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On the Development of Women's Studies in Eastern Germany

Irene Dölling

MUCH HAS CHANGED in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) since the brief period of euphoria in the fall of 1989. Both the social structures and our daily lives have been thrown into turmoil. All institutions are restructuring, and for many of us this means existential uncertainty. At such a time, it is doubly difficult to establish feminist research and women's studies in the formerly East German universities: women's studies have a marginal place in the academic institutions of the former West Germany as well and are not generously supported, and East German women academics committed to establishing feminist research at colleges and universities are doing so from a position in which they themselves are threatened with *Abwicklung* (dismissal) as members of the GDR's academic elite.[1]

Translated by Karen A. Storz and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres.

[1] The concept of *Abwicklung,* often translated as "wrapping up," "winding down," or "dissolving," is at the same time an official term and a euphemism for a procedure that has been going on in economic, social, cultural, and scientific areas since the unification of the two German states. Businesses and establishments that are seen as ineffective according to market perspectives or institutions that do not fit into West German structures are closed or dissolved, and those who have worked in them up until then generally become jobless or are forced into early retirement. For example, all formerly East German universities are being restructured and their personnel replaced. At least three procedures intersect in this process. First, the restructuring according to a West German model is supposed to create a connection to an "international standard," and a modern network of scholarly scientific institutions is to be established. Second, by letting those persons go who are viewed as unproductive scholars or who are politically stigmatized and by replacing most of the professors with scholars from the West, the *Anschluss* to the West is supposed to be established. (*Translators' note: Anschluss* literally means connecting, but is used here in a play on the term used when Hitler invaded Austria on the eve of World War II.) Third—and in my opinion this is decisive—this results in the sort of exchange of power elites that is associated with radical social transformations everywhere. This change is of a decidedly political nature, in which the symbolic gender

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What then has become of the enthusiastic beginnings of feminist research in East German universities? What has become of the women who at that time acted on the conviction that establishing and institutionalizing feminist research and women's studies were integral to the renewal of the universities?[2] What consequences do the particularities of the process of social transformation in a united Germany have for the East German feminist research that is beginning to emerge?

I will offer some very preliminary answers to these questions. Assertions and conclusions are risky, as many things in the academic landscape of the former GDR are open and very uncertain at the moment. Moreover, many of the repercussions that the social transformation process, in Germany and elsewhere, will have for feminist research can only be guessed at at this time; they still resist exact conceptualization. Therefore, my remarks will present more of a stock-taking than a prediction of future developments.

Consequences of feminist research in the former GDR since 1989

There were only scattered signs of feminist scholarship at GDR universities before 1989. The number of women interested in feminist research in fact increased in the 1980s, but with very few exceptions it was virtually impossible for them to teach feminist theories or to carry out feminist research projects. The fall of 1989 produced a change in this direction as well: the opening of the universities to new subjects and structures made it possible for interested women to support the cause of feminist research. Despite resistance to such a course of action, since the fall of 1989, feminist research has gained a foothold in almost all universities and other institutions of higher education that are still in existence.[3] This development has above all affected the humanities, lin-

order plays an important role: i.e., the "subjugation" of the groups defined as weak or inferior is bound up with traditional models of "masculine" and "feminine." This has not only a symbolic but also a practical outcome: women have few advocates in the decision-making processes and are hit particularly hard by the firings.

[2] In what follows I will use the term *feminist research (Frauenforschung)*, which is common in German and generally includes women's studies (*Frauenstudien*), when such research is carried out at universities. (*Translators' note:* The German term *Frauenforschung* is rendered more literally as "research on women," but taken in its German context, its meaning is closer to the English term *feminist research*. As the author remarks in a later footnote [n. 11], the word *feminism [Feminismus]* is often avoided in German.)

[3] With the closing of several academic institutions, such as the College of Economics or the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, e.g., certain activities in feminist research have been completely or partially destroyed. Existing groups of women academics have been dissolved and projects for research and teaching have been discontinued. This also has meant the end of many networks among women at these institutions, networks that had been formed after considerable effort. At the moment, it is difficult to know to what

guistics, and cultural studies and, to some extent, the disciplines of history and the social sciences. What has been achieved so far can only be described as modest. In many programs, however, there are an increasing number of regular course offerings that deal with the situation of women and the analysis of gender relations from a feminist perspective or that discuss the concepts and results of feminist research (especially as developed in western Europe and the United States).

Often it is younger women from the *Mittelbau* (the nonprofessorial teaching staff) who are most active in this regard.[4] For example, it is primarily these women from the middle academic level at the universities of Leipzig, Halle, and Rostock who have been tirelessly trying to create interdisciplinary networks and study groups for feminist research and to establish course offerings in women's studies in various disciplines.

Nowhere, however, has it been possible to duplicate the institutionalization of feminist research that was carried out in the fall of 1989 at the Humboldt University of Berlin with the establishment of the Center for Interdisciplinary Feminist research (ZiF). There, a group of academic women who had been involved in feminist research for some time (including a number of full professors and assistant professors) had prepared the way conceptually for the establishment of such a center. Thus, they could take advantage of the period of radical change in the fall of 1989, when everything seemed suddenly possible and much *was* possible; they could use this time to establish and secure staff and space as well as modest finances for the center. In the first year of its existence, the ZiF made its presence known through so many activities—lecture series, guest presentations by well-known western European feminist scholars, conferences, the development of documentation on women's research in the GDR, and so forth—that it was no longer possible to imagine the university without it. The ZiF is one of the few examples of a feminist renewal of the university through our own efforts. I think it also has a

extent such networks for feminist projects are reemerging in the newly formed structures, which are often only very short-term because they are founded on the basis of the so-called Temporary Job Creation Measures (ABM). The ABM, a way to lower the jobless rate, consist of jobs in projects that generally last only one or two years. The money for the ABM comes from the state via the Federal Bureau of Labor (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit).

[4] There is no equivalent English word for *Mittelbau* (which, by the way, is also not an *East* German word). What is meant is the numerically largest group of female and male academics who have not yet been hired on the professorial level, i.e., who are hired as assistants, usually on limited contracts, in university departments. They are employed primarily as teaching staff. Whereas in the GDR a large majority of *Mittelbau* positions had permanent contracts and—especially in the social sciences and humanities—women were represented at this rank in great numbers, in the old Federal Republic the majority of *Mittelbau* positions are temporary. The alignment of the East German situation with the West will mean that many women who previously had jobs in the *Mittelbau* will lose their positions.

realistic chance of surviving as an institution during the current process of restructuring and staff cuts, at least in its current form as a network for women academics and students who are interested in feminist research.[5]

In contrast, the women academics in Leipzig who supported the initiative of the sociologist Birgit Gabriel and attempted to create an institute similar to the ZiF in Berlin at their university found out that the "good times" were already over by the spring of 1990. At that time, the complete restructuring and extensive replacement of staff at the universities were already looming on the horizon; in this situation it was easy for the university administration to jettison the initiative of these women by pointing out that in times of great financial hardship there was no money available for "supplementary" lines of research. The women nonetheless managed to carry out lecture series open to the entire university and to offer lecture courses and seminars in women's studies in various disciplines. The situation at the university in Halle is similar. However, thanks to the establishment of offices of equal opportunity (*Gleichstellungsreferate*) and the tenacious work of some committed women academics, networks similar to the ZiF are being created at several universities.[6]

At the same time, the ZiF represents in particularly clear fashion the problems that feminist research currently faces at east German universities. In spite of its very promising beginnings, we cannot ignore the fact that interest in feminist research or in feminist networks among women academics and students has not increased (to put it mildly).[7] For example,

[5] Currently the ZiF is institutionally anchored as an office within the Department of Art and Cultural Studies. It is staffed by a managing director, a secretary, and an associate in charge of reference work. The substance of the center's work is determined by an academic advisory committee, on which female students, assistants, and faculty have equal membership. The advisory committee and its director (who, as a rule, is supposed to be a female faculty member for whom this is a supplementary job) are elected for two-year terms by the full assembly of all women who work at the ZiF.

[6] *Gleichstellungsreferate,* which are also called *Frauenreferate,* have grown out of a political struggle on the part of women and the established parties in the old Federal Republic. They are offices in state and municipal governments, in factories, and in scientific and cultural organizations that have the task of furthering the equality of the sexes and women's progress by means of practical political influence. In the fall of 1989, after the changeover had begun but when the GDR still existed, such offices of equal opportunity were also established in East Germany. At the present time there are several hundred offices in Germany at various levels (with differing levels of financial support and decision authority). At the Humboldt University in Berlin, e.g., there is an equal opportunity officer for the university; she is a member of the academic Senate, the most powerful organ for university faculty, staff, and student representation, and she has veto rights over its decisions. It is up to the various departments as to whether they elect honorary equal opportunity officers to support the appointed officer of the university in her work.

[7] This is true at least among the women academics who are still employed at the university. On the other hand, the ZiF has taken on greater importance as a network for quite a few women academics who have meanwhile lost their jobs. They are now connected to the ZiF with ABM-positions (see n. 3 above), generally limited to one or two years, in order to carry out interdisciplinary research projects. According to law, though, they are not allowed to teach.

only twenty to fifty students participated at any one time in the series of lectures entitled "Geschlechter—Wende" (Gender—change)[8] concerning changes in gender relations since the fall of 1989 that was organized by the ZiF during the winter semester 1991–92 and open to the entire university. Given the current enrollment of eighteen thousand students, this is a small number. The lecture series in the summer semester of 1992 on the West German abortion law and modern reproductive technologies was just as sparsely attended. There are various reasons for this stagnation.

1. In the course of restructuring the universities and other institutions of higher education, it is above all positions held by women (who as a rule belong to the *Mittelbau*) that are threatened: the greatest reduction of positions has occurred in this group. The relatively few female faculty probably also have little chance of retaining their positions when they are advertised.[9] Such times of existential uncertainty are not very conducive to winning women over to an involvement in feminist research, which is not very highly regarded in the male-dominated realm of academia.

2. The so-called Structure and Appointment Commissions (SBK) are responsible for restructuring the institutes and defining, advertising, and (re)appointing teaching positions. It is academics from the old Federal Republic, mostly male, who hold the authority on these commissions.[10]

[8] *Translators' note:* A play on the term *Wende,* which means *turn* or *change* (of direction), and is used to describe the events beginning in the fall of 1989 in East Germany.

[9] The procedure for restaffing positions is handled in different ways, but if we make allowances for individual variations at different universities or in different departments, it can be described as follows. All employees (the professors first of all) are evaluated (although the criteria for this evaluation are by no means uniform and verifiable). All positions are advertised, although there can be restricted announcements (restricted either in terms of time or content, and in such a way that only or primarily applicants from the new federal states, i.e., the former GDR, will be considered). A limited number of the advertised professorships (and later probably of the nonprofessorial positions as well) is reserved for so-called in-house appointments. This means that a small number of the positively evaluated professors are given preference as candidates for (re)appointment, if they can hold their own among the group of applicants (even if they do not meet all of the criteria that are imposed in the old Federal Republic, because their previous circumstances simply did not permit, e.g., an extended study, teaching, or research stay in a western European country or in the United States). These application procedures are in general particularly difficult for women from eastern Germany because their childbearing and childrearing years have put them at an additional disadvantage with regard to certain requirements (e.g., number of publications). In the former GDR it was frequently the case that women had children very early, often while they were students or in the first years of their preparation for a career. This fact led in most cases to their becoming stuck in their scholarly field at a middle level, which under these new circumstances led to their being even more disadvantaged.

[10] For example, of the seventy academics from the old Federal Republic who are active in the SBK in Berlin, only two are women. The SBK are composed of the following: three professors from the old Federal Republic and three from the respective east German institution. The chair of the SBK is always from the West and has two votes, so that in any case the West German professors hold a majority. In addition, three representatives of the nonprofessorial teaching staff (*Mittelbau*) from the East German institu-

These "masters" of the future of East German academia and of women academics have for the most part little or no interest in supporting feminist research in the academic disciplines by designating appropriate professorships. Rather, in the course of creating a "new order" at the universities, there seems to be a tendency to reestablish the masculine order as well.[11] The West German members of the commissions face little opposition on this point from their East German colleagues, who are also mostly male.[12]

3. In the winter semester of 1991–92, the proportion of women among the total number of students in their first semester dropped drastically for the first time, from approximately 50 percent to 38 percent. Of

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tion and one student are included. The East German representatives in the SBK are elected democratically in a secret ballot by the assembly of employees (*Mitarbeiter*) while the members from the West are appointed by the Minister of Science of the respective state, whereby the East German institutions have no right to make recommendations. In addition, the representative for women or the officer for equal opportunity (*Frauen-* or *Gleichstellungsbeauftragte*) in the department (if there is one) can also be a member of the SBK. She has no vote, but she has veto power. Votes are counted twice: first, all the votes of the members of the SBK, and second, only the votes of the professors, who have the deciding vote in difficult cases.

[11] For example, of the seventeen advertised professorships in the Department of Social Sciences at the Humboldt University (Berlin), only one is to be filled by a woman according to the recommendation of the SBK, although a number of highly qualified women have applied. It is also striking how many announcements of professorships mention an emphasis on "gender relations." On the one hand, this is a welcome development; on the other, it is also a means of impeding or limiting feminist research: many men who in recent years have increasingly found gender research to be an attractive area of study can and will apply for such positions. And it is also a way to avoid the word *feminism,* which is frowned upon in Germany. Thus, e.g., a position at the Humboldt University that was originally to be entitled professor of "feminist literary studies" on the recommendation of east German women academics was renamed and advertised as "gender problematics in the literary process." The SBK did, however, recommend the designation of a professorship in the Department of Art and Cultural Studies with the title "cultural analysis with an emphasis on feminist research."

[12] Thus, e.g., in five departments at the Humboldt University in Berlin there are no women at all among the East German members of the SBK; sixteen departments have one woman apiece; four departments have two women apiece; and only in three departments do women make up the majority of the East German members, with three female representatives apiece. These statistics are also a good indication of the widespread conviction among women as well as men in the former GDR that equal rights have been gained and that quotas are therefore superfluous. It is an aspect of the curious consequences of a propagated ideology of equality and a veiled form of gendered hierarchies (brought about not least by means of social and political measures) that women and men in the former GDR are amazingly insensitive to matters of women and gender. In a practical way this means that in the case of the processes that are described here as occurring in the universities, women very rarely have advocates and are thereby put at a disadvantage. Added to this is the fact that many people have no knowledge of the regional antidiscrimination law that was passed by the Senate in Berlin while the coalition of the Social Democrats and the Greens was still in power, which, among other things, establishes the rights of the officers of equal opportunity, the so-called *Gleichstellungsreferate.*

course, this does not yet indicate a trend, but it is a sign that a new order of gender relations is emerging in academia as well. Women will in the future be more than ever a minority among students and they will also be taught even less often by women. Regardless of whether these scholars are feminists or not, their relative lack of representation in the university will lead to having fewer female students view an academic career as a possibility for women. Under these conditions it is difficult for feminist research to gain acceptance among students.

It seems to me that in general the generation of young students is not very interested in feminism—at least not in the kind of feminism that has played a decisive role in the life histories and political commitments of the older generation. The women's movement in the west and, after a brief surge after the turning point (*Wende*), in the east as well has retreated and lost influence. The political forms that were characteristic for the movement and other social movements of the 1970s and 1980s are not very attractive to the younger generation, and new forms have not emerged.

Moreover, in eastern Germany there is a widespread opinion that women in the GDR have had equal rights all along. Given the current conditions, in which the East-West polarization seems to be increasing, "feminism" is seen as yet another "Western" thing that East Germans do not want to have foisted upon them. We also know much too little about the feelings, fears, and expectations with which today's youth are facing current social developments—how the increasingly aggressive and destructive tendencies in their society affect their outlook on life, and what practical and symbolic place gender relations have in this scenario.

These sources of stagnation in East German feminist research (which I have sketched here in only a few of their aspects) form a web of insecurities, fears, reservations, and prejudices in our everyday realities—a web that is almost impossible to untangle. This has a depressing effect on women who are committed to feminist research. Such a situation makes it more difficult to reach decisions on important strategic questions. One question of major importance, for example, is what institutional conception of feminist research we will try to develop and carry through politically. In Berlin this is evident in the debate that has been going on for some time already about establishing an academic program in women's studies at the ZiF. Should we fight for such a program (at first as a minor for the social sciences and humanities) without a corresponding base of support, that is, without a strong show of interest among students?

Experiences in the old Federal Republic have shown that such programs (as well as the establishment of professorships for feminist research) have always depended on strong pressure "from below" for their success. On the other hand, the structures of the university are now being laid down for the coming decades. Will we miss our chance if we do not

act on our ideas now? Or do we need to think long-term and practice a politics of small steps, in other words, continue and expand what has been started: making feminist research known in the individual disciplines through course offerings, awakening interest among women students and academics, and encouraging this interest to turn into demands (for women's studies programs, e.g.)? Should we stay with the network character of the ZiF or move toward an institute for feminist research? The latter would provide the chance to establish feminist scholarship decisively by means of appropriate staff positions, but it would also bring with it the danger of placing ourselves in a ghetto and of providing a rationale for the view that such an institute would render continued disciplinary feminist research, and above all financial support for such research, unnecessary.

Even when we take into account that our latitude for influencing such decisions is fairly small, given the current monopoly of power by the SBK, a fundamental problem for the future of feminist research emerges in all of these discussions. The institutionalization of feminist research will be much less the result of pressure from below—from a women's movement—and much more a decision "from above" by the Structure and Appointment Commissions. This means, first of all, that feminist research will be established from the start as academic scholarship, accepted at the margins of traditional academic research. In addition, it will probably mean that only a small portion of feminist research at former East German universities will be done by East German women researchers. Why will students be interested in or accepting of such research if it is introduced to them from above? To what extent can feminist research retain its "subversive" dimension—exposing structures of power and domination—if it becomes established within the institution? In my view, all of this still remains to be worked out. The establishment and institutionalization of feminist research at eastern German universities are taking place within the context of a displacement and reorganization of structures and relations of power that affect the content of feminist research as well and present us with a number of problems.

Problems for eastern German feminist research in the "United Fatherland"

The clearer it becomes how much unification will cost both sides—each in a different way—the stronger the tensions between East and West Germans become as well. The relationship between feminists in East and West has not been immune to these tensions. After a brief phase of euphoric sisterhood, differences and communication barriers soon arose. For some time now, the relationship between feminists in the East and

West has been characterized by division, silence, and mutual prejudices. Already in the fall of 1990, Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit, one of the early theoreticians of the West German women's movement, in a speech expressed her fear that, as a result of the unification of the two German states and their women's movements, "twenty years of my life have been in vain. . . . Women's struggles of recent years are heading back to square one."[13] In the eyes of West German feminists, GDR feminists are not emancipated but trapped in traditional gender roles. Because of GDR feminists' emphasis on professional work as the most important factor in matters of equality, they are considered to be far behind the Western feminism that theoretically examines and politically fights against basic patriarchal gender relations: sexual harassment, the predominant norm of heterosexuality, the "naturalization" of a sexual identity based on traditional cultural models of "femininity" or "masculinity."

Undifferentiated comments like those of Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit are countered by equally simplistic assessments of the situation of women in the former GDR from the East German side. For example, Christina Schenk, one of the politically active women in the Independent Women's Organization and one of two feminist representatives in the *Bundestag* (German parliament), never gets tired of emphasizing that, "in comparison with capitalism, patriarchy in the GDR was child's play" (*taz* 1991). The East German academic Christine Eifler has characterized the polarization as follows: "Western women's libbers [*Emanzen*] versus eastern mommies; freedom fighters on the one side, shackles of the feminist movement on the other" (1991, 9).[14] It is not uncommon for East German feminists to see their Western sisters as arrogant know-it-alls whose manner is not unlike the "colonialist master attitude" that characterizes the typical behavior of the "Wessis" (West Germans) in relation to the "Ossis" (East Germans). They complain of the loss of their identity and the devaluation and invalidation of the experiences that nourish their feminist and emancipatory ideas; sometimes they react to this by glorifying the emancipation of women in the former GDR (as the example of Christina Schenk shows).

This is an unhappy and troubling situation. Although it brings with it the danger of forging new myths, it also brings the chance that this disillusionment about a seemingly unproblematic sisterhood might lead to a mutual acceptance of difference and to new forms of common action

[13] Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit's book, *Sexismus* (1976, 1978), had a decisive influence on discussions within the West German women's movement, which was gathering great strength at the time.

[14] Christine Eifler belongs to that group of women academics who were already active in feminist studies when the GDR still existed. She lost her position at the Humboldt University when her department was dissolved, and she is currently making a living by lecturing and involving herself in other projects.

as well. And as demeaning as it may be for East German women when they are made to take the blame for the actual or perceived loss of the hard-won rights and positions of West German women, these projections and fears also anticipate privileges that may well be called into question. These struggles will certainly have an effect on the goals of the Western women's movement and the purposes and objects of feminist research as well.

The divisions between Eastern and Western German feminism described above lead, in my view, to several tasks facing current East German feminist research. For example, it is painful to discover that women are also capable of turning women into "others" (and in the German-German relationship this is twice as painful). But this can also give rise to a strong impetus to develop a sense of self out of this otherness that is based on sound analysis and a conceptual-theoretical reexamination of the history of the GDR. The East German women's movement and feminist research essentially developed out of a critique of the GDR society and of its ideology of equal rights and its genuinely misogynistic structures. At the same time, they have been shaped by this society. An indication of this is the value they place upon life-long, skilled employment for women, the compatibility of motherhood and employment, the state-subsidized and guaranteed provisions for day-care facilities, and so forth in their programs, concepts, and projects.

But there is currently little reflection in East German feminist research about why these things are still so important to us, in politics as well as in research, even in view of the economic, social, and cultural transformations that are taking place. It almost seems as if we could perceive these changes only by using the same patterns of thought and judgment with which the "women's question" in the GDR was integrated into the political program of socialism (which we critiqued after all!)—as if we were caught in a need to repeat history (the so-called *Wiederholungszwang* of Freud's psychoanalytic discourse). By continually pointing out and protesting how women are being pushed out of the workplace, how large a percentage of the unemployed they constitute, how a new form of poverty is arising among women, how many child-care places have already been lost, etc., we are pointing to extremely distressing and drastic processes, and it is absolutely essential that we speak, that we cry out, about these things publicly.

In doing so, however, we also engage in reductionism because we proceed from the view that employment and motherhood are "naturally" the decisive themes in any consideration of the situation of and discrimination against women. We functionalize women when we view them almost exclusively as the employed or unemployed and as mothers of families. We are certainly pointing to actual losses when we look back and put our finger on what women in the former GDR have lost under the

new conditions in terms of state-guaranteed services and conditions for the compatibility of employment and motherhood and how brutally the new misogynistic conditions have been forced upon us. But in doing so, we are also reproducing a position of dependence on institutional support and security that is widespread among women in the former GDR and that is always connected with a feeling of powerlessness and a sense of being at the mercy of old or new structures of power and control. In this way, power appears to be concentrated at one pole of these relationships, and the relations of domination seem so all-powerful in our heads that no room at all remains for the activity and activation of women.

Perhaps this cannot initially be otherwise during a process of radical transformation such as the present one. Perhaps patience is necessary—perhaps there needs to be some time for adjustment and reorientation. One step toward breaking out of this vicious circle of repetition, resignation, and counterproductivity and dealing confidently and productively with the "otherness" of which our Western sisters are so critical could be an intensive, empirically based reassessment of our history. We could increase our awareness of relations of power and domination through a close examination of how certain things that we consider so important, such as social-political measures and the numerous inexpensive child-care facilities, were built into and functioned in the overall context of a socialist society. These are issues that we have pushed aside in our considerations, perhaps because we would otherwise have to answer questions about how women (including ourselves) contributed to the stabilization of a social system that has now fallen into general contempt.[15] The memory of our own ambivalent experiences in the GDR could stimulate us to explore how a concept of emancipation geared toward equal rights—with its concomitant social policies and policies on women—had thoroughly diverse and contradictory psychosocial and cultural consequences for women and men and for their relationship with each other. A sound understanding of such issues would make it easier for us to relate our legacy, with its possibilities and its limitations, to the developments that confront us during the current transformation into a "modernized modernity."[16]

[15] Whereas the involvement with the State Security Service (Stasi) has extensively occupied the mass media, the political debates, and the arguments about the role of scientific/scholarly and artistic intelligence work in state socialism, and whereas the "Stasi-problem" has become something of a cliché suppressing the differentiated content analysis of conditions and individual positions, in both East and West German feminist research and politics it is virtually ignored. This is justified by the fact that women were far less likely than men to work for the Stasi or act as informers. I suspect that this avoidance also conceals an attempt to fend off a connection between women and power/domination, as well as a view that fixes power on one side of the relationship.

[16] *Modernized* or *reflexive* modernity are the terms that the sociologist Ulrich Beck uses to describe the phase of industrial society that has become the historical order of the day after Chernobyl, after the collapse of Stalinism and the Blocs, and after the

By critically examining and explaining the way it understands itself, East German feminist research could make a concrete contribution to insuring that GDR history is neither simply forgotten nor transfigured in fantasies of a "lost paradise" and thereby hauled along unexamined.[17]

Therefore, a reassessment of our history with the goal of acquiring a new self-understanding must necessarily include self-examination. A critical analysis of our disappointed ideals of German-German sisterhood or of our fantasies about a women's movement with limitless power to change society (fantasies that existed, e.g., in the Independent Women's Organization before the March 1990 elections) could sharpen our understanding of several things: the very personal motives we had for becoming involved in the women's movement or in feminist research before and/or after "the change" (*die Wende*); the social-cultural background of our biographies, which provided the fertile ground for our commitment to the general "cause of women" within which we at the same time made individual claims to particular positions in the social sphere; and how we, too, thought we could speak in the name of other women.

Such an analysis would not only help us to deal differently and more reflexively with the injuries suffered in the German-German sister relationship. Above all, it could also be the key to a conception of feminist research that takes seriously the social and generational differences among women. In a time of growing social differentiation and pluralization of lifestyles, such research would investigate these differences empirically and analytically by demonstrating the concrete connections among social position, gender, and age.

An empirically oriented, differentiated and differentiating approach to feminist research is necessary for another reason as well. The current processes of transformation in eastern Germany as well as in eastern Europe are leading to a change in relations of power, to a new formation of political and intellectual elites, to a new division of people into "winners and losers," the privileged and the disadvantaged, the rich and the poor. Certainly the affluent Western consumer societies will not remain immune to these processes.

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crumbling of traditional ways of life together with their gender roles and "natural" norms. The criteria of progress, growth, wealth, and the like need to be redefined. As Beck put it in his introductory lecture at the German Sociologists Meeting in 1990, "It is a matter of self-limitation—that is, of admitted imperfection" (51).

[17] When I use the collective "we" in the following, it is not with the intention of leveling out differing political and theoretical positions among East German feminist researchers and reducing everything to an abstract, all-encompassing standard. Rather, I intend with that "we" first of all to make explicit my own inclusion and, second, I want thereby to suggest a collective task that we East German feminist researchers must assign ourselves if we want to find our place in these changed circumstances.

The dismissive attitude of many West Germans toward both the "poor East Germans" and the large refugee population in the country is one indication of this. Its counterpart is the hostility toward foreigners expressed by East Germans, who fear they will lose the coveted fruits of unification. These struggles over power and allocation certainly have practical consequences for gender relations—for what is "conceded" to women as well as for what women themselves demand. But even more than in "real life," in which there will probably be no simple return to a traditional division of gender roles, these struggles are taking place on a symbolic level in the form of a "renaissance" of traditional values, of "time-honored" ideas of male and female "destiny." The kind of empirical analyses described above could also help to explain what a rejuvenation of such traditional symbolic gender prescriptions actually means for women and men, given their positions and experiences within these processes of radical change. In this way, East German feminist research could expand its perspective to include dimensions of the current processes of social transformation that it has scarcely taken into account so far because of its concentration on women's employment. Or, to put it another way, such research could leave behind the paradigm of a "humanistic feminism" that fixates its sights on equal rights for women. If it could thereby succeed in productively working through its legacy and not simply following western European ideas, East German feminist research could take part in feminist discourse in its own voice. The chance would also arise to address concepts of Western feminism from its own perspective: to ask which theoretical and political impulses Western feminism offers for further developing its own concept of emancipation and thereby critically working through its own experiences with an "emancipation from above"; to determine where Western feminism is less helpful for its own work because that feminism arose and still exists in the context of very different economic and sociocultural connections; and to analyze critically the "silent assumptions" of Western feminism that today—after the end of the Cold War in a time of radical social and economic changes and in the search for civil standards—are seen more clearly than ever before. Economic prosperity and "the push for modernization" that led to a relative weakening of power differentials between the sexes and between social groups prepared the ground in the 1970s for a "new" women's movement. That movement has succeeded in more definitive ways than ever before in the history of modern societies in making the inequality between women and men be seen as a public scandal and in working politically to change this situation. At the same time, the concepts of Western feminism concerning women's autonomy and their claim to self-realization have been tacitly influenced by the political structuring of difference between the sexes or between women

through experiences in a society whose wealth rests not least on an exploitation of women and men in the Third World and on an unloading of the West's own problems (e.g., its ecological problems) onto the so-called developing countries. Under the present circumstances, a critical reflection of such correlations by Western feminists is urgently called for, especially against a background of increasing national delimitations and nationalist tendencies.

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