



Language

[F.2. Women under Communism and Post-Communism](#) [1]

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Under Soviet-style Socialism women appeared to enjoy rights that women in the west were demanding: for example in higher education and at work, access to affordable child care and the right to maternity leave, and abortion. However they were noticeably under-represented in politics, on average paid less well than men (tending to have less skilled jobs), and patriarchal attitudes meant that women had to undertake all the burdens of shopping, housework and child-rearing in addition to employment outside the home. There was also concern that abortion was used in lieu of contraception, and women were expected to return to work after paid maternity leave, although in the 1960s and 1970s some countries introduced unpaid maternity leave for up to a year and/or child allowances. The possibility of expressing feminist criticisms was limited by the stringent controls on any autonomous protest – a very small feminist group in the USSR in the 1980s immediately came under KGB surveillance. Moreover when in the post- Stalinist era dissent began to emerge, active women were likely to focus on basic human rights rather than women's issues, although in the ferment of the late 1980s feminist issues began to be voiced. A stronger feminism existed in the GDR in the 1980s, where it tended to be linked to peace issues.

Since 1989 the economic, political and cultural situation has changed radically, and also varies between countries, for example in the political power of the Orthodox or Catholic Churches. In Russia in particular women's position rapidly worsened: as a result of the new market economy (and ensuing economic chaos, poverty and rise in criminality), many more women than men became unemployed and women's average wages had by 1995 dropped to 40% of men's (compared with 70% in the Soviet era). Businesses openly advertised for secretaries who were 'young, blonde, long-legged and without inhibitions'; and rates for the rape and murder of women soared between 1991 and the mid-1990s.

Feminist organizations emerged in the 1990s in Russia and in other parts of the former Communist bloc, for example to provide aid to raped and battered women, and to promote women's representation in politics. In the second decade of the 21st century small but well-publicized radical groups like Pussy Riot have challenged the authorities.

Bull, Anna ; Diamond, Hanna ; Marsh, Rosalind, [Feminisms and Women's Contemporary Movements](#) [2], London, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 286

Covers Europe in the 1990s, including essays on 'Theorizing Feminism in Postcommunism', 'Something Unnatural: Attitudes to Feminism in Russia', 'New Mothers' Campaigning Organization in Russia', 'Its about Helping women to Believe in Themselves': Grassroots Women's Organizations in Contemporary Russian Society' and 'Women's Discordant Voices in the Context of the 1998 Elections in the Ukraine'.

Einhorn, Barbara, [Socialist Emancipation: The Women's Movement in the GDR](#) [3], In Kruks, Sonia ; Rapp, Rayna ; Young, Marilyn B., [Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism](#) [4] New York, Monthly Review Press, , 1989,

Einhorn, Barbara, [Feminism in Crisis: The East German Women's Movement in the "New Europe"](#) [5], Australian Journal of Politics and History, Vol. 41, issue 1 (April), 1999, pp. 14-28

Femen, ; Ackerman, Galia, [Femen](#) [6], Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014, pp. 240



Femen was founded in the Ukraine in 2008 by four women to protest against patriarchy embodied in dictatorship, religion and the sex industry. Their well publicised bare-breasted protests have included a dangerous demonstration in Belarus and opposition to President Putin. They have moved to France and this book was first published in French. A film 'Ukraine is not a Brothel' claimed that Femen's protests were orchestrated and the women controlled by a male svengali. This claim is addressed in an addendum to the English version of the book.

Feminist Review, [Issue on 'Post-Communism'](#) [7], no. 76, Feminist Review, 2004

The editorial comments on key changes for women in the transition from Communism: political representation had dropped; more women were overrepresented among the unemployed; socialist reproductive rights were being challenged; women's domesticity promoted as a virtue; and pornography and marketing of women's bodies seen as 'freedom'. Women were also more vulnerable to various sorts of violence, including sexual harassment at work, domestic violence and sex trafficking.

Funk, Nanette, [Feminism in Former East Germany](#) [8], Dissent, issue (Spring), 1992, pp. 152-156

Gessen, Masha, [Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot](#) [9], Riverhead Books, 2014, pp. 308

Discusses roots of the group founded in 2011 and their international support, especially among musical celebrities, after their 2012 demonstration in Moscow Cathedral, leading to imprisonment of the three involved. See also: Pussy Riot, [Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom](#) [10] London, Feminist Press, , 2013, pp. 152 , including letters from prison, court statements, poems and tributes by international admirers.

Graff, Agnieszka, [A Different Chronology: Reflections on Feminism in Contemporary Poland](#) [11], In Gillis; Howie; Munford, [Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration](#) [12] (F.4.a. [The Third Wave of the 1990s-2000s](#) [13]), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 142-165

Argues 'wave' chronology does not apply to Poland.

Guenther, Katja, [Making Their Place: Feminism after Socialism in Eastern Germany](#) [14], Palo Alto CA, Stanford University Press, 2010, pp. 262

Examines feminist activism in two East German cities, Erfurt and Rostock, in context of economic and political upheaval in former socialist bloc, and the trends undermining the rights and status of women.

Haug, Friga, [The End of Socialism in Europe: A New Challenge for Socialist Feminism](#) [15], Feminist Review, issue 39, 1991

Holland, Barbara, [Soviet Sisterhood: British Feminists on Women in the USSR](#) [16], Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press and Fourth Estate, 1986, pp. 272

Includes chapter by Alix Holt, 'The First Soviet Feminists' on Leningrad group associated with The Almanach: 'Women and Russia' and their club 'Maria'.

Jancar, Barbara, [The New Feminism in Yugoslavia](#) [17], In Ramet, Pedro ; Martin, Chris ; Hopken, Wolfgang , [Yugoslavia in the 1980s](#) [18] Boulder CO, Westview Press, , 1985,

Mamonova, Tatyana, [Women and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union](#) [19], Boston MA, Beacon Press, 1984, pp. 272



Mamonova and three others in the group were forced into exile by the KGB.

Marsh, Rosalind, [Polish feminism in an east-west context](#) [20], Women Writing Online, issue 1, 2009, pp. 26-48

Martens, Lorna, [The Promised Land: Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic](#) [21], New York, State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 273

Writings by prominent intellectuals, including Christa Wolf, exploring how far the GDR gave women the equality it proclaimed.

Molyneux, Maxine, [The "Woman Question" in the Age of Perestroika](#) [22], New Left Review, issue 183, 1990, pp. 23-49

Useful overall summary analysis of changing position of women in communist (and post-communist) countries (including China), with detailed references.

Posadskaya, Anastasia, [Women in Russia: A New Era of Russian Feminism](#) [23], London, Verso, 1994, pp. 256

Study spanning women's position in Tsarist Russia, the Communist period and immediate aftermath of dissolution of USSR.

Racioppi, Linda ; Lee, Katherine O'Sullivan, [Women's Activism in Contemporary Russia](#) [24], Philadelphia PA, Temple University Press, 1997, pp. 277

The opening chapters provide historical context, but the focus of the book is on interviews with leading activists, representing the great variety of ideological standpoints and concerns, to develop an analysis of feminism since the later 1980s.

Renne, Tanya, [Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe](#) [25], Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1997, pp. 256

Includes over 30 contributions from nine countries indicating women's activism on issues such as reproduction, health and abortion, political and legal change and violence against women.

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