</sup> Einat Lachover, *Gender Structure in the Written Media in Israel*. (PhD diss., Tel-Aviv University, 2001), 213-217.

<sup>108</sup> Yoram Peri, *Golda Gets Angry Every Morning*, *Haaretz*, March 11, 2003, p. 2B.

<sup>109</sup> A Thing or Two About Semer.

<sup>110</sup> Dany Rubenstein, Yossi Melman, Sagi Green and Anat

Balint, *Hanna Semer, Davar's Chief Editor (1970-1990) Passed Away*, *Haaretz*, March 7, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> *Davar*, September 20, 1, 1982. In an article written on Yom Kippur Eve, Semer wrote: "I also went to synagogue yesterday. I had an unbearable thought that the one to whom the prayers were addressed was not among the worshippers. That he was in the Shatila refugee camp, with the mourners. [...] We will not, God forbid, hand in our reserve duty cards. But the day will come when we will hand in our identity cards, for this is no longer our identity."

<sup>112</sup> Here are Begin's remarks on September 22, 1982: "One lady, editor of a major paper of the workers in Israel, has written an article under the headline 'Removing the Government of Tyranny from the Land.' These terrible words were said about the Roman kingdom of enslavement after the destruction of the Second Temple. And here is a writer in Israel who dares to say this about the elected, democratic government of Israel [...], dares to say that this is a government of evil that must be removed?" <http://www.knesset.gov.il/Tql/mark01/h0028912.html#TQL> (accessed March 31, 2009).

<sup>113</sup> *Davar*, September 24, 1982, 17.

Topics of Semer's Opinion Columns 1970-1990

Israel		World	
Political reality	76	U.S. policies and status	15
Foreign policy	58	Soviet Union policies and status	8
General analysis of the state of the nation	54	Palestinian issue	19
Social issues	43	Other countries	28
Security policy	43	Ideology	10
Economics	43	Personalities	5
Media and communications	18	<b>Total</b>	85 (18%)
History and Jewish identity	15		
Internal affairs	10		
Israeli Arabs	3		
Israel Defense Forces	2		
Personalities	2		
Other	14		
<b>Total</b>	381 (82%)		

were analyzed thematically for the purpose of examining her agenda as an opinion columnist. In the analysis, 466 opinion articles were retrieved, representing an average of 23 articles per year and around two per month.<sup>114</sup> As the table shows, most of the articles (82%) discuss a variety of topics related to Israel, particularly politics and current affairs, general analyses usually published at the end of the year, and social, security and economic issues. Semer also turned her attention to the policies of the two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. She also examined the policies of other countries, among them Egypt, Jordan, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania and Portugal, as well as the Palestinian issue.

Although Semer wrote opinion pieces for many years, her favorite form of writing was news reportage. Her style in the opinion articles reflects this as well. Most of her opinion columns began with facts, and especially with numerical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics or other sources. This is how she defined her writing style:

*I don't write from my imagination. I need facts, background material, and I see myself as a reporter more than anything else. Information-gathering is the heart of journalism. All people*

*can think for themselves; they don't need journalists to tell them what to think.*<sup>115</sup>

In addition to journalistic writing, Semer published three books but complained she had not written more. In the preface to her first book, she wrote about the tension between journalistic writing and writing books: "You have no idea how many books I have not written during my professional career. Some of these would have been best sellers if they had just been written. But I am always too busy writing to write books."<sup>116</sup> In her later years, she was planning to write her autobiography and had even begun formulating it, but her plan was cut short by her sudden death.<sup>117</sup>

Her first book, *Half Tea, Half Coffee*, was published in 1969. The book is a collection of her writings for her radio program *Tea Break* together with essays she wrote especially for the coffee part of the book. Semer considered the book's title to be an expression of her complex view of life: half tragic and half comic.<sup>118</sup> She apparently intended to publish another similar book collecting her further writings for the program, which was broadcast until 1991, and she even began organizing the essays for publication.<sup>119</sup>

Her second book, *Ceausescu of Romania* (1976),<sup>120</sup> is a biography of the Romanian leader Ceausescu published before his transgressions as

<sup>114</sup> The articles were found by examining all the issues published during the period, for the paper's archives are not yet computerized. During those years, Semer also wrote 68 other articles published mainly in the *Davar* supplement and on the first page. These were not included in the analysis.

<sup>115</sup> Mary Oskovsky-Yorek, *Davar Aher, Olam Ha'isha*, January 1988, 39.

<sup>116</sup> Semer, *Half Tea*, 5.

<sup>117</sup> Chapter titles for the planned book were found in Semer's private archives.

<sup>118</sup> Semer, *Half Tea*, 6.

<sup>119</sup> Semer's private archives contained notebooks with copies of these essays and notes indicating her intention to publish a book.

<sup>120</sup> Hannah Semer, *Ceausescu of Romania*, (Tel-Aviv, Hidekel, 1976).



dictator became known. Semer regretted writing the book and shelved it.<sup>121</sup>

Semer dedicated her third book, *God Doesn't Live There Anymore* (1995), to her parents. The book is a collection of her analyses of Jewish communities from her business trips over the years. The book represents her attempt to bring Israeli readers closer to the Diaspora and its history. As she put it:

*If we do not aspire to become acquainted with this history where it took place, with its dark side along with its heroism, with its moments of despair and of grace, if we do not look for it where its remains can be found, if we do not know how to relate to it with the proper mixture of compassion and pride, who will do this for us?*<sup>122</sup>

At the beginning of the 1960s Semer began editing and hosting news and culture programs on the radio and on television, becoming a well known public figure thanks to her sharp and fluent language.<sup>123</sup> Over several decades, she hosted a weekly radio show. The show, called *Tea Break*, was broadcast in the morning to appeal to housewives and also appeared as a column in *La'Isha* [meaning: for the woman], Israel's most popular women's magazine. Even though the column was directed mainly to a female audience, it covered a variety of current topics with emphasis on political commentary, the Jewish question, and Israeli society—also the topics of Semer's newspaper opinion columns. Her *La'Isha* pieces also featured “softer” topics: culture, consumerism, interpersonal relations and the like. Furthermore, these pieces were characterized by a more personal writing style. Semer took on many roles. Besides being an editor and an interviewer, she was often a guest on other radio programs: *Inyanei Hayom* (Matters of the Day), a weekly show discussing current events from an interpretive viewpoint; *Yesh She'ilot* (Any Questions?), a current affairs program that introduced open political debate (a welcome change in the days of conservative establishment radio);<sup>125</sup> *She'ilta Min Ha'ulpan* (Question from

the Studio), broadcast on *Reshet Alef* from 1967 through 1969; *Ifcha Mistbara* (On the Contrary), a program broadcast in 1969 on the army radio station Galei Zahal that examined persuasive ability;<sup>126</sup> *Hapina Hayehudit* (The Jewish Corner), 1970, focusing on developments in the Diaspora;<sup>127</sup> and *Si'ach Hayalim* (Soldiers' Discourse), 1970, a show on which soldiers in field units voiced their opinions.<sup>128</sup>

The visual medium also was receptive to her, and she moderated and appeared on many television news programs, particularly those concerned with the media: the interview show “Kaleidoscope” in 1968; *Kenisa Hofshit* (Free Entry), an evening of interviews, in 1970;<sup>129</sup> current affairs shows, such as *Moked* (Focus),<sup>130</sup> *Dilemma*<sup>131</sup> and *Galgal Hozar* (Ups and Downs), a series of historical debates on major controversies in Jewish history.<sup>132</sup> Semer also took part in public events dealing with current affairs and culture.<sup>133</sup> In the 1990s, Semer wrote many critical articles about the media for the Advertisers Association of Israel's monthly journal *Otot*.

## Being a woman journalist

Semer broke through the glass ceiling and the glass walls blocking women from journalism unlike any other Israeli woman journalist and very few outside of Israel. Despite being an immigrant and an outsider in the party, within a few years her career skyrocketed. Semer held positions that traditionally were, and still are, the exclusive preserve of male journalists: parliamentary correspondent, political correspondent, political opinion columnist and editor of a daily newspaper for two decades. Not only were these accomplishments unusual at the time, they still are today. While women now constitute a major part (40%) of the journalistic work force in Israel, they still run up against rigid barriers. Journalism in Israel still is marked by both longitudinal and latitudinal gender segregation. Women hold junior positions in the professional hierarchy, earn lower salaries than do men, and usually cover areas con-

<sup>121</sup> *Letter to the Editor*, *Haaretz*, from Yossi Ahimeir, March 19, 2003.

<sup>122</sup> Semer, *God Does Not*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> Rubinstein, *Hannah Semer*.

<sup>124</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 11, 1964, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Bloch, *Davar Acher*, 29.

<sup>126</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 22, 1969, 16.

<sup>127</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 1, 1970, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Yoram Peri, *Golda Gets Angry Every Morning*, *Haaretz*, March 11, 2003, 2B.

<sup>129</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 7, 1970, 16.

<sup>130</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 7, 1972, 5; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 8, 1972, 8; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 22, 1973, 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 2, 1981, 7.

<sup>132</sup> From the curriculum vitae, August 3, 1992. In Semer's private archives.

<sup>133</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 10, 1983, 5; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 6, 1991, 11; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 9, 1976, 17; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 15, 1983, 14.

sidered to be “soft” and less prestigious compared to their male counterparts.<sup>134</sup>

Although Semer did not wave the feminist flag, she provides a good example of someone who lived a feminist life. Indeed, an in-depth analysis of her personality, writing and activities reveals a standpoint that can only be called egalitarian. Throughout her career, Semer avoided identifying herself as a feminist,<sup>135</sup> though she spoke out and acted for the advancement of women. This gap between stance and self-identification is well known among Israeli women, especially among those in the public eye.<sup>136</sup> Semer’s feminist position developed over the years, and she even apologized for her earlier statements regarding the advancement of women.

As early as 1972, at the Sokolow Prize award ceremony,<sup>137</sup> Semer devoted part of her remarks to problems encountered by women in the public and professional arenas. In the spirit of the times, she claimed there was no built-in discrimination against women in Israel and pointed to the unequal distribution of the work load in the home as a barrier women must face. In her inimically caustic style, she stated: “The trouble with women is that they do not have wives.”<sup>138</sup> In a 1974 interview to the *Devar Hapo’elet* newspaper, she similarly claimed that the story of her career was not the exception that proved the rule, and that responsibility for women’s inferior status in the field of journalism rested solely on their own shoulders:

*It is women themselves who imposed the limitations that block their way to more meaningful jobs at the newspaper [...] I do not know of one female journalist who applied for an available position as a reporter and was not hired simply because she was a woman, or who was passed over for the position in favor of a man with equal qualifications.*<sup>139</sup>

Early in her career, Semer claimed she was not inclined to hire women journalists because their

role as mothers harmed their work, even though she herself was a single mother. But by 1975, she had already changed her mind: “*I am full of remorse. In today’s reality, every male journalist misses between 80 and 90 work days each year because of reserve duty [...] so women are much more effective at work.*”<sup>140</sup> In 1983, Semer set an Israeli first by appointing a woman—a young mother with a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter—as military correspondent. Semer explained this unusual step as follows: “I felt this was my obligation, since my own appointment was pioneering as well.”<sup>141</sup> Being military correspondent is a very prestigious job in Israel because the military is at the center of the public agenda, and until Semer made her appointment everyone considered this position to be reserved for males. Furthermore, this appointment took place during the First Lebanon War when the IDF was proceeding deeper into Lebanon, and the military desk was the newspaper’s primary envoy. Semer was sure the IDF Spokesman would thwart the appointment and she prepared herself for an uncompromising battle. When she informed the spokesman who she had appointed, she was quite surprised to receive the go-ahead from him.<sup>142</sup> At that time, she was already directly expressing her aspirations for advancing women:

*The familiar concerns of all employers with respect to hiring women, for example that they will miss work when their child gets sick, are no longer relevant today [...]. My experience working with women is excellent. They are loyal and they are willing—perhaps much more than men—to give more than they are obliged to.*<sup>143</sup>

Semer called for promoting women journalists and women in general—in the work force and in politics—though she also called for women to be responsible for their own advancement:

It is impossible just to lay the blame on men. Women are equally responsible. If they would stop occupying themselves with fashion shows and stop envying one another, if every woman in

<sup>134</sup> Einat Lachover, *Women Journalists in the Israeli Press*, in *Women Journalists in the Western World. What Surveys Tell Us*, eds. Romy Frohlich and Sue A. Lafky (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2008), 183–188.

<sup>135</sup> Merav Sarig, “Don’t Say there is Nothing”, *Tel Aviv Newspaper*, March 31, 2000, 83.

<sup>136</sup> Ariela Friedman, *On Feminism, Womanhood, and Women’s Power in Israel*, in *Sex Gender Politics*, eds. Dafna N. Izraeli, Ariella Friedman, Henriette Dahan-Kalev, Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, Hanna Herzog, Manar Hasan and Hannah Naveh (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 20–23.

<sup>137</sup> The Sokolow Prize is a prestigious award in Israeli journalism.

<sup>138</sup> *Davar*, February 23, 1972, 15.

<sup>139</sup> *Forty Years of Devar Hapo’elet*, 1974, 3–4, 10.

<sup>140</sup> Edna Shekel, *The First Lady of the Seventh Heaven: A Special Interview with Journalist Hanna Semer*, apparently from a magazine for children or young adults published in 1975. Pages from this magazine were found in Semer’s private archives, without any identifying marks.

<sup>141</sup> *Otot*, 1995, 51.

<sup>142</sup> *Caspi*, *Each Period*, 81.

<sup>143</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 25, 1984, 18.

a position of strength would work toward promoting other women, things would then begin to move forward.<sup>144</sup>

Semer also objected to affirmative action policies and called for women to reject the extra rights given to them in various fields: shorter military service, younger retirement age, and others as well. She put it like this: *"There is no place for demanding to perpetuate inequality. Where there are special privileges, there is also discrimination."*<sup>145</sup> As Semer grew older, she commented on the feminization of journalism in Israel. Like many others, she felt this process could only be explained by the decline in the profession's status. Likewise, she believed that women "were born for journalism" because they are "communicative and curious, two qualities that are very important in the media." In particular, women have "the inborn experience to do perishable work and to see the results in the conclusion of this perishable daily work."<sup>146</sup>

As mentioned, Semer proposed a political agenda which is reflected in the analysis of her opinion pieces. Yet from time to time, she expressed herself regarding the status of women in the world, and in Israel in particular. For example, as she got older she wrote opinion pieces in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper. She may have felt that when she was not writing as editor she could also write about this topic. This also may explain her coverage of this topic in her column *Tea Break*.

Very rarely did Semer say anything about her experiences as the only woman in a man's world. The only aspect she ever referred to was the conflict between home and work. Semer's family life was quite atypical for Israel of the 1960s and 1970s. In a 2001 interview, she noted the personal price her career had exacted from her: *"I paid a high price for this. I had only one daughter, which was not always so good for her, and now I am alone."*<sup>147</sup> She was aware of the price she paid, but

she was also satisfied with her lot: *"I try to find enjoyment in the work I do, even housework, and of course raising my daughter. From this perspective alone I would say I am a contented person."*<sup>148</sup>

Were her unique qualities as a woman advantageous in the male world in which she worked? Yoram Peri, her replacement as editor in chief, compared Semer's position to that of two other strong women in the print media—Katherine Graham and Francoise Giroud—pointing to what all three had in common: "Strong, assertive, brave women who knew how to stand up to those in authority when necessary. At the same time they were gentle, compassionate, with feminine magnetism and powers of attraction, and even vulnerable."<sup>149</sup>

## Conclusion

Biography places someone who is heroic, different and exceptional in the limelight. It describes a specific piece of reality anchored in time and place, and does not pretend to describe or explain anything other than that piece of reality. Biography thus stands in contrast to the com-

**An exceptional biography has the ability to teach us about the cultural and historical context, for it opens a window on the period and the culture in which it took place**

prehensive understanding of science, which seeks to break away from a specific and unique description in favor of the more general and more common.<sup>150</sup> Hannah Semer is one of those heroes, or heroines to be more precise, one of those outstanding women considered to be exceptional

because they participated in the public arena.<sup>151</sup> An exceptional biography has the ability to teach us about the cultural and historical context, for it opens a window on the period and the culture in which it took place.<sup>152</sup>

The story of Hannah Semer's life encompasses diverse elements of Israel society and culture during the country's first fifty years: the nascent Israeli identity emerging from the ties between the young State of Israel and the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and particularly the formulation of Jewish consciousness and historical

<sup>144</sup> *Laisha*, Issue No. 2064, November 3, 1986, 19.

<sup>145</sup> *Devar Hashavu'a*, November 6, 1992, 17.

<sup>146</sup> Merav Sarig, *Don't Say*, 83.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Devar Hapo'et*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> Peri, *Golda Gets Angry*.

<sup>150</sup> Shapira, *New Jews*, 277.

<sup>151</sup> Amira Gelblum, *Introduction to Women and Gender Studies: Gender and the Politics of History*, In *Ways to Feminist Thinking. Introduction to Gender Studies*. (Ra'anana: Open University, 2007), 498.

<sup>152</sup> Amia Lieblich, "On Writing Biography," *Israel Journal of Communication, Culture and Society*, 2 (1997): 31.

remembrance with respect to the Holocaust; the passage from ideological party journalism to independent journalism, as well as the changes in the status of women in Israeli society in general and in journalism in particular. Each of these elements deserves more comprehensive study based

upon Semer's prolific writing and on interviews with central figures related to *Davar*: journalists who worked at *Davar* over the years, other major journalists in the Israeli print media, and establishment figures who served as journalistic sources at that time.

**Einat LACHOVER (1967)**

is a Lecturer at the School of Communication, Sapir Academic College, Israel. Her research and teaching interests include gender and media related issues and alternative media.  
E-mail: [einatl@mail.sapir.ac.il](mailto:einatl@mail.sapir.ac.il)

## Rezensionen

JOHANNA DORER / BRIGITTE GEIGER / REGINA KÖPL (HRSG.): *Medien – Politik – Geschlecht. Feministische Befunde zur politischen Kommunikationsforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2008, 285 Seiten

Bislang existieren wenige wissenschaftliche Bücher zur politischen Kommunikation, die den Geschlechteraspekt berücksichtigen. Damit wagen sich die Herausgeberinnen mit ihrem Band an die Dreiteilung „Medien-Politik-Geschlecht“ heran und begeben sich in ein erst dünn besetztes Forschungsgebiet. Das Werk gliedert sich in „Grundlagen und feministische Zugänge“, „AkteurInnen“ und „Politikfelder“.

Im ersten Kapitel beschäftigt sich Nancy Fraser mit der Transnationalisierung der Öffentlichkeit. Wer diese anspruchsvolle Hürde meistert, wird mit dem Wissen über Habermas' „Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit“ samt weiterführenden Überlegungen (Öffentlichkeit als kommunikativer Prozess und Öffentlichkeit als Werkzeug) und folgenden noch ausstehenden Fragen belohnt.

- Können wir die Legitimität der öffentlichen Meinung noch sinnvoll hinterfragen, wenn die Teilnehmenden der Diskussion keinen demos und keine politische Bürgerschaft mehr bilden? (S. 24)
- Können wir die nach der Effektivität der öffentlichen Meinung noch sinnvoll fragen, wenn sich diese Meinung nicht länger an einen souveränen Staat richtet, der prinzipiell in der Lage ist sein Gebiet zu regieren und die Probleme seiner Bürgerinnen und Bürger im Interesse aller zu lösen? (S. 24)

Dies erweist sich als wertvolles Wissen für Regina Köpfs Beitrag über feministische Diskurse im Hinblick auf Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit, worin sie das Potential dieser Diskurse zur Erklärung aktueller Debatten um Personalisierung, Emotionalisierung und Intimisierung von massenmedial vermittelter Kommunikation diskutiert. Sie ruft die Wachsamkeit von Praktikerinnen und Wissenschaftlerinnen auf, um eine geschlechtergerechte Politik und Gesellschaft zu erreichen.

Elisabeth Klaus widmet sich dem Informations- und Unterhaltungsaspekt und diskutiert die Überlegung, dass beide Aspekte untrennbar miteinander zusammenhängen. Dies dürfte reichlich Stoff für weitere Analysen bieten, die wirklich bedeutsam sind für unser Fach, da zum Beispiel Fernsehsendungen mit hohem Informationsgehalt als seriös bezeichnet werden, wohingegen Forma-

te mit geringerem Informationsgehalt nicht diese Betitelung erhalten.

Damit endet das Basiskapitel und im Kapitel „AkteurInnen“ startet Birgit Wolf mit der Geschlechterdarstellung in den Nachrichten. Durch umfangreiche Befunde aus diversen Studien (Global Media Monitoring Project) wird das Bild erhärtet, dass deutlich weniger Frauen in den Nachrichten zu sehen sind. Dies gilt nicht nur für Österreich sondern auch für andere EU-Länder. Da sich dieser Artikel der Beschreibung dieser Tatsache verschrieb, fehlen Ansatzmöglichkeiten wie dieses Ungleichgewicht ausgeglichen werden kann. Offensichtlich muss ein Umdenken in den Fernsehanstalten erfolgen um einen Wandel einzulenkten.

Mit der Darstellung von Politikerinnen am Beispiel Angela Merkel beschäftigt sich Christina Holtz-Bacha. Sieglinde Rosenberger analysiert Benita Ferrero-Waldners Imagekampagne im Rahmen der Bundespräsidentenwahl 2004 in Österreich. Dabei bezieht sie sich auf drei ausgewählte Plakate inklusive Slogans und diskutiert die Widersprüchlichkeiten zwischen persönlichem Auftreten der KandidatInnen Benita Ferrero-Waldner und Heinz Fischer in Bezug auf die Parteirichtung und das vermittelte Frauenbild. Günther Pallaver und Günther Lengauer erläutern die weibliche Repräsentanz mithilfe des Framing Ansatzes anhand der O-Töne in Österreichs Medien. Frauenbewegungen in den Medien erörtert Eva Flicker anhand ausgewählter Beispiele ehe Wendy Harcourt „Politische Frauenorganisationen im Cyberspace“ vorstellt und genauer unter die Lupe nimmt. Margreth Lünenborg analysiert Geschlechterverhältnisse im Politikressort und fordert die Beantwortung folgender Fragen:

- Geht die Öffnung des politischen Journalismus für Frauen einher mit dem Verlust des Elitestatus dieser Profession? (S.168)
- Führt dieser Verlust an Prestige und Macht zu einer thematischen Öffnung jenseits der politischen Eliten, die nach wie vor überproportional männlich sind? (S.168)

Johanna Dorer bearbeitet das Thema „Geschlechterkonstruktion im Prozess der Rezeption politischer Berichterstattung“ und nimmt dabei besonders Bezug auf den in diesem Band von Elisabeth Klaus präsentierten Informations- und Unterhaltungsaspekt. Mit der Methode der kollektiven Erinnerungsarbeit kann sie schlussfolgern, dass die stereotype Zuordnung, wonach Männer politik- und folglich informationsinteressiert und



Frauen ausschließlich unterhaltungsorientiert seien, nicht zutreffend ist. Vielmehr fordert sie eine Untersuchung, die den Prozess des doing gender mit Kategorien wie Alter, Ethnizität, und „Rasse“ etc. verknüpft.

Mit „Politikfeldern“ befasst sich das letzte Kapitel und Sabine Lang und Birgit Sauer diskutierten darin die Frauen- und Familienpolitik im bundesdeutschen Wahlkampf 2002. In diesem Zusammenhang dürfte interessant sein, dass die Frauenpolitik in diesem Wahlkampf vielfach in der Familienpolitik unterging und die Politiker stark mit ihren Familien warben und damit Rollenvermischungen vornahmen. Auch hier lässt sich wieder eine Parallele zu Benita Ferrero-Waldners Wahlkampf ziehen, die sich sehr enttäuscht zeigte, da sie von wenigen Frauen gewählt worden war (S.101). Jedoch warb sie nicht als Kandidatin für Frauen, sondern in Ihrer Rolle. Ebenso warben im deutschen Wahlkampf die KandidatInnen nicht nur für Familien, sondern mithilfe Ihrer Familien. Die Frauenpolitik wurde abgewertet, indem Frauen vorwiegend mit ihrer Mutterrolle in Verbindung gebracht wurden und somit wieder in Familien- oder Kinderpolitik fielen.

Brigitte Geiger proklamiert die Herstellung von Öffentlichkeit für Gewalt an Frauen. Damit greift sie ein Thema auf, dass bislang durch Tabuisierung glänzte. Mittlerweile wird es von den Medien aufgezeigt, aber aufgrund fehlender Informationen (zum Tathergang) klischeehaft und sensationsbehaftet veröffentlicht. Diesbezüglich fehlen Qualitätsstandards für JournalistInnen, wie solche Geschehnisse im Sinne der Opfer fortgesetzt werden sollten.

Irmtraud Vogelmayr analysiert die Alter(n)sbilder und -diskurse in den Medien mittels Inhaltsanalyse der Formate: News und Woman 2004/2005. Resümierend hält sie fest, dass die beiden Formate Bilder des Alter(n)s präsentieren, die Prominenz, Körper, Erfolg und das Außeralltägliche zum Vorschein bringen. Mit den Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit beschäftigt sich Johanna Schaffer in ihrem Artikel, die sie an zwei ausgewählten Plakatkampagnen „Einbürgerungs-Kampagne“ und „Deutsche gegen rechte Gewalt“ demonstriert. Auch hier kann sie feststellen, dass Männer, die als aktiv und handelnd dargestellt werden, ausschließlich in der „Deutsche gegen rechte Gewalt“ Kampagne zu sehen sind, wohingegen fast ausschließlich Frauen und Kinder für das andere Werbesujet verwendet werden. Wieder kann die unterschiedliche Geschlechterlogik deutlich herausgearbeitet werden.

„Konstruktion und Repräsentation von Bege-

nungen zwischen Fremden mit Computern“ hat sich Hanna Hacker zum Thema gemacht. Dabei stellt sie ausgewählte Projekte vor, die es Menschen in Afrika ermöglichen Computerkenntnisse zu erwerben. Besonderes Augenmerk hält sie auf den Erstkontakt „Mensch-Computer“. Abschließend diskutieren Elisabeth Klaus und Susanne Kassel Frauenrechte als Kriegslegitimation in den Medien und verweisen auf die Trias Geschlechterlogik, Kriegslogik und Medienlogik.

Das Anliegen des Bandes einen thematisch vielfältigen Bogen zur politischen Kommunikationsforschung aus feministischer Sicht zu spannen und den aktuellen Forschungsstand zu dokumentieren, ist gelungen. Mehr noch, durch die breite Perspektive und die interdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit ist ein Zusammenspiel vielfältiger Perspektiven geschaffen worden, die hoffentlich weit reichende vertiefende Auseinandersetzung nach sich ziehen werden.

Daniela Hahn

JAN WHITT: *Women in American Journalism. A new History.* University of Illinois Press 2008, 180 Seiten.

Jan Whitt, zur Zeit Professorin an der „School of Journalism and Mass Communication“ an der University of Colorado, Boulder, beginnt ihre „neue Geschichte“ der amerikanischen Journalistinnen mit einem sehr persönlichen Einstieg: Nämlich mit der Erinnerung an den Abschluss ihres Doktoratsstudiums, ein Zeitpunkt, zu dem Whitt nach eigenen Angaben feststellen musste, wie wenig sie eigentlich über ihr selbstgewähltes Spezialgebiet weiß. Im Laufe der Aufarbeitung dieser Wissenslücke hat die Autorin dann das Potential der Auseinandersetzung mit weiblicher Journalismusgeschichte entdeckt und betont gleich zu Beginn die noch ungehobenen Schätze, die dieses Forschungsfeld birgt. Whitt sieht ihre Studie lediglich als Ausgangspunkt für weiterreichende Beschäftigungen mit „Frauen der Feder“. In ihrem Buch porträtiert Whitt nahezu fünfzig Frauen aus den verschiedensten Sparten und Genres des Journalismus. Der Aufbau der Kapitel ist chronologisch ausgerichtet, innerhalb der Kapitel behandelt die Autorin nach einer jeweiligen allgemeinen Einleitung nacheinander einzelne Biografien.

Die Autorin beschränkt sich nicht nur auf „klassische“ Journalistinnen herkömmlicher Ressorts, wie Politik oder Wirtschaft, sondern weist auf die Notwendigkeit einer Erweiterung der Definition

des Begriffs „Journalistin“ hin: Es müssen auch Frauen Beachtung finden, die „literary journalism“ (narrativen Journalismus), „women's journalism“ (auf Frauenthemen fokussierten Journalismus) und „alternative journalism“ (hier wird v.a. auf die feministische und lesbische Presse eingegangen) betreiben, oder aber jene Frauen, die dem Journalismus den Rücken kehren, um Literatinnen zu werden.

Die Autorin betont zu Beginn ihrer historischen Aufarbeitung des weiblichen Journalismus in Amerika, dass bekannte Pionierinnen meist Töchter oder Ehefrauen von Herausgebern waren, und so in Mediendynastien hineingeboren wurden. Dieser Startvorteil verhalf etwa auch Ann Franklin im 18. Jahrhundert dazu, als erste Amerikanerin 1735 die Herausgabe der „Rhode Island Gazette“ von ihrem verstorbenen Mann zu übernehmen und bis zu ihrem Tod fortzuführen. Solche und ähnliche Glanzleistungen einzelner Frauen (darunter auch etliche Pulitzer-Preisträgerinnen) werden von Whitt herausgegriffen, um die enorme Leistung dieser Pionierinnen zu würdigen.

Neben den „klassischen“ Herausgeberinnen und Journalistinnen, die sich etwa mit Politik befassten oder regelmäßige Kolumnen schrieben, greift die Autorin jedoch auch Essayistinnen, Photo-Reporterinnen oder „Society-Redakteurinnen“ auf, führt über deren Biografien hin zum „contemporary literary journalism“, dem zeitgenössischen, narrativen Journalismus. Dieses Kapitel befasst sich mit jenen Autorinnen, die weder eindeutig dem Journalismus noch der Fiktion zuzuordnen sind, Whitt meint damit jene Grauzone „...that makes some academicians in both English departments and schools and departments of journalism and mass communication uncomfortable.“ (S. 63). Das nächste Kapitel behandelt „Women Journalists Who Chose Fiction“, die zu Unrecht im Vergleich zu ihren männlichen Kollegen (wie etwa Hemingway), zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit bekämen.

Die von Whitt ausgewählten Repräsentantinnen der alternativen Presse sind in den meisten Fällen

der feministischen oder Frauenpresse zuzuordnen. Herauszugreifen wäre hier vielleicht Hazel Brannon Smith, 1914 geborene Journalistin, Pulitzer-Preisträgerin und engagierte Kämpferin für BürgerInnenrechte.

Die „Lesbian Press“ wird im Gegensatz zu den vorangegangenen Kapiteln nicht nach Biografien, sondern nach Journalen geordnet, v.a. weil oft ganze Kollektive ein Magazin herausgeben und so eine biografische Aufarbeitung ausufern würde, so Whitt. Zu den angeführten Zeitschriften zählen „Vice Versa“, das erste Magazin, welches 1947 etwa ein Jahr lang von Lisa Ben (ein Anagramm für „Lesbian“) herausgegeben wurde; „The Ladder“, eine Zeitschrift, die immerhin ab 1950 sechzehn Jahre lang erschien; das „Focus: A Journal for Lesbians“, welches eines der ersten Magazine war, das sich mit dem „Lesbian rights movement“ auseinandersetzte und so erstmalig auch eine juristische Perspektive eröffnet hatte. Außerdem werden noch „Sinister Wisdom“ und „Lesbian Connection“ vorgestellt. Nach einer Auseinandersetzung mit den (vorwiegend finanziellen) Problemen, mit denen sich die „Lesbian Press“ konfrontiert sah, geht die Autorin noch kurz auf die heutige Situation dieser Nischen-Publikationen ein.

Whitt schließt ihren geschichtlichen Exkurs mit der Aussage: „...women continue to seek rooms of their own in which to think, plan, dream, create, define themselves, think about others, and feel safe.“ (S. 167) Leider wurden in dem Buch kaum unbekannte Frauen portraitiert, sondern vorwiegend Repräsentativbeispiele herangezogen, was jedoch dem Erkenntniswert, den man aus der Lektüre ziehen kann, nicht unbedingt schadet. Hauptanliegen beim Schreiben dieses Buches sei gewesen, so Whitt, diese und künftige Generationen von Frauen mit Hilfe der Geschichte ihrer Vorgängerinnen (und Vorkämpferinnen) zu motivieren und zu inspirieren. Ein Ziel, das die Autorin meines Erachtens nach mit ihrer „neuen Geschichte“ erreichen kann

Timon B. Schaffer

# NEUERSCHEINUNG



Klaus Arnold, Markus Behmer, Bernd Semrad (Hg.)

## Kommunikationsgeschichte

Positionen und Werkzeuge.  
Ein diskursives Hand- und Lehrbuch

LIT

Klaus Arnold, Markus Behmer,  
Bernd Semrad (Hg.):

## Kommunikationsgeschichte. Positionen und Werkzeuge. Ein diskursives Hand- und Lehrbuch.

(= Kommunikationsgeschichte Band 26.)

Münster: LIT 2008.

Was sind die Ziele historischer Kommunikationsforschung? Über welche Theorien wird in der Kommunikationsgeschichte diskutiert?

Welche Methoden eignen sich für die Erforschung historischer Fragestellungen?

Das Lehr- und Handbuch informiert über den aktuellen theoretischen Diskurs und die zentralen Werkzeuge, die zur historischen Erforschung der öffentlichen Kommunikation und der Fachgeschichte herangezogen werden können.

Der thematische Bogen spannt sich von der Kulturwissenschaft und Systemtheorie über Biographismus und Genderforschung bis hin zu quantitativen und qualitativen Analyseverfahren. Mit Beiträgen von Horst Pöttker, Rainer Gries, Kurt Imhof, Klaus Arnold, Rudolf Stöber, Wolfram Peiser, Wolfgang R. Langenbucher, Susanne Kinnebrock, Edgar Lersch, Jürgen Wilke, Markus Behmer, Christoph Classen, Michael Meyen, Hans Bohrmann, Josef Seethaler, Maria Löblich und Stefanie Averbeck.

464 S., geb., EUR 39,90

ISBN 978-3-8258-1309-3

Bei Unzustellbarkeit  
bitte zurück an:

ZN: 02Z033628 M

*medien & zeit*

Schopenhauerstraße 32  
A-1180 Wien

P.b.b.,  
Erscheinungsort Wien,  
Verlagspostamt 1180 Wien,  
2. Aufgabepostamt 1010 Wien