

***Domestic Violence in Postcommunist States. Local Activism, National Policies and Global Forces.* Ed. Katalin Fábián. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. viii, 372 pp. \$21.20, paper.**

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This edited volume by Katalin Fábián is a welcome addition to the still scarce literature on violence against women in postcommunist states. The contributing authors are academics, practitioners and independent experts. They deftly dwell on a unique combination of knowledge of the topic (violence against women) and expertise on the region to develop highly informative case studies. We learn in detail about domestic violence reforms in Ukraine (Hrycak, ch. 2), development of domestic violence legislation in Slovenia (Robnik, ch. 7), the landscape of movements against domestic violence in Central and Eastern Europe (Fábián, ch. 8), and the translation of global feminist norms by activists in Russia (Johnson and Zaynullina, ch. 3) and Kazakhstan (Snajdr, ch. 4). The richness and novelty of the case studies included in this volume make it an exciting read.

The volume achieves an impressive geographical coverage that is truly representative of the postcommunist space. Equally impressive is the range of disciplines, methodologies, and methods that this volume brings together. The essays included therein probe theories of the circulation of global (feminist) norms, social movements' engagement with such norms at the interface of local activism and foreign funding, and movement impact on policy developments. Thus, the volume promises to contribute to debates in social movements scholarship and comparative politics. On the other hand, the variety of disciplinary inquiries and methodological approaches, combined with the geographical breadth, make it difficult to draw comparative conclusions.

Overall, the volume's contributions to the abovementioned academic fields are probably stronger in terms of mapping research agendas, rather than yielding comparative findings. For example, we learn how in virtually every context from Central and Eastern Europe (Fábián in ch. 8) to Russia (Johnson and Zaynullina in ch. 3), and Kazakhstan (Snajdr in ch 4), activists translated (Merry 2006) and 'vernacularized' global feminist norms. Local women's advocates folded terminologies of violence against women within terms, concepts and ideologies that were more acceptable in their own contexts. They pursued strategies that were culturally amenable to their goal of putting domestic violence against women on the policy agendas of their countries. The next comparative step would be to analyze how these movement strategies affected policy outcomes. What are the similarities and differences across these diverse, but comparable, contexts? The case studies offer elements for such an analysis, but more systematic comparison would be needed to arrive at robust conclusions, as Laura Brunell and Janet Johnson do in their chapter on "How Transnational Feminist Networks Promote Domestic Violence Reform in Postcommunist Europe" (ch. 8).

One of the central findings of the volume is that Eastern European and Eurasian 'local' activists against domestic violence are not mere recipients of global norms, but they actively shape them. In chapter 3, Janet Johnson and Gulnara Zaynullina provide a nuanced and convincing account of how Russian feminist writings on domestic violence "added" (p. 90) economic violence to the globally circulated definition of violence against women coming from

the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), CEDAW General Recommendation 19 (1992) and other central documents, such as those agreed on at the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. It is perhaps not surprising, as Fábíán rightly proposes (p. 30), that Russian/ Eastern European feminists would re-inject life into theories that link violence against women to structural economic inequalities, as they resonate well with Marxist/ socialist perspectives. The idea of “economic abuse” also belonged to the initial feminist theories of violence of the early 1980s (such as the Duluth Power and Control model), but by the time the movement became global in the 1990s, it had become de-radicalized and co-opted by liberal legal norms, at least in the United States.

However, the conclusion that Fábíán draws in her editorial introduction about the global impact of Russian feminists’ conceptual developments seems stronger than what the evidence presented in the volume suggests. According to Fábíán, “[p]ostcommunist activism added economic violence as a structural consideration to a previously service-oriented understanding of domestic violence” (p. 30). Johnson and Zaynulliana’s conclusion is more nuanced on this point; they rather propose that Russian activism “reinforced pressures” for the inclusion of economic violence in the definition of violence against women that were also coming from elsewhere, especially East Asia and Central America (p. 103). Sonja Robnik (ch. 7) offers additional evidence for Fábíán’s conclusion, as she shows that economic violence was included in the Law on Family Violence Prevention in Slovenia (2008), as a result of civil society organizations’ advocacy for a broad definition. However, it is unclear whether this example provides evidence of impact on global norms, as the definition of violence against women had already been reformed at that time, significantly with the inclusion of economic violence in the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Women (2006). Regardless of the strength of the feedback loops to the global norms, the ‘local’ activists in Russia, Slovenia and elsewhere did transform these norms in their contexts. Thus, the case studies in ch. 3 (Johnson and Zaynullina), and, partially, ch. 7 (Robnik) and ch. 2 (Hrycak), illustrate the theoretical understanding that “transnational organizing is not a unidirectional process but a global-local intersection where resources, ideas, and benefits can flow both ‘in’ and ‘out’” (Sperling, Ferree, and Risman 2001: 1155, quoted in Johnson and Zaynullina, p. 80).

Another important contribution of the volume is to show how movements against domestic violence draw on particular discursive opportunities, and mobilize and use the (discursive) resources provided by categories other than gender. Ethnicity is a case in point. Edward Snajdr’s analysis of activism against domestic violence in Kazakhstan (ch. 4) shows how “[e]thnicity serves activists as a surrogate theme, which may be ambiguously performed in order to promote, on the one hand, local solidarity with Kazakhstan’s ethnic revival and, on the other, international solidarity with the global women’s movement” (127).

Finally, a recurrent theme for virtually all contributions to this volume is that of the influence and consequences of foreign funding for local activism against domestic violence. Each contributor to the volume offers important lessons learned on what foreign funding enables, as well as what it does not, for local activists. Cautionary tales abound. While all contributors include foreign funding as one factor implicated in their analysis, Celeste Montoya’s piece (ch. 10) brings the inquiry to the center of her analysis. Employing network analysis, she shows how EU funding, through the Daphne programs, contributed to reforms to address different forms of violence against women in countries on the way to EU accession.

The volume will be of interest to scholars of violence against women and post-communism from a variety of disciplines, but also to on-the-ground practitioners who can draw on the rich lessons learned included in the studies.

References

Merry, Sally Engle. (2006). "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle." *American Anthropologist* 108: 38–51.