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PART ONE

Gendering the Postcommunist Landscape
Bug Inspectors and Beauty Queens: The Problems of Translating Feminism into Russian

Beth Holmgren

A few years ago, when the Russian writer and lecturer-provocateur Tat’iana Tolstaia was endorsing the “truth” of Francine du Plessix Gray’s book on Soviet women, she penned this grim portrait of Western feminists rapping on the collective door of Soviet women and grilling them in the “cold, rigid manner” of bug inspectors: “How do your men oppress you? Why don’t they wash the dishes? Why don’t they prepare the meals? Why don’t they allow women into politics? Why don’t women rebel against the phallocracy?”¹ As comforting as it might be to dismiss this image as typical Tolstoyan reductionism, a less extreme version of it recurs in the commentary of Ol’ga Lipovskaia, the editor/publisher of the journal Zhenskoe chtenie (Women’s reading). Lipovskaia remarks on Western feminists’ bewildered, sometimes alienating contacts with Soviet women — the “real confusion of purposes and activities” manifest in various official meetings between the two groups, Western women’s one-track insistence on the value of their own agendas, the problem with effectively translating the most basic Western terms like “feminism,” “emancipation,” and “gender” for a slogan-weary Soviet audience.²

Impressions from the other side of the border record similar misconceptions and sometimes vent a counter-dismay. Reporting in a January 1993 issue of the Nation, Andrew Kopkind notes the lack of a Russian feminist movement and Russian adoption “in the space of a few months” of “some of the West’s most reactionary gender roles and sexual stereo-
As he selectively interviews self-avowed Russian feminists like Lipovskaia and Anastasiia Posadskaiia (the director of Moscow’s Center for Gender Studies), Kopkind relays stories and statistics sure to upset a Western feminist readership—for example, Russian women's seeming acquiescence to a new, markedly Western brand of exploitation (55) or the polls showing the rising number of Russian women who yearn to be full-time homemakers or aspire no further than the very often prone position of “secretary to a biznesman who earns hard currency” (50). In an article of 11 February 1993 for the Los Angeles Times, Elizabeth Shogren simply frames her survey of Russian women in Western terms, stating that these women “[b]y their own choice and because of mounting new social pressures . . . are less liberated, in the feminist sense, than they were when the Communist Party ruled the country.”

Even Shogren’s Russian source, the social anthropologist Irina Popova, seemingly relies on American analogies: “Russian society is going through a phase similar to that in 1950s America, when homemakers and wholesome stars were idealized, . . . but because of a rebellion against the state-decreed sexual puritanism of the Soviet era, the ideal Russian woman is more sex kitten than homecoming queen.”

All of these attempted border crossings, with whatever intent or audience in mind, underscore the real difficulties of translating and transposing even a mainstream Western awareness of gender issues into the Russian (or generally Slavic) context. As one observer remarks, such crossings are liable to produce a kind of “mirror inversion” of images: Whereas Russian women sight the bogeywoman of doctrinaire or self-involved Western feminists, Western women lament what is for them the inexplicable “backwardness” of Russian women retreating to the home or readily consenting to play well-paid male sex object. This mutual misunderstanding seems especially pointed today, but it has existed for decades and pervades both popular attitudes and presumably more complex and considered trends in scholarship. I can offer myself as witness and accessory to this phenomenon. As an American woman trained to be a Slavist and beginning my teaching career in the late 1980s (when women’s studies programs were being established throughout the American university system), I have experienced these border troubles firsthand and at length. Already minted as a traditional scholar, I only learned about gender studies “on the job” from patient colleagues in other fields, and much to my surprised delight, this exposure revitalized and trans-
formed my own research and teaching. Yet I quickly discovered that the integration of gender studies into Slavic studies involved complicated acts of translation and adaptation — acts that distanced me somewhat from my colleagues in women’s studies and for the most part disaffected or bemused my Slavist colleagues. As I have taught and written my way back and forth across this border, I have come to appreciate that the misunderstanding between Western women and Russian women and, by extension, the recurring difficulties of integrating gender studies into Slavic studies, stem from complex differences between first and second worlds, between two very separate contexts of experience, expectation, and expression. This essay attempts only a utilitarian sketch of these border troubles mainly drawn from a first world angle and focused on a limited number of examples, but it provides, hopefully, a somewhat experienced traveler’s “tips” for making a friendly border crossing, a mutually informed and transformative exchange with women in postcommunist Russia.

**WHOSE FEMINISM?**

When Shogren speaks of Russian women “being less liberated, in a feminist sense,” when Kopkind records the absence of a feminist movement, or when I glibly introduce the term “gender studies,” we cannot presume a common ideology, but we seem to rely on a common heritage — one founded mainly on the experience of certain privileged groups of Western women and especially manifest in Western feminist movements of the late 1960s. This is not to claim that Shogren, Kopkind, and I represent the broad spectrum of extant Western feminisms or to argue that these feminisms can be reduced to a 1960s agenda. But if we are not to generalize our historical experience (especially when we are assaying comparisons with non-Western women), then it is imperative that we acknowledge the long-lasting formative influence (both positive and negative) of that earlier agenda and its regional context. The 1960s movements largely formed in protest against the situation of middle-class white women in advanced capitalist states — specifically, against their socially assigned and enforced roles as wife, mother, and homemaker; the legal and actual inequities in their professional, social, and economic status as compared with that of middle-class white men; and the general exploitation and commodification of women as objects of desire. Predictably enough, when feminist scholarship furthered this protest, it focused first
on its own "first" conditions and articulators—on the models, experiences, and works of privileged first world women. This specialized focus prevailed for some time, as did the notion of gender as the unifying category of identity, subsuming other categories like race, class, or sexuality.

Over the last quarter of a century, this bias has provoked much protest, factionalism, and metamorphosis among Western women's groups; internal debate has facilitated a dismantling of traditional presumptions about gender and sexual identity, a greater acknowledgment of class and race differences, the generation of a plurality of feminisms. But despite the attempts of Western feminists to theorize and accommodate difference, we face perhaps the greatest challenge in relating to non-Western women, for such relations require the negotiation of the most complex differences and antagonisms and suffer most acutely from tendencies to generalize the local and stereotype the other. To date, this challenge has been most vividly illustrated and amply studied in relations between first world and third world women. It seems particularly telling that, at least in the early stages of their inquiry, critics writing from third world perspectives asserted regional bias rather than plurality in their readings of Western women; they critiqued Western feminists in general for "shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class white experiences, and in terms of internal racism, classism, and homophobia."6 Elaborating this position in her pioneering essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Chandra Talpade Mohanty charges that Western feminists' presumption of gender as the main source of identity, oppression, and therefore solidarity "implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally" and establishes middle-class white Western women as a "normative referent" against which women of other races, classes, and especially third world nations seem lacking or "underdeveloped."7

However debatable her position, Mohanty's protest and critique should alert us to the possibility of a similar "early" dynamic between first world and second world women.8 If relations between Western feminists and women in the postcolonial world sometimes recall (or are perceived to recall) the blind opposition of Western imperialism versus colonial resistance, Western approaches to Slavic women can be read as similarly myopic, if somewhat less condescending. Certainly conditions were ripe
for miscommunication. By the late twentieth century, decades of cold war politics and Stalinist repression had curiously distorted relations between Soviet women and a wide array of Western feminist groups; in both "camps," the propaganda deployed to demonize the "other" superpower often inadvertently fostered a kind of blinkered idealization. From the vantage point of Western women (even liberal feminists), the public gains of Soviet women under socialism seemed undeniable—the Soviet constitution's guarantee of women's equal professional and economic rights, the access of Soviet women to most areas of the work force, the state's at least partial support for working women (paid maternity leave, public day care). In turn, Western focus on these coveted achievements at times obscured or dismissed the special problems of Soviet women (their unrelieved domestic labor, the lack of consumer goods and services that would ease their domestic burden, the political victimization they shared with men). In fact, in her introduction to Soviet Sisterhood in 1985, Barbara Holland readily admits Western feminists' self-serving nostalgia for the "new Soviet woman" of the 1920s, that almost-realized socialist feminist:

Feminists in the West may feel nostalgic for the determined pioneers of the past who, their red kerchiefs firmly knotted round their heads, climbed into the driving seat of a tractor or picked up a shovel on a building site. We may be hurt by the ridicule now attached to these images by Soviet women, themselves anxious to buy our fashionable jeans and dresses, and leave their dirty overalls behind.  

It seems predictable, then, that this sort of nostalgia would elicit protest, debate, and correspondingly reductive readings from the Russian side. It is interesting to note that a Russian feminist (Anastasiia Posadskaia quoted by Kopkind) redirects Mohanty's complaints about Western "shortsightedness," in this instance generalizing and critiquing the model of Marxist feminists:

When we met with Western feminists we were struck by their social frame. They were Marxists. We argued with them so much I even cried. How could I say that the system that did all this to me was good? No one wants to hear about solidarity in this country anymore, because for years it was imposed: solidarity with South Africa, solidarity with Cuba. For Western women socialism was a question of values. They said, "At least the Communists put liberation down on paper." (55)

At this point in our relations, if Western feminists are to see beyond their nostalgia and Russian women are to hear beyond an alienating political rhetoric, then we all must commit to more historically informed,
contextually sensitive ways of seeing, hearing, and speaking. We may even need to devise a language of paraphrase to defuse those political buzzwords (the legacy of American and Soviet cold war rhetoric, the marketpeak of Western developmental politics) that continue to polarize us.

THE CAUSES OF RUSSIAN WOMEN

Indeed, once we examine the political traditions and historical experience of Russian women, we can appreciate that they have had ample cause to critique their own “determined pioneers” and to dismiss Western “nostalgia.” If the category of gender has been promoted at times at the expense of all other categories of identity by Western feminists, it has been a self-erasing or non-category—indeed, a non-term—in Russian and Soviet societies. To be sure, a “woman’s question” was raised in mid-nineteenth-century Russia to protest noblewomen’s unequal legal, political, and economic status and a Russian feminist tradition (under a variety of names) could be said to extend from the 1860s until the October revolution. Yet, for the most part, Russian women have eschewed specifically feminist programs for what they believed to be the larger, more urgent causes of populism or socialism or, in the Soviet period, Party loyalty or dissidence. For them the unifying, galvanizing categories of oppression and solidarity were those of class and allegiance or resistance to the state (be it tsarist or Soviet). Although the program (and sometimes even the practice) of women’s equal rights was automatically included in many nineteenth-century revolutionary movements, it remains significant that socialist groups (including the Bolshevik party) denounced any explicitly feminist movement as an exclusionary bourgeois by-product, the self-indulgent agenda of privileged middle- or upper-class women. Not unlike women activists in various third world countries, Russian women were historically conditioned to scorn the presumably middle-class bias of feminism and its seemingly extravagant emphasis on individual fulfillment—especially in light of the material hardships and deficits continually plaguing Russian society.

Moreover, while seventy-odd years of Soviet rule certainly legislated the public image of the happy working woman, its less publicized realities shaped very different desires and goals in its female citizens. The “paper rights” issued to Soviet women guaranteed them an equal status and professional access unprecedented (and still unmatched) in the Western
world, but, imposed as they were on an uninvolved populace, these laws neither produced nor were the product of a widespread social revolution. The “right to work” was extended more as responsibility than empowerment, and after a rather chaotic period of social experimentation in the 1920s, Soviet women were left with a monstrous double burden: the state tacitly endorsed their traditional assignment of housework and child care but invested minimal resources in supporting and supplying the domestic sphere. For all the official rhetoric of equality between the sexes, essentialist notions of men’s and women’s capabilities and roles went unchallenged in daily practice and general social and cultural attitudes, with men and the “masculine” valued as the universal and most accomplished norm, and women and the “feminine” regarded as more limited, secondary, and often second-rate.

Yet, contrary to Western expectations, this double burden and practical inequality did not foment any sizable feminist campaign for a domestic revolution. Instead, the eventual binary opposition of Stalinist state versus society — that determiner of all value — generated an almost inverted scenario. Due to the perils and political compromises of public life and a successful “career” in the Stalinist system, the domestic sphere and family life came to be cherished, even by the women who labored there, as a site of psychological and moral refuge. Indeed, Tolstaia argues that Soviet women, more than Soviet men, were able to “remain human” precisely on account of their domestic attachments. “They tried to protect their own little space from the influence of the state. They locked themselves in with family and children.” In direct contrast to the many Western women who struggled to escape a devalued home into a powerful professional and political world, many Soviet women (and men) sought sanctuary and fulfillment in the less monitored world of family and friends, a domestic space that was far more capacious and stimulating than obligatory work or meaningless politics. And while the political landscape has changed in the post-Soviet era, I would argue that the moral onus on public life has not diminished, but grown more complex — directed now against ineffectual politicians and unscrupulous businessmen. For Russian women today, the “return to the home” will certainly limit their political clout and professional options, but it may also constitute a kind of self-investment, a long-overdue vacation, even a moral act of dissociation.

In much the same way, this powerful opposition conditioned Soviet women’s very different approach to another Western target — the objecti-
ification and commodification of women. Over the years the state promoted political icons of Soviet womanhood (the good mother, the heroic shockworker) that invoked carefully maternal and/or maidenly chaste constructions of femininity; these icons implicitly defined and critiqued "bourgeois" constructions that cultivated a fashionable beauty or sexual desirability. At the same time, the state's material neglect of the domestic sphere also limited the production of specialized goods and services for women, including fashion and beauty products. These kinds of goods were obtainable mainly through illegal means and Party connections; they were coveted as emblems of unusual status, even subversive display. To a certain extent, therefore, Soviet women construed the image of the commodified woman as a goal rather than a target, an image valorized by both political censure and material lack. Of course, the commodification of Soviet women did reproduce the degradation and exploitation more explicit in its Western forms; Soviet women were as susceptible as any other group to a manipulative "beauty myth." Yet in the absence of a capitalist market their extreme preoccupation with "looking feminine" (read bourgeois feminine) and obtaining hard-to-get makeup and stylish clothes also signified a personalized triumph over state-imposed norms and consumer priorities. Among her peers, the Soviet woman who managed a bourgeois feminine image without bourgeois advantages (in her context, Party ties) was admirable and enviable for her pragmatic ingenuity—her savvy and daring in manipulating various "private" and even illegal connections. As Elizabeth Waters remarks in an article on Soviet beauty contests, such attitudes very likely help fuel the current enthusiasm for beauty pageants and the seemingly unruffled public response to the new capitalist exploitation of women. She notes the "political statement encoded" in these contests and ascribes their visibility to "the long-frustrated desire for Western style, the sudden emergence of the market, and the freedom granted by glasnost to break old taboos, to explore femininity and sexuality." At least in this transitional period, the market value recently tagged on women's beauty and sexual desirability still resonates with an unofficial desire, a past quest in which women did not simply consume a prescribed ideal, but exercised their own creativity and constructed their own "unofficial" (if still convention-bound) self-image.

Yet the dominance of this state/society opposition, with its attendant material priorities, has wielded a reductive impact as well. Material short-
ages may have lent a "subversive" aspect to women's commodification, but the combination of shortages, conservative social attitudes, and an historical tradition of women's self-sacrifice has had a very negative effect on Soviet women's well-being — most particularly, on their access to safe, progressive modes of contraception and maternity care. As Larissa Remennick notes in a recent study, "IA [induced abortion] has been the principal means of birth control" in the Soviet Union for the last forty years and IA-related mortality rates are shockingly high (10.09 deaths per 10,000 abortions in the USSR as opposed to 0.6 deaths in the US). Contraceptives have always been in short supply; perhaps more surprisingly, sex education has tended to encourage abortion over contraception as "a chosen birth control strategy." Maternity care has varied in quality depending on location, but it has been standard Soviet practice to segregate mothers from their partners and families and to deny women a choice of options during labor and childbirth. Even as it assigned women sole responsibility for their newborns, the Soviet medical establishment invariably treated these mothers as patients, "not person[s]." Summarizing their analysis of Soviet maternity care, Barbara Holland and Teresa McKevitt identify the bitter paradox of Soviet motherhood: "Though in theory the state acknowledges that giving birth is a contribution to society and that mothers are owed respect and support, in practice women undergo lonely, unsupported and powerless labours" (173).

Less overtly, the siege mentality resulting from decades of political opposition (either against a hostile outside world or a hostile state) has also censored women's exploration and expression of their sexuality. In certain specifics, official icons have permeated the general Russian mindset: the role of the good mother still seems to dictate most Russian women's ideal. The uniform model of a virtuous heterosexual woman — the chaste and maternal Party worker, the chaste and maternal dissident — has obstructed the emergence and acceptance of more diversified roles, nontraditional life-styles. It is characteristic that lesbians and bisexuals are not even “seen” in Russian society. Historically, they have surfaced in the criminalized margins of prisons and labor camps (although, unlike gay men, their sexuality was not recognized in the penal code), but most have opted to blend in with the heterosexual majority, to avoid attracting official and unofficial disapproval of their difference. While this homogeneity may be challenged in present-day Russia, a patriarchal and con-
servative hierarchy of "causes" is likely to endure, at least over the next decade, as the most powerful force shaping Russian women's self-worth and political engagement.  

**COMMON MARKET, COMMON CAUSE?**

Grass-roots protest *versus* mandated change, insistence on individual rights and fulfillment *versus* self-sacrifice for presumably greater "causes," career prospects *versus* obligatory work, domestic entrapment *versus* domestic refuge, commodification *versus* improvisation, a constantly generative factionalism *versus* an all-determining opposition — these are the sorts of historical differences that have jammed communications between Western and Russian women. In predictable consequence, these differences have also stymied exchange between scholars of Western cultures and Slavists in the West. The latter group has developed very much under the influence of successive generations of Russian émigré scholars, has become accustomed to regarding the Russian experience as singular and (at times) exemplary, and is especially wary about applying theories and premises based on Western contexts. As a result, many Slavists have been altogether reluctant to recognize gender (not to speak of sexuality) as an influential category of identity, experience, and perception. Their resistance (stiffened at times by a complacent isolationism) has complicated and retarded scholarly and curricular attempts to mediate between the worlds of Western and Russian women.

Yet now that the Soviet system has collapsed and Western and Russian politics and economies seem to be converging (academic convergence struggling to keep pace), we might at last entertain hopes for a more informed, mutually intelligible *dialogue*. Certainly the Russians seem more avid right now for Western goods, more alert to helpful voices in the present cacophony of Western advisors and opportunists. And the need for better, more nuanced translation has never seemed so urgent. Even making allowances for any first world bias, it is striking how much the new Russian powers-that-be are *measurably* diminishing or demoting women in their shift from socialist state to capitalist nation and their concomitant selection and adaptation of various Western "imports." Women's "paper rights" are even now being erased. The new Russian government has already "omitted the legal guarantees of equality for women in the workplace" in its draft constitution; women's representa-
tion in the new Russian parliament has dropped precipitously from a once mandated 33 percent to 10 percent; and Yeltsin and other male leaders, by word and example, encourage the old patriarchal distribution of men in politics and women in the home.\textsuperscript{22} Lipovskaia characterizes these trends as “the emergence of so-called ‘male democracy,’ in which women, long associated with the home, are simply not seen in this newly emerging society.”\textsuperscript{23}

The economic situation of Russian women is even grimmer. Not only has the rocky transition to a “free market” exacerbated women’s double burden to inconceivable extremes, but it has generated what I would call, embellishing on Lipovskaia’s example, a kind of “macho capitalism” dominated by young male entrepreneurs (the so-called “millionaires’ club”), ex-members of the old Soviet nomenklatura, and mafia-like networks of extortion and enforcement. Although some women have emerged as entrepreneurs, their businesses, according to one witness, tend to be “small and scarce” and their owners “less successful because they’re more law-abiding.”\textsuperscript{24} This “masculinization” of private enterprise revives one traditional fiction of man as the more competitive, capable, committed (i.e., undistracted by childbirth and children) employee and evokes corresponding fictions and job descriptions of woman as helpmate — as homemaker or whore. After decades of recruitment into the labor force, women workers are being laid off in large numbers, and in many cases, from more prestigious, higher-earning jobs. Posadskai a gives an eyewitness account of this metamorphosis:

The Soviet pattern was that a woman first got an education, then a lifelong job and finally a pension. . . . It was very stable and secure. Now all this pattern is smashed. Women make up 70 percent of the unemployed. And of these unemployed women, 85 percent have higher or specialized educations. Now the placement officers say they should be cleaners or nurses, the lowest-paid, least prestigious jobs. They say women under 18 or over 45 should not be trained or retrained, because there are no jobs for them. The paradigms of women’s lives are changing. Why should they get a higher education? Most of those losing their jobs are engineers in construction or chemistry, for example.\textsuperscript{25}

Much like current Russian translations of “democracy” and “capitalism,” the extant translation and adaptation of “free speech” also conveys the privileging of men’s desires and value at women’s expense. In the most flamboyant example, the “free speech” of glasnost has led to “freer” representations of sex and sexuality, but, as Helena Goscilo deftly argues
in her essay "New Members and Organs: The Politics of Porn," the new erotica is mainly heterosexual and male-oriented in its focus, projecting for male delectation images of naked or scantily clad, provocatively posed women in all sorts of public fora—television, taxicabs, the mainstream press, commercial advertising. Through the media of the new Russian market, sexual freedom is being purveyed as a heterosexist male prerogative, with women enjoined to consume their own commodification as a means of earning value in men's eyes.

Again (as I must remind myself), such new contextual developments may forever elicit responses in Russian women that differ from what Western feminists (and especially socialist feminists) may expect or presume. But what is particularly frustrating about this moment in Russian history is that we may feel we recognize these "new" commercial manipulations and social values, that we know best the strategies and consequences of capitalism, and it therefore behooves us to play Cassandra, warning Russian women of the feminine mystique, yellow wallpaper, and Stepford wives to come. We can cite chapter and verse: scholars working from Western models have outlined certain scripts of women's devaluation and manipulation under capitalism— their designation as consumer and consumable, the commercial exploitation and careful political containment of their images and desires. We seem to anticipate and perhaps even hope that the same sorts of scripts will unfold in a newly capitalist Russia, so that our expertise might be of value and use.

Yet before we presume one kind of oppression and impose solidarity, we might admit the complexity and possible variation of such scripts. Despite the inequities and ravages of capitalism (or, for that matter, the hidden privileges of democracy), women have not only been made its victims and unwitting accomplices, but have managed to work the system to gain political and economic power. Rather than reprise the role of gloomy prophet, we in the West might help Russian women explore this complexity and consider their own potential. Rather than subscribe to the condescending dynamic of developmental politics, we would do best, I think, to serve as collaborators and interlocutors. Our role seems clearest in terms of intellectual collaboration. In the first place, we must pursue more extensive and diverse literal translation, supplying information and texts about the wide variety of gender issues and the wide variety of women's experiences and accomplishments in different cultures that remain untranslated and largely unavailable to a Russian audience; we must
help subsidize those in-country publications, like Lipovskaia’s *Zhenskoe chtenie*, that have already undertaken this mammoth task. We must invest more concertedly in that other, trickier sort of translation — the development and sharing of gender-aware scholarly analyses and teaching materials focused on Russian texts and contexts. While it has been somewhat useful to export various feminist classics, the very language and premises of these texts often make them alien or indigestible reading for a Russian audience. It is far more productive, I think, when we can discuss and debate issues and analyses on common con/textual ground. Above all, we must create venues for dialogue with Russian women and men through both academic and popular conferences, exchanges, and publications.

The next steps in this collaboration are infinitely harder because they require big bucks, insider access, and a constant self-monitoring. In our interactions with the second world we need to strike a careful balance between an exclusionary insistence on women’s needs and concerns (the historical Achilles heel of liberal Western feminisms) and the rapid, largely unchecked erasure and devaluation of those needs and concerns in the new Russia. The point of our efforts — whether they take place on paper, in institutional fora, or on the street — should be to keep these issues and concerns visible and to offer sample scenarios of women’s successful involvement and achievement. It is important that we finance more contingents of women professionals, politicians, and activists to be alternative voices among the advising hordes of retired American executives and Jeffrey Sachs clones. It is imperative, too, that we develop and support specific working exchanges between a wide variety of American and Russian women’s groups, that together we establish a carefully reciprocal networking and pooling of resources and expertise. Whatever methods we can manage, it is clear that Russian women can learn much from Western women’s struggles to participate in and reform different capitalist and democratic systems. In equal turn, Western women can learn much from Russian women’s long experience balancing the multiple burdens of family, home, and job and their effective involvement with other social and political causes. In any event, if we wish to keep the border open and friendly, it is high time we bug inspectors exchange our respective clipboards and “rigid manner” for an open mind, a ready ear, and a briefcase stuffed with concrete possibilities, and, whenever possible, hard cash.
NOTES

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5. Jo Anna Isaak, “Reflections of Resistance: Women Artists on Both Sides of the Mir,” Heresies, special Russian/English bilingual edition entitled IdiomA, no. 26 (1992): 9-10: “Like many letters of the Russian alphabet that seem reversed to us, the ways in which ‘woman’ is represented is frequently the mirror inversion of the representation of woman in the West. In looking at the image of women on the other side of this mirror, we have an opportunity (almost as we could with computer image programming) to see how our lot would differ if our image was different.”


7. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” the most updated and modified version of which is reprinted in Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, 52-80.

8. In Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (London: Zed Books, 1992), Kumari Jayawardena does frame a more textured reading of this interaction, noting that “[t]he concept of feminism has also been the cause of much confusion in Third World countries” — scorned as a foreign or “bourgeois” product by “traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists” and claimed as a solely Western phenomenon by North Americans and Western Europeans (2).


10. Richard Stites, The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nibil-

11. See Laura Engelstein’s nuanced analysis of the distinction between Russian and Western societies in the late nineteenth century: “But although they [the Russians] adopted the liberal ideal of the autonomous subject, they often rejected the Western bourgeois regard for self-interest and the goal of self-fulfillment.” In The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 4.

12. In Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), Mary Buckley provides a very useful overview of women’s situation in the various periods of Soviet history.


14. See Vladimir Shlapentokh’s study, Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Shlapentokh argues that after Stalin’s death there ensued a process of “privatization” or “destatization” (14) in which the state gradually lost authority “over all strata of the population” (153) and the Soviet people shifted their interest “from the state to their primary groups (family, friends, and lovers) and to semilegal and illegal civil society as well as to illegal activity inside the public sector” (13).


16. Russian commentator Nadia Kakurina identifies this historical tradition of self-sacrifice, dubbing it “the oppressive power of pity”; while she admits that “[t]here is . . . something deeply moving and decent about [women’s] tactful lack of emphasis on their own needs,” she recognizes the hazards of such self-denial. “The oppressive power of pity: Russian women and self-censorship,” Index on Censorship 19, no. 9 (October 1990): 28–29.

17. Larissa I. Remennick, “Patterns of Birth Control,” in Kon and Riordan, Sex and Russian Society, 45–63.


20. Cf. Igor Kon’s “Sexual Minorities,” in Kon and Riordan, Sex and Russian Society, esp. 103: “When talking of homosexuality, Russians almost always
mean male homosexuality; the press has only recently started to mention lesbianism. All the same, life for lesbians is no better. It is true that their relationships do not come under any article in the criminal code, and intimacy between women is less remarkable to the surrounding world. On the other hand, a young girl in our society who is aware of her psychosexual difference finds it harder than a man to find a close relationship. And society’s attitude is just as obdurate: ridicule, persecution, expulsion from college or work, threats to take her children away. The idea that homosexuals, men or women, can actually be good parents would be absolutely anathema to virtually everyone in the former USSR.” See also Cath Jackson’s interview with Olga Zhuk, president of the Tchaikovsky Foundation, a lesbian and gay group based in Saint Petersburg; the interview is published in *Trouble & Strife* 24 (Summer 1992): 20–24. Zhuk speaks of the extreme difficulties of growing up lesbian in Russia — the loneliness and sense of isolation, the lack of any public meeting places for gay women, the fact that most gay women marry “because you are expected to and because women don’t identify as lesbians.” She describes the “sub-culture of lesbianism” that has been preserved in the camps and she notes gay women’s reluctance to come out publicly: “In general lesbians don’t want to work politically. They say that nobody’s bothering them, everything’s okay: it’s much better that no one should know they are lesbians and they don’t want to draw attention to it.” I thank Rebecca Wells for bringing this interview to my attention.

21. For one analysis of how service to these various “causes” has shaped Russian women’s self-representation, see my article “For the Good of the Cause: Russian Women’s Autobiography in the Twentieth Century,” in a forthcoming volume of essays, *Russian Women’s Literature*, ed. Toby Clyman and Diana Greene (London: Greenwood Press, 1994).


24. Kopkind, “What Is to Be Done?” 49. This quote also may be attributable to Lipovskaia; Kopkind is citing a Petersburg woman named Olga who is “an astute, ex-hippie feminist intellectual of 38” (Lipovskaia’s first name, age, location, and ideological self-identification).

25. Cited in ibid., 55. Shogren’s sources state that 80 percent of the unemployed are women (11).


27. See also Lynne Attwood’s discussion of women’s representation in current Russian films — their preponderant depiction as an “object of the male gaze” or the passive (and often supposedly symbolic) victim of male violence. “Sex and the Cinema,” in Kon and Riordan, *Sex and Russian Society*, 64–88.

28. Extending this principle of self-monitoring, we might also conduct a critical review of the kinds of “capitalist” and “democratic” models Western groups are currently exporting to Russia; we need to ascertain if these exported
models bother or dare to specify policies about women's inclusion, promotion, and rights in government and the workplace.

29. For an excellent example of this kind of networking, see the Cooperatives Initiative Program sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Their projects include cooperative seminars to develop women's political participation and empowerment; training and support for women's re-employment and entrepreneurship; and programs to provide better women's health care and child care. Contact: Sarah Harder, Office of the Chancellor, Women's Studies, UW-Eau Claire, WI 54702–4004. There are numerous other programs either in place or in process. For more information on such initiatives, see Women East-West, the newsletter issued by the Association for Women in Slavic Studies. Contact: Mary Zirin, 1178 Sonoma Drive, Altadena, CA 91001.