

oo

insufferable together.

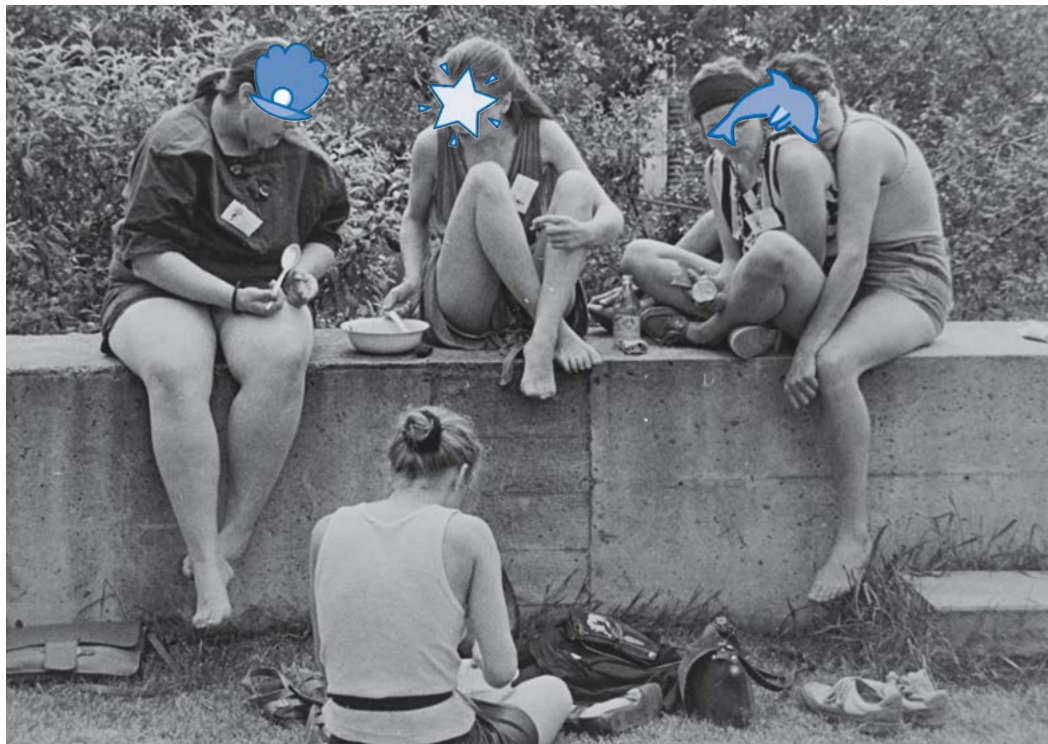
a documentary mosaic

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Ernest Ah, Sabrina Saase,
and Lee Stevens from the
Raumerweiterungshalle collective
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Audio Play Script

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6th Women's Group Meeting "Between Awakening and Persistence."
Jena, spring 1989. The person on the right is Samirah Kenawi, founder
of the GrauZone Archive. Photo: Kerstin Baarmann, GrauZone Archive
in the Archive of the GDR Opposition, RHG/Fo_GZ_1924. In this contri-
bution, people in the images are anonymized since permission could
not be secured from all those pictured.

MUSIC: ZAGHAFT [TENTATIVE]

In a sense, I always knew I was a lesbian. But I thought I was the only one in the whole wide world.

3tot

Tina Elischer

It was difficult to get information.

Nadja Schallenberg

Only much later did we realize what our role had actually been: years later, after the Wall had come down, I would meet women who would tell me that we had been so important for their coming out, and that because of us they realized that they were not alone. That's exactly why we had founded the working group: to break through this isolation. We were trailblazers; we gave them strength to open up.

Bettina Dziggel

That I am homosexual was in no way an easy thing, because I was also Black. Well, I still am Black. But it was easier for me to own up to being homosexual than to being Black.

Nancy Andler

There was that book by Rainer Werner about different sexualities and whatnot; it also mentioned transsexuality and travesty, transvestism, just a short article. At first I thought I was a transvestite, but then at some point I realized I wanted more, or rather, that I was more than that.

Nadja Schallenberg

Usually you would find out about certain cafés or clubs through word of mouth from private contacts. And Irina brought on the full-on punk thing, that whole scene, so that's how I also got a bit of that fighting spirit.

Tina Elischer

It wasn't until I was a bit older that I finally fully came out. So it was easier for me. Before that it wasn't. Before I thought that the fact that I'm Black is already enough of a difference, and that I shouldn't step out of the norm in other ways on top of that.

Nancy Andler

I was in Mecklenburg, on my home turf, if you will, and there was no coming out, no cross-dressing. That only came in 1989. That's when I went to Berlin and got to know the gay and lesbian scene – and that's when things really got rolling.

Nadja Schallenberg

I don't give a damn if people are horrified by me being homosexual.

Nancy Andler

And I was the power tranny.

Nadja Schallenberg

At the forefront of the lesbian struggle.

Tina Elischer

We are not invisible, we exist.

Bettina Dziggel

Marinka Körzendörfer
"Lesbenarbeit
in der DDR" (Lesbian
Organising in the
GDR), 1989, GrauZone

We have our own language, our own way of
thinking, and we can even act independently.

Postcard 1984/85
LiK (Lesbians in the
Church), GrauZone
image archive

Together we are insufferable.

There are piles of essays, letters, transcripts of meetings and speeches, magazines, private notes. We have been researching in the GrauZone for several months now. "We": Sabrina, Lee, and Ernest from the Raum-erweiterungshalle, a collectively-run space for events with a queer feminist focus. We are interested in how lesbians in the former GDR experienced their lesbianism, in their (survival) strategies, and in their political and cultural activities. What were they fighting for?

Samirah Kenawi put together the GrauZone archive from disparate private collections in the early 1990s. Today the GrauZone archive constitutes the part of the Archive of the GDR Opposition that documents the women's and lesbian movement(s) in the GDR.

Samirah Kenawi

Back then, I was researching and revisiting the women's and lesbian movement in the GDR, and made it visible, because it seemed important to me, especially in Berlin given the situation at that time. In the context of the debate with the West German women's movement, it was important to show that in the GDR there had been a women's/lesbian movement, too, and that its themes, foci, and strategies were quite different because, well, the GDR was a different country.

Bettina Dziggel

It's about that specific time period, because later something completely different happened, namely the emergence of a new social order. Or, well, it did not "emerge," it was already there and we were plugged into it, as it were.

Samirah Kenawi
Frauengruppen in der
DDR der 80er Jahre -
Eine Dokumentation
(Women's Groups in
the GDR in the 80s:
A Documentation),
1996, GrauZone

It's important to consider this situation in its social context because otherwise some details may seem grotesque. It is generally important to have a view of the bigger picture, as otherwise the pieces of the mosaic will appear either strangely dull or overly garish.

Nadja Schallenberg

And to bring this out of the shadows for once... There was a transsexual movement in the GDR – only towards the end, yes, but it did exist. What change it wanted to make and where it was heading and what became of it – well, no one

has ever shone a light on that. And that is also a criticism of this scene, this exclusion. This film* that was made for instance – why is it only about the lesbians and gays again? Why don't we trannies figure?

* "Out in Ost-Berlin, Schwule und Lesben in der DDR," 2013

In order to know where the skin that was measured is too tight, where it creases, where it hinders free movement or an upright stance, one must be inside that skin.

Marinka Körzendörfer
"Lesbenarbeit in der DDR," 1989, GrauZone

A current key characteristic of our lesbian emancipation is the quest for our own methods and experimenting with our own ideas and struggles.

Karin Dauenheimer,
"Das Schweigen durchbrechen" (Breaking the Silence), 1987, GrauZone

It's been almost three decades since unification. Many of the people, whose voices we come across in the Archive are still around and can be reached. So we were able to directly ask the people whose lives this research is about, and whose struggles paved the way for us in so many ways. Where did you meet? What was life like in the hetero state prison? What fears did you have to overcome, and what kind of creativity did that require on your part? What were your dreams? Was there an awareness of being part of a group?

Back then I didn't actively take part in the movement in any way. I'd never done it before and still don't. Somehow I wasn't particularly focused on women's issues, nor was I ever really interested in lesbian issues; I just lived my life and knew some people.

Nancy Andler

We didn't know how to go on, so we got together.

Bettina Dziggel

Of course, being a lesbian was not really a thing, and that was the problem. That was one of the reasons why different groups were founded. The Berliner Lesbengruppe [Berlin Lesbian Group] was one of them, and then other working groups on homosexuality, which mostly met under the roof of the Protestant Church.

Samirah Kenawi

Well, we went out to clubs.

Nancy Andler

First, we went to Buschallee, to a place known as the Busche. A place for all of us weirdos. Back then the scene wasn't yet as divided – the goths over here, punks over there, that's for the gays, this is lesbian-only... It was all mixed. Which actually seemed healthier to me in terms of general acceptance, mutual acceptance.

Tina Elischer

It was a completely different context, there was solidarity. Then I also met Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, we were friends. And Roland Schulz, an occasional transvestite who also

Nadja Schallenberg

performed as a drag queen in some place, who knows where. Rosi. The three of us always went from bar to bar together and had lots of fun. There was Schoppenstube, Busche, Café Binokel. That's where I got to know the first tranny from the East, though later she lived in the West.

Bettina Dziggel

LSD quarter: Lychener, Schliemann, Duncker [laughs]. We all lived here in this neighborhood. We didn't have phones then and communication was a bit different. Not that it was necessarily more difficult, just different. And if someone hadn't left a note on the door, we knew in which bars she would be.

Tina Elischer

There was also Lietzenkunsthof, the women's art center; we'd always go there as well. In Lietzen, Frankfurt/Oder, Leo came along as well. Sometimes they still go there today. The artist lived there with a woman; she took over this old farm in GDR times and later we sometimes went there for the weekend and helped out. We plastered the old pigpens and converted them into art spaces and things like that.

Bettina Dziggel

There was this café on Schönhauser. It was turned into a gambling hall, unfortunately. Around the corner there was Café Peking, but only a few of us would go there, because they preferred rich gay men over broke lesbians. And Vineta on the corner of Gleimstraße and Schönhauser. And a coffee shop close by, I forget its name, but Marinka knows it.

"Lesbenfest" (Lesbian Fest), Jena 1987
Photo: Pea Lehmann, GrauZone Archive
in the Archive of the GDR Opposition,
RHG/Fo_GZ_1655



And then there was Lychener, Fängler, yeah, these were some of those evening joints.

And later there was Atelier, where there was also a homo day, but I don't know if that was after 1990 or before. Let's see, what else was there? There were more homo joints, more spaces for gay men than for women, but that's not surprising, it's still like that now.

Nancy Andler

During our research we wondered: What about trans people? In the Archive, we only found rare announcements of one-off discussion events on trans issues, and then at some point in an issue of *frau anders* from May 1991, the text *Lesbische Transen—Ich bin eine von ihnen* [Lesbian Trannies—I Am One of Them] by Nadja Schallenberg. It's a gray zone within the GrauZone. But since it is still possible to talk to Nadja Schallenberg, we asked her about trans groups formed in the GDR.

There were none. I was the only one. Then came the period of political upheaval, and I did educational work with my partner at that time, I organized evening conversations about transsexuality. I was at the Haus der Jungen Talente [House of Young Talents], I was in Weimar, in Jena, in Dresden, in Rostock, in Schwerin, I drove around half the Republic. Wherever I went, groups were formed; I sort of sparked things off.

Nadja Schallenberg

I gave the Sonntagsclub* all my files with my examination records etc. All that is at the Schwules Museum [The Berlin Gay Museum] now. Back then you had to undergo medical exams, where they "checked" whether you were transsexual or not; it was a neurologist or a psychiatrist who decided that. In the East, the Internal Order on Transsexualists** – such a great word – came out two or three years earlier than the Transsexual Act*** in West Germany.

* Sunday Club, a gay, but lesbian, trans, and bisexual friendly meeting point during the GDR; today: a space for LGBTQI people and friends

You'd file your application with your family doctor and from there it went to the Ministry of the Interior, which was in charge of your gender and marital status, and then to the Health Ministry. Then it continued on its "socialist course," back and forth. You had to be examined, which was usually a medical examination. Things could have been improved in that regard; we thought about how we could set up the examination differently. If the result was positive, you started hormone therapy at Charité; the surgery took place in Leipzig with Prof. Dietrich. But you didn't have to worry about that. In the GDR sometimes the civil status would be changed even before the surgery.

** On 27 Feb. 1976 the Ministry for Health of the GDR issued the "Decree on the Gender Re-assignment of Transsexualists."

*** On 10 Sep. 1980 the FRG issued the "Act on the Change of the First Name and the Assessment of Gender in Special Cases" (Transsexual Act).

I knew one trans person. A man who'd had surgery, a gender adjustment that is. But he killed himself 'cause it all went wrong. Lived in Leipzig at the time.

Bettina Dziggel

- Nadja Schallenberg My first negative experiences came after unification, I was beaten up, I lost my job, and the scene all of a sudden excluded me. I hadn't experienced that in the GDR, it was a culture shock for me.
- Nancy Andler I'd have to think about that. By sight, I think, but very few if at all. And I wouldn't be able to say when anyway.
- Tina Elischer Yes, a trans woman, yes. He was, what was he doing again? He worked at the register, she did. Yes, she was accepted – because of me, since all the little boys who worked there were my friends, we'd party together. They knew I was a lesbian. Anyway, they went "Hey, she's putting on tights." "Sure, that's the way it is." Nobody said "Ugh, you're a disgusting lesbian get out of here."
- Nadja Schallenberg I was more involved in the gay-lesbian scene, in the general store, and later I was in the gay scene, because the gays were more accommodating. I was actually in the gay and tranny scene. And because I was often at the Sonntagsclub, and that was rather mixed, we didn't use to separate things like that. As I said, the lesbians were the ones who excluded me, so I didn't feel comfortable with them.
- Bettina Dziggel Because it didn't exist, we didn't have to ask ourselves that question. I think there would have been a lot of controversy between women saying, "No, that's a guy, I don't want that," and women saying, "But this woman transitioned and she will participate." We never had that situation. But I think it would have been hairy, like today.
- Nadja Schallenberg Transsexual women are the ones who are the most excluded and who lose the most in society and in their professional lives. I dealt with that openly and fought for our rights and for the social and political recognition of transsexual people. We called what we did tranny power. We really started with a bang and we really had a ball. It was a wild time, good times. You can't even imagine the great ideas we had, but what became of them in the end? It's just sad how bourgeois the scene has become. If you were lesbian or trans in the 90s, you were on the left. That's the way it was. You were politically progressive, and that's no longer the case today.

It is hard to find information about the life of Jewish women and lesbians in the self-proclaimed antifascist state. Outside the archive, we come across the name Lara Dämmig. She was active in the East Berlin community and in the 90s she was a member of the working group Frauen gegen Antisemitismus [Women Against Anti-Semitism]. In 1998, she founded Bet Debora, an exchange platform for Jewish women from Europe, where she also wrote about lesbian issues. She researched and worked on the culture of remembrance in the GDR and on the lives of Jewish women in Berlin. We were not able to reach her for an interview.

There was no contact with Jewish lesbians that i was aware of. But there seems to have been a group. Samirah Kenawi

MUSIC: NAZIS RAUS [NAZIS OUT] Namenlos (Nameless)

From 1989 until the mid-90s there was the underground lesbian magazine *frau anders* with several issues per year. It had event tips and reports, group presentations, letters from readers, book reviews, like Audre Lorde's *Zami*. There were discussions on history, power structures, coming out, lesbians and alcoholism, lesbians and AIDS, legal issues, trans topics, S&M, gendered language, older lesbians, gay dominance, women in other countries, lesbians in rural areas. The magazines were also sent to people living outside big cities. The issues were partly financed through people's voluntary work. Some official media in the GDR occasionally also reported on homosexuality.

The periodical was called *Magazin*. In 87/88 there was an article about homosexuality, first about gays, of course, and then about lesbians. And that is a GDR magazine! Bettina Dziggel

On 28 June 1985, the word homosexuality appeared for the first time in the *Neues Deutschland* newspaper in a small announcement about a conference. In 1987, the first GDR television report on homosexuality was broadcast as part of the show *Visite*, in which a scientist debunked prejudices about lesbians and gays, and same-sex lovers shared their experiences. Then, on 30 January 1989, the youth radio station DT 64 presented the show *Mensch Du – Ich bin Lesbe* [Hey listen – I Am a Lesbian], in which a group of women discussed problems with interpersonal relationships, love, sexuality, and partnerships. There were three episodes. *Hey Listen – I Am Homosexual* and *Hey Listen – I Am Gay* are both available in the German Broadcasting Archive. *Hey Listen – I Am a Lesbian* cannot be found. The video recording was presumably taped over.

MUSIK: O.T. Erweiterte Orgasmus Gruppe (Expanded Orgasm Group)

Our working group wasn't supposed to be just about history chitchat, sewing, and matchmaking; we also wanted to explain structures and reveal connections, and to discuss other manifestations in society. That was apparently too exhausting and perhaps also too dangerous for some people. (...) We were known as the "terror lesbians" and the "radical lesbians." Marinka Körzendörfer "Lesbenarbeit in der DDR," 1989, GrauZone

The article *Zwölf IMs auf eine Lesbe* [Twelve IMs (unofficial collaborators) for one Lesbian] in the *taz* newspaper from 12 October 1993 states: "Since the early 80s, the Stasi systematically spied on the GDR's lesbian and gay scene. The aim was to subvert the movement."

Bettina Dziggel

It happened more on a personal level. If you knew where a woman lived and that she was involved in this or that circle, then you went there or you wrote to her, hey, would you like to meet. It was all done by mail, so it was a bit more complicated. Though, yes, Marinka had a phone, so she always had to help out. I usually traveled to all kinds of presentations, in Rostock and in Magdeburg, Leipzig, Dresden, in order to present the working group and to encourage the lesbians in those cities to act a little more autonomously.

MfS-Richtlinie 1/76 zur Entwicklung und Bearbeitung operativer Vorgänge (Ministry for State Security, Guideline 1/76 on the Development and Treatment of Operational Procedures), 1976

The secret Guideline 1/76 on the Treatment of Operational Procedures regulates the secret police activities of the Stasi against political opponents. To reliably protect society and guarantee a comprehensive internal security in the GDR the Ministry of State Security must preemptively prevent, uncover, and stifle subversive enemy attacks in a concerted, focused and proportionate manner.

Bettina Dziggel

Backyard, Alte Schönhäuser. I still had to work. The women met, and then I only remember that I went there, and there was no one left. I tried to get everyone together and then the Stasi showed up.

Samirah Kenawi, Frauengruppen in der DDR der 80er Jahre - Eine Dokumentation (Women's Groups in the GDR in the 80s: A Documentation), 1995, GrauZone

In the end, the violent to grotesque reactions of the state apparatus and the interest of the international public were completely disproportionate to the actual activities of the groups.

Gabriele Stötzer "Frauenszene und Frauen in der Szene" (Women's Scene and Women in the Scene), 1992, GrauZone

The Stasi was a paramilitary power system that was hierarchically organized, worked with clear enemy images, a terminology of extermination, and a naive hubris of the total right of defense of a state that increasingly appointed itself.

They tried so hard to find a political reason to sentence me as a state agitator and couldn't find one, so they tried to sexualize and idiotize me as a woman all the more.

Gabriele Stötzer was arrested in 1976 after co-organising a petition against the forced expatriation of dissident songwriter Wolf Biermann in her home-

Lesbian wedding at a Friedenswerkstatt (peace workshop),
Erlöser Church Berlin Rummelsburg 1983. The "executioner"
was later uncovered as an IM (unofficial collaborator).
Photo: private, archive Tina Elischer



town Erfurt. After her release from prison, she began to make art with other women and co-founded the artist group Exterra XX. From 1979 to 1986, her activities were under continued surveillance by the Stasi within the Operative Procedure "Toxin," which was aimed at arresting her again. At times, up to 25 IMs (unofficial collaborators) were assigned to her.

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|--|---|
| Operativer Vorgang
(Operative Procedure)
"Toxin," 1979-86,
Stasi file on
Gabriele Stötzer,
formerly Kachold | Character traits such as willfulness
(...)

G.K. is bisexual and has great contact
problems on a sensual level. It is possible
that to express herself in writing
is a kind of compensation. (...) The mental
state of K. is characterized by hysteria,
paranoia, and permanent restlessness.
(...) G.K. politicizes much of her own
sexual inhibition and is frantically driven
by it in discussions. (...) |
|--|---|

She is of psychopathic nature and suffers
from an inferiority complex. (...)
Public activities against the state by the
group under observation must be prevented.
For this purpose, suitable actions to
control, destabilize, disrupt, and isolate
the person must be carried out.

3tot

*MUSIC: LACH UND FLÜSTER
[LAUGHTER AND WHISPERS]*

GDR school book,
"Biologie
in der Schule"
(Biology at School)

Homosexuals are a minority.

Karin Dauenheimer
"Das Schweigen
durchbrechen," 1987,
GrauZone

An uncritical majority forms the norm.

GDR biology school
book, "Biologie in
der Schule"

Homosexuality should not be equated
with pedophilia, transvestism (wearing
the clothes of the opposite sex),
or transsexuality (disturbance of gender
identity accompanied by the urge for
sex change). These and other deviations
occur in heterosexuals and homosexuals.
They live in our world, but often
still under comparatively different condi-
tions and in comparatively different
ways, in spheres that partly fall outside
the official framework of society.

Günter Dörner, known as an endocrinologist (hormone researcher) at the Charité in East Berlin, gives the following - simplified - explanation:

"homosexuality" in rats is caused by certain "unphysiological" hormone concentrations in the womb before or during birth. This causes a male/female differentiation of the brain, and later "typically female" behavior in the males and "typically male" behavior in the females. The altered hormone level in pregnant rats can be triggered by stress, for example. As a result the males among their offspring crouch and allow others to mount them, and the females mount others. And there you have it: the homosexual rat.

Yeah, Rat-Dörner, as we used to call him.

Rat-Dörner! I told you about him.

From the data it can be concluded (...) that in the future it might be possible, at least in some cases, to correct abnormal levels of sex hormones during brain differentiation in order to prevent the development of homosexuality.

In 1979, the Department of Psychology in Berlin's "House of Health" organized a discussion group for lesbians that was attended by more than 20 lesbians. At a meeting, Professor Günter Dörner spoke about his research on the prevention of homosexuality and tried to encourage the women in attendance to donate blood for hormone tests. The majority ended up having their blood tested. Dörner did not keep his promise to inform them of the results.

Thanks to his research, homosexuality was no longer considered a disease. In the case of transsexual people, he wanted to prove that it's a genetic predisposition, not a disease. That was always his approach. That's how I knew him, he was a great person, great conversations, it was just great.

Rat-Dörner [laughs]. He used rats to conduct research on homosexuality and how to treat it. We never had anything to do with Rat-Dörner; we heard about him and

Ralf Dose
"Von schwulen Ratten
und anderes Getier"
(On Gay Rats and
Other Creatures),
Magnus 2. 1990,
Magnus Hirschfeld
Society

Nadja Schallenberg

Bettina Dziggel

Prof. Günter Dörner
"Letter to the
editors," Archives of
Sexual Behavior, 1983

Gisela Wolf
"Erfahrungen und
gesundheitliche
Entwicklung
lesbischer Frauen
im Coming-Out-Proz-
ess" (Experiences
and Health Condition
of Lesbian Women
in Coming-out Pro-
cesses), 2004

Nadja Schallenberg

Bettina Dziggel

wanted to organize an event. Some kind of cabaret or something like that. But we never did. There were many different influences and Rat-Dörner was one of them; it made us realize, me and a girlfriend back then, that we had to do something about it, it couldn't go on like that. The joke is that in the end our working group was created because all of this.

Samirah Kenawi

There was this working group at Humboldt University, which I believe was founded in the fall of 1984 and somehow came to the conclusion that homosexuality is not a medical problem, but a social one. But that only slowly led to a change of the politics, of the state's relationship with these groups.

3tot

*MUSIC: LACH UND FLÜSTER
[LAUGHTER AND WHISPERS]*

Bettina Dziggel

Things like single parents raising children, living with friends, in communes, those things already existed. There were smaller places in the GDR where friends did that. Women who lived with other women.

Tina Elischer

Right, and then I was asked if I would marry the Bulgarian gay. Because I was working at the swimming pool again. I said, "OK, sure." One day, they came to the indoor pool and down to the sauna, my now ex-husband stayed upstairs, waited, and Freddy, the tram driver, came downstairs and said, "Hey your future husband is waiting upstairs, come up with me." I married him then, and those two stayed together for 20 years.

Bettina Dziggel

For us it was about giving visibility to things. We wanted to make it clear that there are other things besides married mothers, married working mothers. There are women who choose a different path.

Tina Elischer

Then I was unemployed, which was kind of scary in the East.

Nancy Andler

I was not "antisocial." I was working. [laughs]

Tina Elischer

In the socialist system, it was almost impossible to get fired. You couldn't really lose your job in the East.

Gabriele Stötzer
"Frauenszene und
Frauen in der Szene,"
1992, GrauZone

And at first there were only a few who rebelled and made a different claim to modernity. They were immediately criminalized as individuals, just as in the GDR all women and men who wanted to escape the increasingly absurd socialist conditions of production and to create their own place in society, their own jobs, were criminalized and imprisoned.

An “antisocial lifestyle” was an official offence in the East, that you were accused of as soon as you didn’t have a job.

Tina Elischer

Disturbance of public order and safety through antisocial behavior.

§249 Penal Code of the GDR, introduced 1968, 1979 version

(1) Anyone who disturbs the social coexistence of citizens as well as public order and safety by avoiding regular work out of unwillingness to work despite being fit for work, shall be sentenced to probation or imprisonment for up to two years. (2) Anyone who engages in prostitution or otherwise disturbs public order and security through an anti-social lifestyle shall be similarly punished.

If you somehow let yourself be caught dodging the fare or something... Luckily I didn't. I was unemployed for half a year, but I had enough to live on, and with all the people I knew, I didn't really have any trouble with money.

Tina Elischer

In any case, I knew from my own experience that if I didn't go to work, I had to be careful not to end up in jail. This happened to a friend of mine. Once. That was enough for her. Anyone who didn't fit into socialist life could be classified as antisocial. And then there were the people in charge of keeping the so-called “house books” – a log on tenants and visitors. Depending on the guy, he could easily get you in trouble. But it was possible to be accused of living “antisocially,” I knew that as a single parent of two; if people liked you, society carried you along. But if people didn't like you or you came late to work three times, because your children were sick and you didn't bring a sick note, then they'd inform on you. Then your children were taken away from you and you were out of the picture. It was very arbitrary. There is no common thread. There is no common thread for this country. Only in that it didn't like its own people, as it appears. That's something I'm becoming more and more aware of.

Bettina Dziggel

I'm still not “antisocial,” I still go to work. Unbelievable [laughs].

Nancy Andler

In Germany, the classist stigma of so-called antisocial behavior has a long tradition. In criminal law, it can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century. Without a clear definition, during the Nazi period, people could be persecuted as “antisocial” for all sorts of reasons, including poverty, unemployment, or unwillingness to work, alcoholism, psychological crises, homelessness, not having a fixed place of residence, and other things that contradicted Nazi ideology. Romani and Sinti people, sex workers, lesbians, and trans people were also persecuted in this way. While the

Homosexual Paragraph 175 only applied to men, lesbians were denounced and persecuted for alleged “antisocial behavior,” “degenerate love,” and delinquency. In 1968, the GDR introduced §249 into its penal code.

What does it mean to live in a self-proclaimed antifascist state? Who was commemorated, who received reparations? How was fascist history worked through? How were continuing and new fascisms dealt with?

In 1984, the East Berlin group *Lesben in der Kirche* [Lesbians in the Church] decided to pay a first visit to the Ravensbrück Memorial on the site of the largest former Nazi concentration camp for women. They registered to publicly commemorate the victims of Fascism and, in particular, the lesbians among the persecuted. For this, the Stasi classified them as “oppositional.” In the following years, several attempts by the group to participate in commemorative events were obstructed or prevented.

On 10 March 1984, the group laid a wreath in Ravensbrück. Two days later, it disappeared – just like their guestbook entry. Afterwards, some women applied for visas to leave the GDR. Others filed complaints with the Ministry of Culture.

In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of the camp’s liberation, the lesbian group planned another visit. The florist on Gaudystraße, where they ordered a wreath with a printed bow, informed the police. The woman who placed the order was then summoned by the police and told not to go to Ravensbrück. The night before the trip, fearing arrest, the 11 women stayed together in several apartments and then traveled separately to Fürstenberg. They were taken into custody on the way to the memorial, driven away by truck, isolated, interrogated, and threatened. The entire train station in Fürstenberg was closed. They were not brought back to the station until well after the memorial service.

Bettina Dziggel

The antifascism of the GDR was, one could say, implanted in us. We grew up with it. Ravensbrück was a very depressing place for me in the 80s. It was a very violent, oppressive place for me. Up until our arrests. But after that, I didn’t feel it anymore. It was just rocks, fields, a lake, memorials, nothing more.

A year later, on 20 April 1986, the group visited the memorial again. They were guided through the museum by the director and found the pink triangle now listed among prisoner identification signs, even though there had been no such triangles in Ravensbrück. The pink triangle was for male homosexuals. Ravensbrück was a women’s camp. Lesbians as so-called “antisocials,” often got a black triangle. The women laid down a flower arrangement without a bow and signed the guest book. Two weeks later, the guestbook with their entry was gone.

From the 1980s, lesbian-feminist initiatives have been trying to make their commemoration of lesbian women visible against considerable resistance. In 2017, the initiative *Autonome FrauenLesben aus Deutschland*

und Österreich [Autonomous Women/Lesbians from Germany and Austria] reapplied for the so-called Memorial Sphere to be recognized as a memorial to the persecuted and murdered lesbian women in the former women's concentration camp of Ravensbrück. The Brandenburg Memorials Foundation once again declined.

I had the pleasure, a respectful pleasure – I don't know how else to say this [laughs] – to meet a woman who was born there, and she brought me back a little, just recently, in 2014. Then I decided to set foot in Ravensbrück again, with a different perspective. I'm very grateful to her. Now I can go there again, but it's different, and now I support the women with the Memorial Sphere project. To shake things up.

Bettina Dziggel

*MUSIC: LACH UND FLÜSTER
[LAUGHTER AND WHISPERS]*

3tot

I also think it's outrageous to be stopped in the street just because I look the way I look. In this country. Right now.

Nancy Andler

Marina Krug, co-founder of the state- and system-critical group *Lesben in der Kirche* [Lesbians in the Church], reports that the group had access to feminist literature from the West. Audre Lorde and people from the Orlanda publishing company visited the group in 1985. In the following years, the group received books from Orlanda, including *Showing Our Colors*, the groundbreaking anthology by Black women and lesbians on Black German history. Until the summer of 1986, *Lesben in der Kirche* organized lectures, readings and discussions on topics including racism and the living conditions of Eastern European women. Krug says that these events and reading the literature “sharpened our view for racist exclusion in our ranks.”

Racism is a broad subject. I myself think, and am able to tell from my own experience – I have an Egyptian father – that in my context I did not experience racism, and that in lesbian groups, too, there were Black women who were just part of the group and that was completely normal. But you should ask Black women directly.

Samirah Kenawi

I think that has little to do with the GDR. In fact, I think it's universal. Or with how racism was handled there. After all, I have something to compare it to now, and it's not really any different [laughs]. Absolutely not. For me it's just utter nonsense to blame this on some system, since it's not really any different anywhere else.

Nancy Andler

In retrospect, after 1990, I learned that there was indeed racism in the GDR. My father came to the GDR to study and he did, and on this level, that of intellectuals,

Samirah Kenawi

including the Chileans who were mostly academics, there was integration and, as far as I know, they had no problems. In my opinion, racism did exist in the working class, but mostly due to the ghettoization.

Nadja Schallenberg

I did my training as an agricultural technician in Karow, Mecklenburg, and there I was friends with people from Mozambique and South Africa, who were locked away from the population.

Bettina Dziggel

They were not allowed to move outside their open prison. The story of the Vietnamese guest workers in particular was just devastating.

Nadja Schallenberg

The population didn't get along with other cultures or nations, and if they did, it was an exception. That's also why the former GDR or the former GDR territory is so xenophobic; these are the roots of it.

Baumarkt
(Hardware Store)

*MUSIC: CHEMNITZ STADT
[CHEMNITZ CITY]*

Samirah Kenawi

*she is referring
to the racist riots
in Chemnitz in 2018

There were, in fact, problems not unlike in Chemnitz* today. People who have no personal contact with people from other cultures have some kind of preconception about them and it turns aggressive. But I don't think it's that straightforward either; it's certainly a multidimensional problem to do with the fact that integration simply didn't take place and wasn't promoted in the GDR.

Bettina Dziggel

I've been saying this for a long time because I've seen it coming for a long time now in Saxony, I've been following it for decades. It's getting stronger and stronger, which I find terrifying, and people just don't do anything against it. They just keep on saying, "That's just the way it is, what can we do against it." But maybe I didn't really answer your question.

Sabrina Saase

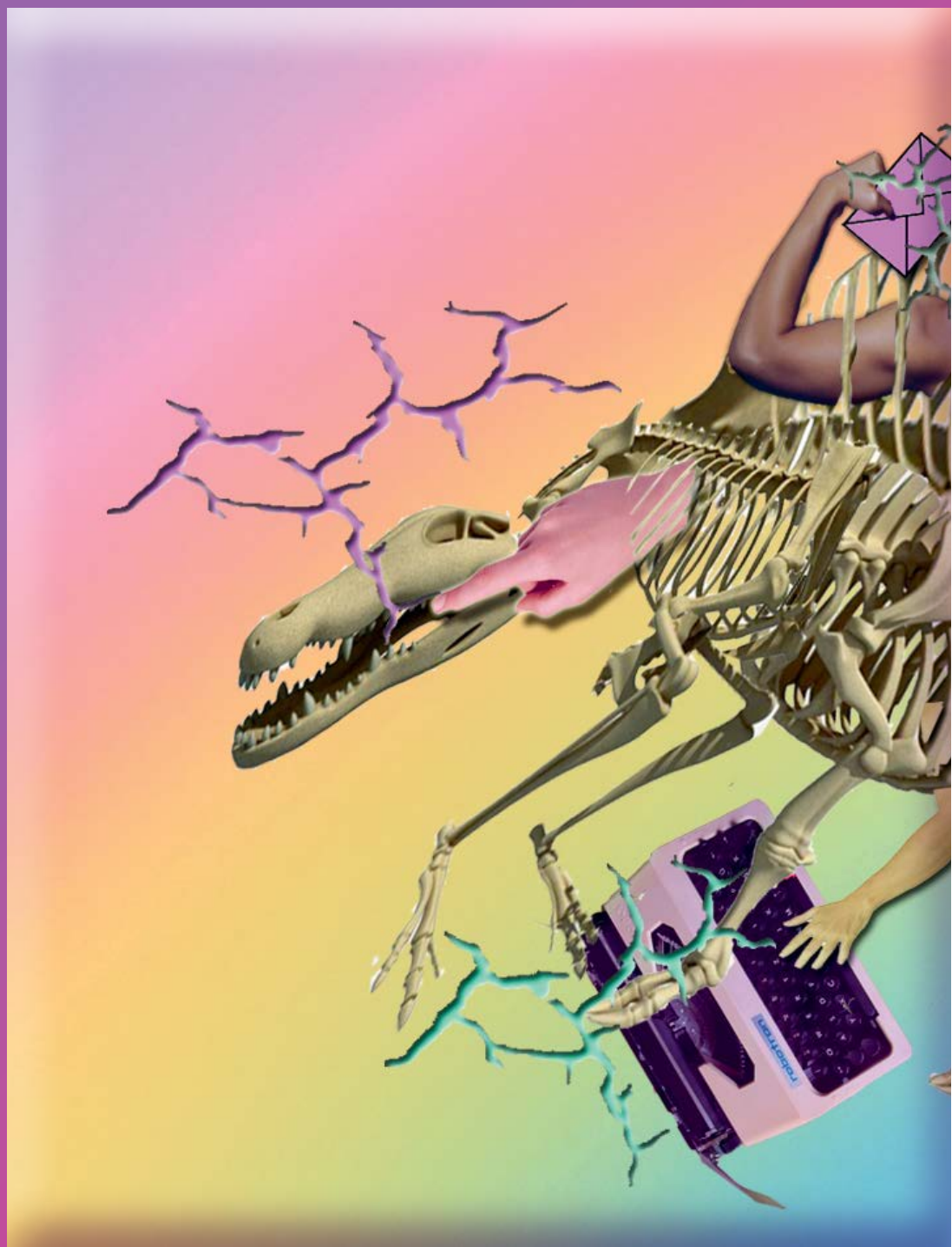
No, you did. You said that you, like us today, grew up or were brought up racist and anti-Semitic.

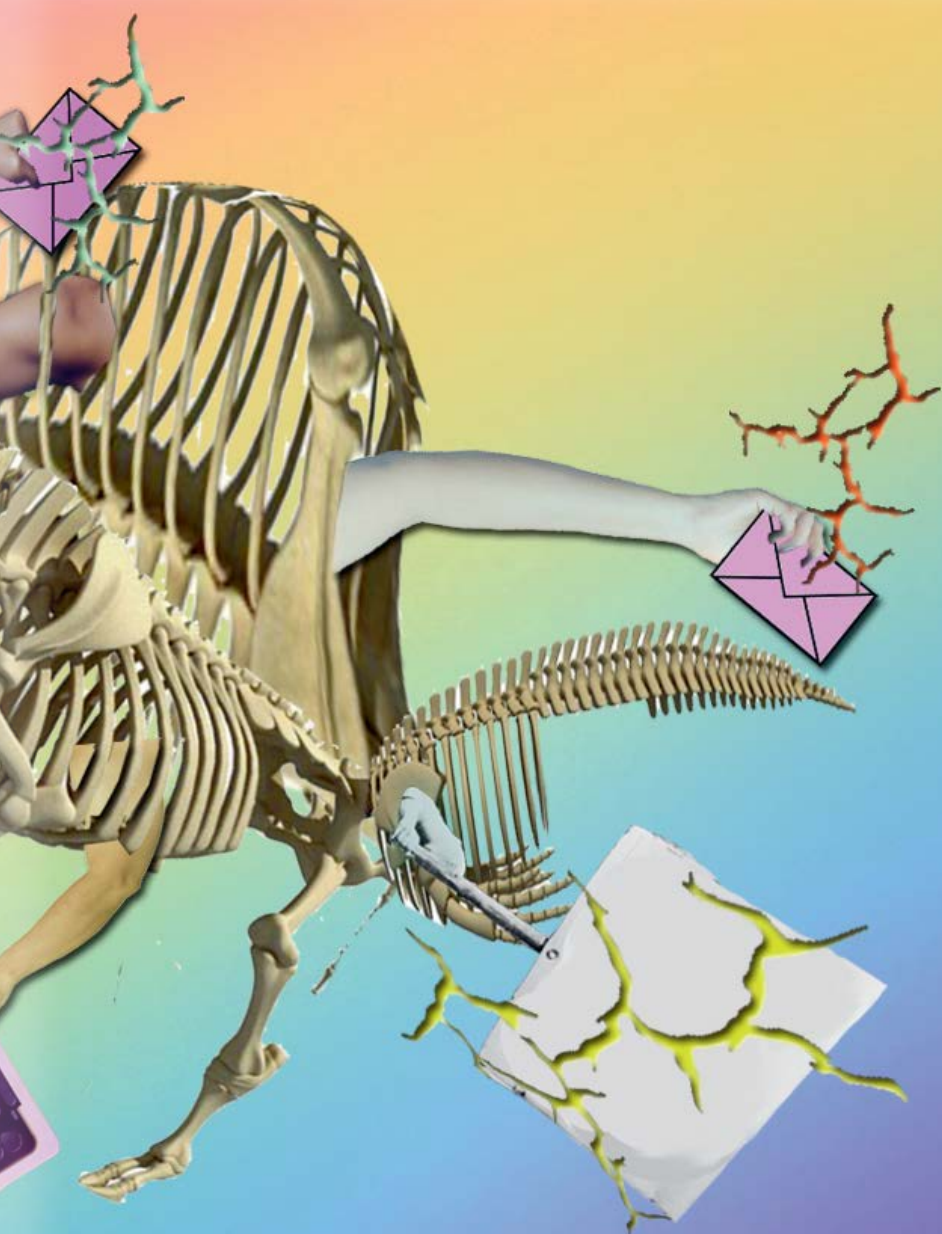
Bettina Dziggel

I wasn't brought up, I grew up that way. I grew up amid silence. And I find that extremely dangerous.

Marinka Körzendörfer
"Fast 10 Jahre
Lesbenbewegung in der
DDR und ihr Übergang
in die bundesdeutsche
Wirklichkeit"
(Almost 10 Years
of Lesbian Movement

The possibilities of political action seem infinitely wider today. Their effectiveness, however, seems very small to us, especially compared to the GDR, whether we look back in anger or sometimes also in quiet melancholy. The few people in the GDR, women and lesbians, who ventured into the public eye with their own





Hättest du gedacht, dass

Private schwul-lesbische Zirkel seit 1950er;
HIB Homosexuelleninitiative Berlin, Ost-Berlin 1973 (1978 verboten);
Homosexuelle Selbsthilfegruppe, Leipzig 1976;
Gesprächskreis für Lesben der Abteilung Psychologie im Haus der Gesundheit Ost-Berlin 1979;
Bibelkreis des Pankower Friedenskreises, Ost-Berlin 1979;
Ak Homosexualität, Leipzig 1982;
Frauengruppe am Sprachenkonvikt, Ost-Berlin 1982;
Lesben in der Kirche, Ak Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe, Ost-Berlin 1983;
Freundinnenkreis, Berlin 1983;
Lesbengruppe des Ak Homosexualität, Dresden 1983;
Ak Homosexualität in der evang. Stadtmission, Halle-Eisleben 1983;
ELSA Erfurter Lesben- & Schwulenarbeitskreis in der ESG, Erfurt 1984;
Lesbengruppe im AK Homosexualität, Leipzig 1984;
Ak Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe, Brandenburg 1985;
Ak Homosexuelle Liebe, Jena 1985;
Frauengruppe, Jena 1985;
Ak Homosexualität, Karl-Marx-Stadt 1985;
Ak Homosexualität der ESG, Rostock 1985;
Sonntagsclub, Ost-Berlin 1986;
Lesbisch-schwule Jugendgruppe, Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1986;
Lesbengruppe die Elsen, Erfurt 1987;
Frauenzentrum Fennpfuhl, Ost-Berlin 1987 (von IM initiiert);
Ak Homosexualität in Gesellschaft und Kirche, Schwerin 1987;
Ak Homosexualität, Aschersleben vermtl. 1987;
Lesbengruppe Jena, frau anders Redaktionsgruppe, Jena 1988;
Unabhängige Frauengruppe, Brandenburg 1988;
Gesprächskreis für Homosexuelle, Cottbus vermtl. 1988;
Lesbengruppe, Halle 1988;
unabhängige Frauengruppe, Magdeburg 1988;
Koordinierungsgruppe der kirchlichen AK Homosexualität, überregional 1988;
Interessengemeinschaft für Transvestiten und Transsexuelle in der DDR in Zusammenarbeit mit MedizinerInnen der Charité, Ost-Berlin 1989;
Vorbereitungskreis Studententage Jena, 1989;
Lesbengruppe Lila Pause, Leipzig 1989;
Ag Lesben/Lesbisch sein der Fraueninitiative Magdeburg, Magdeburg 1989;
Ak Homosexualität mit Versuch einer Lesbengruppe, Stendal 1989;
Ak Homosexualität mit Versuch einer Lesbengruppe, Zwickau 1989;
Chemnitzer Lesben- und Schwuleninitiative e. V., Chemnitz 1990;
... und Lesben in der Provinz

"Who would have thought that there were so many of us..." Chronology of lesbian, gay, and trans groups in the GDR from the 1950s until 1990.

SS wir so viele waren...

ndheit,

Spinrin

19HKA

ier

1988;
R in

89;

Rostock

Schwerin

Stendal

Ost-Berlin

Potsdam
Brandenburg

Magdeburg

Aschersleben

Eisleben
Halle

Cottbus

Leipzig

Dresden

Erfurt
Gotha Weimar

Jena Gera K-M-Stadt
(Chemnitz)

Zwickau

LESBIANS ARE
EVERYWHERE!



ideas about life, achieved a tremendous effect in that dead country with their little strength. It seems to me that the GDR had firm, rigid structures that could not be changed, but were also very fragile. You could maybe compare this to a skeleton from which all marrow and blood - all fluid - had been removed over the years. The Federal Republic, on the other hand, seems to me like an amoeba that existed and exists in an insanely flexible way, adapting to everything, digesting everything. Because of this tremendous flexibility of the current German social system, it is imperative for me that all women, whether lesbian, bi, or straight, work together against the patriarchal structures of society. Lesbians, however, should not refrain from openly standing by their choices and voice them again and again. With our choices, we question and endanger patriarchal structures. But this is only if we live openly, if we don't regard lesbian choices as a private matter of each individual.

in the GDR and
its Transition into
the Reality of the
Federal Republic),
1993, GrauZone

Now it's the younger generations' turn, because they have a different movement, because they have a different way of thinking, a different way of feeling, different demands. You must resist, you must do something. That's exactly what I did back then. Don't just complain and say "Ah, shit." Move your ass, get going, get doing, and bring out the big guns if there's no other way. I mean, the revolution has to start somewhere.

Nadja Schallenberg

MUSIC: NAZIS RAUS [NAZIS OUT]

Namenlos



First LiK (Lesbians in the Church) table at the Friedenswerkstatt (peace workshop), Erlöser Church Berlin Rummelsburg 1983. Photo: Bettina Dziggel, GrauZone Archive in the Archive of the GDR Opposition, RHG/Fo_GZ_0419

