



MAKING THEIR PLACE

FEMINISM AFTER SOCIALISM
IN EASTERN GERMANY

KATJA M. GUENTHER



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Abbreviations

ABM	Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (Employment Creation Measures; see also SAM)
ASF	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialdemokratische Frauen (Working Society of Social Democratic Women)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union)
CDU-FU	FrauenUnion der Christliche Demokratische Union (Women's Union of the Christian Democratic Union)
DFB	Demokratischer Frauenverband (Democratic Women's Association; postunification name of DFD)
DFD	Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands (Democratic Women's League of Germany, East Germany); see also DFB
EU	European Union
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
FTZ	FrauenTechnikZentrum (Women's Technical Center)
GB	Gleichstellungsbeauftragte (Gender Equity Representative)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
LFR-MV	Landesfrauenrat Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (State Women's Council of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania)
LFR-TH	Landesfrauenrat Thüringen (State Women's Council of Thuringia)

PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
RFI	Rostocker Frauen Initiativen (Rostock Women's Initiatives)
SAM	Strukturanpassungsmaßnahmen (Structural Adjustment Measures; see also ABM)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
UFV	Unabhängiger Frauenverband (Independent Women's Association)

Making Their Place

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1 The Place of Feminism After Socialism

THE COLLAPSE OF STATE SOCIALISM in eastern and central Europe in 1989 transformed the world. International leaders hailed the dawning of a new era in which formerly socialist states were to flourish socially, economically, and politically. In spite of these optimistic predictions, struggle has marred the road toward long-term stability. Citizens of formerly socialist states have faced a plethora of problems including interethnic conflict, political division, economic meltdown, and soaring unemployment.

In much of the region, women disproportionately shoulder the burden of the challenges of life after socialism. Women were typically better represented among workers in socialist states than in the capitalist West, but they have been consistently overrepresented among the un- and underemployed in many parts of eastern and central Europe since 1989. While postsocialist transformations have created new opportunities for women, especially for those with specific skills (see, for example, Ghodsee 2005), women overall have witnessed the loss of state support for their economic activity, the curtailing of their reproductive rights, and the rise of traditional gender ideologies that value women primarily as mothers and wives rather than as active participants in the labor market and political life.

Across eastern and central Europe, women have resisted these changes. The most visible feminist mobilization in the region was the East German feminist movement, which worked to integrate women's issues into the calls for a reformed socialism during the tumult of 1989. Yet the national-level mobilization of the East German feminist movement survived only a few months after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Since that time feminist activity

in both eastern Germany and other parts of postsocialist Europe has largely disappeared from public view.

Still, in eastern Germany—as elsewhere in eastern and central Europe—women continue to organize. Cities and towns throughout eastern Germany are home to feminist organizations that address issues like violence against women, women's un- and underemployment, women's political representation, and family and childcare policy. The eastern German cities of Rostock and Erfurt, for example, have each given rise to more than a dozen women's organizations since 1989. These local women's organizations—and the local feminist movements they comprise—emerged when forty years of state repression ceased and the sudden installation of democracy created new arenas for activism and engagement.

Both the local feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt formed around a fundamental concern for the well-being of women. They offer social services while also engaging in political advocacy and public awareness campaigns to increase women's status and challenge gender inequalities within a range of institutions such as the family and the state. Both movements started out seeking to help women cope with the sudden rupture as socialist East Germany unified with the democratic, capitalist, and less gender egalitarian West Germany. The feminist organizations in the two cities address the same issues, including women's unemployment and violence against women. Both operate in the same political structures and the same national political climate and culture. Even the cities that are home to these two movements are uncannily similar in terms of their sizes and population characteristics.

Yet while the feminist movement in Rostock has been a startling success in many ways, the movement in Erfurt has struggled. The two movements have embraced different feminist ideologies and divergent strategies for effecting change. More recently, they have taken dissimilar positions vis-à-vis the rise of the European Union (EU) as a source of gender equality policy.

How has this happened? Why were the paths of the feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt after unification so different? Given shared experience with socialism and German unification, and common political structures and institutions, shouldn't these movements be relatively similar? This book examines local feminist movements after socialism and explains why these feminist formations vary across places, even within the same national state. I draw on interview, observational, and archival data to analyze the central differences, as well as important similarities, between the feminist movements in Rostock

and Erfurt. I chronicle the continued resistance of women in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) to the new expectations for gender and gender relations introduced in eastern Germany as a consequence of German unification in 1990. What emerges is a story not just about two feminist movements but also an analysis of how the people and structures in two cities struggle to define themselves, their values, and their understandings of gender in a period of monumental social, economic, and political upheaval.

While the national-level feminist mobilizations during the immediate unification period of 1989–90 garnered significant public and scholarly attention, interest in women's organizing in eastern Germany largely disappeared when national-level mobilization ceased. This shift gives the impression that the feminist movement in eastern Germany is a thing of the past, and that the spate of problems women faced as a consequence of unification was resolved. In reality, feminist organizing after 1990 has been widespread and remains important precisely because of the stubbornness of many of the gendered social problems resulting from unification, including high rates of un- and underemployment and outmigration among women.

I focus on feminist organizing at the local level both to bring postsocialist feminism to light and to incorporate localized social movements into scholarly discussions of social movements. The relative neglect of local social movements within the rich literature on social movements obscures activism at the non-national level as apolitical or as less meaningful than activism targeting the national state. This in turn renders much of women's social movement activity invisible or unimportant as women are often more active and visible as social movement actors at the local level (Eschle 2000; Ferree and Mueller 2004; Klawiter 2008; Ray and Korteweg 1999; Taylor 1999).

A framework centered on place illuminates why local movements develop differently. Place is typically conceptualized as occurring along three dimensions (Agnew 2002). First, place refers to locale, or the site of daily, routine life. Second, place invokes a geographic location that expresses relationships and connections among different spaces and forces, including political, social, and economic processes. Finally, place summons a sense of collective identity and of belonging through bonds that individuals and communities develop for the settings in which they lead their lives.

Places are not static; they change and can be changed, over time and in response to internal and external pressures (Guenther 2006; Paulsen 2004). Places are in a constant state of reproduction and reformulation, reflecting

social relations and practices and involving struggles over power and meaning. Local social movements are both the outcomes of, and participants in, the project of making places. While the specificities of place can limit possibilities for social action, local movements can also mobilize place and its attendant identities to redefine the logic of a place, to align their interests with those of other actors working to build and maintain local identities and ideologies, and even to create their own political and discursive opportunities. Thus, place is an evolving project, the exact contours of which are an accomplishment rather than a given.

The concept of place—which cultural and social geographers largely developed—is especially useful as a lens through which to examine social movements because it allows for the synthesis and expansion of political and cultural perspectives on social movements. Political process theory typically focuses on the importance of political opportunities for movement success and privileges the state as the central target of movement activity. Political process perspectives explore how states contribute to the formation of social movements and their outcomes, often focusing on political opportunity structures like the presence or absence of political allies and shifts in the political balance of power as critical in giving rise to social movements, and in shaping organizational dynamics, activities, and outcomes (see, for example, Kriesi 1995; Minkoff 1999; Tarrow 1994, 1998). Cultural perspectives, which stem from the new social movement tradition, elevate issues of identity and solidarity and have been especially widely utilized in studies of feminist and women's movements (Taylor 1996; Whittier 1995). While both perspectives offer useful sensitizing concepts for understanding the development and outcomes of social movements, they also provide partially obscured views of social movements. Previous efforts at addressing the importance of the local for social movements (Hellman 1987; Ray 1998, 1999) have stressed political, institutional, and organizational dynamics to the exclusion of considering the historic trajectories of place and the intersections between local cultures, identities, and politics.

A framework organized around place recognizes the salience of *both* a place's structures of power *and* cultural practices for the emergence of social movements. Different levels and units of governance have their own rules of political engagement, distributions of power, and political leanings. Likewise, cultural practices and norms vary across locales. Thinking about place attends to both of these dimensions in trying to understand the emergence and outcome of social movements.

Understanding feminism in eastern Germany requires attention to politics and culture. Not only did women experience changes in both of these domains, but they also participated in efforts at changing both of these domains. Women's issues like violence against women, for example, involve political and cultural norms and problems. Movement goals include effecting policy outcomes and cultural changes. Rather than seeking to separate or compartmentalize politics and culture, I integrate them in my analysis, recognizing their distinctive and common parts in unraveling the roots of the variations in feminism after socialism.

Thinking about place also enhances knowledge about gender for, as Doreen Massey (1994) argues, places vary in their expectations of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between them. Although the sociological literature on gender widely recognizes gender as context-specific, sociologists have yet to fully engage with how or why specific gender systems surface in particular places. In examining the feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt, I uncover important differences in how gender is understood in these two places, and I trace these understandings to specific mechanisms and features within the cities' place characters.

Place and the politics of place character—or how different social actors struggle to define a place and its significance—have been crucial to the development and outcome of the local feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt. The specificities of any given place help explain the feminist formations within that place. Local contexts shape various aspects of social movement organization, identity, strategy, and outcome. As cultures, traditions, and networks differ across specific locations, women's movements may utilize location-specific tactics, including framing strategies (Benford and Snow 2000), have access to unique, local cultural (Swidler 1995) and organizational (Clemens 1993) repertoires and sources of collective identity (Melucci 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Thayer 1997), and be able to offer participants different types of selective incentives (Heckathorn 1996; Knoke 1988).

Because different levels of the state vary in their practices of, and ideas about, gender, women's organizations working in different geopolitical spaces face different political constraints and opportunities. Simultaneously, feminists mobilize to reinforce or reinterpret how they understand the places to which they belong. In both Rostock and Erfurt, the local feminist movements have sought to participate in how the place of the cities is defined, but the extant contours of the cities' place character, or specific combinations of politics,