

- we find not only forms of subcultural right-wing extremism but also Neo-Nazi cells and organized *Kameradschaften* in almost every small town or city.
61. See Rainer Erb, "Die kommunalpolitische Strategie der NPD Ende der Neunziger Jahre," in *NPD: Herausforderung für die Demokratie?*, eds. Heinz Lynen von Berg, Hans-Jochen Tschiche (Berlin, 2002).
 62. Eckhard Jesse, "Von der Linken lernen? Vier rechtsextremistische Intellektuelle im Vergleich," in *Rechtsextreme Ideologien in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Uwe Backes, (Cologne, 2003), 261–88.
 63. Erb, see note 56, 300.
 64. For a full account see Toralf Staud, *Moderne Nazis: Die neuen Rechten und der Aufstieg der NPD* (Köln, 2005); Hajo Funke, *Politik und Paranoia: Rechtsextremismus in der Berliner Republik* (Berlin, 2002).
 65. In order to avoid any competition, the NPD was running in the 2005 general election, the DVU will run in the European elections in 2009. In the meantime, the DVU will participate in five of the next state elections, the NPD will participate in two other state elections.
 66. Jesse, see note 19, 5.
 67. See <http://www.npd.de>, September 2005; *Deutsche Stimme*, September 2005.
 68. Staud, see note 64.
 69. Staud, see note 20.
 70. Quoted in *Telepolis*, 22 June 2005.
 71. On the performance of the Party of the Left see the contributions by Jeffrey Kopstein and Dan Hough in this special issue.
 72. Steffen Kailitz, *Politische Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, (Wiesbaden, 2004), 54f.
 73. Norris, see note 2, 119.
 74. On the success of other European extreme Right and populist parties which more effectively utilize new national identity politics and the electoral divide between national-protectionist and pro-globalization/pro-European views see Susanne Frölich-Steffen and Lars Rensmann, "Populistische Regierungsparteien in Ost- und Westeuropa: Vergleichende Perspektiven der politikwissenschaftlichen Forschung," in *Populisten an der Macht: Populistische Regierungsparteien in West- und Osteuropa*, eds., Susanne Frölich-Steffen and Lars Rensmann, (Vienna, 2005).
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Angela Merkel

What Does it Mean to Run as a Woman?

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Question: Do you intend to run as a woman?

Answer: Do I have any choice?

(Representative Patricia Schroeder, D-Co)

The year 2006 marks almost a century after women worldwide began to gain the right to vote. It is still only half a century after it became internationally commonplace for the ideal of democracy to include both women and men as participants.¹ Yet as this year begins, we not only see Angela Merkel in office as Germany's first woman head of government, but a variety of women leaders emerging around the globe. On January 15, Michelle Bachelet was elected president of Chile, one of the most conservative countries of Latin America, and the next day, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated as the first president of Liberia. Japan is poised to open its imperial succession to women, after a favorable report from its government.

That these are newsworthy events underlines the reality that women are still far from commonplace in positions of national leadership. But the political context into which Chancellor Merkel leads her government has changed dramatically, both domestically and internationally. This transformation is ultimately rooted in the achievements of the women's movements of many nations, whose long-term efforts detached the meaning of citizenship from the family-centered right of an independent head of household, the *pater familias*, and made it a relationship that all individuals had with their governments.

Developing the idea of citizenship as based in the personhood of the individual regardless of gender has been a slow and still incomplete

process. Laws establishing women primarily as mothers and wives, dependents with special disabilities and limited rights, have been undone only gradually.² Separating the welfare of dependent women and children from the absolute authority of the family patriarchy has demanded concrete political struggles. Detaching the meaning of political authority from its literal roots in patriarchy is an even more precarious and partial process, but the signs that it is underway are unmistakable.

This long-term process of degendering politics provides a significant backdrop for any contemporary woman's rise to and exercise of power, including that of Angela Merkel. Unlike the women who held political authority on the basis of their family relationships, whether as hereditary monarchs or "over the dead bodies" of their politician husbands or fathers, she and other women making political news today around the world are rising through their own campaigns and with their own agendas. This could not have happened without women's movements driving the world toward a more gender-inclusive understanding of politics. Considering Angela Merkel as an individual woman as well as a symbol of women's greater role in politics raises the question of how her position should be understood in relation to the state of gender relations in the 21st century. Without in any way claiming her as an exemplar or advocate of feminism, I nonetheless argue that the opportunities and obstacles facing her need to be analyzed in feminist terms.

What women's movements have done since the 19th century and continue to do today is threefold: they change political expectations; they redefine political interests; and they remake political networks. Each of these changes is an essential precondition for allowing women, whether feminist or not, to rise in politics as individuals rather than heirs of a male relative. None of these effects could materialize from thin air—all require political agency and imply active struggles. Both women and men, in complex constellations of interests, have taken part on both sides. Nor are any of these battles over yet, even though there have been important and cumulative victories. This feminist context is fundamental for understanding Angela Merkel, since she has no choice but to "run as a woman". Her very presence both rests on past gains and changes future opportunities for women in several ways.

First, women like Angela Merkel who step onto the political stage make all women visible as citizens, with interests that are sometimes distinctive and sometimes overlapping with those of men, and create legitimacy for women acting politically. John Stuart Mill over a century ago sang the virtues of such *faits accomplis* when he pointed out the expansion of women's education was the most powerful rebuttal to the claim that women could not be educated.

Second, any woman's political activity challenges the conventional distinction between "public" and "private." This "separation of spheres" ideology assigns women the roles conventionally understood as domestic, private, supportive and nurturing—and thus as the antithesis of the political. While ideology is not reality, and certainly not all women are wives and mothers or define themselves in terms of these roles, the association is politically potent. Women's presence evokes this association, but also challenges its exclusionary and demeaning political interpretation. Whether they embrace or reject motherhood, politically active women undermine assignment of all women to "their place."

Third, women in politics often create alternative associations and networks. This work goes on both inside and outside of states, parties, unions and other institutional settings—not only in autonomous women's groups. Mary Katzenstein has pointed out that struggle to change institutions from the inside out, not just to set up parallel women's organizations, has been the distinctive addition to the women's movement's strategic repertoire in the late 20th century.³

What does this long-term transformatory struggle have to do with Angela Merkel, a female politician who rapidly rose through the ranks of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a party with a distinctly non-feminist agenda and a lower than typical share of women members and representatives? The conventional wisdom is that she did not even "run as a woman," at least not until the last sprint toward the election, not explicitly making any appeal to vote for her on gender grounds. Yet this judgment fails to recognize that she has never had any other choice than to "run as a woman" unless she were not to run at all. Within a gendered political system, in which power is still very much associated with manhood, Merkel never has had the privilege of having her gender taken for granted and made

invisible. Unlike male politicians, whether she has wanted to embrace or distance herself from the women's movement, she has always had to face questions and challenges about her position on gender politics, both past and future.

Changing Expectations

To think of gender simply as one of many attributes that Angela Merkel has as a person detracts from recognizing the political opportunity structure itself as gendered. Interpretations of behavior are made through a gendered lens, as her biographer Evelyn Roll, pointed out:

If Angela Merkel is convinced of the inevitability of a process, she moves on unsentimentally. But that is remarked on differently for her than it would be for a man. And should she seek a compromise, which would be called political talent in a man, the newspapers call her hesitant. If she gets her own way, she's called the iron lady whose path is littered with the corpses of her male opponents.⁴

The gendered implications of power and citizenship are already the outcome of long term struggles by and for women, and her choices and chances, in turn, will have an impact on these opportunities, whether she want to have such an effect or not. Even a press release from SPD politician, Renate Schmidt, concedes: "Angela Merkel was not elected because she is a woman, but it also has not hurt her. This can be explained by the increasing normality of this in Germany, to which the women's movement has contributed."

Because Merkel has no choice but to run as woman, govern as a woman, and negotiate with foreign leaders as a woman, the way that women are understood in today's political culture has an impact on her no less than her position as symbol and role-model has on the opportunities opening for other women. Just as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is invoked as a comparison for Angela Merkel, regardless of any actual similarities between them or Merkel's own resistance to such analogies, it will be inevitable for Merkel to be invoked, for better or worse, as model for thinking about future women in politics. Real cultural change in expectations about women in politics, of which the past century has seen a great

deal, comes out of just such concrete, complex and consequently ambivalent individual struggles and accomplishments, not from some disembodied force.

In fact, it would be difficult to overestimate the visibility of Merkel's gender in the past election. Although the media noted, sometimes approvingly and sometimes not, that Merkel herself was not making a political issue of her gender, the press was happy to rush in and fill that gap. If she had perhaps hoped that her gender would be treated as irrelevant, such a wish was certainly naive.

On the positive side, there were continual hopes expressed that she would serve at last to break the "glass ceiling" that held women from top jobs. It was pointed out that the glass ceiling was set higher up for women in the U.S. and even other EU countries than in Germany, and having Angela Merkel as head of government was construed as having a potential effect on breaking that ceiling outside of politics. Alice Schwarzer, the publisher of the magazine *Emma* and consistently anointed by the press as "the" representative of the women's movement, was omnipresent on the media stage. Being asked continually to assess Merkel's "meaning for women," Schwarzer separated herself from Merkel's policy positions but still pointed out the symbolic value of any woman in a leadership role: "just imagine that in America an African American was running for the White House. What effect would that have on Blacks? Exactly. And the feelings among us German women are just like this—ambivalent excitement."⁵ In the U.S. as well, her candidacy was welcomed as a symbolic alternative to the posturing of the current American regime, with some suggesting that President Bush may also have come to be "the biggest reason why female leaders suddenly seem so relevant. He has debased the currency of machismo."⁶

On the negative side, Merkel was chastised by the press for her unwillingness to embrace her gender explicitly as a defining feature of her candidacy, to speak "as a woman" to women as voters and to mobilize them on her behalf across party lines. Whether such a "gender gap" strategy could work in an electoral system in which no popular votes are cast for the individual candidate for chancellor is an open question, but it certainly deserves a degree of skepticism. Nonetheless, as the election neared, Merkel responded to the

demands for such a public acknowledgment of her gender, giving interviews to not only to mass-circulation women's magazines such as *Brigitte* and *Cosmopolitan* but also to the feminist magazine *Emma* that celebrated her identity as a woman and implicitly recognized the significance of Schwarzer's support.

Women Representing Women and Femininity

Merkel's positive acknowledgement of her position as a female pioneer represents an interesting shift in political norms regarding gender. Women long have been considered particularly unelectable if they were in any way perceived to represent women, a "special interest" rather than the "general" interest for which men (understood to be genderless) stood. Most press calls for Merkel to be more explicit about her gender identity framed their demands in terms of her thus "missing an opportunity" to appeal to women rather than being appropriately cautious about deterring voters from supporting the supposedly "narrow" concerns of women. Assuming these calls were not hypocritical appeals to Merkel to commit political suicide, one would have to conclude that in the minds of journalists at least, being a woman was an "extra" rather than a sign of being more limited and "less qualified."

The legitimacy of considering being female a disqualification for executive office dropped as women mobilized in the 1970s—not time alone but the women's movement made this belief less tenable.⁷ As women have increasingly run for and been elected to public office, the *fait accompli* effect has taken hold. Women increased from less than 10 percent of the Bundestag in the 1970s to 32 percent in 2005, and women heads of government from Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. to Gro Harlem Brundtland in Norway have had a large and unmistakable presence on the world stage. Moreover, even in the course of this German electoral campaign the polls showed signs of an additional *fait accompli* effect. Early in the campaign, 56 percent of women (and 37 percent of men) were willing to say in principle that they approved of a woman being Chancellor, but by the end of the campaign 84 percent of women and 70 percent of men said they thought this was fine.⁸

Media interest in Merkel as a woman candidate brought predictable attention to her hairstyle, makeup and dress as well as to her family life, and on all these grounds she was assessed as deficient but trying to meet expectations. A more fashionable haircut and clothes served not only to define her as more feminine but also as accommodating to West German norms of femininity. Paradoxically, because the less conventionally feminine self-presentation she offered in her earlier years was attributed to her "German Democratic Republic (GDR) experience," the naturalness of the equation between female character and feminine style was somewhat undermined. While for Western women politicians, discussions of appearance are used signal their office-worthiness, Merkel's looks became a less presumptively reliable guide to what kind of woman she is "underneath." Becoming more feminine in style thus could be used to signal her willingness to accept West German norms in other matters as well, and not as a demonstration of her lack of seriousness.

The press also found itself needing to justify its interest in her appearance as non-sexist, which would not have been the case when sexism was simply the norm. Journalists insisted that the press had shown similar interest in whether Gerhard Schröder dyed his hair, and tried to construct an image of a new androgynous political norm, one that supposedly governed the behavior of politicians as well as of the media. Thus it was asserted that it was now okay for politicians to cry, presenting Schröder in particular as a testosterone-charged stud (with four wives as evidence) and yet as being just as able to cry or be vain (see the hair dye issue) as any woman.⁹ Martin Benninghoff mocked the idea that gender had anything to do with Merkel's campaign at all; in his view, she is the "Alpha female" (*Alpha weibchen*) who can beat the "sharks" at their own game and make the chest-thumping masculinity of the men look merely foolish.¹⁰

Although Merkel's gender was not presented as a disqualification, observers did portray it as a vulnerability, adding to their doubts as to whether she would emerge as Chancellor at the end of the party negotiations. The long period of postelection bargaining among the German parties inadvertently provided a window for women politicians in other EU countries to express their own sense of identification with Merkel. When accused of meddling in the German political process, they insisted that they were only reacting to her symbolic

role as a woman pioneer and perforce role-model, not endorsing a party or policy for the government. Although her party's failure to win a strong electoral mandate was laid at her feet, her success in assembling a government, over opponents within her party as well as without, and actually emerging as the first female Chancellor in Germany's history then became a separate, and in some ways more notable, accomplishment than her party's electoral showing.

Overall, Merkel's candidacy emerged on a global stage in which it was still perceived to be surprising but no longer inherently illegitimate or even deeply controversial for a woman to head a major government. Women's capacity to direct the affairs of state has become a *fait accompli*, and even though some voters and some of her own colleagues were understood as having difficulty with this, their resistance to her on the basis of gender was portrayed as a sign of their backwardness.

The Intersectionality of Gender

Of course, Merkel is not only a woman. As commentators never tire of pointing out, she is an Easterner of a certain generation, an "89er" rather than a "68er" who, at a transformative political moment, saw more democratic promise in capitalism than in socialism. She is Protestant in a party still largely dominated by Catholics, a natural scientist in a parliament dominated by lawyers and managers. Already her multiple outsider status is being invoked to treat her as a placeholder for the "real" politicians, to explain and justify the prediction that the Grand Coalition that she heads is doomed to be short-lived and ineffective. These expectations, like the belief that even as party leader she would never actually become the CDU's candidate for chancellor, may well underestimate her individual political talents. Only a few months after the election, her personal popularity has risen to the top of the chart of German politicians.

This may not only be the result of a personal skill, but of the complex meanings of gender. The inevitable co-existence of multiple identities for any one individual, and the varied meaning of any one of them depending on the structural location on other dimensions, has become known in the social sciences as "intersectionality." An

intersectional analysis, for example, notes that for women in the former GDR, the role and identity of housewife was alien, while the particular demands of a double day for women under socialism were not felt in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), where entry into a male-dominated occupation and access to full-day childcare and schools represented a vision of liberation. Certainly all women or all men do not share the same interests, or even experience the costs and benefits of their specific position in the same way.

Looking at Angela Merkel in such an intersectional way highlights the way her own upbringing provided specific experiences of gender, but also rejects simplistic political attacks on her as "not able to represent women" because she did not have children nor live through the generational transformation that West German women did after 1968. Merkel's autobiography is no less infused with gender meaning than that of a woman raised in the West who sacrificed all or some of her career goals to her children. However, the gendered meanings of growing up in the GDR are definitely different than those of a West German.¹¹

The GDR trumpeted women's liberation as its "accomplishment" even as the FRG committed itself to restoring the *pater familias*, or *Familienvater*, to his "proper" place of patriarchal authority.¹² While East Germany did not even come close to real emancipation, it did make marriage less a matter of the economic dependence of women on men, particularly for raising children.¹³ This freed women to pick husbands with less attention to their earning capacity and to have children or not, depending on their own wishes. The GDR also took away political rights, making all citizens dependent on the authority of the state as father-of-all, and made access to better jobs depend on political conformity more than on gender per se. Divorced and remarried to a fellow scientist, Joachim Sauer, but also blocked from advancement for her politics, Merkel fits the GDR model of semi-autonomy for both women and men.

Merkel faced discrimination in her career choices because of her father's position as Protestant pastor, not because she was a woman seeking an education in the sciences. For her, science was a refuge from political discrimination rather than a bastion of gender discrimination. Disappointment in the reformability of socialism nonetheless did not prevent her from engaging in political activism in the heady

days of 1989, joining the social movement group *Demokratischer Aufbruch*. Although gender distinctions were present in this and other groups emerging during the unification process, the fluidity and unbureaucratic nature of social movements generally offer women more opportunity than formally organized parties and groups do. Moreover, a framing of those in authority as corrupt old men also offers more political credibility to those who are moral young women, an advantage that Merkel was able to exploit not only in the context of the *Wende* but also in the wake of the CDU's own scandals. It is worth noting that both Bachelet in Chile and Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia came into office with the mantle of reform and opposition against corruption. This expectation of women's moral rectitude and less self-serving behavior is part of the gendered opportunity structure of politics that pastor's daughter Merkel has been able to use to get into office, but will also offer chances for her to take stands internationally (in confronting the US over Guantanamo, for example) that resonate well with a wide spectrum of German voters.

For Merkel, her gender is important but not in the way it would have been in the FRG. As her supporter, Susanne Mayer, wrote in *Die Zeit*:

If Angela Merkel had been a typical East German woman, she would have been a mother and already defeated by the shortage of kindergarten spots and lack of full-day schools in Bonn. Had she been a typical West German woman, she would have trumpeted her fury over these shortfalls and alienated everyone. Angela Merkel is a unified German childless model of success.¹⁴

During the election, her distinctiveness as a non-mother set up an interesting conflict between Merkel and those who appealed to West German norms of appropriate womanhood to discredit her. Since sexism has lost its simple legitimacy, this attack had to come from other women who presumably would be insulated from this charge by virtue of their gender. One mode of critique was to argue that her non-motherhood made her incapable of representing women, an argument that was interesting for what it implied about the visibility and legitimacy of women as an interest group. Since the primary spokesperson chosen for this attack was Doris Schröder, Schröder's fourth wife, and he had recently and notoriously dismissed the struggle for women's interests as a fuss about nothing (*Gedöns*) the cynicism in this strategy was hard to overlook.¹⁵

Feminism as an Implicit Asset

If Merkel's lack of credentials as a mother were advanced as if they were a damning argument by some, other women from the western Länder argued that she lacked credentials as a feminist, as if this identity were not otherwise treated as political leprosy. Of course, in some ways her position as a woman raised in the GDR automatically disqualified her from this label, since she could hardly claim to be a 68er. In the U.S. the feminist label is not nearly as narrow or negative as it is in Germany, but it still would be implausible to expect a serious woman major party candidate (such as Hillary Clinton) to embrace it. Instead, those who would like to see a more feminist candidate look for smaller indications, noting for example that Merkel, unlike many women from the new Länder, embraced and used the grammatically feminine "in" ending.¹⁶ Comparably, in Chile, it was noticed that Michele Bachelet inverted the usual order and addressed "*chileanas y chileanos*."

Another behavior that some were willing to interpret as a "hint" of Merkel's feminist sympathies was the fact that her closest and most trusted advisors within the party are women (e.g., Beate Baumann, Eva Christiansen, Hildegard Müller, Annette Schavan). It is more than likely however that such a female-centered network represents less of a clue to her politics than an indication of just how untrustworthy as allies and confidants she has probably found her male colleagues to be. Merkel has herself chided Alice Schwarzer for claiming her as a latent feminist, noting that "she is likely to be disappointed. I am after all in the CDU." Schwarzer, however, back in 2000, already had countered this argument, saying "no one expects her to be a true feminist, since she is a woman of the CDU. But such women, from [Elisabeth] Schwarzhaupt to [Rita] Süßmuth, have already provided sufficient evidence that a sort of feminism-lite is possible."¹⁷ However, just this willingness to see a gender-political advance in a nonfeminist party victory was also frequently condemned by other feminists: "Forget symbols and milestones—whoever wants Merkel as a chancellor is going to get the really existing CDU/CSU. This is the consequence Frau Schwarzer is unwilling to draw."¹⁸

But having a feminist effect on the gender norms of politics does not require a woman to actually espouse feminist policies. It may be

more telling to note that Merkel is well aware of the male norms and expectations that demean and attempt to exclude her; as Alice Schwarzer pointed out, Merkel had even favorably reviewed *Backlash*, Susan Faludi's bestseller about political and media attacks on women, in 1993 in the pages of Schwarzer's feminist magazine, *Emma*. Merkel also began her government career with an appointment to head the Ministry of Family, Women, Seniors and Youth, where she could not possibly have avoided working with civil servants dedicated to women's advances. While it indeed seems unlikely that Merkel is in any meaningful sense a feminist, she is clearly not allergic to contact with feminism or incapable of trusting and promoting other women around her.

Women's Networks and Gender Solidarity

This ability to be part of a network of women, not a lone woman who is trying to pretend to be as man-like as possible to fit into prevailing definitions of legitimate political authority (the Thatcher strategy), is one critical way in which Merkel's gender matters. As a woman chef quoted in one of the many forums on expectations for Merkel-as-woman argued, "I expect Frau Merkel, as I expect any woman in a position of leadership, to provide other competent women networks of support and to cover their backs. It would be naive to assume that Frau Merkel's gender does not play a role and will not play a role."¹⁹ As threatening as her building a "girls' club" seems to be to some men and media who remark upon it, it is indeed remarkable that German political culture has changed enough to create a route from being a woman heading the ministry for women to being a woman chancellor (*Frauenministerin* to *Kanzlerin*) and to accumulate a pool of talented and experienced women at the top on which Merkel can draw for personally loyal advice.²⁰

This significant influx of women into cabinet positions, state executive roles, and among parliamentary leaders arose as a consequence of decades of feminist struggle. The idea of party quotas for women was first embraced in Germany by the Green Party (at 50 percent) and was spread, in diluted form, through processes of party competition. Twenty years later, the idea that women would be

absent from a party list seems sexist and wrong across the entire spectrum. As all parties adopted their own, weaker quota rules, however reluctantly, the previously unquestioned norm of maleness began to topple. In that sense, no matter how unfeminist her political positions, Merkel is an heir of Green politics in Germany and of the women's movement worldwide.

The quota model has become a powerful global norm, taken up in the African Union, India and many of the countries of Europe as a means of making their democracies more truly representative of all the voters. By dismantling the implicit male norm for who belongs in government, the quota approach opens up more opportunity to women, even women who, like Merkel, were initially appointed by men who seriously underestimated and patronized them. The ability of women to take advantage of such opportunities, however, depends on their own initiative, not only as individuals, but as part of a network of women who take each other seriously and support their advances. That Merkel can be so evidently part of such a network is both evidence of the accomplishments of those who have gone before and also another symbolic blow against the belief that women are less able or appropriate in positions of authority.

In sum, Angela Merkel necessarily did run as a woman, both symbolically and personally. Both general expectations about women in politics, and specific expectations tied up with her individual biography and political skills play a particular role in the meaning that her historic position carries. Whether or not women were more likely to vote for her (all else being equal, which will demand more multivariate analysis of the polling data), she definitely benefited from the efforts of women over the past century and from the specific feminist struggles of the past thirty years to change politics in more inclusive directions. The general challenge to machismo as a political style—exemplified not only in criticisms directed at Gerhard Schröder but at the resistance to President Bush's "cowboy" style of governance—contributed to her success, and offers her opportunities to walk the thin line between being an "Iron Lady" and a presumed pushover. She is also inevitably going to contribute in her turn to changing the symbolic associations of gender and politics, as the intense media attention to her has already shown. Paradoxically, one of the most powerful evidences that such a change has

happened already is the extent to which her gender can actually become unremarkable as she goes about the work of exercising political authority, though the regularity of such attention to her gender is the surest sign that change is still has a long way yet to go.

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Notes

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13. Myra Marx Ferree, "The rise and fall of 'mommy politics': feminism and German unification," *Feminist Studies*, 19, no. 1 (1993): 89-115.
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