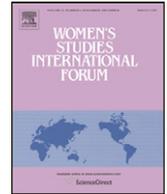


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Book review

Domestic Violence in Postcommunist States, Fábíán Katalin (Ed.), Local Activism, National Policies, and Global Forces, Indiana University Press (2010), 372 pp., ISBN: 978-0-253-355041, 978-0-253-22218-3

As its title indicates, domestic violence in post-communist states is an intriguing issue on two counts: firstly, as Katalin Fábíán herself underlines, the application of the term *domestic violence* is still widely discussed; secondly, *post-communist states* encompasses countries with very disparate cultures and histories whose contemporary circumstances are subject to many contradictory global and local developments and influences.

The volume is divided into two sections. The first, entitled *The development of domestic violence policy in postcommunist states* presents different issues pertaining to domestic violence in six states drawn from the variegated postcommunist landscape, from the vastness of Russia to small Slovenia. The studies encompassed such topics as transnational advocacy campaigns, violence prevention, terminological problems in writing about violence, the development of domestic violence activism, awareness politics, as well as the influence of practice on the creation of legislation.

The presentation of the historical development of domestic violence policies in postcommunist world is somewhat hindered because four of the case studies pertain to Soviet successor states: The Ukraine (by Alexandra Hrycak), Russia (Janet Elise Johnson and Gulnara Zaynullina), Kazakhstan (Edward Snajdr) and Tajikistan (Muborak Sharipova and Katalin Fábíán) were, prior to their independence, subjected to the same state authority and thus their domestic violence policies were alike—in that there were none, and from this perspective the institutional and non-institutional starting points were alike. At the same time, however, the socio-cultural traditions of these countries, together with their level of political and social development, differed enormously upon the fall of the Iron Curtain. In this, Tajikistan was an extreme example, devastated by 5 years of civil war in the post independence period.

The beginnings of concerted efforts to counter domestic violence in the early 1990s, as is exhaustively documented in Katalin Fábíán's book, were characterized by close cooperation with Western and international foundations and

projects, as well as by the influence of Western models, which were in need of a deal of adaptation to meet local needs and circumstances. As these countries had no tradition of tackling the issue of domestic violence—neither with regard to state policies nor through the activities of autonomous women's NGOs—the West–East encounter should be evaluated as fairly successful despite—in the words of Fábíán—the “quite pessimistic” opinions of some authors.

The remaining two countries presented in these case studies—Poland, analyzed by Thomas Chivens, and Slovenia by Sonja Robnik—enjoyed quite different socio-political situations prior to 1991: Poland had been part of the Eastern Bloc, while Slovenia was a constituent republic of Yugoslavia, itself independent from the Soviet sphere of influence since 1948. Poland experienced the development of endeavours to counter domestic violence in the 1990s, and this was based on the work of informal feminist groups back in the 1980s. Slovenia's first help line for women and children who were victims of violence was established by a feminist group in 1989, prior to the change of political regime. In Poland and Slovenia feminist movements developed their own concepts, or at least the germs of concepts, of work aimed at countering domestic violence.

Given these various backgrounds, the six case studies cover very different examples of the development of policies addressing domestic violence. They offer the reader a most informative and analytical insight into a variety of possible ways in which the problem of domestic violence may be tackled.

The second part of the book focuses on *International organizations and domestic violence policy in postcommunist states*. Four essays, written by Katalin Fábíán, Laura Brunell and Janet Elise Johnson, Celeste Montoya and Olga Avdeyeva, provide an overview of NGOs and institutional networks working against domestic violence within the EU and beyond. While underlining the importance of international treaties and obligations, the authors also state that these are no guarantees that state parties improve, or even introduce, appropriate policies to combat violence within their respective countries. Nonetheless, international obligations can be, and were, useful tools in NGOs exercising pressure on states' actors to convey the official policies into more concrete measures.

Together with the editor's comprehensive introductory article on the politics of domestic violence in postcommunist states in Europe and Eurasia, this book offers excellent insight

into different aspects of developing domestic violence policies (e.g., social, political, legal, terminological, etc.). It also fairly emphasizes that the association of local and international NGOs on the one hand, and international organizations on the other, has been a crucial factor in influencing the development of national domestic violence policies.

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