

# Women's Movements and Democratic Transition in Chile, Brazil, East Germany, and Poland

*Lisa Baldez*

In many countries women have responded to transitions to democracy by mobilizing along gender lines to advance their own agendas. In countries as diverse as Argentina, Korea, Spain, and South Africa, women saw popular demands for democracy as an opportunity to press for the democratization of everyday life and the extension of women's rights. They mobilized across class and party lines to demand that incoming democratic governments ensured women's equal participation in politics. Yet not all transitions to democracy have been accompanied by the mobilization of women as women. In most of the transitions in Central and East Europe women who participated in dissident movements did not organize on the basis of their status as women. Within democratic transitions, when will women mobilize on the basis of their gender identity? There are three significant causes of women's mobilization: resources, the way issues are framed, and the exclusion of women from the agenda-setting process within the opposition. The key resources that lead to gender-based organizing are preexisting formal or informal networks in which women participate. Direct contact with the international feminist community allows women to frame their situation in terms of their status as women and to organize separately from men. Finally, the systematic exclusion of women from the process of agenda setting affords them an opportunity to unite in a broad coalition on the basis of their shared identity.

This article focuses particularly on this last point. Women's movements represent many different identities, interests, and issues.<sup>1</sup> Despite important differences, however, many women's movements experience a particular moment at which women unite on the basis of their gender identity. At this moment, the peak of mobilization in women's movements, a diverse array of women's organizations comes together to form a coalition that transcends cleavages along class, race, or partisan lines. These peak moments typically occur at a rally, a demonstration, or a conference. They differ from other points in the evolution of a movement in terms of their size, breadth and significance. They frequently constitute the largest convocation of organizations in the history of a movement. They represent the acme of unity and the ideal expression of the goals of the movement, while at the same time encompassing a wide array of interests and issues.

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They typically inaugurate a movement in the public eye and introduce women's demands into the public arena.

Peaks of protest consolidate women's political clout. They attract the attention of (primarily) male political actors, who seek to harness women's capacity to mobilize for their own electoral goals. Interest from political parties leads to the incorporation of women's demands in the political agenda and further fuels popular support for the movement. The coalitions that emerge out of such moments often come to serve as the institutional representatives of the women's movement in the political arena. Scholars and activists alike uniformly acknowledge the importance of these moments in the history of a movement; they take on mythic proportions in histories of movements and in the memories of activists.

The formation of such coalitions is not inevitable, as women's movements typically include groups with diverse and conflicting agendas. What prompts women's groups to coalesce is their exclusion from the process of realignment, the point at which actors within the democratic opposition form new alliances with one another. The exclusion of women and women's concerns from the agendas articulated by primarily male opposition leaders heightens the political salience of gender relative to other cleavages and triggers the formation of a united front among women's organizations.

At the same time, these peak moments prove difficult to sustain. Conflict seems to break out among groups within the women's movement almost as soon as the peak of unity occurs. But the ephemeral nature of these moments does not undermine their significance. Peaks of protest demonstrate women's capacity for mobilization, which attracts the attention of party elites. Once male politicians see women as a constituency worth coopting, they begin to compete for women's support. The advent of electoral competition fragments the movement.

This argument will be examined with regard to three countries in which women mobilized during democratic transition—Brazil, Chile, and East Germany—and one in which women did not—Poland. These cases provide variation on the dependent variable and enhance the validity of the inferences that can be drawn from them.<sup>2</sup> The women's movements that emerged in Chile and Brazil were two of the largest and most vibrant in Latin America; they joined human rights groups, feminist organizations, and shantytown groups organized around issues of economic subsistence. In East Germany the movement included women's peace organizations, lesbian collectives, radical feminists, socialists, and neighborhood groups. In Poland the level of autonomous organizing among women remained miniscule in comparison.

Organizational resources constitute a necessary but not sufficient variable for women's mobilization. In all these cases, women participated in formal and informal networks that provided the infrastructure to build a women's movement. Only in Chile, Brazil, and East Germany were the other two variables present. First, direct contact with feminist activists in other countries persuaded dissident women to consider the advantages of gender-based mobilization. Second, male opposition leaders excluded women

and women's issues from the agendas they established during the process of realignment, as groups within the opposition formed new coalitions that challenged the existing regimes. In Poland only one of these three factors was present: Polish women were highly mobilized through membership in dissident unions. Yet they had very limited access to international feminist ideas, and male opposition leaders included women's concerns in their negotiations with the existing authoritarian regime in the early 1980s. These two factors gave Polish women less reason to organize autonomously.

### **Women's Movements and Democratization**

Initially, research on democratization paid little or no attention to women's participation, but studies of the role of women's movements in democratic transitions have exploded in the past decade and generated a wealth of information and empirical detail about many cases.<sup>3</sup> Many explanations of the conditions under which women mobilize have been offered. Most studies concur that women's movements emerge as a function of some combination of resources, framing, and opportunities, but the way in which these variables are defined differs from case to case. None can be generalized to explain all cases. Systematic comparison across cases and regions reveals three factors as critical to the mobilization of women in democratic transitions: organizational networks, direct contact with international feminism, and exclusion from the process of decision making within the opposition.

**Resource Mobilization** One school of social movement analysis points to organizational resources as the factor that gives rise to mobilization. According to this perspective, movements emerge as a function of individual decisions about the costs and benefits of collective action or as a function of material resources that can be brought to bear on organizing.<sup>4</sup> Factors such as money, leadership, and (especially) existing organizational networks facilitate mobilization. People who already participate in groups can be mobilized around other issues more easily than isolated individuals.

Organizational networks constitute a necessary but not sufficient cause for the emergence of women's movements. In all four cases discussed here, significant numbers of women participated in both formal and informal groups that could have formed the organizational infrastructure of an autonomous women's movement. Many kinds of networks can serve as crucibles for women's organizing; no one particular type of network is required. In these four cases households, churches, and unions generally provided the foundation on which women's movements could be built. In Latin America political parties and international organizations also provided mobilizational resources for women.

In some cases the demands of domestic work forced women to organize collectively. The most explosive rates of mobilization in Latin America took place in poor and work-

ing-class neighborhoods, where deep economic crisis prompted women to organize around household activities, forming soup kitchens, shopping collectives, and craft workshops. Many poor and working-class women became politicized as a result of these informal neighborhood groups.<sup>5</sup> Housework did not have the same impact on women who could employ domestic servants to shop, cook, clean, and care for children. Freedom from the rigors of household labor gave many women time that could be spent on political activities. It changed for women who went into exile and could no longer afford to hire maids. Many women became radicalized as a result of doing housework for the first time.

In the socialist countries performing household tasks in conditions of scarcity also fostered informal networks among extended family members, trusted friends, and neighbors. Accounts of the status of women in Communist countries consistently point to the "double burden" of formal employment and housework as an obstacle to autonomous organizing among women, yet in many cases it promoted social ties.<sup>6</sup> For example, waiting in long lines to buy food was conducive to making connections.

Churches provided dissident groups with space to meet, funding, and, most important, protection from repression. In Latin American countries the Catholic church fostered women's participation at the grass-roots level through ecclesiastical base communities and human rights work.<sup>7</sup> In Poland the Catholic church supported dissident activity through the Solidarity movement. In East Germany Protestant churches played a similar role; their neutrality with regard to the Communist regime allowed them to shelter the opposition.

In Latin America participation in political parties facilitated women's mobilization in two ways. First, it provided women with valuable organizational skills. Second, it often brought them face to face with sexist attitudes of their male colleagues, which fueled awareness of feminist concerns. Aid from international organizations and foreign governments helped incipient women's groups build support and become institutionalized. In the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe dissident groups received far less support from international organizations until after 1989.

In all four countries women were involved in a variety of formal and informal networks that provided the mobilizational resources with which a women's movement could be built. Yet women's movements developed in only three of them. What prompted women to perceive their participation in these networks in terms of women's inequality relative to men and to organize separately from men?

**Cultural Framing** A second aspect of social movement theory has come to be known as cultural framing. Frame analysis highlights the role that ideas, beliefs, culture, and discourse play in shaping collective action. This approach focuses on the way in which activists perceive their status and convey their concerns to the public.<sup>8</sup> The concept of framing suggests that movement discourse is contingent and strategic. The deci-

sion to mobilize as women, for example, represents a decision about how to frame collective action. Women can participate in social movements on the basis of many identities—as workers, students, poor people, or environmentalists—but they will frame their actions in terms of gender identity only if they believe that their concerns stem from their status as women and if they perceive some advantage to be gained by presenting themselves as women to the outside world.

Many have pointed to the diffusion of international feminist discourse as a key factor in mobilizing women in Latin American transitions. According to this view, feminist ideas caught on in part because they differentiated the democratic opposition from the authoritarian status quo.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, while the discourse articulated at international women's conferences was ostensibly available to women from all countries, it did not foster mobilization in all countries. Many women in the former Communist countries explicitly rejected international feminist perspectives. As Czech feminist Jana Hradilková put it, "feminism smells like an ideology, and people have had their fill of ideology here."<sup>10</sup> Communist governments consistently claimed to have emancipated women and to have solved the "woman question" by instituting full employment for women. But these claims rang hollow when participation in the work force did not result in gender equality and did not improve the quality of women's lives.

Thus, international feminism fostered women's movements in Latin America but impeded them in the former Communist countries. However, not all women in Communist countries rejected feminist discourse. In East Germany women embraced international feminism; geographic and linguistic proximity to West Germany gave East German women access to information that allowed them to challenge prevailing views. Moreover, while international feminism inspired women to take action in Latin America, its impact was not automatic or unequivocal. Resistance to feminism has proven strong in Latin America, a region also characterized by a traditional culture that venerates the image of women as mothers. In Latin America women's acceptance of autonomous organizing emerged from long, often conflictual discussions and debates, usually initiated by women who learned about feminism in exile.

Women are more likely to frame their situation in terms of their status as women as a result of direct contact with feminist movements abroad. While many women participated in dissident organizations that included both men and women, only those women who learned about international feminism firsthand perceived their problems in terms of their identity as women and considered the advantages of organizing separately from men. Women who did not have this contact tended to maintain negative stereotypes about feminism. This argument should not be understood to imply that women in authoritarian countries were incapable of reaching such conclusions on their own or that they should have reached them at all. In fact, women brought feminist ideas back to their own countries and served as the main interlocutors of them. Direct and sustained

contact with feminists from other countries presented women in relatively closed societies with a new way to conceive of their situation.

**Political Opportunities** A third aspect of social movement theory maintains that movements rise and fall in part in response to changes within the political arena, known as changes in political opportunities.<sup>11</sup> This approach points to the state as the central interlocutor of collective action in many cases. Recent studies have sought to narrow the concept of political opportunities in order to increase the possibilities of generating predictions about future outcomes.<sup>12</sup> This analysis builds on them by identifying the political opportunities that are relevant in women's movements and explaining why they constitute opportunities for women in particular.

Within cases of transition in Latin America, scholars generally concur that the suppression of conventional forms of political activity under military rule provided a space for nontraditional actors and nontraditional forms of participation to emerge. More precisely, repression directed primarily against male-dominated political parties and trade unions allowed women to develop new styles of political engagement. These spaces expanded as military regimes liberalized but shrank when political parties (re)gained control within the political arena.<sup>13</sup>

To what extent does this argument apply to women's movements in the former Communist countries? The pervasive power of Communist parties clearly limited the space for independent mobilizing, yet the breakdown of these regimes in the 1980s did not always foster the emergence of women's movements. The reason has to do with the dynamics within the opposition itself. One point on which almost all accounts of women's movements and democratization agree is that women in these cases mobilized against authoritarian rule. Women protested against political oppression and economic crisis engendered by the existing regimes. But a closer look at the dynamics of women's mobilization amid transition suggests a more nuanced version of this story. Women also mobilized to protest against exclusion within the opposition. In fact, in transitions away from authoritarian rule women's movements peaked at the point at which actors within the democratic opposition formed new alliances with one another. The absence of women and women's concerns from the agendas articulated by primarily male opposition leaders prompted women's organizations representing diverse interests to unite on the basis of gender identity.

To a certain extent, periods of realignment provided an opportunity for all organized groups within civil society to press for the incorporation of their concerns in the political agenda. Yet in most cases the vast majority of people involved in these discussions were men. Despite whatever role they may have played in opposition activities up to this point, women suddenly found themselves frozen out of the process of negotiating the terms of transition. A close correlation between the timing of coalition formation among male opposition leaders and the peak of mobilization among women indicates

that women mobilized in part to protest their exclusion from the decision-making process that occurred within the democratic opposition itself. In other words, the gendered dynamics of the transition catalyzed the peak moment of mobilization among women's organizations. The common experience of exclusion prompted diverse groups to join together to demand a role in setting the agenda. Where women were included in the process, there was no catalyst for the formation of a women's movement.

## Brazil

When the Brazilian military seized power in 1964, it sought to restructure Brazilian society fundamentally, in economic, political, and social terms. The military regime's policies created three sets of issues around which women mobilized: human rights violations, economic subsistence, and women's rights.<sup>14</sup> Women made up a majority of the participants in approximately 100,000 Christian base communities organized by the Catholic church.<sup>15</sup> Many of these women went on to organize in neighborhoods to demand "adequate schools, health centers, running water, transportation, electricity, housing and other necessities of urban infrastructure."<sup>16</sup> The government did not suppress these groups, but the government's lack of responsiveness and refusal to take women's concerns seriously was a radicalizing experience.

Feminist framing did not automatically take in Brazil. When U.S. feminist activist Betty Friedan visited Brazil in 1971, for example, the press ridiculed her.<sup>17</sup> Things began to change during the period of liberalization in the late 1970s as women who had been exiled began to return home. The experience of living in exile proved humbling for women who had been active in leftist politics. Women suddenly found themselves without jobs, without the support of family and friends, and without domestic servants. For many the loss of identity was acute. As one Brazilian woman lamented: "[When we were in exile] I was his wife. [My husband] continued to be a political activist and I ceased being one."<sup>18</sup> Once abroad, contact with feminist movements then strongly brewing in western Europe and North America gave exiled women a language to make sense of their new status. This language centered on women's awareness of gender inequality and the value of organizing autonomously from men.

Returning exiles brought feminist ideas back with them when they came home. They had a tremendous impact on women's organizing in Brazil, particularly in regard to the issue of movement autonomy. "The exiles literally flooded feminist groups in São Paulo" and "shared their experiences in types of feminist activities unheard of in Brazil before the late 1970s," one activist observed.<sup>19</sup> Women who had been in exile in Italy and France, for example, persuaded others that it was possible to create a feminist movement in a predominantly Catholic culture.<sup>20</sup> International organizations provided resources to bolster these efforts. A 1975 meeting organized to mark the United Nations International Year of the Woman led to the creation of several groups dedicated to pro-

moting awareness of the status of women. Grants provided by the Ford Foundation legitimated research on women's issues and helped institutionalize women's centers.<sup>21</sup> International and regional feminist meetings had a multiplier effect, providing venues for women from all over the world to share their experiences and create networks.<sup>22</sup> By the late 1970s women's organizations flourished in Brazil.

The peak of protest for the Brazilian women's movement occurred in 1979, in the midst of conflicts among the opposition political leaders that ended in a major realignment of the party system. From 1965 to 1979 the military government retained the façade of electoral democracy but permitted only two parties to exist: the progovernment ARENA (Alliance for National Renovation) and the opposition MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement). Growing popular support for the MDB in the 1970s prompted the regime to liberalize, although the government did so in the hopes of remaining in power. To sow dissent within the MDB and weaken the MDB's chances for a victory in the legislative elections in November 1978, the government dropped hints about a future reform of the party system. This strategy worked; although the MDB increased its support in the elections, uncertain signals about the likelihood of reintroducing party competition exacerbated conflicts within the party. In the few months immediately before and after the elections some MDB politicians began "openly working for the creation of other political parties," while others advocated a united front against the government.<sup>23</sup> These conflicts within the opposition and the effort to form new coalitions during this period (late 1978 to early 1979) constitute the beginning of a process of realignment.

Women's groups campaigned to put women's issues on the opposition agenda for the November 1978 elections, but with little success. "Most of the organizations [were] too small to have much impact on their own and [were] often frustrated in trying to make their demands heard through other political channels such as unions and parties. Even the grass-roots Workers' Party ha[d] no women's representation."<sup>24</sup> Exclusion from the process of realignment provided the conditions for women to unite. Women's mobilization reached a peak during this period. On March 8, 1979, International Women's Day, close to one thousand women gathered for a two-day Women's Congress in São Paulo that included women from trade unions, neighborhood groups, feminist organizations, professional associations, mothers' clubs, black feminist groups, and academic research centers.<sup>25</sup> The First National Women's Conference took place in Rio de Janeiro a month later. These events catalyzed mobilization across an even wider range of women's groups. Sonia Alvarez emphasizes their significance in her widely cited study of the Brazilian women's movement. "By 1979, women activists had sparked a burgeoning political movement that appeared to span all social classes, races, and ideologies."<sup>26</sup> Thus, while Brazilian women began to organize against authoritarianism in the early 1970s, the movement did not peak until the beginning of 1979. Its peak coincided with the emergence of competing coalitions within the opposition.

Women's organizations continued to proliferate in the 1980s, but the unity evident at the First Women's Congress soon dissolved. The anticipated reform of the party system



came in November 1979, when President General João Batista Figueiredo dissolved the two party system and decreed a law that permitted the formation of new parties out of the MDB. Five new opposition parties formed between 1979 and 1981: the Popular Party, the Brazilian Labor Party, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, the Democratic Workers' Party, and the Workers' Party. The military government hoped that the various factions would compete against one another and weaken support for the opposition, but its strategy strengthened the links between politicians and the grass roots.<sup>27</sup> All of the opposition parties began to compete for the support of women's organizations. Realignment thus further spurred popular support for the women's movement because of a convergence of interests between the new parties and women's organizations. As Alvarez writes, "during *abertura* [opening], the opposition actively courted women's support. And women's movement organizations overwhelmingly supported the opposition, mobilizing thousands of women for electoral participation and promoting antiregime mass rallies."<sup>28</sup> All the new parties included at least some of women's demands on their agendas.<sup>29</sup> Yet the realities of electoral competition also fragmented the movement, as different groups aligned themselves with particular parties.

## Chile

The military government that seized power on September 11, 1973, employed draconian measures in its efforts to achieve economic stability and political order. It banned political parties, shut down congress, and engaged in a systematic campaign of terror and repression that resulted in the torture, death, and disappearance of thousands of people. During the first ten years of military rule under General Augusto Pinochet fierce repression curtailed overt expressions of opposition to the regime. Scores of organizations formed clandestinely. Chilean women played a prominent role in this underground opposition. They organized along three lines, in a pattern similar to Brazil. Human rights groups grew out of women's efforts to support political prisoners and locate relatives who had been detained. Women in poor and working-class urban neighborhoods organized economic subsistence groups to deal with economic crisis and cuts in social spending. In the late 1970s university-educated women, many of whom had been active in Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government, organized small, informal feminist discussion groups to reflect on the changes that living in a dictatorship had wrought on their lives.<sup>30</sup> International support proved critical in the emergence and survival of all of these groups. The Catholic church provided safe places to meet for many of them. Religious men and women helped to organize soup kitchens and women's centers in the shantytowns around Santiago. By the early 1980s Chilean women had created a dense organizational network.

Women who returned to Chile after spending time in exile brought back ideas about feminism with them, particularly from countries with active feminist movements, such

as Sweden, Canada, Austria, West Germany, and the U.S. As in Brazil, women living in exile bore the full responsibility for household chores and child rearing for the first time in their lives.<sup>31</sup> The experience forced women to confront the oppression of women in the domestic sphere firsthand.

Ideas about feminism were not new to Chile. Media sources from the period indicate awareness of women's liberation movements in other countries. Prior to the 1980s, however, Chileans tended to view feminism either as radical man hating that violated traditional gender norms or bourgeois false consciousness that betrayed the prospects for socialist revolution. Living in exile provided some Chilean women with a different context in which to interpret feminist ideas. Feminism gave these women a language to make sense of their experiences and showed them the value of identifying with women as women in a way that transcended national boundaries and national identity. Chilean women did not accept foreign ideas about feminism uncritically, but rather forged uniquely Chilean interpretations through a process of discussion and reflection.

As in Brazil, funding from international organizations, particularly the Ford Foundation, allowed women academics to conduct research on the status of women. Studies published by groups such as the Center for Women's Studies (CEM) raised awareness of women's subordination and helped to build support for the movement.<sup>32</sup> Chilean sociologist Julieta Kirkwood played a critical role in the process of "translating" feminist ideas through her writings and the many workshops she conducted in Chile.<sup>33</sup> Participation in regional and international conferences strengthened the incipient movement and provided a space for the further articulation of autochthonous understandings of feminism.

Potest in the Chilean women's movement peaked in 1983. In May 1983 Chileans opposed to the regime organized a mass demonstration in Santiago. Organizations representing labor, students, human rights groups, the poor, and white collar professionals took the streets to denounce the regime. The surprising success of this demonstration triggered a series of general protests that took place every month for the next three years, until 1986. The opposition political parties moved quickly to assume leadership of the protests. Defying the regime's ban on party activity, opposition politicians formed two separate alliances. Both alliances sought to control the protests and promoted popular mobilization as a strategy to unseat the military, but they disagreed vehemently on other points of strategy.

On August 7, 1983, the centrist Christian Democratic party joined moderate factions of the Socialist Party and other leftist parties to form the Democratic Alliance (AD). Foremost on their agenda were acceptance of democratic institutions, rejection of violent tactics, and support for capitalism. This center-left coalition represented a significant shift within the opposition forces; the Christian Democrats had initially supported the military takeover.<sup>34</sup> The Democratic Alliance initiated negotiations about the terms of transition with the Pinochet government, but it soon became clear that Pinochet had no intention of giving control back to civilians and that the AD had been premature in

its efforts to engage in a dialogue with the government. In response to the AD's miscalculation, the radical left parties formed the Popular Democratic Movement (MDP). The MDP coalition favored armed confrontation with the regime over a negotiated return to democratic rule. The formation of these two competing coalitions constituted a realignment, the emergence of viable, coordinated alternatives to the military regime for the first time since the coup.

Conflicts over strategy between these two coalitions galvanized women in the opposition. In November 1983 a group called Women for Life (*Mujeres por la Vida*, MPLV) unified women across party lines. The sixteen women who formed the group represented the full spectrum of political parties within the opposition. They served as referents of various positions but did not represent their parties in an official capacity. Even though they were party leaders, they framed their actions in terms of women's status as political outsiders in order to highlight their exclusion from the decision-making process. Women for Life saw the task of inspiring unity within the opposition as one that women were uniquely qualified to carry out. In the opposition paper *La Época*, on January 4, 1988, for example, Women for Life leader Fanny Pollarolo claimed that the group's task was "to inspire the spirit necessary to unify the opposition, to overcome the ineffectiveness of the men."

On December 29, 1983, Women for Life held a massive rally in the Caupolicán Theater in downtown Santiago. This event drew 10,000 women representing a diverse array of issues and interests from all the factions within the opposition, the Democratic Alliance and the Popular Democratic Movement, and activists from human rights groups, subsistence organizations, and feminist collectives. The rally catalyzed the formation of a broad-based, multisector women's movement. Women had formed separate organizations prior to this point, and many of them had participated in the general protests, but not in a coordinated way under a single banner.<sup>35</sup>

The success of the Caupolicán rally got the attention of party politicians. As María Elena Valenzuela notes: "Women for Life became the reference point for political organizations on women's issues as well as the most important arena for convening and discussing the social mobilization of women."<sup>36</sup> MPLV sent a representative to the Civic Assembly, the main forum for hammering out an agenda for the transition, and political parties across the political spectrum adopted women's concerns onto their platforms.<sup>37</sup> But the unity expressed at the Caupolicán rally did not last long. Soon afterwards, the movement split along partisan lines. Ultimately, women in the opposition overcame these divisions enough to create another umbrella group, the Coalition of Women for Democracy, to force the incoming democratic government to adopt some of their demands, but they were never able to recapture the Caupolicán moment.<sup>38</sup>

## East Germany

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) exercised a remarkable degree of control

over the lives of East German citizens. It forbade any groups that did not support the party. Yet dissident activity among women emerged in the 1980s, primarily in the universities and under the protection of the Protestant church.<sup>39</sup> The church sheltered peace, environmental, gay and lesbian, and women's groups. It provided physical space for them to meet, publicized their events in the church press, and held annual rallies that facilitated regular contact among dissidents.<sup>40</sup> The church sponsored informal discussion groups for women during their "baby year," mandatory one year maternity leave, which helped to raise their consciousness about gender inequality.<sup>41</sup>

The most prominent of the East German peace groups was Women for Peace, which mobilized in opposition to a 1982 law that allowed women to be drafted into military service. Women for Peace actively sought out contacts in the West, particularly in West Germany where shared language facilitated communication. They took inspiration from the Greens and the Greenham Common Women in England. Access to international conceptions of feminism also came from East German intellectuals themselves. Thanks in part to a liberal travel policy for artists, writers such as Christa Wolf "provided the language for feminists to free themselves from the official value system."<sup>42</sup> The ruling party permitted the publication of foreign feminist writings, although it prohibited them from being discussed.<sup>43</sup> Regular contact with western feminists and awareness of feminist ideas changed East German women's perceptions about their role in the dissident peace movement and convinced them of the advantages of women-only peace groups. The Communist regime's increasingly conservative policies toward women, known as "mommy politics," further enhanced the appeal of feminism.

International attention shielded women's groups from repression. Amazingly, despite its notoriously pervasive surveillance, the East German security forces (the Stasi) proved unable to stop Women for Peace from holding demonstrations. Women's structureless and leaderless protests stymied the Stasi's customary strategy of "rounding up the ringleaders" of dissident groups, at least initially.<sup>44</sup> When the Stasi arrested the core leaders of the group in December 1983, the women called upon their foreign contacts to pressure the regime for their release. It helped that one of the five women arrested was Barbara Einhorn, a feminist scholar from New Zealand.<sup>45</sup> As one supporter recalled, "western publicity became our best protection" against repression.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the Stasi prevented the growth of popular support for the group.<sup>47</sup>

Women's mobilization in East Germany peaked in a climate of political realignment. In the first few weeks of September 1989 four distinct citizens' movements emerged, each offering a different set of proposals for constructing a new state. New Forum, the largest of the four with more than 200,000 members, called for democratic dialogue but did not offer a clear programmatic alternative to Communist rule. Dissidents loosely affiliated with the Protestant church formed Democracy Now. This group included approximately 4,000 people and supported the democratic renovation of socialism. Another group of Protestant church leaders organized Democratic Awakening, which

also called for a renewal of socialism. A fourth group, United Left, was more tolerant of the ruling party and “openly identified itself as a Marxist leftist, socialist group.”<sup>48</sup> These groups did not constitute formal political parties but rather proto-parties that articulated alternatives to the Communist system. Their formation marked the public emergence of democratic alternatives to the Communist regime and constituted a period of realignment. As Brigitte Young affirms, “virtually none of the citizens’ movements included women’s issues in their platforms.”<sup>49</sup>

September 1989 was thus a ripe moment for women’s organizations to coalesce. Female political entrepreneurs responded publicly to the absence of women’s issues on the agendas of the new coalitions just a few weeks later and “organized in virtually every city in the former GDR” around the goal of participating in the political process as women. The movement quickly gained momentum. On October 11, 1989, a group called Lila Offensive staged a protest during a government-sponsored rally in which they called for women to participate as equals in society and politics. Their slogans demanded that women have a place in political decision making. On November 6 prominent feminists began to circulate a public letter that demanded women’s participation in the transition process. On December 3, a month after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, women’s groups came together to form the Independent Women’s League (UFV), a coalition that represented a wide array of organizations, including radical feminist groups, lesbians, socialists, groups with national visibility, and local grass-roots organizations.<sup>50</sup> Twelve hundred women attended this initial gathering, which took place at the People’s Theater in East Berlin. The main slogan of the demonstration was “Without women there is no state.”<sup>51</sup>

The UFV rally represented the peak of women’s mobilization in East Germany, a point Einhorn affirms.

Initially, it had seemed as if the UFV would become a mass movement, with considerable influence and a large presence in the mainstream political process. There was a feeling of exhilaration and the hope that, inadequate as the GDR’s approach to “emancipation” had been, it nevertheless provided a basis upon which demands for measures which they saw as guaranteeing real equality of opportunity for women could build.<sup>52</sup>

Young reports that participants described the protest as “the moment of euphoria,” and she herself describes it in Aristide Zolberg’s terms as a “moment of madness.”<sup>53</sup> Adherents of the organization saw their main task as “organiz[ing] women’s politics among women’s groups independent of political party structures.”<sup>54</sup> They claimed to have modeled their agenda on Swedish gender policy, further demonstrating the influence of international factors.<sup>55</sup>

The UFV won concessions from the opposition in the short term. Members of the group represented women’s issues at the National Roundtable in 1989–90 and fielded candidates in the 1990 parliamentary election. Yet none of the UFV candidates won, and

women's influence waned as the issue of reunification monopolized the agenda. The movement continues to exist apart from the West German feminist movement, but many UFV members remain wryly realistic about its small impact on the democratization process. UFV members later held a mock funeral for the East German women's movement under the slogan "Yes, without women there can be a state."<sup>56</sup>

## **Poland**

From the Communist takeover of 1945 to the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, dissident women's organizations were extremely rare in Poland. Their rarity can not be explained as a function of limited mobilizational resources.<sup>57</sup> Women participated in dissident unions; they made up half the members of Solidarity, for example. Many women worked in primarily female fields, such as textiles and nursing, but only on a handful of occasions did female-dominated unions engage in opposition activities that emphasized their status as women.<sup>58</sup> The high level of mobilization in Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s begs the question of why a women's movement did not emerge in Poland during this period.<sup>59</sup>

Awareness of international feminism inhibited women's independent mobilizing in Poland, exactly the opposite effect that it had in Brazil, Chile, and East Germany. Poles were aware of international feminist ideas, but they associated them with the Women's League, the official women's organization, and thus discredited them. The state both mediated and monopolized information from abroad, rendering foreign ideas suspect among ordinary Poles. Poles traveled abroad frequently in the 1970s, making "four million trips to Western cities" during the decade, but the state restricted international traveling privileges to party loyalists.<sup>60</sup> For dissidents, direct contact with the western world remained very limited. These and other privileges extended to party elites bred deep antipathy among ordinary Poles—and contempt for the ideas they brought back with them from abroad. In this context, women were likely to have associated western feminist ideas with the party and thus to have seen them as (another) source of oppression, rather than as a potential source of liberation.<sup>61</sup>

A conference held by the Women's League in 1981 provides suggestive evidence for this claim. The slogans that party leaders intoned at this meeting echo the concerns of western feminists and suggest that Polish party officials were influenced by international events such as the United Nations' Women's Conferences. These slogans included: "The corset with which they once laced us keeps disabling us," "Why are we so weak and helpless?," and "Democracy is impossible without women's involvement."<sup>62</sup> It is little wonder that Polish women were skeptical of groups whose views elided so neatly with those of party officials.<sup>63</sup> With very few exceptions, Polish female dissidents saw feminism as tainted by association with the regime.

The absence of autonomous organizing by women in Poland stands out in relief

against a cycle of antiregime protests that broke out in the late 1970s. The cycle began in June 1976 when workers staged a protest against recently announced price increases. The government responded to these strikes promptly—it eliminated the price increases and brutally suppressed the workers—but its actions set off explosive levels of popular mobilization that lasted several years.<sup>64</sup> A visit from the newly elected Polish pope, John Paul II, in June 1979 further bolstered the strength of the opposition. By 1980 the economic situation had deteriorated, resulting in widespread food shortages. Another attempt to impose price increases in June 1980 prompted the Gdansk shipyard workers to go on strike, triggering a wave of strikes that quickly spread throughout the country. Their efforts brought the government to the negotiating table in August 1980 and resulted in a series of concessions to workers known as the Gdansk Agreements. The emergence of Solidarity constitutes a realignment: the formation of a new coalition within the antiauthoritarian opposition.

The success of the Solidarity movement sparked what political scientist Grzegorz Ekiert calls a “civic fever” that he claims “spread to all social groups, cities and villages in the country, and to all organizations and institutions of the Polish party-state.”<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, this fever did not spread to women. Dissidents took over unions and other party-dominated groups, but the Women’s League remained immune to pressures to democratize.<sup>66</sup> Why did women’s groups not form during this period of realignment?

The main reason is that women did not consider themselves to be excluded from this process. The strike leaders explicitly addressed women’s issues during the Roundtable discussions between Solidarity and the Gierek regime. The Interfactory Strike Committee won several concessions that women strongly supported: a three-year paid maternity leave, guaranteed day care slots for working women, and, for nurses, higher wages and housing.<sup>67</sup> Women made up a minority of the delegates to the 1981 Solidarity Congress (only 8 percent), and many women were conscious of the degree to which men dominated the Solidarity leadership.<sup>68</sup> But the vast majority of women raised little objection.<sup>69</sup>

A very small group of women took action to contest women’s exclusion from Solidarity’s leadership. The women who organized separately to challenge women’s status within the movement made up a tiny fraction of Solidarity members—forty to fifty women out of five million.<sup>70</sup> The Polish Feminist Association grew out of a series of seminars that Polish sociologist Renata Siemienicka held at the University of Warsaw in the late 1970s. The group organized “consciousness-raising groups, held lectures and debates on women’s issues and delivered leaflets round factories and schools” in order to raise awareness about women’s status.<sup>71</sup> Comments from Beata Ficzer, one of the group’s founders, point to the influence of international feminism.

When I was a student at the sociology department I saw a notice about a meeting on feminist movements in the world. Then I realized that I knew a lot about various social movements but very little about feminism. All I knew was about bra-burning and so on....[this meeting made me aware of] my

need, then subconscious, to think about myself as a woman. During this meeting I met other young women who had the same need and were far more advanced in their search than I was.<sup>72</sup>

The imposition of martial law in 1981 pushed these groups underground, impeding efforts to build support.

The climate for women's organizing in Poland changed in 1989, when the proposal of an antiabortion law in the *Sejm* in June 1989 "activated" the women's movement.<sup>73</sup> Thirty women's groups emerged during the abortion debate, but they were "dramatically fragmented and reluctant to enter alliances or to create a united front, in part for fear of being associated with the communists."<sup>74</sup> Women created a formal separate division within Solidarity in fall 1989, but demands for the inclusion of women did not enjoy popular support. Opportunities and issues around which women could mobilize exist, but feminist organizations remain "tiny minority groups," a far cry from the explosive levels of mobilization that occurred in Brazil, Chile, and East Germany.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Three variables are significant in explaining women's mobilization during democratization. Formal and informal networks in which women were involved constituted the organizational infrastructure to build women's movements. Direct contact with the international feminist community prompted women to frame their situation in terms of their status as women and to organize separately from men. Finally, exclusion from the process of realignment within the democratic opposition catalyzed the formation of a formal coalition among diverse women's organizations.

When women mobilized against authoritarian regimes, they did so around many different interests, including human rights, peace, feminism, sexual orientation, and poverty. Even within single countries, women held different visions of what the fall of the authoritarian regime would bring: justice for victims of human rights violations, a new way of doing politics, an end to economic crisis, a coveted spot in the new government, or the freedom not to work. Yet the shared experience of exclusion transcended other substantive differences among women's groups. Finding themselves suddenly rendered voiceless as their male comrades in arms constructed the new polity, women who had supported distinct agendas discovered a shared set of concerns. Exclusion from critical decisions about the shape of the new polity triggered a peak protest among a group of already highly mobilized women. Poland demonstrates that, when the credibility of feminism is undermined and when male opposition leaders address women's concerns, the impetus for women's mobilization diminishes.

Nevertheless, women's movements have a seemingly inevitable tendency to fragment in the posttransition period. Peaks of protest proved ephemeral. In most cases moments of unity among women dissipated almost as soon as they occurred. These moments gar-



nered the attention of male political elites and forced them to put women's issues on the agenda. Once the opposition parties incorporated women's demands onto their agendas, the initial impetus for uniting on the basis of gender, women's exclusion, became less salient. Cross-sector unity among women proved difficult to sustain once women had won even limited access to the decision-making process.

## NOTES

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