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GUERRILLA MOTHERS AND DISTANT DOUBLES

West German Feminists Look at China and Vietnam, 1968–1982

In July 1969, five hundred West Berlin female kindergarten teachers voted to strike.¹ Several women picketing carried a sign apparently unconnected to the labor action. Under the word ›Vietnam‹, the poster showed a woman with an infant and book in one hand and an assault rifle in the other. A caption in English read: ›We will fight and fight from this generation to the next...‹.² What linked the German kindergarten teacher to the guerrilla mother in a distant war? Was this a superficial gesture of equivalence or did it hint at West German feminists' deeper engagement with the communist East Asian world? Most existing histories suggest that West German feminists looked only one way in the decade after 1968: to the West, and to likeminded activists in France, Great Britain and the United States with comparable experiences and forms of mobilization.³

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- 1 Ilse Lenz (ed.), *Die neue Frauenbewegung in Deutschland. Abschied vom kleinen Unterschied. Eine Quellensammlung*, Wiesbaden 2008, 2nd ed. 2010, p. 65.
 - 2 Film footage of the protest appears in Helke Sander's 1981 film *Der subjektive Faktor*. For an insightful analysis of the use of the image in the film see Mererid Puw Davies, 'West German Representations of Women and Resistance in Vietnam, 1966–1973', in: Sarah Colvin/Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (eds), *Women and Death 2: Warlike Women in the German Literary and Cultural Imagination since 1500*, Rochester 2009, pp. 229-249, here p. 229. See also Clare Bielby, *Bewaffnete Kämpferinnen. Linksterrorismus, Frauen und die Waffe in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von den späten 1970er Jahren bis heute*, in: *WerkstattGeschichte* 64 (2014), pp. 77-101, here pp. 88-91; Kaja Silverman, Helke Sander and the Will to Change, in: *Discourse* 6 (1983), pp. 10-30, here p. 16.
 - 3 Myra Marx Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism. German Gender Politics in Global Perspective*, Stanford 2012, p. 71 (German edition: *Feminismen. Die deutsche Frauenbewegung in globaler Perspektive*, Frankfurt a.M. 2015); Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties. The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978*, New York 2013, pp. 298-299; Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, Frankfurt a.M. 2014, pp. 32, 142, 606-625; Kristina Schulz, *Der lange Atem der Provokation. Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968–1976*, Frankfurt a.M. 2002.



We will fight and fight from this generation to the next...

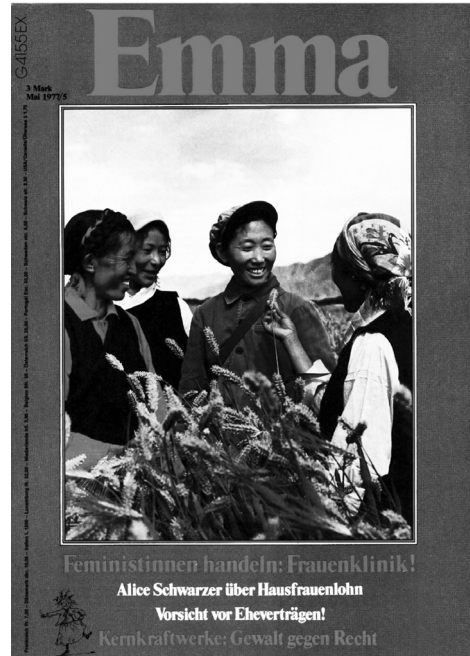
Guerrilla mother poster from the cover of *Gidra*, March 1970 – a newspaper published by Asian American students at the University of California, Los Angeles, 1969–1974

A recent study draws attention to the collaboration of female migrants and refugees with West German women in the 1970s but only mentions in passing the influence from what was then called the ›Third World‹.⁴

Yet the links went deeper than the isolated protest sign. Books about women's politics and child-rearing in revolutionary China sold tens of thousands of copies in German translation. Women's groups adopted and adapted techniques from accounts of revolutions in China and Vietnam. A 1977 issue of the West German feminist magazine *Emma* featured a Chinese woman in a blue worker's suit smiling with female farmers, likely members of national minorities. The article stated as a matter of fact that Chinese women had ›progressed further than the women in most European countries that had once been ahead of them‹.⁵ Looking back at the early years of the women's movement, a feminist working group observed in 1987 that it was a ›sign of the movement in search of a new feminist self-understanding to engage with alternatives and models not only from history but also from those outside of one's one society. Just as

4 Lenz, *Frauenbewegung* (fn. 1), pp. 24, 707, 710. See, by contrast, the frequent references to internationalism in the collected interviews in Ute Kätzel (ed.), *Die 68erinnen. Porträt einer rebellischen Frauen-generation*, Berlin 2002 (new edition Königstein 2008).

5 Susanne Kahn-Ackermann, Der lange Marsch der Chinesinnen, in: *Emma*, May 1977, pp. 43-51, here p. 43. Editor's introduction.



Emma, May 1977

China seemed like a social alternative to the student movement in the late 1960s and one's own desires and hopes for change were directed toward the cultural-revolutionary China, so was it assumed that equality had been achieved by the Chinese woman in this »ideal« society.⁶ For many West German feminists in the first decade of the women's liberation movement, to look at communist China and Vietnam was to look at the future.

This article reconstructs a lost history of influence, identification and emulation between West German feminists and East Asian communist women. It brings the West-East encounter back to light, tracing some of the ways that Chinese and Vietnamese socialism inspired and attracted West German feminists from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Beginning in a spirit of socialist universalism around 1968, West German feminists drew on reports of the experience of Chinese and Vietnamese women who they felt lived in the »liberated zones« of post-revolutionary society. Like the French radicals who declared that »Vietnam is in our factories«, West German feminists created a global framework for their activism. Looking east, they took models of political consciousness-raising and direct action from China and Vietnam for their own.⁷

6 Mechthild Leutner/Arbeitsgruppe Frauen in China (eds), *Frauen in China*, Berlin 1987, p. 2.

7 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago 2002, p. 80.

Attention to the power relations close at hand defined the autonomous women's movement of the 1970s. In the school, the bedroom, the clinic, and the workplace, they found sites of everyday oppression hidden in plain sight. But attending to the proximate did not mean ignoring the larger world. Frederic Jameson observes that the Maoist concept of cultural revolution underwrote the notion that the ›personal is political‹ for young Western socialists in the late 1960s.⁸ A West Berlin feminist reading list in 1969 included pieces on cultural revolution by Mao and Lin Biao. Texts, images and travelers crossed Cold War borders in the decade after 1968. They left a transnational public of shared symbols, identification and inspiration in their wake. This article tracks the arc of exchange, from the enthusiasm of the late 1960s and 1970s to the West German feminist disenchantment with the global South by the early 1980s.

1. Half of the Sky: Guerrilla Mothers and Feminist Universalism around 1968

The US women's movement grew out of collaboration with the African-American Civil Rights movement.⁹ West German women also articulated their position through analogies with racialized populations. An early instance was Karin Schrader-Klebert's article ›Women's Cultural Revolution‹, published in the widely read journal *Kursbuch* in 1969.¹⁰ The article became ›famous‹ in the 1970s, and one scholar describes it as the ›earliest German-language publication in feminist philosophy‹.¹¹ Schrader-Klebert placed feminist mobilization in a sequence with the ›struggle of oppressed, dehumanized peoples against imperialist and colonialist violence‹. In her account, women were not only inspired by the political action of non-white populations but were in a fundamentally similar situation. Dynamics of racial and gender subordination created both male and female subjectivity. She concluded that ›women are the Negroes of all nations‹, claiming a transnational, universal equivalency based on the shared experience of oppression.¹² The dispiriting reality of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, including the German Democratic Republic, where the relationship between the sexes had

8 Frederic Jameson, Periodizing the Sixties, in: Sohnya Sayres et al. (eds), *The Sixties Without Apology*, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 178-209, here p. 189.

9 On the frequently tumultuous relationship between US feminists and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and later Black Panthers, see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open. How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, New York 2000, pp. 109-140.

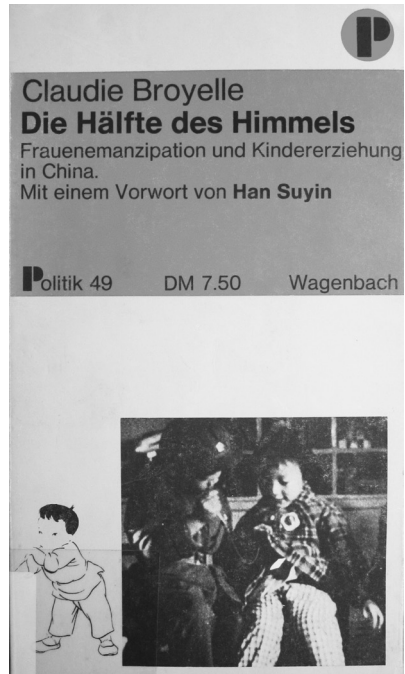
10 Karin Schrader-Klebert, Die kulturelle Revolution der Frau, in: *Kursbuch* 17 (1969), pp. 1-45.

11 The designation as ›famous‹ came from a 1981 retrospective of the women's movement which also reprinted much of the original article, demonstrating its lasting importance: Die Neue Frauenbewegung: So fing es an, in: *Emma*, February 1981, pp. 20-24, here p. 24. Herta Nagl-Docekal, Feminist Philosophy in German: A Historical Perspective, in: *Hypatia* 20 (2005) issue 2, pp. 1-6, here p. 1.

12 Karin Schrader-Klebert, Die kulturelle Revolution der Frau [1969], in: Ann Anders (ed.), *Autonome Frauen. Schlüsseltexte der neuen Frauenbewegung seit 1968*, pp. 52-76, here p. 53.

only been equalized formally, proved the need for a revolution within the private and not simply within the public sphere.¹³ Women of color were at the vanguard of this transformation.

Feminist universalism cast all women everywhere as always-already potential partners in a political project of liberation.¹⁴ One former activist recalls that ›the novelty of the women's movement was precisely in this way of seeing all women as the oppressed, suffering or »revolutionary subject«.¹⁵ The spirit of feminist universalism was perhaps captured best in the title of French feminist Claudie Broyelle's 1973 report on ›women's liberation and child rearing in China‹, *Half of the Sky* (*Die Hälfte des Himmels*).¹⁶ Published in the same year in French and German with sixty thousand German-language copies in print by 1976, *Half of the Sky* was the decade's most iconic book about the world beyond North America and Europe for the West German women's movement. It appeared on the reading list for the Munich Socialist Women's Organization, and a historian called it recently one of the ›cult books‹ of the West German 1970s.¹⁷ The concerns of West German and French feminism were broadly similar. But there was an immediate site of application for Broyelle's insights in the so-called *Kinderläden*, or alternative daycare centers, which proliferated in empty storefronts across West Berlin



13 Ibid., p. 57. See also Celia Donert, Whose Utopia? Gender, Ideology and Human Rights at the 1975 World Congress of Women in East Berlin, in: Jan Eckel/Samuel Moyn (eds), *The Breakthrough. Human Rights in the 1970s*, Philadelphia 2014, pp. 68-87, here p. 73.

14 On recent historical treatments of this claim see Celia Donert/Janou Glencross, Gendering Universalisms in International History, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 8 (2011), pp. 451-456.

15 Christina Thürmer-Rohr, Die *Courage* war Sprachrohr der Frauenbewegung, in: Gisela Notz (ed.), *Als die Frauenbewegung noch Courage hatte. Die ›Berliner Frauenzeitung Courage‹ und die autonomen Frauenbewegungen der 1970er und 1980er Jahre*, Bonn 2006, pp. 57-61, here p. 58.

16 Claudie Broyelle, *Die Hälfte des Himmels. Frauenemanzipation und Kindererziehung in China*, Berlin 1973.

17 Sozialistische Frauenorganisation München (SFOM), Literaturliste, February 1, 1975. Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte München (hereafter IfZ), ED 899 (Bestand Neue Frauenbewegung München), Bd. 1; Thomas Heberer, The ›Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution‹: China's Modern Trauma, in: *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 3 (2009), pp. 165-181, here p. 166.

and West Germany after 1968.¹⁸ Alternative child-rearing was an especially important focus for the West German strain of the women's movement, in part because of a perceived connection between early childhood education and the authoritarian personality traits that had led to the Third Reich.¹⁹ Through Broyelle, the Chinese model offered an alternative genealogy.

A West German women's group wrote in 1987 that Broyelle's book ›contributed to the consolidation of the cultural-revolutionary image of the emancipated Chinese woman‹.²⁰ Chinese-Belgian author Han Suyin wrote in the book's foreword that *Half of the Sky* was also a didactic text, offering guidance for non-Chinese feminists about how ›women can truly liberate themselves‹.²¹ The book's popularity was premised on the notion that China and Western Europe, though distant from one another, were contained within a single communicative space within which lessons about feminist mobilization could be exchanged productively. The celestial space of the ›sky‹ in the title, which in German (*der Himmel*) could also mean ›heaven‹, expressed the universalist mood of the moment even as it neglected the challenges of intersectionality that feminists of color would later bring to the fore. For Western feminists, ›half of the sky‹ was a transcendent category and the ultimate umbrella concept that contained all women within it.

Broyelle took the book's title from the frequently repeated quote from Mao Zedong that ›women hold up half the sky‹. Yet the version that Broyelle used to preface the book included a second clause that betrays the particularity of the approach that both she and West German feminists took to the People's Republic of China (PRC). The full quote, as reproduced in her book, read: ›Women shoulder half the sky and it is up to them to conquer it.‹²² The amendment of the second clause – ›and it is up to them to conquer it‹ – transformed the statement's sentiment from one of naturalized, automatic entitlement to an injunction to action and a call to mobilization. It also suggested the need for female problem-solving and self-organization free of state involvement. The emphasis on autonomous women-led action was the defining feature of Western European feminist readings of women in China and revolutionary Vietnam.

Broyelle's book was filled with Chinese women acting on their initiative. A self-declared Maoist, Broyelle had spent time herself as an *étalée*, working in a French factory with other women at the end of the 1960s.²³ In her accounts of China, she described women drawing on the local knowledge of elderly women to find springs in

18 Gerd Koenen/Laura K. Diehl, Mao als Mona Lisa der Weltrevolution. Erinnerungen an den westdeutschen Maoismus, in: Sebastian Gehrig/Barbara Mittler/Felix Wemheuer (eds), *Kulturrevolution als Vorbild? Maoisten im deutschsprachigen Raum*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, pp. 27-38, here p. 32. On the *Kinderläden* see Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft* (fn. 3), pp. 725-740.

19 Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton 2005, pp. 162-165.

20 Leutner/Arbeitsgruppe Frauen in China, *Frauen in China* (fn. 6), p. 2.

21 Broyelle, *Hälfte des Himmels* (fn. 16), p. 5.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

23 Donald Reid, *Etablissement: Working in the Factory to Make Revolution in France*, in: *Radical History Review* 88 (2004), pp. 83-111, here p. 97.

times of drought, gathering to create new designs for a factory by themselves, and spearheading collective agriculture projects.²⁴ Time and again, she provided examples of women pushing in two directions, against both received ›feudal‹ mindsets and the halfway measures of revolutionary officials. She described how ›rebellious women staged public wine tastings‹ to destroy superstitions when locals insisted that alcohol was fatal to women.²⁵ She recorded how women rejected the government's templates for ›grandiose‹ worker's housing, and opted instead for houses built with local materials in cooperation with local populations to avoid alienating the peasants from the workers.²⁶ In Broyelle's telling, women took the revolution further than its leaders intended.

Feminist depictions of female Third World revolutionaries cast them as having made the transition from a feudal past to a socialist present, one that was presented as an ideal future for Western women themselves. The journal issue in which Schrader-Klebert's piece on the ›women's cultural revolution‹ appeared in 1969 also included an article by Edoarda Masi, a member of the Italian Communist Party, who had studied at Peking University in 1957–58.²⁷ In a panegyric tone, Masi described how gender relations had transformed since the Revolution and continued to change in the course of the Cultural Revolution under which family relations resembled ever more those of ›citizen to citizen, of comrade to comrade‹.²⁸ In Masi's account, the particularist markers of sex in China were falling away gradually toward an egalitarian utopian end-point. West German feminist Frigga Haug recalled enthusiasm for the Chinese example of leveling difference in the first years of the women's movement. She remembered organizer and filmmaker Helke Sander suggesting that feminists adopt a uniform of jeans and padded ›Mao jackets‹ to make them indistinguishable to the ›gaze of men‹ in 1969.²⁹

As they looked East, West German feminists followed the narrative of transition from ›Before to After‹ provided by the Chinese themselves.³⁰ Focused on grassroots solidarity between women, feminists felt that it was not enlightened state intervention from above but active female mobilization from below that had transformed the relationship between the sexes in China and Vietnam. This interpretation resonated with the distinctive emphasis on the principle of autonomy in the West German women's movement and the perceived need to construct parallel social institutions without the

24 Broyelle, *Hälfte des Himmels* (fn. 16), pp. 24, 34, 60–61.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

27 Edoarda Masi, *Kritik und Selbstkritik der Neuen Linken*, Berlin 1973, p. 71.

28 Edoarda Masi, Die Familie im alten und im neuen China, in: *Kursbuch 17* (1969), pp. 98–128, here pp. 120–124.

29 Frigga Haug, The Women's Movement in West Germany, in: *New Left Review* 155 (1986), pp. 50–74, here p. 54.

30 On the prevalence of this structure of Maoist self-representation see Patrick Wright, *Passport to Peking. A very British Mission to Mao's China*, New York 2010, p. 356.

assistance of either men or the government.³¹ Feminist accounts of East Asian communism circled around the theme of women acting and organizing ›by their own power‹ (*aus eigener Kraft*). West German filmmaker Claudia Alemann used the phrase as the title of a twenty-five minute film she made about women in the ›liberated zones‹ of Vietnam in 1971.³²

Chinese and Vietnamese women seemed to have fulfilled Schrader-Klebert's prescription for women's ›self-organization as a conscious class‹.³³ The diversity of roles they took on was also central in feminist depictions. Women acted as producers, organizers and defenders. A West German feminist call to demonstrate against the Vietnam War in January 1973 echoed the leitmotif as it recounted how Vietnamese women had gone from a state of near slavery to a realization of their own power in the course of struggle against the Americans. Before the war, the text read, women lived with disease and high infant mortality, and were treated by men as chattel. In the US-held cities in Vietnam, ›Americanization is leading to total collapse‹ and ›women were often forced to enter the bordellos as prostitutes for the invading troops‹. By contrast, life in the liberated zones ›means a total transformation‹: ›[Women] assume nearly complete responsibility for the continuation and advancement of social life. [...] they work the fields and secure production of the goods needed by the population and the partisans. They direct the schools and the hospitals, and they man the anti-aircraft guns to defend against the constant bombing of the American planes. [...] The participation of Vietnamese women in all aspects of the liberation struggle gave them a new consciousness of their possibilities and their rights. They lost their old constraints and fears and gained the conviction that, like men, women can and must participate in fighting everywhere for a humane existence.‹³⁴

The passage is interesting for a few reasons. First, the discourse of Americanization destroying local production and women being forced into prostitution carried clear echoes of the German wartime experience and, even more so, of the postwar occupation.³⁵ It reflected an attraction to the ruptures of sex relations in the war zone, where traditional gender roles were undone and even overturned. At the same time, it was a very different construction of the Vietnam War than that of the male dominated extra-parliamentary opposition. Leaders of the socialist student movement focused primarily on political-economic interpretations of the conflict and the potential

31 This was one of the distinctions from the US women's movement which was often much more willing to see a progressive role for the state. Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism* (fn. 3), pp. 81-85.

32 Sozialistisches Filmkollektiv, Filmstudio, n.d. [Frankfurt a.M.]. IfZ, ED 914 (Bestand Helke Sander), Bd. 41.

33 Schrader-Klebert, *Die kulturelle Revolution* (fn. 12), pp. 52, 55.

34 *Frauen gemeinsam sind stark*, n.d. [January or February 1973]. IfZ, ED 914, Bd. 41.

35 On tropes of gender in occupied Germany see Elizabeth Heineman, *The Hour of the Woman. Memories of Germany's ›Crisis Years‹ and West German National Identity*, in: Hanna Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years. A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968*, Princeton 2001, pp. 21-56. For a similar observation on West German poetry about Vietnam see Davies, *West German Representations* (fn. 2), p. 244.

international expansion of the fighting zone.³⁶ By contrast, the most important effects of the Vietnamese revolution for the author of this feminist text were personal and the transformation largely internal as women gained ›a new consciousness of their possibilities and their rights‹. The central fact of the Vietnam War was its realignment of gendered structure of power. War itself could be a consciousness-raising experience.

Feminist universalism around 1968 created a global equivalence between women, united by their common position of subordination vis-à-vis men regardless of overlapping factors of race, nationality and even class. For some West German feminists, women in China and Vietnam were distant doubles, objects of identification where mutual understanding was grounded in a shared universal experience of womanhood. At times, the sense of global sisterhood could lead to the counter-intuitive conclusion that one did not have to practice internationalism because the solidarity was already there, or the notion that the international context could be set aside to concentrate on the local. In a 1973 interview, feminist Alice Schwarzer responded almost petulantly to the notion that West German feminists should relate their own struggle to others emphasizing that women ›hardly dare say women's struggle without saying class struggle five times in the same breath. We should finally be allowed to speak of our own oppression... The Vietnamese farmer is no doubt allowed to fight in his rice field without thinking about the exploitation of the West German worker.‹³⁷ Schwarzer called for an acceptance of local engagement, and implied that to remain aware of the entire field of political action would dilute the available energies for one's own political work.

Indeed, as the next section will make clear, much of the power of feminism lay in the notion of speaking from one's own experience and ›on one's own behalf‹. Ulrike Meinhof took this phrase as the title of a notable column from 1968, in which she described the pelting of a male socialist student leader with tomatoes when he did not engage with feminist criticism as a case of women acting ›on their own behalf‹ in contrast to the use of tomatoes against the Iranian Shah, which was a protest ›on behalf of the Persian peasants.‹³⁸ For many, what was inspiring about the women's movement was that one could talk about what one knew. Women overly familiar with the experience of having others speak for them could escape the dynamic of advocacy by speaking for themselves. Yet even as West German feminists began to ›turn inward‹, they borrowed and reworked techniques from distant sources, including China and Vietnam.

36 See Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front. Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany*, Durham 2012, chapter 3.

37 April-INFO Dienst. Frauenaktion Frankfurt a.M. III/1973. IfZ, ED 914, Bd. 43.

38 Ulrike Marie Meinhof, Women in the SDS: Acting on their own Behalf [1968], in: Karin Bauer (ed.), *Everybody Talks about the Weather – We don't. The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof*, New York 2008, p. 209. This article was reprinted in the first issue of *Courage* in 1976.

2. Transnational Techniques: Investigate, Speak Bitterness, Stage Reversals

The years from 1973 to 1977 were a time of experimentation with projects financed and run exclusively by women in West Germany, including the founding of the first women's press, film journal, theory journal, bookstore, health center and record label all in 1975.³⁹ It was also a time of expanding international feminist organization, with West German women participating in the International Women's Congress in Frankfurt in November 1974, United Nations International Women's Year Congresses in Mexico City and East Berlin in 1975, and the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels in 1976.⁴⁰ A statement written by women at the Frankfurt conference from twenty-five European, North and South American countries expressed the desire to ›learn from the experience of Vietnamese and other Third World women‹ and the fact that they ›respect and defend their rights to defend and organize their own struggles‹.⁴¹ The conference focused on key issues, including female genital mutilation, which would define human rights advocacy by women's groups in the 1980s.⁴² In this period of international networking, it was arguably less the details of women's lives in China and Vietnam and more the techniques originating in part from communist East Asian women's struggles that made their presence felt. This section will focus on three of the most important techniques, the *enquête* (investigation), ›speaking bitterness‹, and *fanshen* (reversal), showing how each was the product of transnational traffic and transfer.

The *enquête*, or investigation, was central for West German feminists in the 1970s. They adopted it from the French Maoists who had been using it as a tool since 1967, having themselves taken it from the suggestion of Mao Zedong to ›direct your eyes downward‹ and begin political organization by gathering information about the everyday life of the populations one hoped to liberate.⁴³ The *enquête* involved questionnaires and onsite interviews with diverse groups such as farmers, prisoners and migrant workers. In Richard Wolin's words, it was intended ›to allow the oppressed to describe

39 Die Neue Frauenbewegung, 7. Teil: Vom Hexen und Hetzen, in: *Emma*, August 1981, pp. 34-43, here p. 34; Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism* (fn. 3), p. 83.

40 Lenz, *Frauenbewegung* (fn. 1), p. 30; Jocelyn Olcott, Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret. Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women's Year Conference, in: *Gender & History* 22 (2010), pp. 733-754.

41 Proposal for Solidarity with Third World Women. Frankfurt a.M., November 17, 1974. IfZ, ED 914, Bd. 41.

42 Irene Tinker/Elaine Zuckerman, Women's Economic Roles and the Development Paradigm, in: Bruce Currie-Adler et al. (eds), *International Development. Ideas, Experience, and Prospects*, New York 2014, pp. 116-132, here p. 119. For the 1980s see Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany*, Philadelphia 2012, chapter 5.

43 Julian Bourg, The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s, in: *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005), pp. 472-490, here pp. 477, 488-490.

their predicament in their own language.⁴⁴ The *enquête* was to have a radicalizing effect on both the investigators and the investigated. As the former became enlightened about the everyday experiences from a different class, race or occupation than themselves, the latter would achieve deeper self-understanding by describing the grievances that normally went unspoken. Such investigations were premised on skepticism of specialized academic knowledge and, as one woman described the belief of the magazine *Courage*, founded in 1976, that ›every woman is an expert, an expert of the everyday (*Alltagsexpertin*) and her experience‹.⁴⁵

In the early 1970s, West German feminists used the *enquête* to make contact with ›experts of the everyday‹ within the non-German migrant working population. A 1973 leaflet titled, ›Now we speak – Women break the silence‹, included an interview with two female guest workers, one Turkish and one Greek. ›Maria‹ from Greece reported her defiant free speech in the workplace: ›I always say what's on my mind when the foreman speaks to me. I shout too. I go on breaks when I feel like it and tell other women to take a break too, to come to the bathroom. We smoke and talk there. You can do a lot against Siemens. BUT YOU HAVE TO KEEP TALKING AND STAY THERE!‹⁴⁶ In an ideal-typical response to the *enquête*, the female migrant worker used the interview to both express her own modes of defiance and enjoy the reader (and interviewer) to do the same. Such like-minded responses fit the script of feminist mobilization well, and were easily folded into the production of networks of sisterly solidarity across national lines. Reports from China published in the mid-1960s to the early-1970s, including Broyelle's *Half of the Sky*, followed a similar narrative pattern, as experience reports of subjective transformation in liberated territory. One account circulating in Frankfurt in 1973 described the path of a certain Song-Li Ying from teenage ›slave of a rich landowner‹ to the ›deputy party secretary of a Communist agricultural brigade‹, and thus ›from the middle ages into modernity‹.⁴⁷

Chinese women provided important examples for the empowering potential of self-articulation. Feminist Ursula Nienhaus recalls that the ›Asian experience of ›speaking bitterness‹‹ alongside the US practice of the consciousness-raising group provided an important template for West German feminists in the early 1970s.⁴⁸ The model of consciousness-raising dictated that ›one woman could not give advice or help to another. Rather, everyone was supposed to speak about their own problems, desires, etc.,

44 Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East. French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, Princeton 2010, p. 35.

45 Christa Wicherich, *Die Courage hat mein Feminismusverständnis eindeutig beeinflusst*, in: Notz, *Als die Frauenbewegung noch Courage hatte* (fn. 15), pp. 62-67, here p. 63. See also Lenz, *Frauenbewegung* (fn. 1), p. 24.

46 R. Guckert, *Jetzt reden wir – Frauen brechen das Schweigen*, n.d. [1973]. International Institute of Social History Archives, Neue Linke, Studentenbewegung, Außerparlamentarische Opposition in Deutschland Collection, file 67.

47 April-INFO Dienst. *Frauenaktion Frankfurt a.M. III/1973*. IfZ, ED 914, Bd. 43.

48 Ursula Nienhaus, *Wie die Frauenbewegung zu Courage kam. Eine Chronologie*, in: Notz, *Als die Frauenbewegung noch Courage hatte* (fn. 15), pp. 7-22, here p. 14.

listen carefully and discover that not all things experienced as personal problems are actually individual.⁴⁹ While there were many avenues for information about the US, those from China are easier to trace. Alongside Broyelle, the most important texts were Jack Belden's *China Shakes the World* (1950) and William Hinton's *Fanshen* (1966). *Fanshen* was published in the well-known *edition suhrkamp* series in 1972, but its chapter on women had been in circulation since 1969 in a 61-page book called *Kinhua. Frauenbefreiung in China* (Women's Liberation in China), with 8,000 copies in print by 1971. Published by the Frankfurt based *Verlag Roter Stern* (Red Star Press) run by antiauthoritarian student leader K.D. Wolff, *Kinhua* contained selections from both *China Shakes the World* and *Fanshen*.⁵⁰ As one of the central texts mediating female Chinese communist experience to West German feminists, the narratives of both sections are worth examining at some length.

The first half of the excerpt told the story of *Kinhua*, or Gold Flower, a woman that Belden had interviewed for *China Shakes the World* in the 1940s. *Kinhua* had been married against her will to an older man who raped and beat her. After years of abuse, she turned to the Women's Association, newly formed by female members of the Communist-led 8th Route Army. One of the leaders, Dark Jade, reassured her, ›Put your heart at rest... we shall solve this question. All the women united in one body shall be as one sister.‹⁵¹ Their solution was direct action. After both the father-in-law and husband refused to confess that they had abused *Kinhua*, the women's group tied them both up, confined and even beat them until they were willing to do so. The confrontation was empowering for *Kinhua*, who became an organizer herself, encouraging young people to marry for love rather than because of family pressure.

Multiple techniques from the feminist repertoire of the 1970s are nascent here. The first is the role of speech. The process of *Kinhua* describing her experiences, or ›the speaking aloud of what had been going round and round in her mind for so long‹, was called an ›investigation‹ by Dark Jade, and was seen as curative in itself. Belden's own approach to the interview was also less interrogation than therapy, anticipating the non-interventionist model of the consciousness-raising group. He wrote that *Kinhua* told her story ›in a flood of bitter tears, angry imprecations and emotional outbursts of despair, frustration and hope.‹⁵²

The second relevant technique was the empowering role of direct action carried out by groups of women. The link between the Chinese 1940s and the West German 1970s is explicit in this case and is most clear in the book's selection from *Fanshen*. Published by Monthly Review Press in 1966, *Fanshen* recorded Hinton's observations in the land reform period of the PRC in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His descriptions

49 Ibid.

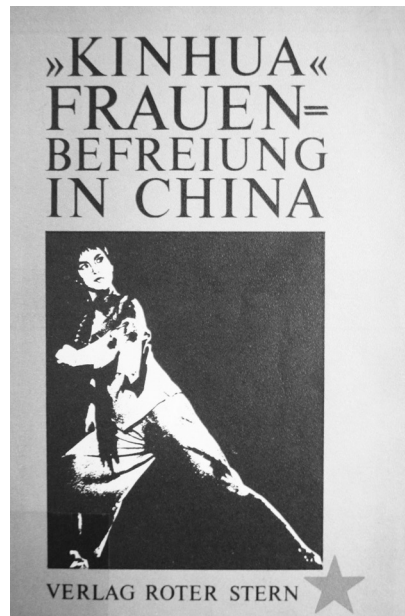
50 William Hinton, *Fanshen. Dokumentation über die Revolution in einem chinesischen Dorf*, Frankfurt a.M. 1972; Jack Belden/William Hinton, ›*Kinhua*‹. *Frauenbefreiung in China*, Frankfurt a.M. 1969. There were three editions of the book: in 1969, 1971 and 1973.

51 Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World*, London 1950, p. 300.

52 Ibid., p. 276.

of women's self-organization were celebratory, and introduced some of the key terms that West German feminists would adopt themselves. ›Untrammled by the presence of their menfolk‹, he wrote, women ›could voice their own bitterness against the traitors, [and] encourage their poor sisters to do likewise.‹⁵³ As with *Kinhua*, the starting point for politicizing previously unmobilized women was creating a women-only liberated zone for plaintive speech. Speaking produced a new consciousness. ›By ›speaking pains to recall pains‹‹, Hinton wrote, ›the women found that they had as many if not more grievances than the men and that once given a chance to speak in public they were as good at it as their fathers and husbands.‹⁵⁴

The edition of *Kinhua* published by *Verlag Roter Stern* emphasized the question of militancy. Its cover featured an image from the ballet ›The Red Detachment of Women‹ printed in the illustrated magazine *China im Bild*, in which a glaring woman with a clenched fist leans back as if prepared to strike.⁵⁵ The militant East Asian women held a certain mystique in the West German's women's movement in the 1970s. Beginning in the early 1970s, some feminists learned karate and other East Asian martial arts as forms of self-defense or as preparation for entering the armed underground.⁵⁶ The mystique climaxed in the 1977 film *Madame X: Absolute Ruler*, made by lesbian director Ulrike Ottinger based on the Chinese ›pirate queen‹, Lai Choi San. Madame X's costume and makeup were both martial in their resemblance to samurai armor, and exaggeratedly feminine in the lipstick and red circles on her cheeks, creating a camp version of the sexualized stereotype of the hysterical violent women prevalent in West Germany, especially in reference to female members of terrorist groups.⁵⁷ The



53 William Hinton, *Fanshen. A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, New York 1966, p. 157.

54 Ibid.

55 Belden/Hinton, ›*Kinhua*‹ (fn. 50), cover.

56 Cristina Perincioli, Anarchismus -> Lesbianismus -> Frauenzentrum. Warum mußte die Tomate so weit fliegen?, in: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung/Feministisches Institut (eds), *Wie weit flog die Tomate? Eine 68erinnen-Gala der Reflexion*, Berlin 1999, pp. 98-117, here p. 105.

57 Piratinnen auf dem Bodensee, in: *Emma*, August 1977, p. 13. On this trope in 1970s West Germany see Clare Bielby, *Violent Women in Print. Representations in the West German Print Media of the 1960s and 1970s*, Rochester 2012; Patricia Melzer, ›Death in the Shape of a Young Girl‹. Feminist Responses to Media Representations of Women Terrorists during the ›German Autumn‹ of 1977, in: *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11 (2009), pp. 35-62.

mock-dramatic voiceover intoned that ›woman of varied nations and walks of life‹ embraced the ›world of uncertainty and danger‹ offered by Lai, seeing China as an escapist space of cosmopolitan homosocial fantasy. Combining tropes of militancy and autonomy in a similar way, a 1977 report in *Emma* from Saigon after the defeat of the US forces described Vietnamese women as ›modern Amazons who face the strong world of men with an equally strong world of women‹.⁵⁸

The anonymous authors of the afterword to *Kinhua*, presumably members of West German women's groups themselves, suggested the learning process produced by reading accounts of Chinese women's experience. They began by noting that, even before publication, the texts from Belden and Hinton had ›already been discussed as mimeographed manuscripts in many women's groups‹ and that ›time and again, the point of entry for all discussions was the role of violence in efforts of liberation‹.⁵⁹ They described the psychological effect: ›At first, we were shocked by the reports of the beating of and spitting on the terrible, reactionary husbands. Our shock held a sense of guilt for the spontaneous desire to be able to use violence ourselves in the struggle against oppression, but it also came from the insight that one can respond to oppression which itself does not occur in the open with much more serious violence.‹⁶⁰ A 1977 article in the feminist magazine *Courage* by members of a Frankfurt women's group demonstrates how these insights turned into the application of techniques from revolutionary China in 1970s West Germany. The authors gave a report to a national women's conference in Munich on their use of *fanshen*, which they said meant ›something like ›to reverse‹‹.⁶¹ ›During the Chinese revolution‹, they explained, ›the struggle against feudal structures, including those in the minds of men, was carried out under this concept. Women were empowered to develop their own activities and learning processes.‹ The ›reversal‹ came when groups of women confronted men who were opposed to women's organization and were abusive to their wives. Women would begin with discussion and ›if they were not convinced, then women came up with something else: a husband who continued to beat his wife would take a beating himself.

For the Frankfurt feminist group, *fanshen* meant above all the practice of gathering as a group to confront abusive husbands, reversing a position of subordination and weakness into one of strength through augmenting the will of the individual with that of the group. As in the case of *Kinhua* described by Belden, women first confronted men verbally and then used their bodies if they refused to comply. In situations where women wanted to stay in their homes, members of the Frankfurt group would perform an ›occupation‹ (*Besetzung*) with members of the group remaining in the apartment ›in regular shifts‹ to prevent another act of abuse until the husband grew fed up and left. In cases where the women were being prevented from leaving, the technique

58 Charlotte Peter, *Moderne Amazonen*, in: *Emma*, February 1977, p. 48.

59 Nachwort, in: Belden/Hinton, ›*Kinhua*‹ (fn. 50), p. iv.

60 *Ibid.*, p. v.

61 Frauengruppe aus dem Frauenzentrum Dreieich in Neu-Isenburg, *Fan-Shen*. Von China bis Neu-Isenburg, in: *Courage*, June/July 1977, pp. 16-20, here p. 16.

was different. ›Recently‹, the group reported, ›women in Frankfurt practiced *fanshen*: they locked the husband in the bathroom while the wife packed her things. When the door opened, she was gone.‹⁶²

Belden and Hinton's accounts had a formative influence in other Western feminist circles as well. Carol Hanisch describes the *Fanshen* chapter on women as ›one of the several sparks that would help light the prairie fire of women's liberation‹ in the US. She recounts that the first women's liberation group in New York City, New York Radical Women, would meet under a poster that linked China with African-American and feminist mobilizations, containing three lines, ››Tell It Like It Is« – the Black Revolution/ ››Speak Pains to Recall Pains« – the Chinese Revolution/››Bitch, Sisters, Bitch« – the Final Revolution.‹⁶³ Alice Echols confirms that *Fanshen* was a ›widely read and influential book among feminists and leftists‹ at the turn of the 1970s and sold over 200,000 copies in the US.⁶⁴ Gerd Koenen and Laura Diehl call it a ›key book‹ for West German activists.⁶⁵

The movement of the techniques of the *enquête*, speaking bitterness, and *fanshen* between China, France, the US and West Germany provides graphic evidence of a transnational feminist imaginary that was also a transnational public. It demonstrates the difficulty, if not the futility, of locating origins in the dense network of textual and verbal exchanges in the social movements that emerged from the 1960s.⁶⁶ Belinda Davis has argued that the international traffic of young people in this period created a sense of ›a whole world opening up‹. She describes, for example, a woman being ›completely electrified‹ by seeing her first Mao button and first copies of Mao's book of quotations on a trip to England.⁶⁷ Davis makes the convincing case that the so-called ›kitchen table politics‹ of the women's movement should not be seen as a retreat from politics but as an alternative form of building civil society at the borders of the private and the public.⁶⁸ The Third World did not vanish in this process. It is notable that in Sander's autobiographical film of the first years of the women's movement, *Der subjektive*

62 Ibid.

63 Carol Hanisch, A Women's Liberation Tribute to William Hinton and the Women of Long Bow, speech given at Columbia University, April 3, 1999, URL: <<http://www.carolhanisch.org/Speeches/HintonSpeech/HintonTribSpeech.html>>.

64 Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad. Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975*, Minneapolis 1989, p. 147; Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air. Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, London 2002, p. 60. On the influence of Maoism on black feminists see Robin D.G. Kelley/Betsy Esch, Black like Mao. Red China and Black Revolution, in: *Souls. A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 1 (1999) 4, pp. 6–41, here p. 25.

65 Koenen/Diehl, Mao (fn. 18), p. 32.

66 Kathryn T. Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968–75*, Urbana 2005, p. 227.

67 Belinda Davis, A Whole World Opening Up. Transcultural Contact, Difference, and the Politicization of ›New Left‹ Activists, in: Belinda Davis et al. (eds), *Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s*, New York 2010, pp. 255–273, here p. 262.

68 Belinda Davis, Civil Society in a New Key? Feminist and Alternative Groups in 1970s West Germany, in: Karen Hagemann/Sonya Michel/Gunilla-Friederike Budde (eds), *Civil Society and Gender Justice. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, New York 2008, pp. 208–223, here p. 217.

Faktor (*The Subjective Factor*, 1981), she portrayed the moment of germination of the first group of the autonomous women's movement as two women meeting at a (literal) kitchen table under a portrait of Che Guevara, combining the distant and the close at hand.

Chinese communism meant many different things in the radical and alternative milieu of West Germany. The absence of firsthand experience with the distant country and the paucity of reliable reportage from the Cultural Revolution – along with a willful dismissal of the negative reports that did arise – freed China from the same scrutiny suffered by neighboring socialist countries such as the GDR. Before 1968, small groups of socialist students used Maoism in the spirit of anti-authoritarian provocation.⁶⁹ After 1968, so-called K-Groups of diverse orientation emerged, with many aligning themselves to Beijing. Membership in K-Groups peaked around 20,000 in 1977.⁷⁰ For the K-Groups, Maoism meant celebrating the vanguard role of the Third World under Chinese leadership against the ›revisionism‹ of the Soviet bloc, following the principles of ›democratic centralism‹ and ›proletarian discipline‹, as well as a deliberate identification with the working class, going ›to the people‹ by taking jobs in factories and embracing a clean-cut appearance against the putative self-indulgence of the alternative leftist subculture.⁷¹

The interest of West German feminists in China and Vietnam was different than the doctrinal orthodoxy of the K-Groups. While frequently adopting the self-description of the Chinese Communist Party and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam uncritically, West German feminists nonetheless combined influences from East Asia with parallel streams from Western Europe and the United States. To take up the dubious and depoliticizing category often used to describe the K-Groups and parts of the socialist student movement, there was no Mao or China ›cult‹ in the West German women's movement. Rather, there was a selective reading of available texts and an aspirational identification between women across lines of geography and culture. Indeed, the fuller the picture became of the situation of women in China, the less secure the feminist support for East Asian communist governments became. Even as the techniques of revolutionary Chinese women in consciousness-raising groups emerged as part of the repertoire of Western feminism, Western feminists were increasingly skeptical about the status of women's liberation in China itself.

69 Slobodian, *Foreign Front* (fn. 36), chapter 6.

70 Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft* (fn. 3), p. 11.

71 Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt. Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977*, Cologne 2001, p. 477; Felix Wemheuer, Einleitung: Die vielen Gesichter des Maoismus und die Neue Linke nach 1968, in: Gehrig/Mittler/Wemheuer, *Kulturrevolution als Vorbild?* (fn. 18), pp. 9–23, here p. 17; Andreas Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne. Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, p. 39; Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft* (fn. 3), pp. 130–131.

3. Foreign Sister Liu: The Seeds of Disenchantment, 1977–1982

Claudie Broyelle, who had been both a weathervane and a boon for the image of China in feminist circles around 1973, reflected the changed climate in feminist circles with the publication of her 1977 sequel to *Half of the Sky*, titled *Second Return from China. A New Report on Chinese Everyday Life*.⁷² The preface to an excerpt from the book in the West German feminist monthly *Courage* noted that Broyelle's first volume had been intended to show how ›women's liberation is closely tied to socialism‹ but the second ›is more critical than the rose-tinted travel diaries.‹⁷³ The magazine's editors chose a section of the book related to reproductive rights. Broyelle reported on the lack of access to contraceptives for unmarried couples, and women being either compelled to have abortions or denied the right to abortion for political reasons. She provided one account of a woman who killed herself from shame after being impregnated through rape by a cadre at a people's commune.⁷⁴ The excerpt was clearly selected for maximum impact on its West German feminist readership for whom campaigns to legalize abortion were central in the 1970s.⁷⁵ Members of a West German women's delegation to China in 1977 punctuated the point about the need for women's activism from below to effect change by presenting Chinese women with a Weimar-era poster showing women toppling paragraph 218, the section in the penal code outlawing abortion (see the photo on the next page).⁷⁶

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the subsequent trial and public condemnation of Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, had also been influential in shifting opinions on China in feminist circles. In the pages of *Courage*, feminist academic Barbara Duden reported that Jiang was being described as an ›evil and power-hungry woman who wanted to be empress‹ and a ›witch‹ who had ›sabotaged women's liberation.‹ Duden felt that Jiang's story was being used as a ›piece of moral theater‹ to discipline female overreach.⁷⁷ Other feminists asked why Jiang's private life, including her past

72 Claudie Broyelle/Jacques Broyelle/Evelyne Tschirhart, *Zweite Rückkehr aus China. Ein neuer Bericht über den chinesischen Alltag*, Berlin 1977.

73 Gudula Lorez, *Zweite Rückkehr aus China*, in: *Courage*, October 1977, pp. 34-35, here p. 34.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

75 The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1975 that abortions were only permitted with medical and psychological indications, overturning a more liberal decision made by the *Bundestag*. Edith Hoshino Altbach, *The New German Women's Movement*, in: *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (1984), pp. 454-469, here p. 456. See also Michael Schwartz, *Abtreibung und Wertewandel im doppelten Deutschland. Individualisierung und Strafrechtsreformen in der DDR und in der Bundesrepublik in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren*, in: Thomas Raithel/Andreas Rödder/Andreas Wirsching (eds), *Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne? Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren*, Munich 2009, pp. 113-128.

76 Brigitte Krause/Stefanie Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu. Frauenbilder aus der VR China*, Hamburg 1979, p. 61. The photograph was also reproduced in Barbara Duden, *Chinareise (III). Zwischen den vier Bergen*, in: *Courage*, March 1978, pp. 34-39, here p. 37.

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 38.



Brigitte Krause/Stefanie Ritter,
Fremde Schwester Liu.
Frauenbilder aus der VR China,
Hamburg 1979, p. 61

as an actress, figured so centrally in her vilification when the male members of the Gang of Four were spared the same treatment.⁷⁸ They reprinted Chinese caricatures of Jiang as a woman in a slit skirt on stage with men below her, and another of her as an oversized figure towering over a man and flexing her arm like a body builder.⁷⁹ The subtext was clear. Above and beyond political intrigues, it appeared that Jiang's real crime was being a powerful woman and West German feminists came to her defense.

The constant description of Jiang as a ›witch‹ was especially galling for West German feminists who appropriated the traditional term of misogynistic insult and suspicion regularly for their own self-identification. To name two of many examples, a feminist magazine from 1972 was called *Witches' Press* (*Hexenpresse*), and a women's health handbook from 1975 was titled *Witches' Whispers* (*Hexengeflüster*).⁸⁰ Commenting on Jiang's trial, *Emma* magazine wrote that ›the stories from distant China involve all of us [...] because they remind us one more time that – in all cultures and social orders – inconvenient women are not opponents to be taken seriously but little ladies to be laid low. Active women who strive for power are whores and witches. It's as easy as that.‹⁸¹ The form of Jiang's persecution called into question the hope that Chinese gender relations had leaped forward into a brighter future.

78 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 117.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

80 Altbach, *Movement* (fn. 75), p. 456; Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism* (fn. 3), p. 90. For other examples, see Alice Schwarzer, *Die neuen Hexen*, in: *Emma*, May 1977, pp. 6-8; *Die Neue Frauenbewegung*, 7. Teil (fn. 39); *Hexenpresse* cover reproduced in: *Die Neue Frauenbewegung*, 3. Teil: ...aufs Kämpfen eingestellt!, in: *Emma*, August 1981, pp. 16-23, here p. 18.

81 Satire, in: *Emma*, February 1977, p. 5.

Alongside the specific questions of reproductive rights and Jiang's vilification, the growing feminist disenchantment with China revolved around the all-important question of speech. Broyelle placed speech at the center of her understanding of women's liberation, posing it against what she called the ›legalistic illusion of earlier women's movements‹ that liberation could be granted through suffrage, the right to divorce and even equal pay for equal work.⁸² Such demands, she claimed, had either been achieved or become mainstream in Western Europe, but women were still not free. Schrader-Klebert had acerbically condemned the female ›Uncle Toms‹ who enjoyed ›pseudo-emancipation‹ in entering the male workplace without addressing the gender imbalances that structure society.⁸³ ›Women's oppression‹, Broyelle wrote, ›cannot be explained, it is something »experienced« and »felt«.⁸⁴ One of the goals of the new women's movement had been to undermine the ›regime of incommunicability‹ under which women lived.⁸⁵

To their confusion, Western feminists found that when Chinese women spoke in the late 1970s, they often recounted bitterness only in the past tense. West German feminists reported that women ended conversations consistently with the exclamation: ›We have happy lives!‹ Yet they observed that this formulation always appeared at awkward moments in the conversation and seemed to be used to ›fend off further questions‹. It left them wondering ›what is happiness in this country?‹⁸⁶ When the state-produced periodical *Women in China* resumed publication in 1978 after having been shelved during the Cultural Revolution, a West German feminist student in Beijing remarked that the content seemed to simply mimic the party line. It is ›certainly no »Chinese Emma«, she observed, comparing it unfavorably to the organ of West German feminism, with its constant critical reports on matters of sexuality, mainstream and state sexism and women's rights.⁸⁷

Such an independent voice did not seem to exist for women in China. During her time there, Duden recounted hearing ›the same facts about old superstitions about women being bad luck‹ and the assertion that ›since the liberation, women had become the masters of the country‹ until she suspected it was ›a prayer wheel for foreign guests, ideologically blessed rules of speech repeated over and over‹. She speculated that beyond simple rhetoric, the repetition also reflected a ›thought barrier for the speaker themselves, behind which potential contradictions remain hidden‹. Visiting West German feminists, she said, reacted with ›growing impatience‹ to these ›stereotypical formulas that excluded any form of differentiated explanation‹.⁸⁸

West German feminists feared that the absence of plaintive speech meant not a genuine absence of everyday bitterness but an absence of both self-knowledge and sufficiently hospitable environments in which to speak. The conclusion of West German

82 Broyelle, *Hälfte des Himmels* (fn. 16), p. 7.

83 Schrader-Klebert, *Die kulturelle Revolution* (fn. 12), p. 56.

84 Broyelle, *Hälfte des Himmels* (fn. 16), p. 8.

85 *Ibid.*

86 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 47.

87 Charlotte Kerner, *Die Hälfte des Himmels?*, in: *Emma*, October 1978, p. 43.

88 Duden, *Chinareise* (III) (fn. 76), p. 36.

feminists was, in effect, that a woman who could not articulate her grievances could not be free. By definition, liberation could not be complete but must be part of an ongoing process. To claim liberation had been arrived at was a sign of having fallen back into self-deception. Scholars have shown how face-to-face contact with East Asian socialist women often deepened the pre-existing beliefs of Western feminists about their heroism.⁸⁹ Yet such contact could also shake the foundations of certainty about the trustworthiness of their interlocutors.

For West German feminists, speech had a dual political function. On the one hand, it deepened self-understanding. Describing one's own experience revealed the contours of one's own oppression. On the other hand, such speech contributed to group-building.⁹⁰ Group speech was an accessory to epiphany. In the case of women's groups in the PRC, by contrast, group speech was part of a dynamic of socialist tutelage. Xiaoxian Gao describes how female cadres tutored rural women on how to speak about their own work, guiding them toward the narration of a socialist subjectivity.⁹¹ Whereas Western feminists used group speech to locate the cracks and points of tension in everyday life, Chinese cadres used it, at least ideal typically, to create a more seamless melding of the individual to the whole. Western feminists had also misidentified the motor of change in Chinese Communist ideology. While they saw the autonomous self-organization of women as the driving force behind the leveling of gender relations with the state remaining relatively distant, the CCP saw the state and the party as active interventionist forces, as Tina Mai Chen puts it, guiding ›the development of the national body‹ in ›salvationist modes of thinking‹.⁹²

Dissatisfied with the apparent refusal of Chinese women to speak bitterness *after* the revolution, West German feminists turned to the technique of the investigation to find another version of the truth. This happened in part through deeper source-based studies of the situation of women by social scientists and historians.⁹³ It also happened through personal visits. Mechthild Leutner and the working group ›Women in China‹ wrote that the end of the 1970s were marked by a de-idealization (*Entidealisierung*) of China brought about by the opening of the country to more visitors after the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁴ As more reports of China came from first-person accounts as well as journalistic reportage of the catastrophic consequences of the Cultural Revolution itself, it became less plausible to sustain China for the ›distant projection of one's own hopes‹.⁹⁵ A West German woman who spent two years in China

89 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road. Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era*, Ithaca 2013, p. 262.

90 See Davis, *Civil Society* (fn. 68), pp. 217-218.

91 Gao Xiaoxian, ›The Silver Flower Contest: Rural Women in 1950s China and the Gendered Division of Labour, in: *Gender & History* 18 (2006), pp. 594-612, here p. 601.

92 Tina Mai Chen, Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China, in: *Gender & History* 15 (2003), pp. 268-295, here p. 283.

93 Leutner/Arbeitsgruppe Frauen in China, *Frauen in China* (fn. 6), p. 2.

94 *Ibid.*

95 *Ibid.*

reported in *Emma* of what she calls the ›first ›feminist‹ wall newspaper‹ pasted up at Peking University in 1980, in which a woman declared that she ›hated being a woman‹ because of the subordinate position they continued to occupy even in Communist China.⁹⁶ Such anecdotal evidence worked to erode the edifice established by official Chinese self-presentation.

The most comprehensive record of West German women's interaction with Chinese women can be found in the accounts of the 1977 delegation, which included Duden, recently described as ›one of the most important feminists of *Courage* magazine‹.⁹⁷ It is worth dwelling on the delegation at length as it was the first face-to-face encounter between West German and Chinese feminists in China itself and Duden's account was serialized in four articles in *Courage*. The delegation was composed of twenty-three women from Hamburg, Berlin and Amsterdam. Most of the women were teachers and educators, as well as one doctor, two architects, an office employee and students, all between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-eight.⁹⁸ The participants documented the trip well in an illustrated self-published book, five articles and a film.

In the past two decades, scholars have routinely interpreted the internationalism of Western activists as a ›projection‹ of their own desires and wishes.⁹⁹ As the protest sign mentioned in the introduction suggests, West German feminists often lionized the multi-tasking ›guerrilla mother‹ who could incorporate the multiple demands of political struggle effortlessly, including those coded both masculine and feminine. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu describes this construction on the part of Western feminists as ›radical orientalism‹, creating ›idealized depictions‹ that corresponded more to the needs of Western subjects themselves than to empirical reality.¹⁰⁰ Yet what is striking about the 1977 Women's Delegation is how self-conscious they were about the dangers of projection at the time. The delegation's self-reflective attitude was flagged by an opening quote in the book-length account of the trip titled, *Foreign Sister Liu. Images of Women from the PRC*. The quote, from Bertolt Brecht, is about someone who ›set out like someone who sought a new country, tired of the old one, doubtlessly dying to hear his own cry of joy, but what he actually sought was *his* country.

The Brecht quote set the tone for the report by acknowledging openly the elliptical nature of internationalism, conceding that it was as much about the activist as the object of solidarity. In the course of their conversation with women professing perfect happiness, for example, members of the delegation wrote that ›we are constantly made

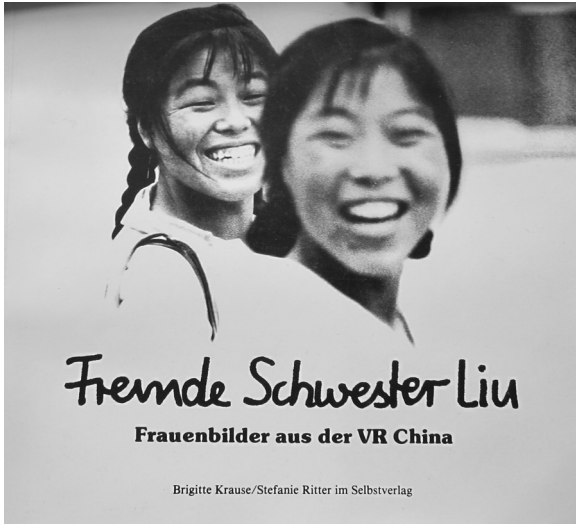
96 Ann-Kathrin Scherer, China heute, in: *Emma*, December 1982, pp. 8-17, here p. 11.

97 Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft* (fn. 3), p. 149.

98 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 4.

99 See e.g. Sara Lennox, Enzensberger, *Kursbuch* and ›Third Worldism‹: The Sixties' Construction of Latin America, in: Sigrid Bauschinger/Susan L. Cocalis (eds), ›*Neue Welt*‹/›*Dritte Welt*‹. *Interkulturelle Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 185-200, here pp. 195-197; Arlene Teraoka, *East, West and Others. The Third World in Postwar German Literature*, Lincoln 1996, introduction; on the limits of this metaphor in understanding West German leftist internationalism in the 1960s see Slobodian, *Foreign Front* (fn. 36), introduction.

100 Wu, *Radicals* (fn. 89), pp. 5-7.



Brigitte Krause/Stefanie Ritter,
Fremde Schwester Liu.
 Frauenbilder aus der VR China,
 Hamburg 1979

aware that the questions we are posing the Chinese women say more about us than the answers the Chinese themselves give«. It made them question their own priorities. »For example, is our need to have sexual relationships with men as early as possible or our need to flee overly constrictive bonds our »most essential« requirement? Is this really what we want ourselves?« »A long way from home«, they wrote, »we are thrown back onto ourselves again.«¹⁰¹

The West German feminists turned to informal investigations to reconcile the competing positions that they encountered, and found that empirical reality took their side. »By observing gestures, reactions, and forms of behavior«, they wrote, »we could discover things that were not contained in the Chinese women's statements.« They recounted seeing young couples hidden in the semi-darkness of the city parks at night »touching each other tenderly«. »These observations«, they said, »demonstrated the contradiction between public morality, as articulated in the answers to our questions, and young people's need for affection, which they are forced to pursue in secret.«¹⁰² The women reporting from the delegation placed the truths uncovered in the course of their observations above the seemingly deceptive and possibly self-deceptive discourse of the Chinese women themselves. Asking if they »could understand the reality of women in this country with our cultural understanding«, they ultimately answered that it was indeed possible, trumping cultural relativism with a belief in the universality of sexual drives.¹⁰³

101 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 48.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

Like Broyelle, the women of the 1977 delegation paid particular attention to everyday life, contending even more adamantly that this was the place where one could assess the reality of women's liberation. After enthusiasm for the propagandistic formulas and images of the East Asian ›guerrilla mother‹ holding infant, gun and book at the turn of the 1970s, feminist skepticism extended to state-produced rituals, data and discourse over the course of the decade. The 1977 West German women's delegation typified this new attitude of suspicion toward the state by expressing both weariness and wariness of the repetitive formulas of cadres and party members and the experience of being greeted perpetually by applauding crowds. ›What had we done to deserve these ovations?‹ one of them wanted to know.¹⁰⁴ Housed in luxurious high-rise hotels ›which literally looked down at the people‹, they asked: ›Hadh't we traveled to a socialist land out of a desire to find equality and be incorporated into it ourselves?‹¹⁰⁵

Feminists asked similar questions about other liberation movements. Traveling to Southern Africa to report on anticolonial struggles in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, Carol Prote said in 1979: ›I know them from pictures, proud young women, with guns in their hands, in guerrilla uniforms. I have seen them in photos from the Vietnam War [...] and the same question always arises: what would happen when the war is over? [...] Will they take part actively and self-responsibly in the construction of the new society or just play a background role?‹ Interviewing young female guerrillas in Zimbabwe, Prote reported that their responses were either ›prefabricated‹ or that they would duck behind a doorway before responding, presumably with a male superior, especially in questions related to sexuality.¹⁰⁶

In response to their version of this predicament, the delegates in China set out to find truth everywhere except where they were being told to find it. Krause and Ritter described how they ›could only find situations of everyday life for the Chinese‹ when they went into the streets at 5 am to ›sit in a dark doorway so as not be immediately seen. Otherwise we would be immediately surrounded by a thick throng of flabbergasted people.‹¹⁰⁷ They implied that they could only experience China when they were invisible, and their method was reminiscent of ethnography. They wanted to observe the Chinese in their native habitat ›as they really were‹ to decide whether they deserved to be admired from afar, to assess if they were worthy objects of international solidarity. Krause and Ritter explained that they had come to China in a ›search for new ways of living (*neue Formen kollektiven Zusammenlebens*) that are freer, more humane, and more equal.‹¹⁰⁸ And they believed that they had not found it in the factories, the homes or the official gatherings but in the streets, ›in the way they sat together outside and spoke with one another.‹¹⁰⁹

104 Ibid., p. 14.

105 Ibid.

106 Carola Prote, *Afrikanische Begegnungen*, in: *Emma*, April 1979, pp. 55-58, here pp. 55-57.

107 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 16.

108 Ibid., p. 9.

109 Ibid., p. 118.

The only possibility to discover these new ways of being was through investigation. Members of the delegations hid in doorways and ranged into Chinese streets equipped with film and video cameras. On their return to West Germany, they found that it was the ›images that showed everyday life in the streets and apartments that most excited‹ people and opened up opportunities for discussion at photo exhibitions in galleries and women's pubs.¹¹⁰ This was a form of internationalism very different from the ›transnational advocacy networks‹ that political scientists identify in the 1970s.¹¹¹ Rather, it was an internationalism of shared subjectivity. Actual contact or communication was less important than a reflected way of being and of being-together (*Zusammenleben*).

Most telling was the conclusion to Ritter and Krause's book in which they describe the entire voyage itself as a project of ›female solidarity‹.¹¹² Yet what they meant was not, in the first instance, solidarity between German and Chinese women but between the German (and Dutch) women of the delegation themselves. The final image in the book is of three members of the delegation with their arms around each other accompanied by the caption: ›We set out to come closer to our foreign sisters in China and to get to know collective life. We returned home filled with unanswered questions and the knowledge that much effort is still needed to truly understand ourselves.‹¹¹³ Frustrated at the difficulty of navigating the gaps between official rhetoric and street-level reality as all-too-visible visitors in a foreign country, the West German feminists ended their major voyage of internationalism with a return to the examination of their own subjective perspectives and assumptions.

4. Conclusion

›Half of the sky has gone dark‹, an introduction to an article on China in *Emma* magazine read in 1982.¹¹⁴ The author, who had spent two years in Beijing, declared that ›after 33 years of socialist re-education, sexism in China seems to be back on the offensive‹.¹¹⁵ She reported of female infanticides as a result of the One Child Policy, the persistence of sectoral gender segregation in the workplace, and the fact that the Cultural Revolution had not brought ›general emancipation‹ but ›violent death for hundreds of thousands of people‹.¹¹⁶ The year before, Chinese courts had condemned

110 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

111 Margaret E. Keck/Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca 1998.

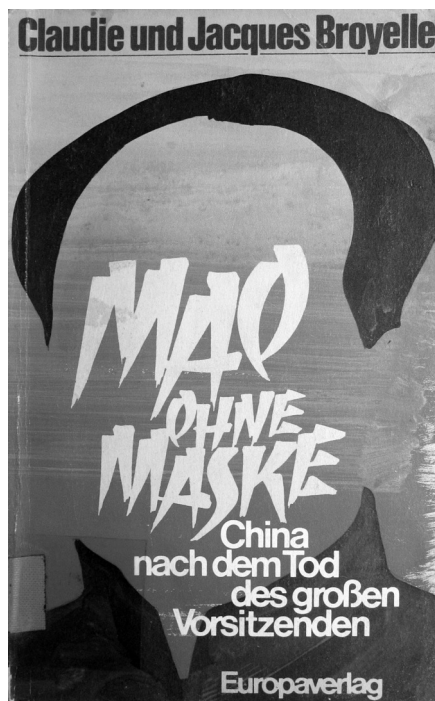
112 Krause/Ritter, *Fremde Schwester Liu* (fn. 76), p. 120.

113 *Ibid.*, back cover.

114 Inhalt, in: *Emma*, December 1982, p. 2.

115 Scherer, *China heute* (fn. 96), p. 11.

116 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16.



Claudie and Jacques Broyelle, *Mao ohne Maske. China nach dem Tod des großen Vorsitzenden*, Munich 1982

Mao's widow Jiang Qing to death for crimes committed during the Cultural Revolution. Feminist and human rights groups in West Germany demonstrated against the verdict. Among the leaders were feminist figurehead and publisher of *Emma* magazine, Alice Schwarzer.¹¹⁷ An article in *Emma* that year explained the grounds for protest: ›She was a radical leftist and a woman to boot. You can throw anything at a woman like that. This is what connects us with Jiang Qing.‹¹¹⁸ The demonstration was a turning point, crystallizing the defensiveness about Jiang's persecution noted above into outright protest, and marking a conclusive transition from praise of China to criticism. Bellwether author Claudie Broyelle captured the shift yet again in the polemical title of her 1980 book, *Apocalypse Mao*, published with an equally sharp title in German as *Mao Without his Mask*.¹¹⁹ China had gone from the future to another national variant of the patriarchal past.

117 Rossana Rossanda, Miss Li, Wolkenkranich, Blauer Apfel, Blau der großen Wasser, in: *Emma*, March 1981, pp. 16-19, here p. 16.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

119 Claudie Broyelle/Jacques Broyelle/Chengli Sun, *Apocalypse Mao*, Paris 1980; Claudie and Jacques Broyelle, *Mao ohne Maske. China nach dem Tod des großen Vorsitzenden*, Munich 1982.

No feminist utopia arose to replace China or revolutionary Vietnam, which, though distinct nations, had often been treated almost interchangeably through the 1970s. While there was ongoing interest in, and solidarity with, political movements in the Global South, the full identification of West German feminists with distant struggles faced three obstacles. First was the tendency of liberation movements to place the goals of the nation in general above those of women in particular, thus disqualifying them from membership in an ›autonomous women's movement‹, which remained keenly attentive to the ›struggle within the struggle‹.¹²⁰ Second was the perceived persistence of patriarchal attitudes even after the revolution, whether in the alleged ›pasha‹ attitude of entitlement among Muslim men or the *machismo* of Latin American men.¹²¹ Third was the open reluctance of many leftist regimes or liberation movements to tolerate homosexuality or recognize reproductive rights, whether justified by the demographic need for an expanding population in the case of Palestine, the ›revolutionary beliefs‹ of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) or lingering Catholic values in Nicaragua.¹²²

In retrospect, the cooperation between feminist and human rights groups in the Jiang protests was significant. By the beginning of the 1980s, the women's movement had largely moved from a celebration of what was happening in the collective spaces of the public streets and ›liberated zones‹ of the non-Western world to a more frequent condemnation of the gendered violence that was happening behind its closed doors. While feminists still declared solidarity with women in the Global South, the Third World appeared more frequently in feminist publications as a source of retrograde tradition and more overtly violent forms of patriarchy. In the 1980s, issues such as female genital mutilation, domestic violence in non-Western culture, and a particular focus on the role of Islam in oppressing women came to the fore for the women's movement.¹²³ Gestures of solidarity with non-German women were increasingly accompanied by criticism of non-German mores, particularly those of Islam in the case of Turkish women.¹²⁴

120 Judy Kimble, *The Struggle Within the Struggle*, in: *Feminist Review* 8 (1981), pp. 107-111. See Elvira Ganter, *Die Ehre, für Palästina zu kämpfen. Gespräche im Libanon*, in: *Courage*, August 1981, pp. 13-15. An important book, which went through three editions in three years, was Raymonda Tawil's first person testimonial about her struggle against both Israeli occupation and Arab patriarchy: Raymonda Tawil, *Mein Gefängnis hat viele Mauern. Eine Palästinenserin berichtet*, Bonn 1979. The 1975 International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City is often cited as a point of divergence between feminists from the Global North and their focus on reproductive rights and sexuality and female activists from the Global South who focused on questions of national liberation, gender complementarity and economic equality. See Olcott, *Cold War Conflicts* (fn. 40), p. 749.

121 Gisela Burckhardt, *Frauen in Nicaragua. Guerilleras und der Machismo*, in: *Emma*, February 1983, pp. 26-29, here p. 27.

122 Ganter, *Ehre* (fn. 120), p. 14; B.B., *Lesben und Schwule als Brigadisten in Nicaragua*, in: *Die wöchentliche Courage* 20/1984, p. 10; Prote, *Begegnungen* (fn. 106), p. 58.

123 See Sara Lennox, *Divided Feminism: Women, Racism and German National Identity*, in: *German Studies Review* 18 (1995), pp. 481-502; Wildenthal, *Language of Human Rights* (fn. 42), chapter 5.

124 Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, New York 2007, pp. 142-143. See, e.g., Cornelia Mansfeld, *Islamisierung in Kreuzberg*, in: *Courage*, May 1980, pp. 12-13; Sabine Schruff, *Fatma muß Jungfrau sein*, in: *Emma*, August 1977, pp. 16-29.

In a parallel strand emerging from the women's movement 1970s, the attention to subjectivity displayed by the women's delegation in China segued into an increased focus on race and racism, including anti-semitism, marked by the 1981 publication of an article by feminist Dagmar Schultz titled ›Confronting the Racism in Ourselves‹.¹²⁵ Sara Lennox describes how Schultz and others, in collaboration with women of color, began to question the defensibility of simple analogies like Schrader-Klebert that declared women the ›Negroes of all nations‹.¹²⁶ Even as forms of collaboration and cooperative activism flourished from the 1980s onward, the belief in a distant ›ideal society‹ disappeared.

For over a decade after 1968, West German feminists looked at China and Vietnam for examples and interlocutors. My article has revisited this exchange to remind historians that the repertoires of social movements emerged from transnational exchanges that extended southward and eastward as well as to the West. Efforts to narrate ›German gender politics in global perspective‹ must be sure not to forget the East.¹²⁷ To do so would be to write out half of the sky.

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125 Dagmar Schultz, Dem Rassismus in sich begegnen, in: *Courage*, October 1981, pp. 17-22.

126 Lennox, *Divided Feminism* (fn. 123), p. 484.

127 The reference is to the subtitle of Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism* (fn. 3), which, while an excellent book otherwise, focuses exclusively on the West in the sections on the first decade of the West German women's movement.