Employment, Gender and the Dual Transformation in Germany

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The New Germany in the East

Policy Agendas and Social Developments since Unification

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Hildegard Maria Nickel

TWO INTERWOVEN PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

The Federal Republic of Germany is undergoing a dual social transformation. On the one hand, there are the economic, social and cultural processes associated with political unification, which have primarily been taking place in the east, in the new federal states. On the other hand – and this is often forgotten – this transformation of eastern Germany is set within a process of social transformation in the west, the old federal states, which began long before German unification. This more general process relates to the constellation of post-war growth,[1] and is evidently undergoing a crisis. At least, the process is no longer smooth, and has not yet entered a new phase of prosperity leading to a noticeable decrease in high basic unemployment.

From the outset, west Germany's post-war prosperity went hand-in-hand with reforms achieved after tough conflicts over the distribution of wealth. The results were high levels of employment, prolonged economic growth, cushions for social inequality, a broad expansion and individualisation of educational and career opportunity, a diversification of freely chosen forms of cohabitation, and broad democratisation. The basic social consensus of the post-war period was founded on a social contract that was not legally enshrined but was nonetheless observed in practice, which aimed to achieve compromise on the distribution question and which was inspired by the idea that all members of society were 'social partners' with a more or less equal right to benefit from economic growth. During those years, federal government policy did not merely trail along in linear fashion behind the (upward) development in GNP. Social spending actually grew faster than GNP, as in all western European countries; it also played a pro-active part in shaping the social structure by compensating and regulating, and to some degree the emancipatory interests of the individual made gains from this. The rights implied by this intention were actually assertable. This was the narrow material basis for a

whole series of emancipatory steps forwards for women in the Federal Republic of Germany from the mid- or late 1960s onwards.[2]

Following the structural crisis in the mid-1970s this overall social construct grew unstable; mass unemployment nibbled insidiously at the financial foundations of social state mechanisms for secondary distribution. From 1982 a policy in effect began gradually modifying established relations of distribution in the name of deregulation, labour market flexibility and the 'restructuring' of the social state, its aim evidently being to discard the social compromise, and in this it was not entirely unsuccessful. The nature and intensity of this project to resize the social state, however, are such that the control potential of capital accumulation is at risk. The fulfilment of individual social and cultural needs is flung back to the level of primary income distribution, ignoring the fact that societies today are stratified in terms of status, power and access to resources along lines of class, gender, age and ethnic origin.[3] In the long term, there is a danger that civil consensus will be undermined.

The process of transformation does not affect all the men and women in Germany at the same time and in the same way. The differentiations between the sexes, and also between women, are huge. Struggles over the distribution of resources, above all employment, are exacerbated. In the same breath, the old bourgeois order of gender, which had long since been abolished in the GDR anyway, has finally vanished in the Federal Republic, or to put it another way, the contract between the sexes associated with the industrial era of capitalism is becoming obsolete, with both parties, women and men, challenging it increasingly. The old gender order centred on the 'normal family' and the ideal of a 'family income'[4] and was founded on the division and bipolar gender allocation of gainful employment and domestic labour.

> This world was characterised by the idea that people should be organized in a heterosexual nuclear family with a male as its head, living primarily off the man's earned income. The male head of household received a 'family income' which was enough to feed children and a wife-and-mother who performed the housework unpaid.[5]

Even if this breadwinner marriage has been eroding in Germany since the late 1960s at the latest, and in spite of the fact that many families did not fit that industrial model before, it is ultimately the foundation on which the German social state, modifications apart, is built. It is certainly one reason why there are structural limits to integrating women into the world of paid employment. East German women are feeling this particularly at present, but they may be the ones who bring to a head the conflict over

who gets the jobs, which is the very core of the equal rights issue, and who show up the need for renewal in employment policy and the social state. At least, they illustrate problems which affect women generally in Germany.

EAST GERMAN WOMEN: THE DOUBLE SOMERSAULT

Ursula Schröter maintains (and she is not alone in this) that east German women can be divided into two distinct groups,[6] and in May 1993, according to her representative random sample, 35 per cent of all east German women belonged to the group of losers.[7] I have my doubts as to whether this blanket approach is correct. What is the yardstick? Is it the social situation of women in the GDR? Is it a comparison with east German men? Or with west German women, or foreigners living in Germany? Or does it simply mean that many east German women are worse off than others? Dichotomy hinders our insight into the multiple facets of reality. Besides, clinging to the thesis of losers and winners assumes that women are the lucky or unlucky victims of a structural process over which they have no influence. The opposite is true. Women, like men, were active protagonists in the changes which led to the end of the GDR. Women, like men, voted in the majority at the GDR's first free elections in March 1990 for rapid economic and currency union. Now, however, what many did not wish to recognise at the time is becoming very clear. The crisis of transformation in the west, with a still incomplete transition to a post-Fordist stage, is hitting (eastern) women harder than (eastern) men.[8] It is a waste of time celebrating the 'winners' among women who, in spite of massive job losses in industry and agriculture, in spite of the erosion of once reliable social measures, such as childcare, and all the manifestations of political exclusion, have managed nonetheless to stay on keel, just as it is a waste of time to lament the 'losers', who are still not able, or else are less able than ever, to extract themselves and their children from the nightmare of fears and uncertainties. It is rather more useful to address the transformation crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany and ask how it is affecting women at various levels, and also to recall and demand those mechanisms which society can employ to regulate such matters.

True enough, there is a variety of factual evidence – from rising long-term unemployment in eastern Germany to the feminisation of poverty – that women are worse off. That is absolutely not at issue, but the over-simplistic picture needs to be placed in perspective:

1. The employment rate for east German women remains higher than for west German women; 66 per cent of women in eastern Germany have

jobs which require them to make social insurance contributions, whereas in western Germany the figure is 45 per cent. In other words, western women are in a less satisfactory situation than eastern women when it comes to having their own welfare entitlements.[9]

2. The transformation process in eastern Germany has turned many women into the principal family 'breadwinner', and in the average eastern household almost 50 per cent of the income is earned by women, compared with a third in the west. This has consequences for the gender relationship and could, in the medium term, encourage a pact between the sexes which is based on complementary functions with a low 'depth of hierarchy'. Moreover, the participation of women with young children in the labour market is considerably higher in the new states than on original federal territory. This is presumably a major reason why the proportion of married couples with children described as being in an 'economically difficult position' (children being a poverty risk!) is lower across the board than in the east than in the west.[10]

3. The difficulties of transformation have not so far triggered the expected return to a traditional gender model in eastern Germany. Rather, the 'data suggests the people in the new federal states acquired useful experience in the past with women's dual role', so that in 1995 attitudes to women working was summarised as 'growing approval in the east, stagnation (or else decline) in the west'.[11] And the 1997 Data Report observes astonishing differences between east and west: according to every second west German, women should stay at home to look after the children and the housework (47 per cent women/53 per cent men). In eastern Germany, this opinion is held by 'only' a quarter.[12]

4. The overall picture confirms that women enjoyed a certain 'home advantage' in the transition to a market economy due to a pronounced gender segregation in structures of employment in the GDR and the fact that in 1989 women were heavily over-represented in the service sector. On the one hand, this also meant that women did less well in the GDR's employment system than men, in that the large number of women in this sector was inversely proportional to income distribution and social prestige in the service industry. On the other hand, it also means that a large percentage of women with jobs were not directly affected to begin with by the mass redundancies which accompanied de-industrialisation in eastern Germany, and their experience of labour market restructuring took place against a lower-key gender competition.

If we look back at the dramatic changes of 1989/90, we can see – in spite of all the myths to the contrary which now seek to impose a different interpretation – that when the men and women of the GDR took recourse to 'Exit and Voice' (leaving the GDR or demanding the right of expression)[13] and acceded to the Federal Republic, they were relinquishing their claims on a system which included a 'head start on equality'[14] for east German women. Job security, full employment for women and mothers taken for granted, gainful employment compatible with motherhood, government measures to assist women and families, abortion available in the first 12 weeks with the costs (if the option was taken up) borne by social insurance, and a countrywide network of childcare facilities: these were the as yet unparallelled trademarks of the GDR's 'head start on equality' which, quite possibly, caused more women than men to ponder a while back in 1990 before beginning their democratically elected free fall into a different social configuration, their 'crash landing in the modern age'.[15] Ultimately, however, these familiar manifestations of a social state in paternalistic form were unable to withstand the tide of history. The men and women of the GDR had broken out of a society which took decisions for them and provided for their wants, in order to participate in a modern world which drew its legitimation from other mechanisms – mass consumption, parliamentary democracy and the welfare state – and which, in times of economic prosperity, had provided universal access to its highly developed mass culture. Social polarisations seemed to have been erased, and the social state seemed to present a reliable framework. But once the men and women of the GDR had arrived in the modern Federal Republic, it turned out that this other kind of society was already 'evaporating'.[16]

The stable development which men and women of the GDR had perceived from the outside as the dominant feature of the Federal Republic was founded, not on the elimination of social inequality, but on its regulation by means of high wages, full employment (extending increasingly to women) and a redistribution, or 'transfer' of resources, by the social state to cushion the 'weaker strata' and overcome crasser differences in the standard of living. The cracks which began to permeate this prosperous society in the mid-1970s were less visible on the outside or else appeared to be temporary and, if everyone knuckled down to the task, capable of repair. So the men and women of the GDR were not simply set down upon unification in a different society ridden with modern imponderables and replete with alien challenges which they had chosen of their own will to confront. Instead, the social fabric which they expected to encounter in Federal Germany was already being eroded by the time of unification, or had at least stumbled against own limits. Nevertheless, the *Wende* of 1989, set in motion an irreversible, dynamic social process, and

the head start on equality was plunged into the ambivalent maelstrom of modernisation which had already held the west in its grip for some time. It is also buffeting the gender relationship, which is being redefined, while the gender contract hitherto taken for granted and practised by east Germans is losing its structural basis. Suddenly, jobs for women require legitimation, and are the centre of bitter rivalry over this 'strategic resource'.[17]

By now, however, it is becoming clear that, for all the self-assertion and resistivity mustered by east German women in defending their employment, the battle to nudge them out of the market has long since been raging. Moreover, huge social differentiations have been making their mark on female employment generally, and having a job no longer ensures independence, because earnings may not be enough to make ends meet.

By way of concluding this section, I should like to ask a few questions. If at the moment we can observe a tenacity about the east German gender arrangement and a resistivity by women in eastern Germany to being elbowed out of the job market, is that merely a 'temporary aberrance' which will vanish for once and for all as the next generation takes over? Or will the 'eastern model' shape the future for western men and women? Have structural changes perhaps been leading to a feminisation of male employment (with low incomes, precarious jobs, pseudo-self-employment, and so on), to an equalisation downwards, democratising the gender pact only in the sense that a man's working life is now more like a woman's? Is this equalisation downwards a foretaste of the future which awaits the united Germany? Or – and this brings me to the last question – is the gender relationship going to continue unscathed because, to turn Beck's image for the 1970s and 1980s on its head, the 'elevator effect' has become a nose-dive in the 1990s, dragging all social groups down together?

WHAT HOPE FROM THE SERVICES? THE SHADOWS AND COLOUR SPECTRUM OF THE JOBS FOR WOMEN

I shall confine my attention in what I have to say next to large-scale structures in the private service sector in eastern Germany, where the majority of women are still employed. Basically, we can describe the situation as follows:[18]

1. In the wake of German unification and the accompanying boom of 1990–92, a dynamic evolution of the service sector was predicted and occurred, not least in the new federal states. Commercial and savings banks, insurance companies, wholesalers and retailers profited from

and played a leading role in the 'construction effort'. There was a definite expansion of employment in this field. After this impressive increase during the 'build-up phase', the number of jobs passed the zenith in late 1993/early 1994, and in terms of employment the sector has found itself since then in a 'consolidation' phase. In figures, compared with an ongoing decline in the number employed in the primary sector (from about 900,000 to 200,000) and secondary sector (from about 4 million to 2.3 million), the tertiary sector has witnessed an increase in jobs from 3.6 million to 4 million.

2. Unlike the situation in industry from 1990, the big structures in the private service sector took over entire companies and departments almost completely in many fields, including their staff. There is no uniform pattern as to how the organisational and employment structures of these 'western models' were adopted in the new federal states. Modifications occurred, depending on variegated corporate strategies, and active support from east and west German managers gave rise to some specifically eastern features which can still be discerned.
3. In GDR days, service sector employment was almost exclusively female (90 per cent). Even in 1995/96 it still reflected a relatively high segregation (70 per cent). However, as the internal labour markets are restructured, the women still employed by these companies are increasingly being subjected to a subtle displacement ('the new genderisation'), which is achieved not only through the staff recruitment mechanisms, but also by means of company policy on working hours, mobility requirements and – especially at managerial level – long hours and greater pressure.
4. Our latest study,[19] begun in 1996, already indicates that the federal German labour market crisis has now also taken complete hold of the service sector in the new states. The services, therefore, are not the new hope for employment, at least not at present. Deutsche Bahn, the German rail company, is an example. Privatisation is casting its shadow ahead, so that staff have to cope with constant breaks in continuity, change is the 'norm', and there is nothing secure to rely on. To sum up, the effect of corporate integration is long-term discontinuity.

As work in the service sector is extremely heterogeneous, I shall attempt now to avoid generalisations by skirting along some specific segments where empirical research has been conducted, as it has for the financial services[20] and to some extent for the retail trade.[21] Care services[22] have been subjected to comparatively little gender analysis, although this is still a women's domain in the new federal states. We also have some studies

under way, although not yet completed, with regard to women affected by the corporate transformations in the transport sector, that is, the German railways.[23]

THE RETAIL SECTOR: FEWER FRUITS FOR LABOUR?

The process of corporate transformation affecting the retail trade has been accompanied by gender-specific restructuring in internal labour markets. Although the retail trade could still be classed as a women's sector in 1994, with a workforce which was 64.2 per cent female (and evidently women will retain their majority here), the percentage nonetheless dropped dramatically between 1991 and 1994.[24] Those employees of former east German institutions who lost their jobs – despite the overall increase in employment until 1994 – were primarily (older) women. By contrast, new contracts during the corporate build-up were given more frequently to (young) men from outside the sector than to women. While the personnel was being restructured, only limited value was attached to managerial training and experience gained specifically in the retail trade. In 1988, 62 per cent of these managerial positions in the GDR's retail and supply sector had been held by women. Instead, the existing corporate hierarchies were 'slimmed down', and west Germans, mostly men, were appointed to managerial posts. In this way, an excessive proportion of women lost higher-grade jobs, and in very few cases were they able to acquire middle-management positions after obtaining qualifications which were formally acknowledged.

Gender restructuring in the retail sector in eastern Germany is also reflected in more precarious employment patterns and in monthly income: in 1994 the net monthly income of women employed in the retail sector averaged 1,354 Deutschmarks, compared with 1,893 Deutschmarks for men.

THE FINANCIAL SERVICES: WOMEN ON THE WAY UP?

Because of the gender-specific segregation which had characterised employment in the GDR, east German women in banks and insurance had a healthy chance of continuing in employment during the build-up phase. Not only were they usually not fired, they actually benefited in 1990/91 from a hiring boom for staff with commercial training.

This was followed by a corporate 'training offensive' which enabled most of these women to acquire basic qualifications which met the latest

western standards in the sector. This not only meant an opportunity to stay in work, but created a bridge during that first period for young women to obtain more skills which would grant them access to a supervisory function in middle management or else enable them to specialise in financial products. Today, the percentage of women in third-grade and particularly fourth-grade management (that is, branch managers and team heads) is still higher in the east than in the west in most of the companies studied.

During the consolidation phase – that is, from about 1993/94 onwards – the 51,000 employees, notably women, have gone increasingly on to the defensive. There are several reasons for this: the financial sector has now acquired a greater economic and social significance in eastern Germany, which is reflected in more training applications from men; personnel policy has led to the practice of granting preference to male applicants during the selection procedure, even if their school record is poorer; and streamlining-out all manual activities, especially in the central offices of insurance undertakings and the back office of commercial and savings banks, has primarily hit low-skilled women. The older ones in particular have poor chances of keeping their jobs even by obtaining more qualifications. The financial services seem to be copying a few methods from lean banking, by outsourcing operational functions (such as IT) and shifting previously centralised responsibilities (such as personnel) down to the branches. Lower and middle area/divisional management is being thinned out. As these are the posts where women are well represented, this could turn out to be one of those 'modernisation traps' for women with career ambitions.[25]

The financial service companies reveal the same phenomena which we find right across the tertiary economy: women are disadvantaged by gender-related models of working hours – although there is a general trend for eastern women to cling to full-time jobs – and by the widening wage gap. Nevertheless, it is not yet clear whether, in this particular sector, the restructuring of employment towards jobs for men will continue smoothly as a *linear* process. Since late 1993/early 1994 these internal labour markets have been more or less closed, with a majority of up to 68 per cent consisting of women with newly acquired basic training and also up-to-date specialist and managerial qualifications. In the light of this, it might be assumed, on the one hand, that women will be able to assert their position in the medium term, and even increase their share of management posts. On the other hand, owing to the drastic staffing cutbacks forecast for the sector from the late 1990s, women's current 'home advantage' is more than shaky. It is not yet clear to what extent women will be able to respond to these structural changes steadfastly and actively, especially given intensified requirements of flexible commitment in terms of time and

place, and structures of employment that seek increasingly to make 'holistic', total use of skilled human labour. This development, however, will also encourage demands for the *extra-functional virtues*, such as an ability to work in teams, a responsible attitude and a friendly manner with clients. This, in turn, could open the door to female skills and provide a slight boost for women as their position in the field generally deteriorates.

NEW TRACKS TO 'RESET THE POINTS' IN GENDER RELATIONS? IMPRESSIONS FROM DEUTSCHE BAHN

A team of researchers at the Humboldt University is currently contributing to a project on 'Women in the corporate transformation process in the new federal states: Female options in the financial and transport sectors', which is supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. My own part in this concerns the national railway operator Deutsche Bahn AG (DB AG), a service company with a personnel structure highly dominated by men. The former east German rail operator Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR) employed 32 per cent women, and could thus be classified as a mixed company in terms of gender distribution, whereas its western counterpart at the time, the male dominated Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB), employed only 7 per cent women. The all-German DB AG is a privatised company born from the fusion of these two predecessors on 1 January 1994. Although slightly over 15 per cent of the payroll is female, there are significant differences between the new and old states and also between the company's fields of business. The strong presence of women in the new states is particularly concentrated in the customer-oriented service departments, with their specific profile of qualifications and activities.

Unification of the two German states in 1990 created a new situation on the railways: two nationalised companies, DR and DB, now served a single German (transport) market. The merger triggered major corporate restructuring. It is not surprising, given the state of the east German economy, that DR were first on the operating table.

DR's restructuring began with huge cutbacks in staff. Between 1990 and 1993 the payroll was reduced from 236,121 to 148,161, a decrease of 37.2 per cent. Among those who lost their jobs, women were over-represented. The female proportion of DR's workforce fell from 31.6 per cent to 26.4 per cent.

Dismissals were restricted to specific personal terms under an agreement between the management and employees, so that the reductions were achieved by means of socially cushioned measures such as

compensation, partial retirement, premature retirement, and so forth. We have evidence that women made more use of these provisions than did men to leave the company. At the same time, DB was facing a staff shortage in certain departments (such as train stewards and in the technical sector). DB responded to the situation by freezing all new recruitment. Positions were to be filled from the DR surplus, which means that DR employees had to meet above-average demands on their geographical mobility. In spite of the staff reductions and transfers, DR still had a surplus of personnel, which was 'carried along' for an initial period.

The corporate labour market policy of DB AG, i.e. since the merger on 1 January 1994, is under three-corner pressure from subsidies (which have to be phased out), the development of company personnel to handle the new market orientation of the various business areas, and social cushions for restructuring.

Although the company structures of the two corporate milieus we have been investigating – financial services and transport – are very different, and with them the processes of corporate restructuring, two inter-referential paths of development can nevertheless be observed. The aim of the transformation process in both corporate environments is to reconstitute these companies as *modern service providers* offering a highly specialised, flexible spectrum of services addressed to specific target groups. This is reflected, first, in a philosophy of 'maximum' customer orientation on the outside and the development of the services required on the inside. Second, the specialisations and redefined business areas associated with this catalyse internal processes aimed at a more efficient added value chain. Changes in the activity structure of individual employees and the occupational demands made of them are coupled with, on the one hand, staff reductions (notably in administration due to slimmer hierarchies and IT rationalisation) and, on the other, a (controlled) expansion in employment in customer-related services.

Our provisional findings at Deutsche Bahn AG differ from those derived in our earlier research in the financial sector, if only – to start with – because the fusion of the two railway operators east and west came relatively late. The previous period, in which DR had adjusted to DB structures by massively reducing staff, quite unlike the financial sector, was overlaid by the operator's conversion from a public authority into a private company, with far-reaching political and structural implications for the organisation as a whole. Furthermore, the way in which eastern staff were integrated was quite different. It did not so much entail a broad training offensive, which in the financial services also performed the function of a collective transition phase, as call upon individual members of staff to fullfil a variety of mobility demands (in terms of *place*, by working

elsewhere, sometimes in the west of the country; in terms of *time*, by adapting to new patterns of working hours; and in terms of *content*, by switching to different departments). Individual response was a key factor in staying with the company.

Our studies at Deutsche Bahn AG, like the studies we have already concluded in the financial services, demonstrate that gender is a feature that without any doubt still exercises a crucial 'usherette' function, allocating people places in the increasingly bitter battle over the distribution of labour, and more especially the battle over income and positions (of leadership). At the same time, however, these studies indicate hugely expanding differentiation and hierarchies among women themselves. Transformation and 'market-oriented' company restructuring at Deutsche Bahn AG have brought new requirements of individual life-style, with changes in the nature of work and the way life inside and outside the company is combined. Partcular points include: more compressed tasking, willingness to be mobile and flexible, cooperation and competition, self-employment and servicing, social competence and optimal enhancement of individual resources.

Servicing – often described as a dead end or a bad job – is not a peripheral activity in the company, associated with low wages and prestige, but a central reference for modernisation. Much of this work takes place either around direct customer advice or around inter-company, market-oriented exchange relations. It is ascribed and allocated to women rather than men. This raises opportunities for an enduring source of qualified female employment, but also the risk of new gender demarcations.

At first glance, differentiation among women is a function of motherhood. Provisional analysis suggest that requirements in terms of working hours have become heavier, more flexible and more individualised. The 'normal working week' – especially at Deutsche Bahn, but also in other service companies – is highly differentiated. To keep their job, or improve it, the (female) employees accept limitations on the time they have available for life outside the company, but this flexibility is especially overstretched when they have children of an age requiring care, leading to the 'release' of these women from the workforce. For the most part, the women interviewed – at DB AG most of them work shifts – display a remarkably casual routine in constructing their outside-time requirements around a highly individualized work timetable, rather than the other way round.

This obliges them to synchronise and coordinate on an individual basis, talents which are not evenly spread. We call this skill 'change management'. It applies to a specific ability to coordinate which indicates

the active accomplishment of combining various activities and spheres of life into a coherent and consistent whole, thereby achieving 'synergetic effects'. It is regarded, then, as an 'individual resource'. Whether east German women in general have more of this resource to draw on, as a result of their habitualised experience of combining work inside and outside a company, remains to be seen. However, our findings to date confirm that east German women do still make use of specific know-how in tackling new demands on their time, and these routines provide a resource in coping with the pressure to adapt.

Overall, we also find confirmation of something which other analyses have already illustrated.[26] It is not the fact that women have children that underlies their growing exclusion from gainful employment; quite the reverse: 'children' are used to justify exclusion in retrospect. Exclusion and inclusion are determined primarily by qualifications. Along this axis, (east German) women are being elbowed out of the labour market in a process which has not been addressed or researched at all adequately.

SUBTLE DIFFERENTIATIONS OR SOCIAL POLARISATION

The studies show that the gender label still plays a key role in 'assigning people to their place' as the battle for employment heats up, and especially in the tussle for income and rank. At the same time, these studies indicate new and rapidly increasing differentiations and hierarchies among women in the samples. We realised that there was one group of women – at least in the financial services and above all in the insurance field, where few women are to be found in western Germany – actually have excellent chances of promotion and know how to use them. These are middle-aged women (aged 30 to 40 when unification came) who had already been highly motivated to train, achieve and climb in GDR days, who have managerial experience and had finished raising their families when the changes began, or else whose children were now independent beings. These women showed in the GDR that they could be and were persistent and determined about pursuing their careers. Many of them acquired their formal training, usually a university degree, by means of distance study while working and having children. This means that they had to learn to use their time efficiently under GDR conditions, practising 'change management' techniques and learning how to coordinate a variety of demand complexes. These skills, combined with a 'pressure of circumstance' which evidently ignited tremendous potential in these women, now seem to offer an excellent basis for making the grade under new conditions. These women are now well-anchored in the management of east–west mergers in the new

federal states, having taken additional or continuous training. In these positions they are profiting from the store of knowledge and experience they acquired in east German institutions and from the fact that they speak a 'common language' with the staff inherited from the past, often functioning as buffers and mediators between western managers and eastern employees (and clients).

THE 'PATH DEPENDENCY' OF GENDER RELATIONS

Our research has illustrated the value of treating societal transformation in Germany as a dual, interwoven process. This two-way interplay with its dovetailed dynamics is of particular relevance to gender relations. The bi-focus is as follows:

- On the one hand, those processes which concern the societal transformation and structural change that were set in motion in former west Germany long before unification and which, since the mid-1970s, have been building into a structural crisis which encroaches upon all fields of social life.
- On the other hand, those economic, social and cultural processes which were triggered in eastern Germany from 1990 onwards by incorporating the former GDR into the old Federal Republic. From the outset, this societal restructuring of eastern Germany has been embedded within the structural changes affecting the old Federal Republic and is also deeply moulded by the character of this western model with its unresolved, crisis-ridden constellation of problems.

Economic reconstruction in eastern Germany has not (yet) created a mirror image of west German structures in (gendered) employment relations. Although institutional structures have been largely appropriated, the social relations inlaid within them are not identical. Furthermore, this transformation (in eastern Germany) has not yet reached its conclusion. It would be accurate to say that it is entering a new, protracted, complex second phase. The points of departure are, first, a drastically shrunken industrial base with the risk of 'tertiary crisis' and, second, the contradictory economic, political and socio-cultural 'knock-on effects' of the first phase. This period of development could be condensed into the hypothesis that the first phase presented an image of 'rupture', dealt with at structural level by rigid institutional transfer and at the level of individual response by the mobilisation of familiar resources which people have proved unwilling to give up, even though they may have adjusted to

new requirements. The second phase, by contrast, is characterised by 'enduring discontinuity' in the economic, corporate context and in the personal (occupational) context, linked at the structural level of sector and company with an orientation towards 'new production concepts' and which, at the level of individual action within an interplay of workplace and non-workplace demands, unleashes the 'exploration', 'coordination' and 'fine-tuning' of contradictory and often contrary orientations.

The power and internal dynamics of cultural (habitual and symbolic) influences – and that includes either gender – are inherent in this briefly outlined process of dual transformation. Whereas in the old federal states of Germany the model of the male family breadwinner and the female family carer is institutionally dominant, although undergoing erosion at the level of life scenarios and concrete arrangements, in the new states of eastern Germany we observe an eroding model of combined activity, in which gainful employment for women is the norm, but where domestic labour is unambiguously women's responsibility. Given present income patterns, east German women are expected as individuals to reconcile work inside and outside the home. Gender relations remain very different in concrete practice, both in the private world and in the corporate world. There are, however, also empirical indications that the (re)structuring of gender relations is 'path dependent'. The effect of this is that structural asymmetries in the federal employment system and the division of activity into public and private spheres tend to be 'self-regulating', so that even if east German women cling individually to the combination model and are proving resistant to the mechanisms which exclude them from company labour markets, these asymmetries will tend to be replicated in the new states even against their will.

The process of company change, inlaid within the process of societal transformation, moves along a time axis and, as far as gender relations are concerned, it is still to some degree open; path dependency does not rule out the influence of agents. That is something which (transformation) research by social scientists would need to describe more accurately. We know from studies carried out in core sectors of industry that increasing flexibility in production, being geared to performance criteria, generates new types of segmentation and that these are disadvantageous to women. New patterns of rationalisation in industry clearly indicate trends towards reorganising gender relations, stabilising rather than countering gender hierarchy in the division of labour.[27]

By contrast, studies on new organisational strategies and patterns of labour in certain service segments may well indicate 'that opportunities arise here for redefining the gender division of labour, with some equalisation of career prospects for women and men ... besides, it is

becoming harder to draw a boundary between male and female domains, which has hitherto been the decisive segregation mechanism in implementing integrated strategies'.[28] The unification process – as we know from our own empirical analyses – began, for example, by opening up unprecedented scope for action, especially for western male managers, which was utilised very differently as a function of different corporate philosophies, but rarely in conscious pursuit of equality, the promotion of women and/or a democratisation of company gender relations. If we compare companies, we discover major differences in the specific constitution of company gender relations which negate hypotheses seeking to generalise either a negative or a positive scenario. The concrete structure of opportunity for women can sometimes vary substantially even within the same service segment. The empirical research also makes it very obvious that the (corporate) process of reorganisation has 'time windows' which (can) open to varying degrees and for varying periods of time in the sense of opportunity structures for exerting an active influence. More academic reflection is needed to understand this link between the time axis and the design of employment options for women.

NOTES

1. The main features: creation and expansion of a social security system (secondary distribution), public regulation of income distribution (fiscal policy), creation and social regulation of a network of industrial relations ('tripartism'), and creation of a system of intermediate institutions to defend particular interests and to perform public, non-governmental functions (associations, societies, etc.).
2. An analysis that breaks down federal German women's policy into stages shows, for example, that the concept of 'free choice' (career or family) gained ground between 1966 and the early 1980s, although by the late 1970s discussion about 'new motherhood' was gradually beginning, reminding women more insistently again of their alleged 'nature'. Cf. *Frauen im mittleren Alter, Lebenslagen der Geburtskohorten von 1935 bis 1950 in den alten und neuen Bundesländern*, Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums für Frauen und Jugend, Vol. 13 (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne: Kohlhammer, 1993).
3. N. Fraser, *Widerspenstige Praktiken. Macht, Diskurs, Geschlecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 255.
4. N. Fraser, 'Die Gleichheit der Geschlechter und das Wohlfahrtssystem: Ein postindustrielles Gedankenexperiment', in A. Honneth (ed.), *Pathologien des Sozialen. Die Aufgabe der Sozialphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 360.
5. N. Fraser, 'Die Gleichheit der Geschlechter', p. 351.
6. U. Schröter, 'Ostdeutsche Frauen im Transformationsprozess', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B20 (1995), p. 40.
7. U. Schröter, 'Ostdeutsche Frauen', p. 41.
8. See also 'Aspekte der Arbeitsmarktentwicklung in Ostdeutschland', *DIW Wochenbericht*, No. 23 (1995), pp. 461–9.
9. E. Holst and J. Schupp, 'Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen in Ost- und Westdeutschland', *DIW Wochenbericht*, No. 28 (1996), pp. 461–9.
10. B. Eggen, 'Einkommenslagen und wirtschaftlich schwierige Situationen', *Sozialer Fortschritt*, No. 3 (1997), p. 97.

11. *Informationsdienst soziale Indikatoren*, No. 13 (January 1995), 'Einstellung zur Berufstätigkeit der Frauen', pp. 6-9.
12. Statistisches Bundesamt (ed.), *Datenreport* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997).
13. W. Zapf, 'Der Untergang der DDR Und die soziologische Theorie der Moderne', in Bernd Giesen/Claus Leggewie, *Experiment Vereinigung. Ein soziologischer Großversuch* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 38–51.
14. R. Geissler, *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992).
15. H. Wiesenthal, 'Institutionelle Dynamik und soziale Defensive. Eine vergleichende Betrachtung der Akteurskonstellation im Transformationsprozeß der neuen Bundesländer', *BISS-public 11*, p. 523.
16. U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, 'Individualisierung in modernen Gesellschaften. Perspektiven und Kontroversen einer subjektorientierten Soziologie', in U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Riskante Freiheiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 35.
17. R. Kreckel, *Politische Soziologie der sozialen Ungleichheit* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1992).
18. H. Hüning and H-M. Nickel, 'Grossbetriebliche Dienstleistungen. Rascher Aufbau und harte Konsolidierung', in Lutz, H-M. Nickel, Schmidt, Sorge (eds), *Arbeit, Arbeitsmarkt und Betriebe* (Opladen: Leske Budrich, 1996).
19. H-M. Nickel and H. Hüning *et al.*, 'Frauen im betrieblichen Transformationsprozess am Beispiel Deutsche Bahn', DFG Projekt 1996–98. The project team consists of Hasko Hüning (Free University of Berlin), Michael Frey, Irina Kohlmetz, Iris Peinl, Susanne Völker and two students, Alexandra Manske and Ulrike Stodt, all of whom are at the Humboldt University in Berlin.
20. H-M. Nickel and H. Hüning (eds), *Finanzmetropole Berlin. Strategien betrieblicher Transformation* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1998).
21. H. Hilf and H. Jacobsen, *Einzelhandel in den neuen Bundesländern*, final report by SfS Dortmund 1995; O. Struck-Möbbeck, 'Transformation und Modernisierung im ostdeutschen Einzelhandel', in H. Hüning and H-M. Nickel (eds), *Grossbetrieblicher Dienstleistungssektor in den neuen Bundesländern* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1997).
22. M. Skogvall, 'Das weibliche Handlungsfeld "Pflege"', in H. Hüning and H-M. Nickel (eds), *Grossbetrieblicher Dienstleistungssektor*.
23. Hüning and Nickel, *Finanzmetropole Berlin*.
24. The reference figure for the retail trade in the new federal states in the late 1990s is a workforce of 490,000, 73 per cent of them women. The Federal Statistics Office reports the following development from 1991 to 1994: in 1991 there were about 591,000 jobs in the sector, 71.9 per cent held by women; until 1994, the workforce continued to grow, with 632,000 jobs that year. Yet in percentage terms, the women's share fell to 64.2 per cent (406,000 women and 226,000 men).
25. In the project seminar on 'Women in the corporate transformation process' at the Humboldt University in Berlin, we have taken up the question we asked in 1993 about what happened to the women who used to manage branches of the east German savings bank in East Berlin. To begin with, it looked as though they would be offered promotion paths once they had completed the right training. Now, however, it seems that not one of the 73 women has obtained promotion. In fact, most of them have not even been able to hold their rung on the ladder. See H. Hüning and H-M. Nickel *et al.*, 'Transformation – betriebliche Reorganisation – Geschlechterverhältnisse', special issue of *Zeitschrift für Frauenforschung* (Hannover: Institut Frau und Gesellschaft), Vol. 16, Nos 1 and 2 (1998).
26. Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, *Wirtschaftliche Leistungsfähigkeit, sozialer Zusammenhalt, ökologische Nachhaltigkeit* (Bonn: Dietz, 1998).
27. B. Aulenbacher, 'Technologieentwicklung und Geschlechterverhältnis', in B. Aulenbacher and M. Goldmann (eds), *Transformation im Geschlechterverhältnis* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1995).
28. M. Goldmann, 'Globalisierungsprozesse und die Arbeit von Frauen', in E. Altvater, E. Haug and O. Negt (eds), *Turbo-Kapitalismus* (Hamburg: VSA, 1997), p. 157.