
© Angelika Schaser
Women in a Nation of Men: The Politics of the League of German Women’s Associations (BDF) in Imperial Germany, 1894–1914

Angelika Schaser
Translated by Pamela Selwyn

The leading members of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF), the umbrella organization of German women’s associations founded in 1894, were recruited mainly from the upper middle classes and urban strata. Like the male educated middle classes, the BDF supported national unity, and it sought to deploy the concept of the ‘cultural nation’ as an emancipatory strategy on women’s behalf. Although the BDF initially conceived of itself as part of an international as well as a national movement, like Wilhelmine society more generally, it underwent an increasing nationalization after the turn of the century and came to identify with the imperialist aims of the German nation-state. Only in the Weimar Republic did the BDF return to a greater emphasis on the internationalism of the women’s movement.

German scholars of nationalism only discovered the category of gender in the 1980s, and the field remains ‘inadequately explored’. Women have either been left out or subsumed under the term nation, and not studied in their own right. After all, women had no ‘fatherland’; they were incapable of bearing arms and were thus excluded from civil rights – the nation-state was composed of male individuals. On the other hand, though, the common ‘mother tongue’ constituted an essential characteristic of the nation, and it was largely passed down by women. Thus it is not surprising that issues of gender history have seemed most pressing for the study of the creation of a national identity. Only in times of external and/or internal threat did the ‘nation’s second half’ capture the spotlight. Women thus come to the attention of women’s and gender history at historical moments in which the nation needed reassurance –
in times of war, revolution or violent upheaval. Such events, however, merely represented eruptions of a 'female nationalism' that also revealed itself in peacetime and contributed to German society's national search for itself. If we move beyond the question of women's participation in and specific contribution to national uprisings, the study of the obvious gender imagery transported by the image of the nation as an 'extended family', and of its significance for the constitution of the German nation is only just beginning. International comparisons in the field of gender and the nation are also almost wholly lacking in German scholarship.

In what follows, I will show how an expanded definition of the 'German women's movement' can afford us glimpses of a large number of previously ignored women's associations that, although they were at first indifferent or opposed to women's emancipation, came with the increasing nationalization of the women's movement to be mobilized by the BDF. The associations, often organized within the German Red Cross (DRK), devoted themselves to national tasks and had connections with BDF member organizations on the local level. The second section will draw attention to the fact that it was the division of labour within the BDF that enabled women's associations inside and outside the BDF to develop closer ties. Until the outbreak of the First World War, the BDF's heterogeneity permitted a very functional approach to nationalism and opened it to accusations of internationalism, which was understood as tantamount to socialism. The final section will show, using the example of the Nationaler Frauendienst (National Women's Service, NFD) founded by the BDF at the beginning of the First World War, and the discussion of 'female compulsory service', how the BDF attempted to portray all of women's areas of activity as 'national tasks'. It was thanks to the BDF's successful 'enclosure policy' before 1914 that the majority of women's associations accepted the BDF's leadership role after the outbreak of war, and that the BDF managed to use this broad support in order to promote women's equality and integration into the nation while still emphasizing gender difference.

The Range of Women's Associations in Germany

Thus far, women's historians have focused on certain bourgeois-liberal, Protestant-influenced women's associations, proceeding from the assumption that there was a sharp polarization between the middle-class and proletarian women's movements. More recent work shows that there were numerous contacts between the personnel of the proletarian women's associations and of BDF member organizations, particularly on a local level.
The League of German Women’s Associations

Because of the frequent dominance of male board members, charitable organizations such as the Prussian Patriotischer Frauenverein (Patriotic Women’s Association), whose members were drawn from upper middle class and aristocratic circles, have been described by historians as lacking any autonomous (female) associational life. This assessment is valid only for certain of these associations, however. It also ignores the potential dynamism within such organizations, a result of the partial collaboration and frequent overlapping memberships of women in charitable and denominational associations and/or women’s educational associations.

Because they have tended to equate the middle-class women’s movement with the large national women’s organizations, such as the BDF, and one of the oldest and most important women’s association, the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein (General German Women’s Association, ADF, founded 1865 in Leipzig), scholars initially overlooked the fact that in contemporary perceptions, the women’s movement extended far beyond the umbrella of the BDF. In an entry on ‘women’s associations’, the 1905 Meyer’s Lexikon gives a detailed list of the ‘Red Cross women’s associations’ and lumps all others together under ‘other women’s associations’. Helene Lange, a member of the BDF executive and a well-known representative of the middle-class women’s movement, also distinguished between two groups of women’s associations: the one pursued ‘purely humanitarian aims’, while the other dedicated its efforts to ‘promoting women’s interests’. At the beginning of the twentieth century, before the 1908 reform of the Prussian act regulating associations, which allowed women to become members of political associations, charitable associations constituted the largest group. The number of charitable patriotic women’s associations rose sharply in the early years of the Wilhelmine era: there were 400 in 1877, and almost 800 in 1891. The wars of 1864 and 1866 had led throughout Germany to the spontaneous creation of women’s associations that placed themselves in the tradition of the Frauenverein zum Wohle des Vaterlandes von 1814 (Women’s Association for the Good of the Fatherland), which had been founded after the occupation of Prussia by Napoleon. On 11 November 1866 Prussia’s Queen Augusta founded the Vaterländischer Frauenverein (Patriotic Women’s Association) in order to ‘ensure that those female contingents who, regardless of religion or rank, did such truly selfless and magnificent work during the war, may continue their successful joint activities in peacetime as well’. The association was placed under the aegis of the Red Cross and was supposed to ‘seek, in a patriotic spirit as well, to offer immediate assistance in general or local calamities such as wars, conflagrations, floods and epidemics, and to alleviate suffering as
much as possible. When the precursor to the German Red Cross, the Gesamtorganisation der Deutschen Vereine zur Pflege im Felde verwundeter und erkrankter Krieger (General Organization of German Associations for the Care of Wounded and Sick Soldiers in the Field) was founded in 1869, it only included men’s associations. The question of their relationship to the women’s associations remained open. Apparently, however, the latter did not simply allow themselves to be subsumed. The Verband deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women’s Associations) was founded on 12 August 1871. The largest member group, the Patriotic Women’s Association, alone counted 1,050 branch and auxiliary associations and a total of 274,741 members’ in 1902.

The second group of women’s associations served ‘the promotion of women’s interests’ in one way or another. Most regarded themselves as professional or educational organizations and only a minority – above all the ADF, which was founded in 1865 – was primarily dedicated to women’s emancipation. These heterogeneous associations came together in 1894 in the BDF, which could thus claim to represent the middle-class women’s movement in Germany. Even if the members of a more radical
wing founded the Verband fortschrittlicher Frauenvereine (Federation of Progressive Women’s Associations) in 1899 as an alternative to the BDF, the gesture remained temporary and demonstrative, as the founding associations did not leave the BDF but remained members. In 1907 the entire Federation of Progressive Women’s Associations joined the BDF. What all of these associations of the middle-class women’s movement had in common was that they defined themselves as unaffiliated to any political party, as a ‘cultural movement’. We have no reliable figures, but we may conclude from the growing membership in the BDF that this second group also enjoyed increasing membership: founded in Berlin in 1894 by 34 women’s associations, the BDF had 193 member associations in 1907, and 52 member federations in 1914 (which together represented 2,362 associations) plus 289 groups that joined directly.

The BDF had close ties to the national-liberal tradition, which sought to overcome the cultural pessimism of the post-unification period with the help of a ‘New Idealism’. Before the outbreak of the First World War proponents of this tendency had clearly decided ‘the competition between power-political expansionism and foreign cultural and economic policy . . . in favor of “peaceful imperialism”.’ This did not, however, prevent the BDF and its member associations from supporting the Wilhelmine program of warship construction at the turn of the century or propagating the acquisition of colonies. At a rally held by the ADF, one of the most influential organizations within the BDF, in the run-up to the new Navy Act of 1900, a speaker called for naval construction as a peacekeeping measure: ‘We do not want Germany to be even fractionally weaker than other nations should it ever, despite its love of peace, be compelled to defend its national independence in a war thrust upon it.’ The BDF, too, considered military and economic strength the indispensable basis for maintaining peace and increasing German influence abroad. The main tool should, however, be the ‘dissemination of the German idea’ in the form of economic and cultural exports. It was in this spirit that the BDF, which repeatedly emphasized that the women’s movement was primarily a women’s educational movement, participated directly and indirectly as a ‘cultural imperialist’ institution. The numerous new German schools founded abroad after 1870 with vigorous support from the Allgemeiner deutscher Schulverein zur Erhaltung des Deutschtums im Auslande (General German School Association for the Preservation of Germanness Abroad) were also carefully registered and approved by the BDF. Women were probably very active in this field, even if their activities are seldom explicitly mentioned. When, for example, the address book of German schools abroad was published in 1904, the chairman of the
General German School Association for the Preservation of Germanness Abroad, which included women’s and girls’ groups, could report that the Association’s central board of directors had compiled the material ‘mostly at the expense of our hard-working local women’s group in Darmstadt’. This work was first centralized in the Auslandsbund Deutscher Frauen, which was founded in 1915 as the central body representing the interests of German women abroad.

This enumeration only partly takes account of the parallel organizations and women’s auxiliaries of men’s associations, such as the Deutscher Frauenverein für die Ostmarken (German Women’s Association for the Eastern Provinces) founded in 1895, the Flottenbund deutscher Frauen (German Women’s Naval League) founded in 1905 and the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft (Women’s League of the German Colonial Society, FBDKG) founded in 1907. The women active in these groups supported the nationalist course of the men’s associations to which they had attached themselves and sought to make their own specifically feminine contribution. Some, including the women’s league of the Deutscher Flottenverein (German Naval Association) and the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft belonged to the BDF. Historians have shown little interest in these women’s associations, regarding them as mere insignificant appendages of the male organizations. Yet even in these organizations women apparently pursued their own agendas, which could differ markedly from those put forward by the ‘mother association’ founded by men. Thus shortly before the First World War there was an intense debate in the commission of the German Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft) over collaboration with the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft. The latter’s feminist stance was the reason for the lack of collaboration, as all those present agreed. The fact that there had been an attempt to elect ‘a Miss Gertrud Bäumer to the committee of the women’s league’ was considered proof positive of the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft’s emancipatory ambitions. This episode shows the depth of the mistrust between men and women in the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft and the degree of the rapprochement between the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft and the chairwoman of the BDF.

However these women may have viewed woman’s role, gender polarity and ‘female’ and ‘male’ tasks in society, they expanded their own sphere of action through their associational activities. Most of the ‘purely charitable’ organizations had formed spontaneously during the Revolution of 1848–49 and the wars of the second half of the nineteenth century. Many outlived their original purpose and regrouped in peacetime. This
The League of German Women’s Associations

was connected in part with the attempts of governments to put women’s auxiliary activities on a more regular basis, but also shows that in times of war women could acquire new spheres of action and competence that they did not relinquish voluntarily once the conflict was over.

Woman’s ‘Cultural Duty’ in the German Cultural Nation

Before the First World War, the nation and nationalism were rarely problematized. For the German educated middle classes, national feeling was an extension of family feeling and ‘tribal spirit’.

The sense of belonging to the German nation, which was defined as a cultural nation, was considered a sort of inevitable outgrowth of common descent, language and culture, which according to the contemporary view was what constituted the unique ‘character’ of every nation. In this interpretation, in the case of the German ‘cultural nation’, the sense of solidarity was thus not based on a declared belief in a particular form of state, but rather arose ‘naturally’ out of descent.

This sort of cultural nationalism must have been considered mere common sense among women of the German middle classes and was accepted as a given by the BDF and its member associations. The most important founding members of the BDF were the large national organizations the ADF and the Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein (General German Association of Women Teachers, ADLV). These two associations played a pioneering role and strongly influenced discussions within the BDF. Helene Lange (1848–1930) assumed a key position in all three associations. A founding member and chairwoman of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein since 1890, she participated in the founding of the BDF as a member of the executive board in 1894 and was also elected chairwoman of the ADF after the death of Auguste Schmidt in 1902. Her partner in life and work, Gertrud Bäumer (1873–1954), was chairwoman of the BDF from 1910 until 1919. With the journal *Die Frau*, which she began publishing in 1893, Helene Lange also succeeded in creating a central organ of the middle-class women’s movement, in which she exercised major influence in the choice and treatment of topics as editor.

Distancing itself from the materialist view of history, the middle-class women’s movement in Germany had always emphasized that it represented a ‘cultural movement’ shaped far more by intellectual motivating forces than visible economic causes. The BDF, most of whose leadership at the turn of the century was close to the national liberal circle around Friedrich Naumann, hoped that women would gain an acknowledged and
'equivalent' participation in the nation state. 'Equivalent' did not sound quite as radical as 'equal'; it emphasized gender, did not recall socialist 'levelling' and contained the notion of a fundamental reform of society that was supposed to render revolution superfluous.

The BDF's 'lack of a programme', so often lamented by scholars, proved to be an advantage in this respect. It enabled the BDF to unite the women's movement's various wings and thereby integrate numerous associations 'that had not yet been consciously influenced by these ideas, but nonetheless served them.' All associations worked together in the BDF on the basis of a minimum consensus: only such objectives ‘as all can heartily agree upon’ were to be set. In this way the individuality of the member groups could be maintained and the BDF leadership could divide important tasks among the different associations. While the ADF, as a sort of spearhead of the BDF, sought to prepare women for political equality through political education, other groups devoted their efforts to specific educational and professional issues as well as social and charitable work. The close interlocking between the BDF executive and the ADF leadership ensured that the BDF did not lose sight of the goal of women's emancipation. At the same time, its deliberately apolitical stance left sufficient room for associations that opposed women's political equality. Paragraph 2 of the national statutes stated that: 'Through organized cooperation, women's charitable associations should be strengthened in order to work successfully for the good of the family and the nation, to combat ignorance and injustice and strive for a moral foundation for the way of life of all.' In order to remove 'social defects in all areas', the BDF set itself the following tasks in its founding assembly:

1. To incorporate after-school facilities for children into all elementary schools,
2. To introduce health education (including information on the harmful effects of alcohol)
3. Protective legislation for women workers
4. To disseminate knowledge of all of the laws affecting women
5. To admit women to state examinations for the medical profession and secondary education,
6. To train women for, and admit them to, the profession of public poor relief.

In this programme, the BDF clearly placed the common good of the state and family before women's individual demands and thus paved the way for the integration of welfare associations. The BDF programme emphasized not better educational and professional opportunities for women (the aims of the educational and professional associations) but rather women's special responsibility within the social reform process: 'woman's
The League of German Women’s Associations

cultural task’. Women were to rid male-dominated society of the deformations of modernity, class hatred, pauperism, monotony and indifference, and to initiate a return to the ‘lasting values’ of German culture, thus contributing to the creation of a nation that transcended class, gender and religion.

This orientation towards the common good did not, however, mean that the BDF had lost sight of political equality for women. The BDF succeeded as early as 1902 in passing a resolution recommending that ‘the member associations [should] strongly promote understanding of the idea of women’s suffrage because only women’s suffrage could ensure the lasting success of all of the League’s efforts’.36 For tactical reasons the demand for suffrage was not placed at the forefront of the BDF’s work, but mainly left to the ADF. In 1910, on the initiative of its chairwoman Helene Lange, the ADF stated its objectives more clearly. It now called itself the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein. Zugleich Verband für Frauenarbeit und Frauenrechte in der Gemeinde (General German Women’s Association and Federation for Women’s Work and Rights in the Local Community).37 Comparisons with countries where women already had the vote made Lange sceptical. She recognized that formal equality alone could not bring about the hoped-for radical social change that ‘female cultural achievements’ might effect. For that reason, she wanted to prepare women through training in citizenship and intensified participation on the micro level of the municipality ‘to bring women’s cultural influence to a full inner development and social efficacy.’38

The transformation of the ADF into a ‘joint national representative body’ for all of the women’s associations active in local politics did not cause an abandonment of broader objectives. It merely bowed to the growing division of labour within the BDF and offered an umbrella organization to groups that had previously held aloof from the BDF. Many of these were local and regional federations of women’s associations working in the field of municipal policy, which belonged to the charitable and patriotic spectrum. This further advanced the BDF’s enclosure policy, for from this point onward the ADF ‘no longer made its organizational advancement dependent primarily on the founding new local branches... but above all on the membership of existing women’s associations in the area of municipal policy.’39 This ‘practical politics’ helped the ADF to attract the interest of mothers and non-professional women.

Although by the turn of the century the BDF increasingly characterized the women’s movement as a national movement, it maintained a sober and functional approach to nationalism and accusations of internationalism up until the First World War. After the Anti-Socialist Law was
revoked in 1890 the women’s movement strengthened its international contacts. Helene Lange received the decisive inspiration for her call for a reform of girls’ schooling from the US and England, and she couched it in her usual ironic terms.\textsuperscript{40} The founding of the BDF itself had, of course, followed in 1894, inspired by the 1893 congress of the International Council of Women (ICW) held on the occasion of the World’s Fair in Chicago, which had been attended by German delegates. In 1897 the BDF became the third national women’s organization to join the ICW after its American and Canadian counterparts. These international contacts and sources of inspiration were soon to be played down.

Leading educational policymakers’ and educators’ idea that ‘education’ and ‘culture’ should be regarded not simply as individual but rather as ‘national guarantors of identity’\textsuperscript{41} also influenced the BDF. Beginning around 1900, the national significance of women’s ‘cultural work’ began to be writ large. The invocation of the nation proved an ideal catchphrase for expanding women’s sphere of influence without appearing to be too radical. Both men and women were fascinated by nationalist patterns of thought because they seemed to leave the future open. The ‘purely charitable activities’ such as (field) nursing that were allotted to women were viewed as a ‘complementary counterpart to male military service’\textsuperscript{42} and, beginning with the Wars of Liberation, had become a mass phenomenon that united women from monarchists to radical democrats. While some groups sought to use their ‘genuinely feminine activities’ to establish or solidify the traditional sexual division of labour, others deployed nationalism as an emancipatory ideology and hoped that it would provide women with more education, access to new occupations or more political influence, and even complete political equality.

At the turn of the century, the accelerated expansion of the navy accompanied by a public propaganda campaign and an hysterical international policy led to the increasing nationalization of Wilhelmine society. The growing sense of crisis and increased domestic conflicts after 1905 unleashed a wave of defamation of anything international. Those forces that rejected change and clung to the status quo equated the downsides of modernity with internationalism. Socialism, feminism and ‘world Jewry’ appeared to be mere variants of the same basic evil.

Helene Lange reacted to this trend not merely by emphasizing the national traits of the German women’s movement, but also by using the accusation of internationalism as an opportunity to take the offensive. She asserted that the German women’s movement had developed from the nationalism of its origins to internationalism and that it held the ‘lack of rights and of a deeper relationship to the cultural life of their own

\textsuperscript{258}
people in the past and present’ responsible for women’s ‘irredeemable’ alienation from their own nation. ‘Where did this tendency towards internationalism in the German women’s movement, which is actually foreign to the German national character and to female nature, come from?’ she asked, only to answer ‘that German men have forced women who wanted to fulfil their national duties into internationalism’.43

Although the BDF’s actions acknowledged the prevailing overheated nationalism and took every possible opportunity to emphasize the women’s movement’s national stance, it was accused by the Deutscher Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation (German League to Combat Women’s Emancipation, founded in 1912) of working towards the demise of the German nation. The anti-feminist League did not attack women’s organizations wholesale, but rather offered to support all those women’s associations ‘that wished to participate in a national and truly feminine spirit in uplifting female life’. The BDF immediately took up this accusation and countered that the German women’s movement fulfilled ‘a national duty in everything it does’ and had ‘demonstrated that it placed national unity above the fragmentation of partisan opinion, and that it possessed the strength to express this unity to the outside world as well’.44 The reference to the unifying character of the women’s movement, which the BDF managed to strengthen with its ‘non-partisan’ stance, was skilfully directed at the distinction, commonly made in Germany, between the ‘partisan squabbling’ in (male-dominated) political life and the aspirations of a ‘female politics’ that rose above these differences. The exclusion of the Social Democratic women workers’ organizations at the founding of the BDF, regretted by some women who wanted to mediate between the bourgeois and socialist women,45 meant that in the years that followed the spectrum of women active in the BDF expanded from the traditionally bourgeois liberal groups to those in national conservative circles. The BDF’s reply to its enemies was thus not merely supported by its member federations and associations, but also met with the approval of nationalist conservative organizations such as the Lübeck Patriotic Women’s Association.46 In this case, the anti-feminist League’s massive attacks did not produce the intended effect of driving a wedge between the charitable patriotic women’s associations and those that called for women’s emancipation. The enlargement of the BDF facilitated not only its movement in a more national conservative direction, but also gave the BDF board the chance to win over wholly new groups of women to the idea of emancipation.

In its campaign of defamation, the anti-feminist League continued to deploy accusations of internationalism. At this period, though, the
successes of the women’s movement were so apparent that Gertrud Bämmer could confidently assert that: ‘It is in the nature of certain intellectual movements not to be contained by national boundaries.’ Internationalism and nationalism were not mutually exclusive, and the German women’s movement, ‘which has set up a cultural ideal, is by this very fact tied in its personification to the national character’.

The Nationalization of the BDF at the Outbreak of the First World War

Whenever it claimed civil rights for women, the BDF was reminded of the connection between citizenship and the capacity to bear arms, which appeared in the eyes of many to represent the last insurmountable barrier to women’s equal participation in the German nation-state. The women’s movement was thus occupied with the search for an equivalent to military service that women could perform. It was in this context that the idea of compulsory service for women, a topic discussed with increasingly intensity after 1900, was born. At the much talked-about congress that accompanied the 1912 exhibition on ‘Woman in Household and Profession’ Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne called for a ‘female service year’. Gnauck-Kühne sought to portray this service year not as an innovation, but as an ‘organic extension’ of home economics instruction in the schools. Girls should be introduced to their domestic duties just as men were to their military duties. That same year the BDF entered the public debate with a resolution that presented the ‘female service year’ in a different light — one that emphasized the arena of public welfare work rather than the domestic sphere. To be sure, girls with an elementary school-leaving certificate were to receive obligatory instruction in home economics that would be equivalent to the ‘female service year’. The actual ‘female service year’ for the higher social classes, however, should be spent in women’s social work schools under female administration. The BDF argued for the establishment of more such schools, but believed that the female service year should not become obligatory before women had attained political equality.

When the First World War broke out, these plans for compulsory female service were not merely taken up; women’s every activity was now declared a ‘national task’. The German troops marching off to war were juxtaposed with the ‘home army’ of women. On the day of mobilization the BDF sent its members an organizational plan for the immediate establishment of a National Women’s Service (Nationaler Frauendienst,
NFD). According to Gertrud Bäumer, the basic demands for the implementation of the plan were: ‘1. Coordination with the Red Cross and the Patriotic Women’s Associations; 2. Coordination with the authorities; 3. Consultation with the welfare associations outside the Red Cross [DRK]’. \(^5\) The Nationaler Frauentag’s activities followed in the footsteps of the ‘Women’s Association of the Fatherland of 1814’ and its successor organizations in the German Red Cross. In order to avoid conflicts, the Nationaler Frauentag clearly distinguished its activities from those of the German Red Cross and emphasized that the German Red Cross alone was responsibility for nursing in the field. The slogan of ‘home service’, which the Nationaler Frauentag adopted for its work, was declared to be the ‘wartime translation of the term “women’s movement”’. \(^4\) Women’s municipal welfare work, so strongly encouraged by the ADF in the years before the war, now proved very useful. The women’s associations in the cities now joined forces, organizing cooperation with local authorities to secure food supplies and aid families whose breadwinners had been conscripted or made unemployed by the war. The Nationaler Frauentag also helped women to find employment and set up information centres to assist them in coping with everyday problems. In the nationalist fever of early wartime, it became clear that the BDF could rely upon previously neutral or even hostile groups of women. The war was a great mobilizer of women. \(^3\) Although at the current stage of research it is not yet clear to what extent individual women’s associations or women Social Democrats who had previously kept their distance worked with the *Nationaler Frauentag*. \(^6\) The BDF, or the Nationaler Frauentag, which it had initiated, appears to have met with a high degree of cooperation among women of all milieus, at least at the beginning of the war. There is much evidence that it was the long-standing if selective collaboration on the local level that now permitted relatively smooth cooperation among Social Democratic, national conservative and liberal women. \(^7\)

During the war Helene Lange emphasized once again that women’s duty to serve must not exhaust itself in motherhood. She pointed to ‘the analogy between female compulsory service and man’s military service’ in order to define women’s duties in a future peace-time. \(^8\) She noted that, strictly speaking, men were doubly bound to serve: in wartime they were liable for military service and in peacetime their duty as citizens obliged them to accept honorary posts. In her analysis of this ‘double male compulsory service’ she set up a parallel between the introduction of universal conscription and the expansion of communal self-administration in order to derive from women’s wartime duty to serve
a peacetime duty to perform volunteer work. Helene Lange called for obligatory citizenship instruction for girls – a ‘female service year’ – to help them to fulfil these tasks satisfactorily. The core of this programme would be instruction in home economics and basic economics along with physical education. Here Helene Lange took up a notion developed by the ADF, that girls and women should be given a national education in a Fichtean spirit.

The idea of compulsory service for women sparked a lively public debate. Gertrud Bäumer, however, noted with annoyance in 1916 that most authors who expressed an opinion on women’s service treated the women’s movement’s idea of ‘women’s duty to serve society in peacetime in a wholly inadequate and dilettantish manner’. Women’s compulsory service was generally regarded as a mere wartime stopgap measure, whereas in peacetime women were to be relegated to voluntary, purely charitable activities. Bäumer expressly warned against hastily introducing the compulsory service year on the basis of ‘such an underdeveloped consciousness’, as it might prove to be a ‘Trojan horse of the worst kind’.

Conclusions

Various segments of the population used nationalism as a legitimisation strategy for the most diverse objectives. In their demands and actions, proponents and opponents of women’s emancipation alike invoked the nation and national obligations. The BDF and ADF were so successful in deploying nationalism as an emancipatory strategy even before the First World War that the anti-feminist opposition came to view this apparently ‘moderate’ wing of the women’s movement as its main enemy. No matter how the activities of the different women’s associations were accentuated, and whatever their extent, women’s arenas and radius of action expanded clearly beyond the domestic sphere. In other words, even women who opposed emancipation were busy emancipating themselves. This led to the absurd situation after 1918 that women who opposed the suffrage were elected to the National Assembly as deputies of the conservative Deutschnationalen Volkspartei. At the beginning of the First World War it became apparent that, in this extreme situation, broad segments of the population were quite willing to accept women’s informal and largely unpaid performance of ‘national tasks’. As soon, however, as women demanded a concrete participation in the state that went beyond the vague sentiments of national community, ‘female national tasks’ were quickly restricted to volunteer and charitable activities. This finding substantiates Ute Planert’s thesis ‘that the restrictive national conception of femininity
as a complement to the masculine already contained, inherently, as it were, the seeds of change, without ever truly being able to overcome its intrinsic limitations and embrace gender-political equality. 64

Notes


10. The case of the chairwoman of the Patriotic Women’s Associations (Vaterländische Frauenvereine), Selma von Groeben (1856–1938), demonstrates the shakiness of such assessments. She was the deputy chairwoman of the Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund, directed welfare work in Hannover during the First World War within the framework of the Nationaler Frauentdienst and remained until her death in close contact with Gertrud Bäumer. See also Heinsohn,
The League of German Women's Associations


13. Chickering, "'Casting their Gaze More Broadly'", 162.


15. Grüneisen, Das Deutsche Rote Kreuz, 75–6. For the statutes see 257–8.

16. Lange, 'Frauenvereine', 111.


18. Evans, The Feminist Movement, 149.


22. ADF appeal, Die Frau, 322–3.


27. Venghiattis, C. (1997), Mobilizing for Nation and Empire: German Women's Patriotic Activism through the Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft, 1907–1945, unpublished paper; Chickering, 'Casting Their Gaze more Broadly', 181 ff. See also Wildenthal, L. (1993), "'She is the Victor': Bourgeois Women, Nationalist
Gendered Nations


28. Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Abt. Berlin, 61 Ko 1 (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft), Akte 163, 87. I thank Claire Venghiattis for drawing my attention to this source.


31. Helene Lange was the sole editor of *Die Frau* until 1916, when Gertrud Bäumer joined her. In 1921 *Die Frau* became the official organ of the BDF.


33. This motto was borrowed from the National Council of Women of the United States, which had been founded in 1891.


38. From the ADF’s fourth leaflet of 1907, Helene-Lange-Archiv in the Landesarchiv Berlin, 5-29/2.


44. (1911/1912), ‘Erklärung des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine zur
The League of German Women's Associations


45. On this see the declaration by BDF chairwoman Auguste Schmidt, in (1900/1901), *Die Frau* 8: 180 and Helene Lange’s ‘little study of the women’s movement’ in (1900/1901), *Die Frau* 8: 180 ff.


50. As early as January 1912 Lange could no longer locate the originator of the ‘old’ demand for a female service year. Lange, H. (1911/12), ‘Die Dienstpflicht der deutschen Frau’, *Die Frau* 19: 214–17.


57. See Guttmann, *Weibliche Heimarmee*.