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Abstracts

Robert Brier, Gendering dissent: human rights, gender history and the road to 1989

Paradoxically, “1989” has been simultaneously interpreted as a victory for human rights and a setback for the rights of women. Some authors see a causal relationship between the two. The dominance of a seemingly universalist human rights language in 1989, they argue, made it difficult for women to articulate and defend their rights as a particular group. This essay explores this paradox by focusing on dissidents, a group of people who played a central role both in the revolutions of 1989 and the global rise of human rights. In the dissident movement, women were active at all levels, yet they overwhelmingly played an auxiliary role. Yet this had little to do with the language of human rights as such but rather resulted from how it was used both domestically and internationally. Moreover, the position of women in the dissident movements also mirrored their position in state socialist societies at large. There was, in fact, something of an unspoken consensus between the rulers and the dissidents on the position of women in the Soviet bloc.

Beáta Hock, The female worker in words and pictures: historical narratives and visual representations

As state socialism is being gradually historicised, a set of dominant topics and narrative conventions become recognisable in how communist culture is being remembered and chronicled. Within this discursive universe, the portrayal of the socialist woman has earned a prominent place. While adding further aspects to conventional interpretations of this figure, the paper also argues for dimming 1945 as an ultimate rupture point and recalls, instead, meaningful continuities with both progressive social ideas and artistic aspirations of the interwar years as the period preceding Europe’s decades-long ideological division.

Malgorzata Fuszara, Has anything changed? Gender justice in Poland after 1989

The article takes stock of the views on political, legal and economic equality of the sexes in Poland since the democratic change. Against the backdrop of the substantial achievements of state socialist projects on gender equality policy it becomes evident that there are in fact various different perceptions of gender justice within Polish society since the political turnaround of 1989. Views of female and male interviewees differ considerably, in particular regarding the reasons for the continuous gender inequality. Many women call for more emphasis on political interventions against gender discrimination. On the other hand, a great number of men consider the current situation as quasi natural and thus beyond political regulation. The onerous establishment of political structures proves to be a great obstacle for

setting a feminist agenda. However, the “Congress of Women” (*Kongres Kobiet*) as a gender political interest group is about to implement a platform of political opinion formation.

Karol Sauerland, Women in the Solidarność movement before and after 1989

Without the vigorous intervention of some women during the historical strike at the Gdansk shipyard in August 1980, Solidarność would not have come into being. Likewise, women played a pivotal role during the phase after the implementation of martial law on 13 December 1981. It was thanks to their enormous activities throughout the entire country that as early as spring 1989 the Round Table was established, where it was decided to hold semi-free elections, which finally resulted in the turnaround. However, few women participated in the Round Table talks. Only just over a decade ago, women’s withdrawal from active politics has entered the public and academic debate.

Hanna Hacker, Remember: how it was possible to write lesbian women’s history, and why the art of losing is no queer disaster

Against the backdrop of re-reading and re-writing some of their own research, the author queries premises of writing the history of a figuration which is or was called ‘lesbian women’. The emphasis lies on studies about German-speaking countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What can “lesbian history” mean at all nowadays, the very term “lesbian” seeming thoroughly ‘queered’ and re-written in a trans*feminist frame? Referring to Michelle Perrot’s classic question “Is writing women’s history possible?” and to Michel Foucault’s deliberations on an archeology of knowledge, the paper reflects upon transformations of knowledge production concerning ‘lesbian history’ since the 1970s. The respective ‘progress’ in research and theory turns out to be as complex as contradictory. In the beginnings of lesbian-feminist historiography in German contexts, de-essentialising femininity was much more present than one might presuppose; later on, historical research evolved less clearly towards intersectional, postcolonial or anti-ableist paradigms than could be expected. Still, even these narratives on ‘our history’ have to be deconstructed extensively. Does this mean that it is about time to bring ‘lesbian historiography’ to a close altogether?