Women in the Two Germanys

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Many women scholars in all fields of the social sciences in recent years have used a feminist perspective for analyzing the relation between social and political institutions and the different historically shaped roles of women and men in production and reproduction. Although asymmetry prevails in nearly all societies, an increasing number of studies show evidence of variation in gender roles developing out of different structural and cultural bases. It is this variation that we are trying to explore here in order to gain a greater understanding of the crucial factors involved.

The division of the two Germanys at the end of the Second World War into a socialist and capitalist political economy provides fascinating material for the impact of diverse political systems, embedded historically in the same cultural tradition, on the development of gender equality. We will look at the impact of economic developments in the two societies, at the influence of juridical activity and the role of the state, and at the part played by women’s organizations and movements. It is difficult to predict with any precision the outcomes of the changes that are taking place at present in both societies. On the one hand, these changes are steeped in cultures that are laden with historical traditions, values, and systems of belief with respect to gender differences. On the other hand, changes did occur, and they occurred within economic and political contexts that have gone in different directions since the formation of the two states. The two states played sharply contrasting roles throughout the last forty years with respect to gender issues. And it is in relation to state policies and developments in the realm of policies that we must examine the role of women themselves — the emergence of an independent women’s voice, its timing, and the social and political shape it took.
In both societies it is clear, first, that women are not simply passive recipients of institutional policies but respond in ways that influence further developments. Secondly, women are influenced by discussions and practices outside their own society. The increasing contacts among women political leaders and intellectuals from all over the world slowly result in a degree of “internationalization” of perceptions and self-understandings among those who articulate the primary issues of women. And thirdly, though opinions vary concerning the adequacy of the changes taking place (with respect to political/occupational participation and modifications of traditional gender arrangements in other areas) most social scientists studying these issues agree that crucial structural changes are necessary for preparing the ground for gender equality even if they do not automatically lead to role changes in more intimate spheres.

Our paper will begin with a brief overview of the period following the Second World War in East and West Germany, and then turn to the role of the state in defining the status of women. We will examine the integration of women in educational, work, and political institutions and analyze the transformation — and continuities — in family life. After enumerating the main differences, we will discuss some of the most recent developments taking place in the two countries.

*Common Historical Origins and Different Paths*

Although Nazi policy and ideology reenforced patriarchal views of gender, German women during the war could not simply stay home and produce children for the state while their husbands were in the army. They took over work in agriculture and elsewhere though most had little professional or vocational training. In 1950 there were approximately three women for every two men in the age range twenty-five to forty.\(^2\) The country was in ruins. In an effort in the East to attract as many women as possible into the labor force, the Soviet military administration (SMAD) immediately set up policies in East Germany insuring equal pay for equal work. These policies found ideological support in the traditions of early socialist thinking which included the analyses of such women as Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, now interpreted by those who had been politically active during the Weimar Republic. Insisting on women’s full participation in the labor force became state policy in the GDR and was followed by a restructuring of educational and work institutions to encourage the incorporation of women into public life. At the same time, the state set up an official women’s organization, the DFD, the Democratic Women’s Federation whose official goals included the transmission of government policies and socialist ideology to its members, the encouragement of non-working women into the workforce, and the education of women in the “practical” skills of needlework, cooking, etc.
While women entered the educational system and the work force in huge numbers, the promised social services — and partial state responsibility for the socialization of children — remained underdeveloped in the fifties, and women were forced to set them up themselves in the factories where they worked. The difficulty of life at the time, the lack of necessary goods of all sorts, and the terrible condition of housing resulted in great dissatisfaction. It was only in the 1960s that the present child care system, reputedly the best in Eastern Europe, was systematically introduced throughout the country.

At this time, too, many people, including women, experienced great upward mobility. The need to develop the country and the loss of experienced and trained people to the west opened unprecedented opportunities for capable people. In addition to the regular schooling during the day, an extensive adult educational system was developed to train people for more and increased responsibilities while on the job. (This system still exists though it has been reduced, in part because a considerable number of people presently work below their level of qualification.) Included in this program of continuing education were classes developed in the 1960s geared to women with several children or to women who were responsible for the care of an ill or elderly person.

West Germany took a very different course, The three “western” occupation zones — the American, the British, and the French — formed in 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany. The issue of women’s rights came to a head in the discussions of the constitutional convention, the “Parliamentary Council.” After long fights in the Council and in the public, the Basic Law of 1949 had finally stated: Men and women are equal. As a consequence, all laws which discriminated against women had to be suspended. That happened in 1953. But it was not altogether clear what precisely had occurred.

There was an inherent tension between the principle of gender equality and the principle of freedom of contract which was guaranteed by the Basic Law to both employers and workers. There was also the question of how much the state should interfere in society — which after the excesses of the Nazi period was a particularly sensitive issue. The relationship of men and women as well as the question of women’s place in society was perceived as being beyond the state’s control. It was widely agreed that the state should set up general norms, but should intervene as little as possible not only in the citizen’s private sphere, but also in the freedom of social contract. How then could the principle of the Basic Law that men and women are equal be implemented in social reality?

The long standing fundamental difference between the middle class women’s movement’s notion of separate spheres of men and women which were nonetheless equal in value, and the socialist women’s movement’s notion of equality in all realms of society, especially in the labor force and in politics — which could only be put into effect by forceful political and economical regulation — was decided in West Germany in favor of the former position. It
took until 1957 for family law to be amended by the Act on Equal Rights for Men and Women (*Gleichberechtigungsgesetz*). Male preponderance in many issues concerning marriage was abolished. Women had the right on principle to take up paid work. (Previously they had had to ask for their husbands permission.) The husband’s right of disposal over the wife’s property (legacy of the civil law of 1900) was abolished. This, surely, sounds like a successful implementation of the principle of gender equality.

But articles 1356 and 1360 of the civil law remained in force. These stated that women’s contribution to the support of their families consisted mainly in doing the housework, and that they were only allowed to go out to work if this decision did not interfere with their duties as mothers and wives. The Act on Equal Rights for Men and Women consequently legalized the “housewife-marriage.” In 1954 the U.S. High Commission commented on some tendencies in West German politics which crystallized around the Minister of Family Affairs, Josef Würmeling. The strong influence of Roman Catholicism on politics was observed with some disquiet. It was only in 1977 that a new family law under the social democratic/liberal coalition legalized the partnership marriage.

Although the equal rights clause of the Basic Law was an important accomplishment — an accomplishment women in the United States are still striving for in West Germany it did not and still does not match social reality, even with the numerous improvements in recent years, and the increased awareness of inequality between the genders. Traditional gender roles and the male/female division of labor were quickly restored in postwar West Germany, and the example of “forced emancipation” in East Germany deterred further steps toward more equality in the crucial years of the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was argued that policies in the 1940s and 1950s which “ostensibly protected the family were in fact policies that defined the social and political status of women” in society. The return to a supposed “normalcy” was encouraged by politicians and the churches, and these along with yearnings for peace and economic security discouraged major protests from women who with very few exceptions accepted their roles as housewives and at best supplementary wage earners.

There were vigorous campaigns against “double-wage-earners” in the 1950s and the 1960s. The unions fought at the time for a wage which was designed to be a male “Leistungslohn”. That is, it was supposed to be sufficient for a male breadwinner to support a dependent wife and an average of two children. It was not at all unusual for a women to be dismissed as soon as she got married. Such dismissals happened not only in factories but were also common practice in the civil service.

However, many women had to live their lives without a male breadwinner. Single women were marginalized and did not attract much
attention from law makers; and the producers of family ideologies clung to the notion of the “whole” family and perceived single parent families as deficient. Many women — especially those who were married — all too willingly followed the false prophets of the idyllic family. Children who had mothers working outside the home were the nation’s target of pity and labeled as “Schlüsselkinder” (key children).

Although women’s work was discouraged, and women were discriminated against, undervalued (unequal pay, and later so-called “light” wages), regulated with questionable measures, and although the return to domesticity was officially praised by churches and politicians, the overall share of women in the labor force was rising constantly.

Not only economic need but also the rising expectations during the “economic miracle” in the 1950s and 1960s urged many women to continue to go to work after they married and also after they had had children. The notion of female work only being supplementary to the family income enabled a constant expansion of female work outside the house (especially among married women), without endangering the stability of traditional role models. And that is what happened.

Developments in the German Democratic Republic resulted in similar transformations but they did so earlier and more thoroughly. By 1970, over a third of all students in higher education in the GDR were women and 80% of all eligible women were studying or in the labor force. Though only 22% of women sixty years or older had skilled worker’s training or post-secondary education at the time, approximately 80% of the women under thirty had already achieved such an education.

Despite the effective integration of East German women into the educational system and the labor force, and despite the development of childcare facilities and other important social supports (such as generous pregnancy and post-natal leaves) a number of problems became apparent in the 1970s. It had been expected that the absorption of women into the labor force would not prevent them from having children and devoting their energies to creating a warm family environment (with the help and participation of their husbands, at least in the ideological public discussion of this issue). Furthermore, in the efforts by women’s commissions to improve the position of women in the enterprises and in other institutions, it was assumed that women would be ready to take on even more responsibility, to continue to improve their qualifications, to go on for even more advanced degrees, etc. Instead the regime found itself confronted by one of the lowest birth rates in Eastern Europe (so that the number of children born fell below the replacement level). In addition, women were increasingly reluctant to pursue advanced training. Rather, many requested part-time work in order to meet their family demands. Their difficulties stemmed from the continuing hardships of everyday life, the lack of...
— or long waits for consumer — goods, the continuing frustration with housing, and the remaining contradictions between the public ideology of sharing housing tasks and the reality of everyday life.17

It was at the Eighth Party Congress in 1971 that the program for solving the housing problem by 1990 was set into motion.18 A number of improved social supports were also introduced. These included increased financial help for each child, lengthening the period of time allowed away from the job with the birth of a child, reducing the hours of work and increasing vacations for women doing shift work. Improvements in supports continued to be introduced in the GDR so that at present women have a year's leave with pay and a guarantee of returning to the same job with the birth of each child (recently an option for men as well, though rarely used)19 and a year and a half with the third child, a work week of forty hours (rather than 42 3/4) with children under sixteen as well as paid days if a child is ill and a parent has to remain at home.

Presently, half of the students in vocational training and in the university in the GDR are women. Over 70% of all women have completed an apprenticeship or more advanced vocational training. Women now forty years or younger have achieved the same educational standards as men. Over 90% of women eligible to work are either studying or in the workforce, a third part-time (typically working six rather than eight hours a day).

Over three quarters of the children under three are in Krippen and over 92% of the children between three and six are in the Kindergarten.20 At the same time as these policy changes and social supports improved many aspects of life for GDR citizens, a number of serious problems remained. The lack of, or long wait for, consumer goods, the long work-day with additional chores at home, and the difficulty of balancing the demands of family and work continue to plague GDR women and men. At the same time, there are growing tensions revolving around the division of labor in the household.

Continuities and Contradictions

During the 1970s, there were important changes in both societies with respect to women. In West Germany, the beginnings of the women's movement became apparent. Its development was influenced by a number of factors — social democratic policies of the past decade, the student movement, and even an awareness of educational and other developments in East Germany. The international discussion taking place in the United States and Western Europe also played a major role.21

In West Germany within the last fifteen years we have again experienced some acceleration of women's work. The percentage of women at work then rose from 41.4% to 43.3%, which is an increase of 2%. The change is greater
if we look at age cohorts and at the marital status of women. Most spectacular of all is the increase of married women in the age range 25-45 years.22

Women today still are the ones who will most likely interrupt their work outside the home, if small children have to be taken care of, but the time-span in which women stay at home while observing family duties — especially taking care of small children decreased from fifteen to eight years on the average between the early 1950s and today. One or more career breaks in her working life is still a common experience of women in West Germany.23

The second major change that took place is the shift of sectors in which women were employed. Between 1950 and 1985 the percentage of women working in agriculture declined from 34% to 7%, and the percentage in the service sector (industry and professions) rose from 12% to 32%. The percentage in the manufacturing industry remained stable at 25%.24 The labor market continues to be sex-segregated, and according to recent studies no indications of change can be observed.25 Women are concentrated in the lower positions of society and in special so-called women’s jobs and consequently they earn less than men. There are only few women who make it to the top. The social system is strong enough to keep women in “their place,” and flexible enough to allow a few of them to rise to top positions.26 In times of economic recession, when women compete directly with men, women are still the ones who are worse off: They are more often hit by unemployment that are men.27 Male labor still is more easily marketable, although the economy cannot exist without the female labor force any more; neither can the civil service or the service sector in general. This points to the crucial question of the historical origin of the structural problem of the gender division of labor in industrialized societies and to the contradictions which it puts on women’s lives especially.28

Women continue to carry a double burden, but the “solution” of earlier times: dropping out of the labor force as soon as a family is founded, is no longer the only alternative for women in West Germany. In times of rising divorce rates29 the housewife-marriage no longer provides women with economic security, and that certainly has always been true for working class women, but it expands to middle class women as well. For the first time women face the difficult situation that marriage is no longer a secure prospect of life, and at the same time the job market is tightening. Women currently face a situation in which they are no longer protected by traditional marriage, yet not being able to lead an independent life. This situation may in the short run even lead to a strengthening of traditional female role models, though, we believe, not in the long run. In the present we experience an enormous variety of life-styles which coexist.30

East German women also continue to experience a number of difficulties meeting the demands of their occupations and combining work with their personal lives. Even with the entry of women into some traditionally “male”
occupations such as medicine and engineering and other technical fields, they remain segregated to a considerable degree in traditionally female occupations and within their professions they rarely are found in the highest leadership positions. Although they represent a third of the managerial personnel overall, the higher the positions, the lower the percentage of women. This is true at the workplace, in the union, as well as in the party and government.\textsuperscript{31} The reasons for these are complex; but they include an unequal sharing of household chores, discrimination by male colleagues, and a assessment by women themselves of the worth of taking on even more responsibility.

The Democratic Women's Federation is not systematically addressing these issues. It voices official policy rather than the articulated wishes and needs of women — independently of the state. Members do get involved in a number of important educational and social activities, fighting for a needed playground or increased transportation, helping the elderly, etc., but they do not at all represent a challenge to official state policy. One social scientist observed, for example, that clerical workers, most of whom are women, earn approximately 500 marks a month (or 250 dollars at official exchange rates). However, even though their salaries are so low, incomes are centrally determined. The women have had no organizational backing for any collective demands either from the German Women's Federation or the union, even if there is privately voiced frustration.

\textit{The 1980s in the Two Germanys}

There are two important developments in the GDR that are worthy of special attention. These involve the changing self-conceptions of women and the changing forms of family living.\textsuperscript{32} There is little question that even if women marry with traditional role expectations, the higher their qualifications and the longer their work involvement, the greater is the commitment to work.\textsuperscript{33}

Women, however, of all classes identify themselves less often than in earlier years as simply wives, and most would not consider staying at home even if they opt for more part-time work and even if they remain home when the children are young,\textsuperscript{34} take work below their qualifications to be near the apartment (again, this varies with training) and even if they typically move in response to the needs of their husbands. State policy, then, with respect to women has been a crucial factor affecting their self-conceptions and ultimately their changing relations to the people with whom they live.

The high divorce rates — approximately a third of all marriages end in divorce — relate to the changing self-conceptions of women both in the west and in the east. In the west, a strong minority of women have changed through participation in the women's movement and the articulation of some of their
basic demands by political parties. In East Germany, one important motive for divorce has been the lack of participation of men in household chores, although the younger and more educated the men, the greater their activity in the household and their involvement with children. Both societies have had an increase in the number of couples living together without marriage and an increase in divorced people who would rather not remarry. While, at least in the GDR, most couples who live together eventually marry, and most divorced people hope to marry again these variations of the traditional form reflect a new consciousness and strength on the part of women, as well as the economic possibility of making such a decision. Women living alone with children (approximately a third of newborn children in the GDR are born to single mothers) retain their jobs, and have special access to housing and childcare supports though these important supports certainly do not address all their needs. Loneliness and a reduced standard of living plague the single parent.

In West Germany many political activities have been initialized to improve the situation of women. The Green Party with its clear commitment to gender equality has stimulated political action in the other parties as well. The SPD has just approved a 40% quota regulation for each gender for all political offices. At the end of 1988 the SPD introduced into parliament a draft law which would ban discrimination against women in all sectors of society. The intention to secure a greater degree of gender equality has recently manifested itself even in the CDU (with its mixed records regarding these issues). The CDU dedicated its party congress of 1985 to a “New Partnership between Men and Women.” The women’s movement since the late 1960s certainly has induced many changes, but parts of the movement also remain skeptical of the ability of the political system to transform gender politics. The ambivalence of social movements with respect to political integration also obtains to the women’s movement in West Germany. As in other countries conservative reactions tend to crystallize around the question of abortion.

In the 1980s an independent women’s voice is emerging in the GDR. Women are involved in independent peace groups and they are becoming increasingly active and vocal in professional associations. Literature of such GDR writers as Christa Wolf and Irmtraud Morgner continues to focus openly and sensitively on the roles of men and women in their personal lives and in their relation to social institutions. Importantly, women intellectuals have articulated a number of the salient problems of GDR women. In their analyses, they have been influenced by criteria used in the women’s movement in the west as well as by their own experiences over the years. Although not all of their articles have been published, a few can be read in “Sonntag” and other widely read papers and journals. Their increasing access to GDR women creates a wider consciousness of such issues as the implications of the socialization process for the continuing patterns of relations between the genders and the role of the
school in channeling girls in their classes and after-school hours into traditional activities. According to Hildegard Nickel, a GDR sociologist, the interest of girls in technical occupations has been declining since 1976, and they represent less than a third of those in technically skilled labor in industry.42 One serious result is that many women do uninteresting technical work, while the more complicated and interesting demands of the new computer technology are being met by their male colleagues.

The limited access of women to high level positions in the GDR is a thorny issue. It cannot be reduced to household demands and male discrimination, even if these are among the primary causes. To some extent, an assessment is being made about the value of taking on these high level positions. If it is true that many of the leaders and managers at the higher levels of GDR society have limited movement for independent decision making and, in the end, have to reflect in their work and interpretations decisions with which they do not agree, or fulfill tasks which are very difficult to achieve, there should be some reluctance to take on the responsibilities of these positions. It seems that many men have this reluctance as well. Women may use the excuses of traditional responsibility but for some, their refusal may only be phrased in these terms in order to have the acquiescence of their male colleagues.

Clear examples of the reluctance to get involved when one has only limited power to affect decision making can be seen in the difficulties associations in the residential areas have attracting active members.43 It may be that an increasing representation of women will occur within institutions which are democratizing. One interesting example is the great increase in the number of women elected to the district leadership of the Union of Artists.44 A third of the new people elected (half of all those in new leadership positions) were women. Although the long-run implications of the national congress are still being debated, the elections at the local levels reflected frustration with a number of issues, and demands for greater democratization were heard at several levels of the organization.

In the GDR, the state from its beginning was supportive of integrating women into public life, and it took on the role of formulating policies on women's issue. Women received a number of important social supports, become educated, and entered the labor force. At the same time, the "ownership" of that issue by the party — or its integration into party policy makes it more difficult to challenge without becoming implicated in an advocacy for more general reform. State socialist societies are not alone in this dilemma. At a recent conference at Harvard's Center for European Studies, Swedish politicians and intellectuals spoke of the delicate rope they have to walk in order to retain the strong consensus on the equal participation of men and women at all levels of Swedish society and at the same time remain advocates for addressing all the issues that are not being dealt with in such a "consensual" governing structure.45
Concluding Remarks

There are those who question whether it is possible for women to succeed in achieving gender equality in a society where the inferior status of women not only has a long tradition but is embedded in the social framework itself. Whether complete gender equality will ever be achieved in the East or in the West remains an open question.

Both German societies advanced toward gender equality. And in both societies, there remain important inequalities. Yet what happened east and west of the Elbe river was quite different in character. Different causal factors predominated, and the outcomes, too characteristically differ. In the Federal Republic, the changes were driven primarily by social forces, above all the women’s movement. In the GDR, state and party action was the main driving force. We do not want to exaggerate the differences between the two societies, neither do we want to play them down. State intervention plays a much larger role in West Germany than anybody acquainted with only the United States would assume.

But the differences are real. And they have tangible consequences. The status and the prospects of women in the GDR suffer from the fact that there is no strong autonomous women’s movement which could articulate with some precision the actual problems of women and at the same time energize women (and men) into action on their own. At the same time it is clear from our comparison that change brought about by autonomous social forces tends to reflect the power inequalities in the society. The women’s movement in the West fights for all women on some issues but may emphasize more particularistic gains of special benefit to middle and upper-middle class women.

There are a number of potential sources of change in both societies, but whether these develop in the coming years remains uncertain. The recent changes in some of the West German political parties seem to us an important and exciting development, promising further advances despite the later start of the advocacy in gender equality in the Federal Republic. At the same time, there are some conservative forces active in West German political life that stand against advances in women’s rights and gender equality.

In the GDR, it seems that further advances toward gender equality at home, at work, and in political life could come about with a greater participation of women in the higher levels of organizational life and with the attendant greater power to advocate positions and policies that are not governed by male perceptions, norms, and assessments. For reasons that should be clear by now, such changes appear unlikely without more general increases in participation and a greater democratization in GDR society. This process seems to be beginning now with efforts at deep democratic reform, though it is still too early to predict the outcome with any certainty.
Yet the causal relationships between democratization and developments toward gender equality work both ways. Real equality takes many transformations, not all of which are political in a narrow understanding of the term. Many of them, however, are and will be political. That means that the forces pushing for gender equality — forces that in the long run are strong indeed — will also support real democratization, for broader based active participation in political and social life.


2The demographic consequences of the Second World War are described in Adelheid zu Castell, “Die demographischen Konsequenzen des Ersten und Zweiten Weltkriegs für das Deutsche Reich, die Deutsche Demokratische Republik und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” in Waclaw Dlugoborski, ed., Zweiter Weltkrieg und sozialer Wandel (Göttingen 1981), 117-37, esp. 121. In the age range of the 25 to 40 years olds the ratio was 1403 women compared to 1000 men, p. 131.


4Civil Law, § 1354.

5§ 1356: “The woman is in charge of the household. She is entitled to take on paid employment, as far as this can be combined with her duties in marriage and family.” §1360 a: “Should the husband be unable to make an adequate living, the wife is obliged to seek paid employment in addition to her regular housework duties.”

6C. The Würmeling Ministry. It is difficult to assess accurately what role the Chancellor plays in the current increase of clerical influence in German political life. This development is typified by the activities and objectives of the Minister of Family Affairs, Würmeling. The continuation in office for over five years of a predominantly Catholic party has naturally begun to have some effect upon the character of the government. The clearest expression of that influence is this newly created Ministry which exercises certain functions in the supervision of morals. . . . Numerous Germans, particularly among anti-clerical circles, look with foreboding at such developments and warn that a government so strongly Catholic in orientation is, under clerical influence, taking on with disquieting speed the characteristics of the Salazar government in Portugal. They prophes that Western Germany will shortly be an authoritarian regime strongly under church influence strictly controlling the morals, if not the faith, of the population. Such forecasts seem exaggerated when one considers the strength of protestantism, anti-clericalism and materialism in Germany.” From, “Some Observations of West German Political Developments. U.S.HICOG, Bonn to the Department of State, Washington, Despatch No 82, July 12, 1954.” Printed in Hans-Jürgen Schröder, Die Anfangsjahre der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine amerikanische Bilanz, Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 37. Jg. (1989), 329.
More awareness of inequality certainly does not automatically lead to improvements in the concrete situation of women. According to Ulrich Beck the situation in West Germany can at present be characterized by a changed consciousness that goes parallel to a stability in the real situation (which has not improved) of women especially on the labor market and in social security. Ulrich Beck, “Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne” (Frankfurt 1986), 162.


Moeller, “Reconstructing the Family,” 144.

Kolinsky, 47; Vogel, 70.

In 1952 working mothers (married as well as unmarried) were protected by law (the Maternity Protection Act). Robert Moeller has pointed out the ambivalence of this law which on the one hand protected working mothers, guaranteed them paid time before and after childbirth, but on the other hand enabled employers to regulate women and make pregnancy an issue in working contracts. Factory inspectors who had to enforce the law had reason to believe that some employers tried not to hire women in childbearing age because of the costs and the restrictions the law posed upon them. The Maternity Protection Act was designed to regulate a situation which was considered a deplorable exemption rather than a rule. The law makers had in mind women who were forced to work outside the home because of material scarcity. There was hardly anybody to be found who at the time perceived this to be a question of free choice. See Robert G. Moeller, “Protecting Mother’s Work: From Production to Reproduction in Postwar West Germany,” Journal of Social History, vol. 22, no. 3 (1989): 413-37.

In 1950 it was 26.4%, according to Ute Frevert, “Frauen-Geschichte,” (Frankfurt 1986): 256 In 1970 it was 30.0% and 1985 it was 35.9% according to Statistisches Bundesamt, ed., “Frauen in Familie, Beruf und Gesellschaft” (Stuttgart 1987), 63.

Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1984 (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik), 303.


The poor condition of housing was the problem and not the costs of housing for individuals and families. Housing is subsidized and represents only about 4% of the household income.

Feminists are still debating the advantages of a baby year in which it is expected that women will drop out from work. On the one hand, it is a period of time that many women look forward to. On the other hand, projects at work may continue with women falling behind in their contribution. Managers, academic heads, etc. sometimes hesitate to hire
women when it is clear that they will most likely drop out for a period of time, and on
more than one occasion, women encountered anger after they announced they were
pregnant. These negative reactions are discussed in the GDR. For a description of the
joys and problems of those rare fathers who take the baby year off, see Gislinde Schwer,
20Jutta Gysi and Wulfram Speigner, “Changes in the life patterns of families in the
German Democratic Republic,” in *Academy of Sciences of the GDR, Institute of Sociology
155 (Jan/Febr. 1986): 50-74. West German women voiced complaints about their roles
in the family and at work.
22Between 1970 and 1985 the overall share of married women rose from 35.4 to 42.5%.
In the same time span the share of the age cohort from 25 to 45 year old married women
increased from 41.5% to 56.6%; from Statistisches Bundesamt, “Frauen,” 63.
23Kolinsky, 153 ff.
24According to Kolinsky, 160. See also Statistisches Bundesamt, “Frauen,” 65.
25Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, “Bestands- und Entwicklungsdaten zur
Struktur des Arbeitsmarktes unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Frauenarbeitsplätzen” (Dokumentation des Bundesministers für Jugend, Familie, Frauen
und Gesundheit, April 1989); Angelika Willms, “Segregation auf Dauer? Zur Entwicklung
1983), 107-81; Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Der geschlechtsspezifische Arbeitsmarkt*, 2d
ed. (Frankfurt 1981).
26Frevert, 296 (German edition).
28This is discussed at greater length in: Hanna Schissler, “Natur oder soziales Konstrukt?
Zum Verhältnis der Geschlechter zwischen bürgerlichen Emanzipationsbewegungen
und industrieller Gesellschaft,” in Marieluise Christadler, ed., *Frauen in der
29Statistisches Bundesamt. 21-23. Since 1960 the divorce rate in West Germany has
30Beck, 195-98.
32For a more detailed analysis of these see Marilyn Rueschemeyer, “New Family Forms
in a State Socialist Society: The German Democratic Republic,” *Journal of Family Issues*,
33These results, found in interviews by Marilyn Rueschemeyer with professionals, are
confirmed in the research of GDR social scientists working on women in the labor force.
Irene Dölling also discusses these changing self conceptions: “Social and Political
Changes in the Lives of Women,” in *Studies of GDR Culture and Society*, vol. 6 (1986).
34The small family remains preferred in the GDR: For every 100 couples with children
under 17, 55% have one child, 37.6% two children, 5.9% three children, and 1.5% four
children or more. In Jutta Gysi, “Familienformen in der DDR,” *Jahrbuch für Soziologie


Marilyn Rueschemeyer, “Participation and Control in a State Socialist Society” (Harvard University, Center for European Studies Working Paper Series no. 17), 37-40.


Bundestagsdrucksache, 11/3728 (Bonn 1988).

The famous law case in Bavaria, in which women had to testify in a most humiliating way against their doctor who had performed abortions on them has been labeled by some newspapers a “modern witch hunt.”

To name only two of a number of important women writers in the GDR.

Hildegard Nickel, “Sex-Role Socialization in Relationships or a Function of the Division of Labor,” in Marilyn Rueschemeyer and Christianne Lemke, eds., The Quality of Life in the German Democratic Republic: Changes are Developments in a State Socialist Society (New York), 55.

Rueschemeyer, “Participation and Control in a State Socialist Society.”

Rueschemeyer, “Artistic and Political Developments in the German Democratic Republic” (forthcoming).

See, for example, Maud Landby Edwards, “Gender Politics and Public Politics in Sweden” (Conference on Women and Power: The Swedish Experience in Comparative Perspective, Harvard University, Center for European Studies, October 1988).