

Cambridge University Press
0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition
Valerie Sperling
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia

Engendering Transition

This book offers the first comprehensive analysis of the contemporary Russian women's movement and of the social, political, economic, historical, and international contexts that surround it. Valerie Sperling paints a vivid portrait of the women's movement's formation and development, paying particular attention to the key challenges facing a social movement in post-communist society, including the virtual absence of civil society, constant flux in political institutions, wrenching economic changes, and the movement's own status in a shifting transnational environment. The author also addresses the specific challenges facing women's organizations by discussing societal attitudes toward feminism in Russia. Based on participant observation, primary source materials, and dozens of interviews conducted in Moscow (as well as two smaller Russian cities), the narrative brings alive the activists' struggle to build a social movement under difficult conditions, and sheds new light on the troubled and complex process of Russia's democratization.

VALERIE SPERLING is Visiting Assistant Professor at Clark University, Massachusetts. She is the author of several journal articles on gender politics in Russia.

Cambridge University Press

0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition

Valerie Sperling

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia

Engendering transition

Valerie Sperling



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition
Valerie Sperling
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Valerie Sperling 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in 10/12pt Plantin [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Sperling, Valerie.
Organizing women in contemporary Russia: engendering transition /
Valerie Sperling.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. 283).

ISBN 0 521 66017 3 (hbk). – ISBN 0 521 66963 4 (pbk.)

1. Feminism – Russia (Federation)
2. Women – Russia (Federation) – Social conditions.
3. Russia (Federation) – Social conditions – 1991–
I. title.

HQ1665.15.S685 1999

305.42'0947 – dc21 98–43642 CIP

ISBN 0 521 66017 3 hardback

ISBN 0 521 66963 4 paperback

Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Note on transliteration</i>	ix
<i>Map</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 Russian women's movement groups and activists	15
2 Analyzing social movements	43
3 Feminism, femininity, and sexism: socio-cultural opportunities and obstacles to women's movement organizing	54
4 "Democracy without women is not democracy!": political opportunities and obstacles to women's movement organizing	98
5 "Unemployment has a woman's face . . .": economic opportunities and obstacles to women's movement organizing	146
6 Remembrance of things past: the impact of political history on women's movement organizing	179
7 International influences on the Russian women's movement	220
Conclusion	257
<i>Appendix</i>	273
<i>Selected bibliography</i>	283
<i>Index</i>	292

Tables

1	Groups by type and specific issue-focus	<i>page</i> 31
2	Economically based causal chains leading to the emergence of women's movements in the West and in Russia	149
3	“Do you plan to take part in rallies and meetings [<i>mitingi i sobraniia</i>]?”	218
4	Surveyed Russian women's organizations officially registered as of 1995, by city	273
5	Surveyed Russian women's organizations, by city and year of formation	275
6	Surveyed Russian women's organizations, by membership size	277
7	Activists' number of children	279
8	Activists' education levels	279
9	Data on surveyed Russian women's organization members: age, education, profession	279

Acknowledgments

Writing a book about a social movement is a dicey undertaking. After viewing drafts of parts of this manuscript, some of the activists I had interviewed were livid: angry, upset, and afraid that my mention of conflicts within the movement would lead to immediate de-funding, and to dismissal of the movement as a gaggle of quarrelsome females. Other activists were thrilled that someone had given voice to their concerns and aired the conflicts that they had longed to see discussed in public. It is my sincere hope that readers of this book on a fascinating and valuable social movement will not leave the text with the first impression. My purpose in describing instances of conflict as well as of cooperation is not to display other people's dirty laundry in public, but rather to paint an honest portrait of a social movement, seen from the rare vantage point that participant observation allows. Naturally, social movements across the globe are riddled with conflict, interpersonal, tactical, strategic, and ideological. I argue in this book that the Russian women's movement, like all social movements emerging into a post-communist environment, encounters a particular set of challenges that would make smooth sailing nearly impossible.

Several institutions and countless people deserve and have my gratitude for the support and assistance they rendered me during the process of researching and writing this book. The International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) made possible the trip to Russia during which much of the data was collected, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) provided funding for the writeup of the dissertation in which this book had its genesis, and a postdoctoral fellowship from the Davis Center for Russian Studies at Harvard University provided institutional and financial support for the rewriting and rethinking process.

The countless people on whose advice (formal and informal) I have relied include: Gail Lapidus, George Breslauer, Henry Brady, Kim Voss, Jim Richter, and everyone who reviewed the book. I also thank editors Michael Holdsworth and John Haslam for their support and suggestions, and Karen Anderson Howes for her eagle-eyed copyediting skills.

Cambridge University Press

0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition

Valerie Sperling

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii Acknowledgments

Georgina Waylen and Vicky Randall provided constructive comments on an earlier version of chapter 4, which they published in their edited volume, *Gender, Politics and the State* (London: Routledge, 1998), as “Gender Politics and the State During Russia’s Transition Period.”

This book would never have been written or researched without the great help and kindness of a veritable slew of Russians, as well as several Ukrainians, Chuvash, Cossacks, expats, and so forth: you know who you are. I’m inexpressibly grateful to all of my interviewees, to everyone at the Moscow Women’s Archive, to Natalia Abubikirova, Nadezhda Azhgikhina, Laima Geidar, Masha Gessen, Maia Kazmina, Olga Khasbulatova, Oleg Kharkhordin, Elena Kochkina, Valentina Konstantinova, Elvira Novikova, Marina Regentova, Tatiana Troinova, Martina Vandenberg, and so many others without whose help, invitations to seminars and conferences, and networking advice I would never have met all the activists that I did manage to meet, nor would I have gathered all the written materials that now make up my own archive of sorts. Thanks also go to my friends, parents, and grandmothers for their bottomless well of emotional support. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Sam Diener, for his truly endless willingness to read, edit, and argue; for his contributions, especially to the conclusion; and for his commitment: without these, this book and I would have suffered considerably.

Cambridge University Press

0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition

Valerie Sperling

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Note on transliteration

I have used a modified Library of Congress system for transliteration. Diacritical marks appear in the notes and bibliography, but have been largely omitted from the text so as not to distract the reader. Thus, “Tatiana” in the text becomes “Tat’iana” in the notes. Diacriticals in the text remain in Russian words discussed or given as examples; they are also retained in occasional transliterated passages that serve to clarify my translations. Finally, well-known names are rendered in their familiar transliterated form (for example, Yeltsin rather than El’tsin, and Yabloko rather than Iabloko).

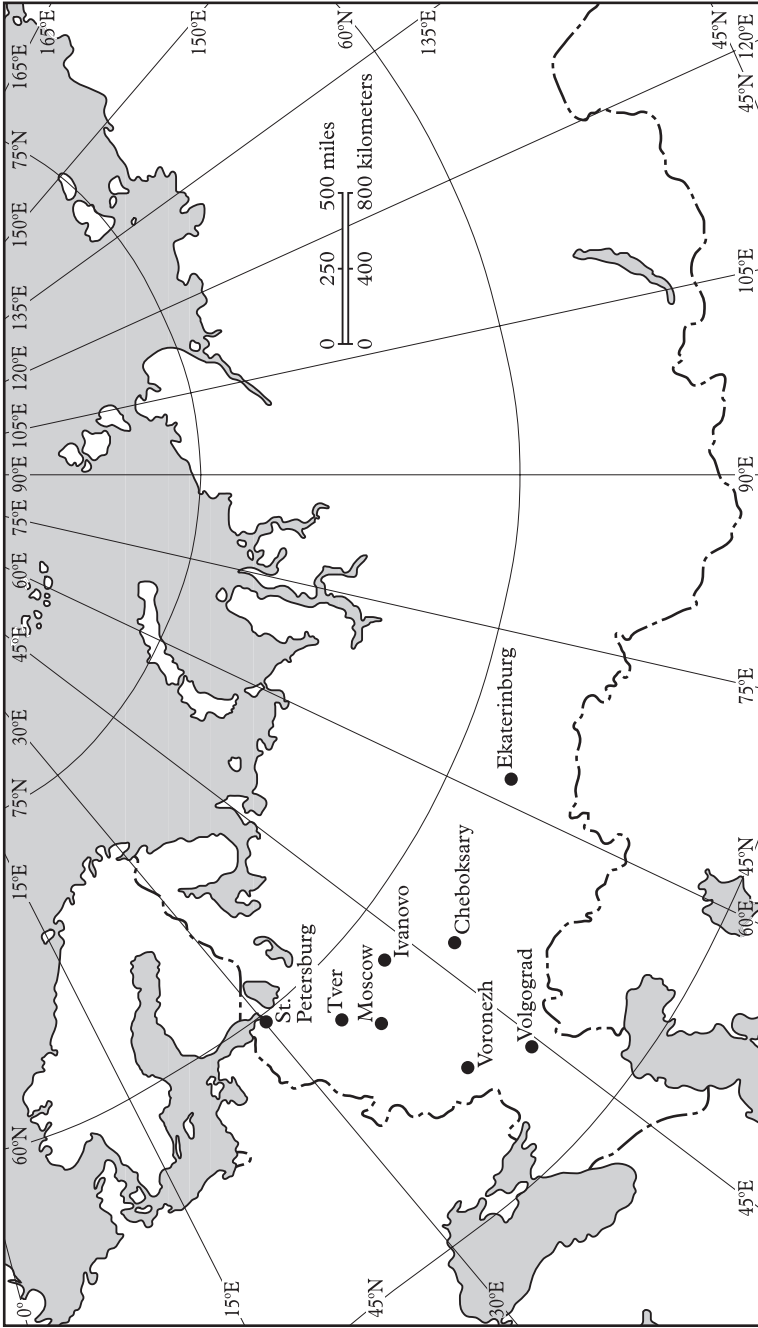
Cambridge University Press

0521660173 - Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition

Valerie Sperling

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Selected cities in Western Russia