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“Frauen für den Frieden—Oppositional Group or Bored Troublemakers?”

By Susanne Kranz¹

Abstract

This paper explores the autonomous women's group Frauen für den Frieden (Women for Peace) that was founded in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1982. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the reasons behind the foundation of the group as well as its functioning and its rather quick decline and dissolution. A crucial reason for the establishment of an autonomous, yet illegal, women's group was the ratification of a new military law that specified drafting women into the military service in case of a national emergency. Additionally, women challenged the existing Friedenspolitik (policy of peace) of the socialist state. Opinions and views about ideology, religion and politics represented minor matters within the group yet they played a decisive role in weakening it, which was further facilitated by the infiltration of the organization by the Ministry of State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit), short Stasi. The group has been discussed in previous research, primarily German-language sources, but often only as part of the larger peace movement and not in its own right as an independent organization. Its role leading up to the events of 1989/90 has also been overlooked. The paper relies on archival sources, accounts of former activists, and members of the SED who perceived the group as “bored troublemakers,” broadening the existing knowledge on autonomous women's organizations in East Germany and Frauen für den Frieden in particular. It offers new insights into an important oppositional group indirectly challenging the state's power which was established as a women's organization without explicit women's issues on their agenda.

Key Words: German Democratic Republic, Women for Peace, Cold War

Introduction

*Da sie an der Welt nicht zweifeln konnte,
blieb ihr nur der Zweifel an sich.
(Because she couldn't doubt the world,
she could only doubt herself.)*
Christa Wolf

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the stagnant economy and repressive society of East Germany led to growing discontent of the people with the political system and saw the emergence of several oppositional movements. Some of these groups assembled under the protection of the Protestant Church even though most of them were not necessarily Christians. While the Church enabled them to remain partly hidden from the state's security service, it also created greater vulnerability for infiltration by the state's security's informal employees (IM,

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Informelle Mitarbeiter). The Church leadership understood the Church as an institution of the socialist system, an integral part of socialist society, yet the Church remained a considerable danger to the state (Grabner 35). Emancipation, liberation, and self-determination of women were difficult tasks for the Protestant Church. Due to its history of hostility towards women, the Church was rather conservative regarding women, but still more open-minded than the government led by the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands [Socialist Unity Party of Germany]). It remained partly opposed to the political practices of the dictatorial regime, even though the Church never openly questioned the system. According to Samirah Kenawi, the paradox was that the feminist discussion was carried from within the Church into the society and not from the society into the Church (16). The conservative, old-fashioned opinion about women and the emerging women's groups offered reasons for feminist-inspired discussions within the Church.² State and society did not support these discussions since feminism was perceived as a Western concept, which neither served the government nor the women of the GDR. "Discrimination was more visible in the Church than in the secular GDR society which postulated the equality of the genders and which concealed the inequality of women through women's committees, women's promotion plans and social-political measures" (Kenawi 16).

The Church was admonished by the state not to get involved in state affairs (Grabner 85). On March 6, 1978, a discussion regarding state and Church occurred in which the SED wanted to establish freedom and set boundaries for the Church and its power. The dialogue established a self-determined legal and financial status for the Church and granted more ideological freedom to the Church. These concessions made by the state were contradictory. The GDR was clearly an atheist state; 20 percent of the population was Protestant and only 3 percent was Catholic (Schenk and Schindler 133). The SED successfully suppressed religious movements, and the Stasi always had an eye on Christians because of the perceived threat of their interference with the system. The government wanted to prevent opposition groups from using the Church as a carrier for their ideas and from establishing networks; hence, any meeting or gathering had to be of purely religious character. Political leaders wanted to prevent the Church from becoming a mouthpiece of the opposition. On the other hand a dialogue occurred to achieve better control over potential illegal oppositional groups. If the Church attained greater freedom, these groups would leave their limiting private spaces and approach the Church for logistical support and meeting rooms. Kenawi states that between 1978 and 1983 the Stasi uncovered several opposition groups within the Church (16). Once the small opposition of the early 1980s blossomed into a larger visible movement in the later 1980s, and the mass demonstrations in 1989, the role of the Church withered rather quickly and the unusual dialogue between Church and opposition ceased to exist, further facilitated by the fact that the events of 1989/1990 took a life of their own far beyond the control of the oppositional movement, the Church and the state.

The Church as an Oppositional Space?

The opposition groups that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s utilized new opportunities the Church presented. The Church enabled them to access Western literature and media. For the use of Western literature GDR citizens were required to have official permission (Giftschein) from the state, and it was only allowed when the literature was needed for particular research (Kenawi 17). The Church, as an institution, was able to attain work visas for travel to

² For a detailed account on the role of the Church for the oppositional movements in the GDR see: Christa Sengespeick-Roos, *Das ganz Normale tun. Widerstandsräume in der DDR-Kirche*.

Western countries and help groups establish contacts with international organizations. This way opposition groups were able to interact and exchange information with West German and other European groups. Even though the Church never questioned the state, the party, or the patriarchal and hierarchical system, the newly achieved freedom and room for discussion and initiatives changed its role in society.

Since no opportunities to organize along cultural, social, and political issues existed outside the Church, the Church was now placed in critical opposition to the state (Neubert 355). Before, the Church never acted as an oppositional force, although the state assumed it did. Now the state formally pressed an oppositional role on the Church.³ In addition, disagreements and arguments occurred between the oppositional groups, the Church, and the state over Church services. Opposition groups increasingly used Church services as political and informational events and platforms. Churches were freed from the requirement to gain permission from the state to hold events. In contrast to the SED and the party's mass organizations, all other groups needed to declare events and hope for approval. Events of purely religious character needed no announcement and special permission. The opposition groups, including "Frauen für den Frieden" (Women for Peace) used Church services for their events by declaring political events to be religious ones. The Church opposed the concealed abuse of Church services because it was seen as a sacred ritual (Kenawi 19).

Despite its paradoxical position, the Protestant Church assembled all kinds of civil rights movements in order to maintain its neutrality between state and opposition. Gradually, women split from the general opposition to establish separate women's groups. This split occurred because women realized that they needed to articulate the women's question separate from the social question. Even though equality between men and women and the right to work for both genders were anchored in the constitution, an essential open discussion about social values, performance criteria, gender-related division of labor and gender roles was missing. The Church provided room for these debates, probably more unintentionally than planned.⁴ As soon as women gathered in groups they understood that their private problems, such as incompatibility of paid labor, household work and childcare, were societal problems and that the state was as patriarchal as any other country, communist or not. Women's groups in the Church contained three different trends: (1) non-religious women's groups, (2) religious women's groups, and (3) lesbian groups (Kenawi 21).

Most of these non-religious groups existed within private friends' circles long before they became visible. Kenawi describes the developments as a "decade of solidarity of the Church with women" (18). Through these sympathies a feminist discussion within the Church and between the groups and the Church was encouraged. One of the most important non-religious women's groups was "Frauen für den Frieden" which came into existence in 1982. Many groups tried to win the DFD (Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands [Democratic Women's Association Germany]) as a sponsor for their events and meetings but failed. Even women within the DFD attempted to address and discuss feminist issues, but every attempt was rejected until 1989 (Kenawi 26).

³ Neubert discusses the fact that the Church saw itself neither as part of the party nor the opposition but within the context of GDR socialism this created a paradox. If the Church wanted to escape/limit party control it was perceived as an oppositional force that needed to be controlled by the state, so if Church services or spaces were used by oppositional forces the state understood the Church as part of the opposition (p.355-356).

⁴ Kenawi begins a careful discussion about the role of the Church in feminist discussions among women's groups arguing that the state was able to cover its patriarchal attitudes with women's programs whereas the Church was openly patriarchal, making the feminist dialogue that emerged even more interesting.

The second trend, the religious groups, developed from the traditional women's work within the Church; their topics included family and children, women in the Church and society, abortion, feminist theology, and tradition versus feminism. The religious groups had better opportunities to organize because they had access to rooms, technical equipment, and the ability to publish booklets and journals. Through publication an attempt to create a network between women's groups was initiated (Helwerth 237). Religious women's groups organized meetings once a year to discuss and exchange information with women from all over the GDR.

The third group of women's movements within the Church, the lesbian movement, split from the women's movements and the homosexual movement, a larger working group that fought for the acceptance of alternative lifestyles, because women realized that they were carrying the double burden of being lesbian and women. They fought for acceptance of a lesbian way of life and wanted to create public meeting places. Lesbians were also strongly represented in the political disturbances and activities in fall of 1989. All three types of groups kept themselves informed and updated through word of mouth and a network of private contacts. They were lacking technical equipment, such as telephones, faxes, and copy machines, essential to building well-organized and well-working networks. Consequently, it remained difficult for them to keep in touch and organize events (Schenk and Schindler 133).

Some of the most important women's movements that were established during the 1980s which supported the emergence of the non-violent uprising in East Germany were the UFV (Unabhängiger Frauenverband der DDR [Independent Women's Association of the GDR]); lilo (Fraueninitiative "lila offensive" [Women's Initiative "purple offensive"]); and SOFI (Sozialistische Fraueninitiative [Socialist Women's Initiative]) (Kahlau 108). Ironically, none of these groups wished the GDR to vanish or be annexed by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and they were painfully aware of the possible implications of a rushed unification on women's rights. They merely intended to reform politics and society, and create a humane socialism with more individual rights and freedom. Most of these groups were only locally and regionally organized and had few opportunities to expand. Their task was seen as the "Aufbruch der demokratischen Kräfte" [Upheaval of the Democratic Forces] (Kahlau 108). One of the most important and earliest movements that impacted the rise of oppositional groups in the late 1980s and established a basis for a national women's network was "Frauen für den Frieden;" a group often overlooked that needs to be explored in more depth.

Frauen für den Frieden—An Oppositional Force in the Making

During the late 1970s and early 1980s the Cold War frenzy experienced a revival and the arms race between the two superpowers increased, as did the cooperation of women's peace groups throughout Europe. In February 1982, the West German "Frauen für den Frieden" initiated a peace march from Berlin through the territory of the GDR to Vienna to demonstrate under the motto: "Disarmament in East and West—for a nuclear-free Europe."⁵ The East German government, however, withheld permission for the women to march through the GDR and denied East German women their participation. Herein lies one reason for the foundation of the East German "Frauen für den Frieden" in March 1982, at that point still illegal since no independent women's movements were allowed. The DFD, one of the mass organizations of the SED, had been established as the sole representative for women's interests and rights and given the fact that gender equality had officially been proclaimed at the eighth party congress of the

⁵ *Dokumentation Frauen für den Frieden* (Berlin: Matthias Domaschk Archiv, 1982).

SED, no women's organization, including the DFD, was actually needed. Nevertheless, the women's peace group was able to establish and maintain contacts with members of the movement throughout Europe, though often limited to letters or speeches in absentia due to travel restrictions imposed on most members. Women mainly organized to secure their own and their children's future. Opinions and views about ideology, religion or world politics represented minor matters and initially posed no concerns to the functioning of the group. The main topics were peace, disarmament, the refusal of military service, the prevention of the realization of the NATO-Double Decision and the stationing of SS-20-Missiles on the territory of the GDR.⁶ The increasing armaments in both parts of Germany augmented the fear and the possibility of war. The US decided to station Pershing II and other cruise missiles in the FRG to which the West German government agreed on November 22, 1979. Consequently, Russia declared the placement of further SS-20 missiles on East German territory. Women demanded that the GDR would not participate and further contribute to this threatening atmosphere even if the number of weapons were increased in West Germany. The stationing of additional weapons in the East was followed by a governmental explanation that peace would be further safeguarded through the presence of weapons. The rhetoric of the GDR as the only German Friedensstaat (state of peace), propagated since 1947, was consistently applied to justify the policies of the Soviet Union. In consideration of these developments, the first peace workshop was organized by oppositional groups in July 1982 in Berlin with 5000 people in attendance. Many more of these workshops followed throughout the GDR, often within the framework of the Protestant Church.

Apart from the official Friedenspolitik, a key reason for the foundation of "Frauen für den Frieden" was the new military service law, ratified on March 23, 1982 (Fulbrock 234). The law stated that in case of a national emergency, women between the ages of 8 and 50 could be drafted for military service to defend their country. The first women, especially in medical professions, were already called in for the required military medical examinations. This law was the politically motivated reason to get together and overcome the powerlessness and passiveness of the people based on the state's despotism (Sänger 80). Approximately 150 women⁷ signed an open letter (Eingabe)⁸ to Erich Honecker, Chairman of the State's Council of the GDR, arguing against military service in case of war (Behrend 2). An open discussion about the law was repudiated; hence, the women felt compelled to draw up this petition. The Ministry of Defense viewed women as essential for the protection of the country because the possible "imperialist politics of threat" could impose a dangerous situation on the GDR. For the government the law was also an expression of the realization of gender equality that was laid down as a basic right in the constitution. For women on the other side "military service for women was not an expression of equality, but a contradiction of them being women" (Neubert 460). Women's task was to protect life and not destroy it. The petition stated that women with and without children, Catholic, Protestant or irreligious cannot quietly accept this law and the direction the government is taking. They wrote in their petition: "We are not willing to participate in military service and demand the right to refuse military service because the law is restricting our freedom of conscience."⁹ In addition, the women argued that:

⁶ The NATO Double Decision of December 12, 1979, ruled that measures needed to be taken to decrease the qualitative and quantitative predominance, regarding missiles, the USSR vis-à-vis the USA.

⁷ West German media reports talk about 300-400 women signing the letter. See Helmut Lölhöffel, "Der Offenheit einen Riegel vorschieben" in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22.12.83 (RHG/FfF-Dok-IV).

⁸ Eingaben were a GDR specific system to express grievances to the government which were used widely with varying outcomes and responses.

⁹ *Eingabe an Erich Honecker* (Berlin: Matthias Domaschk Archiv, 12.October 1982).

We women want to break the cycle of violence and refuse to participate in all forms of violence as means of conflict resolution.

We don't perceive our equality to men in the fact that we stand next to men with weapons in their hands but next to men who have also recognized that abstractions such as "enemy" and "opponent" actually imply the destruction of mankind.

We women perceive the willingness to serve as a threatening gesture, which opposes the striving for moral and military disarmament and which drowns the voice of reason in military obedience.

We women object to being part of the National People's Army and defending a country which will be uninhabitable even after conventional warfare that would most likely end up in a nuclear catastrophe in Europe.

We women believe that humankind is at the brink of disaster and every minor event could lead to a catastrophe. This fall can be prevented if we lead an open discussion.

According to the constitution, article 65, all drafts of basic laws have to be discussed amongst the people before being passed. In our opinion this law is a basic law since half of the population is affected by it.¹⁰

Women also collected signatures, and conducted several night prayers for peace under the protective roof of the Protestant Church, a phenomenon of the East German oppositional movement, as discussed earlier. The openness of the Church, however, also made it easier for the state security to infiltrate groups which is partially to blame for the breakdown of the organization. In December 1982 the open letter was published in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*. The participating women were now subjected to questioning and further repressions by the Stasi. Many women were aware of possible repercussions they might face, which could include the loss of their jobs, the end of their studies or vocational training, forms of social ostracism and threats of losing custody of their children; some had previous experiences with the Stasi and were more inclined to sign another petition.¹¹ Activists had to be very careful whom they would ask to sign the letter. On several occasions women who intended to sign withdrew their support out of fear.

In January 1983 women issued another letter to the government because they were not given any response to their first petition; it was signed by fewer women than the first, portraying the threatening and intimidating behavior of the government. The letter refers to personal conversations that took place between governmental institutions, mostly the Stasi, and individual women often pressuring women into removing their signatures from the petition. The second

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ See Irena Kukutz, *Grenzüberschreitend. Frauenprotest im Kalten Krieg* for interviews Kukutz held with several former activists and their reasons for signing the letter as well as their fears and emotions about the consequences.

letter called again for an open discussion and transparency.¹² An open protest of the group “Frauen für den Frieden” occurred. In several cities the group was making its existence public. Subsequently, the government “recommended” that some of these women leave the GDR before facing further and more severe consequences. On March 8, International Women’s Day, West German “Frauen für den Frieden” organized the formation of a human chain between the American and Russian consulates in West Berlin to deliver peace messages against hate and violence. Encouraged by these activities the Eastern group arranged a picket with candles and built a human chain between the American and Russian embassies to promote communication between East and West. Approximately 70 women and men participated in this demonstration, which resulted in massive police engagement and growing repression.

In October 1983, the group initiated “Denial in Black;” 50 women dressed in black handed over their petitions to refuse military service to the responsible military service offices. Again massive engagement of the security forces occurred. The Stasi had been informed about this protest by its IMs and successfully dispersed the group. They increased identity checks, stationed officers, purposely took pictures of women dressed in black, replaced post office workers in order to intercept letters and obtain names and addresses of all women sending their refusal to the military service. Archival records draw a disturbing picture of how events unfolded that day and the tactics women employed to avoid arrest. The refusal letter of Traudl Kulikowsky¹³ reads as follows:

Besides the fact that I don’t like uniforms and that they don’t really contribute to healthy living, can you imagine women’s legs in these boots? And the not necessarily communicative way of speaking, not really feminine. Could you imagine your wife speaking to you like this and still being nice to her? I will not take a gun in my hands, a sort of phallic symbol, I don’t even know how to handle. Also what is there to defend in case of an atomic war? I think I wouldn’t even have time to find a cozy place at the cemetery. This law needs to be discussed with women. Dialogue is not as bad as orders. Maybe we can disarm the law? Please understand that I discharge myself from this duty.¹⁴

Kulikowsky’s letter tellingly reveals the contradictions women faced under a socialist system claiming to have achieved complete gender equality. While clearly expressing that women serving in the military contradict the nature of women, she reinforces gender stereotypes and the patriarchal system of the GDR which becomes a central point of discussion amongst women’s groups emerging in the late 1980s.

The situation was further aggravated when the East German government, on October 25, 1983, announced the plan to station Russian nuclear short-range missiles in the GDR. Following this, the Green Party of the FRG sent a delegation to the East German government, and western peace advocates met with eastern activists to discuss current issues. The politicians of the Green Party carried back postcards written by East German women and children with messages of

¹² *Brief an Erich Honecker* (Berlin: Matthias Domaschk Archiv, 20. January 1983).

¹³ Traudl Kulikowsky was an East German actress who left the GDR in 1984. She was not a regular member of the group but signed two petitions to the government calling for an open dialogue about women serving in the military. In the late 1970s, before becoming active in Frauen für den Frieden, and her application for an exit visa she worked as an IM for the Stasi.

¹⁴ Traudl Kulikowsky, *Brief an das Wehrkreiskommando Berlin*, 21.10.83, RHG/FfF-Dok-IV.

peace and references to the dangers of wars, violence and armament. These were handed out during parliamentary sessions. The Stasi imposed curfews, increased questioning, and refused further entry for West German peace activists into the GDR, in order to prevent activities and communication. Around this time they also planted IM Karin Lenz, known as Monika Haeger, to monitor “Frauen für den Frieden.” Despite doubts, her IM status was unknown to the women until 1989 when the group had been infiltrated by several more IMs. The Stasi planned regular surveillance and faked the expulsion of Karin Lenz from the SED allowing her easier access to the organization. She belonged to the core of the women’s group, was present at every meeting, wrote publications and petitions, and maintained many Western contacts. In addition, phones were tapped and apartments wired.

“Frauen für den Frieden” organized the first women’s meeting in Halle; this assembly was organized to express their doubts and to demonstrate for a more peaceful society which also targeted the educational system of the GDR, including schools, kindergartens, textbooks, toys, etc. These gatherings occurred yearly, in 1985 in Berlin, 1986 in Leipzig, 1987 in Magdeburg, 1988 in Karl-Marx-Stadt (today Chemnitz), and in 1989 in Jena (Kenawi 23). All types of groups, ranging from religious, non-religious to lesbian, environmental and intellectual, participated in these annual meetings and helped to establish a network of women’s groups paving the way for the opposition that emerged in 1989. In March 1985 the East and West German “Frauen für den Frieden” planned a meeting in Czechoslovakia which once again was prevented by the Stasi through declining travel permits to activists. An additional event took place in May when the women issued an appeal to the American Congress, an initiative to end the ideological separation of Europe. European women were “demanding the end of all nuclear weapons tests, immediately and forever.”¹⁵ In conclusion, in June 1985 the state’s security opened their Zentraloperativer Vorgang (ZOV) “Wespen” (central operative file “Wasps”). The mission was the GDR-wide corrosion (very explicitly and vividly described in archival records) of “Frauen für den Frieden.” Eventually, in 1986, the international year of peace, new groups and movements emerged out of “Frauen für den Frieden” such as Doctors for Peace, third world groups, environmental groups, and other democratic organizations.

“Frauen für den Frieden” had begun to practice interrogation drills as early as October 1983 knowing that arrests were imminent. Barbara Einhorn, academic and activist, residing in the UK, had visited the women and was planning a publication in the UK and the FRG before being arrested for treacherous disclosure of information.¹⁶ Following her detainment and deportation, Einhorn received entry refusal until 1988 (Kukutz 101). In December the political leadership was frightened enough to finally arrest the perceived “leaders” of the group which included Irena Kukutz and Jutta Seidel who were released after a short detention and threatened with legal consequences, and Bärbel Bohley and Ulrike Poppe who remained in prison until January 24, 1984. West German “Frauen für den Frieden” protested at Check Point Charlie in Berlin for the release of these women and the release of other political prisoners in the GDR, an event which drew international attention. At the international meeting of peace movements in Stockholm at the CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) in January 1984, petitions were made to the leading politicians calling for the release of the two imprisoned women. Einhorn wrote in the British newspaper *The Guardian* on January 12, 1984:

¹⁵ *Dokumentation Frauen für den Frieden* (Berlin: Matthias Domaschk Archiv, 2001).

¹⁶ For a detailed description of Einhorn’s experiences while in prison see: Irena Kukutz, *Grenzüberschreitend. Frauenprotest im Kalten Krieg*, 101.

How cruise missiles have claimed two East German victims! Two women see pacifism as the only viable strategy for the de-escalation of the arms race; opposition was addressed to both superpowers. The women's concern was purely to promote contact and understanding between women's peace groups through the exchange of feminist issues. Although the GDR's record on legal, social, and economic measures in favor of equality for women is impressive, the women with whom we have contact had begun to value talking and acting together as women for the first time.¹⁷

The group itself wrote a declaration that was published in the West German *Frankfurter Rundschau* in which they protested the arrests. Bohley and Poppe were facing twelve years in prison for treason if prosecuted. The declaration furthermore states, "since the state security forces, for decades, thought about women as easily susceptible followers of men, these measures display a new attitude towards our work. We don't need this kind of equality."¹⁸ This poses the question whether the women were a political or rather a gender-based threat to the supposedly un-patriarchal leadership and society of the GDR. The group additionally requested the West German government to put an immediate stop to the stationing of missiles and stop pretending that the political situation in Germany had not changed. The group indicated that the West German government is as much at fault as the East German government for the arrests. After her release, Bohley continued her engagement in oppositional groups, but was finally expelled from the GDR in 1988 and sent on a "compulsory vacation" to Great Britain from which she was able to return in 1989. It comes as no surprise that political resistance was at its peak in the 1980s and amongst the forms of resistance¹⁹ utilized by women, the peace movement and requesting to leave the GDR figured highest (Weil 23). Women's resistance was quantitatively low, but only in the 1980s were women ever arrested for being part of the peace movement. Officially, 32 women have been arrested as part of the peace movement between 1972 and 1989 (Weil 17).

After the release of Bohley and Poppe in early 1984, the Stasi created uncertainty and rumors within the organization through anonymous letters stating that Poppe and Bohley were claiming sole leadership and making all decisions without the consent of other members. These letters successfully generated mistrust and suspicion. Lenz, who started working for the Stasi in 1981, actively contributed to the growing suspicion since her tasks as an IM included the spread of rumors. According to Lenz, the Stasi was particularly interested in the privacy of its "subjects" (which she claimed to never have entertained) due to the destructive impact not just on the individual but the entire group. Lenz admitted that the split within the group, the split amongst the "enemy,"²⁰ satisfied her (Kukutz and Havemann 163). It is important to mention here that Lenz, in later conversations with Irena Kukutz and Katja Havemann about her work as an IM, states that the enemies she encountered were not as she had imagined them to be, but her responsibility as a comrade to protect her country outweighed the friendships she had cultivated

¹⁷ Barbara Einhorn, "How cruise missiles have claimed two East German victims" in: *The Guardian*, January 12, 1984.

¹⁸ Frauen für den Frieden "Abschreckung nach Innen," in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23. December 1983.

¹⁹ Forms of resistance according to Weil include: secret activities against dictatorship, participating in demonstrations, members of the peace movement, and request to leave the GDR or attempted escape.

²⁰ The "enemy" was defined as follows by the Stasi: "Persons, who in groups or as individuals, purposely develop political and ideological views opposing socialism and who endanger or damage the socialist order of society through their actions and behavior in order to realize their views." in: Irena Kukutz and Katja Havemann, *Geschützte Quelle*, 36.

yet she was deeply hurt by the arrests and the forced exile of Bohley since she somewhat believed in the cause of “Frauen für den Frieden.” She had become a close friend and even confidante to some activists. Her account provides a clear picture of the schizophrenic condition she was in. On the one hand she received awards for her loyal services from the state security, and on the other hand she had to force herself into believing that these women with whom she shared her life were planning to harm her country for which she was ready to do anything (Kukutz and Havemann 43).

After the nation-wide wave of arrests, and due to fear of repression, the women decided to split the movement into regional factions which made it almost impossible to organize activities, coordinate meetings, and communicate. These events finally led to the breakdown of “Frauen für den Frieden”. Nevertheless, in 1987, the group endeavored to continue their work and appealed to the leadership of the Church for support, hoping to reverse the split from 1984 because they realized that it hindered their work and the coordination of events. In addition, smaller branches had completely dissolved because of the non-existent network. By that time the fragmentation of the group and its membership was irreversible and many organized and/or joined other oppositional groups. The last official meeting mentioned in archival records, took place in December 1988, when the Stasi also closed its ZOV Wespen. The final report states that “the association has the personnel but no group activities are taking place. [...] due to the increasing insignificance of western European women’s movements the group lost importance. The work of the IMs has reduced the organization to a minimum which now deals with politically less important issues like feminism...”²¹ The Stasi records unmistakably indicate how the group quickly transformed from a serious threat, despite its small size, and no clear indication of what constituted a serious threat, to a group of bored women who were just out to make trouble and should not be taken seriously especially considering that they were only concerned with ‘feminist’ issues which do not indicate a threat to the state. The women were portrayed as Tunichtgut (good-for-nothing) and antisocial elements by the state security, which begs the question of why it had to be eliminated in the first place.

The End of Frauen für den Frieden but a New Beginning

Over time, the themes of “Frauen für den Frieden” had changed. New topics, such as nuclear energy, genetic engineering, ethics, education, and also women-specific subjects like abortion were discussed. Reasons for this shift in priorities were the worsening economic situation, the decrease of the nuclear threat as well as the fact that women began to realize the lack of gender equality. Furthermore, the reactor accident in Chernobyl on April 26, 1986, made the dangers of nuclear energy obvious and imposed new threats upon society. This incident increased environmental concerns, especially since the GDR was less concerned with environmental issues, showing that atomic threats and dangers created concerns for everybody which did not stop at ideological boundaries. Education created an additional concern. The educational system of the GDR promoted gender segregation, traditional gender roles, and military themes. From the first grade the schools constructed a picture of the enemy (Kenawi 24). Women fought against militaristic education and toys. From the early 1980s women submitted petitions to the Ministry of Education against military toys and militaristic school education. They initiated a “Kinderladen” [Children’s Shop] in 1980, which was seen as an

²¹ MfS Auskunft zum feindlich-negativen Personenzusammenschluss “Frauen für den Frieden” Berlin, 13,12,1988, RHG/FfF-Dok-X.

alternative to the authoritarian education and upbringing of children. It furthermore criticized the kindergarten and high school system of the GDR and the state's views on education as well as militaristic elements of education. This institution was organized privately by mothers and fathers. The Kinderladen, a thorn in the eyes of the leadership, was closed by the state's security on December 16, 1983 because the leaders perceived this different concept of education as a threat to communist ideology, a threat to the development of the all-around socialist personality. Coinciding with the incarceration of Bohley and Poppe, "one morning at 6 am, a clear-up squad smashed the windows, loaded the furniture and the toys on a truck and bricked up the shop."²²

When the first nationwide women's meeting occurred in 1988, "Frauen für den Frieden" had given up its actual founding reasons and was dissolved into a network of various women's, peace, and civil rights groups whose main concern now was to reform the existing political system of the GDR into a human socialism with democratic features. Only a small percentage of women who were active in the group participated in later established women's groups such as the UFV. Some founded and/or joined other oppositional movements like Neues Forum and Demokratie Jetzt; others withdrew entirely from political life. During the late 1980s the Stasi registered fourteen active women's groups with approximately 150 women (Neubert 710) and around 650 civil movements.²³

Conclusion

"Frauen für den Frieden" was rather circumstantially established as a women's group; most peace movement events, under the roof of the Protestant Church, were not women-only events. Furthermore, the group did not include gender-specific issues in their agenda, but the draft law opened new dimensions since women were now directly affected by the possibility of war and its consequences. And because of this direct concern they decided to completely eliminate men from their discussions and meetings, leading to the end of (marital) relationships in some cases.²⁴ Discussions about the state's women's/mommy policies did not take place, but for the first time they encountered other women with similar concerns, some of them gender-based.²⁵ Membership was exclusively for women (based on gender-specific issues such as the double burden) yet women and men, just as proclaimed in the official state's gender policy based on Marx and Engels' ideas on the class struggle, continued to fight side by side for peace and an improved socialist system. A convincing motive for only allowing women into the group was the dominant and sometimes opinionated behavior of men, including friends and husbands, the women had already experienced in previous oppositional work.²⁶ The group was perceived as an oppositional force and regardless of its low membership and limited outreach they were recklessly pursued by the government without ever posing a serious threat to the state. One reason for the repression and ultimate destruction of the group was the audacious "attack" on the

²² See the interview with Ulrike Poppe in Irena Kukutz, *Grenzüberschreitend*, 30.

²³ This number appears relatively high compared with Behrend who states 2000 active members of the civil movements in 1989.

²⁴ The private life of some activists was meticulously recorded by the Stasi and visible in the archival records in the Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. See also Irena Kukutz and Katja Havemann, *Geschützte Quelle*. and Irena Kukutz, *Grenzüberschreitend*. for more information.

²⁵ See Kenawi, a statement of *Frauen für den Frieden* Halle discussing the reasons for becoming a women's group, 171.

²⁶ See Katja Havemann interview which explains in more detail how this organization became a women's group without explicit women's issues in: Irena Kukutz, *Grenzüberschreitend*, 12.

state's proclaimed Friedenspolitik and the Friedensstaat itself. In addition, the question remains how much the patriarchal government of the GDR perceived the women themselves as a threat rather than their political activities since they barely encountered oppositional women,²⁷ hence it was easy to frame these women as antisocial elements. The majority of East German women were most likely unaware of the existence of "Frauen für den Frieden," especially given the high expectations as workers and mothers resulting in the infamous double or rather triple-burden of paid labor, childcare and household labor; and the lack of publicity further limited the impact of the organization. On the contrary, the women were seen as harmless or rather bored troublemakers by others. Helga Hörz, representative of the GDR in the UN Commission on the Status of Women, believes that these women were not really interested in improving the political or social framework of the GDR as they claimed but rather in the creation of unnecessary trouble, especially given the fact that the GDR pursued an active Friedenspolitik,²⁸ that was highlighted at every opportunity by the official rhetoric of the party and its mass organizations. Hörz further states that some of these activists were attention seekers rather than real oppositional forces because women had all the opportunities to be peace activists within the existing state structures. No matter how one wants to "label" the organization, the efforts to discredit this small group as mere troublemakers completely overlook the ways in which they effectively blurred the lines between the private and the public sphere, between the political and the personal, because their understanding was undoubtedly shaped by the connection between everyday life, the government and its policies. Precisely this understanding or probing of new territory is what sets these women apart from the general oppositional forces who often maintained single issue agendas as well as the majority of East German women who accepted the proclaimed emancipation of women as accomplished or who simply did not have the time to question the government's peace and women's policies. Yet, one must be aware of the fact that the blurring of lines was a rather subconscious process and the group's primary intent was not to disrupt patriarchal state processes but to challenge the peace rhetoric used by the political leadership. The protection of life and peace were essential features of the group's agenda, and they were inseparable from all spheres of life. In order to ensure these, they felt that being and acting political was an obligation rather than a choice. It is critical to mention that "Frauen für den Frieden," despite its short life and limited outreach, was a catalyst for further civil rights movements to emerge in the late 1980s which were essential for the upheavals of 1989. Active women were clearly not bored troublemakers, even though they may have been perceived as such by the SED and DFD, but rather critical forces of change even though this change occurred later and under different circumstances. One can also conclude that women were not pushing a gender-based agenda and only marginally challenged the patriarchal boundaries of the socialist state. The women's peace movement cannot be underestimated in the role they played in the general oppositional movement of the GDR since many of these women established or entered new movements. The rapid succession of events in 1989/90 and the rushed unification left many oppositionists defeated in their quest for a reformed socialism resulting in a quick decline of civil rights and women's movements after unification. Unfortunately, this left post 1990 Germany with a dearth of women's organizations and women's activism that has yet to be mended.

²⁷ Discussions whether the GDR was a patriarchal state continue to this day between former activists and SED members. For further information see: Susanne Diemers, *Patriarchalism in der DDR*; Ursula Schröter and Renate Ullrich, *Patriarchat im Sozialismus?* and Ursula Schröter, Renate Ullrich, and Rainer Ferchland, *Patriarchat in der DDR*.

²⁸ Personal Conversation with Prof. Helga Hörz, Berlin, July 2012.

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