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Dinah Dodds and Pam Allen-Thompson, eds.: The Wall in My Backyard: East German Women in Transition

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The major open question about the plenum is this: what if the NES had been carried out—what would the consequences have been? In all likelihood there would have been a double spring in the late sixties, a Prague spring and a Berlin spring. Some say the combined strength of the two springs would have been a successful foreshadowing of perestroika. Others maintain (and I think they have the better argument) that the Soviets would have done in Berlin what they did in Prague.

In perusing the reams of material provided in *Kahlschlag*, I could not help but be struck by the rigidity, superciliousness and paranoia on the part of those who ran the GDR. I was gradually overpowered by the feeling that if the people in charge had only had a sense of humor things would have been less grim. The one art form spared at the plenum was satire—there were hardly any cabaret texts in existence, so what was there to attack? I had to remind myself that capitalism had many centuries to lay the groundwork for a society stable enough to develop a sense of humor; communism had only decades, and under conditions relentlessly unpleasant.

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Dodds, Dinah and Pam Allen-Thompson, eds. *The Wall in My Backyard: East German Women in Transition*. Interviews and trans. by D. Dodds. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994. 178 pp. ISBN 0-870-239-325. \$30.

This volume of interviews with East German women following the *Wende* exceeds expectations for such a text, as it is a theoretically sophisticated document. Unlike the East German counterpart on which its format is loosely based, the *Protokoll*, here we find a completely self- and historically-conscious attempt by the editors to provide a variegated and non-ideological context for the understanding and assessment of the experience of the *Wende* by GDR women.

The volume contains 18 interviews with East German women of varying ages and professional backgrounds. As the editors readily admit, the interviewees are almost exclusively well-educated, professional women from Berlin. Each interview is

prefaced with a brief biographical sketch of the interviewee and background pertinent to the interview context. The interviews themselves are presented *Protokoll*-style: questions of the interviewer are left out and each entry reads like a personal narrative. The interviews are then followed by the editors' summation of a follow-up interview in 1992, if one took place. Most of the original interviews took place between late 1990 and early 1991, 4-5 months following official unification.

A highlight of this volume is the attention paid by the editors to material necessary for a non-specialist audience. The 21-page introduction is detailed enough for the novice, yet nuanced enough to delight the GDR specialist. It contains historical information about the events of the *Wende*, historical and critical evaluations of the situation of women in the GDR, and examples of GDR policy and law concerning women. In addition, the appendix contains a useful chronology of the *Wende* and a glossary of terms for those not familiar with GDR parlance. Of special interest is the editors' attempt to critically assess their own work: the recognition of the advantages and disadvantages of documentary material, musings on the difficulties of establishing memory and historical fact, the manipulation of the editing process itself, and the limits of the present sample as an indicator of GDR women's experience of the *Wende*. This particular self-consciousness of the editors lifts the *Protokoll*-genre to a new level of validity as documentary material.

The editing process itself is an art. Here we find 18 interviews wherein the obvious is not constantly reiterated and the typical is portrayed continually from differing perspectives. Central to the editors' work is the following idea: "By challenging the misconception that life in the GDR was monolithic, the book attempts to contribute to an understanding of the complexity of this transition" (3). Correspondingly, the interviews reveal women's lives in the GDR as diverse and multi-dimensional: sometimes exciting, sometimes dull, sometimes painful. Their experiences as they begin to "live" in a united Germany also take on a heterogeneity often missed in attempts to define GDR women's experience. Conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities exist side-by-side and often within one narrative. For example, while one woman claimed that life in unified Germany was less complicated, especially since she now only worked 40 hours per week

instead of the 43 3/4 hours typical in the GDR. However, she later complained about working so hard that she had no time for her private life.

The text confirms the losses GDR women have suffered since unification; unemployment, financial insecurity, and shrinking benefits still top the list of concerns for these women. GDR women also share in the general loss of identity and history suffered by former GDR citizens since unification. However, the diversity inherent in the narratives reflects affirmation as well as critique of both systems. All the women spoke of both gains and losses since unification. Most significantly, the portrait of women presented here is one of "active participants in a new society." Still remaining is the inner-emancipation, even self-confidence, which many women achieved in the GDR as a direct result of not only financial independence, but also multiple responsibilities (work, family, household) and daily battles for recognition. Thus, there is some continuity in this upheaval.

The clear and very readable style of the editors makes this volume entirely appropriate for classroom explorations of GDR women's experiences as well as cultural transitions since unification. Most importantly, the volume achieves the editors' goal of contributing to a "differentiated understanding" of the GDR. By focusing on daily life experiences, the text also reveals the interpretive inadequacies of monolithic interpretations of GDR culture.

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Ensikat, Peter. *Ab jetzt geb ich nichts mehr zu: Nachrichten aus den neuen Ostprovinzen.* München: Kindler Verlag, 1993. 363 pp. ISBN 3-463-40214-9. DM 36.

Anstelle eines Nachwortes zitiert Ensikat Brecht:

Ich sitze am Straßenrand.
Der Fahrer wechselt das Rad.
Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich herkomme.
Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich hinfahre.
Warum sehe ich den Radwechsel
Mit Ungeduld?

Das Zitat ist eine poignante Beschreibung des Lebensgefühls von vielen Ostdeutschen. Eine

Rückkehr ins Arbeiter- und Bauernparadies ist grotesk, selbst als Traum. Die Zukunft im unsicheren, existenzbedrohenden westlichen Kapitalismus erscheint vielen auch nicht eben attraktiv zu sein. Was bleibt ist Ungeduld, Nervosität und der Komplex des Kainmals von der falschen Seite der Welt zu kommen, über Nacht zum Minoritätenstatus relegiert worden zu sein. Dieses Lebensgefühl manifestieren in ihren neueren Werken eine ganze Reihe von ehemaligen DDR-Schriftstellern. Meistens kombinieren sie dieses Gefühl mit einer individuellen Art der Vergangenheitsbewältigung, einem Versuch der Rechtfertigung und, in selteneren Fällen, einer Apologie. Zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt erfolgt eine Stellungnahme zur Stasi, wobei meistens die Opferrolle angestrebt wird.

Ensikats Buch hebt sich wohltuend von vielen der eben umrissenen Werke ab. Zunächst einmal ist er Kabarettautor, der durchaus in der Lage ist, auch das eigene Leben nicht überzubewerten, es im größeren Zusammenhang zu sehen und dabei die Situationskomödie vieler Lebenslagen nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren. So liest sich die Autobiographie flott. Das Buch ist eingeteilt in Lebensabschnitte, z. B. "Nachrichten aus der Provinz Finsterwalde" und "Nachrichten aus der Provinz Leipzig," wobei das Wort "Provinz" ganz allgemein auf die DDR zielt. In diesen größeren Abschnitten gibt es eine Reihe kleinerer, die alle mit der Frage "wieso" anfangen, z. B. "Wieso ich Finsterwalde nicht mochte," "Wieso ich nie bei der Stasi war." Die penetrante Frage "wieso?" weist natürlich in Richtung Erklärung, Rechtfertigung. Da sie aber zigmal wiederholt wird, unterstreicht sie auch die Fragwürdigkeit des Unterfangens und hat einen komischen Effekt, zumal die Antworten, in Form eines kurzen Kapitels, nicht der Banalitäten und des Zufalls entbehren, die oft den Lauf eines menschlichen Lebens bestimmen. In der Mitte und am Ende des Buches erscheinen von Ensikat verfaßte satirische Texte aus dem Kabarett. Diese Texte sollen offensichtlich eine Legitimationsfunktion haben, andererseits machen sie das Buch aber auch lebendiger. Denn wenn man hört, daß einer "Kabarettautor" ist, ist man begierig darauf, Beispiele dieser humorversprechenden Tätigkeit zu sehen. Ensikat enttäuscht nicht.

Das eigene Leben wird hier also distanziert—kritisch gesehen, mit Humor und manchmal selbsterniedrigend und demütig. Wie steht es nun um dieses Paradigma eines DDR-Lebens gesehen vom