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 nonnational 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,

economy, geography, history, culture, and organizations that interact and endure over time, presented these two feminist movements with different constraints and opportunities. Ultimately, the feminist movement in Rostock has been more successful in participating in the process of making place than that in Erfurt since German unification in 1990.

Local places are situated within nested arenas of social action, and local social actors capitalize on—and manipulate—relationships with other levels of action to promote specific understandings of their local place. In a complex global environment, this means that diverse social actors—including feminist movements—can attempt to participate in the process of making place and of defining the linkages between places. For example, policymakers in Rostock largely reject the federal unified German state as a legitimate source of identity or politics, but embrace the EU as a meaningful and important partner in the development of the city and its sense of place character.

Even in an increasingly global world, local places also shape how people experience life. Local norms and identities serve as filters for understanding processes of globalization. Through "glocalization," local places moderate the demands and effects of global processes.[1]

Given the multiple scales of action available to social movements in eastern Germany, the women's movements in Rostock and Erfurt have the possibility of jumping scale, or strategically targeting one level of social action over another (Masson 2006; Regulska and Grabowska 2008). For example, many feminist organizations in Rostock bypass the federal state as a site for meaningful social action and instead focus on the EU. Sometimes, what appears to be a constraint at one level of action creates an opportunity for meaningful change at another.

Three interrelated aspects of the places of Rostock and Erfurt have been especially crucial to the ideologies and goals of local feminist movements, the nature of state responses to demands made by these movements, and the paths of movement development (see Figure 1.1). The seeds of these forces took root well before unification. However, their power became evident only after democratization opened new pathways for political participation and protest.

First, political forces include the political climates of the two cities and their respective states, the distribution of political power within these locales, and the dominant goals and strategies of policy actors. Political forces also include the balance of power between state organs and the feminist movement. Particularly important politically are the degrees of legitimacy and capacity of feminist actors and organizations.

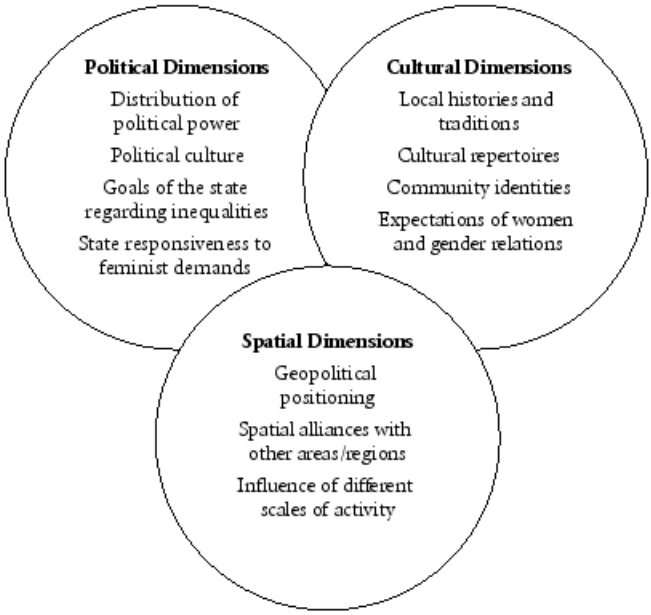

Figure 1.1 Dimensions of Place Salient for Local Feminist Movements in Rostock and Erfurt

Second, cultural forces involve specific local histories and cultural repertoires that create different possibilities for feminist movements to expand, reposition, or come into conflict with, existing traditions, social norms and expectations, and community identities. Especially critical here are socialist legacies, or the memories and (re)interpretations of the socialist past that shape responses and attitudes toward the postsocialist present and future. In the western imagination, socialist legacies are too often represented as archaic anchors to a dismal past, as retardants to progress and the full ascendance of democracy and capitalism. However, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, socialist legacies are not just sources of retardation, regression, or nostalgia. They may also serve as innovative strategies for maintaining individual and group identity and survival (Berdahl 2000a). Rather than being regressive, under specific conditions, socialist legacies may actually be progressive, *enhancing*, instead of limiting, the efforts of feminist movements to achieve gender equality. To illuminate the relationship between socialist legacies and specific outcomes for gender relations, my analysis of the feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt

attends to how, why, from where, and under what set of circumstances feminist activists and community leaders draw on socialist and/or postsocialist rhetoric and practice, and to what effect.

Finally, spatial forces encompass the geopolitical positioning and fictive geographies of the two cities. Fictive geographies refer to spatial alliances, or social constructions of space that bridge multiple geographic locations, allowing inhabitants of one location to claim membership in geographically and geopolitically bounded areas to which they do not ostensibly belong. Spatial alliances are highly relevant for the project of constructing places because who or what a place is aligned with contributes to the character, identity, and practices of that place. Spatial forces also involve dynamics of scale and opportunities for movement across levels of governance to effect change.

Feminist Formations in Rostock and Erfurt

Stretched along the mouth of the Warnow River until it reaches the Baltic Sea coast, Rostock is a city marked as much by wide, open expanses as by crowded, more typically urban cityscapes. Rostock is part of a German periphery that occupies a liminal space between two different Europes: eastern and western. The city is located in the poorest and most rural of the so-called new German states that were once part of GDR. When I first visited Rostock in 2000, the city was still reeling from the changes accompanying the end of state socialism in 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany in 1990. Like so many other cities in eastern Germany, Rostock was being rebuilt and renovated. Scaffolding swathed the majority of the picturesque Baroque and Gothic buildings in the city's historic center. The sound of hammers echoed along every street. A reinvention was underway.

Although only a short ride away on the street car, the Südstadt, or South City neighborhood, feels a world apart from the charming downtown district that has developed over centuries around the University of Rostock, the oldest university in northern Europe. In the Südstadt, the unsightly cinderblock high-rises, or *Plattenbauten*, that characterized East German urban planning stretch in seemingly endless rows. The lawns around the *Plattenbauten* are overgrown and pocked with dandelions. Local youth have spray painted various social and sexual commentaries on benches and trash cans; one wall of a building reads, "Only the pig says capitalism is inevitable."

I follow a sagging footpath to a small cement office building that is wedged between two apartment buildings. A bright purple sign announces that I have

found the Beginenhof, Rostock's women's center. The Beginenhof houses several local feminist organizations that offer an array of services and opportunities, including counseling and advocacy for survivors of physical, sexual, and emotional violence, job training and placement, language instruction, cultural enrichment through art and dance, and political organizing.

The women who work at the Beginenhof are mostly in their forties and fifties. These are women who worked in a range of occupations before unification, holding jobs as diverse as ship's engineer and teacher. Their commitment to gender equality and their need for work led them to women's organizing in 1990. They sit with me in the small café on the first floor where we drink coffee and smoke cigarettes as they share their stories of life in East Germany before and after German unification.

Located in this building since 1994, the Beginenhof is named for the Beginen, or Beguines, a colony of pious women dedicated to altruism and religious mysticism who founded largely self-sustaining communities, mostly in the Low Countries, Germany, and France, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. First recorded as residents of Rostock in the thirteenth century, the Beguines ran a hospice and orphanage until the end of the sixteenth century on a central street still named Beginenberg (Beguines' Hill).

According to its publicity materials, the Beginenhof models itself on a set of underlying principles that governed the medieval Beguines. First, the Beguines lived free from male violence, religious and secular structures of violence, and ideological dogmas. Second, the Beguines fostered a free, solidary society in which women and their children could live and work in an alternative to hierarchically organized guilds and without being forced into isolation from the world at large. Third, the Beguines practiced "social engagement," seeking to interact peacefully and cooperatively with each other and with members of other communities. Finally, the Beguines strived to create communities in which women's diverse life experiences, living arrangements, and thinking could be harmoniously united.

In adopting the name and mission of the Beguines, feminist activists in Rostock successfully co-opted an important local legend to frame their mission as a natural progression of Rostock's history rather than as an abrupt deviation from the city's traditions. As one volunteer at the Beginenhof noted, "This name does not suggest the bra-burning lesbians of the West, but instead a local tradition of women's autonomy." Indeed, in many of its efforts, the feminist movement in Rostock has been able to capitalize successfully on local traditions, norms, and

legends, as well as on the city's leftist political culture, to embed itself as a natural part of the city and to further its aims. In so doing, the feminist movement feeds back into the city's place character. The feminist movement reinforces positive identities and boosts community self-esteem during a period in which the city has suffered a great deal from the overwhelming changes accompanying the end of state socialism and the introduction of capitalism.

In Erfurt, feminists have had fewer opportunities to capitalize on place. Situated in southeastern Germany, Erfurt lies in a politically and socially conservative region. As in Rostock, feminists have actively organized there since 1989. In fact, although the GDR had functionally collapsed several months earlier, many feminists in Erfurt take pride that in July 1990, Erfurt became the first city in the GDR to support a municipal women's center.[2] The feminist movement in Erfurt had an auspicious start, drawing national media attention when a group of feminist dissidents stormed the local headquarters of the East German secret police in Erfurt, setting off a domino effect of similar citizen takeovers in cities across the GDR.

One of my earliest interviews in Erfurt was with the city's Gender Equity Representative (Gleichstellungsbeauftragte, or GB), a political appointee charged with overseeing gender issues in the city and supporting women's organizations. Erfurt is an architecturally austere city with the exception of the charming area around the Krämer Bridge, a 120-meter-long bridge that, with thirty-two houses built on it, is the world's longest inhabited bridge and the only bridge of its kind in Europe. The GB's office sits in the upper floors of what appears to be a former mill not far from the bridge. A tall woman with an imposing stature but a warm smile, the GB glowed like a proud mother as she rattled off the names and goals of the feminist organizations in Erfurt her office has supported over the years. She cheerfully described amicable relationships with the men who have served as mayor during her time as GB. Her enthusiasm for her work was clear as she described her involvement with the first feminist organization in Erfurt, which ultimately gave rise to both of the city's women's centers.

Yet when I asked her about the challenges the feminist movement in Erfurt has experienced, her face darkened. Although appropriately diplomatic, she admitted that Erfurt is not necessarily a city that embraces feminism. After an initial wave of support for feminist and women's causes among city leaders in 1989–90, the political climate of the city and of the local state became increasingly closed to feminist interests. By the late 1990s, as funds earmarked to support social services related to unification dried up, the city sought to mini-

mize its commitments to feminist organizations. City leaders decided to merge the GB's office with the office dedicated to issues of immigration and ethnic diversity in 1997. Women's organizations operating as municipal institutions were terminated and handed over to independent nonprofit organizations. In a political and cultural environment generally hostile to feminist concerns, feminists have struggled to establish a firm foothold in the city. Feminism—and especially the radical strand of feminism adopted by one branch of the local feminist movement in Erfurt—simply didn't align with city's understanding of itself as a place where family and church reign supreme.

In this place, ideological and tactical disagreements emerged both within and across feminist organizations. Groups skirmished over limited resources. Fresh wounds aged into old grudges, inhibiting collaboration and cooperation across organizations and undermining the movement's external legitimacy. Ultimately, feminists were largely excluded from the project of making place in Erfurt after 1989.

Women in eastern Germany experienced the collapse of state socialism as an opportunity—and in many cases even as an obligation—to organize and mobilize as women, for women. Yet such efforts have not been unilaterally successful. When the federal state did not present long-term possibilities for successful agitation by feminist organizations, eastern German feminists focused on subnational levels of the state instead. Here, they perceived greater chances for achieving success and felt more comfortable and capable. Still, not all local places provided optimal conditions for feminists to participate in defining the values, identities, and practices there. Differences in place have created divergent opportunities for women to organize to address the problems and issues stemming from the transformation from state socialism to democratic capitalism.

Gendered Transformations After Socialism

The collapse of state socialism in 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany in 1990 created both problems and possibilities for women living in the former GDR. Unification quickly followed the collapse of the GDR and the ousting of its ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or SED). The victory of a conservative alliance of political parties, led by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, on March 18, 1990, signaled the GDR's acquiescence to move ahead rapidly with unification.

German law provided two options for how unification might progress. One route would have involved the dissolution of the governments of both East

and West Germany and the creation of an entirely new constitution. Instead, unification proceeded under the provisions of Article 23 of the West German Basic Law, which called for the accession of eastern Germany into the existing Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany). The inability of the Soviet Union to support the interests of the GDR and the SED ensured that the unification process would follow terms set by the FRG.

Consequently, rather than adopting East German policies about welfare and gender relations, the West German system was introduced in East Germany. While the debate about abortion rights, which pitted the GDR's liberal policy against a far stricter policy in the FRG, received more public attention than any other unification issue, other key policy arenas affecting women, including employment, child care, pensions, and divorce regulations, were radically revised after unification in ways that have been largely detrimental to eastern German women.

The western German expectation of a male breadwinner family model in which good women stay home to raise their children is reflected in social policies that make it difficult for women to combine mothering with paid employment. For example, while municipalities may be able to allocate funds for child care, the national state does not guarantee child care for children beyond public schooling, and day care is in notoriously short supply in Germany.[3] Women who choose to be mothers in the unified Germany face the dilemma that their earnings may not cover the expense of child care, a conundrum that is especially salient for solo mothers. Mothers, especially those with young children, regularly report employment discrimination (Rudd 1999). Simultaneously, cultural representations of the *Hausfrau* maintain that the ideal mother stays at home throughout her children's time at home, thereby reinforcing state ideology that good mothers are stay-at-home mothers (Rinke 1994). This image is in stark contrast to West and later western German representations of East German mothers as *Rabenmütter*, or raven mothers, who abandon their helpless infant children in unsafe day-care facilities and care more about their work than their family.[4]

Coupled with soaring unemployment, changing gender ideologies and social policies pushed eastern German women out of the workforce and into the home. While both men and women in eastern Germany have felt the overall contraction of the labor market in the new eastern states, women have been disproportionately affected. In 1994, women comprised two-thirds of all those unemployed in the new eastern states (Brown, Jasper, and Schröter 1995).

Women are also less likely to receive services from state unemployment offices. For example, one study of job referrals made by the state unemployment office in East Berlin in 1991–92 found that women received 57 percent fewer referrals to job openings than equally qualified men (Adler and Brayfield 1997).[5]

Loss of employment was accompanied by a loss of state services in eastern Germany. Most detrimental for women who need or want to work outside of the home, day care is no longer guaranteed for children of any age.[6] The reduction in state support for child care, as well as a reduction in how much time employers are required to provide for paid maternity leave, suggests that the unified Germany is less concerned with women's workforce contributions and more concerned with their maternal contributions (Meyers, Gornick, and Ross 1999).

Other social welfare programs have also been revised in ways that disproportionately undermine women's economic independence, thereby increasing women's reliance on a male breadwinner. Pension plans have been pared down and now hinge on previous earnings, placing women at a disadvantage when compared to men who earn more and have fluid work histories. Taxation favors two-parent, married families, and a special tax benefit for families in which one spouse earns significantly more than the other is especially advantageous for those following the traditional family model. Furthermore, many expenses assumed by the GDR, either in whole or in part, are now the responsibilities of individual eastern German citizens. As prices for everything from real estate to food staples skyrocketed through the elimination of state controls and subsidies, incomes dropped just as quickly (Dodds and Allen-Thompson 1994; Meyer and Schulze 1998).

Eastern German women discovered that their primary value lies in their usefulness as mothers and consumers rather than in their capabilities as active participants in the labor market. Increased personal freedoms and decreased protection from the market characterize the so-called emancipation of East Germany. The simultaneous introduction of democratic rights, massive state retrenchment, and a new gender ideology essentially inverted the type of state eastern German women lived under for forty years.

Eastern Germany in the Unified Germany

Women in eastern Germany experience an intersecting marginalization as both women and as eastern Germans. Certainly, eastern Germany's postsocialist experience deviates from those of other post-Soviet states, and many of the problems that plague nations further to the East, such as major interethnic conflict,

complete economic collapse, and struggles to rebuild the state, have not been as pronounced in the eastern German case. Yet an additional challenge for eastern Germany is its unique position as a postsocialist state annexed by an existing democratic superpower. The "wall in the head" is the continued cultural and psychological separation between eastern and western Germans, who often regard one another with animosity and resentment. The unified German government has pumped more than a trillion dollars into the former East Germany with mixed outcomes. Although a few key cities like Dresden and Leipzig are success stories, much of eastern Germany has remained in a consistent economic slump after unification. Eastern Germans have become scapegoats for a range of social and economic problems in Germany, including racist violence and neo-Nazism and a shrinking economy. Western Germans discourses routinely complain that eastern Germans were damaged by communism, rendering them lazy and welfare dependent.

Eastern Germans resent their political marginalization and the denigration of all aspects of the GDR. They also face a heightened sense of relative deprivation vis-à-vis their neighbors in the West (Offe 1997). In East Germany, approximately 50 percent of the population had neither a car nor a color television, 25 percent of dwellings were without indoor plumbing, less than half of dwellings had central heat, and only 16 percent of homes had a telephone (Jarausch 1994). In June 1990, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl promised that the new eastern German states would soon be "blooming landscapes . . . where people will want to live and work." Placing their hopes in such promises, many eastern Germans expected that they would soon share the same standard of living as their western counterparts. Yet eastern Germany continues to lag behind western Germany in terms of infrastructure and basic living standards (Deutsche Bundesregierung 2003, 2004). As much as 12 percent of the population has left the new German states, as Germans call the former East German states, leaving behind empty cities and towns with aging populations. As one eastern German friend told me only half-jokingly, "The only thing Easties can beat Westies at is the number of our unemployed and the size of our welfare rolls."

Eastern Germany constitutes less than one-third of the total population of Germany; the combined population of all of the eastern German states is still less than the population of western Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia. This difference in population renders the eastern part of the country more politically vulnerable as it represents proportionately fewer voters. The size of the eastern German population has been one reason for the strug-

gles faced by the Party of Democratic Socialism (Partei der Demokratischen Sozialismus, or PDS, or, since their merger with the Labor and Social Justice Electoral Alternative in June 2007, Die Linke, or The Left), the postunification reincarnation of the SED, in trying to establish itself a major player in the politics of the unified Germany.[7]

Conveniently dropping the "n" from the German word for nostalgia, *Nostalgie*, creates a word beginning with the German for East, *Ost*. The media has capitalized on *Ostalgie* through the creation of hit game shows on East German trivia and talk shows that specialize in where-are-they-now profiles of East German celebrities (Bach 2002). The Little Green Man, a cartoon figure who alerted East Germans when to cross the street at intersections, is the star of his own trademarked product line featuring t-shirts, backpacks, household items, and key chains emblazoned with his image. East German consumer goods, such as the faux coffee distributed by the SED, have set new sales records, and the GDR's state-manufactured vehicle, the Trabant, or Trabi, has become a prized collector's item (Berdahl 2000b). While the eastern Germans I met and worked with are overwhelmingly grateful for the end of socialism and for unification, they also see many aspects of life in the GDR as superior to life in the unified Germany. Economic insecurity, depopulation and the migration of young eastern Germans to western Germany and other parts of Europe, individualism and a corresponding lack of concern for community well-being, and the symptoms of increased social strain, including neo-Nazism, crime, and drug addiction, are just some of the problems eastern Germans see as the direct outcomes of unification.

What I witnessed in my daily life in Erfurt illustrates some of these problems. I sublet an apartment from a young eastern German woman who moved westward for a job. The apartment was small and cheaply furnished, located at the outer fringe of the city's downtown area in a recently renovated building with nine units. Reflecting the tenant composition of a typical apartment building in Erfurt, a young student couple lived in the apartment below me, three of the units upstairs were inhabited by retirees, and four of the units apparently remained empty.

Each day, I walked one block to an underpass that burrowed beneath six lanes of traffic and a greenbelt to connect my neighborhood to the heart of the city. I didn't especially enjoy this experience: the underpass is dark, dirty, and, especially at night, made me slightly nervous, in part because it attracted a group of men who would stand at its mouth drinking beer and occasionally

issuing lewd comments. Yet I quickly found that passing through the tunnel was an important ritual in that it served as a sobering reminder of the magnitude of postunification transformations. Walking through the underpass transported me from the Thälmannvorstadt, or Thälmann suburb, a bleak neighborhood comprised of a mixture of old brick buildings and cinderblock high-rises, most of which had not been renovated since unification, to the sparkling center of Erfurt. In the underpass, the wind blended the city's various elements—a baby's pacifier, a few empty beer cans, pieces of a Russian-language newspaper, and dozens of leaves and cigarette butts—into unique sculptures. My gaze invariably switched between the heaps of trash and the tunnel walls, which are caked with layers of graffiti. I was walking through an urban art project, appropriately illuminated by the flickering twitches of failing fluorescent lights.

When I reached the other side, I crossed another street, passing a kabob restaurant that was always empty and scurrying down one final narrow road into the city center. Finally, I entered the attractive, albeit somber, core of the city, leaving behind its unsightly, decayed fringes. As the state capitol of Thuringia, Erfurt is a bustling city, and the city's pedestrian zone, anchored on each end with a large plaza, is consistently crowded. While the plazas are large to the point of being overwhelmingly vast, the streets connecting them are tight, narrow, and pretty. Many of the buildings in this area have been beautifully restored since unification. Canals from the Gera River cut through downtown, bringing the cheerful notes of ducks and running water into the mix of sounds that comprise the city's auditory fabric: church bells, the screeching brakes of street cars, the drone of voices, the sizzling Bratwurst on a street vendor's grill.

Here, freed from the smoky convenience stores and dreary second-hand shops in my neighborhood, a world of clean, bountiful consumer opportunities lay at my fingertips. I could browse through the neatly arranged apparel and house wares at one of Germany's more popular and higher-end department stores, Karstadt. I could stock up on scented bath gels or colorful toothbrushes at one of the three gleaming drugstores within a three-block radius, or parade through the aisles of the spacious supermarket. If I got tired, I would find a comfortable place to rest along the large fountain in the middle of the city's shopping mall. When hunger became an issue, the bakery tucked between the boutiques had, by my count while waiting in a long line, seventeen different types of cake available. I could have my cake and eat it, too, all the while listening in on the dozens of mobile phone conversations around me, or to the happy chimes of Euro coins being placed onto the cashier's tray.

All of this, of course, is new. Twenty years after the collapse of socialism in eastern Germany, the memory of the GDR is obliterated in the new shopping arcades of Erfurt. Especially for the city's older people, the changes are overwhelming. I accompanied an acquaintance in Erfurt, Marta, who celebrated her fiftieth birthday in 1989, on an informal tour of downtown in which she pointed out to me what new stores used to be in the GDR. She was amazed by the rapidity of change in the city since unification, and she joked that she barely recognized her hometown anymore. Marta has mixed feelings about the free market system. On the one hand, she is grateful for the availability of basic consumer goods and the overall improvement in the quality of life. On the other hand, she is troubled by what she sees as a materialist obsession, especially among younger people. So many items that were rationed or substituted in the GDR—sugar, flour, coffee—or that were only available after years on a waiting list—like cars and most household appliances—were suddenly abundant. In Marta's view, the glossy stores and their gleaming wares are part of a "cover up, to distract us from what is really going on." Indeed, after walking around downtown, I have largely forgotten the decay of my outlying neighborhood, the continued crisis of un- and underemployment evidenced by the groups of men that congregate on my street corner, and the flight of young people, disproportionately women, to the West. When dusk falls and Marta and I say good-bye for the evening after a dizzying walk through the shopping mecca of downtown, I head back to the tunnel with a sour taste in my mouth.

Ostalgie is but one piece of a complicated puzzle. Certainly, many eastern Germans are grateful for the support they have received from western Germany. They have also widely embraced their entrance into a new and unfamiliar international system. The collapse of the GDR and its fellow Soviet states marked the end of the cold war, and eastern Germany experienced a significant shift in its alliances as the state reoriented itself from East to West. Unification led eastern Germany out of the protectionist Soviet bloc and into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union, shifts that have created unique paradoxes for citizens of the former GDR. In many respects, the gender ideology of the EU is more congruent with that of the GDR than with that of the unified Germany, and insofar as the EU supports gender equity policies, it has become a potential resource for feminist activists. Participation in the EU, and democratization more broadly, have also enabled feminist activists in eastern Germany to build networks and coalitions with women from other countries.

Yet the shift in alliances also repositioned eastern Germany from the top of the status hierarchy in the Soviet bloc to the bottom of the status hierarchy in the EU. While once the most economically powerful of the Soviet satellite states, eastern Germans lived in an economically and politically marginalized region of the EU from the time of unification until the accession of new member states further east in the former Soviet bloc into the EU in 2004. Unemployment in many parts of eastern Germany is at 25 percent with no signs of lessening. Eastern Germans move westward by the thousands in search of improved economic opportunities such that some eastern German areas have lost as much as one-third of their total populations since unification; both Rostock and Erfurt shrunk from cities with populations of more than 250,000 in 1989 to slightly fewer than 200,000 in 2005.

In organizing to respond to the shifting landscape of postsocialist eastern Germany, women, as well as the broader institutions and communities of which they are a part, have mobilized socialist legacies, or the experiential histories of individuals, organizations, and institutions during the socialist period. Although western observers especially tend to think of socialism and postsocialism as monolithic conditions, certainly within the same national state, if not across huge swaths of central and eastern Europe, socialism and postsocialism are distinct across specific geopolitical and temporal contexts. How people experienced socialism, and how they experience postsocialism, isn't necessarily the same in one place or context as it is in another. Rather, these are context-specific experiences, and they are an integral part of local communities and individual lived experience; that is, socialist legacies, too, are a part of place. Variations across contexts have meaningful implications for women's political mobilizations because these variations shape the frames, strategies, and ideologies available to activists and to other social and political actors. In Rostock, for example, the socialist past is often revered, while in Erfurt it is more often rejected and feared. These responses have significant implications for the political cultures of these two cities and their respective regions and for the feminist movements that struggle there.

Furthermore, postsocialist transformations are gendered processes. Discourses and practices of gender are deeply interconnected with postsocialist transformations (Gal and Kligman 2000a), as becomes visible by listening to political rhetoric (Young 1999), observing interactions between clients and social workers in welfare offices (Haney 2002), discussing the balance of work and family with men and women (Nash 1997; Rudd 1999; Sandole-Soroste 2002),

and following debates about abortion and reproductive freedom (Maleck-Lewy 1995; Zajicek and Calasanti 1998). Discourses about gender are not limited to local or national debates; they also reflect international pressures. During the cold war, Soviet bloc states viewed themselves as in competition with the West, and social policy decisions were one area where Soviet states could assert their superiority over the West. The GDR, for example, introduced its liberal policies governing abortion in response to a confluence of factors (Harsch 1997), including in anticipation of the demands of the feminist movement in West Germany (Einhorn 1992; Maleck-Lewy 1995). West Germany, however, pointed to its ability to support a nuclear family model with a stay-at-home mother as a significant symbol of its prosperity and superiority over East Germany.

The competition today is typically less about beating the West and more about catching up to it. Policymakers in eastern Germany closely follow developments in western Germany and in the EU and its member states, and they often adopt external discursive strategies made available through these new resources to advance policy reform and fashion an eastern Germany that looks and feels like western Germany. Still, responses to the shift in alliances from the Soviet Union to western Germany and the EU and its member states vary. Communities negotiate international pressures, models, and resources in divergent ways, with some even rejecting western ideas and strategies. Local actors harness the complex cultural, political, and economic shifts resulting from unification to redefine gender relations in postsocialist eastern Germany in different, and often competing, ways.

Utilizing the term "postsocialist" in and of itself presents an analytic and ethical conundrum that warrants mention here. As numerous scholars of formerly colonized states have argued, the language of postcolonialism may obscure colonial relations that continue to shape the experiences of citizens in postcolonial states. Labeling people as "postcolonial" also contributes to their "othering," rendering them exotic, unequal, and different. Parallel problems emerge in using the term "postsocialist." The discourse of postsocialism conceals the role of both socialism and of cold war politics in these societies. Rather than recognizing continuities, the conversation around postsocialism all too often focuses on ruptures. At the same time, the language of postsocialism marks eastern and central Europeans as distinctly different from western and northern Europeans because of their socialist history. This "othering" has been especially pronounced in public debates about EU expansion, and in Germany it has helped maintain the "wall in the head" dividing eastern and western Germans.