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## **A SOCIO-ECONOMIC OVERVIEW OF GERMAN WOMEN SINCE THE DIVISION AND REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY**

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The Second World War affected the whole of Europe as well as the world; it caused tremendous loss of life and property. According to one source, approximately forty-eight million men were killed, wounded or became prisoners of war from across the globe. More than 3 million Germans were killed, wounded or went missing in the war. After the war the 50 million population of Germany was dominated by women. Women between twenty to forty years of age were in large numbers. By 1950, nearly one-third of families in Germany were headed by single woman. War widows, single mothers, divorced and even young unmarried women found it difficult to get a husband.<sup>1</sup>

Before the First and Second World Wars, women in Germany were supposed to play a traditional role as housewives, and therefore their domain was restricted to *kinder, kirche and kuche* (children, kitchen and church). It was after the First World War and particularly at the end of second Great War, that women were left with no choice but to participate in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the shattered and defeated Germany. With a decrease in the male population, women in Germany bore great social responsibility, which included looking after their families as single bread-winners besides combating the psychological effects of war.

West Germany faced very severe socio-economic problems after the war ended, not only because of the decrease in male population, but also because there was an influx of refugees from East Germany (12 million by 1950), which caused a serious shortage of housing and jobs. In the eastern part of Germany, women had faced horrors such as rape and other forms of victimization and many had committed suicide. It was men who started and fought the war, but women had to equally share the political, social and economic consequences of the war. Those men who had participated

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<sup>1</sup> Michael G. Huelshoff, Andrei S. Markovits, and Simon Reich (eds.), *From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 117.

in the war and survived were psychologically disturbed and unable to adjust in the familial and societal environment. Women had become heads of families in their absence and their role in the family had expanded. German children were also deeply affected by this situation, where their mothers had become their sole guides while their fathers had become strangers in their own homes. These socio-economic consequences of the war led to an increase in the divorce rate by 1948.<sup>2</sup>

In 1948 the American occupation authorities formed a Women's Affairs Section with the objective of assisting women's groups to organize themselves politically in war affected western Germany. This Women's Affairs Section worked on a very small budget, besides having rather limited objectives; it was much less creative as compared to the model adopted by the Soviet Union, which had a more practical approach concerning women's issues. The Soviets gave their women many opportunities to participate on an equal basis in rebuilding the country. They were well represented in nearly all sectors of the economy.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, like the Russian women, German women too suffered a lot during the war and its drastic social, economic and psychological consequences. Finally, the West German women were given equal rights in the 1948 Basic Law (constitution), for a provision states "The state shall promote the actual implementation of equal rights for women and men and take steps to eliminate disadvantages that now exist".<sup>4</sup>

While the equality of women was accepted in the constitution, the fact is that in practice its implementation was not done. All laws which discriminated against women were in still in force until 1953. The term equality was not clear in the minds of the ordinary people. The Church still perceived women as somewhat inferior, and therefore in need of the guardianship of men. The Social Democrats, more liberal than the Conservative CSU-CDU accepted the equal status of women but still considered women as caregivers of the family. This notion got political as well as social support.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>4</sup> [www.gesetze-in-internet.de/english\\_gg/english\\_gg.html](http://www.gesetze-in-internet.de/english_gg/english_gg.html).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The Federal Republic of Germany was under pressure to amend its civil law regarding gender equality, but the conservative parties and the Church did not want an alteration of the laws rather they favoured the existing traditional concepts of gender roles. In 1957 the civil law on gender equality was amended, but women had to wait till 1958 to have equal rights to the family property and income. By 1959, the husband's rights concerning the upbringing of children and divorce were cancelled. Despite these amendments, family law still described woman as a housewife, who was supposed to dutifully fulfill all her responsibilities to home, husband and children. In 1977, more amendments were made in the family laws and this time husband and wife were declared equal partners, with equal duties towards family and children. However, in practice women were still treated as housewives.<sup>6</sup>

While the constitution and the laws declared women as equal to men it took a long time to implement these laws. At the social level, the role of German women as housewives was considered much more important than their contribution to the workforce. They shared the economic burden, the responsibility of managing their homes and looking after the children. West German women faced the difficult task of maintaining a balance between work and household with minimum state assistance for child care facility.

Despite this inequitable attitude of state and society towards women, they continued to work outside the home and the number of working women began to grow gradually. In 1950 working women constituted 31.4% of the total workforce, while in 1989 the percentage rose to around 38%. The number of working mothers with school-age children tripled between 1950 and 1962. Society did not accept working mothers and they were blamed for neglecting their children and often any signs of delinquency were attributed to negligence on part of the mother. 'Maternal Deprivation', a term introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) applied to the catastrophic experiences of children affected by the Second World War and its consequences, but in West Germany it was often used for the children of working mothers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. Kolinsky, *Women in Contemporary Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 49-54.

<sup>7</sup> Derek Lewis and John R. P. Mckenzie (eds.), *The New Germany* (UK: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 176.

Although gender equality was granted by the constitution, in the Federal Republic, marriage, children and family life were perceived as a woman's prime responsibilities. Government also supported this concept and provided tax incentives for married couples. For women who wanted to take up a job a 'three-phase-model' was established in the 1960s and it still describes the role of working women in German society. This model divided working women's life into three phases: (1) unmarried, educated and employed (2) married, working life/career halted for ten to fifteen years to look after children and household and (3) once again employed but with household as the primary responsibility. Women who were inclined to ignore the aforementioned societal model found it difficult to continue their careers owing to the timings of German schools and the lack of proper government-run child care services.<sup>8</sup>

Lack of adequate child-care forced many career minded women to take a break from their employment and when circumstances allowed them to re-enter the job market, it was not easy to find appropriate and gainful positions. They were less paid than men, although the constitution declared them equals. Male domination and the notion that women's work was unimportant posed more problems for working women. They were paid less than men and their work was less valued.

To retain their jobs was also very difficult for women after they got married, for they were easily dismissed from factories and the civil services on any alleged minor negligence of work. The 1950 law regarding civil service legalized the termination of the services of married women.<sup>9</sup> Despite discouragement, discrimination and unfavourable conditions, women courageously continued working and the female ratio in the workforce gradually began to grow.

Family law was reformed by the Act on Equal Rights for Men and Women in 1957. Thus men's supremacy in marital issues was nullified. This amendment gave women the right to take up jobs without getting their husbands' permission. Previously they had to take permission from their husbands. The civil code of 1900 had conferred on a husband the right to dispose off his wife's property. The new law annulled the husband's control over her property, but Articles 1356 and 1360 of the civil code still

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<sup>8</sup> E. Kolinsky, *Women in Contemporary Germany*, 154.

<sup>9</sup> Michael G. Huelshoof, Andrei S. Markovits, and Simon Reich, *From Bundesrepublik*, 121.

described women's main role in the family as housewives and if they chose to take up employment, they had to ensure that they were fulfilling their duties as mothers and wives. The 1957 Act on Equal Rights for Men and Women was dubbed the "housewife marriage". By 1977 the Social Democratic-Liberal coalition government passed a new family law called "the partnership marriage" which emphasized that husband and wife were free to do whatever they chose for the betterment of the financial position of the family.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1950-1975 the ratio of female employment increased from 47.4 percent to 54.0 percent. A prominent change occurred in the female work force as the married working women's ratio rose from 25 percent in 1950 to 42 percent in 1982, while men's employment rate declined from 63.2 percent to 53.1 percent during this period. Almost 90 percent of women married to industrial workers took up employment. It meant that industrial workers were less prejudiced on the matter of female employment, or perhaps economic imperatives were behind this liberal attitude. Until the 1950s, overall wages remained very low. One third of the families earned more than 600 marks, while one fourth families earned between 250 to 400 marks and 11 percents males had salaries of less than 250 marks. But females earned less than men. In the 1950s an industrial female worker earned 45.7 percent lower than her male co-worker and a white collar female worker earned 43.7 percent lower than her male colleague. This was a big disadvantage for women who headed their families and they had to go through tough times. The numbers of working women in different sectors varied from 1950 to 1985. In the agricultural sector the female work force decreased from 34 percent to 7 percent, in the services sector (industries and professions) it increased from 12 percent to 32 percent, but in the manufacturing industries their ratio was constant at 25 percent.<sup>11</sup>

### **Women in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)**

The GDR's economy was very different from that of the Federal Republic of Germany. The main difficulty faced by its industrial sector after the war was shortage of labour which made women's participation in the work force very essential. During the 1950s women in the GDR were encouraged to participate in the political and the economic realms by acquiring education. The literature of that decade portrayed a changed East German

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 123.

woman, who was playing a more positive role in society with the help of the Communist Party. The Act for the Protection of Mother and Child and the Rights of Women (1950) became the basis of all subsequent laws in the GDR.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, women in GDR played a vital role in strengthening the economy. Communist ideology and the shortage of labour compelled women to come forward and become an essential part of the country's economic life.

The GDR government realized that working women were facing the double burden of job and family and as a result were delaying or were reluctant to have children. This had resulted in a decreased birth-rate. The government thus introduced a policy of promoting household-related industries. This policy solved issues related to household work such as cooking, washing clothes and child care, which was placed under the public domain. Government-run childcare facilities were established at work places. Household equipments were designed to ease women's chores at home and also to facilitate their work outside.<sup>13</sup>

The education policy of the GDR was aimed at providing the same education to girls and boys. With the encouragement of the government, girls studied disciplines related to sciences and industry. In 1989, before the fall of the Berlin wall female students constituted 48.6% of those pursuing higher education, among them 73% were being trained as teachers and 66.7% were getting degrees in mathematics and science disciplines. It was accepted that education was a means to change societal attitude towards women.<sup>14</sup>

Initially the participation of East German women in the national economy was merely owing to necessity but later this trend became an integral part of GDR society. The state promoted women in every field, to get maximum production. Child care facilities and maternity leave was patronized by the government to facilitate the careers of women.

Combining motherhood with career was a difficult task, but society was supportive and most women preferred to get married in their early twenties. The government provided financial support for early marriage

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Lewis and John R. P. Mckenzie, *The New Germany*, 183.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

and for starting a family. Interest free loans worth 7,000 marks were provided to couples under thirty for purchasing household equipments. This loan called 'childrend off' (abgekindert) was supposed to decrease with the birth of each child and when a couple gave birth to three children within eight years they could no longer avail the loan. Divorce procedures were very easy and women were able to head their families as a single parent, without child support from the father. It was mostly women who filed for divorce and by 1989, 69% of all divorces were filed by women. In 1989, 91.2% women of working age in the GDR were either in employment, or being trained or pursuing education. This compared favourably with the West German women, only 55% of whom were employed.<sup>15</sup>

The employment rate of women in GDR was highest not only in the Communist bloc but also in the world, although the Western countries doubted this claim of the GDR government. That women actively participated in the GDR's state planned economy was proved right for after reunification most women lost their jobs. West Germany had no such large scale state organized women's employment. This economic independence of the East German women demonstrated that the Communist system granted some freedom to the individual, though male and female were both under its clutches and many human rights and freedoms were curtailed.

Besides some of the earlier mentioned facilities given to working women, working mothers could avail six months paid maternity leave and twelve months off from work for a first born and eighteen months for each subsequent children. Sickness leave and maternity leave had equal benefits. A single mother could avail leave for upto three years in case of non availability of child care facilities. Pregnant women, those with a child of up to one year and a single mother of a child under three years of age could take a temporary off from employment and their employer was bound to give the job back after the leave ended. The sate provided child care facilities to all working mothers. This child care system was almost free with very low charges for lunch and remained open between six in the morning and seven in the evening. Those women who worked on shift availed the special child care facilities which offered boarding for the working days. The children were taken home at weekends. In 1989, child

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 185.

care facilities were availed by 80% of children up to the age of three. Three-to- six year old children were sent to kindergartens and schulhorts, a day home which gave school-based supervision at the end of school. This facility was availed by 80% of children between six and ten years of age.<sup>16</sup>

All these facilities were state owned and had the objectives of providing women a better working environment and facilitating population growth. These facilities for mothers provided by the government encouraged women to participate fully in economic activity but it also became a huge burden on employers and the state. Also, at times it proved to be a big hindrance in the professional advancement of women, for whenever an economic crisis struck these women were the first to be fired.

Working mothers were given special consideration at the work place. Instead of the normal forty-three hour work week, working mothers were given the concession of working only for forty hours a week. All women were given one paid day leave in a month. The pensions of working mothers were not affected by the birth of children. Though all these measures were aimed at increasing the birth rate, or at least arresting its decline, the end result was that working mothers drew full benefits from them.<sup>17</sup>

The family law of GDR promoted and facilitated the institution of marriage and did not encourage cohabitation of unmarried couples, single parents and foster families. Marriage became the social and legal standard in society while the new western trend of live-in relationship or common law partnership was ignored and discouraged.<sup>18</sup>

Although women were given the best possible education and as working mothers were provided with all sorts of facilities, they still faced some problems. Women were eased from motherhood responsibilities and could continue working but opportunities for professional development were very limited and demanded high physical and mental abilities. Work and family together, emerged as a double burden. Though there were maximum legal guarantees of gender equality, inequality still existed. Policy

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<sup>16</sup> E. Kolinsky, *Women in Contemporary Germany*, 265.

<sup>17</sup> M. Donald Hancock and Helga A. Welsh (eds.), *German Unification* (Oxford: West View Press, 1994), 234-235.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



makers kept social differences and traditional gender inequalities alive. By the 1980s all policies for women were designed by men and the role and participation of women in politics was very limited.<sup>19</sup>

Women in the erstwhile GDR were so deeply involved in their work and household matters that they did not get time to participate in political activities. They were overly burdened owing to the two roles they were fulfilling at the same time. Although the state provided child care facilities, in return women had to spend more time and put in more effort at work.

Girls and boys got the same education, but girls were not allowed in the armed forces, a profession that was accorded the greatest importance in society. This meant the domination of men. Though women took up jobs preferred by men, men were not encouraged to intrude into the female domain and as a consequence women dominated specific jobs as in the West. Women's work was considered of low status and was low paid (68-75% of men's wages) and their jobs lacked variety and were less technical than men's. Women were often not given jobs suited to their qualifications so they worked on low posts and were accommodated in traditional women's work. Almost 75% of working women adjusted themselves to work which involved nurturing or care-giving services, such as nursing.<sup>20</sup>

Despite inequalities, the former GDR successfully utilized its women work force and 90% of women worked in different fields, which was the highest ratio in the world. Though this economic independence did not help enhance social equality, it made women independent and career-oriented. After the reunification of Germany, women from the former GDR wanted to pursue their careers but they became victims of high unemployment and the facilities which they had availed in the former GDR were curtailed.

### **Women since reunification**

The treaty which established the political unification of the GDR and FRG on October 3, 1990, also had an agenda regarding women. Politicians and women activists put pressure on the government, so Article 31 of the treaty laid down policy objectives concerning women. These objectives were: (1) equal rights for women, (2) co-ordination between work and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 235-236.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis and Mckenzie, *The New Germany*, 187.

family life and (3) continued provision of child care and introduction of uniform laws regarding abortion in the FRG and the GDR. The article stated:

- (1) The German legislature has the duty to make further laws on equal rights for men and women.
- (2) The German legislature taking into consideration different legal and institutional views regarding the employment of mothers and fathers shall formulate laws which could co-ordinate family and professional life.
- (3) Day care centres in the territory specified in Article 3 of this Treaty (the former GDR) shall continue to function and the Federal government should take responsibility of their expenses for a transitional period up to June 30, 1991.
- (4) The German legislature should introduce laws regarding abortion by December 31, 1992 and provide appropriate safety to unborn life. It must also provide a solution according to the constitution to the pregnant woman through guaranteed legal right of counseling and public support in both parts of Germany. To attain all these goals a system of counseling centers shall be set up immediately in the former GDR by the federal government. These centres must be given proper staff and funds to advice and assist pregnant women after the abortion also. If the government failed to make new laws in the given time period the existing laws shall be applied in the former GDR.<sup>21</sup>

A major issue faced by the women of the former GDR after reunification was the abortion law. The former GDR had a liberal law on abortion (a woman was allowed to opt for legal abortion up to twelve weeks of pregnancy) while in FRG the law regarding abortion was very strict. After reunification, the law related to abortion was made restrictive which caused resentment among women in the eastern part of Germany. Women had to follow the provisions as revised by the federal constitutional court on May 29, 1993. Abortion was declared a criminal act in FRG except for special cases. In reunited Germany abortion was no longer free of cost and

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<sup>21</sup> Michael G.Huelshoff, Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich, *From Bundesrepublik*, 148-149.

women had to attend obligatory counseling. West German women found the new rules regarding abortion useful but the women of the eastern part found obligatory counseling before abortion demoralizing. They missed their former independence of decision-making in such matters.<sup>22</sup>

Reunification was supposed to be a merger of two independent states, but in reality GDR became a part of FRG and the laws of the latter prevailed in every field. The women of eastern Germany saw not only the abortion laws as curtailing their independence and individual liberty, other laws such as those regarding working facilities also demoralized them.

New laws were implemented only after the completion of the formal unification process. The issue of abortion was a crucial one and unification could have been jeopardized because of it; therefore a final decision about abortion was postponed for up to two years after unification. East German working mothers were allowed to avail GDR's maternity benefits of before 1 July 1991, whereas East Germany's law granting up to six weeks paid leave to mothers for nursing ill children under fourteen years of age was replaced on July 1, 1991 by the West German law, which allowed only up to five days paid leave to mothers to look after sick children under eight years of age. United Germany offers generous maternity benefits as compared to the UK but still lags behind those of the former GDR. This makes a woman dependent on her husband/partner as benefits are insufficient for a single mother to look after her children. Though mothers get funds from social security, part of the maternity benefits is the responsibility of the employer, so employers usually avoid hiring mothers of young children.<sup>23</sup>

Since reunification women have been badly affected by unemployment. The westernization of former GDR contributed to the high unemployment rate of women. As the FRG did not have a very strong system of providing facilities such as day care for children, working women lagged behind in the economic realm. As mentioned earlier, nearly 90% women in GDR were employed, but after reunification this rate declined drastically. Employers in West Germany preferred male employees and considered women workers a burden. The facilities of maternity leave and sick leave were curtailed in united Germany. Full day child care facilities are not provided by the government and the privately run facilities are quite expensive, so it

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis and Mckenzie, *The New Germany*, 190-191.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

is not easy for a woman to pursue any career while she is bringing up infants or young children.

The unemployment rate of working women in Germany increased after unification. The GDR's social and political philosophy had upheld citizen's participation (irrespective of gender) in economic activity and this was discarded after unification. The number of jobs created in the former GDR was excessive, causing optimum employment. During the unification process these extra jobs were liquidated which made many East Germans jobless. The unemployment rate in former GDR which according to its Communist government was zero, now rose to 15.1 percent by 1993.<sup>24</sup> The large set up of state run day care for children in the eastern part was dismantled after reunification as it was considered an unnecessary burden on the economy. The dismantling of the state run day care system meant the rise of unemployment among women.

There was a big disparity in the employment of men and women in the GDR and FRG which is discernible even after unification. Women, as pointed out earlier, were guaranteed equality in GDR's constitution but in practice they faced discrimination. The term "glass ceiling" in the former GDR, meant that women were employed only as clerks and secretaries and executive positions and technical fields were not open for them. Women's wages were almost sixty to sixty five percent lower than those of men's in the GDR.<sup>25</sup> Wage disparity was even greater in the FRG as compared to the GDR. In both parts of Germany, women were offered "traditional" jobs as clerks, administrators and child-care workers. After reunification many of these jobs were eliminated, for these were an economic burden on the state.<sup>26</sup>

Both in FRG and GDR, women faced hurdles in establishing themselves in the scientific fields. There were many causes behind this situation, including social pressure on women to stay home and look after their families and another was the typical male attitude of perceiving science and technology as a field suitable only for men. Male scientists were not

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<sup>24</sup> Michelle Hagenbuch, "Women in a Unified Germany", available from <https://martindale.cc.lehigh.edu/sites/martindale.cc.../hagenbush.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> F. Maier, "The Labor Market for Women and Employment Perspectives in the Aftermath of German Unification", *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 17 (1993): 267-80.

ready to decrease the twelve-hour work days in laboratories, which would enable women to have more time to look after their children. As a consequence, women were discouraged from continuing their careers in the sciences. There were very few female German scientists and one of them Christiane Nusslein-Volhard, decided not to have children to pursue her career as a scientist. German women scientists hope for a change in the system, but this may take time. The supposition was that after the old generation of male scientists who believed that women were only meant to look after kinder, kuche, kirche retired, the new generation of scientists and men in general would accept women in all professions and work with them more willingly. It seems, however, that the male mindset in Germany has not changed much.<sup>27</sup>

The taxation structure in the Federal Republic of Germany is another hindrance to the participation of women in economic activity outside the home. If both spouses are employed, the couple has to pay more taxes. Thus a married couple with one employed spouse has more net income than a couple with both spouses employed. This is called "splitting" in the German tax system.<sup>28</sup>

The GDR's educational system offered excellent education to both female students and professors. As compared to FRG, the average East German woman had very good education and training. In 1991 the former GDR had the highest rate in the world for adult women's education and stood third in the world in the realm of women's higher education after the United States and Canada.<sup>29</sup>

The government in Berlin is encouraging women to get higher education but the educational system of the Federal Republic of Germany is such that it is not conducive for a woman to acquire higher education if she has a family and a career. The educational system of FRG allows the pursuit of a PhD degree only after a person enters his/her early thirties. This is a perplexing situation for women who want to start a family and also pursue

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Aldhous, "Germany: The Backbreaking Work of Scientist-Homemakers", *Science* 263 (11 March 1994): 1475-80.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Hagenbuch, "Women in a Unified Germany".

<sup>29</sup> G .S. Goldberg, "Women on the Verge: Winners and Losers in German Unification", *Social Policy* 22, no.2 (1991): 35-44.

higher education and a career. This is the reason why many women prefer their career over having children.<sup>30</sup>

Since women in West Germany were deprived of higher education owing to the educational system, the number of female PhD faculty members in fields such as physics, chemistry, mathematics and geosciences always remained low in the Federal Republic. German women faculty members constitute only two percent of the total number of women teachers in the world devoted to these fields of sciences. This was the lowest percentage in the world. While till 1990 almost thirty-five to forty percent women constituted the academic faculties in the former GDR, the “glass ceiling” was very obvious, as only nine percent of female faculty members were tenured. After unification, the female faculty decreased very quickly as the East German academic system was merged with that of the Federal Republic. The number of jobs were reduced and women become the main victims.<sup>31</sup>

Women in contemporary Germany are trying to pursue careers alongside family responsibilities, but lack of state-run facilities present hindrances in their progress. Recession has also affected women much more than men as they were the first ones to lose their jobs. Unemployment is also affecting marriage and the birth and rearing of children.

Before unification, West Germans married later than the East Germans. The basic reason for this difference was that the people in the West were more conscious regarding financial security and stability before starting a family, while the East Germans were encouraged by the government to get married early and have families. Since unification, the marriage rate has decreased in both parts of the country. The birth rate has also declined and the rate of abortion has increased. Families with one or two children have increased, while those with three or more children have declined. Out of 19.5 million married couples, 8.4 million have no children. All these trends have emerged owing to discriminatory policies regarding women.<sup>32</sup>

As discussed earlier, both parts of Germany had different patterns of marriage before reunification, but since then these patterns have changed.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Aldhous, “Germany: The Backbreaking Work”, 1477.

<sup>31</sup> Michelle Hagenbuch, “Women in a Unified Germany”.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

United Germany now faces a decline in birth rate as well as marriage rate owing to the continuing economic recession which has made married women's jobs more insecure. Women now prefer either to remain single, or postpone having children.

Domestic violence against women has also increased in the eastern landers since unification. This is a result of the social set up in which the husband being the head of the family is supposed to have the right and authority to decide everything for the family. This notion often leads to conflict. Women in eastern Germany who were contributing forty percent of the family income before unification had now become powerless, because of their reduced economic status.<sup>33</sup>

After the formal division of Germany in 1949, the male population of GDR tried to migrate to FRG for better economic opportunities and for more political freedom, but this wave of migration was stopped by the erection of the Berlin wall by the East German government in 1961. Once again after reunification a new wave of migration started towards the west, but this time it was women from the east migrating to the west for better economic opportunities. It was the increasing unemployment rate in the eastern part of Germany in the 1990s which compelled many highly qualified women to move to the west. Now women of child-bearing and working age were moving from large cities like Berlin and Hamburg, to the rich southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Wurttemberg to search for jobs. Owing to this large scale migration of women, there was a decline in the ratio of female population in the eastern landers. In some areas of eastern Germany there remained only 76 women to every 100 men. Almost two thirds women from the east left for the west after reunification.<sup>34</sup>

The migration of women from the east resulted in social and demographic changes. Thus between 1995 to 2005 the number of births declined sharply in eastern Germany. Germany has the lowest birth rate in the world (1.36 children per woman in 2010) and in the eastern landers it is much lower. However, some parts of eastern Germany which have comparatively strong economies such as Leipzig, Dresden, Erfurt and Berlin, have stable

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "New Realities: East-West Migration in Germany", 20 March 2012. Visit [KnowledgeAllianz.com/demography/migration/?209...germany](http://KnowledgeAllianz.com/demography/migration/?209...germany), (retrieved on 25 February 2014).

populations. Overall the prediction for the eastern part of Germany is that there would be a decrease in population in coming years.<sup>35</sup>

This trend of migration is depriving the east of skilled and trained labour, and has contributed not only to the deterioration of the economy in the east but has also created social problems.

Soon after unification, in 1994 the birth-rate in Germany declined rapidly to 0.77, which was the lowest in the history of Germany. Demographers found various causes for this rapid decline in population. The term “demographic shock” was associated with the fall of the Berlin wall, for it halted all activities related to birth, marriages and divorces. Another cause of population decline was that the East Germans began to adopt western social trends such as getting established in a career before starting a family. Now women found it difficult to simultaneously bear the burden of pursuing a career and looking after a family. The average age of East German women at the first birth has also increased. In 1989 women in GDR gave birth to their first child at the average age of 22.9 while in FRG the average age was 26.8. By 1995 the average age of women from western Germany at first birth rose to 28.2 years while in eastern Germany it rose to 26.9 years. Thus the younger women of eastern Germany began to follow western family styles and had their first birth at a later age. East German women over the age of 25 who had already borne their first child before the fall of the wall decided not to have a second child after the unification. The year 1994 turned out to be the year of the ‘gap of births’. Since 1994 infertility has begun increasing in eastern Germany. In 2008 the fertility rate in eastern Germany was 1.40 while in western Germany it was 1.37.<sup>36</sup> This is largely owing to marriages at a late age. From 1991 to 2000 the average age of women on their first marriage increased from 23.7 to 28.5 years in western Germany. The ratio of children born to unmarried couples varied in eastern and western Germany. In western Germany, the traditional norm of marrying before having children has continued, also because this is perceived as providing financial protection to the mothers, who are often forced to give up working altogether. In East Germany it was quite acceptable for women to have children before marriage, as the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Steffan Kronnert and Samuel Kipper, “Demographic Development in Eastern Germany”, (September 2010), visit at [www.berlin-institut.org/online-handbookedemography/east-germany.html](http://www.berlin-institut.org/online-handbookedemography/east-germany.html), (retrieved on 07 January 2014).



government gave support to the unmarried mothers. Besides, there was high employment among women. In 1990, 35 percent children were born outside wedlock in East Germany while in West Germany only 10.5 percent children were born before marriage. By 2008, 61 percent children were born to unwed mothers in eastern Germany and in western Germany such children constituted 26 percent of the total number of births. This trend reveals the differences in social norms in both parts of Germany.<sup>37</sup>

Since the population of the GDR (in particular women) was most affected by the reunification, economic constraints and lack of the provision of facilities by the state compelled women to stay unmarried and childless.

It was assumed that East German women would become more docile, domesticated and submissive after unification, but this assumption proved false for in reality after twenty years of unification it is the women of western Germany who are trying to become like the women of eastern Germany. Women from the east are more confident, independent, educated and active than the western women. They are willing to work full time and prefer to have children earlier. They are confident about their appearance and most of them are not inclined to diet to stay slim. It is interesting to note the wage disparities. Women of western Germany earn 24 percent less than men, while women from the former GDR earn only 6 percent less than men. However, overall women earn less than men in both parts of the country.<sup>38</sup>

Since reunification, eastern German women have gained a more prominent place in German society because of their high level of education and skills. Many eastern German women have excelled on national and international levels; some very important examples are Chancellor Angela Merkel, a physicist, Manuela Schwesig, a prominent leader of the Social Democratic Party, Marybritt Illner, who hosts a major political talk show and famous actresses, Nadja Uhl and Nora Tschirner, who have proved their abilities despite having lived under totalitarian rule. At the time of the fall of the Berlin wall, female employment in the West was 55 percent while it was 90 percent in the East. It is noteworthy that women from East Germany like others in the erstwhile socialist bloc, more readily and quickly accepted

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Kartin Bennhold, "20 Years After Fall of Wall, Women of Former East Germany Thrive", *The New York Times*, 5 October 2010.

change in comparison to men. Eastern German women despite their Communist background have impressed the western German women owing to the former's success. They have reached higher management levels than women from the west.<sup>39</sup>

After 20 years of reunification, women from the eastern part of Germany have proved themselves competent, educated, confident and skilled. They survived in conditions where after reunification Germany faced a rise in unemployment and women were particularly neglected; they lost their facilities as working mothers and working women to which they were accustomed in East Germany, but they did not lose heart and continued to compete in every field. They have become role models for the women of western Germany.

Overall, there are 66 percent working women in Germany, of these only 32 percent are working mothers. Fourteen percent working women have one child and six percent have two. The overall birth rate per woman is 1.38 percent. In both parts of Germany women earn less than men. They prefer to work part time and mostly do not have access to top level jobs. However, in recent years, the numbers of young female doctors has increased and women have begun to gain positions in middle management in top consumer enterprises. In future, they could administer major industries and institutions. Working women still contribute fifty percent of the income of the family. In present day Germany, the eastern part has a better child care set up where 37 percent children of less than three years of age are availing the facility as compared to 3 percent in the western part.<sup>40</sup>

Two and a half decades after reunification German women are progressing. Women from both parts of Germany are striving to obtain a status equal to that of men. In many fields they are far ahead of men. Though facilities for mothers and working women are not ideal they are slowly improving and despite all hurdles, women are proving their capabilities in many fields. Side by side with their careers they are performing their duties as mothers.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Kartin Bennhold, "In Germany, A Tradition Falls, and Women Rise", *The New York Times*, January 17, 2010.