

Kristina Schulz. *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2002. 276 pp.

Kristina Schulz. *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976.* Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2002. 276 S. Euro 34.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-593-37110-8.



Reviewed by Kay McAdams (Department of History and Political Science, York College of Pennsylvania)

Published on H-German (August, 2004)

The Making of the Women's Movement in France and the Federal Republic

Der lange Atem der Provokation by historian and sociologist Kristina Schulz is an important and interesting contribution to the history of the European women's movement of the late-twentieth century. Guided by theory related to the study of New Social Movements, Schulz presents an analysis of the women's movements in France and the Federal Republic informed by a desire to understand them as new forms of collective protest and mobilization that do not simply derive linearly from the student-left protest movement of the late-1960s. Schulz presents a history of the movements in France and the Federal Republic that is certainly not comprehensive, but rather seeks to address a number of questions with regard to the nature of these movements and the new feminism associated with them. She carefully explores the connection between the 1968 movement and the birth of the women's movements in France and the Federal Republic, examines the relationship between the women's

movements and the struggle to change abortion law in France and the Federal Republic, considers the various forms of contending feminisms that emerged within the movements, and analyzes the impact of the movements in terms of social changes subsequently achieved in later decades that served the interests of women. Schulz succeeds in portraying the women's movements in France and the Federal Republic within their specific national contexts, and she presents each movement as a plurality of views, factions, and groups, which disagreed about philosophies and strategies but which shared a common feminist purpose of changing women's status as an oppressed societal group and which aimed at achieving women's equality and emancipation. Ultimately, Schulz concludes that in the long term (hence the title of the book), the women's movements in France and the Federal Republic were a success in terms of contributing to a liberalization of abortion laws, placing women's issues

on the political agenda as part of a process of democratization, and opening up societal, educational, and political institutions to women.

Schulz's analysis is aimed at discovering the dynamics of the movements in France and the Federal Republic in terms of their genesis, influences on the movement, interaction with outside groups and with the social and political context, internal functioning, and impact on social and political changes in the 1970s and beyond. One of the great strengths of this work is Schulz's attention to the changing nature of the movements as they developed, coalesced, and acted within their specific national contexts. Schulz furthermore rejects simplistic causal relationships and assumptions about the nature of the movements, and she therefore asks several sets of questions designed to break down and discover both how and why the movements developed as they did.

In Schulz's analysis, the women's movements in France and the Federal Republic resulted from a disjunction between reality and expectations. Postwar societal and political changes had produced a narrowing of the difference between the lives of men and women, specifically with regard to work force and educational opportunities, but these changes only led a body of women to become more aware of still-existing deficits in women's status and continued areas of discrimination and oppression, such as in the reproductive sphere. The discrepancy between expectations and the delivered reality resulted in a generalized feeling of dissatisfaction that saw its expression in the building of small women's groups at the localized level in Paris, Berlin, Hamburg, and Frankfurt. Schulz concludes that postwar conditions certainly influenced the women's movement by producing a cohort of women ready to be mobilized because of their general sense of continued injustice, but the actual mobilization of women would require additional factors, namely the 1968 movement and the struggle to change abortion law in France and the Federal Republic.

In addition to the contribution of postwar structural changes to the development of a women's movement, the emerging movement also derived its foundation from a number of philosophical, ideological, and theoretical sources. Schulz discusses the theoretical underpinnings contributed by American feminist authors, Simone Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Lacan's poststructuralist influence on psychoanalysis and the meaning of language, and the ideologies of the New Left. The new feminist thought that emerged as a result of these influences differentiated itself substantially from a Marxist interpretation

of women's oppression as well as from classical feminism. This new feminist thought identified gender as socially constructed and identified women as a specific oppressed group that needed to carry on its own emancipatory and revolutionary struggle. The New Left contributed the idea of the possibility of a revolution of the existing oppressive socio-political order carried out by new non-class based revolutionary agents. The New Left also contributed provocative strategies for action aimed against traditional authorities and institutions. Overall, however, Schulz views the influence of the New Left on the emerging women's movement as ambivalent. It exercised its influence primarily in the area of theory, not practice. As Schulz shows with her subsequent discussion of the 1968 movement, women's discrimination within the so-called revolutionary movement became increasingly apparent.

1968, taken as a signifier of the New Left's movement for far-reaching social and political change, occupies a problematic position within the scholarship of the 1968 movement and the women's movement. The scholarship on the 1968 movement assumes that the women's movement directly derived from it, while the scholarship of the women's movement portrays only a tangential relationship. Schulz recognizes a relationship between 1968 and the women's movement, but she analyzes how each influenced the other, rather than assuming a linear relationship of causality. Essentially, women involved with organizations of the New Left associated with the 1968 movement, such as the SDS in the Federal Republic, became frustrated with what they perceived to be a lack of genuine attention to women's issues given by their brethren within the context of a so-called revolutionary struggle. Schulz describes the relationship existing between the 1968 movement and the emerging women's movements as one of both reliance and rejection. While borrowing its revolutionary rhetoric and strategies, the women's movement nevertheless continually accused the New Left of not being revolutionary enough. Women therefore had to organize themselves in the interest of women. The influence of the 1968 movement on the women's movement is tangible in the form of revolutionary ideas and strategies, but the 1968 movement itself did not cause the women's movement. That impetus, Schulz argues, was the fight to change abortion law, because only in the course of that struggle did women collectively and publicly mobilize and articulate demands associated with a social movement for equality as women.

The real focus of this book is the consolidation of the

women's movement as part of the campaign to change highly restrictive abortion laws in France and the Federal Republic (Art. 317 of the Criminal Code in France, Paragraph 218 in the Federal Republic). The publication in 1971 of manifestos signed by hundreds of women in both countries declaring that they had obtained illegal abortions is seen by Schulz to be seminal in the launching of organized women's movements. According to Schulz, the struggle to reform abortion law launched, in part, by these publications functioned differently within the dynamic of the movements in France and the Federal Republic. Schulz argues that in the French context, the primary women's group that took up the struggle, the Mouvement pour la libération des Femmes (MLF), which existed as a decentralized and loose association of women's groups, instrumentalized the issue as one of many that represented the continued oppression of women. In the context of the Federal Republic, the abortion struggle was the entire reason that the women's movement came into existence, Schulz argues. While the MLF in France existed before it took up the struggle, in the FRG, a social movement to change abortion law became a movement only after agitation began. A loose organization of affiliated groups came into existence in June 1971 with the creation of Aktion 218, which functioned as a coordinator of activities directed at calling attention to the need to eliminate paragraph 218. Only later, after 1972, did the German women's movement expand its scope of activity beyond agitation for a legalization of abortion. As in the French context, this evolutionary broadening of the movement involved a loss of influence for the main group involved in the abortion struggle, in this case, Aktion 218. Nevertheless, a broader social movement was created from what began as a narrowly focused campaign. The dynamic of the movement was taken up by small consciousness-raising groups that provided forums for discussion and the sharing of personal experiences, as well as self-help for women and aid to women in need of support.

In the final stage of her analysis of the women's movements, Schulz presents an examination of the internal intellectual divisions that produced two forms of feminism within each movement. Schulz's discussion of the divisions existing within the new feminism includes an interesting examination of the interpretation and use of Simone Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in the German and French contexts. The book had a very different impact on feminists in France and the Federal Republic. The discourse of French feminism, she argues, was always conducted around Beauvoir's work, either through adoption

of her anti-biological ideas of gender and her analysis of the roots of inequality, or in rejection of her ideas. Beauvoir herself emerged as a physical presence in the women's movement in France, and she actively involved herself in supporting various protest actions. In the Federal Republic, on the other hand, Beauvoir's work did not have much resonance until after the mid-1970s. As the German women's movement reoriented itself to include a broader range of issues and ideological standpoints, Beauvoir's work acquired significance and was interpreted for a German audience by Alice Schwarzer. Schwarzer, Schulz argues, developed an interpretation of gender from Beauvoir's work that emphasized the making of women in an oppressive social context. In Schwarzer's interpretation, much of the existential nature of Beauvoir's ideas about gender and women's complicity in their inequality was downplayed in favor of an interpretation that emphasized women as victims of societal oppression. Clear differences thus emerged between France and Germany over the use of the book within the women's movements. In Germany, the book was used symbolically to justify an interpretation of oppression that blamed men and society, and presented women as passive victims. In France, the book was used more theoretically to back a theory of feminism that was critical of a patriarchal and materialistic system.

Schulz depicts the emergence of two concepts of feminism in the 1970s that differed fundamentally on their understanding of womanhood, the roots of women's oppression, the nature of emancipation, and the strategies for achieving that emancipation. Cultural feminists, as she calls them, traced the roots of women's oppression to psychic structures, and were very influenced by the work of Lacan on language and psychosexual development. Cultural feminists emphasized the inherent difference of women as a result of their potential motherhood, and sought emancipation in the form of the transformation of the individual woman's psyche. Women were emancipated to be themselves; the cultural feminist vision of society involved recognition of the equality of the feminine ("the other"). Social feminists, on the other hand, emphasized emancipation of women as occurring foremost through social equality with men. Social feminists rejected the notion of a natural difference between the sexes in favor of arguing for the social construction of gender, à la Beauvoir. The oppression of women as a class had its roots in a patriarchal capitalist system that reinforced itself through mentalities, laws, institutions, socio-economic structures, the family, and the educational system. The true emancipa-

tion of women therefore involved a thorough restructuring of both the productive and the reproductive sphere that allowed for women's complete equality in a system in which common humanity, rather than gender difference, was emphasized. Social feminists actively worked for legal changes to better women's status and promoted an improvement in women's material conditions, such as the promotion of women's education, help for working mothers, and protection of women as victims of various forms of discrimination and oppression.

Schulz labels the division within feminism, "dual strategies," indicating her argument that these divisions were not an indication of weakness of the women's movement, but rather of strength, in terms of opening up multiple possibilities with regard to changing women's situation. In the 1970s and 1980s, women's issues moved onto the political main stage; feminism became anchored and institutionalized. The success of the vast number of "women's projects" that developed in the course of the 1970s and 1980s, such as the founding of women's discussion centers, self-help centers, battered women's shelters, and women's studies programs at universities, is attributable to society's acceptance of women's demands for equality. Schulz concludes that ultimately the women's movement was a success, despite the fact that it fell significantly short of realizing several of its goals (restrictions on abortion were only liberalized, not eliminated, for instance), and that success was also the result of continued structural changes occurring in society.

The women's movement, through its pressure on policy-makers, and its public presence, succeeded in achieving a liberalization of abortion laws, a change in laws affecting women's status, the opening up of higher education to gender studies, the adoption by political parties and state institutions of "women's issues," and the creation of projects directly benefiting women, such as women's shelters. As a result, the women's movement became less radical, more reformist, and largely lost its autonomy in favor of an integration into the system it originally challenged.

Schulz's book has much to offer with regard to its analysis of the women's movement in France and the Federal Republic. Schulz avoids assumptions about the connections between the women's movement and the 1968 movement, and carefully seeks to assess the direct results of the women's movement in the context of ongoing societal change. Her source base is excellent, and she uses a range of sources derived from within the movements themselves, as well as interviews with women who were involved with the movements at the time. A reading knowledge of French would be advisable, as she translates some of her quotes into German, but not all of them. Her analysis of the comparative aspects of the movements (French-German) are brief and the reader may desire more development, but overall, Schulz presents a sound analysis of these movements that reveals their inner dynamics within each national context.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Kay McAdams. Review of Kristina Schulz, *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976* and Schulz, Kristina, *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. August, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9714>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.