

Call for Papers

Gender Relations in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany

***feministische studien* Issue 2/2027**

The social and political developments of recent years have once again brought questions of gender, sexuality, and intersectional inequality in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as in East Germany, to the forefront of public and academic debates. This development has been accompanied by growing attention to the diversity of gender-related lived realities, to processes of social transformation, and to new theoretical and empirical approaches within gender studies.

Across Europe, increasingly strong authoritarian tendencies can be observed, and Eastern Europe is no exception. In recent years, women's and gender studies in particular, as well as achievements in gender equality, policy, and law, have become targets of political attacks. A prominent example is Hungary, where the accreditations of gender studies degree programs were revoked by a government decree in 2018, and the Central European University moved its main campus from Budapest to Vienna. The delegitimization of gender-related research is often merely the entry point for a broader delegitimization of critical knowledge production. Gender equality policies, women's rights, and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex*, and queer (LGBTQI*) individuals are also under considerable pressure to justify their legitimacy in various countries. In Hungary, adoption by same-sex couples was banned in 2020. In Poland, some municipalities and local politicians have called for LGBTQI-free zones, and a far-reaching abortion ban has been implemented. In Slovakia, the government has decided to recognize only two genders.

While gender and sexual diversity are being resisted and opposed in this way, antifeminist positions, traditional family models, and masculinist ideas are simultaneously gaining strength. In East Germany, public debates in recent years have therefore focused less on women and more on men. On the one hand, men are portrayed as losers of the post-socialist transformation process, and on the other hand, in light of the success of far-right parties, they are described as a problem for democracy. Such broad generalizations not only demonstrate how societal diagnoses of crisis become gendered but also raise questions about the origins of these attributions, what important distinctions are lost in the process, and how these narratives are connected to social transformation, regional identities, political orientations, and diverse constructions of gender.

Looking toward the East brings the interconnections between gender, nation, war, violence, and militarization back into sharper focus. Current geopolitical conflicts in Europe, particularly Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, are closely intertwined with gendered structures, both producing and potentially challenging them. Masculinity continues to be traditionally associated with defensiveness, self-sacrifice, and military strength, while women are addressed as mothers of the nation, as those in need of protection, or as bearers of cultural and familial continuity. It is intriguing that while these traditional gender roles shape political discourse, national cultures of remembrance, and state mobilization strategies, everyday practice is much more ambivalent. This is particularly clear in the context of the war in Ukraine, where women assume diverse roles as soldiers, volunteers, activists, journalists, and caregivers, thereby relativizing traditional notions of war as a masculine domain. Against

this background, theories of a simple backlash or an intensified traditionalization are not entirely convincing from a gender-theoretical perspective.

In addition, these developments are always accompanied by new feminist, queer, and civil society mobilizations. Women, lesbians, intersex, and trans* persons are increasingly emerging as visible actors in politics, academia, culture, social movements, and digital spaces, thereby prompting a renegotiation of traditional boundaries between the private and the public spheres. For instance, the anti-abortion laws in Poland have sparked massive feminist protests. In this context, new alliances and diverse feminist political practices are emerging. In another instance, the Serbian anti-corruption movement, which is driven largely by students, has been described as a peaceful and feminist-influenced movement characterized, among other things, by the use of gender-inclusive language, the deliberate rejection of violence, and the questioning of traditional gender roles. Against the backdrop of existing research, this raises the question of whether, and to what extent, the increasing public visibility and political engagement of women faces resistance. What is the situation, for example, in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as in East Germany, regarding an antifeminist backlash, for instance in the forms of hate speech and misogynistic attacks—not only in the political sphere, but also in digital and media publics?

From an intersectional perspective, focusing on women as political actors also raises the question of their heterogeneity. Marginalized women, too, are not merely victims of discrimination, violence, or social disadvantage; they are often political actors in their own right, possessing their own strategies, bodies of knowledge, and forms of resistance. This is evident, for example, in the case of Roma women. On the one hand, they are affected by forced sterilizations, racialized exclusion, and neoliberal restructuring. On the other hand, they have developed independent feminist and political movements and advocate for social and political rights both within Roma women's organizations and in the broader Romani activist movement. Closer attention to these dynamics is needed in order to open up new approaches to questions of gender, ethnicity, class, citizenship, and social justice.

Looking eastward is also inseparable from questions of labor relations and gender relations—not least because a central narrative about the East emphasizes the particular importance of work in people's lives, as well as the stronger integration of women into the labor market compared to "the West." Under post-transformation conditions, however, what is the current relationship between gender, work, care, and the economy in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as in East Germany? Since the 2000s, migration research and care research in particular have highlighted the growing transnational interconnectedness of working and living conditions. Paid employment, reproductive labor, and family care arrangements have long been organized across borders and are structured by global inequalities. A striking example is the figure of the commuting or migrant care worker, such as Polish women caregivers and domestic workers in Germany. They have become key social figures of the contemporary care crisis and exemplify the logic of global care chains. Such constellations point not only to economic dependencies between Western and Eastern Europe, but also to the gendered and racialized organization of care work, as well as to the increasing precariousness of working and living conditions in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany. These developments in gender and labor relations can only be adequately analyzed by considering the interplay of the welfare state, migration, class, and global care regimes.

In this issue of *feministische studien*, we aim to contribute to bringing the often marginalized expertise from Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as East Germany, more prominently into academic debates and to critically broaden dominant Western or Western European perspectives. This

also raises the fundamental question of which gender-theoretical concepts are suitable for adequately analyzing the relationship between “East” and “West” and for thinking beyond simplistic oppositions. The approaches of interculturality that have been discussed since the 1980s have certainly provided important impulses for engaging with cultural difference. However, they were often themselves embedded in perspectives based on a logic of difference, describing “other cultures” from a predominantly hegemonic Western viewpoint. In such frameworks, the “East,” imagined as a homogeneous entity, was frequently constructed as backward or lagging behind, while the “West” functioned as the unmarked norm. Against this backdrop, debates that seek to interpret Europe’s post-socialist space through a postcolonial lens have gained increasing significance, particularly within Eastern European studies. These discussions have been driven to a considerable extent by scholars from Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe. Queer perspectives have also contributed to the critique of such East–West dichotomies by drawing attention to the homonationalist framing of these discourses and by highlighting that Queer Studies are often perceived in Eastern European contexts as carrying distinctly Western connotations. As a result, conflict-ridden tensions emerge between different scientific, political, and cultural regimes of belonging—tensions that Eastern European gender scholars must continually navigate.

Against the backdrop of these diverse developments and thematic priorities, the issue of *feministische studien* 2/2027 seeks to strengthen transnational exchange within gender studies, to make regional perspectives more visible, and to promote comparative as well as intersectional-transnational approaches. The issue will center both, the shared trajectories of development and the differences between post-socialist and post-Soviet contexts as well as East Germany. We are particularly interested in identifying the current transformations taking place in these regions and exploring the theoretical impulses they generate for gender studies at large.

We welcome not only scholarly analyses but also reports on local developments and insights into ongoing research projects that address the following questions—or related issues beyond them—from a feminist perspective:

- Which developments are currently emerging with regard to gender relations, gender studies, and feminist movements in the various regions of Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as in East Germany?
- What assumptions are embedded in the cultural-historical concepts of “gender” and “the East,” and to what extent are these concepts discursively reproduced in academia, politics, and the media as a supposedly unquestioned and naturally given connection?
- Is it analytically meaningful to speak of gender relations in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany as a whole? If so, what are their defining structural characteristics?
- In what ways do gender norms and practices differ across, and where do they resemble one another within, Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany?
- What is the current state of gender studies in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany, and what lessons can be learned from these contexts regarding the defense of academic freedom?
- What forms do feminist movements take in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany, and what potentially specific challenges do they face? Where are alliances emerging with other movements (such as labor movements, movements defending academic freedom, democracy movements, migration-related initiatives, and queer movements), and where do forms of transnational solidarity develop?

- From an intersectional perspective, which forms of marginalization and discrimination, but also which forms of political mobilization, become visible in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and East Germany?
- What new configurations of gender, work, and care can be observed in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe and in East Germany, and how can they be theorized within the tensions and interrelations of migration, welfare-state arrangements, and global structures of inequality?

Extended abstracts (1,000–1,500 words) should be submitted no later than **August 30, 2026** to the following three email addresses:

- Julia Gruhlich (Julia.gruhlich@uni-goettingen.de)
- Stine Eckert (stine.eckert@wayne.edu)
- Regine Othmer (manuskripte@feministische-studien.de)

Abstracts may be submitted for the following sections:

- **Research Article:** 6.000–8.000 words (max. 9.000)
- **Discussion/Debate Article:** 2.000–3.000 words

In addition, proposals are welcome for:

- **Conference reports and reviews of monographs or edited volumes:** up to 1.200 words
- **Artistic works** for the section *Images and Signs (Bilder und Zeichen)*.

All word counts exclude footnotes and references.

Authors will be notified regarding their abstract submissions in **early September 2026**. Full manuscripts must be submitted by **February 28, 2027**.

Feedback following the **double-blind peer-review process** will be provided by **mid-May 2027**. If a manuscript is accepted, revisions need to be submitted by **July 30, 2027**.