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Frauenemancipation and Beyond: The Use of the Concept Emancipation by Early German and French Feminists

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In my recent book, Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830 to 1860, I maintained that early radical feminists in both Europe and the United States seized upon the concept of emancipation to advance their unpopular cause. In this paper, I'd like to briefly recapitulate my reasoning there and expand it with regard to women in the German states and France. Since Prof. Drescher will be dealing with Frenchwomen, I will spend more time on the Germans. Throughout, I come to this subject from the direction of feminism, rather than antislavery. Although the two causes were often intertwined by American and British feminists in this era, who applied the concept of emancipation to women's situation relatively easily, in Germany and France the word had different associations and resonance.

In Europe, the French Revolution of 1789 extended the concept of emancipation to people who were not enslaved. "Emancipation" was increasingly used to signify the hoped-for liberation of oppressed groups: the Third Estate, the peasantry, serfs, and Jews. During the revolutionary era European feminists, among them Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, and the German Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, applied the term to women. Hippel's 1792

treatise, On Improving the Status of Women declares that men have enslaved women since the dawn of time. Anticipating the argument of our august commentator by two centuries, Hippel forcefully maintained that “the oppression of women is the cause of all the rest of the oppression in the world.” He argued that this ancient enslavement intensified in his own day when the revolutionary French government refused to enfranchise “an entire half of a nation,” thus depriving the female sex of equal rights, even though they “worked themselves to break the fetters in which the nation lay....” An Enlightenment figure who supported the principles of the French Revolution while deploring its violence, Hippel, like other contemporary feminists, pragmatically urged the French government to ensure its democracy and liberalism by granting equal rights to women:

even if slavery is tolerated and practiced on but a small scale, in the short or the long run it makes slaves of us all. Under a lenient, moderate governmental system whose powers are not unlimited, the woman has from time immemorial counted for more than in despotic states, where the slavery of the woman is politically necessary.¹

Hippel died in 1796 and his works fell into obscurity, but this association of feminist principles with the French Revolution severely handicapped Germans who wanted an improvement of women’s status throughout the nineteenth century. “Many excellent reforms have encountered a long and obdurate resistance on this side of the Rhine simply because they were said to be a product of the upheaval of 1789,” two German feminists wrote in 1884,

and the women’s movement, in addition to its unfortunate origin [in France], was brought into disrepute as the ‘Emancipation of Women.’ The greatest stumbling-block in our way has been the signification given to this term, and we tacitly

¹ Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, On Improving the Status of Women, [Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber], trans. and ed. Timothy F. Sellner (1792; reprint, Detroit: Wayne State University, 1979), pp. 89, 188, 120-121, 104.

agreed to avoid its use, although it was impossible to find one which could exactly replace it.²

Compounding emancipation's unfortunate provenance for Germans was its use by the French Saint-Simonian movement in the early 1830s. The Saint-Simonian concept of "emancipation of the flesh" was usually interpreted by both male Saint-Simonians and society as a whole as "free love" -- the right to end marriages, engagements, and sexual liaisons at will, regardless of law, religion, or the existence of children engendered by such unions. The French author George Sand's immense influence as the embodiment of the "emancipated woman" beginning in the 1830s and her claiming "freedom of the heart" for the female sex contributed to the sexualization of the concept of female emancipation. Thus the linkage of women and any word meaning greater independence - - emancipation, freedom, liberation or liberty - - was invariably interpreted sexually in this period, especially in the German states but also throughout the Western community. The all-male Young Germany literary movement of the 1830s "wanted the 'femme libre' [the Saint-Simonian term for the "free woman" who practiced "emancipation of the flesh"] and dreamed of unbounded sexual pleasure," writes German literary scholar Renate Möhrmann.³ Historian Carola Lipp comments that "45 years of enmity to France hindered the 1848 reception of Frenchwomen's progress. When 'emancipation' was typically used in Württemberg, it meant emancipation in the french style" and presented "pictures which Württemberg women could hardly identify with."⁴

² Anna Schepeler-Lette and Jenny Hirsch, "Germany," in The Woman Question in Europe: A Series of Original Essays, ed. Theodore Stanton (1884; reprint, New York: Source Book, 1970), p. 140.

³ Renate Möhrmann, ed., Frauenemanzipation im deutschen Vormärz: Texte und Dokumente (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1978), p. 5.

⁴ Carola Lipp, "Frauen und Öffentlichkeit: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen politischer Partizipation im Vormärz und in der Revolution 1848," in Carola Lipp, ed., Schimpfende Weiber und patriotische

Given these difficulties with the application of emancipation to women's situation, what is surprising is how often German feminists used it in the 1830s and '40s. Where did they encounter the concept? In her first feminist piece, published under the "half-pseudonym" Otto Stern in 1843 and titled "Female Emancipation," Louise Otto called "emancipation...the catchword of our day."⁵ In part, the word was in the air because of discussions about the retrograde political and social situation in the German states. The Germanies were considered politically backward in this period, a situation which conservatives lauded and liberals deplored. Lacking constitutions, basic civil liberties, and established rights, Germans turned to the language of liberation -- both religious and secular -- to transform their situation. German feminists certainly encountered the term "emancipation" in contemporary discussions about freeing German Jews from existing legal restrictions and penalties. But the discourse over "emancipating" Jews by admitting them to civil equality drew on the language of the universal rights of man while debating whether the Jews' "faith" or "race" disqualified them from being part of a "fatherland" founded on Christianity and Germanic descent.⁶

The vocabulary used by early German feminists was completely different. It reflected the belief that the situation of German women was not equal to that in other Western nations. Germans only think of woman "as a hausfrau, not a rational being and intellectual companion," as English reformer William Howitt complained after he and his

Jungfrauen: Frauen im Vormärz und in der Revolution 1848/49 (Moos & Baden-Baden: Elster Verlag, 1986), p. 298.

⁵ Otto Stern [Louise Otto], "Zur Frauenemancipation," Unser Planet: Blätter für Unterhaltung, Literatur, Kunst, und Theater ed. Ernst Keil, 28 February, 1843, p. 107. Portions of this article are reprinted in Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, Die Anfänge der deutschen Frauenbewegung: Louise Otto-Peters (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), pp. 71-73

⁶ For a nuanced discussion of these topics in Baden, see Dagmar Herzog, Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), chs. 2 and 3. Herzog argues that liberals were far more willing to accept Jewish emancipation than any feminist claims.

wife Mary had lived in Heidelberg from 1840 to '43.⁷ To protest this oppression, Germans who wanted to improve women's status employed the language of abolitionism. Not only "emancipation," but "slavery," "chains," "bondage," "fetters," and "masters" appear frequently in their writings. Linkage to the contemporaneous Anglo-American anti-slavery movements could have been provided by the press, by correspondence, and by foreign visitors like the Howitts. The couple arrived in Heidelberg right after the London World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, where they vigorously protested that body's decision not to let the American female delegates take their seats.⁸ Early German feminists frequently worked the radical concept that women were the slaves of men into their poetry, novels, and essays. While men could generally use such language free of sexual innuendo, women carried the extra burden of having to reject insinuations that they only advocated their own emancipation in order to be sexually liberated. They also came under far more severe criticism than their male counterparts if they dared to question religious orthodoxy, as we shall see in the case of Louise Aston.

One strategy for Germans who wanted to claim more for women was to oppose the morality of their own countrywomen to the licentiousness of the French. In her article on female emancipation, Louise Otto sought to distinguish between "the emancipation of women," desired by "all who prize progress" and "the emancipation of the flesh" of the French Saint-Simonians, the source of "the shameless picture of the

⁷ Cited in Amice Lee, *Laurels and Rosemary: The Life of William and Mary Howitt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 146.

⁸ For one example of the Howitts' views, see Mary Howitt's letter of 5 June 1840, printed in *Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*, ed. Margaret Howitt, 2 vols. (London: Wm. Isbister, 1889), vol. I, pp. 291-292. For a letter informing a German of the events at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, see Anna Jameson's letter to Ottilie von Goethe, 2 July 1840, describing the rejection of the U.S. female delegates. Printed in G.H. Needler, ed., *Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 126.

femme libre” before which “every German woman lowers her eyes.”⁹ A major theme in Ida Frick’s 1845 feminist fantasy, Women’s Slavery and Freedom, is that German women should reject the false French values of coquetry, gallantry, and slavery to fashion in favor of superior German “simplicity,” “investigation of the self,” and freedom. Frick similarly opposed the “courage” of the women of early Germanic tribes to the decadence and false values of ancient Rome. Instead of chasing the “fool’s gold” of the social life of French salons, German women should cultivate “the moral purity of Northern women.”¹⁰ Linking women’s emancipation to Germanic values and nationalism was a strategy which would be employed throughout the nineteenth century -

- Louise Otto maintained it for much of her lengthy feminist career.

But it contained problems of its own. Distancing female emancipation from both French revolutionary values and sexual liberation had the effect of weakening and diminishing the claims feminists were able to make on behalf of women. I’ve found that in this period the willingness to equate women’s situation with that of slaves is a marker of feminists’ radicalism. Otto herself was extremely wary of using such terms, reflecting the circumspection which led her also to downplay demands for women’s suffrage in these years. Once she dropped her male pseudonym, she avoided the language of slavery and emancipation and criticized those who employed it.

Others were bolder. In her early novels, Luise Mühlbach repeatedly invoked these themes. The heroine of The Lively World (1841) refused “to be any man’s slave” because she “loves her freedom and will not surrender it for chains, whose weight one can never weigh before one has been fettered with them.” Her 1849 Aphra Behn

⁹ Otto Stern, “Zur Frauenemancipation,” p. 104.

compared the uprisings of Caribbean slaves to its heroine's embrace of female emancipation. Based loosely on the life of the seventeenth-century English author, Aphra Behn contains powerful denunciations of female slavery:

“I am a woman, that is my entire misfortune,” she said. “Men have taken everything from us, even the right of spiritual creation! We can only be the slaves of our husbands and bear their children, that is our duty and our profession....But I, I want to be equal to men! I want to be free, not bound!....I don't want to be a wife anymore, but rather a free, feeling, thinking, and purposeful human creature!”¹¹

Other novelists, like Fanny Lewald and Ida Hahn-Hahn, also used emancipation and slavery to express their feminist ideas. In these years, when censorship still prevailed in many German states, writers worked feminist themes into their fiction and poetry, ensuring the spread of such ideas to a far wider audience than that reached by political tracts.

In 1846, however, a real-life case involving the feminist author Louise Aston galvanized discussion of female emancipation in Germany. Unhappily married at 20 to an English industrialist 24 years her senior, Aston divorced her husband after nine years of marriage and moved to Berlin with her three-year-old daughter. Two years later, in 1846, she published a provocative poetry collection entitled Wild Roses. Many of her twelve poems challenged the limits of acceptable female expression. “A Sacred Ceremony” denounced both Christian priests and their religion for allowing marriages of convenience like Aston's own. “Dithyrambe” thanked “the god of the grape vines” for destroying “the old world”: “So might all that holds the heart in chains/ Perish and die!”

¹⁰ Ida Frick, Der Frauen Slaventhum und Freiheit: Ein Traum von Hans-Heiling-Felsen (Dresden and Leipzig: Arnoldischen Buchhandlung, 1845), pp. 18, 52, 55.

¹¹ This discussion is drawn from Renate Möhrmann, Die andere Frau: Emanzipationsansätze deutscher Schriftstellerinnen im Vorfeld der Achtundvierziger-Revolution (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1977), ch. III.

The refrain of “Life Motto” was “Free life, free love/ May I always be true!” and the verses praised “the free choice of free hearts” and “love” which had been “oft enslaved,/ Without rights or fatherland....” “To George Sand” extolled the French writer as “the free woman...Free from sin, because free from error....

Calmed by your spirit’s magic beams
 I can bravely scorn the crowd’s contempt:
 Let them pray before the golden calf
 And sacrilegiously slander the prophets;
I stand with you, veiled from their eyes
On the free heights in holy rapture!¹²

A few days after the anthology appeared, the police, who had already received complaints about Aston’s presence in male taverns and cafés, reported her to the government. Interrogated by a Berlin magistrate about her beliefs on religion and marriage, Aston replied that she did not agree with either as currently constituted. The government then declared her “a danger to civic peace and order” and gave her eight days to leave the city.¹³

Debate ensued in journals and newspapers. Aston publicized her side in My Emancipation, Proscription, and Justification, published of necessity in neutral Belgium later that year. She explained that what she longed for was Sand’s definition of female emancipation: “the right and dignity of women to participate in free relationships, in which an honorable approach to love can be cultivated.”¹⁴ Claiming the sexual side of female emancipation in Germany alienated many liberals. Louise Otto quickly distanced

The citations are on pp. 75 and 84. After 1850, Mühlbach, whose real name was Klara Mundt, turned conservative, renounced her earlier writings, and wrote historical novels about German royalty.

¹² It is extremely difficult to obtain Aston’s writings today. The best source is Louise Aston, Ein Lesebuch: Gedichte Romane Schrifte in Auswahl (1846-1849), ed. Harlheinze Fingerhut (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1983), pp. 18-28. Fingerhut reprints only the four poems cited here.

¹³ Aston published the documents of her case in her book, Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung (Brussels, 1846), pp. 11-34. These pages are reprinted in Möhrmann, ed., pp. 68-82.

herself from Aston's "immorality" and Johannes Ronge, a leader of the German Catholic movement which supported feminist aspirations, denounced her.

But Aston soon received important support from another emerging German feminist. Mathilde Franziska von Tabouillet, later Anneke, shared Aston's experiences as an unhappily married woman, a divorcée, and a single mother attempting to raise a daughter on her own. In her 1847 defense of Aston, Woman in Conflict with Social Circumstances, Anneke questioned the double standard which blamed women for divorce and condemned them for the same religious beliefs admired in Spinoza and Hegel. She also expanded the argument that women were currently no better off than slaves. "Why do opinions which men have been able to hold for centuries seem so dangerous to the government when held by women?," she asked,

Because they nourish with their hearts' blood...the belief...that they will never again let themselves be sold into slavery. Is this the reason? Yes it is, because truth upheld by women, goes forth as a conqueror which overthrows the thrones of tyrants and despots. Because truth alone will set us free and loosen the bonds of self-denial and the shackles of slavery.¹⁵

An activist who ran a "communist salon" in Cologne with her second husband, a radical army officer, Anneke did not further develop her arguments about women's slavery until she emigrated to America after the 1848/49 revolution.

The revolution itself allowed German feminists to increase their demands for women and, in so doing, to use the radical imagery of slavery to make their case. Aston returned to Berlin after the March uprising and published her journal, The Freedom

¹⁴ Aston, Meine Emancipation, cited in Fingerhut, ed., p. 12.

¹⁵ Mathilde Franziska Anneke, Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnisse (1847), p. 11. The only existing copy of this work is in the Mathilde Franziska Anneke Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Fighter, there for seven months in 1848; its first issue asserted that women no longer had to remain “what they have always been -- children or slaves.”¹⁶

Four other feminist periodicals appeared in these years: the Women’s Mirror, which has not survived, Anneke’s Women’s Newspaper, which ran for only three issues as a cloak for the outlawed socialist journal published by her husband, Otto’s Women’s Newspaper, and Louise Dittmar’s Social Reform. The last was the most radical.

Dittmar, who published anonymously until her parents’ death, developed her feminist arguments at the freethinking Mannheim Monday Club, which included Jewish as well as Christian members. Alone among German feminists, she argued that there were no innate differences between the sexes. Dittmar analyzed women’s oppression as economically and politically based, argued for equal laws, education, and job training subsidized by the state, and defended the female right to sexuality. It is in the four issues of Social Reform, reprinted in 1849 as The Essence of Marriage, Along with Some Essays about Women’s Social Reform, that the concept of slavery is most frequently and forcefully applied to women’s situation.¹⁷

“The freedom of women is the greatest revolution, not just of our own day, but of all time,” Dittmar proclaimed, “since it breaks fetters which are as old as the world.” Going on to argue that women were also enslaved by the “fetters of idealization” and the “shackles of beauty,” she concluded that women had been “victims” long enough. Unlike a number of American feminists, who tended to distinguish between slavery and poverty,

¹⁶ Portions of this first issue of Die Freischarler are reproduced in Ruth-Esther Geiger and Sigrid Weigel, eds., Sind das noch Damen: Vom gelehrten Frauenzimmer-Journal zum feministischen Journalismus (München: Frauenbuchverlag, 1981), pp. 47ff.

¹⁷ The best analysis of Dittmar is Dagmar Herzog’s encyclopedia entry, “Louise Dittmar,” in Anne Commire and Deborah Klezmer, eds., Women in World History (Waterford, Conn.: Yorkin Press, 1995), and Herzog’s chapter 5, “The Feminist Conundrum” in her Intimacy and Exclusion.

Dittmar linked the two conditions. “As long as money rules, we [women] are slaves without money,” she asserted.¹⁸ In her long essay on marriage, she argued that when women were financially and politically dependent, most marriages would be unhappy. Only the application of “democratic principles” to marriage itself could transform a situation in which “the political position of men *vis à vis* women is that of the patricians to the plebeians, of the free to the slaves.”¹⁹

In addition to her own writings, Dittmar published pieces from other writers and the radical revolutionary press. A lengthy essay from the Heidelberger Volksführer excoriated the current condition of most marriages:

Men have, by virtue of the laws, put the weapons in their own hands....and many women bear, as signs of bondage and slavery, bruises on their bodies in honor of their husbands, since her strict married lord has inflicted these often for a meaningless petty crime....Do not let mockery confuse the emancipation of women (liberation from slavish relationships) with those who make it seem ridiculous....The fundamental rights of the German people have already been drafted....It would be an insult to all noble-thinking men if they did not forthrightly help women to participate in this joyful freedom in all relations. Otherwise women must pass on their slave-chains from generation to generation.²⁰

Otto welcomed Dittmar’s Social Reform in the pages of her own Women’s Newspaper. Although she disagreed with some of Dittmar’s points, she supported her questioning of “the spiritual and material fetters of the entire female sex.”²¹ Similar opinions appeared in other radical papers. “Without exception, our women are more or less slaves of their husbands or relatives, or better said, the slaves of slaves,” wrote a Cologne journal in 1849, going on to urge new legislation and financial support to free

¹⁸ Louise Dittmar, Das Wesen der Ehe, Nebst einigen Aufsätzen über die soziale Reform der Frauen (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1849), pp. 119-120, p. 106.

¹⁹ Louise Dittmar, Das Wesen der Ehe (Leipzig: Otto Wiegand, 1850), pp. 5, 18-19.

²⁰ Dittmar, Das Wesen der Ehe, Nebst...., pp. 113-118.

²¹ Louise Otto, Frauen=Zeitung, #5, 19 May 1849, p. 70.

poor women both from the “tyranny” of their husbands and the “inhumanity” of prostitution. “Freedom is moral; slavery immoral,” they concluded.²²

These writings represent the highwater mark of German radicalism. As the revolution went under in the early 1850s, the use of slavery to characterize women’s lot disappeared from German discourse. Anneke and Aston went into exile, Dittmar never found another publisher, and Otto survived by remaining silent throughout the 1850s. Daring to criticize women’s oppression publically by drawing on the vocabulary of abolitionism needed the support of a society which did not put people in jail at hard labor for voicing such opinions. When a German women’s movement re-emerged in the later decades of the nineteenth century, it was far more moderate and restrained than the radical feminism of mid-century.

Although the denouement of French radical feminism mirrored that in the German states, its origins differed. Many French feminist documents of the 1789 era applied emancipation to women’s situation. While most Frenchwomen later repudiated both the Enlightenment and revolutionary models of womanhood in favor of domesticity, a native radical tradition survived. The early socialist Saint-Simonian movement was French in origin and its self-named New Women frequently applied the analogy of slavery to the female condition. “Because we have deeply felt the slavery and nullity that weighs upon our sex, we are raising up our voices,” went the lead editorial of the first issue of the Saint-Simoniennes’ 1832 newspaper, La Femme Libre.²³ Sexual innuendoes in the male

²² Der Verfolger der Bosheit, #33, 22 December 1849, p. 1ff., reprinted in Gerlinde Hummel-Haasis, ed. Schwester zerreißt eure Ketten: Zeugnisse zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Revolution von 1848/49 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), pp. 154-5. The title of this pioneering anthology of German feminist documents from 1848, Sisters, Break Your Chains, reflects the importance of the slavery analogy in that period.

²³ La Femme Libre, vol. 1, #1, p. 6, reprinted in Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine, Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 286.

French press forced them to change its title, but these early feminists continued to use the term frequently.

A women's movement arose from the Saint-Simonian community because male leaders simultaneously nurtured female participation in the movement while severely limiting women's agency. From its inception in the late 1820s, Saint-Simonianism welcomed women to its ranks, largely because of its belief that many of society's ills had been generated by ignoring the supposedly innate female virtues of peace, harmony, and love. By the early 1830s, however, women within the movement complained that "male Saint-Simonians are more male than they are Saint-Simonian" -- that is, that the men were more interested in free love than in allowing women an equal share in the movement's leadership.²⁴ In 1831 the few women already in the hierarchy were dismissed, and the movement's new "Supreme Father" proclaimed that "female emancipation" could best be achieved by the "rehabilitation of the flesh" through free love while calling on women "formulate for herself her law of the future."²⁵

The result was the creation of the world's first independent feminist movement. Naming themselves the "New Women," Saint-Simoniennes analyzed their situation both within the community and society as a whole as that of slaves. "Women alone will say what freedom they want" wrote "Joséphine-Félicité" in the women's journal,

Whoever else may desire our freedom, I want it, and that is the essential point. I wanted it before encountering the Saint-Simonians or Monsieur Fourier. I want it in spite of those who oppose it, and....I am free....It is now up to us to work for

²⁴ Claire Goldberg Moses, "Saint-Simonian Men/ Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s France," *Journal of Modern History*, 54 (June, 1982), pp. 240-267; Suzanne Voilquin, *Mémoires d'une saint-simonienne en Russie (1839-1846)*, ed. Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe (Paris: Editions des Femme, 1977), p. 15.

²⁵ Moses and Rabine, p.35ff.

our liberty by ourselves; it is up to us to work for it without the help of our masters.²⁶

These New Women rapidly developed a new feminist vision of what society could become by rigorously applying the concepts of slavery and emancipation to existing structures and ideas. They discarded last names as signifiers of male dominion and female slavery. “If we continue to take the names of men...we will be slaves without knowing it,” wrote Désirée Véret; Jeanne Deroin asserted that “This custom which obliges the wife to take her husband’s name is nothing but a branding iron which prints on the slave’s forehead the initials of the master’s name...”²⁷

The Saint-Simonian movement coined the phrase “the emancipation of the worker will lead to the emancipation of the woman.” The New Women first reversed this slogan, arguing that only female emancipation could lead to workers’ emancipation. Later they deconstructed this false opposition, arguing that since most women were workers, any true liberation must include both “material emancipation,” providing “everything that the people and women need,” as well as “social emancipation” from the false concept of male dominance. Building on the Saint-Simonian argument that capitalism had intensified the subordination of women, the New Women asserted that only egalitarian socialism could free women from slavery to men: “As long as a man provides us our material needs, he can also demand that in exchange we submit to whatever he desires, and it is very difficult to speak out freely when a woman does not have the means to live independently.”²⁸

²⁶ Tribune des femmes, reprinted in Moses and Rabine, p. 291.

²⁷ Tribune des femmes, reprinted in Moses and Rabine, p. 296; Jeanne Deroin, “Profession de Foi,” in Michèle Riot-Sarcey, ed., De la liberté des femmes: “Lettres de Dames” au Globe (1831-1832) (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1992), p. 135.

²⁸ Tribune des femmes, reprinted in Moses and Rabine, pp. 316, 290.

Increasingly, the New Women emphasized their need for financial emancipation from men through “a new organization of the household and industry.” While they debated the values and dangers of sexual liberation, they consistently stressed their need to be freed from the existing choices of marriage, prostitution, or jobs which did not pay enough to live on. “Once woman is delivered and emancipated from the yoke of tutelage and protection of man,” wrote Claire Démar, “once she no longer receives from man her food or wages, once man no longer pays her the price of her body, then women’s existence and social position will derive only from her own ability and works.”²⁹

Démar’s last writing, My Law of the Future (1833), attempted to envision what life might be like once “the heavy chain of slavery” had been cast off and woman had “repudiate[d] the injurious protection of the man who would call himself her master and is only her equal!”³⁰ Arguing that women, like men, desired sexual change and freedom, Démar urged that society liberate women from the necessity to raise children by advocating “social motherhood.” First advanced in Plato’s Republic, this system had those best at it parent raise children instead than those who gave birth to them. Throughout, Démar used the analogy to slavery to urge the liberation of “man, woman, and child” from “the law of blood and from exploitation of humanity by humanity!”³¹

Démar’s pamphlet was reprinted in 1834, but later that year the Saint-Simonian movement collapsed. Some of the New Women followed the “Supreme Father” to Egypt in a quest to find the female messiah; others continued to meet in Paris. From 1836 to ‘38, they contributed to Gazette des femmes, a new feminist journal, edited by the de Mauchamps. Its strategy for feminist reform was to petition the legislature, a new tactic

²⁹ Tribune des femmes, reprinted in Moses and Rabine, p. 321.

³⁰ Claire Démar, Ma Loi d’Avenir, reprinted in Moses and Rabine, p. 181.

in France, and one which historian Claire Moses argues was adapted from the Anglo-American abolitionist movement. Between 1836 and 1839, numerous petitions for women's rights were presented, unsuccessfully, to the French government.³² One for the reinstatement of divorce asserted that

Harmony between spouses, as in all kinds of association, can only result from a relationship of equals...The hideous union of despotism and servitude perverts the master and the slave, and such is our nature that dependence obliterates all affection.³³

It was one of three petitions penned by the next French feminist to use the analogy to slavery to advance women's rights, the individualistic and idiosyncratic Flora Tristan.

Considering herself an independent loner, Tristan read and was influenced by Saint-Simonian writings. When she returned from her 1833-4 trip to Peru, she attended the weekly meetings of the Gazette des femmes editorial board. Her 1838 account of her South American journey, Peregrinations of a Pariah, is filled with comparisons of women to slaves. On a personal level, Tristan described her own situation as that of a woman "enslaved to a man at an age when all resistance was vain" by having married at seventeen. Arguing more universally, she declared that "In Europe, women are men's slaves just as they are here [in Peru] and have to suffer even more from men's tyranny." Throughout, she analyzed the female situation as one of enslavement to individual men, as well as to the all-male institutions of church and state. She urged others to join her "in

³¹ Ibid., pp. 202-203.

³² Claire Goldberg Moses, French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 104-105; Moses and Rabine, pp. 76-77. For an analysis of female petitions to the French legislature between 1830 and 1848, see Michèle Riot-Sarcey, "Des femmes pétitionnent sous la monarchie de Juillet," in Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Lalouette, and Michèle Riot-Sarcey, eds. Femmes dans la Cité (Grâne: Créaphis, 1997), pp. 389-400.

³³ Cited in Máire Cross and Tim Gray, The Feminism of Flora Tristan (Oxford: Berg, 1992), p. 19.

open revolt against a social order which sanctioned the enslavement of the weaker sex.”³⁴

The paired themes of slavery and emancipation run throughout the remaining works of Tristan’s short life.

Her dissection of social conditions in early industrial England focused on British hypocrisy, especially about freedom:

In this country, which claims to be free...one half of the nation is not only deprived of its civil and political rights, it is also in many ways virtually enslaved; women can be sold in the market-place, and the legislative assembly denies them a place in its bosom. Oh shame! Shame on a society that persists in such barbarous customs! What ridiculous arrogance that England should insist on the right to impose her principles of liberty throughout the world! Yet where is there a country more oppressed than England: even the Russian serf is happier than the English factory worker or Irish peasant. Is there any place on earth where women do not enjoy more freedom than in the British Isles?³⁵

Tristan’s hyperbole should not obscure her perspicacious analysis of the situation facing English women and workers. Four years before Engels’s work on Manchester, she maintained that the condition of the English proletariat was even worse than that of most slaves, “but do not think for a moment that I should want to commit the sacrilege of condoning any form of slavery.” Early French feminists’ socialist background led them to see no conflict between the “pauperization” of industrial workers and the condition of chattel slaves -- both seemed the inevitable result of exploitative economic systems.

(American feminists generally argued that slaves were much worse off.)³⁶ In her last completed book, The Workers’ Union, Tristan continued to argue that ending the slavery

³⁴ Flora Tristan, Les Pérégrinations d’une Paria 1833-1834 (1838; reprinted Paris: Maspéro, 1979), pp. 173, 106, 174.

³⁵ Jean Hawkes, trans., The London Journal of Flora Tristan (1840; reprint London: Virago Press, 1982), p. 57-58. Tristan is referring to an account that a man had paraded his wife with a rope around her neck for sale at a Worcester market. I’ve found a number of references to this incident in French writings, but not in British ones.

³⁶ For a discussion of this topic in the United States, see Carl J. Guarneri, The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), ch. 9, “The Problem of Slavery.”

of women through egalitarian, democratic socialism would benefit both the sexes and society as a whole.

Her writings influenced other early European feminists. Subscribers to The Workers' Union included Pauline Roland, Jeanne Deroin's husband, and George Sand. The veteran English abolitionist, Anne Knight, copied pages of Tristan's writings into her diary, in addition to most of Claire Démar's My Law of the Future and other writings of the New Women. In the volatile months following the French Revolution of 1848, these women pressed hard for women's rights, employing the argument that women's situation resembled that of slaves or the proletariat, and that denying them basic civil liberties would cause the revolution to fail.

Knight, who had welcomed the American female delegates to London in 1840, moved to Paris in 1847. During the revolution, she and Deroin addressed a number of public letters to government officials, urging "the complete abolition of all privileges of sex, of race, of birth, of caste, and of fortune" to ensure the success of the new republic. "I have fought for twenty years against the oppression of slavery; this question and that of the rights of women are one," Knight wrote a French minister who had sponsored legislation outlawing women from joining political clubs.³⁷ Influenced by Knight, Tristan, and her early contact with Saint-Simonianism, Jeanne Deroin worked this theme into her numerous writings of the revolutionary years -- so much so that her biographer said that her life's work could be summarized by a single word, "emancipation." "Humanity goes forward...however, woman, still a slave, remains veiled and silent....she

³⁷ Anne Knight, Jeanne Deroin, and A. François, "A M. le Président du Club du Peuple," 18 June 1848 in the Anne Knight Papers, Library of the Society of Friends, Friends House, London; Anne Knight, "Lettre à M. A. Coquerel" (Paris: Madame de Lacombe, 1848), reprinted in La Voix des Femmes, #24, 25 April 1848.

has no name, no country, she is banished from the sanctuary....bent under the yoke of man,” she wrote in a series of lectures she delivered in 1848.³⁸ Her solution was complete equality, the “abolition” of all privileges. One of the first to oppose the socialist anti-feminism of P.J. Proudhon, she deconstructed his famous dictum that women must be either “housewives or harlots” in the pages of her feminist newspaper: “To your dilemma, Monsieur, I will oppose another which for me is an axiom: slave and prostituted or free and chaste -- for woman, there is no middle ground. Prostitution is the result of the slavery of women, of ignorance, and of poverty.”³⁹

Deroin’s daring should not blind us to the difficulties that Frenchwomen faced in employing terms like emancipation and slavery. In March of 1848, a group of women formed the Society for the Emancipation of Women. Their manifesto demanded that liberty, equality, and fraternity be extended to the female sex to ensure the success of the revolution. But they felt compelled to add a footnote to the front page explaining their use of this controversial term:

The word emancipation, in its positive and legitimate meaning, signifies, above all, intellectual and moral liberation. This first and superior condition being, for both sexes, the normal basis of all social progress....The word emancipation is still so often abused that this explanatory note seemed necessary.⁴⁰

This diffidence -- so similar to that of German women in the same era -- presaged the imminent defeat of feminist claims. Activist women correctly feared that their demands and actions would only be interpreted sexually. In an era in which women in general were routinely referred to as “the sex,” any attempt to introduce women’s rights to the

³⁸ Adrien Ranvier, “Une Féministe de 1848: Jeanne Deroin,” *La Révolution de 1848: Bulletin de la Société d’histoire de la révolution de 1848*, 4 (1907-1908), p. 321; Jeanne Deroin, *Cours de droit social pour les femmes* (Paris, 1848), p. 6.

³⁹ *L’Opinion des femmes*, 2, 10 February 1849, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *Société pour l’émancipation des femmes: Manifeste*, 16 March 1848, p. 1.

legislature met with laughter and crude jokes. Female suffrage was defeated 899 to 1. The deposed king, Louis Philippe, had remarked that “she who gives birth should not rule” -- the male revolutionaries of 1848 expanded this dictum by insisting that women’s sexuality prevented them from any participation in the “public sphere” of government.⁴¹ Proudhon’s views -- that a woman’s value was two-thirds that of a man’s, that just as men could not be wet-nurses, so women could not be legislators, that women divided into housewives or harlots -- received the support of the left. The conservative right remained hostile to any extension of women’s rights. By the early 1850s, the French women’s movement, previously “the most advanced and the most experienced of all Western feminist movements,” writes Claire Moses, had been destroyed and silenced. Deroin went into exile in London, Roland died from her harsh life in prison, Voilquin emigrated to Louisiana, others left for Belgium and Switzerland.⁴²

In the 1850s, a few stalwart Frenchwomen continued to press for feminism, but they were forced begin by countering Proudhon. Juliet Adam’s Idées anti-proudhoniennes of 1858 continued to use the concept of emancipation on women’s behalf, but dropped any overt comparison to slavery. Over half her text was spent refuting the new socialist anti-feminism. Only Jenny d’Héricourt, previously associated with the Saint-Simonians, continued to use the slavery analogy consistently, and in the 1850s she could not get her writings published in France. But she too remained on the defensive. Her 1860 treatise, The Freed Woman, had as its subtitle A Reply to Messieurs Michelet, Proudhon, etc. and d’Héricourt prudently avoided the French word “émancipée” in favor of the less provocative “affranchi.” However, d’Héricourt

⁴¹ “Ce qui accouche ne doit pas régner.” Cited in Priscilla Robertson, Revolutions of 1848: A Social History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 38.

passionately battled Proudhon's misogyny. In 1856, he had written that "the sort of crusade that is being carried on at this time by a few estimable ladies in both hemispheres in behalf of the prerogatives of their sex...[is] an infatuation that proceeds precisely from the infirmity of the sex and its incapacity to understand and govern itself." D'Héricourt replied:

An infatuation like that of slaves, pretending that they were created freemen; of the citizens of '89 proving that men are equal before the law. Do you know who were, who are the infatuated? The masters, the nobles, the whites, the men who have denied, who do deny, and who will deny, that slaves, citizens, blacks, and women, are born for liberty and equality.⁴³

By 1860, when d'Héricourt wrote, this nation was on the brink of civil war.

Within a few years, the United States ended legal slavery and Russia freed its serfs.

Western feminists used the slavery analogy, which gained a great deal of its power from actual existence of slaves within the Euro-American world, less often. When they did, they extended its reach. In 1867, when the Russian medical student Nadezhda Suslova successfully defended her thesis at the University of Zurich (one of the few medical schools to admit women in these years). Prof. Edmund Rose spoke on her behalf: "Her thesis proves the aptitude of women for scientific work better than any theoretical discussion of the Woman Question. Soon we are coming to the end of slavery for women, and soon we will have the practical emancipation of women in every country and with it the right to work."⁴⁴ "Soon" has not yet arrived. We can only hope that some of

⁴² Moses, French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, p. 149.

⁴³ Madame d'Héricourt, A Woman's Philosophy of Woman, or Woman Affranchised (New York: Carleton, 1864), pp. 36-37. This is an abridged translation of d'Héricourt's La Femme affranchi, 2 vols. (Brussels and Paris: A. Lacroix, Van Meenen, 1860).

⁴⁴ Cited in Thomas Bonner, To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 37.

us may witness the time when the analogy of slavery to women's situation will no longer be used because the conditions which created it have completely disappeared.