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Women and Development in Postsocialism: Theory and Power East and West

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Introduction

Socialism's fall in Eastern Europe has resulted in rearrangements of political, economic, and social forms, all of which have far-reaching implications for the lives of women. Women, who are frequently the primary caregivers of children and families, are struggling to make a living amidst formidable challenges. In Ukraine, for example, women's earned income is only half that of men's.¹ Additionally, women's representation in official politics has plummeted across the region.² Many East European women have taken up the strategy of founding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) called "mutual-aid associations" that seek social justice for disadvantaged groups such as large families, orphaned children, the elderly, and the disabled. In some ways, the emergent civil societies in states such as Ukraine have a distinctly "women's face." While women's social justice struggles have resulted in social and political reforms, they also have engendered highly meaningful personal transformations for women leaders.

I have been carrying out ethnographic research in Kyiv, Ukraine, since 1998. To date, this work has analyzed popular, political, and academic engagement of the "civil society" construct in the postsocialist context by examining ten non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led by women.³ Further goals of this research have been to outline the challenges facing women in the post-Soviet period, and to examine the long-term effects of the Soviet gender contract. I argue that, in many cases, leadership roles in social organizations are a form of alternative employment for women, who have been forced out of their jobs in the context of postsocialist economic crisis and a revived nationalism that emphasizes women's domestic, care giving functions.

I therefore conceptualize the space of civic organizations, and particularly caring-oriented "mutual-aid associations," as a niche that is being carved out specifically by and for women in post-Soviet Ukraine. Within this niche, circulate competing discourses on women and their roles, the state and its responsibilities towards citizens, and class differences and criteria of social worth (Stark 1994). While a few women take up discussions of women's rights in their organizing efforts, many draw on "traditional" notions of femininity and women's "natural" roles as mothers. By examining these different discourses, in my research I have analyzed the

social space of civic organizations as a locus of complex personal, local, state-level, and transnational transformations.

This work adds to research on women's social justice struggles and post-Soviet women's movements by documenting the gendered nature of civil society in post-Soviet Ukraine and analyzing discourses on gender, class, activism, the state, and civil society that position women within Ukraine's so-called non-governmental sphere. I take up discussions of transnational interventions in Ukraine's NGO development, particularly exchanges between Western feminist groups and local women's groups in Ukraine. I examine how Western feminism(s) translate into the Ukrainian context, pointing out ways in which Ukrainian women activists take up or reject feminist discourses, and how they may localize them to better suit their own experiences and worldviews. The research has examined the "feminizing" of organizational life in Ukraine as the combined result of women's practical concerns and practices (i.e. for survival), local and transnational discourses on women and their roles in civil society, and transnational initiatives to empower women.

Ten organizations (encompassing eleven women NGO leaders) have constituted the major sources of information for my research. I chose mainly civic organizations structured as "mutual-aid associations" that simultaneously act as both a support group and a humanitarian (charity) organization. The organizations in my study have included groups for the following categories of persons: large families, women pensioners (retirees), persons with spinal cord injuries, women with disabilities, and children with cancer and their families (two organizations). Three other organizations were charity or service organizations that had no fixed membership but usually had very specific target groups (such as children with cerebral palsy, and "Chernobyl children"). My study also includes one non-profit cultural organization whose members strove to instill a sense of patriotic pride in Ukrainian youth. Only two of the ten organizations were founded on a specifically women's platform—the organization for disabled women, and the organization for women retirees. Primary research methods have included participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the directors and assistant directors of the organizations, life history interviews, and media analysis.

Debates: Women's Empowerment and Civil Society after Socialism

Since the fall of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, Western scholars and those from the former Soviet Bloc have scrutinized "post-Soviet" women and the various transformations, struggles, and achievements that have characterized their lives during the "transition" to democratic, capitalistic forms of government (Bridger and Pinnick 1996; Buckley 1992; Drakulić 1992, 1998; Edmondson 1992; Einhorn 1993; Funk 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993; Gal 1997; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Handrahan 2002; Haney 1999, 2000, 2002; Ishkanian 2000; Kay 2000; Moghadam 1993; Pavlychko 1992, 1996; Rivkin-Fish 2000; Rubchak 1996, 2001; Sperling 1999; Walsh 1998; Watson 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Zhurzhenko 2001).

Many of these researchers have pointed out the relative advantages that democratization and the development of civil society in the region have created for men. A representative example of this work includes Peggy Watson's article, "The Rise of Masculinism in Eastern Europe." In the article Watson (1993:72) writes the following:

... the changes which have been wrought [in Eastern Europe] now offer systematic advantage to men. That is because civil society offers an enhanced but unequal scope for action in the new public sphere, while the private sphere—the traditional domain of women—is set to lose much of its previous significance. Civil society means the empowerment of men and the enactment of masculinity on a grand scale.

Similarly, of civil society in postsocialist states Barbara Einhorn (1993:65) has written that:

... women's relegation to the hearth is occurring precisely at the moment when the private sphere has lost the significance it inadvertently gained as a substitute civil society. In other words, at the very moment when women are being once again assigned to the private sphere, it is the public sphere which is being revalued, at least for men.

These analyses are not so much generated from a misrecognition of the substantial roles that women now play in the postsocialist "third sector" of non-governmental organizations, as from the assumption that, since their civil society activities are usually relegated to the (supposedly) non-political sphere of NGOs, women's interests and needs are thus devalued. Indeed, many scholars see women's focus on "traditionally feminine" issues (and scholars' insistence on underlining the "maternalist" orientations of many women's groups) as a threat to women, whose influence and activities are thus relegated to a realm outside the bounds of meaningful political decision-making. Of Russian NGOs, for example, Liborakina (1998) writes: "The nonprofit sector shows signs of turning into a female ghetto of low pay and little power." Handrahan, who has studied NGOs in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, asserts that the "gendered nature of civil society . . . represents a negative trend of lack of female access to genuine decision-making positions" (2000:19). Furthermore, she argues that "... because: (a) NGOs are not seen as important by local political leaders, and (b) NGO work is difficult, and brings fewer financial rewards, women have been allowed to dominate the non-formal-civic public space" (2002:83). Handrahan believes that Western governments who drive "civil society building" efforts in the region "fail to understand the implications of a female-driven civil society" (*ibid.*, 82). Because donors equate NGOs with civil society, she writes, they automatically assume that greater women's participation in NGOs is beneficial to women. She states, "... the happy assumption that a proliferation of women active in NGOs adds up to an equality in

political decision-making is both erroneous and detrimental to authentic political participation for both women and civil society as a whole" (ibid.).

These conclusions may be countered, however, by theoretical arguments made by scholars studying women's civil society initiatives in other parts of the world. Even when women's activism in NGOs is "patriarchally oriented" (that is, "woman-centered," as opposed to "feminist"), argues Tyyskä (1998:398), for example, women have the potential to have political influence from the "outside" (ibid., 407). Tyyskä studied various organizational strategies of women in Canada and Finland to assess the relative effectiveness of strategies she calls "insider" and "outsider." Asserting that, "women are relatively invisible in Canadian politics," she writes that, "making important gains in areas deemed to be 'traditionally feminine' not only establishes women as major political players but also creates a legitimacy for a large number of 'women's' issues which have traditionally been assigned a secondary status" (ibid., 407-408). As William Fisher (1997:446) pointed out in his seminal critique of discourses surrounding the work of NGOs, "non-governmental" (as in non-governmental organizations) does not mean "non-political."

While I am sympathetic to arguments made by scholars such as Handrahan and Tyyskä at both ends of the "empowerment" spectrum, I would assert that the question of women's empowerment through civil society initiatives is somewhat more complicated than either "side of the house" admits. In focusing my research and analysis on the NGO sector as a creative gendered space for women, I have tried to show that, contrary to statements made by Watson (1993) and Einhorn (1993) a decade ago, women do seem to have found an avenue for entering the "new public sphere" by taking up meaningful roles as social activists (c.f. Phillips 2000). Granted, to describe their activism they often refer to tropes of domesticity such as motherhood and care giving—common indexes of the presumably devalued private sphere—but competing ideologies of womanhood produced tensions that the women constantly negotiated, both individually and collectively (Berdahl 1999:197). I found that some of the activists I knew began to take up narratives on women's rights, narratives that were transformative for them.

One of my primary research methods, the collection of life histories from women activists, yielded an abundance of narratives that illustrated women's complicated subject positions. When I asked them about the history of their lives, the women produced what I call *braided narratives*, or narratives through which they wove together seemingly contradictory discourses (maternalist/motherist, feminist, nationalist) into unexpected accountings for past, current, and future actions (Stark 1994). The life history narratives illustrated how women's roles as social activists fit into their lives as a whole, as they outlined the circumstances through which they had come to this work, and the significant others (persons and institutions) who had influenced them. Tracking these narratives thus allowed me to analyze the various tropes of womanhood, femininity, and social justice the women in my study took up to describe their lives over time.

This article will focus on the experiences of one consultant, Ivana, whose life history narratives were very indicative of the braided narratives I have been de-

scribing. Ivana was 47 years old when I first met her in 1998. We met at a conference in Kyiv on women and children's health, and she introduced herself to me as the assistant director of an organization for youth called Hope (her husband was the director). I found out that Ivana was also a high school teacher, and that she conducted extracurricular activities for her students to educate them about issues pertaining to health, hygiene, and sexual reproduction. Ivana had worked for 10 years as an engineer in the late seventies and early eighties, but left what she called a "promising" career to teach preschool when her children (now aged 16 and 21) were young. After her children started school, Ivana became qualified to teach high school. She founded the public organization Hope in 1996 with her husband to help disadvantaged teens, especially girls. The organization's activities included mainly what Ivana called "enlightening" (Rus. *prosvetitel'skie*)⁴ or educational events, focusing particularly on providing teenage girls with sex education courses, the focus of which included family planning and the prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases.

I remained in close contact with Ivana throughout my two years of fieldwork, and was thus able to track her career as a social activist. By the end of December 1999, Ivana had quit her teaching job of 15 years and was working for the vocational education division of the Kyiv city administration. She was very active in Kyiv's NGO community, and had become a "trainer"⁵ for an international foundation in Kyiv that promoted civil society development. Although her work in the Kyiv city administration was very poorly paid,⁶ her position as a trainer provided the opportunity to make additional income.

Because I knew Ivana longer than I knew almost any other consultant, it was possible for me to witness the various transformations she went through during the two years of my extended fieldwork in 1998 and 1999. Ivana's story typified ways in which civic organizing simultaneously engendered changes in profession, expertise, and interests of women activists, and also sparked personal transformations. For some activists like Ivana, these personal transformations were very significant. She told me that her organizational work had given her increased self-esteem and a greatly improved self-image. In many cases, activists' personal transformations could be traced to discourses brought to Ukraine by representatives of international foundations that encouraged women to become leaders in their communities, to "realize themselves," and to organize for "women's human rights."

It was interesting to note how local women received these "feminist" discourses from the west, especially in light of the nationalistic narratives that configured women's roles in the country. In Ukraine, which gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, women are assigned moral responsibilities as "hearth mothers," the nurturers of the first generation of free Ukrainians (Rubchak 1996). Women are being encouraged to devote themselves to home, family, and children, to fulfill what Mikhail Gorbachev called their "purely womanly mission" (1987:117). Nationalist discourses in Ukraine are also taken up to articulate women's

dissatisfaction with the Soviet gender contract. As some scholars have noted, post-Soviet women have tended to organize not around the “right to work” or an “escape” from domesticity (Sperling 1999:70), but rather around the right *not* to work, and the freedom to “realize themselves as women.” Both sentiments are a result of the failed Soviet policies to liberate women, which guaranteed women’s participation in the labor force, but did not alleviate any of women’s domestic burdens such as childcare, housekeeping, cooking, and laundering. The complex ways in which women activists weave together these various discourses of womanhood, nationalism, and women’s liberation is striking. Examples from Ivana’s life history narratives illustrate this well.

Analysis of Ivana’s narratives affirmed the benefits of utilizing ethnographic methods to develop understanding of women, civil society and empowerment after socialism. Seemingly unrelated events were stitched together by Ivana in a seamless narrative of self-development and “self-realization” as a woman and an activist. The parallels between how Ivana described the various “turn-arounds” (Rus. *povoroty*) in her life were particularly notable. As mentioned earlier, Ivana left a successful engineering career to be a “nanny” at the daycare facility her children attended, a move that brought with it a dramatic decrease in professional prestige and salary for Ivana. In explaining this choice, Ivana said that trying to enter a “masculine” profession had been a big mistake, and that working with people, not with instruments, was her true “womanly” calling. Ivana said she had realized that she was “an engineer of human souls.” Ivana indexed stereotypes of gender and work that ascribe some professions or orientations to men, and others to women. She implied that her efforts to transgress these “norms” had been misguided. When her children started going to elementary school, Ivana decided not to go back to engineering, and she studied to become a teacher. She narrated these career choices as a realization that her calling was to work with people—especially children—and to disseminate knowledge, activities that she said suited her as a woman.

This same narrative line figured into Ivana’s explanations for how she entered public life through social activism. She saw herself first and foremost as a woman, a woman who was taking up “womanly” roles and responsibilities in promoting social change. As Linde (1993:72) has noted, in relating life history narratives, people often pause to take an evaluative stance, thus indicating how they would like their comments and the experiences they are describing to be interpreted. This was certainly true of Ivana, who’s evaluative comments were often critical of a Soviet gender ideology that had placed more focus on production than on families, and that had championed women as workers above all. Importantly, she indicated that, in trying to establish herself as a professional and thus focusing on her career goals (something she believed the state had encouraged—indeed, forced—her to do), she had nearly failed to “realize herself” as a woman. She said, for example, “Back then I tried to prove myself as a worker; now I am proving myself as a woman.” Also indicative of this stance (criticizing the Soviet state for champi-

oning women and men as workers, rather than as family members with familial responsibilities) were the numerous narratives in which she emphasized the centrality of the family in general, and the importance of her own family specifically.

These tropes describing “women’s nature” were used by Ivana (and other consultants) to forward explanations of why so many social activists in Ukraine were women. Social activism, which in Ukraine was often carried out on a platform of caregiving and charity, was seen as a particularly “womanly” endeavor. Ivana’s following narrative is indicative of such narrative lines:⁷

All of these problems that we solve, they involve those problems that probably somehow touch the emotional sphere more. These are the kinds of problems that women can see better, and how to solve them. A man is more rational. Sometimes he thinks that these problems can be solved only in a pragmatic fashion. And a woman—she can solve these problems just by talking to a person—a psychological effect. With some of her own more . . . emotional methods. And men, to be honest, often think that these problems don’t need to be addressed, that they will solve themselves. And they occupy themselves with more practical things, really. And since men don’t attempt to solve such problems, namely drug abuse, alcoholism and so on—this means they think that specialists—specially prepared persons—must solve these problems. But in this case—myself, for example—these problems can be solved by having turned it into a kind of dedication. My husband thinks that it is all nonsense; [he believes that only] specialists can solve those kinds of problems...A woman knows how to solve these problems, in what way they can be solved better, and more simply. Somehow you must say to the girls . . . What is their problem? Listen to them. One must have patience to hear out these girls who have such problems. To listen and give some kind of advice, probably. To come to a solution of these problems and this kind of patience—it is up to women of course. To mothers, most often.

To explain the abundance of women active in NGO work, Ivana indexed traditional gender stereotypes of women as emotional, sympathetic, and sensitive to the problems of society, especially to children’s problems. Her narrative include the often-heard “observation” that women are “more suited” for social work because of their “natures.” At the same time, however, Ivana also recognized that this “sphere” was one of the only public spaces open to women in conditions of post-Soviet economic crisis, where women dominated the “army of the unemployed.” She recognized that gender discrimination in hiring was partly to blame, and that “public work” was a “women’s sphere” precisely because it was not very prestigious. Thus, Ivana made the following comments:

Many women work in social organizations, and men either go without work or find themselves [work] that is considered more “masculine,” in *serious* institutions, enterprises, and so on (my emphasis). Of the unemployed, there are more women. Those are mostly women who, in their time, received an engineering education, and when all of our enterprises in Ukraine closed down—and they are

still closed—the army of the unemployed was made up of precisely those women who had been engineers. Now I meet a lot of women who worked with me at a [state] enterprise at one time. Now they work at the bazaars. They were fairly highly qualified, economists and mechanical engineers, and so on. Therefore, women found themselves a way out of the situation, and they went into social work. It is sad...I don't want to say it is sad that they do social work, but that...the rights of women here are violated.

Like many of my consultants, Ivana recognized that unemployed women—especially engineers, whose careers had become “obsolete” in postsocialism, and especially middle-aged women, who faced sex discrimination in hiring—had only two viable options: to become “traders” at the bazaar or to go into “social work” in NGOs. Despite her flowery narratives about women being “suited” for work dealing with the “emotional sphere,” Ivana saw that women's inequality on the job market was pushing them into the “third sector.” It was precisely this inequality that international foundations (Counterpart International, Inc., the NIS-US Women's Consortium, and others) were targeting in Ukraine through programs designed to educate women in “leadership” and “business” and to support the women's movement.

Ivana welcomed such efforts, but did not embrace the aspects of these programs that she found too “aggressive” for the Ukrainian context. The following translated excerpt from an interview details Ivana's reactions to the seminars:

SP: When you went to those trainings, they were on gender, right?

Ivana: Yes, gender and women's leadership.

SP: Did they change how you think about relations between...

Ivana: The sexes?

SP: Yes. Or did they reinforce what you already thought?

Ivana: In principle...about me, right? It changed me a lot. At last I was able to talk about myself, about what I am proud of. What qualities in myself I can be proud of. I could talk about my accomplishments, or about what I am proud of in life in general. I took away many positive things for myself. I found my way in life; I was able to become a leader in some ways. I became convinced that I have the right to have my own opinion. I have the right to insist on my rights. I have the right to insist on my own positions. That was very important for me.

But I also saw that I changed something in those trainings [when I began to conduct them myself.] There were a lot of aggressive presentations that, for our mentality, are not characteristic. So now when I conduct the trainings, I conduct them a bit differently; I plan them a little bit differently.

Other conversations with Ivana revealed that, when conducting the “women in leadership” seminars herself, she “softened” the presentation of material on the cultural construction of gender roles. Indeed, my experiences in Kyiv showed that Ukrainian “trainers” tended to skimp on the “gender material” and focused more on issues of women’s rights and leadership skills. At one “Women in Leadership” seminar I attended, Nina, the trainer, completely skipped over the section on “gender,” and neither “gender” nor men’s and women’s “roles” were mentioned in the seminar.⁸ Therefore, “imported” discourses on women, leadership, women’s rights, and gender were localized by NGO trainers and activists, who adapted these narratives to local understandings of men and women’s roles in social and political life. In other words, by drawing on elements of a feminist discourse, Ivana changed how she talked about the Ukrainian social order (i.e. she took up discussions of how women’s and girls’ rights were being violated). She did so, however, by talking about women’s rights and women in leadership, rather than challenging notions of “traditional” gender roles.

A reluctance to adopt “gender theory,” which proposes that gender roles are socially constructed, is, of course, not unique to Ukrainian or postsocialist women. Many women in the United States would also reject gender theory. Second wave feminism in the U.S., which began around 1965, was focused on “practical” problems of women’s civil rights, the right to work, equal pay for equal work, and institutionalized misogyny (DuPlessis, Blau, and Snitow 1998:3-12). Many second wave feminists, academics included, have similar struggles as the Ukrainian women I knew in accepting new gender theory that challenges sex-role stereotypes. Ukrainian women’s difficulties in accepting the notion of socially-constructed gender roles, I found, were compounded by the pervasiveness of contemporary Ukrainian nationalist discourses that assigned men and women very specific roles in the family and society.

Despite their reticence to adopt Western feminist discourses that would challenge traditional gender roles, Ivana and several other women in my study did indicate that they had found the seminars on “Women in Leadership” personally empowering (Ivana’s narrative above illustrates this poignantly). Ivana told me that attending the seminars had boosted her self-image and strengthened her self-confidence. In this sense, the seminars had effectively “trained” Ivana to become a better leader. Ivana told me:

I began to look differently at some problems—life positions and so on—after those seminars. For me it was one of those turning points in my life . . . I had many complexes (Rus. *byla zakompleksovannaia*) for a long time . . . and after those seminars I felt more confident, more literate professionally, in order to socialize with people on a certain level...Earlier I was unable to pick up the receiver and speak with a stranger. Now it is the easiest thing for me. In front of any rank of person, no matter who it is...I can speak on the same level as they and feel absolutely competent in those problems that I want to share or discuss and so on. That is proof that I have become adequately confident in myself . . .

Learning about “women’s rights” and completing exercises designed to heighten self-esteem were the aspects of the seminars that Ivana had found most personally relevant and empowering. Ivana indicated that she had invited other women to get involved in the seminars, and that these women had also experienced positive personal “changes” as a result of their participation.

Ivana indicated that participating in women-focused civil society initiatives had helped her heal emotionally after a series of domestic difficulties. Her husband had treated her poorly, she said, but began to respect her when she learned leadership skills and gained self-confidence. Ivana thus connected the transformations she had experienced as a result of the seminars with the broader personal transformations she believed her social activism had engendered:

I am glad, after all, that my life isn’t gray; my days are not gray, rather they are full. Sometimes I have days that are planned down to the minute . . . I see that people around me, who surround me—they get charged with my enthusiasm . . . I’m very happy, truly, that I gained some confidence . . . Earlier I walked around like this, [with my head hunkered down], and now I walk with a raised head. That is, I can look people in the eyes. Earlier I couldn’t look people in the eyes, because I thought that I was a freak (Rus. *urodka*), that I was . . . in short, I had a mass of complexes that I developed in childhood, and which my husband supported for a while. And now I know that I can do . . . things that not every third, fourth, or fifth [person can do]. So these are the things that have happened to me recently—good events, good changes, you could say.

In this narrative Ivana drew upon particular discourses through which she was able to remake her sense of personhood. Through this self-transformation narrative Ivana was enacting her potential and realizing herself as an agent. Her comments underlined the sociality of personhood, especially her assertions that the people around her (those in her networks) got “charged with her enthusiasm.” Her self-descriptions were indicative of the dialogical nature of personhood and also reflected the various discourses that are offered up to and appropriated by women NGO activists. Many of the women in my study related narratives similar to Ivana’s. Almost all of my consultants mentioned a heightened sense of self-confidence and agency, and an improved self-image, as a result of their work.

Ivana’s life history narratives, which link the various trajectories of “transition” in the postsocialist Ukrainian state with transitions in her own life, are indicative of the complex nature of women’s subjectivities after state socialism. Her experiences as a woman civic activist cannot be boiled down to cohesive wholes that we might label as “empowering” or “disempowering.” Time will tell, I think, whether or not women like Ivana, through the types of organizing efforts I have been describing, are able to make social and political spaces for themselves, or if they are limiting themselves to a place that has been assigned them. These issues must be studied ethnographically, using methods and theories that can capture the rich and diverse experiences of the wide spectrum of post-Soviet women.

Diversity in Experience: Lessons from Ukraine and Beyond

When assessing women's empowerment in civil society institutions, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there is a range of social organizations led by women in post-Soviet societies. Certainly in Ukraine, social activists represent a broad swath of Ukrainian society. Some of my key consultants had been blue-collar workers, and they were "mothers of many children" located near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Even though they were leaders of NGOs, such women, whose organizations represented marginalized groups such as large families, occupied positions relatively devoid of prestige. On the other end of the spectrum there were women who were well-known political figures with contacts and supporters in the upper echelons of the Ukrainian government and in the Ukrainian diaspora community. It is difficult to compare the experiences of these women, whose lives were so dissimilar.

Their mandates as NGO leaders were also quite different. The multiple orientations of the groups in my study are highlighted when we consider the range of discourses that women took up in narrating their lives as women engaged in social justice struggles. The women's narratives articulated a range of concerns along the "feminine/feminist" continuum; that is, some of the women emphasized women's "natural" roles as mothers and care givers, while others spoke of women's liberation and women's rights. It is clear, therefore, that one must distinguish between types of "women's activism," since some groups advance women's causes directly, while others do not.

Significantly, the fact that women are active in NGOs does not necessarily mean that "women's causes" are being addressed (Delind and Ferguson 1999). Given this situation, it is tempting to compartmentalize "types" of women's activism by dividing groups into those with "feminine" concerns (such groups often have been called "motherist movements" in the scholarly literature (see J. Fisher 1989, 1993; Navarro 1989; Schirmer 1993a, 1993b)) and those with "feminist" concerns. However, I concur with Lynn Stephen (1997:29), who has studied women's groups in Latin America, who argues that "labeling [these women's groups] as either 'feminine' or 'feminist,' with corresponding 'private' and 'public' claims, makes little sense and does not capture the richness and complexity of the political ideologies and agendas they have developed." Ivana's narratives of activism and personhood presented above illustrate the futility of such an exercise.

Additionally, it has been pointed out that it is inaccurate to portray "motherhood" as part of the private/domestic sphere, since motherhood is "a prime site for state surveillance" (Hyatt 2000). In the United States, for example, this is accomplished via a system of state welfare benefit assistance that involves surveillance of poverty, abuse, and so on. Through the welfare system, motherhood and the "domestic sphere" become a site for regulation. Indeed, ". . . it is impossible to speak about motherhood without speaking of social systems of power and domination" (Orleck 1997:5). Therefore, in evaluating "maternalism" as a motivation for women's activism, we must not forget that throughout history and cross-culturally mother-

hood has been a “target for governmentality and state intervention” (Hyatt 2000). So-called “motherist” movements, therefore, are not as apolitical as they might seem (Ruddick 1997).

In her study of the CO-MADRES in El Salvador, or the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador “Monseñor Romero,” Stephen writes that, “If we want to understand how and why people act, we must carefully consider the synthetic results of people’s own experience on their behavior. This prevents us from portraying women activists as flattened, uniform caricatures who fall on either one side or other of some universal feminist continuum” (1997:54). Stephen’s study of this dynamic group shows how members’ “understandings of their gendered position in the world did not emerge suddenly or in a uniform manner” (*ibid.*). She traces how women activists retained some of their original ideas about women and motherhood while adding to them ideas about women’s rights and other discourses that were made available to them by a range of institutions. I would argue that the same was true for my consultants in Ukraine, who narrated their experiences with a range of discourses about their place in the world as women and as activists. Their narratives seemed contradictory at times. When we take into account the women’s life histories, material conditions, and location in social networks, however, it is possible to examine how the women were negotiating a range of discourses and flows. Trying to squeeze their experiences and strategies into categories labeling them as “feminine” or “feminist,” “empowering,” or “disempowering” would only serve to impoverish them or to create coherence where it may not exist.

Women East and West: Confrontation and Cooperation

As I try to understand women’s lives after socialism, I shy away from taking an evaluative stance, for fear of reproducing dichotomizing discourses based on notions of “The West and the Rest,” discourses that have been criticized by feminist scholars in recent years. Specifically, I am referring to hegemonic discourses of “Western” feminism that fail to recognize “other” feminisms and that produce categories such as a monolithic “third world woman” (Mohanty 1991), “women of color” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Lugones and Spelman 1983), or “Chinese women” (Rofel 1994). While challenges to the hegemony of Western feminism(s) are not new, since the fall of the Iron Curtain these struggles have been played out in a new arena—Eastern Europe. Before socialism’s collapse, contact between Western feminists and their Eastern European counterparts was sporadic, and occurred mostly at international conferences where western feminists expressed their views on patriarchy and inequality to a bewildered audience made up of self-proclaimed feminists from other parts of the world (Drakulić 1998). Eastern European feminists found that their concerns were quite different from those of the Westerners they were encountering.⁹ Since state socialism’s fall, Western feminists have been actively involved in trying to raise feminist consciousness in the region. In

many cases, well-intentioned Western feminists have discovered that their efforts to help their Eastern European "sisters" become feminists are unwelcome (Funk 1994). The result of some of these East-West encounters¹⁰ has been the production and perpetuation of misunderstandings between Western feminists and women in Eastern Europe, as has been noted by Funk (1993, 1994), Gal (1997), Watson (1997a, 1997b), and others. As Gal (1997:30) has written:

When the end of state socialism in 1989 provided the opportunity for increased contact between women of Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the United States, the result was a profound surprise and dismay by all participants at the expectations voiced from the 'other side(s).' As a participant in some of these interactions, I can report that Eastern European women often saw Western feminists as proselytizers: messianic, implicitly universalizing, and thus imperialistic. On the other hand, Eastern European women were often seen by Western feminists as disappointingly undeveloped politically; backward and ignorant in their rejection of Western feminism, and sometimes simply apolitical . . .

Precisely this kind of encounter is described at length by Slavenka Drakulić (1992) (a feminist), in her book *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*. Drakulić's concerns have been summed up well by Nanette Funk (1993:318), whom I quote:

Slavenka Drakulić . . . recently wrote an essay about an American woman who had interviewed her and later wrote asking Drakulić to submit an article on women in Yugoslavia for an anthology . . . Drakulić laughed at the topics proposed in the letter, such as an 'analysis about women and democracy, the public sphere, civil society, modernization, etc. A kind of Critical Theory approach.' Drakulić was asked specifically about 'the kinds of interventions women have made in the public discourse, e.g., about abortion, women's control over their bodies, what sorts of influence women have had in the public discourse . . .' Drakulić regarded all these questions as inappropriate, reflecting the typical American misunderstanding of post-communist women. She was also annoyed at the American woman's ease and readiness to publish about post-communist women after she just 'spent several weeks in Berlin.' And she was critical, if at points grudgingly complimentary, about the American woman's persona, clothes, and hair, calling her 'surprisingly, [for an American feminist, presumably] dressed with style.'

This encounter is made all the more fascinating when Funk reveals that she was the American woman about whom Drakulić was writing in 1992. She uses Drakulić's criticisms and her own reactions as a starting point for seeking common ground between East and West that recognizes power differences between Western feminists and "post-communist" women in all their variety. (Drakulić (1993) did end up contributing an article to Funk and Mueller's edited volume *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (1993), and she addressed many of Funk's questions in the piece.)

Encounters between Western feminists and Eastern European feminists have been fraught with tension, to be sure. But these encounters . . . have also planted the

seeds for real dialogue between women who have different ideas about the meanings of concepts such as “patriarchal society,” “women’s rights,” “machismo,” and others that are key to much feminist thought (Drakulić 1998). In Russia, for example, a feminist magazine called *You and We* was initiated by two American feminists, Katrina van den Heuvel and Collette Shulman. Anastasia Posadskaya, Director of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, acknowledges that this magazine, which she says has been widely distributed, has helped to “bridge the gap between East and West” (Waters and Posadskaya 1995:372). In 1990, the Network of East-West Women (NEWW) was founded by feminists in the United States and the former Yugoslavia to facilitate international communication and to serve as a resource network for exchanges between women concerned about women’s issues in Central and Eastern Europe. Today NEWW links over 2,000 women’s advocates in over forty countries.

Such efforts linking Western and Eastern European feminists have sought to address the problems and misunderstandings inherent in the promotion of a “feminist diaspora” that almost inevitably has its roots in the West, thanks to Western feminists’ greater access to money and feminist literature, and also their greater experience organizing in a mass movement (Drakulić 1998). Ann Snitow (2001), one of the founders of NEWW, consciously uses the term “feminist diaspora” problematically to illustrate the tensions and failures involved in “suitcase diplomacy.” She has thus defined “feminist diaspora” as “a big idea that travels around and falls apart.”

In my research, as a Western feminist it has not been my intention to portray Ukrainian women as suffering from a “false consciousness” or to criticize them for the positions they take concerning women’s and men’s roles in society. I have not intentionally painted a picture of them as “unenlightened,” and I hope I have not given the impression that there exists a singular “Ukrainian woman’s” voice. Instead, I have tried to show the complex ways that the women I knew negotiated various discourses in order to give their lives meaning and to stake a place for themselves in Ukrainian society and in a globalizing world. It is my hope that my research will contribute to a dialogue on these issues among scholars and activists interested in women’s issues.

Notes

1. In 1999 the estimated earned income for men was \$4,576, while women only earned an estimated \$2,488 (United Nations Development Programme 2001)

2. In the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, a high percentage of women in positions of political power were artificially created through quotas, and women deputies constituted 50% local Soviets (Councils) and 30% of the republican Supreme Soviet. Free elections after independence in 1994 returned only 17 women deputies of the 405 elected to the Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada), just 4% of the total. This number almost doubled in the 1998 elections, when 32 women (or 7.8% of the total) were elected to parliament. In the March 2002 parliamentary elections the percentage of women deputies

elected declined to 5.1%, or 23 of 450 deputies. Additionally, very few women elected to political office occupy positions of real political power.

3. I have also conducted medical anthropological research in Ukraine, focusing on the effects of Chernobyl (Phillips 2001), folk healing in rural areas (Phillips 2004, Phillips and Miller 2004), and the Ukrainian disability rights movement (Phillips 2002).

4. Both Ukrainian and Russian are spoken in Ukraine. Interviews with Ivana were conducted in Russian and Ukrainian. The terms transliterated here came from conversations we conducted in Russian.

5. As a trainer, Ivana led seminars for other NGO activists in Ukraine. Seminar topics included grant writing, working with volunteers, public relations, and so on.

6. Ivana's monthly salary was 150 UAH, or 120 UAH after taxes. This amounted to less than \$30.

7. All translations from the Russian and the Ukrainian are my own.

8. This seminar was facilitated by the NIS-US Women's Consortium, an international coalition of groups whose goal has been to increase the participation of women in "democracy building" by providing instructional and technical assistance to women's groups and by enhancing the leadership skills of women.

9. Drakulić (1998), a Croatian writer from Zagreb, describes how, at an international conference called "Comrade Woman" in Belgrade in 1978, she saw her "first live feminist." Some of the "lessons" provided for Yugoslav women by Western feminists, as described by Drakulić, focused on the evils of high-heeled shoes and make-up, issues that the Yugoslav women did not see as pressing problems.

10. As Bunzl has shown, East-West border crossings after socialism (mostly from West to East) engender neocolonial subjectivities for "Easterners" in a variety of contexts. Bunzl's work explores how same-sex tourism by Austrians in Prague exemplifies "larger processes of subjectification that construct distinctly Western sexualities in constitutive opposition to the East's embodied Otherness" (2000:90). Like the metaphors used by western feminists to describe East European women as "backwards" and apolitical, the neocolonial metaphors Bunzl examines are products of unequal power relations between East and West.

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