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Party Politics, Citizen Activism and the Media: Negotiating Gender Roles in the GDR and FRG, 1968-1989

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Party Politics, Citizen Activism and the Media:
Negotiating Gender Roles in the GDR and FRG, 1968-1989

by

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Abstract

This thesis project began as a case study assessment of two women's magazines: from East Germany, *Für Dich*, and from West Germany, *Emma*. Archival research undertaken to support this examination indicated the significance of a range of political actors in establishing and reinforcing new gender role expectations, specifically for German women, in the 1970s and 80s. I demonstrate that it was not only or primarily the media or grassroots political movements that drove social change, as some historical analyses suggest, but that various strata of government were also significantly engaged in the process. This thesis addresses: political ideologies driving changes in East and West Germany, bi-lateral relations between women's organizations from both states, the ratification by East and West German governments of the Charter for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and finally a case study examination of the two previously mentioned women's magazines.

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Introduction

The Cold War era was an especially fluid period of political change for women in both East and West Germany. In the wake of leftist student protests of the late 1960s, western women organized to challenge a perceived system of patriarchal oppression. In the 1970s and 80s, women in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), much like women in other western nations, meaningfully changed and challenged regional political and cultural norms. East of the Iron Curtain, women's politics also changed from the early 1970s onwards, though in the case of East Germany, this turn was directed from the dictatorial leadership of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). I intend to demonstrate that both East and West German citizens and governments engaged in a negotiation of legal rights and social values. My examination considers how women's politics were negotiated, enforced and reinforced at a variety of political levels ranging from independent, grassroots organizations to regional governing authorities and international committees. East and West Germany were closely situated in terms of geography, language and shared history; thus, a comparison assessing the creation and repetition of norms fostered by opposing governments can provide interesting insight into the ways that citizens' fundamental values were shaped. I aim to demonstrate the variety of political spheres wherein new gender roles were debated and constructed in East and West Germany between 1968 and 1989. This timeline starts with the political upheavals that crystallized in 1968, east and west of the Iron Curtain, as left-leaning political activists challenged the status quo of their governing regimes. It concludes with the collapse of the East German socialist regime and the subsequent reunification of East and West Germany. Following the watershed year

1968, which I outline in greater detail below, women's groups emerged in the Federal Republic of Germany challenging the gendered norms of the community by various means. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) a new direction was also taken in negotiating women's politics. I argue that changes in community attitudes and social norms were actively shaped and contested in the 1970s and 80s in an on-going negotiation between state actors, such as elected and non-elected government representatives, and politically engaged citizens. In both East and West Germany, a conscious process of gender role negotiation was undertaken with the aim to change policy and manipulate the media made for women's consumption in order to create and reiterate new gender norms and policies. The following chapters will each highlight a different level of government or sphere of negotiation in the process of creating and contesting East and West German women's politics.

Governments and women's groups engaged in role negotiation concerning women's place in the labour force, their role as mothers and as political actors. Taken together, this role negotiation formed the basis for fundamental social changes over two decades. Academics from the disciplines of literature and history have developed a significant body of research concerning the issue of gender role and feminist political negotiation from the literature of West, and more importantly, East Germany. This topic was of particular interest in the immediate post-reunification years of the early 1990s.¹ Literary studies will

¹ See, for example, John Griffith Urang, *Legal tender: love and legitimacy in the East German cultural imagination*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), and Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011). From the immediate post re-unification years see, for example, Georgina Paul, "'Über verschwiegenes sprechen': Female Homosexuality in the Public Sphere in the GDR before and after the *Wende*," in *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*, eds. Elizabeth Boa et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), and also, Eva Kaufmann, "Adieu Cassandra? Schriftstellerinnen vor, in und nach der *Wende*," in *Women and the Wende*.

not, however, be the main focus of this thesis, as I aim to demonstrate that the issue of gender role negotiation occurred at various levels of government including: local, national and international strata. This introduction will first provide an historical foundation to the different origins of women's politics in East and West Germany. I will then situate my research in the historiography of this field and outline the different spheres of negotiation of gender politics that I examine in the subsequent four chapters. Turning now to the post-war era, I will provide background about the political division of Germany, which had a significant impact on the manner in which governments in the FRG and GDR conceived of and treated political policy concerning female citizens.

Following the end of the Second World War, the victorious Allied forces created two Germanies. In the West, the United States, Britain and France guided the formation of the capitalist FRG, and in the East, the USSR oversaw the founding of the socialist GDR. From the formation of both East and West Germany, the different regimes undertook fundamentally different steps towards repairing the war-ravaged countries. In the East, the SED gained unilateral control of the GDR with the support of Soviet forces and claimed to represent the best interests of the working class. Recognizing the need to rebuild in the wake of the destruction of WWII, the Party introduced the tenets of Marxist-Leninism into the legal code and governing systems of East Germany. Among other things, this meant the codification of equal pay for equal work decreed in 1946, which was intended to incorporate women into the workplace on a permanent basis in order to help rebuild the shattered post-war economy.² In the absence of a significant proportion of German men, who had either died in the war or remained in prisoner of war camps in the Soviet Union,

² Brigitte Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland: German Unification and the Marginalization of Women*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 63.

sometimes for years after the war had ended,³ women filled a necessary void in the labour pool. By 1960, 65.2 percent of East German women were engaged in the paid labour force,⁴ compared to 40.9 percent in 1949.⁵ While the SED's goal was primarily economic, it aligned with the Marxist-Leninist ideal that women would be emancipated through wage labour.⁶ The Democratic Women's Federation (DFD) was formed in 1947, while the future GDR was still under the direction of the Soviet Military Administration, in order to oversee the socialist education of women in the GDR and to operate as an intermediary organ between East German women and the SED. The organization grew steadily over the 40 years of SED rule, so that by the end of the 1980s, the DFD represented a membership of 1.5 million East German women.⁷ Through the 1950s and 60s, the DFD operated as a branch of the SED to help facilitate legal reforms and improve women's lived experience under state socialism by providing an ever-increasing package of social benefits.

By systematically increasing the benefits granted to working mothers in the GDR, the SED actively created a social system that was at once meant to incorporate women into production, but which did not fundamentally seek to challenge women's roles as mothers and homemakers. In 1950, the SED introduced the Law for the Protection of Mother and Child and the Rights of the Woman.⁸ In 1972, a series of new laws were introduced: the

³ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women the Family and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2007), 46.

⁴ Ute Frevert, "Umbruch des Geschlechterverhältnisse? Die 60er Jahre als geschlechterpolitischer Experimentierraum," in *Dynamische Zeiten: die 60er Jahre in den beiden Deutschen Gesellschaften*, eds. Axel Schildt et al. (Hans Christian Verlag: Hamburg, 2000), 648.

⁵ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 91.

⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁷ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld (Hereafter - BAB) DY 31/777, 58.

⁸ Women received a maternity grant of 500DM for each of their first four children and 1000DM for any fifth and subsequent children, and women with more than two children received a child benefit. In 1952, married working women were granted a monthly housework day, in order to help them manage what Dagmar Herzog identifies as the triple burden of household labour, paid labour in the workforce, and voluntary free time engagement in the socialist community. See McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 6.

maternity grant was increased to 1,000DM for each child; paid maternity leave was increased to 18 weeks; and additional paid holidays were granted to working mothers with two or more children.⁹ Women were ideologically courted by the state and encouraged to enter the workforce en masse as emancipated socialist citizens. At the same time, entering the work force was often an essential economic decision taken by women to ensure the survival of their families, particularly in the immediate post-war years of rationing and deprivation.¹⁰ The Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ), which eventually became the GDR, was devastated by the war. In 1945, approximately 20 percent of pre-war housing had been destroyed by allied bombing, agriculture operated at 15 percent of its 1939 levels, and a reported 90 percent of women who visited Berlin health clinics were underweight.¹¹ This was unsurprising considering that the majority of urban women and unemployed housewives were allocated rations of less than 1200 calories per day.¹² The SED offered women better rations when they complied with the party directive to engage in their own socialist emancipation by entering paid employment. Though women's legal emancipation was guaranteed through wage labour, lived experiences and gendered expectations did not universally change, as I shall demonstrate in chapter one. Legal emancipation did, however, provide the foundation for a model that women were expected to fill, and it helped to shape the direction of women's politics in the 1970s and 80s, which will be the focus of this study. The publically articulated role depicted for women's edification in the mainstream media of the GDR reinforced on the one hand, women's equality with men, and on the other hand, it

⁹ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 65.

¹⁰ Lenore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen, "The Myth of Female Emancipation: Contradiction in Women's Lives," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 169.

¹¹ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 26.

¹² *Ibid*, 35.

glorified women's roles as mothers and engaged community members. The political and emancipatory experiences of East German women were fundamentally different from those of their West German counterparts.

Following the Second World War, women in the areas occupied by the United States, France and Great Britain were also charged with the duty of helping to rebuild. After the initial period of occupation, during which the so-called "rubble women" worked in the streets literally clearing the cities of war wreckage, sometimes voluntarily, although often under orders from the occupying forces, West German women were encouraged to return to the home.¹³ Under the political guidance of conservative Chancellor Konrad Adenauer from 1949 to 1963, the traditional model of the bourgeois German family was touted as the means to overcoming the fascist past and restoring stability, both politically and socially.¹⁴ Adenauer aimed to reestablish the breadwinner/housewife model, according to which German women were dependent on their husbands for economic survival and women's individual rights were constitutionally subordinated to the preservation of the family.¹⁵ But this was neither a possibility nor a reality for many women in West Germany following the war, partially due to the need for labourers in the wake of a war that had significantly reduced the number of able-bodied male German citizens, and partially due to the fact that this period was marked by rationing and hunger.¹⁶ Access to food was even worse in the western occupation zones than in the SBZ.¹⁷ The ration card assigned to housewives in the

¹³ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 40.

¹⁴ Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*, (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁵ Myra Feree, *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 46.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity," *The American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 379.

¹⁷ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 26.

West was nicknamed the “ascension pass,” and women weighed on average only 93.5 pounds in 1947.¹⁸ Though for some, especially middle-aged women, Adenauer’s policies marked a descent into joblessness and poverty,¹⁹ government aims to reinstate women’s role as the nucleus of the German family took hold. Many of the women who had been forced to work in some of the lowest paid, most difficult and dead-end jobs in the immediate post war years dreamed of a return to peace and stability. Because of Adenauer’s policies, the majority of women were able to return to their roles as mothers and housewives.²⁰ In the period from 1950 to 1961, women’s involvement in paid employment remained low, barely increasing from 24.6 to 34.5 percent.²¹ In the immediate post-war years, the image of the rubble woman was venerated in the West German media. Women had proven themselves as competent and active German citizens. Yet as West Germany underwent an “economic miracle” in the 1950s, largely as a result of American support and investment, women’s political issues were swept back into the private sphere.²² It would not be until the early 1970s, after the collapse of the long-standing governing conservative coalition, and in the wake of student rebellions and leftist revolt of the late 1960s, that women started to challenge this social order in any widespread or systematic manner.²³

Beginning in the first half of the 1960s, West Germany underwent a wide range of liberalizing tendencies. The battle for reform of the legal code was fought on a number of different yet interrelated fronts, ranging from debates about pornography and youth

¹⁸ Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman,” 374.

¹⁹ Ibid, 379-380.

²⁰ Ibid, 376.

²¹ Frevert, “Umbruch des Geschlechterverhältnisse?” 643.

²² Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman,” 376-377.

²³ Eva Maleck-Lewy and Bernhard Maleck, “The Women’s Movement in East and West Germany,” in *1968: The World Transformed*, eds. Fink et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 381.

protection laws to access to abortion and women's place in the public sphere.

Liberalization of policy in government arrived as the *Bundestag* (West German parliament) underwent a fundamental shift from Adenauer's conservative government to the leadership of subsequent chancellors like Ludwig Erhard and Willy Brandt, eventually resulting in a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) between 1966 and 1969.²⁴ This paved the way for the social-democratic/liberal coalition of the SPD and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) beginning in 1969.²⁵ At the same time that federal politics were shifting away from conservative leadership, the sexual revolution of the West commenced in the idealistic furor of the 1960s. The student movements and the disparate New Left, made up of a diverse collection of politically left-leaning citizen's groups like the Socialist German Student League (*Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*, or SDS), challenged the status quo of heteronormative and monogamous sexuality, and they introduced a new sexual freedom to the public lexicon. Joining in mass protests with similar movements in other parts of Europe and America in the late 1960s, they issued the government a broad list of demands for cultural and social change. They disapproved of economic disparity between the East and West, and between the "First" and "Third worlds," and they rallied against the Vietnam War. The New Left movement peaked during the mass protests of 1968, which challenged the authoritarian structure of contemporary government and society. Following 1968, the

²⁴ Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels*, 110-111. See also Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal: The erotic empire of Beate Uhse*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 104.

²⁵ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 374.

New Left fractured from within as political unity withered and women left the movement to create one of their own, which I discuss in greater detail below.²⁶

The governing authorities of the FRG responded to social pressure for change on a number of fronts. For example, from 1962 through to the mid-1970s, the West German draft reform of the sexual criminal code was debated and introduced in a variety of proposals that were presented by various political parties for review in the *Bundestag*. The power shift in the *Bundestag* resulted in the realization of the fully-developed notion of *Rechtsgut* (legally protected right), which was favoured by liberalizing legal scholars. According to the legal value shift concerning *Rechtsgut*, the conservative opinion suggesting that the purpose of the law was to uphold the moral order of the community could no longer be justified. Liberal legal theorists argued that the purpose of the law was not to uphold changing moral standards, but to provide for “the proper protection of individuals from personal or material injury.”²⁷ This shift helped to undermine legal arguments based on moral values, which had been the foundation of arguments against things like “youth endangering texts” and indecent materials in earlier conservative governments. The legislative debate concerning whether West Germany should legalize pornography provides an excellent example of how *Rechtsgut* was used to justify liberalization of the public sphere. Conservatives who opposed texts or images that they perceived as lewd or pornographic now had to prove that this material was harmful to the community or to youth in particular if they were to have any chance of pushing through censorship. Since the groups opposing pornography were not able to prove that illicit texts and images caused harm to the community, the *Bundestag* passed legislation to update the

²⁶ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, “The Women’s Movement in East and West Germany,” 375.

²⁷ Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*, 107-108.

sexual criminal code, partially legalizing the sale and display of pornography in public spaces in 1973, and taking full effect in 1975.²⁸ The legal debate and feminist response to the introduction of pornography in West German public space, which Elizabeth Heineman has written about extensively,²⁹ will not be the focus of this examination. However, the issue of pornography highlights how the notion of *Rechtsgut* was used in the West to usher in new legal standards, and provides necessary background information.

The concept of *Rechtsgut* is essential to understanding the differences between East and West German regimes. While in the West, the 1960s and early 70s witnessed a shift from justifying legal permissibility on the basis of a supposed shared community morality to an absolute measure of individual or community harm, no such equivalent shift occurred in East Germany. In fact, the SED relied on the rhetoric of socialist morality well into the 1980s to police and also justify the kinds of erotic output available to East German citizens.³⁰ Socialist morality provided the ideological basis for establishing sexual norms in the East German community; it was part of the ever-present ideological reasoning presented to East German citizens in propaganda and served to justify the legal and social expectations of the party. The official East German explanation of all things concerning gender norms and appropriate East German sexuality relied ideologically on the basis of socialist morality. By contrast, West German feminists who challenged the laws and values

²⁸ Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*, 155-156.

²⁹ For more on the explosion of pornography in the public spaces of West Germany, see chapter 6 of Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*.

³⁰ The sale of any kind of erotic and sexual output in the GDR was justified by the concept of socialist morality. East German citizens were instructed that since all workers, male and female, were equal under state socialism, the basis for unequal power relationships, which was supposedly the foundation of West German prostitution and pornography, had disappeared from East German society. East Germans entered sexual relationships purely on the basis of love and equality, and the SED protected East Germans from the sale of love and the wares associated with unwholesome West German sex on the basis of this imposed socialist morality. For a lengthier discussion of erotic output in the GDR and more on the idea of socialist morality, see Urang, *Legal Tender*, and Josie McLellan, "Visual Dangers and Delights: Nude Photography in East Germany," *Past and Present* 205 (2009): 143-174.

of the FRG, whom I discuss below, responded to the legal notion of *Rechtsgut* and could not rely on moral arguments. This context of student revolt and shifting social, legal and political values in government set the stage for an emergent feminist movement in West Germany.

The West German women's movement arose out of conflict within the broader German Student League because some female members felt that their male colleagues were excluding women, ignoring their concerns and forcing them into a subordinate position within the movement.³¹ In the wake of the crumbling student movement of the late 1960s, the autonomous women's movement developed a new feminist platform. West German women from the SDS formed the Women's Working Group from among their female New Left colleagues; they pressed for change on issues concerning women like abortion and childcare and pursued their goals by creating associations exclusively for women that were not dominated by male leaders.³² The new independent women's movement was based on negation; leaders of the movement rejected the ideal of motherhood, male leadership, and traditional hierarchical structures.³³ The independent feminist movement developed and challenged the state from a position of self-imposed exclusion. They attempted to encourage women's autonomy through greater solidarity with other women, in part by refusing to engage in politics created by and for men.³⁴ Further, autonomous feminists rejected the idea of creating an umbrella organization to link disparate groups (as had existed in Imperial and Weimar Germany), ensuring that no major representative

³¹ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 376.

³² *Ibid*, 384.

³³ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 27 and 48.

³⁴ Feree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 84.

organization emerged from the autonomous movement in the post-war period.³⁵ In practice, this ensured that all of the independent women's groups that I discuss below remained marginal in the wider context of West German civil engagement; individual groups represented the values of their own members, but not necessarily a wider political movement. Independent feminist groups pursued project-based work like opposing pornography in public spaces and working to secure safe and accessible abortion rights for women, sometimes individually, and sometimes in concert with other regional groups. In 1971, for example, 374 women publically admitted to having had abortions in the periodical *Der Stern*.³⁶ Following the legalization of pornography in 1975, autonomous feminists worked to oppose the sudden explosion of pornography in the public sphere, and in 1977, the women's magazine *Emma* sued *Der Stern* for displaying images of nude women on the cover, arguing that this was a violation of women's human dignity.³⁷ In chapter one, I will discuss how the women-centered, exclusionary politics of West German autonomous feminists set the tone and determined the language of West German gender negotiations through the 1970s and 80s.

Though the autonomous feminist movement never disappeared in West Germany, some women recognized that the project-based work of independent feminists had not been particularly successful in changing the social order.³⁸ Consequently, a parallel women's movement emerged and gained traction in mainstream politics around the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. West German women sought to attain quotas for greater women's representation in all of the major West German political parties. They recognized

³⁵ Feree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 82.

³⁶ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 381.

³⁷ Heineman, *Before Porn Was Legal*, 166.

³⁸ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 54.

that criticizing state policies from the outside had not resulted in significant changes to legislation, nor had women been able to attain political goals, like protecting women's right to abortion and self-determination.³⁹ Women in the late 1970s and early 1980s started working from within government, changing the terrain and terminology of the public negotiation of women's roles in society. I will now transition to an assessment of East German women's politics, establishing a framework for how women negotiated their political and private roles in the GDR.

In East Germany women enjoyed significant family and social benefits, which I discuss below, especially from 1972 onwards, but oppositional organization and criticism of the regime were not tolerated. The SED mandated women's emancipation in the GDR, providing women with a public role in the community along with access to paid employment and a host of social benefits. But women were excluded from the highest echelons of power; in the 1970s and 80s, there were only two female candidates and no full female members of the Politburo, the highest governing body of the GDR. Margot Honecker, the wife of SED party leader Erich Honecker, was the only female representative of 45 government ministers.⁴⁰ Women were neither represented in positions of power, nor were they allowed to challenge the rule of the regime, because political dissidence was not tolerated in the dictatorial GDR. The process of negotiation between state and citizen occurred within the structural confines of a socialist dictatorship, to which I shall now turn. The SED aimed to legitimate its rule by providing citizens with a host of modern social

³⁹ Feree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 65.

⁴⁰ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 386.

benefits and, as Jürgen Kocka has argued, the GDR operated as a kind of modern dictatorship.⁴¹

The political systems of East and West Germany offered citizens of the two nations very different rights and privileges; for example, West Germans could opine freely in public about qualms with the government. By contrast, East Germans had no civic sphere of open political negotiation, but they did enjoy significant social benefits like guaranteed access to employment, which operated as a sort of peace offering to the people of the GDR to help assuage political frustrations that many undoubtedly shared. Kocka's engagement with the notion of East Germany as a modern dictatorship is a useful conceptual tool for understanding *Frauenpolitik* (women's politics) in the GDR.⁴² Kocka rejects the equation of the GDR with earlier totalitarian dictatorships, arguing that there was far less violence and terror in the GDR, especially from the 1970s onwards, than there had been in dictatorships like Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany.⁴³ He suggests that the GDR was marked more by inflexibility and stagnation than by the totalitarian concept of constant mobilization.⁴⁴ According to Kocka's theory of modern dictatorship, the SED aimed to develop economic, social and cultural modernization, which is evident in the "anti-traditionalist" elements of East German society, such as better state-organized family planning, restructured gender relations, updated industry and new forms of modular-style apartments.⁴⁵ Beyond the

⁴¹ Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 17-26.

⁴² I use the terminology "women politics" to refer broadly to East German legal and social changes made on behalf of women. It also refers to West German political goals pursued by *Politikfrauen* (political women), women who may or may not have identified themselves as feminists, but pursued liberalization and aimed to eradicate gender discrimination in traditional institutions c. 1980, but who were separate from the Independent Feminist movement. See Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 26.

⁴³ Kocka, "The GDR," 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 23-24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

more favourable elements of East German dictatorship, Kocka suggests that the GDR can also be viewed as a modern dictatorship in terms of its bureaucratic administration, repressive means of control (such as propaganda and state surveillance carried out by the Stasi, the East German secret police), and mass party claims to absolute control carried out under a binding ideology.⁴⁶ These elements combined to create a society in which civic freedoms were repressed, but where the government sought legitimacy through efforts to make life tolerable for the population by providing a comprehensive package of social benefits. The SED provided social benefits like year-long maternity leave and shortened work-weeks for mothers in order to ease the burden of balancing full-time employment with persistent traditional attitudes that relegated household chores to women. Yet in spite of generous state-funded benefits, for many East German women the utopian model of emancipated socialist motherhood remained unattainable.

As I have begun to illustrate, certain modern values became important in both the East and West German states from the period of the mid-1960s to the late-1980s. In the context of a global Cold War environment, the various brands of *Frauenpolitik* and feminist action that will be the focus of this examination were developed. Brigitte Young posits that the West German feminist movement of the early 1970s was a reaction to patriarchal structures in the private sphere, by which she means that women were systematically encouraged to be dependent on their husbands; in contrast, East German women reacted to public patriarchy.⁴⁷ According to her argument, women in the East were provided for in terms of employment, benefits, maternal care, education, etc. and therefore had no need or incentive to challenge state socialist paternalism on the basis of their unique experiences as

⁴⁶ Kocka, "The GDR," 21.

⁴⁷ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 145.

women.⁴⁸ While I agree with Young's argument concerning public and private sphere patriarchy, I aim to demonstrate that in spite of the East German state-based patriarchy that she considers a fundamental boundary to women's political engagement, many women did negotiate their political and private roles in the GDR. They were, however, forced to articulate their negotiation in terms of socialist ideology, which I will demonstrate in the following four chapters. While the independent women's movement of West Germany established the terms of gender role and policy negotiation in the FRG, in the GDR, the state dictated the parameters of acceptable negotiation. Yet limited contestation and negotiation did exist under SED rule. I will now briefly outline how historians like Dagmar Herzog, Dagmar Langenhan and Sabine Roß have conceptualized many women's experiences of emancipation under socialist rule.

Several historians have addressed the fundamental inequities of daily life that many women in the GDR experienced, ranging from a "socialist glass ceiling"⁴⁹ to a double or triple burden in terms of women's duties to their families, their jobs and to the state.⁵⁰ Langenhan and Roß have pointed out that in 1979, Inge Lange, Head of the Division for Women in the Central Committee of the SED, fundamentally challenged the SED's narrative of the success of gender equality in the GDR when she identified the elusiveness of real legal and social equality for East German women.⁵¹ I contend that while women faced significant marginalization in the GDR, they pursued an agenda within the confines of dictatorship to negotiate on a variety of political levels for the achievement of gender

⁴⁸ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 28.

⁴⁹ Dagmar Langenhan and Sabine Roß, "The Socialist Glass Ceiling: Limits to Female Career," in Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience*.

⁵⁰ Dagmar Herzog, "East Germany's Sexual Evolution," in *Socialist Modern: East German everyday culture and politics*, ed. Katherine Pence et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 72.

⁵¹ Langenhan and Roß, "The Socialist Glass Ceiling," 177.

equality. While actual equality never did exist for many women in the GDR, I suggest that East German representatives from organizations like the DFD sought to improve women's situation and clearly articulated how and where equality was lacking. The SED responded to DFD reports by introducing increasingly plentiful benefits to help women manage persistent inequalities in daily life. In chapter two, I will focus on the ways in which women from both East and West Germany aimed to negotiate gender equality within the specific limits of their political systems in greater detail. For now, it is important to stress that identical civil society organizations did not exist in the GDR, and East German citizens did not enjoy the same kind of open political engagement that the West German liberal democratic system provided. This ensured that western-style feminism did not develop in the GDR and defined key limitations to East German women's personal experiences of the negotiation of gender roles. Yet I aim to demonstrate that just as women from West Germany negotiated their role within the political confines of their own system, women from the GDR, specifically DFD representatives who operated as a point of transmission between the SED and the general population, used the media and internal reporting to contest and negotiate on-going gender disparity in spite of limitations on political criticism.

Neither wage labour emancipation nor state-dictated legal equality sufficiently guaranteed women's equality in everyday life. Langenhan and Roß have examined the extent of East German women's notions of emancipation and have demonstrated that while women were officially integrated into a number of non-traditional jobs, and they did make some headway in achieving mid-range positions of power, their ability to rise to positions of power within government and in factories were systematically limited. Andrew Port has demonstrated that gender discrimination existed on the factory-floor throughout the 1950s

and 60s,⁵² and Langenhan and Roß argue that following the introduction of greater maternity benefits in 1972 women came to be seen increasingly as “unreliable employees” by factory directors and were rarely promoted to jobs with a greater degree of supervisory power and responsibility.⁵³ They also conclude that it was more challenging for women to meet the demands of the work force due to a traditionally masculine style of socialization and conduct, according to which men went out to drink and socialize after work, while women went home to tend to the household and children.⁵⁴ I will work from this foundation to assess how the state responded to this inconvenient reality, which was neither invisible nor silent. I will pinpoint women’s individual responses through an investigation of the DFD’s strategies for combatting systematic inequality, while contrasting state efforts to manage, deflect or ignore actual inequality in the socialist system. For instance, the SED engaged in statistical manipulation, glorifying equality where it did not actually exist, and in their official rhetoric, they criticized those supposedly traditional or backwards women who were unable to accept the emancipation granted them by the socialist regime. The pronounced contradictions between women’s daily, lived experiences and official SED rhetoric is a potentially enlightening area of historical investigation. The next four chapters examine how gender norms were negotiated in two very different political systems. I will now briefly outline the way that Konrad Jarausch and Paul Betts have conceptualized the differences between East and West German political regimes and the ways civil organizations contested state policies.

⁵² Andrew Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207-208.

⁵³ Langenhan and Roß, “The Socialist Glass Ceiling,” 187.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 187.

Jarausch has theorized about the extent of state-citizen negotiation in his book *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans*. He argues that in the West, protesters relied on the legally protected right to engage in the open civil society in order to criticize government policies and social norms, while in East Germany citizens lacked the right to openly criticize the regime. Jarausch suggests that West German protesters relied on the very system that they were opposing, while East Germans could develop no parallel rebellion. I will return to this argument in chapter two, but here I would like to focus on Jarausch's subsidiary argument that if we examine the furthest limits of repression found in dictatorial nations like the GDR, certain unintended responses to dictatorship arise. Jarausch builds on Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Eigen-Sinn*: the assertion of individual will within the populace, which Lüdtke argues was never fully broken by the repression or propaganda of the SED.⁵⁵ Jarausch develops the idea of a society of "limited negotiation," where a small autonomous public sphere was created in the allowable semi-private spaces of individual's lives.⁵⁶ He argues that in order to protect this space, some individuals curtailed their own careers, a form of micro-resistance, in order to avoid the greater expectations of socialist acquiescence that accompanied positions of power. Some people in the GDR also found ways of appropriately voicing their criticisms and frustrations in order to express discontentment with the regime. This was done primarily through *Eingaben*: formulaic letters that typically identified the SED promises and highlighted the letter-writer's socialist qualifications, before charting a strongly worded critique of one the regime's particular inadequacies to fulfill those promises.⁵⁷ East German citizens had a legally guaranteed right to petition the

⁵⁵ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 197.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 197.

state, and *Eingaben* became the primary means for individuals to communicate their dissatisfaction about the regime's inadequacies.⁵⁸ While *Eingaben* do not constitute a sphere of open civic engagement, they are an example of one limited means that East Germans used to critique the regime. Paul Betts suggests that they were "system-sustaining," because citizens legitimized SED rule by offering criticism of the state on state terms, but they were also a potential source of subversion.⁵⁹ Jarausch and Betts' analyses point to areas of state-citizen negotiation, which are worth examining in order to better understand the matrix of civic-state power. Building on these ideas, I will now outline the next four chapters in which I assess the political spheres of negotiation wherein citizens, government officials and regimes created and contested new gender roles and state policies concerning women.

Chapter one will outline the ways in which federal leaders sought to direct and navigate the creation of greater gender equality in the FRG and the GDR. I contend that political officials actively and consciously manipulated the media in order to stay abreast of popular trends and challenges communicated by civil society organizations. The DFD in East Germany reported on survey results that suggested East German women were not yet equal in the private sphere, in spite of SED pronouncements about the success of women's emancipation under socialism. In the West, independent feminists sought wider female membership in order to challenge legal and social norms. In both cases, political parties created new policies and responded to citizen challenges in the popular media. Chapter two considers the interaction between the representatives of East and West German women's

⁵⁸ Paul Betts, "Building Socialism at Home: The case of East German interiors," in Pence et al. *Socialist Modern*, 123.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 124.

groups, tracking the different ways that state actors negotiated gender equality. Women from the FRG and the GDR met frequently to share experiences and ideas in the pursuit of greater gender equality, but I argue that representatives from both nations were limited by their political systems of origin and personal ideological barriers, which restricted their ability to identify effective political work undertaken by representatives of groups from the opposing system. Chapter three outlines the involvement of both East and West German governments in the creation of the UN Charter for the Eradication of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). I show that West German governing ministries faced criticism from both representatives of citizen's movements and internal government officials to ratify the treaty more quickly and engage in international efforts to prioritize gender equality. In the GDR, civic criticism was not allowed and no independent civil society existed, but the SED representatives of East Germany faced criticism from the international community and were forced to defend state policies. I argue that East and West German governments both opened themselves up to criticism by choosing to sign the CEDAW. These chapters will provide political context for the fourth chapter, which outlines a comparative case study between two political women's magazines: East Germany's *Für Dich* and West Germany's *Emma*. I show that while women's magazines in East and West Germany created and reiterated different ideological gender role expectations, both of these magazines were fundamental to the negotiation and reiteration of new gender role expectations.

The next four chapters assess women's politics in East and West Germany during the Cold War. I am specifically interested in the manner in which norms and expectations were created, repeated and normalized, and then challenged, on both sides of the wall. The

case study approach to a popular culture analysis promises to provide a unique perspective on both the adaptability and regularization of gender politics during the later decades of the Cold War era, when social change was widespread. Comparative research further helps to establish a cohesive picture of East and West German history, which should ideally be considered in relation to each other. The ripples of both stabilizing top-down measures of legal and social normalization during the Cold War period, and de-stabilizing shifts in popular values must be addressed on a variety of levels to create a picture of how a conflicted whole is created from the disjointed aims of state and citizen.

Chapter One - Ideological differences in the theories of women's emancipation in East and West Germany

Governments in East and West Germany consciously aimed to shape the minds, values and opinions of the electorate in the 1970s and 80s by focusing on reformulating the gender roles and expectations of citizens. In the Federal Republic some politicians and reporters, whom I discuss below, claimed that this conscious gender restructuring focused on men to a greater degree in West Germany than in East Germany. In both states, however, the focus on creating and reinforcing a new mainstream female role model can be seen not only in popular media, but also in government planning and reports. In this chapter I will examine the theoretical underpinnings of both East and West German federal parties' attempts to direct citizen's conceptions of appropriate gender roles. My sources for this examination range from internal government reports, speeches, government planning documents, and interviews of elected officials that were published in magazines. This examination of government materials will provide broad background for how the two governments became involved in the media campaigns and themes that I explore in the chapter four case study of *Emma* and *Für Dich*. Firstly, I will look at the plans made by FRG political parties to direct media campaigns and to directly communicate with media outlets. I will also consider the impact of the independent women's movement and the sexual revolution more generally on political parties and officials in terms of shaping the way that governments addressed citizens and contended with prevailing and changing gender roles. I will then assess the ideological justification behind the work carried out by the DFD (*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands*, Democratic Women's League of Germany) in the GDR. More specifically, I will examine the attempt to reconcile paid labour with

motherhood within the bounds of socialist ideology. I argue that how the issue of gender relations was handled in the media through the 1970s and 80s was shaped, at least in part, by the ideological purposes and goals of the SED in East Germany and by the independent women's movement in the Federal Republic. Political parties and women's groups attempted to direct women's self-awareness on the basis of clearly articulated ideologies. The conscious efforts of government officials to shape gender relations in the GDR and the FRG demonstrate that while in the FRG slightly more effort may have been paid to shaping men's attitudes towards women's emancipation (legal and social), in both nations women were the primary targets of federal campaigns. Answering the "woman question" in both states came down to adjusting women's attitudes, although this was carried out differently by different regimes.

In the FRG, government actions were shaped by the demands of the emergent independent feminist movement. From the beginning of the 1970s, women were demanding social change in the workplace, the media and in the legal code. According to Eva Maleck-Lewy and Bernhard Maleck, in this earlier phase of the women's movement, women engaged in horizontally organized, democratic projects, rather than seeking equality through state paternalism by advocating rights-based legislation. For example, they established women's cultural cafes and shelters and instigated media campaigns contesting violence against women. In so doing, they rejected the hierarchical structures of traditional organizations.¹ West German independent women's groups in the 1970s became politically engaged through project work, like providing rape relief centres for

¹ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 385.

women,² and in the 1980s they used strategic letter-writing campaigns like that of the *Frauen Gegen Pornographie* (Women Against Pornography) group to oppose the enormous outpouring of so-called soft pornography into the public sphere.³ However, by the 1980s, some formerly independent feminists recognized that the impact of this political methodology had its limits, lacking access to the real levers of power.

Women with roots in the independent feminist community described above, such as organizations like the German Women's Initiative (DFI), which I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, began entering mainstream politics around the late 1970s and early 1980s. By the time that women started to push their way into mainstream party politics in the early 1980s, the independent women's movement had already changed the public discussion surrounding women's roles in public life, family life and in the media in the FRG. Due to women's consciousness raising efforts, political parties recognized a need to respond to criticism emanating from civil society organizations beginning in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, women started pressing major political parties as diverse as the Greens, the SPD and the CDU to introduce quotas for greater representation of women in the *Bundestag* and at all levels of government.⁴ The impact of West German shifts in feminist engagement is reflected in the numbers of female representatives in the *Bundestag*, from a nadir of only 5.8 percent female federal representatives in the 1970s, followed by minimal

² Letter from Ulrike Teubner to Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit, November 28, 1979. See also letter from Sybille Humburg of Frauenzentrum Mainz e.V. to BMJFG, also Project outline "Notruf und Beratung für vergewaltigte Frauen im Frauenzentrum Mainz e.V.," and Letter from Ulrike Teubner, Rosemarie Steinhage, and Ingrid Becker to Frauenzentrum mainz e.V., Bundesarchiv Koblenz (Hereafter BaK) B189/25432.

³ Letters from Irene Rupprecht, to Antje Huber BMJFG, December 30, 1979 and letter from Arbeitsgemeinschaft "Frauen gegen Pornographie" to BMJFG March 4, 1980. See also letter from Marianne Weg to Arbeitsgemeinschaft "Frauen gegen Pornographie," in BaK - B189/25436. Soft pornography in this context refers to photos that were sexual in nature and displayed nudity but did not display sexual acts and excluded children, bestiality and violence. For more on defining hard versus soft pornography, see Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*, 154 and 166.

⁴ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 385.

growth beginning around 1983 at 9.8 percent representation, and rising to 15 percent in 1990 at the time of reunification.⁵ Because independent feminist politics were woman-centered, rejecting association with male-centered party politics and the primacy of motherhood, political parties seeking to engage female voters were faced with the difficult task of formulating a political response to feminist criticism that rejected mainstream politics out of hand. As I will demonstrate, the language of this early grassroots movement established the terms for the discussion concerning women's changing role in West Germany in the media and among political parties. Those outside of the feminist movement entered the discussion seeking greater reconciliation between feminist demands for changes in gender roles and traditional community models. Government officials responded to the ideological challenge established by independent feminists. As Dagmar Herzog has demonstrated, citizens and the state were engaged in a process of actively negotiating gender roles during the period of the sexual revolution.⁶ Her arguments will serve as the historiographical reference point for the account to follow.

It is never clear to what degree government policies shape the day-to-day experiences of citizens, or whether citizens are the driving force behind top-down directives. Herzog has contended that in both East and West German history, governments have not remained in power by remaining static; they have responded to shifts in public opinion, just as they have helped form, direct and reinforce social norms. In her article, "Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures," she provides examples of how shifting cultural values can lead to legal change, and vice versa. As an example of legal

⁵ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 175.

⁶ Dagmar Herzog, "Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures," *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009), 1287-1308.

change leading the way, she cites the decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1969 in West Germany, which occurred not as a result of mass mobilization but in part because of the liberalization of attitudes within political parties. Abortion rights, alternatively, were the rallying cry of West German feminists throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet in spite of hundreds of West German women openly flouting the law,⁷ paragraph 218 of the West German Basic Law made abortion illegal from 1976 onwards except in exceptional circumstances where a medical, eugenic, social or ethical justification existed.⁸ Herzog's analysis is useful in considering the example I discuss below of an early response by the FDP faction of the governing coalition of West Germany to respond to feminist politics in the public sphere. The party answered the criticisms of the emergent feminist movement by attempting to manipulate typically gendered behaviours and specifically focused, at least initially, on men's roles in the family. By the 1980s, media focus had largely shifted to a negotiation of women's roles in the community.

Following the shift in federal politics in the FRG in September 1969, away from the more conservative coalition of the CDU-SPD to the social-liberal coalition of the SPD-FDP, a variety of changes in governing attitudes came to be reflected in party planning and discussion. Beginning in 1973, a large project was undertaken by the FDP, called "Advancing the Situation of Women in the Family and Community" (*Verbesserung der*

⁷ Maleck-Lewy and Maleck, "The Women's Movement in East and West Germany," 381.

⁸ Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal*, 166. In practice, the social justification provided a kind of back-door method for women to receive safe abortions after 1976, but the exceptions were also the spark to a major protest occurring in 1988. In the Bavarian town of Memmingen, authorities charged gynecologist Horst Thiessen and hundreds of his patients for carrying out or receiving illegal abortions under the justification of social need. The court ruling from February 1989 resulted in fines for 174 women and two and a half years in jail for their doctor. The trial demonstrated the hypocrisy of the abortion laws, which were haphazardly enforced across the country. It also served as an example of how state enforcement could lead to citizen protest, a process of negotiation that finally resulted in the legalization of abortion in 1993. See Feree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 65 and 147-148.

Situation der Frau in Familie und Gesellschaft), or *Projektbereich 160*.⁹ The overall project was meant to challenge the stereotypical roles of women in the family through a government-driven media campaign. Between 1974 and 1977, media efforts were directed at the “male partner,” and the project plan articulated a need to avoid any discussion revolving around emancipation, noting that “especially in the majority of the male population, the issue of ‘emancipation’ is seen as negative, which causes much fear and resistance.”¹⁰ This early phase of the project – which was short lived and eventually became nearly as women-centred as the focus of East German women’s politics that I discuss below – sought to deal with male resistance head-on by using humour and a pointed media campaign to demonstrate the errors of gender prejudice to the target audience. Project planners, under the supervision of M. Mantek, planned to portray what they called typically male and female behaviour in relatable social scenarios, with the aim of demonstrating the social barriers that women faced in employment, scientific and technical studies, and in the media or everyday life.¹¹ According to the project outline, the FDP sought to convey that “emancipation does not mean competition between the sexes, but rather change and development of both sexes alongside one another.”¹² The project planners suggested ongoing television and radio series as the ideal way to reach the public. This demonstrates the FDP’s immediate concern with engaging the male segment of the population – or more specifically the “male partner” – with the grassroots trend of women’s politics. The final aim of the project was to improve women’s health and, as the title suggests, the situation of women within the family and society. The project proposal

⁹ BaK - B 310/44, 12-13. All translations in this document are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ Project outline for “Projektbereich 160,” May 2, 1974, BaK - B310/44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

identified women's wishes and abilities as being stunted by insufficient time, self esteem, and experience.¹³ *Projektbereich 160* aimed first to adjust men's attitudes towards women's emancipation in the FRG in order to create more space for women's personal development and for their social engagement. Though the stated purpose of this project was to influence women's situation and potential roles in society, it introduced a slightly more gender-balanced attempt at restructuring gender relations than would be seen from the independent feminist movement and the mainstream media in subsequent years. Other official responses from the period, however, tended to follow the woman-focused language and intentions originally set forth by the independent women's movement, focusing less on overall community reform.

The government imperative to maintain stability was a typical response from government officials attempting to reshape women's perceptions of their social roles. They were attempting to avoid fueling gender competition and radicalism while still responding to grassroots feminism. In a May 1972 interview in *Brigitte*, a West German women's magazine, Dr. Katherine Focke, Minister of Family, Youth and Health (BMJFG) for the SPD, demonstrated the tightrope that the government walked in pursuing new avenues of women's civic engagement. The article focuses on the social role of housewives, a group that represented over 10 million citizens of the FRG in 1974. Focke's response to the questions posed by the *Brigitte* interviewer – "How do you rate the situation of housewives? Should it be changed? If yes, in what way?"¹⁴ – demonstrated the party's intention to make an official response to social movements, while still revealing official concern about alienating more traditional segments of the population. She contends that

¹³ Project outline for "Projektbereich 160," May 2, 1974, BaK - B310/44.

¹⁴ "Brigitte: Hausfrauen heute," February 27, 1974, BaK - B310/44.

“there is no need, and therefore no social impetus to use political measures to change family life or to radicalize the existing situation of housewives.”¹⁵ She felt that family politics had to reflect both continuity and renewal. Family and women’s politics, she argued, were fundamentally the political concern of the whole society, a fact that was reflected in SPD policy concerning income allocation, taxation, security, and equality in education.¹⁶ She claimed that the SPD’s goals focused on dismantling clichéd role models in order to make it easier for women to combine career and family. They sought to do this by increasing the number of kindergartens and all-day schools in order to decrease the demands on women in the home. According to Focke, housewives could benefit from higher education not only because it could provide an avenue into the paid workforce but also because it would raise their quality of life. She asks rhetorically “whether the media, especially the TV, could not provide housewives with more targeted and tangible examples to make life-long learning experiences available even to housewives.”¹⁷ Focke’s concern for housewives, whose traditional role was certainly the target of some feminist group’s opposition, and was increasingly held up in the feminist and occasionally mainstream media against a new ideal of the independent working woman, demonstrates her party’s concern for stability in a period of widespread social changes. In the face of a divided population, where some women were challenging the status quo through their project based, non-hierarchical, non-governmental work, and others were holding on to an older model of family-based security, the governing SPD aimed to find some middle ground. They articulated a desire for change and responded to the grassroots women’s movement while

¹⁵ “Brigitte: Hausfrauen heute,” February 27, 1974, BaK - B310/44.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

carving out a role for the women who could not, for any number of reasons, relate to the political movement that was already changing media portrayals of women from the early 1970s onwards.

Bundestag representative, Helga Wex of the CDU, responded to the same questions about the situation of housewives in West German Society for the *Brigitte* article in 1974. She claims that the ongoing public discussion divided women into two camps as either career women or housewives, valuing the former over the latter. She contends that “fairer social policy would dictate that the different value placed on these two roles should be eliminated.”¹⁸ Wex attempts to assuage the fierce conflicts of the public debate; she condemns the media portrayal of housewives as isolated, frustrated and held back, and suggests that the government should pay stay-at-home mothers for their household and family labour. She argues that housewives did very important work in the community, specifically noting, “the main job of the woman within the family is raising children.”¹⁹ She recommends that the best way to reduce the segregation of women into two camps – working and non-working – was to pay stay-at-home mothers a monthly child-raising stipend (*Erziehungsgeld*) of 300 marks for the first three years of each child’s life. Further, she elaborates that women’s household responsibilities should not prevent them from undertaking work in the community, suggesting that such social “activities could extend to charitable, educational, or church-based work as well as work with non-profits.”²⁰ Wex, like Focke, felt that women could benefit from community involvement. But her answer to the public debate about gender roles in West German society favoured paying mothers in

¹⁸ “Brigitte: Hausfrauen heute,” February 27, 1974, BaK - B310/44.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

appreciation for their labour in the private sphere, in order to reinforce that the traditional role of women in the community was vital. By her logic, if all women were paid for their labour, it would nullify the growing divisiveness between career women and housewives. Wex aimed to stabilize a role for women that did not challenge their traditional position in the family or community, but which might ameliorate perceived growing tension between housewives and working women. Incidentally, her position only served to fuel feminist opposition to traditional expectations of women's roles in magazines like *Emma* in later years. As the examples of Wex and Focke show, mainstream political parties were actively seeking to engage in the public debate about the future social roles women might play. Yet while political parties obviously wanted to be involved in the public discussion, negotiation, and reinforcement of gender roles, they were less inclined towards changing women's roles within the parties themselves.

Though the SPD was elected on a platform of social change, they responded slowly to demands for greater female representation in the party. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the Association of Social Democratic Women (AsF), the women's branch of the SPD, had rejected quotas for women's representation, suggesting that women had to create change within the party to become a political force in their own right. Only the drift of voters to the Green Party in the early 1980s, which openly favoured women's political engagement through quotas, changed this policy. The AsF started to push for quotas as the Greens became a major political challenger in the early 1980s.²¹ By 1988, the AsF campaign for quotas resulted in a new woman-friendly policy within the party. The clamour of

²¹ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 55.

feminist organizers, within and outside of the government, forced parties from across the political spectrum to respond to their movement on women's groups' own terms.

Though the SPD was somewhat more receptive to grassroots political changes, even the conservative CDU began responding to the demands of the independent women's movement in the 1970s. The women's branch of the CDU (*Frauenvereinigung der CDU*) presented a policy program action plan in 1971 in an attempt to guide the CDU's future women's and family policy. This plan argued that "women's rights to equal opportunities in education, training, professional practice and prospects for promotion must ensure that women receive equal pay for equal performance and that the lowest pay-grade is eliminated."²² The CDU women's group identified that the party needed to respond to social value shifts and the grassroots women's movement. The action plan did not aim to oppose feminist politics, but to address what to some looked like a threat to the social order by publically reaffirming the view that "the position of the housewife and mother is in all respects equal with that of the working woman."²³ The CDU women's group went on to outline its concern that women should be able to choose whether they would like to be stay-at-home mothers or working women.

As West German feminists contended with the traditional image of the ideal German housewife and mother, the CDU women's union identified a need to create a cohesive public policy concerning the ongoing debate about women's new potential prospects in the labour force and as public actors in the society more generally. Its response was fundamentally reactionary, demonstrating both concern that the traditional position of women in society was changing and that they did not support, or potentially even

²² Frauenvereinigung der CDU, 1971, BaK - B310/44.

²³ Ibid.

understand the shift. However, the Women's Union of the CDU report goes on to justify that the women's organization would remain essential until "women were transferred adequate responsibility in business, industry and public affairs, as well as in politics," pointing out that "after all, more than half of German voters are women."²⁴ The CDU women's branch concluded its report with a list of media contacts, indicating not only the authors' immediate concerns about the need for better female representation in the political and social sphere, but also a focus on how women were being addressed and depicted in the media. Conservative women were concerned about the portrayal of women in women's magazines, and on the radio and television; indeed, they sought to protect traditional values by using their own media contacts to ensure that the role of wife and mother did not disappear from the media portrayal of women at a period when feminist groups were gaining traction in the public sphere. The aims of West German political parties to mould female citizens were consciously shaped in response to the unfolding women's movement in order to negotiate a middle-ground for gender relations and gender norms that allowed some continuity with the past. The top-down response of West German political parties in creating new party platforms and engaging with the media about the so-called woman question was a necessary answer to grassroots mobilization. By contrast, the top-down direction of East German government policies and community norms were a product of an ideologically motivated dictatorship.

In the GDR, the SED tried to reinforce East German gender roles that were based on Marxist principals, a fact that became increasingly visible in its women's policies through the 1970s and 80s. The party had started trying to shape a new role for women under

²⁴ Frauenvereinigung der CDU, 1971, BaK - B310/44.

socialism through aggressive propaganda campaigns beginning in the late 1940s, relying upon the DFD to embed Marxist philosophy into the mentalities of GDR women. The purpose of the ideological struggle to control the image of an ideal socialist woman was dual-pronged: on the one hand, the government required women's reproductive and productive compliance in order to support the socialist economy; and on the other hand, the SED touted women's successful emancipation as a key indicator of the triumph of Marxism more generally. Women persistently reported that their lived daily experiences did not reflect the socialist ideal, because the demands of the private sphere, such as raising children and maintaining a household, did not allow them the time to pursue higher learning and leisure opportunities as they wished. In response, the DFD, at the behest of the SED Central Committee, consistently attempted to help women reinvent their role in the family and the public sphere, providing an increasingly comprehensive bundle of social services. The ideological basis of SED rule provided a foundation for the establishment of socialist gender norms in East German society that required women to successfully balance their dual roles as mothers and workers. SED propaganda, frequently found in the women's magazine *Für Dich*, which I explore in greater detail in chapter four, was self-consciously used in an attempt to direct women to fulfill the specific gender expectations of state socialism. Over the span of four decades in which the DFD administered the state-sponsored emancipation of women in the GDR, its activities rested on the same, unchanging ideological principles. August Bebel, author of *Women and Socialism*, which was first published in 1910, provided the cornerstone to Marxist *Frauenpolitik* as taught by the DFD. The fact that East German women's emancipation was based on the theoretical ideology of Marxist writers helps to explain the tactics of the DFD and its limited successes

in the pursuit of women's equality. Following the teachings of Bebel, which I will now discuss, DFD officials aimed to eradicate the inequalities and difficulties women faced under socialism.

Bebel advocated a fundamental rejection of what later came to be known in the GDR as bourgeois feminism. He suggested that while the working woman suffered from an economic and social dependence on man, she suffered alongside the workingman from the wage dependency of the capitalist system.²⁵ Bebel argued that the socialist goal was

not only to achieve equality of men and women under the present social order, which constitute[d] the sole aim of the Bourgeois women's movement, but to go far beyond this, and to remove all barriers that make one human being dependent upon another, which includes the dependence of one sex upon the other. *This* solution of the woman question is identical with the solution of the social question.²⁶

His reasoning suggested that women's emancipation would follow naturally from the eradication of class-structured labour. State officials adopted this ideology and referred to it frequently in speeches and government policies. The fact that women in the GDR continued to report difficulties in managing their multiple duties under socialism at a notably higher rate than men, even after 20 years of federally guaranteed wage security and equality in the workplace, was deeply problematic in terms of Marxist determinism. Historians have called the phenomenon of women's labour under socialism the "triple burden,"²⁷ which can be summed up as a lack of balance between the demands of paid labour, the social expectations of women's role in the family, and the extra demands of the socialist state for women to spend their free time "productively." Yet, according to Bebel's ideological teachings, the DFD could not create a bourgeois-style competition between the

²⁵ August Bebel, *Women and Socialism*, trans. Meta Lilienthal (New York: Socialist Literature Co., 1910), 7. (*Emphasis from original*)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Herzog, "East Germany's Sexual Evolution," 72.

genders in the GDR, and by the same reasoning, the basis of western feminism was rejected as misguided and incomplete. As I demonstrate below, state-driven media consistently coached female citizens and discussed the need to reform women's policy in terms of reforming women themselves. Interestingly, government officials seemed to overlook the fact that their aims at emancipation had actually successfully taken hold among a substantial segment of the female population, indicating that perhaps the SED had insufficiently targeted men in reforming East German gender roles.

By 1970, the women raised under the tenets of state socialism in the GDR were already beginning to demonstrate the degree to which they had internalized the lessons of Marxist equality and emancipation. As Donna Harsch contends, the SED neglected to implement changes in the private sphere because, while women's oppression was grounded in the patriarchal family, the way to real emancipation was through her shared place in production.²⁸ Statistical data, detailed below, gathered by the SED from this period demonstrates that with the encouragement of the SED and socialist policy, women were entering higher education at an impressive rate, working even after they were married with children, and choosing to divorce their partners as they saw fit. In the absence of electoral democracy, sources like statistical assessment and opinion reporting provided the government with feedback about how well citizens were acclimatizing to state-dictated policies. They therefore provide an historical glimpse into statistical trends and areas of government concern. An official government report was written in 1980 about the impact of new women's policies adopted at the Ninth Party Congress held in May 1976. From 1971 to 1980, the number of women who graduated with a technical or professional

²⁸ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 3.

qualification rose from a reported 37.2% to 57.5%.²⁹ In the same period the number of divorces, especially among younger people, also increased significantly. In 1970, there were 27,407 divorces, totaling 16.1 for every 1000 people, and in 1980 there were a reported 44,794, 26.8 for every 1000 people.³⁰ Statistical leaps of this nature demonstrate that women had in many ways internalized the social and labour expectations established by state socialism. They were more highly educated than their mothers had been and than their counterparts in West Germany. Many women pursued higher education with the expectation of engaging in paid employment, taking short breaks only during pregnancy and in the first year of their child's life. Further, women initiated divorce in two-thirds of the cases, demonstrating their willingness to publicly acknowledge both conflict and disappointed expectations within marriage.³¹ The high divorce rate under state socialism, as Ilse Thiele, member of the Central Committee and head of the DFD, pointed out in 1975, was an indication of the success of state socialism:

[The Divorce rate] should not necessarily be considered a negative phenomenon; rather, there are a number of understandable grounds for it [...] In his work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels proves that in socialist society, the economic independence of woman from man results in a totally new foundation for marriage and the family. It is transformed from a more or less economic institution that serves to supply women and children, into a union between two people who live together on the basis of love, trust, and mutual respect.³²

The above-mentioned statistics demonstrate that women had taken their socialist education to heart. Higher education and divorce were now commonplace among women, and they were viewed as neither a source for shame nor bewilderment; they were

²⁹ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 75.

³⁰ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 110.

³¹ Anne Hampele, "The Organized Women's Movement in the Collapse of the GDR: The Independent Women's Association (UVA)," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Nanette Funk et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 181.

³² BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/36, 138.

normalized and celebrated. Yet state actors consistently treated women's response to state socialism, or more accurately, women's experience in state socialism, as only partially developed. Propaganda in various media targeted women to further their socialist education. And the DFD sought to provide solutions to women's reported difficulties and inequality by adjusting the policies directed at women, not by identifying and attempting to alter women's private experiences – which self-reporting from the women of the GDR showed was the greatest source of frustrated emancipation efforts.

The private sphere was, in many ways, a last bastion of widespread traditionalism within state socialism. According to a 1968 survey taken to determine some of the problems facing women, 82 percent of women responded that the burden of household chores and children were the primary hindrance to their ability to qualify for higher positions.³³ In 1971, a survey was taken of *Für Dich* readers responding to a question about the barriers and difficulties facing employed women in the GDR.³⁴ For example, 48.2 percent of respondents suggested that the burden of housework was the main cause of women's difficulties under socialism, while 44.7 percent said raising and maintaining their children took too much time, and 41.9 percent said the time expenditure of grocery shopping and insufficient access to services (*Diensleistungseinrichtungen*) were the cause. In addition, 30 percent of women suggested that insufficient support from the responsible leader in the factory created difficulties for them. A 1986 letter from Inge Lange to Erich Honecker outlines the continued focus of the DFD on helping working women manage their duties to household and family.³⁵ She insists that women had been reporting throughout

³³ BaB - DY 30/ IV 2/2.042/2, 9.

³⁴ BaB - DY 30/J/IV 2/2J/3878, 7.

³⁵ BaB - DY 30/ IV 2/2.042/30, 257.

the 1970s and 80s that they were still having trouble fulfilling all of the expectations of socialism. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that the DFD significantly changed its strategies in reconciling women's paid labour with traditional private sphere duties; rather, it educated women about the better benefits provided by the SED, without actually addressing the source of inequality and unfulfilled emancipation. Tatiana Böhm has argued that while the SED touted the GDR's policies towards women as the successful solution to the woman question, it was also the very thing that undermined women's emancipation.

She argues:

If formal equal rights and the social policy of combining motherhood and work was a model of integration long accepted by women, it was nevertheless a model that in the long run *prevented* the emancipation of women, questioning neither the traditional structural division of work at home and in the workplace nor the question of domination.³⁶

Lenore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen have similarly discussed women's daily experiences under state socialism, considering the degree to which women did or did not personally experience emancipation as a result of state policies. They suggest women experienced some degree of emancipation, but were provided with no conceptual tools to challenge the very real inequalities they faced in everyday life.

According to Ansorg and Hürtgen, East German women experienced some degree of successful emancipation, specifically in terms of paid employment. However, they posit that successful moments of emancipation did not create a cohesive whole and since women's paid labour is obviously not synonymous with emancipation, they argue that examining conditions within the private sphere is critical to any assessment of the real

³⁶ Tatiana Böhm, "The Women's Question as a Democratic Question: In search of Civil Society," in Funk et al., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, 151.

degree of personally experienced emancipation.³⁷ Divorce rates, in this context, demonstrate the success of the DFD in imparting socialist values on the women of East Germany. Prior to state socialism, the traditional family structure was as firmly rooted in the regions that became East Germany as in the West. Yet because of the SED, and according to its Marxist ideology, women were granted emancipation from the private sphere through wage labour, and the Party used the DFD and the media to direct women on their new civic role. As the high divorce rate might indicate, what appears to have been missing in the private sphere was an equal education of both men and women on the subject of emancipation. The persistent focus of state discussion, reporting, and policy on women's need for greater or better emancipation demonstrated the blinkered focus of the state in targeting women's emancipation independent of an equivalent policy to target men. Women received extensive benefits because their ongoing difficulties under state socialism challenged the ideological basis of women's emancipation and thus the whole socialist program. The SED explicitly aimed to shape women's self-understanding on the basis of ideological goals.

SED family and women's policy of the 1970s and 80s did not demonstrate official recognition of a disconnect between wage equality and emancipation within the home. Since a significant number of women consistently reported difficulty balancing work and family obligations, the SED enhanced its family policy to ease women's lot, but little was done to actually change the basis of their struggles within marriage. Many mothers, though not all women, were granted slightly shorter workweeks at equal pay and a housework day

³⁷ Ansorg and Hürtgen, "The Myth of Female Emancipation," 169.

that they could use to catch up on chores.³⁸ The increased benefits provided by the SED were heralded in the state media and warmly greeted by the women who got to enjoy these perks; the regime demonstrated that it could and would respond to women's difficulties and these policies were very popular. But only women were granted such benefits, which reinforced the notion that housework was the sole responsibility of women.³⁹ According to one report, between 1970 and 1980 women seeking a divorce were awarded sole custody of their children over 90 per cent of the time,⁴⁰ which reinforced that the mother was the essential caretaker responsible for raising children. The propagandistic efforts of socialist magazines did not reflect the fact that many women had long since taken the message of female emancipation to heart. The SED offered women increasingly better means to balance responsibilities, but not fundamental social changes that would lead to the eradication of overwork. The DFD's efforts were bound by the limitations of Bebel's and Marxist theory. The state was concerned with advancing family policy as a means of solving the issues frequently reported by women in the GDR as difficulties. More specifically, as I have demonstrated, the party granted women benefits like shorter work weeks, and longer maternity leave in order to increase women's free-time in the home. In effect though, state policies stood to reinforce the gender norms and expectations that feminist groups were combatting in West Germany.

Parties in East and West used the media to present new policies and contend with citizen complaints and challenges. Their media campaigns bear some resemblance, despite

³⁸ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 39.

³⁹ See, for example, Ina Merkel, "Sex and Gender in the Divided Germany: Approaches to History from a Cultural Point of View," in *Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History*, ed. Christoph Kleßmann (Oxford: Berg Publishers 2001), 100 and McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 73.

⁴⁰ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 112.

their widely divergent theoretical bases. Marxist theory did not account for the persistence of unequal relationships within the private realm following the entry of women into the workforce as equal workers which was an ongoing source of consternation for government officials. From 1972 onwards, the SED pursued policies meant to materially and socially ease women's triple burden, with the goal of creating a more comfortable experience for women under socialism. But in so doing, the state reinforced gender biases in the private sphere, and while their policies certainly eased the lived experience of some women, the basis of inequality – that is, women's triple burden which was not imposed on men to the same extent – was still present. In the FRG, more effort was focused on reforming men in the 1970s than in the GDR, but though the two systems of gender politics were ideologically very different they both tended to focus more emphasis on *women's* changed mentality. In West Germany, this was a reflection of the insular nature of the independent women's movement of the 1970s. Because the movement arose organically from the civil society, and consciously rejected traditional hierarchical organizations, by the time political parties started actively responding to the women's movement, they were reacting to the terms of a discussion that had already been set. The West German woman's movement addressed women and excluded men by suggesting that women needed to break free from established subordination based on traditional roles. Independent feminists fought against and, indeed, outside of the patriarchal structure. As such, the movement excluded men, and thus ignored the reeducation of men, except in cases where the federal parties attempted to mitigate the feminist message and activities of the independent women's movement. I have demonstrated in this chapter that the ideological underpinnings of women's emancipation in East and West Germany were fundamentally different. Due to the differences in the

ideological origins of East and West German women's emancipation efforts, top-down government efforts to direct the creation of new gender norms followed different approaches, even as both targeted women over men. I will now shift to an examination of political exchanges between feminist representatives from East and West Germany. I aim to demonstrate that though representatives of various women's organizations of East and West Germany met frequently, the ideological differences that I have outlined in this chapter limited the success of their political exchanges.

Chapter Two - “We’re talking past each other”: Political engagement between East and West German women’s organizations

The DFD operated as an essential point of transmission for women’s politics within the GDR. It was an operative arm of the SED and worked to bring national policy concerning women and mandated in the Politburo to fruition. The DFD operated as an hierarchical organization with local, regional and national representatives, who collected information and reported on the state of women’s politics in the GDR. In a report from 1980 sent by Ilse Thiele to Margot Schrieber, Chairperson of the Active Women’s Ministry for Land, Forest, and Food Goods Economy (*Vorsitzende des Aktivs Frauen Ministerium für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft*), Thiele described the work undertaken by the DFD since the Ninth Party Congress in 1976. She claimed that “with its political-ideological work, the DFD has helped to consolidate the socialist consciousness of women’s firm attachment to and confidence in the SED, deepening their political views to bind women more closely to our socialist state.”¹ Navigating the socialist political experience of women in the GDR was the job of DFD leaders, but as representatives of state socialist women’s politics, the same women were also frequently in contact with West German independent feminists and the women’s branches of West German political parties. DFD leaders were also deeply involved in the creation and production of the official image of the socialist woman through periodicals like *Für Dich*, the only women’s magazine published in the GDR, which mixed socialist propaganda with more frivolous articles about fashion and travel for the mass consumption of East German women. Where West German feminists and the women’s branches of political parties could struggle openly for women’s equality in

¹ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 10.

their civil organizations, criticizing the patriarchal structure which they identified as the source of women's oppression,² women in East Germany – including the leadership of the DFD – could not. Negotiation occurred in more limited and subtle ways in East Germany than in the FRG.

In this chapter I will first undertake a theoretical analysis of the acts of negotiation and opposition undertaken by women's groups within the very different political climates of the FRG and the GDR. I will then outline the relationships between the DFD and a number of West German women's groups, particularly focusing on which groups were the first to make political contact and what their intended areas of discussion and exchange were. I will show that while West German independent feminists frequently sought contact with the DFD, they were not unwilling to publically criticize East German representatives of women's politics. I will conclude by assessing the extent of internal DFD critiques of the women's politics in the GDR and the degree to which they aligned with West German feminist critiques. Though the leaders of the DFD consistently acknowledged the ongoing inequalities that women in the GDR faced, their room for maneuver was limited by the SED monopoly on power and the structurally imposed restrictions on freedom of the press. They therefore worked pragmatically under the leadership of the SED to advance women's emancipation under state socialism. The frequency with which the DFD and various women's groups from the FRG converged for meetings makes it clear that some degree of transmission of ideas occurred between the groups. Yet East and West German women's groups were mostly incapable of creating successful dialogue due to an inability or unwillingness to view ideological differences constructively. I argue that neither group

² Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 145.

truly understood the other's structural limitations – the specific political circumstances that contributed to fundamentally different strategies for negotiating gender roles, social expectations, and women's policies. Both East and West German women's groups consciously sought to negotiate broad social changes in gender roles, and each attempted to guide policy shifts through direct influence on governing bodies. I will now transition to an examination of the ways that historians have conceptualized negotiation and dissent under different forms of government, before addressing bilateral relations between East and West German women's organizations.

The bounds of acceptable political behaviour play a decisive role in the forms of criticism and protest taken by citizen's groups and political organizations alike. Jarausch has theorized that the structural conditions of support and opposition on either side of the wall influenced how each regime pursued legitimacy as a fundamental political concern. In his book *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, he assesses the student and New Left rebellion against the capitalist system in the FRG during the late 1960s, and he explores the limits of dictatorship in the GDR. In the FRG, the student and New Left movement opposed the inequalities in wealth distribution, the meaninglessness of consumerism, the ongoing nuclear arms race between East and West, and global human rights abuses.³ Jarausch points out that the underlying conflict apparent in these protests against the civic culture of the democratic West was that they relied on an open public sphere guaranteed by the rule of law. Protesters aimed to demonstrate that the West German authorities aggressively policed citizen's behaviour, but in order to make such claims, protesters depended on legally guaranteed rights of assembly and opinion. The New Left rejected the system which

³ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 162.

allowed it to publicly voice criticisms, the significance of which becomes evident when compared to East German society where no such freedom to publicly criticize the regime existed.⁴ Stated differently, protesters operated within the conventions of the system in order to fundamentally change that system by altering the disparity in power that had traditionally existed. The independent women's movement of the FRG, likewise, sought to operate independently outside of the hierarchical political structure,⁵ while still lobbying for women's greater political equality and engaging in forceful criticism of the system in which they operated. Political parties, whose women's branches pursued equality from within government, operated from a different principal of engagement. But they relied on the same fundamental protection of their right to criticize and engage in the civic sphere, which was protected by the rule of law. The absence of an equivalent, legally guaranteed, democratic civic culture in East Germany stunted the development of a similar movement in the East.⁶ Yet the women of the DFD still found ways of negotiating with the state within the bounds of their own political system, despite West German criticisms to the contrary. As I will demonstrate below, bilateral engagement between East and West German women's organizations was often fraught with difficulties due to fundamental ideological differences and public criticism of the opposing group or groups.

In the 1980s, the women's branches of West German political parties and West German feminists increasingly expressed interest in learning more from and more about the women's politics of the GDR. In July 1978, the Democratic Women's Initiative (*Demokratische Fraueninitiative*, or DFI) approached the DFD, and suggested intensifying

⁴ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 169.

⁵ Young, *Triumph of the Fatherland*, 48.

⁶ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 169.

the connection between the two organizations for the purpose of “granting the women in [their] group the possibility of learning about the activities of [the DFD] and the lives of women in the GDR.”⁷ Following the Central Committee of the Politburo’s 1977 statement that “the DFD should develop no independent work with the FRG,”⁸ the DFD expressed no desire to pursue such a relationship. But upon the request of the DFI, they sent materials such as editions of *Für Dich*, placards and brochures, and information about the 30-year anniversary of the GDR. In a letter to Inge Lange on October 22, 1979, Thiele asked whether it would be possible to regularly send information to the DFI, and she wondered how the two groups might establish a closer and more regular relationship. She suggested that they might be able to arrange an annual exchange of delegates.⁹ Contact continued into November 1984, but due to bureaucratic slowness and an apparent lack of prioritization on the part of the DFD, a first in-person meeting had still not taken place. Following a discussion with DFI representatives Mechthild Jansen and Heide Härtel-Herrmann, Thiele reported that

during the duration of the conversation, the guests constantly returned to the subject of problems that touched on feminist viewpoints; such subjects as ‘stereotypes,’ ‘changing of the codes of conduct and behaviours of men and women, especially in regard to the family, and equal responsibility for children,’ etc.¹⁰

Further, Härtel-Herrmann, in preparation for the expected upcoming exchange, insisted in a letter to Thiele that the DFD “must absolutely make the difficulties that still exist in the GDR visible.”¹¹ Thiele expressed her irritation: “We answered that we would always represent our normal lives and that we wouldn’t provide a parade of superwomen, but that

⁷ Letter from Ilse Thiele to Inge Lange, October 22, 1979, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Report by Ilse Thiele, November 30, 1984, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

¹¹ Ibid.

we thought they were interested in learning about and studying socialism, and not primarily about its difficulties.”¹² Thiele also noted that “[the DFI] were a small grouping and had no mass influence. [They] float without direction and cannot develop any systematic work, since it was difficult [for them] to work out and enforce any common line.”¹³ This report demonstrates the initial difficulties faced by the DFI and the DFD in creating the terms of a meaningful discussion due to the two organization’s enormously different worldviews. On the one hand, the women from the GDR were critical of the limited potential of a non-mass, non-hierarchical civil society group like the DFI to affect any real change. The DFI, on the other hand, demonstrated to their host a fundamental mistrust of the DFD in representing a realistic image of the daily life and difficulties facing East German women. In their relations with western organizations and parties, the DFD often faced explicit criticisms of the organization’s effectiveness in serving East German women’s needs.

West German delegates frequently questioned the legitimacy of the DFD as the sole representative of East German women. The German Women’s Circle (*Deutscher Frauenring*, or DFR), one of several West German independent women’s groups, openly questioned DFD representatives in a meeting between the two groups in May 1981. Forty-six members of the DFR participated in the conference on “The Role of Women in the GDR Community” that was held in East Berlin. Herta Jung (DFD Vice-Chairperson), Lieselotte Otting (member of the federal executive board), and Gisela Senftleben (manager of the DFD federal executive board) oversaw the conference. The relationship between the DFD and the DFR was also the result of a request put forward by the leader of a West German group, Eva

¹² Report by Ilse Thiele, November 30, 1984, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

¹³ Ibid.

Ehrlich, president of the DFR.¹⁴ According to Senftleben's report on the conference, West German delegates asked questions like: "The DFD has its own Faction in the People's chamber – this system is totally new to us. Does this Faction work independently or is this where party politics are practiced? Who reviews the candidates? [...] How does the DFD finance their work? The German Women's Circle is independent in the FRG, is this also the case with the DFD? What is the composition of the national executive?"¹⁵ These questions were positively received by Senftleben. In her report she suggests that "these questions were directed primarily to learn how democracy [was] handled [in the GDR]."¹⁶ Despite an invitation for future reciprocal meetings, however, the DFD offered no commitment for further engagement with the DFR.

The unwillingness and inability of the DFD to pursue further relationships with the women's organizations of the FRG demonstrated its deference to the will of the Politburo of the SED. In both of the reports outlined here, the initiating party seeking greater interaction between East and West German women was a group from the FRG. The DFD did not frequently pursue connections to the women's groups in the West, and it was also the most likely organization to end the relationships that did develop. In some cases, which were typically not explained or justified in any way, the SED Central Committee dictated to DFD representatives that future contact must cease.¹⁷ Beyond Central Committee directives, however, and despite the fact that women in the DFD considered relationships with women's groups from the West to be valuable,¹⁸ bi-lateral meetings on women's

¹⁴ Report by Gisela Senftleben, December 9, 1981, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Report by G. Bluhm, September 18, 1987, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

¹⁸ Letter from Ilse Thiele to Inge Lange, October 22, 1979, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72. See also Report by Gisela Senftleben, December 9, 1981, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

issues seem to have been entered into very hesitantly and exited quite readily by the DFD. This rests in part on the fact that the Central Committee identified East German women's politics in 1971 as having already attained success. In the Report of the Central Committee following the 8th Party Congress of the SED, Erich Honecker announced: "It is in fact one of the greatest achievements of socialism to have largely realized the equality of women in our state, both legally and in life. No capitalist country in the world can claim the same for itself."¹⁹ This had a limiting effect on the ways that East German women could conceive of and manage their own emancipation. According to the party, gender equality was not a problem in East Germany, and since the SED rejected West German feminism as a potential source of division between the male and female members of the working class, it limited contact and the possibility of significant transmission of western values into the East. In fact, a delegation of DFD representatives sent in 1986 to the FRG reported that Dr. Wiebke Buchhorst-Will, a clothing and textiles industry executive, commented that "this trip to the FRG must be like a trip into the past."²⁰ Her comment clearly resonated with the opinions held, at least officially, by the leaders of the DFD. Whether East German women were interested in learning from West German feminists or not is somewhat irrelevant. The point was moot for the women of the DFD, who could not take the same approach to improving women's politics as the women of West Germany did. East German women had no civic society comparable to the West German independent feminists and political parties; by contrast, the DFD was a mass organization that was directly answerable to the

¹⁹ Erich Honecker, "Aus dem Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII. Parteitag des Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands," From "Geschichte des Kampfes der deutschen Arbeiterklasse um die Befreiung der Frau" (1975):Dokumente der revolutionären deutschen Arbeiterbewegung zur Frauenfrage 1848 - 1974. Leipzig, Dokument 118, S. 286/287, accessed May 9, 2013, <http://www2.gender.hu-berlin.de/ausstellung/Infocomputer/Massnahmen/Honecker.htm>

²⁰ Report titled "Bericht über den Besuch einer Delegation des DFD bei der Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialdemokratischer Frauen (AsF) vom 6. – 11. 10. 1986," October 15, 1986, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/73.

SED. Its operations and relationship to the party was fundamentally different than the relationship of West German feminists to the various western political parties. Due to the very different theoretical bases of East and West German women's politics outlined in the previous chapter, exchanges and conferences with western feminists were not officially reciprocal experiences from the perspective of the DFD. In meetings with women from the West DFD representatives took on an attitude of teaching women's politics, not learning them. West German politicians who typically sought out meetings with the DFD were plainly not in accordance with this view.

West German feminists tended to first invite guidance and input from the DFD in the area of women's politics and then criticize their hosts in the West German popular media, on the radio and in magazines, to the chagrin of the SED. In 1984, Waltraud Schoppe of the recently founded Green Party sent a letter to Thiele and the DFD. She wrote: "Since we do not view the 'woman question' as an isolated problem of the Federal Republic, we believe that it is necessary to get an idea of how the problem is evaluated in other countries and social systems, and what possible solutions are being implemented."²¹ Conceding that "the equality of women in the GDR is given a high priority,"²² she asked for permission to visit the GDR in order to learn more about gender relations under state socialism. Thiele forwarded the request directly to the SED Central Committee, whose leaders offered an invitation to the Green party to visit the GDR from January 21-25, 1985.²³ The Green party delegation included Heidemarie Dann, Hannelore Saibold, Marita Wagner and Waltraud

²¹ Letter from Waltrund Schoppe to Ilse Thiele, July 16, 1984, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

²² Ibid.

²³ Report by G. Bluhm, September 18, 1987, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

Schoppe.²⁴ On the last day of the Greens' visit to the GDR, Schoppe held a press conference and relayed some of her impressions and opinions about East Germany. On the situation of women in the GDR, she reported:

We notice with appreciation that laws have been created that give women the opportunity to participate in the production process. But we also see that there is a difference between the GDR and the Federal Republic. Here in the GDR the workforce is needed, and because of this the women are also needed. [...] Nevertheless, we believe that some of the laws and regulations that have been made here are very worthy of discussion.²⁵

However, she also raised some concerns about women's leadership roles in the GDR. She stated: "We can't help but wonder, and here I come around to discussing the question of women's politics, why a woman like Ms. [Inge] Lange, who we encountered as a very pugnacious woman, has been a candidate for the Politburo for ten years, and is not yet a full member."²⁶ She also outlined the following opposition to the political system:

As Greens we are an anti-capitalist party. But we do not believe that the way to real socialism that has been taken here is correct because we do not believe that the development of the productive workforce can be regulated to allow the conditions necessary for future viability and the needs of the people.²⁷

Schoppe's comments reflected her party's curiosity with SED women's policies. But she also directly criticized insufficient female representation in the highest echelons of the GDR government, and she cast doubt on the long-term sustainability of its political economic system. The West German press picked up on the story, further undermining the potential relationship between the Greens and the DFD.

²⁴ Copy of news article by Marlis Menge, "Jeans und Pelzjaken," February 13, 1985, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

²⁵ Internal Report entitled "Pressekonferenz der Delegation der Grünen der BRD," January 25, 1985, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

In February 1985, a news article in the Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit* by Marlies Menge covered the experiences of the Greens in the GDR and expressed opinions that were certainly unprintable in the East German press. Menge related:

The East German women congratulated themselves constantly on the women-friendly social policies of their government – [but] the women of the Greens want more: more women in positions of power to enforce female representation. [They find that] one GDR Minister (Margot Honecker, responsible for education) and two candidates for the Politburo (run without women for its entire existence) – this is too little for them.²⁸

She also raised doubts about the men in positions of power in the GDR, and their ability to concern themselves with the needs of women, insisting that “the Greens refuse to believe that men really represent the interests of women; so much is done for women in the GDR, they believe, because they are needed for the work process.”²⁹ Following this critical Western commentary, no further contact between the DFD and the West German political party was sustained.³⁰ Unlike other international relationships fostered in order to maintain the GDR’s international standing (such as ties to organizations like the United Nations, which I discuss in the next chapter), the SED was hesitant about entering into bilateral relations with small and expendable independent women’s groups, and they quickly ended these relations in response to criticism from West German groups. The relationship between the DFD and the women’s branch of the SPD proceeded slightly differently, but bore many similar attributes in terms of how the GDR was discussed by western contacts in the West German press.

²⁸ Copy of news article by Marlis Menge, “Jeans und Pelzjaken,” February 13, 1985, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Report by G. Bluhm, September 18, 1987, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

The DFD pursued a different tack in their relations with the women's branch of the SPD, because they were seeking political alignment between women's groups concerning the peace and disarmament process. The DFD approached the AsF in a letter from Thiele dating from October 1983. Writing on behalf of the DFD, Thiele expressed a desire to work together towards disarmament in the spirit of the United Nations Disarmament Week. She did not mention any particular interest in discussing women's politics, however the Chairperson of the AsF, Inge Wettig-Danielmeier, responded with a request of her own. Danielmeier asked if their conversation "could include a discussion about peace, but also about the situation of women in [the two] countries, as well as a comparison of the concrete measures taken in order to realize the equality of women."³¹ Upon introducing this stipulation, Inge Lange, to whom Thiele had obviously forwarded Danielmeier's answer, conferred her decision-making capacity directly to Erich Honecker, who agreed to a meeting between AsF leaders and the DFD.³² The AsF sent Danielmeier and Dr. Monika Kramme as delegates to meet with SED representatives Inge Lange, Ilse Thiele, and Herbert Haber (Member of the Central Committee and leader of the West Division of the Central Committee).³³ The relationship between the DFD and the AsF was different from the relationship between the DFD and other West German political groups mentioned above for certain key reasons. The DFD had initiated the relationship and was pursuing an agenda for peace and disarmament under the auspices of encouragement from the UN, and it consequently had more at stake. Its work with the SPD reflected an effort to engage peacefully with one of the largest West German political parties. The SPD, while not the

³¹ Letter from Inge Wettig-Danielmeier to Ilse Thiele, November 14, 1983, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/73.

³² Letter from Inge Lange to Erich Honecker, December 14, 1983, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/73.

³³ Letter from Inge Lange to Erich Honecker, January 13, 1984, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/73.

leading power at the time, still held 38.2 percent of the Bundestag in 1984. Further, the AsF, while critical of the GDR, was not as openly derisive of East German women's policy as some of the other West German women's groups proved to be, allowing the SED to save face.

Representatives of the AsF were more sensitive and balanced in their critique of women's policies in the GDR than, for example, the Green Party. Danielmeier explained her organization's take on women's politics in the GDR in a radio interview with Thomas Hauschild for the State Committee for Radio. She suggested:

If you take the question of women's equality in isolation, the East has certainly come much further than the West, meaning, women have come further in terms of professional integration, and they are far better educated than the women in the Federal Republic are when held in comparison to men.³⁴

She went on to argue that the family situation in the GDR was the main area where public opinion formation had not effectively taken hold: "I almost get the impression, that here [in the FRG] more was set in motion as concerns changing men's roles, as was perhaps the case in the GDR."³⁵ But she defended the very marginal inclusion of women in the highest rungs of power, which softened her criticism. "[Women,]" she pointed out, "are not represented in leading positions to the same degree, but it must be said, of course, that one does not get to special positions at age 20 – and the now-50-year-old group [of women] is of course not as well educated and represented as younger women."³⁶ Members of the AsF were more sensitive in the presentation of their critiques than the independent feminists and the Greens, which made political relations easier to maintain.

³⁴ Transcript of interview between Inge Wettig-Danielmeier and Thomas Hauschild, February 8, 1984, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/73.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The criticisms the DFD faced from West German women's political organizations reflected the differences in political systems and the divisiveness of Cold War politics. West German women questioned and critiqued the purported emancipation and state-dictated equality of women in the East. In so doing, they directly criticized the work of the DFD, which was inherently limited by the political ideology of the state socialist system. West German groups were criticizing a political system different from their own. Yet their criticisms were based on the values of the western liberal democracy, which was the basis of West German women's own political experience and understanding. The DFD's experiences, specifically with the DFI, demonstrate the western feminist preoccupation with changing the representation of women in the media and deconstructing gender stereotypes. These concerns were of little interest to the leaders of the DFD, who directed the representation of women in the East German media, though within the confines of accepted Marxist dialectics. The DFD belatedly recognized that organizations like the DFR, DFI and even the Green Party had limited power to bring the disparate goals of these organizations to fruition. They represented a small, critical segment of the public and were in no way the directors of mass political opinion, but rather participants in an organic and self-consciously non-hierarchical movement. The importance of small civil society organizations in West Germany may not have been fully recognized by the leaders of the DFD, who headed a massive bureaucratic operation. By contrast, the DFD and AsF had a slightly different relationship, which might suggest that the SED was more willing to accommodate the more powerful West German political parties, whose representatives moderated their public critiques of the GDR.

According to Menge's news article published in *Die Zeit* in 1985, one of the Green Party representatives declared, "we are talking past each other,"³⁷ which sums up the relationship between women's groups in East and West Germany. The disjuncture in political systems left both sides unable to see the potential effectiveness of the work of women's organizations on the other side of the wall. Though the women's groups described in this chapter shared many of the same aspirations in terms of equality, each was limited by the realities of their different socio-economic systems. Despite the fractured and diverse nature of Western civil society, West German feminists worked with as much unity as possible towards the goal of influencing government decision making. The women of the DFD similarly developed pragmatic strategies to lobby for improvements of women's lives in the face of ideological limitations. In both cases, the groups sought to influence the image of women in the media to prod their federal governments towards policies that would bring about gender equality within two very different regimes. I will now turn to an assessment of the ways in which DFD women articulated, as plainly as the state socialist system would allow, that they were not satisfied with the degree of women's emancipation in the GDR.

Although the SED declared socialist women's emancipation a success in 1971, East German women leaders demonstrated that traditionalist views and socialist expectations ensured that most women did not enjoy or experience real equality in their daily lives. Women like Thiele and Lange reported, however cursorily, on the work that citizens, the DFD and the SED still needed to undertake in order to make women's lived public and private equality a reality. In 1975, Thiele compiled a report for Potsdam's regional leaders

³⁷ Copy of news article by Marlis Menge, "Jeans und Pelzjaken," February 13, 1985, BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72.

in which she stressed that “overall, it is actually still the case that women are severely strained by the tasks of household care and raising and caring for children.”³⁸ In 1980, Lange prepared a report called: “Partial analysis on the implementation of the resolution of the 9th FDGB congress to continue the improvement of the societal status of women.” The FDGB, or the Free German Trade Union Federation, was another mass organization of the GDR. Lange reported on the work and successes of the DFD in improving women’s role in the socialist society in the wake of the FDGB Ninth Congress that was held in 1975. But in no uncertain terms, she criticizes the failings of specific plans:

Despite intensified efforts on the part of the women’s committees and union leaders to increase the number of educated women, especially in the highest levels of management, no real progress has been made since the 9th FDGB congress.³⁹

The report concludes that “the union control of the specific measures in the cadre program, the BKV and the promotion of women is also ineffective, and they should absolutely be intensified.”⁴⁰ Yet another report from 1985, entitled, “On the development of the DFD and its community influence amongst the broadest range of women,”⁴¹ outlined the ongoing work of the DFD. The report contains a wider discussion of the work of rank-and-file DFD members in communal improvement projects, such as building and renovating play areas and living spaces. In response to decisions taken by the Central Committee on June 29, 1983 and October 24, 1984, the report notes that

the women’s organization turned its attention more intensely toward those tasks which further ease the lives of women, allowing them to fashion their free time more sensibly and to take their need for relaxation into account, while also building closer

³⁸ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/36, 117.

³⁹ BaB - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/29, 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ BaB - DY 31/1531, 33.

relationships between members to achieve their full integration in the work of the organization.⁴²

Here the DFD persists in outlining their goals to lighten women's workload, specifically referring to the need for relaxation time in the context of a wider discussion concerning volunteer work, an element of the officially encouraged triple burden. Their concern about women's lack of free time demonstrates that the DFD was still receiving complaints about this from working women and that the organization took this concern seriously enough to raise it repeatedly in party meetings. This example also highlights the difficult position of the DFD as a point of transmission between the SED and the women of the GDR. On the one hand they assert that women should ideally engage in DFD community activities to an even greater degree, and on the other hand they clearly establish that the SED needed to create more and better policies to help women balance their household and employment duties. The DFD operated as a sort of broker for women's concerns to inform the government of ongoing difficulties faced by women, though obviously their reports had to conform to SED ideology. They aimed to shape and demonstrate citizen compliance in keeping with the goals of the SED, but they also acted to a limited degree as representatives of their constituents, operating within the existing system to enforce new and improved gender norms.

These examples provide a representative sample of DFD reports from the years 1970 to 1989. At no point did the employees of the organization declare or accept the official pronouncement of the success of women's emancipation under state socialism. In reports and speeches throughout this period, leaders of the DFD consistently made clear that their aim to ensure women's roles as both mothers and workers in the socialist

⁴² BaB - DY 31/1531, 33.

community was not yet a fully realized success. In part this was reflective of the nature of the socialist regime in which they worked – they had to demonstrate that they were always struggling towards a new goal for the betterment of socialist society. But the older goals, foundational goals about women’s equality, did not disappear from the radar of DFD leadership despite party pronouncements. Leaders of the DFD were limited to certain ideological parameters in the critiques they could express on behalf of their constituents, but they were not entirely muzzled. As such, it is clear that while this group cannot be considered part of a civil society that could independently criticize the regime, the DFD did operate in some limited way as a representative body, in spite of West German pronouncements to the contrary.

The bilateral relationship between East and West German women’s groups were plagued from the beginning by the biases and misunderstandings both sides introduced to their discussions. The frequency with which East and West German women’s groups met throughout the 1970s and 80s demonstrates their underlying interest in engaging with the women from the other Germany. East German women from the DFD and West German independent feminists and the women’s branches of federal parties failed to acknowledge the systemic limits to contestation and negotiation within different political contexts. Groups expressed criticism of the effectiveness of women’s work in developing fuller gender equality, while on both sides of the East-West divide, politically engaged women were addressing regimes critically according to the ideology of very different systems. The ideological differences between East and West regimes ensured that the experiences of women in East and West Germany were fundamentally different, yet some parallels did exist. Women’s organizations from East and West Germany in the 1970s and 80s were one

of the moderating forces in the ongoing negotiation of gender roles and women's policy within both German communities. Governments in the FRG and the GDR were confronting negotiation not only with politically engaged organizations and parties, but also in tandem with a wider international community that aimed to improve the situation of women all over the world. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of the relationships between East and West German governments with the United Nations.

Chapter Three - German signatories of the CEDAW: Negotiating women's policies at the international level

In 1979, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Both the FRG and the GDR were signatories, and as member states they helped to outline the aims of the convention. Representatives from both nations demonstrated a desire to be included and recognized as members of the international community by engaging with the UN Charter's aim to "ensure the universal recognition in law and in fact of the principle of equality of men and women."¹ As a result of differences in the political systems of East and West Germany, the regimes of the two nations were criticized by different political actors. As I demonstrate below, in the Federal Republic criticism stemmed from civil society organizations and from government ministry officials. By contrast, in the GDR, where no active civil society was allowed to develop, signing the treaty made the SED answerable to an international commission. Following a brief analysis of the ideological basis of East German dictatorship, I will outline the aims of the convention, pointing out areas of overlap in the national women's policies of East and West Germany and international goals. I will then highlight how the ministries of the FRG responded to the convention and how independent women's groups like the German Women's Circle (*Deutscher Frauenring*, or DFR) and the German Association of Professional Women (*Deutscher Verband Berufstätiger Frauen*, or DVBF) reacted to a long delay in the FRG ratification of the treaty. Finally, I will outline the responses of a group of SED delegates to criticisms from the UN concerning GDR women's policy. I argue that the recognition sought by both countries for adopting modern woman-friendly policies by

¹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 2, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

signing the CEDAW made both regimes answerable – though to different communities – in the ongoing contestation of gender policy and gender norms. Turning now to a brief reiteration of Jürgen Kocka’s analysis of the GDR as a modern dictatorship, I will examine how providing citizens with generous state-sponsored benefits was part of an SED quest to legitimize state socialism in the GDR.

Kocka’s conceptualization of the GDR as a modern dictatorship, which I outlined in the introduction, aids understanding of the top-down elements of East Germany’s policies on women. In the GDR, women’s emancipation – a modernizing element of state policy – was driven by the will and word of the SED. It was granted within the ideological bounds of socialist dictatorship, which helps to explain the underlying tension of the lived daily experiences of women discussed in chapters one and two. East German mothers could expect to work and receive reasonable compensation and a wide array of thoroughly modern social benefits (such as long maternity leave, housework days, additional cash upon the delivery of a child, etc.). But theirs was not a chosen emancipation, rather it was a socialist requirement of state ideology that was consistently reinforced through outlets like socialist magazines and the media more generally. The theoretical underpinnings of state ideological differences that I outlined in chapter one shaped the different ways that East and West German governments encountered criticisms as they engaged with the international community on the issue of women’s politics. As outlined in chapter two, in contrast to the dictatorial elements of the East German system, the West German parties faced criticism from the active civil society. Just as the FRG government faced public criticism for its domestic policies and legislation, it also faced criticism from politically active citizens and groups – including internal criticism from government officials – for its

international policy aims. I will now outline the goals of the CEDAW, before illustrating the processes of West German democratic negotiation.

The CEDAW reflected the international political moment in which it was written by advocating for equality between genders, eradication of racism and apartheid, the cessation of colonialism, and the participation of women in strengthening peace movements and nuclear disarmament.² CEDAW was adopted by the UN in 1979 and brought into force in 1981, meaning that signatory nations consented to be bound by the treaty tenets following ratification by federal government legislation starting in 1981. Signatory nations debated and amended the articles of the treaty through 1977 and 1978, and aimed to reflect a variety of political and social contexts as effectively as possible. For the most part, the convention aligned neatly with the bulk of both East and West German legislation concerning equality. It outlined the following policies, as well as numerous others: “the right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction;”³ “access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;”⁴ and that governments ensure “on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.”⁵ The convention was ratified in the GDR almost immediately in 1980, reflecting the authority of the socialist government to pass legislation without significant political or civil debate. Signing the convention served to reiterate the officially touted primacy of gender equality and women friendly social policy in the GDR. Justifiably or not, the SED

² Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

³ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 6, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

⁴ Ibid, Annex Pg. 5.

⁵ Ibid, Annex Pg. 7.

could easily point to its policies concerning women's emancipation and declare success, as it so frequently did. As a dictatorship, the party did not need to contest or debate the treaty, which in any case generally aligned with the stated objectives of the regime; they could push through ratification without internal or external contestation. Criticism and negotiation of the SED women's policy, as I will demonstrate below, came instead from the international community. In contrast, prior to ratification in the FRG, the CEDAW was contested and negotiated for half a decade. The convention was not ratified in West Germany until July 1985,⁶ because every federal ministry was first made to analyze its contents to assess possible areas of conflict with FRG laws.⁷ In the end, the West German ministries discussed several possible abstentions to various articles, but they enforced only two upon ratification of the convention.

It appears that the Ministry of Youth, Family and Health (BMJFG) requested that each government ministry in the FRG report on potential conflicts between the West German Basic Law and the CEDAW. In response, each of these ministries registered their concerns with the convention. They raised a variety of issues, which I detail below, that they felt might make certain sections untenable. The office of the Federal Minister of Economics and Labour (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung*, or BMAS), for example, pointed out a potential concern with Article 11.1 (a), guaranteeing the "right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings,"⁸ and Article 11.2 outlining a number of

⁶ Excerpt from "Declarations and Reservations made upon ratification of or accession to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and objections made to reservations," May 30, 1987, BaK - B189/25553.

⁷ Letter from Antje Huber to Frau Ehrlich, April 23, 1981, Koblenz BArch - B189/25554.

⁸ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 6, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

steps to prevent discrimination against women on the basis of marriage or maternity.

BMAS Minister Strachwitz suggested that clarification was needed, as

the “right to work” as a human right in the Federal Republic of Germany is enforced neither for men nor for women. However, as a fundamental social right, the right to work is recognized. It should be pointed out that [this right] applies equally to men and to women.⁹

Highlighting this concern may have been an attempt to redress criticisms outlined in the GDR press concerning West Germany’s high unemployment rate.¹⁰ It may also have been a rebuttal to criticisms stemming from the independent women’s movement, which were published in magazines like *Emma*, outlining discrimination in the workplace that had resulted in women receiving lower wages and inferior promotion and labour opportunities in West Germany.¹¹ In any case, it reflected official concerns that the government could not be held responsible within a capitalist system for the full employment of every citizen.

The office of the Federal Minister of the Interior (*Bundesminister des Innern*, or BMI) also responded to the request for an assessment of the CEDAW. It reported on articles two to five, pointing out specific language worthy of consideration prior to ratification.

According to BMI Minister Weyershäuser, Article 2 (b) outlined the commitment

to prohibit *through sanctions* every form of discrimination against women, to take all measures appropriate to eliminate discrimination *by any person, organization or company*, and also those requirements to abolish all discriminatory *customs and practices*.¹²

He proceeds to point out that according to Article 3, legislative measures should be used in the social economic and cultural fields to ensure women’s de facto equality, meaning, for

⁹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 2, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

¹⁰ Horst Meyer, “Frauen kämpfen um Ihre Recht,” *Für Dich* 24, 1968, 9. See also Dr. Horst Pattke, “Gleichberetigung Kontra ‘Goldene’ Lebensregeln,” *Für Dich* 2, 1970, 9. See also Heinz Simon, “Verlierer sind die Frauen,” *Für Dich* 26, 1981, 18-21.

¹¹ Claudia Pinl, “Erziehungsgeld – Ja oder Nein?” *Emma* 8, August 1977, 23.

¹² BaK - B189/25554, 074. (*Emphasis from original*).

example, establishing quotas for women's inclusion in non-governmental organizations.

The BMI report reiterated article 5, in conjunction with these first two, outlining the requirement that governments take action

to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.¹³

Weyerhäuser expressed concern that these articles may have required the “commitment to implement equality in non-governmental sectors,” which could only be carried out by adopting new rules, “meaning, ones which in all areas [met] comprehensive equality or anti-discrimination laws.”¹⁴ The concerns raised by the BMI were not meant to undermine the process of ratification. They were meant to ensure that any political commitment to intervene in the establishment of rules in the non-governmental sector would first be discussed in the *Bundestag*, as this sort of civic intervention was a potentially contentious political concern.¹⁵ The BMJFG requested critiques of this nature and assessed them in order to ensure that ratification of the convention would not conflict with the laws of the FRG. Though the majority of concerns did not result in abstentions, the process of democratic negotiation slowed down ratification of the treaty, which resulted in an outpouring of criticism from women's groups like the DVBF and the DFR, as well as internally from government ministry officials.

The coalition governments of the SPD-FDP up to 1982, and the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition thereafter, faced criticisms from groups and individuals who supported the

¹³ BaK - B189/25554, 075. Translation from original CEDAW convention, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 4, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

¹⁴ BaK - B189/25554, 075.

¹⁵ Ibid.

proposed international agreement and wanted the government to expedite the ratification process. By February 1981, *Bundestag* representatives and various ministries, such as the BMJFG, were already receiving critical letters. President of the DVBF, Dr. Ilse Becker-Döring, indicated to Anke Fuchs, SPD member of the *Bundestag*, that DVBF members were convinced that “based on the state of [FRG] legislation there should be no serious problems in carrying out the ratification [of the convention] in the near future.”¹⁶ Further, she argued, “A longer postponement of ratification would serve neither the Federal Republic of Germany, nor would it be justifiable in view of the interests of women.”¹⁷ Another of West Germany’s independent women’s groups, the DFR, was also paying attention to the slow-moving ratification process. In April 1981, DFR president Eva Ehrlich requested information from Antje Huber, Federal Minister of Youth, Family and Community, on when ratification could be expected in order to present a report to the International Council of Women in Brussels later that month. Huber responded that an assortment of potential conflicts were holding up the process of ratification among the various ministries perusing the convention for adoptability. These included: “‘the new world economic order’, self-determination of populations, service with the military, and worker and mother protection.”¹⁸ Yet Marlies Kutsch, another representative of the BMJFG, in a letter to vice-president of the *Bundestag*, Annemarie Renger, outlined that government ministries were not, perhaps, working with the kind of haste one might expect. Without naming any ministries specifically, she asserted:

I will in this context openly say that, just in terms of preparing a bill to ratify the convention into law, [this] shows the limitedness of personnel on the task force of

¹⁶ Letter from Ilse Becker Döring to Anke Fuchs, February 5, 1981, BaK - B189/25554.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Letter from Antje Huber to Eva Ehrlich, April 23, 1981, BaK - B189/25554.

women's politics. In other Houses [of Legislature] dealing with such conventions, there are well-equipped units to prepare such a draft-law.¹⁹

Thus, it is clear that the West German federal ministries were criticized by both independent observers and by internal officials. These initial criticisms eventually slowed during the subsequent five years it took for the treaty to be ratified, and in the end West Germany articulated only one important declaration and one abstention, to which I now turn.

The careful examination of the CEDAW undertaken by the various government ministries aimed to protect the FRG from political missteps and to clearly articulate the position of the FRG in the context of Cold War politics. Upon ratification of the treaty in 1985, the FRG outlined that with respect to the preamble of the convention

the right of people to self-determination, as enshrined in the Convention of the United Nations and in the International Covenants of 19 December 1966, applies to all peoples and not only to those living "under alien and colonial domination and foreign occupation". All peoples thus have the inalienable right freely to determine their political status and freely to pursue economic, social and cultural development. The Federal Republic of Germany [...] will interpret the 11th paragraph of the preamble accordingly.²⁰

As this declaration suggests, West Germany was particularly sensitive to any potential threat to its social and political order, due to the nation's geographical position directly on the boarder of the Eastern Bloc. Specifically referring to the rights of people to pursue their political status and economic, social and cultural development freely was a means of indicating that the FRG would retain its fundamental political system of liberal democracy.

This declaration was a political maneuver to reinforce that though the Federal Republic

¹⁹ Letter from Marlies Kutsch to Annemarie Renger, February 25, 1981, BaK - B189/25554.

²⁰ Excerpt from "Declarations and Reservations made upon ratification of or accession to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and objections made to reservations," May 30, 1987, BaK - B189/25553.

would ratify the CEDAW, it would not compromise on basic rights, which was precisely what it interpreted the Eastern Bloc nations to have done. In addition, the FRG registered a partial abstention from Article 7 (b), which guaranteed women's right to "participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government."²¹ FRG signatories articulated that it would "not be applied to the extent that it contradicts the second sentence of Article 12 a (4) of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany. Pursuant to this provision of the Constitution, women may on no account render service involving the use of arms." Of all of the potential concerns raised by the various ministries, these were the only two points of clarification made by the FRG upon ratification of the convention in 1985. The political process of democratic negotiation slowed ratification in the West, to the great frustration of independent feminists and other civil organizations and government critics. By way of contrast, the SED pushed the CEDAW through in short order, because it did not have to go through a process of democratic negotiation, yet in so doing, the SED made itself answerable to criticism of East German women's policies and the situation of women in the GDR. More specifically, the SED chose to answer the questions and critiques of the UN CEDAW committee concerning its women's policy in order to preserve the GDR's international standing. While the criticisms of the UN committee, which I discuss in greater detail below, did not force the SED to change its policies or contend with domestic dissatisfaction to any great extent, questioning from the CEDAW committee did cause the political envoys from the GDR to defend East German domestic policy. In fact, as it turned

²¹ Excerpt from "Declarations and Reservations made upon ratification of or accession to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and objections made to reservations," May 30, 1987, BaK - B189/25553.

out, the international community, and more specifically the United Nations, was one of the few organizations that actually induced GDR representatives to engage somewhat critically with their own policies and defend them openly, though in a limited manner.

By ratifying the convention, which the SED did in 1980, the regime agreed to the CEDAW requirement to report on the state of women's politics in the country at specified intervals, making the East German government answerable to the UN CEDAW committee. Article 18 of the convention required signatories to submit reports on the "legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures" adopted by the state in order to bring the convention into effect.²² Reporting was required one year after ratification of the treaty by the state, and subsequently every four years. In February 1989, the GDR submitted its second regular report to the CEDAW committee and the Secretary-General of the UN. The report itself included the standard list of self-congratulatory women-friendly policies frequently found in the GDR media outlining the success of East German social policy.²³ Socialist women's politics were a cornerstone of the SED's welfare program, and the propaganda produced for GDR citizens closely resembled the reports furnished to the UN.

The SED reported similarly successful results of its socialist women's policy in each of the CEDAW reports written in 1982, 1985 and 1989, positively describing the legal emancipation of women in the GDR. The official report from 1982 claimed: "the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women sets the GDR no fundamentally new tasks."²⁴ The same report further insisted that women in the GDR faced no barriers to the practical realization of their political participation and stated:

²² Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Annex Pg. 7, January 22, 1980, BaK - B189/25553.

²³ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 184.

²⁴ BaK - DY 31/905, 19.

In the People's Chamber, the highest legislative body in the GDR, there are 500 deputies, of whom 168 are women, which is 33.6%. The Democratic Women's Federation of Germany, the single representative organization for women in the GDR, is represented by its own faction, comprised of 35 members, in the People's Chamber.²⁵

The 1982 report also highlighted the comprehensiveness of GDR law in terms of fulfilling the requirements of CEDAW articles 10 to 14, which demanded the right to work, the right to equal pay for equal work, equal access to social security, the right to an equal education and to special protection of women's health. The SED could point to its social policies and widely reported statistical successes in fulfilling these requirements. In the next nine pages, for example, the report lists that "almost 52% of polytechnical high school students are female,"²⁶ "99.2% of female high school graduates who do not wish to pursue higher education pursue vocational training,"²⁷ and "in the area of culture, women [made] up around 45% of all managerial personnel."²⁸ The ease with which the East German government could rattle off the successes of its women's policy reflected its legal code and legitimate aims to integrate women fully into the sphere of production while encouraging reproduction. As the questions posed to the GDR representatives by the UN in 1989 demonstrate, however, the focus of the SED's policy on women as mothers and workers did not fulfill the full intent of the UN convention. To put it differently, the SED overlooked elements of equality that were being widely discussed in the western sphere through the 1970s and 80, such as legislation to protect sex trade workers and the creation of support networks for battered women. The party typically omitted such issues in its UN reports, or declared that they had been successfully solved under the tenets of state socialism. I will

²⁵ BaK - DY 31/905, 20.

²⁶ Ibid, 23.

²⁷ Ibid, 24.

²⁸ Ibid, 25.

now consider the UN reports in greater detail, and specifically highlight the willingness of the SED to defend its domestic policies to the international community.

The questions presented in 1989 by the UN commission lay outside of the traditional realm of socialist reporting and fascinatingly turned the criticisms of East German propaganda about the West back on to the GDR. In a letter from February 21 1989, Elizabeth Evatt, CEDAW chairperson contacted Thiele, the appointed representative of the DFD and leader of the delegation in charge of reporting to the UN. Evatt quoted the 1989 GDR report, which outlined that men and women were jointly responsible for family life in East Germany. She then asked; "Is it not, however, the case that in 46% of all households, women perform the housework without the help of men? Do women not still play a subsidiary role in the family? Do women not have less free time than men?"²⁹ These questions, the responses to which I address below, demonstrated doubt on the part of the UN as to the reality of the reported situation in the GDR. Yet they were relatively simple questions that the DFD was reasonably well-prepared to answer. Subsequent and more direct questions were harder for the DFD to answer, such as: "What educational programs exist to overcome traditional attitudes and stereotypes?"³⁰ Others, like the following, were omitted or denied as problems in the standard reports on GDR policies furnished to the UN:

Is there information about violence and sexual harassment in the family?
Are there special programs and services for the victims of rape and battery?
Is there prostitution?
Are there laws in place to punish male customers of prostitutes?
Can the DFD initiate programs for women?
Can you provide information about the number or percentage of women that are members of the Politburo, for example as cabinet ministers or who operate as first secretaries?³¹

²⁹ BaK - DY 31/905, 77.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 78.

Unlike in its bilateral relationships with smaller political groups and parties from western nations like the FRG, the SED acknowledged its accountability to the UN, protecting its international reputation by answering these questions. Along with Thiele, two other delegates were sent by the SED to the UN to present the GDR report to the CEDAW Committee. These included: Gertrude Korf, Special Officer, or *Fachreferenten*, for Women's Affairs in the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of the GDR; and Werner Strasberg, Vice President of the Supreme Court of the GDR. The delegates offered some clear answers to the challenging questions posed by the committee, though their tendency to gloss over or ignore specifics when answering politically sensitive questions is plainly evident in the 1989 report delivered to the UN, to which I now turn.

The three SED delegates sent to the UN were not at liberty to criticize the party or its federal policies. Thiele, Korf and Strasberg could no more concede the SED's social policy failures to the CEDAW committee than they could in the GDR press. This censorship is evident in the verbal responses of the GDR representatives to the follow-up questions of the committee that were summarized in the report written by the CEDAW representatives. Thiele's opening remarks from the 1989 account of GDR women's policies outlined that while the state regulated equality between the sexes, "the country was still faced with ideological barriers, outdated traditions and customs, which made it difficult for women to develop their talents to the full."³² This quasi-concession that not all policies had been successful essentially blamed cultural backwardness, mitigating federal culpability. She also reported, however, that "there was only one female Minister and five Assistant Ministers," but that "a higher percentage of women were in elected bodies," and that

³² BaK - DY 31/905, 86.

“Women participated in ruling the country.”³³ Korf also partially conceded that “no special institutions were responsible for implementing the convention,” but clarified that “it was a common concern and all institutions were responsible.”³⁴ According to the summary report made by the UN committee following Korf’s presentation:

Division of labour within the family was often done in a sex-specific way and attitudes in that regard needed to be changed. Men helped out more now but research had shown that women still tended to do repetitive cleaning tasks and washing. [...] Women as a rule did more household chores than their husbands, but that was changing in young families. Young men were increasingly taking paternity leave, some of them for up to a year.³⁵

The actual facts that women were barely represented in the upper echelons of the party and that they had less free time and greater household responsibilities could not be explained away with long lists concerning the statistical success of women in the education system. Reality remained that there was only one female minister in the GDR, and two female candidates for the Politburo.³⁶ Since power rested in the Politburo, the faction of the DFD in the People’s Chamber provided a show of democracy, as opposed to the real thing. As demonstrated above, certain facts were simply conceded, but they were surrounded with attestations that women’s roles were considered important by all governing officials and that women were included in the national project.

The responses to questions concerning sexual violence, prostitution and criminality were far more evasive. Delegate’s answers were extremely limited or tended to avoid specific questions altogether. The UN committee report relayed Strasberg’s assertion:

Protection against assaults was provided and that [it was] extended to wives and children. [...] There were also provisions against sexual harassment within the family.

³³ BaK - DY 31/905, 87.

³⁴ Ibid, 86.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ BaK - DY 30/IV 2/2.042/72, 2.

There was a low delinquency rate and violence and other criminal acts were just exceptions. [...] Prostitution was punishable but there were only a few cases each year.³⁷

Strasberg's report obviously provided little new information concerning SED policies for managing assault and violence in the family. The fact that "protection was provided," "provisions" existed, and also that "delinquency rates were low,"³⁸ in no way specified for the committee how GDR authorities dealt with problems of abuse and sexual misdemeanors. Strasberg glossed-over federal responsibilities by providing answers only where no defined group or individual could be held accountable for clearly articulated federal policies concerning private sphere criminality. In a follow-up question, one expert of the committee asked if any studies had been done in the GDR linking the high incidence of violence against women and the level of prostitution.³⁹ The committee report recorded Strasberg's response that "studies had shown that prostitution was not a result of violence [...and that] there had been very few cases of prostitution in the German Democratic Republic." The responses to the specific questions outlined here, which were only a sample of those directed at the GDR delegates, tended to be quite evasive. Delegates were avoiding criticizing the regime directly in the face of unequivocal questions that should have led them to meaningful concessions and analyses. The decision by the SED to sign and ratify the convention was a gesture of their desire to be recognized as a modern social welfare state in the international sphere, but their accountability and ability to answer for their policies were cursory.

³⁷ BaK - DY 31/905, 86.

³⁸ Ibid, 86.

³⁹ Ibid, 87.

The governments of the GDR and FRG both chose to voluntarily engage with the international community to seek recognition for the efficacy of their women's policies. In both cases, they were confronted with criticism of their inability to implement the CEDAW effectively, though reproach emanated from different circles. The differences in political systems forced the critique of East and West German women's politics into different spheres. West German feminist groups and other citizens engaged in the civic sphere democracy of the FRG criticized the slowness of the government in becoming answerable to the UN for its women's policies. Conversely, the questions asked of the GDR representatives by the UN committee attempted to direct East German officials towards self-reflection and intensification of state aims towards women's emancipation. Cold War ideological differences persisted into 1980, and along with the rhetoric, came the desire to prove the superiority of either capitalism or communism. I have outlined here how the East and West German governments became answerable for criticism emanating from different spheres by signing the CEDAW. In the next chapter I will assess a very different arena of political debate and negotiation in East and West Germany by examining the public depiction of women in the media. The following chapter presents a case study examination of West German feminist magazine *Emma* and East German women's mass magazine *Für Dich*.

Chapter Four - Women in the Media: A comparison of women's magazines *Emma* and *Für Dich*

In both East and West Germany during the 1970s and 80s, women's magazines made important contributions to the negotiations over gender roles. In this chapter, I will examine the only mass-produced East German women's magazine, *Für Dich*, which was first released under the name *Die Frau von Heute* in 1946. I will consider it in comparison with the West German feminist magazine, *Emma*, which was first issued in February 1977. Taken together, these periodicals provide an interesting point of comparison because, unlike most other women's magazines from the period, they were both explicitly political and focused primarily on women's issues, such as women's roles as mothers, and questions relating to women's health. The Press Department's (*Pressamt*) publishing license for *Für Dich* in 1988 described it as an "illustrated weekly magazine for women, with contemporary political, economic and cultural contributions."¹ Alice Schwarzer, Chief Editor of *Emma*, similarly announced in her magazine's first edition in 1977 that "EMMA is a feminist magazine, because we will always take a consistently female perspective in every situation – whether it be §218, economic policy, or fashion – we will ask: What does this mean for us women?"² Both magazines were widely circulated and aimed to impart an expressly political message. In 1988, 935,000 copies were printed of *Für Dich* weekly,³ while already in March 1977, 300,000 copies of *Emma* were printed, of which 83 percent were sold.⁴ I argue that both magazines sought to create and then reiterate new ideas concerning social expectations of women's roles and experiences in the communities of

¹ "Lizenzurkunde," January 12, 1988, BaB - DC 9/1273.

² Alice Schwarzer, "Unsere Zeitung," *Emma*, February 1977, 3.

³ "Lizenzurkunde," January 12, 1988, BaB - DC 9/1273.

⁴ "Emma über Emma," *Emma* 5, May 1977, 4.

East and West Germany. The political message conveyed in each of these magazines articulated a different ideological message to help women define their roles, which was a clear reflection of the social economic systems from which they originated. It was not until after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that *Für Dich's* political message challenged the existing social order, and then it started to reflect many of the critical elements commonly found in *Emma*. In this chapter, I will consider a comparative sample of the political messages outlined in each of these magazines concerning women's politics in East and West Germany.

Magazines, as I will demonstrate below, articulate community norms that are invented and repeated for widespread consumption and therefore provide insight into the values and ideas of specific historical moments. They provide valuable evidence for a study of trends in popular discussion and debate. By comparing some main themes and ideas discussed in both *Emma* and *Für Dich*, I will demonstrate that certain fundamental goals were the same for the editorial staff of both periodicals. Such goals included encouraging women to live full, public lives in the community beyond the traditional private sphere, and challenging women's own notions of what they could expect from themselves and from their communities in terms of personal development and employment opportunities. The opinions articulated by the editorial staff of the two magazines, however, reflected fundamental differences in how they felt women should conceive of and accomplish these goals. I will first look at how each of the two magazines depicted the broad issue of women's emancipation, specifically considering editorial letters and reader's letters to assess how magazine staff attempted to direct women's critical thinking. I will then look more closely at how women's health issues were discussed and challenged in both

magazines. The way that editors chose to reflect on women's health concerns provides an excellent example of how deference to authority was either challenged, as was the case with *Emma*, or reinforced, as in the case of *Für Dich*. Following this, I will assess how both editorial groups conceived of motherhood, either reinforcing it as a fundamental duty for women in the community, or challenging the notion of a biological imperative for women to reproduce. I will conclude by examining the ways in which the message from *Für Dich* changed in 1989, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. As will become clear, negotiating and maintaining a political message for a female audience was the fundamental aim of both periodicals up to that point. Both East and West German women's popular media negotiated and reinforced different ideological messages, but both were deeply engaged in the process of reformulating gender roles and women's policy.

While these two magazines were fundamentally different, they also shared certain characteristics that make them a valuable source for comparison. *Emma* provides a particularly good example of the democratic freedoms of West German civil society; its political objective was, and remains, to fundamentally change what *Emma's* editors identify as the West German system of patriarchal oppression in favour of greater gender equality. On the other hand, *Für Dich* was directly administered by the propaganda wing of the Central Committee of the SED – that is, the branch of government that was directly answerable to the Politburo for policing the propaganda espoused in the East German media.⁵ It provided readers with a range of expectations and everyday examples of women living under socialism. Lutz Sauerteig has argued that magazines provide a mirror of the cultural values of particular groups at a given moment in history. He suggests that certain

⁵ Irene Dölling, "But the pictures stay the same... 'The Image of Women in the Journal *Für Dich* Before and After the 'Turning Point'," in Funk et al., *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, 175.

cultural values – things like sexual and gender norms – are created and stabilized through repetition.⁶ In the case of these two magazines, what was printed for East and West German women became a potential model for women’s self-understanding during the period of the Cold War. These models were formed through admonitions about women’s labour, women’s role as mothers, women’s engagement in politics and, rather often, notions of appropriate female sexuality. I will assess these two magazines as a mirror of society that both reflected everyday norms and aimed to shape and create them. I begin with the issue of women’s emancipation, which was deliberately discussed – though in widely divergent language – in East and West German media through the 1970s and 1980s.

As I establish in chapter one, women’s emancipation was conceived ideologically in very different ways in East and West Germany. The editorial staff of *Für Dich* consistently sought to impart a notion of women’s emancipation as an element of the socialist experience. It was said to occur in tandem with male worker’s emancipation, rather than in competition with men. The editorial staff frequently published excerpts from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and August Bebel, reiterating the basic theoretical premise of women’s emancipation under socialism.⁷ Beyond their reliance on historical tracts to justify women’s contemporary emancipation, the editorial staff of *Für Dich* also aimed to highlight the ways in which men provided support for women’s emancipation in the community. In an article written in 1975, Marlis Allendorf, the future chief editor of *Für Dich*, poses the question: “Where were we emancipated [women] without [men]?” She was referring

⁶ Lutz Sauerteig, “Die Herstellung des sexuelle und erotischen Körpers in der westdeutschen Jugendzeitschrift BRAVO in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren,” *Medizin Historisches Journal* 42 (2007): 144.

⁷ Marlis Allendorf, “Uhrzeit ohne Liebe,” *Für Dich* 43, 1970, 3; See also, Inge Lange, “Lenin und die Frauen unserer Zeit,” *Für Dich* 17, 1970, 2-3; See also, “Sie haben Recht Genossin Marx!” *Für Dich* 15, 1983, 14-15; See also, “Marx’ Name und Werk-lebendig in aller Welt!” *Für Dich* 116, 1983, 2.

broadly to the family men she envisioned as women's active partners in the private sphere.⁸ The article goes on to assert that in the socialist community, women's emancipation was successful because women had the support of their husbands. Allendorf argues that "the vast majority of self-confident women in our day were able to so successfully follow their own path because they had their husbands at their side, who helped them greatly with their private duties."⁹ Allendorf emphasizes that the editorial staff were "especially happy to read the letters of many children who call their fathers *the man*, 'because he feels responsible for everything: the household, the workplace, the parents' association and the village club.'"¹⁰ These examples illustrate how *Für Dich* consistently aimed to reinforce socialist ideology as the basis for women's emancipation and the new everyday norm. According to Marxist ideology, when women were emancipated through equal employment alongside men, they would become equal citizens in both the labour force and in the private sphere. The goal of *Für Dich's* editors was to reflect this as a successful reality in the socialist community in order to further instruct East German women about their own emancipation.

The editorial staff of *Für Dich* aimed to create and normalize an everyday experience of equality in the private sphere. They drew from readers' letters to help build and depict an ideal, yet average socialist life for readers to emulate. It is notable that even in articles such as this, which glorified the role of husbands and fathers in assisting women's public emancipation through support in the private sphere, Allendorf does not contend that perfect equality had been achieved in the GDR. She clarifies that

⁸ Marlis Allendorf, "Wo waren wir Emanzipierten ohne Ihn?" 8.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 9.

we have repeatedly pointed out the discrepancy that still exists between the proportion of household work carried out by men and the heavier burden that women bear, and we will continue to do so as long as the disparity prevails.¹¹

Yet despite acknowledging ongoing inequality in the private sphere, and implicitly endorsing it by reiterating that men were helping women with *their* household duties, Allendorf proceeds to highlight the successes of women's emancipation under state socialism rather than focusing on failure. Her answer to the problem of ongoing inequality in the private sphere was to question whether a 50/50 division of labour in the family guaranteed equality. She concludes, quoting from a reader's letter, that it was more important for both partners to have sufficient free time, rather than to create a perfect division of chores.¹² The article finishes by asking readers to send letters about men whose contributions to the family and community had resulted in greater love and friendship because of their progressive identification with socialist gender norms. Here we can see the most profound difference in the discussion of women's emancipation between *Für Dich* and *Emma*. State socialist propaganda required that successes be lauded even though traditional attitudes persisted; the negative was played down in order to create a public image of progressive gender camaraderie. By contrast, the editorial staff of *Emma* was highly critical of all ongoing disparities between the genders in the FRG.

Emma's editors sought to represent the different factions of the independent women's movement by using the magazine like a public political forum. As early as August 1977, the editorial staff started requesting information from readers to add to a mailing list directory of women's organizations from all over West Germany. Their aim was to create a central directory in order to help connect solitary women with local feminist groups and to

¹¹ Allendorf, "Wo waren wir Emanzipierten ohne Ihn?" 9.

¹² Ibid.

help spread information and more easily connect project work through the wider feminist community.¹³ Alice Schwarzer, the self-styled representative of the disparate women's movement,¹⁴ declared in the second edition of the magazine that "at the risk of disappointing the lords of creation, it needs to be clarified again: the women's struggle is primarily a struggle for women, not a struggle against men."¹⁵ On one level, Schwarzer was suggesting, however sarcastically, that women's emancipation did not fundamentally rely upon gender antagonism. By making this claim, her intention was similar to the goals of the *Für Dich* staff in attempting to avoid greater rivalry. For Schwarzer, the women's struggle was about creating a cohesive community of women to combat traditional norms – not necessarily against men, but against the patriarchal system that was the basis of women's oppression. However, in contrast to the focus on gender harmony that was consistently pursued in the 1970s and 80s in *Für Dich*, *Emma's* editors focused on women, targeting female audiences in order to create a woman-based movement for change.

Emma's editorial staff, under Schwarzer's guidance, sought to direct West German women into communities that relied on gender solidarity. In an article from March 1978, Schwarzer addressed a commonly held view asking, "haven't they always told us that the worst enemies of women are women themselves?"¹⁶ In this editorial, she aims to inspire female solidarity by attempting to combat women's own opposition to the feminist

¹³ Editorial Staff, "Emma über Emma," *Emma* 8, August 1977, 4.

¹⁴ Alice Schwarzer has engaged in very public feminist campaigns and as such is probably the most readily identifiable West German feminist. However, she has also been criticized from by women engaged in independent feminist politics as an *Einzelgängerin* – a woman who goes her own way with little concern for the communal good. Schwarzer's definition of women's emancipation rejects marriage and motherhood. As such, she has been criticized for her politics from within and outside of the women's movement as an emancipated woman who does not reflect "typical" women, though obviously she has many supporters as *Emma* still publishes a monthly edition. See Myra Feree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 75.

¹⁵ Alice Schwarzer, "Männerhaß," *Emma* 2, March, 1977, 3.

¹⁶ Schwarzer, "Wie Mies sind Frauen?" 5.

movement. In answer to her opening question, Schwarzer replies: “Well, [women] are certainly not our ‘worst enemy’ since they have far too little power. But they can make our lives pretty difficult. And in terms of the new sisterhood, it is especially painful when women oppose other women.”¹⁷ She goes on to explain to readers that “[their] primary enemy is not women, but rather is and will remain the male-dominated society.”¹⁸ Her aim was to help establish and strengthen solidarity between all women to contest ongoing gender inequality within the patriarchal society of the FRG. *Emma*’s editorial staff was attempting to demonstrate to women in the FRG the need for women to create an autonomous community to contest systemic inequalities, while *Für Dich*’s staff was seeking to do the opposite – to demonstrate that a gendered struggle would divide the community and undermine the gains of socialist women’s emancipation.

Emma’s editors focused on the uncompleted work of the feminist movement because they wanted to engage greater gender solidarity and increase membership in their movement. *Für Dich*’s editors had to focus on the success of state socialism, and therefore the message delivered in the magazine concerning emancipation was limited to encouraging cooperation between men and women. The socialist magazine was the only mass produced women’s periodical, and it served to enforce the notion of successful women’s emancipation under socialism. By contrast, in February 1978, *Emma* recorded an average monthly readership of one million.¹⁹ While impressive in terms of the newness of the magazine and its very specific political mission, this represented a very small proportion of the total West German population or even of the potential female readership.

¹⁷ Schwarzer, “Wie Mies sind Frauen?” 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Alice Schwarzer, “Was hat Emma mit dem Stern zu tun?” *Emma* 2, February, 1978, 5.

Feminists from the independent feminist movement had to contend not only with what they identified as systemic patriarchal oppression, but also with opposition from women's groups and the mainstream media. For example, *Brigitte*, West Germany's most popular women's magazine, which included articles about beauty, fashion and the role of the housewife in the community,²⁰ among other things, had a readership in 1975 of 4.12 million.²¹ The political message delivered in *Emma* challenged deeply ingrained social norms and struggled to overcome a lack of receptiveness from men and women alike. Thus, *Emma's* editors consistently aimed to create a bigger and more unified community of feminists. In contrast, *Für Dich's* editors were writing within the confines of dictatorship and were expected to trumpet socialist success. The negotiated element of socialist media, however, allowed the editorial staff to mention ongoing inequalities in the private sphere, so long as they did not dwell on the failures of state socialism. These examples help to illustrate the different portrayal of women's emancipation in *Emma* and *Für Dich*. Whereas *Emma's* staff sought to create a movement based on female political engagement, *Für Dich's* staff was ideologically bound to include men in the work of creating gender equality in the community. This basic ideological difference was reflected in articles in both magazines throughout the 1970s and 80s, which I will now discuss as I turn to an examination of how it shaped the depiction of women's health.

From the earliest issues of *Emma*, Schwarzer and her team of journalists sought to distance the independent women's movement from the traditional practice of medicine, while still providing a forum to discuss women's health. In an editorial written for the May 1977 issue, Schwarzer described a project to create a West German women's self-help

²⁰ Frevert, "Umbruch des Geschlechterverhältnisse?" 645.

²¹ Viola Roggenkamp, "Meine Freundin BRIGITTE," *Emma* 10, October 1986, 42.

clinic. The purpose of the project, as Schwarzer explained, was to learn to “be able to carry out gynecological examinations of one’s self (which means less time in the horrible chair...); it means being less dependent on the whims of ignorant gynecologists; it means getting to know one’s own body.”²² The clinic was started after a lecture given by two American feminists, who came to West Germany to discuss how women’s self-help clinics were run in the United States.²³ Schwarzer describes a scene in the article in which American speaker Debbie Law “suddenly stripped off her jeans and panties, squatted on a table in the middle of the room with her legs spread, inserted the speculum she brought with her, and encouraged the women in the room to come closer to see for themselves.” Schwarzer told her readers that “what we saw is a banality for every gynecologist, but a secret for women ourselves: we saw our own bodies. The vagina to the cervix.”²⁴ This anecdote was meant to raise women’s awareness that the medical practice was largely created and run by men.

In a subsequent article written later that year in June 1977, *Emma* journalist Eva-Maria Stark discussed the oppressiveness of the male-run medical system, specifically in terms of pregnancy and childbirth, and advocated for a shift back to traditional home birthing and midwifery. While Stark doesn’t directly refute the potential value of hospitals in childbirth, she contends that home birthing

would primarily spare women feelings of guilt, neurosis and psychosis. Birth is no illness and it doesn’t automatically belong in the hospital. We don’t need a sterile

²² Alice Schwarzer, “Die Neuen Hexen,” *Emma* 5, May 1977, 6.

²³ For a brief period in the early 1970s, women’s self-help clinics became very popular in the United States feminist movement. Following a model established by Los Angeles women’s activists Carol Downer and Lorraine Rothman, women began learning about their own bodies using a speculum and mirror in order to become more self-aware. Though feminists eventually lost interest in the gynecological self-examination, the self-help model for establishing women’s clinics remained, as did the interest in becoming well-informed about one’s own body. See, for example, Rosalyn Fraad Baxendall and Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, (New York: Perseus Books, 2000), 123-124.

²⁴ Alice Schwarzer, “Die Neuen Hexen,” *Emma* 5, May 1977, 6.

labour room full of technical apparatus, but rather a humane, psychologically relaxed situation and a midwife with the best possible education.²⁵

These examples demonstrate that *Emma's* staff sought to discuss women's health issues and were concerned about the politics of medical practice; they felt that women should take greater charge of their own health and be treated by female practitioners. *Emma's* authors advocated greater self-understanding and less reliance on traditional, professional medical knowledge, which they interpreted as yet another element of male domination over women's bodies. By contrast, *Für Dich's* editors favoured the opinions of physicians and provided space for male doctors to answer readers' questions about their health.

Doctors were frequently featured in *Für Dich*, in order to provide a professional opinion on a variety concerns about women's health and sexuality. It is noteworthy that in the medical discussions published in *Für Dich*, the doctors who responded to women's medical questions were usually male, despite the fact that that according to a 1982 report written for the UN CEDAW commission, 50.8 percent of doctors in the GDR were women.²⁶ *Emma's* editors, on the other hand, chose to favour the voices of female medical professionals, and they discussed women's health in terms of self-examinations and personal experience. This reflects their preference for exclusivist politics that relied on and worked for women and women alone. By contrast, the editors of *Für Dich* had no specific ideological reasons to avoid professional male opinions in their discussions of women's health. The medical opinions published in *Für Dich* highlight the fundamental differences in political ideology, goals and attitudes reflected by two magazines.

²⁵ Eva-Maria Stark and Ester Sordini, "Ärzte gegen Hebammen," *Emma* 6, June 1977, 17.

²⁶ BaB - DY 31/905, 28.

Medical articles published in the East German magazine clearly articulated to East German women that the doctor knew what was best, and that women should submit to professional medical advice. In a 1968 article, gynecologist Dr. Rolf Gerlach set out to clarify new scientific discoveries for women, and he discusses ethical and moral questions concerning the East German “anti-baby” pill, Ovosiston.²⁷ The article begins with the argument that Ovosiston is the preferred contraceptive choice for women, highlighting its many positive effects on women’s lives, such as allowing women to choose when to have children, and allowing women to get through their studies without the interruption of unplanned pregnancy. Gerlach then mentions some of the side-effects of the pill, such as headaches, nausea, acid reflux, and weight gain, but he assures readers that in most cases “the symptoms disappear quickly and fully.”²⁸ He goes on to pose and answer the following question: “Why does it always have to be the doctor who decides on the use of Ovosiston?”²⁹ To which he responds; “That is easy to explain: Only after a thorough genealogical examination, and after specific personal circumstances are taken into account, does it become clear whether Ovosiston or a different birth control method is appropriate.”³⁰ This example highlights a variety of differences in the ways that *Emma’s* editors conceived of women’s health issues, compared to how they were portrayed in *Für Dich*. Gerlach encouraged women to trust the effectiveness of the new birth control medication, to trust that the commonly reported side-effects from the pill would subside, and to trust the doctor to provide the best medical advice following a gynecological examination. While this article was published nearly a decade before *Emma* was founded, it

²⁷ Rolf Gerlach, “Ovosiston um Jeden Preis?” *Für Dich* 48, 1968, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

³⁰ Gerlach, “Ovosiston um Jeden Preis?” 20.

neatly highlights the differences between how the two magazines approached women's health issues. The opinions and ideas articulated in this article changed very little in later issues of *Für Dich*.

Two decades after Gerlach's article was published in *Für Dich*, articles by male doctors continued to instruct women on medical health issues, driving home a clear message that women should not manage their own medical care. In 1988, Dr. Harold Sommer provided answers to women's health questions in his recurring column entitled, "Consultation with the Gynecologist" (*Sprechstunde beim Frauenarzt*). He received a question from a reader in Jena stating that she contracted bladder infections very easily and wondered if there was any sort of household product that she could use to control the problem. She asked, "Does one absolutely have to go see a doctor due to bladder infection?"³¹ To which the doctor replied that women suffered from bladder infections ten times more frequently than men and that "this type of infection should not be played down and should not be handled alone [...] it should always be examined by a doctor so that he can provide a diagnosis and order the appropriate therapy."³² He mentions that the typical home remedy is an herbal tea, and he explains the preparation necessary to access the benefits of the home-based cure. Though a simple, standard household remedy was available, he first emphasized that the reader should not take her health into her own hands, in spite of the fact that the woman clearly articulated that she suffered from the ailment frequently and had therefore obviously regularly visited her doctor about the problem in the past. In article after article about women's health, *Für Dich's* editors reiterated that women should rely on a professional (male) doctor. *Emma's* editors,

³¹ Harold Sommer, "Sprechstunde beim Frauenarzt," *Für Dich* 25, 1988, 46.

³² Ibid.

meanwhile, extolled the virtues of self-help, arguing that women could and should undertake a great deal of their own medical care, avoiding gynecological examinations whenever possible.

The ideological basis for discussing medical advice provided to women in women's magazines is less self-evident than in more obviously ideological issues like emancipation and equality. But in the case of both of these magazines, editorial choices demonstrate certain fundamental ideas about whose opinions should be valued and accepted. *Emma's* editorial staff insisted to readers that the existing medical system was a place of oppression, and they encouraged women to create their own facilities and develop projects dedicated to supporting women's own medical needs. Alternatively, *Für Dich's* editorial staff was driven by a desire to demonstrate to female citizens of the GDR that their health needs were being cared for by well-educated and trustworthy medical practitioners. Discussing women's health was a way for the regime to remind citizens of state-sponsored health benefits – like free access to the birth control pill and abortion – while reinforcing cultural norms like hierarchical deference to the superior knowledge of medical professionals. It was also a place where medical professionals could subtly mention the eventuality of procreation, leaving little question in readers' minds that abortion and the pill were simply means of delaying childbirth, allowing women to determine when – not if – they wanted to have children. Ideology defined the frequent reiteration of messages prepared for East German women's consumption in *Für Dich*. Articles aimed to demonstrate, for example, that women's social role in the community would be improved by having children. In fact, this was a means of encouraging higher birth rates which were identified by the socialist regime as a sort of symbolic affirmation of SED rule. As Annette

Timm has pointed out; “Increasing the birth rate was a concrete means of proving that not only the medical system but the entire social system of the GDR supported families and was therefore more just. In the highly politicized atmosphere of the Cold War, birth rates were used as evidence of superiority over the West.”³³ Ideology provided the backbone of an array of messages conveyed in both *Emma* and *Für Dich*. I will now shift briefly to an examination of the different ways in which the politics of motherhood were discussed in these two magazines.

For the editorial staff of *Für Dich*, questioning whether or not East German women wanted to have children appears to have been forbidden territory. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, pro-natal propaganda was inserted even in unrelated articles. This follows logically from the intentions of the socialist state, whose underlying purpose concerning women and family policy was frequently expressed as the aim to help women balance paid employment with the duties of motherhood.³⁴ Josie McLellan has argued that because the state required women’s involvement in the labour force, it was willing to establish social policies to make this possible.³⁵ She discusses the significant social benefits provided to help single and married woman manage the burden of childcare such as the baby year (*Babyjahr*). This 1976 policy allowed either parent to take one full year of maternity or paternity leave, though it was most frequently taken by mothers. She points out that this kind of woman-friendly social policy actually resulted in increasing the gendered division of labour in the private sphere. In families where the woman took the *Babyjahr*, traditional

³³ Annette Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289.

³⁴ BaB - DY/30/IV 2/2.042/6, 107-108; See also BaB - DY/30/IV 2/2.042/2, 8; and BaB - DY/30/IV 2/2.042/29, 9.

³⁵ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 82.

values, which saw women as the primary caregiver for the child and home, were often reestablished in the first year of the baby's life. The government's aim to ease women's ability to balance labour and motherhood actually reinforced traditional attitudes towards the gendered division of labour, even after the woman returned to her job.³⁶ In one sense the SED created policies that made combining motherhood and employment a possibility, but they also caused an unintentional retrenchment of traditional norms. In any case, state policy was focused on encouraging motherhood, which is plainly evident in the pages of *Für Dich*. In an article from January 1974, entitled "What would marriage be without children?" readers letters were published emphasizing the apparent wonder of raising a family. Rowitha and Rainer Buchholz from Berlin wrote: "Our little one brings us joy that we could not have previously imagined. Our marriage is richer and stronger because of our son."³⁷ Similarly, Marianne H. of Dresden suggested: "Only with children and through children does one remain young. To be young means not to become comfortable, not in thought and not in action."³⁸ In another issue from February 1977, *Für Dich* published children's letters about their mothers, idolizing both maternity and the socialist work ethic. Reinhold Hahn, age 12, for instance, wrote that his loving mother was fully employed and the single caregiver to her 8 children following the death of their father four years earlier.³⁹ Similarly, the three children of the Henning family wrote that since their father was studying in the Soviet Union, their mother was the sole caregiver and provider for the children, and that she was engaged in the community and always caring and in good spirits with her

³⁶ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 73.

³⁷ Rowitha Buchholz and Rainer Buchholz, "Was Wäre die Ehe ohne Kinder?" *Für Dich* 2, 1974, 6.

³⁸ Marianne H. "Was Wäre die Ehe ohne Kinder?" *Für Dich* 2, 1974, 6.

³⁹ Reinhold Hahn, "Mütter ist die Größte," *Für Dich* 8, 1977, 17.

children.⁴⁰ Pro-natal propaganda was created in response to government official's anxieties over the declining GDR birthrate.

Government officials were clearly distressed by the declining birthrate in the GDR in the early 1970s,⁴¹ which dropped slowly through the 1950s and 60s, rebounded somewhat in the 1970s following the enactment of generous new parental benefits, but then began to decline again in the 1980s.⁴² Though mainstream publications presented childlessness as neither an option nor a reality, as Timm has argued, cultural factors like working conditions, gender relations and faith in the future had a greater impact on individual's reproductive choices than did government policies or propaganda.⁴³ Regardless of this reality, *Für Dich* went on reporting about things like men in the FRG not wanting to have children, apparently because of the hostility of the capitalist system towards children.⁴⁴ Yet, even in propaganda demonizing West Germany, only men were seen to reject procreation. It appears that German women – East or West – could not be shown deliberating on their role as mothers, though in fact that is exactly what *Emma's* editors were doing.

Emma did not present a single, clear-cut opinion on the issue of motherhood; instead, the editorial staff presented a variety of opinions from different individuals and groups. In a pair of articles published in 1978, Schwarzer and Ulrike Holler highlighted the work of SPD *Bundestag* representative Dorothee Vorbeck, who helped initiate a campaign against mother's day and what Holler called "its function to make women dumb."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Henning, "Mütter ist die Größte," *Für Dich* 8, 1977, 17.

⁴¹ BaB - DY/30/IV 2/2.042/6, 107.

⁴² Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 259.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ingeburg Starke, "Ein Kind? Nein danke!" *Für Dich* 25, 1980, 6.

⁴⁵ Ulrike Holler, "Ihr wahres Gesicht," *Emma* 4, 1978, 12.

Schwarzer and Holler were careful to be clear that opposing mother's day was not the same as opposing mothers: It was a campaign that opposed the glorification of women's perceived biologically determined role as mothers in the German community. Yet Schwarzer also made very disparaging statements about motherhood, such as: "The terrorist claim of 'mother's love' forbids every woman's confession of her ambivalence and dissent. It happens to be a reality that under the current conditions motherhood has enslaved women."⁴⁶ In another article from 1977, Schwarzer lambasted the proposed idea of paying women a wage for their housework and mothering duties. She claimed that offering women 300-400 marks per month was a way of sanctifying the "holy" institution of the German family. In her strongly worded editorial she insists that "a housewife remains a housewife. An allowance is only a thin gilding for a woman's fate in this man's society, where being a housewife is not freely chosen, but is enforced and remains reserved only for women."⁴⁷ Yet in spite of the general opposition to a predetermined role for women as housewives and mothers, *Emma's* editors also tried not to alienate would-be feminists who also happily identified as mothers. In an article from 1984, Katja Leyrer opposed the idea that mothers could not also be feminists. She felt that the West German feminist movement had provided women with only two potential options – to either be mothers, or career women. From her perspective, the goal of feminism should allow her to "have it all!"⁴⁸ Articles about motherhood, like many other themes discussed in these two magazines, thus demonstrate the different ideological concerns of *Emma* and *Für Dich's* editors.

⁴⁶ Alice Schwarzer, "Mutterliebe," *Emma* 4, 1978, 9.

⁴⁷ Alice Schwarzer, "Hausfrauenlohn?" *Emma* 5, 1977, 3.

⁴⁸ Katja Leyrer, "Rabenmutter – na und?" *Emma* 11, 1984, 11.

Both magazines sought to reflect the realities of their readership when discussing the politics of maternity, though they approached the subject very differently. *Für Dich's* editors relied on the letters of readers to highlight the positive elements of raising children, both in terms of personal happiness and for the good of the community more generally. The socialist magazine was less likely to question the social role of mothers; its method tended more towards normalizing motherhood and reminding women of all the social benefits that they would receive as mothers. By contrast, *Emma's* editors plainly rejected the foregone conclusion that women's primary purpose was procreation. By opposing the idea that women's natural place was in the home, however, they alienated some women who supported feminism's general message but also wanted to enjoy motherhood. Leyrer emphasized this point in 1984, providing insight into the lateral ways in which women's politics were being negotiated in West Germany. She rejected the brand of feminism that split women into two camps – as either mothers or career women. In some ways her ideal society reflected the experiences of East German women, who were granted their societal place through emancipated wage labour, but who remained central figures in the family. Yet, the very fact that motherhood was contested within the West German feminist community by people like Leyrer, distanced the West German experience of feminism from the experience of East German women, whose role as emancipated working mothers was dictated to them. Once more, where women in the FRG could engage in civil sphere debate, negotiating their own place in society, East German women could not openly contest or condemn the foregone conclusion under socialism that procreation was a key element of citizenship. What becomes immediately obvious in reading *Für Dich*, is that it was a tool of a dictatorial regime, and while in some limited ways *Für Dich's* writers and editors sought

to mediate their message and create a space of discussion and limited negotiation, their efforts can not be taken as representing an open civic sphere. I will now examine the shift in how women's politics were discussed in *Für Dich* in the years 1989 and 1990 and outline how *Für Dich's* socialist message collapsed along with the SED regime.

The *Wende*, or turning point, ushered in new freedoms in civil society and in publishing alike. Following weeks of peaceful civil protest in the early autumn of 1989, Erich Honecker was replaced by Egon Krenz as the head of the SED on October 18. The collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, represented a watershed moment, ushering in significant changes in East German politics. It resulted in Krenz abolishing the SED's claim to supreme unilateral leadership over the GDR, opening the door for democratic reforms. Alongside newly won rights of congregation, mobility, and freedom of speech, a thaw occurred in the world of publishing. This thaw was quite apparent in the final issues of *Für Dich* for a brief period before the magazine folded in May 1990. In December 1989, just weeks after the SED relinquished its hold on power, *Für Dich's* editors started publishing letters from readers reflecting a much more critical and honest view of the role of women in East German society. Alf Lüdtkke has suggested that language in the GDR had undergone a process of normalized repression under the domination of the SED, and following the *Wende*, "many [sought the opportunity to make] a 'great pronounciation.'"⁴⁹ For a brief period, this could be seen on the pages of *Für Dich*. Some of the authors more timidly shared opinions that previously went unpublished in the mass media of the GDR, like Dorette Lück, who simply stated, "we need more women in the

⁴⁹ Alf Lüdtkke, "Sprache und Herrschaft in der DDR. Einleitende Überlegungen," in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte: Erkundigen zu Herrschaft und Alltag*, eds. Alf Lüdteke et al, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 16.

government and in high leading positions, since we represent half the population.”⁵⁰ Others were starker in their criticism, like reader Antje Schmidt who argued that “questions of politics in the party cadres must be made transparent in order for women to have a real chance at gaining higher social positions. Our equality exists on paper, but it leaves much to be desired in reality.”⁵¹ By 1990, *Für Dich*’s own editorial staff began publishing similar criticisms of the regime, undermining the propaganda that they had published over the preceding decades. Eva Schafer wrote an editorial on the role of women under socialism that outlined the hypocrisy of the regime. She claimed that “at the beginning of the 1970s the women’s question was declared officially solved. That was the moment that triggered the solidification and partial renewal of patriarchal structures. Women’s politics were no longer directed at emancipation, but at ‘overarching’ objectives.”⁵² She went on to articulate a concern similar to feminist views in West Germany that “women who choose to live a life without children are considered egotistical career women who cannot on principle speak up (especially not about women’s politics!)”⁵³ Further, the tone and layout of *Für Dich* changed significantly in the first few months of 1990. It soon started to include commercial advertisements where few had previously existed, and everything from the article contents to the colour scheme started to reflect the publishing style of West German women’s magazines. A Hamburg publisher, Gruner & Jahr, acquired the magazine in March 1990. It modeled the new layout after the West German magazines *Constanze* and *Tina* that had become popular in the East.⁵⁴ Distribution of *Für Dich* in the former East German states

⁵⁰ “Was Frauen wollen,” *Für Dich* 49, 1989, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Eva Schäfer, “Frauenfragegelöst – Patriarchatwohlauf!” *Für Dich* 6, 1990, 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴ Dölling, “‘But the pictures stayed the same...’,” 176.

was very disorganized and the magazine folded shortly after reunification in May 1990.⁵⁵ But as the final year of issues attests, the frequently reiterated socialist gender norms that *Für Dich* had so carefully crafted over the previous decades did not hold up to the criticism of East German women once they had the freedom to express their views openly. Somewhat surprisingly, the *Wende* had a much greater impact on East German than on West German publishing, at least in terms of *Emma's* output. *Emma's* editors barely registered the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of socialism in the GDR; there was virtually no mention of these events in the magazine's pages until the first free elections were held in the GDR in March 1990.

I have aimed to demonstrate here that both *Emma* and *Für Dich* were simultaneously inventing and reinforcing new gender norms and identities for women's consumption through the 1970s and 80s. As the devolution of *Für Dich's* political message in early 1990 suggests, the norms consistently reinforced by *Für Dich's* editors perhaps reflected neither their own personally held values, nor the feelings of many women in socialist East Germany. *Für Dich's* editors used cheery letters from readers to create an idealized reflection of socialist society. They focused on the successes of state socialism as they were expected to, and only acknowledged the failures of socialism in limited ways. *Für Dich* provided women with a model for conformity in their different roles as mothers and workers, and established within that model a general deference to the authority of the state. *Emma* on the other hand, rarely celebrated successes, and the magazine's editors spent a great deal of ink outlining the inequalities and indignities women in the FRG faced on a daily bases. Their purpose was to draw more women into the feminist movement and

⁵⁵ Dölling, "But the pictures stayed the same...," 176.

to create greater gender solidarity between women in order to undermine patriarchal oppression. Ideological differences between West German independent feminists and East German state socialism become clear in tracing patterns and norms in these two magazines. Whereas East German women were instructed to celebrate men as supporters of their equal emancipation, West German women were encouraged to work in homosexual environments to achieve emancipation on their own terms. While circulation numbers do not definitively indicate the impact that women's magazines had on their readers, particularly in East Germany where only one women's mass magazine was produced, they do indicate that both *Emma* and *Für Dich* were deeply engaged in the process of creating and renegotiating a role for women in the 1970s and 80s in East and West Germany.

Conclusion

Women's experiences under East and West German regimes naturally varied from person to person, not just from state to state. Individual citizens chose to engage with the political ideologies of governments and social movements to varying degrees, or not at all. What I have aimed to demonstrate here, however, was that movement participants and government officials made conscious and consistent efforts to mobilize media sources, like popular magazines, in order to create and enforce new gender norms and policies in East and West German society. Some of the goals of the DFD, like encouraging women to engage in the paid workforce and facilitating a public role for women, were similar to the aims of independent feminist organizations in the West. But the ideological differences between these groups were significant. Fundamental differences were apparent in the media produced for women, such as *Emma* and *Für Dich* magazines.

As the evidence I have presented suggests, gender roles went through a period of significant public renegotiation in the 1970s and 80s in East and West Germany. Though superficially it may appear that negotiation between states and their citizens is something unique to open, democratic civil societies, I have attempted to demonstrate that it also occurred in limited, yet important ways in the GDR. The SED provided an ever-increasing bundle of social services to East German women precisely because a significant proportion of women informed government agencies through official surveys that they were dissatisfied with the inadequate equality of their private-sphere emancipation. Survey results demonstrated that wage labour had not freed women from traditional attitudes and community norms and that they struggled to balance the duties of mass organization

involvement, motherhood, and paid employment. Thus the SED offered social benefits as a sort of supplement to help ameliorate what amounted to an ideological failure, namely that equality in the work force – which while legally mandated was never properly achieved – would raise women to a position of parity with men. Put differently, women’s reporting undermined the SED’s ideological claims that through equally distributed wage labour, women could enjoy their roles as emancipated mothers and workers in socialist society. The SED’s benefits package was a means of addressing and limiting the basis for East German women’s complaints. They sought to relieve women of some private sphere labour, and thus ease women’s unique burden under socialism. But the root of gender inequality under socialism, which was based on the persistence of traditional attitudes, specifically among men and certainly among the ruling elite in the Politburo, did not disappear. While the process of negotiating gender roles and gender policies occurred differently in the East, it was a *negotiation* in both East and West.

The differences in the process of negotiating East and West German gender roles can be summed up as a top-down process, in the case of East Germany, and in the case of West Germany, as a grassroots or bottom-up movement for change. East German women answered government directed surveys about their lived experiences, the DFD transmitted the message to the men who held power in the Politburo that women continued to face unequal difficulties compared to men as citizens under socialist rule. In the interest of increasing birthrates and legitimizing SED leadership, the party then provided women increasingly generous social benefits. This was a recurrent pattern, specifically increasing from 1971 onwards, after Erich Honecker became head of the SED. Following the *Wende*, the top-down, state-directed gender roles established and reinforced through socialist

media withered under the emergent civil society criticism of East German women. The processes of negotiation in East and West were similar in some ways; in both cases the popular press was used as an essential sphere of contestation. Yet while in the East, women mainly responded to state-run surveys, and women's policy was primarily a response to top-down directives, in the West, gender role contestation first arose as an issue worthy of debate among politically active citizens' groups that operated outside of government. Gender role negotiation was, at least in the beginning, a grassroots or bottom-up program demanding change, to which government actors responded.

The West German process of gender negotiation started at the grassroots level, with women from the independent feminist movement contesting the enduring influence of traditional values and the slow pace of progress towards different groups' disparate goals. The women who initially challenged West German social norms, like the legally defined subordination of a wife to her husband, established the terms of women's political challenge and, at least in the beginning, remained outside of the government hierarchy. They forced the mainly male representative body of the *Bundestag* to respond to the civil organization demands of women's groups on women's organizations' own terms. In this manner, women directed a bottom-up challenge, criticizing social norms and federal policies that they opposed. What I have aimed to demonstrate here is that West German government representatives from a range of political backgrounds consciously and actively responded to political criticisms; they engaged in a process of negotiation with challengers like the Women Against Pornography and the editors of *Emma* in order to maintain a stable civic culture and preserve continuity with the past. Independent feminists attempted to create a unified community of politically active women to press issues like legalizing

abortion and opening all professions to women, into the realm of public debate. In the 1970s, leading parties like the CDU and the SPD responded by attempting to mitigate radical change, driving women's political challenges further into a process of negotiation. This eventually resulted in women entering mainstream politics in greater numbers through the 1980s.

I have argued that East and West German negotiations about gender roles and policies evolved through a process of creating and stabilizing norms. The media played a vital role in creating, relaying, contesting and reinforcing new policies and expectations, mainly for women, but also for men, in the on-going process of conscious negotiation. Magazines like *Emma* and *Für Dich* were an essential tool of average citizens and government actors alike, and the process of creating greater gender equality in the FRG and GDR was highly contested.

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