

**THE SOVIET UNION AND THE INTERNATIONAL
DOMAIN OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES:
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND A CASE STUDY OF
THE SOVIET WOMEN'S COMMITTEE (1941-1991)**

By

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Anna Levin, the head of the Israeli-Palestinian department in Kvinna till Kvinna foundation, was sitting with me on the balcony of a pastoral Christian hotel in Nazareth. We had come together, Swedish, Palestinian and Jewish women activists for a follow-up session for a seminar which I had co-facilitated with Jelena Djordjevic, the deputy director of the Anti-Trafficking Center in Belgrade in Istanbul few months before. We were discussing my thesis, and the richness of cross-national history of women's struggles. "You know," Anna said, "Alexandra Kollontai was one of the pillars of the early twentieth century women's movement in Sweden." "Actually, no," I said, "I never heard that". It was an intriguing statement. Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1954) was the mother of much of the Soviet legacy within the women's rights domain, and a valuable gender philosopher for Russian feminist movements and beyond. I knew that she had, in fact, been "sent away" to become a Soviet ambassador in Sweden by the Bolshevik Party in 1927. Given the depth of her engagement, it is reasonable to assume that she wasn't spending her time in Sweden just sightseeing in Stockholm's islands. "Yes," Anna told me, "she is referred to in Swedish feminist historiography as an integrative part of our legacy, a very significant part". "That's amazing," I answered, and I was indeed stunned, certainly not about the fact that Alexandra Kollontai had a significant contribution to the development of the women's movement at the place of her exile, but stunned to realize that this idea had never crossed my mind before...

Nazareth, Palestine-Israel, October, 2010.

Abstract

This research is inspired by the work of Third World feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty and influenced by the work of Central European academic Francisca de Haan. It suggests a revision of the imaginative mapping of international women's history.

The research addresses the question, 'What role was played by the Soviet Union (SU) within the international domain of women's rights and struggles, and how can this role be conceptualized?' The subsequent research question is, 'What were the specific ways and mechanisms of the SU's direct engagement as this was carried out by the Soviet Women's Committee (1941-1991). I suggest that the role of the SU in the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles can be conceptualized as consisting of motivational and active dimensions. The active dimension, in turn, consisted of *direct* and *indirect* engagements. I use the concept of *engagement* to encompass the idea that regardless of the exact motivations of the socialist super power, its actions had the potential of real, although not necessary always positive, impact within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles. In order to answer the main research question, I focus on the *direct active engagement* of the SU and discuss in depth the mechanisms employed by the SU and its actor, the Soviet Women's Committee. My research aims to contribute to the critical insights of the Chinese-American scholar Wang Zheng and the Romanian scholar Raluca Maria Popa, supporting their argument that we need a significantly more complex approach to the history of socialist state-supported women's organizations.

My research is based on primary archival materials found in both traditional and online archives. My secondary sources include materials issued by Soviet sources, such as the journal *Soviet Woman*, as well as various other brochures and books. I also base my research on three interviews, most importantly with Samira Khoury, a life long leader of Tandi, a women's organization that was closely related to the SWC and which still operates in Israel, along with a few additional short interviews with women who were familiar with the work of the Soviet Women's Committee.

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While I was writing and moving around the globe, hundreds lost their lives in the struggle against Israeli occupation, among them dear friends and comrades. I miss them deeply.

This work is dedicated to them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC – CENTRAL COMMITTEE

CEDAW – CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN.

CP- COMMUNIST PARTY.

CSW – [UNITED NATIONS] COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN.

HUAC – HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE.

IAW – INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN.

ICW – INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

IWY-INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S YEAR.

PWM-PALESTINIAN WOMEN MOVEMENT.

SIB – SOVIET BUREAU OF INFORMATION.

SPF – SOVIET PEACE FUND.

SWAFC – SOVIET WOMEN’S ANTI-FASCIST COMMITTEE.

SWC – SOVIET WOMEN’S COMMITTEE.

UFF – [*UNION DES FEMMES FRANCAISES*] UNION OF FRENCH WOMEN.

VOKS - [*VSESQJUZNOE OBSHESTVO KUL’TURNY S VYAZI S ZAGRANITSEY*] ALL-UNION SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

WIDF – WOMEN’S INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION.

SCSSAA -SOVIET COMMITTEE OF SOLIDARITY WITH STATES OF AFRICA AND ASIA

INTRODUCTION

This research contributes to the historiography of the international domain of women's rights and struggles during the twentieth century. For the purpose of this thesis I define the domain as a combination of two main areas. The first area consists of local and international formal and informal rights of women and other factors that determine their social positions. The second area includes international and local women's movements, defined here as "female collective action in pursuit of social and political goals" (Molyneux 2010, p. 3) worldwide.

Thus, the term international domain of women's rights and struggles is used as well to encompass *global* collective actions of women. The term is deployed to abstain from using the term 'global women's movement,' as I agree with Caribbean women's rights advocate and academic Peggy Antrobus that the attempt to access the history of women's struggles within the limits of the term is highly problematic. In her words, "the adjective global itself appears to minimize cultural and contextual differences that are valued by women's movements in different cultures and contexts," which might lead to a disregard of "profound differences among women even within national boundaries" (Antrobus 2004, p.1). I hope that the term international domain of women's rights and struggles suggests a more descriptive analytic framework.

The research aspires to contribute to the growing effort to create accounts of world women's history (Smith 2004-5). It is based on the proposition that the changes within the international domain of women's rights and struggles during the twentieth century were an outcome of a convergence between activism of women's movements and changes of the broader political circumstances. The present work aspires to contribute to the body of knowledge on the ways in which women's movements and global politics and economics interfere with one another, producing both advances and setbacks in women's rights and their position world-wide. This thesis is intended to support the broader argument by Central European academic Francisca de Haan (2009, 2010) and UK academic Helen Laville (2002) that the Cold War is a crucial dimension in the history of women and women's movements in the twentieth century. In

addition I join the central argument of de Haan's *Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: the case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)* (de Haan, 2010b) that research into the contribution of women's movements which are imagined as located in the Cold War's East is neglected and that their history remains *not known*¹ due to "continuing Cold War paradigms within historiography of transnational women's movements" (De Haan, 2010b, p 564).

Within the broader field of women's historiography and the Cold War, the work focuses on the role of the Soviet Union and the state-supported *Komitet Sovetskikh Zhenshin* -Soviet Women's Committee (SWC). The organization was established in 1941 as the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee (SWAFC) as a part of the SU's war effort and its name was changed to Soviet Women's Committee in 1956. For tens of thousands of women, the SWC opened doors and launched careers in the Communist Party apparatus (Warshofsky Lapidus 1978, pp. 135-170). It provided Soviet women with an accessible institutional infrastructure (Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See 1997, pp. 72-75) and, more pertinently for our topic, it created and managed a vibrant international network, which was of utmost significance for the people's diplomacy of the Soviet state (ibid, p.74). It was dissolved in 1991, when, following the fall of the Soviet state, The Union of Russian Women was established on the remains of its infrastructure.

The role of the SWC and the Soviet Union in the history of the domain has not been silenced or utterly forgotten, but rather studied in a fragmentary fashion or simply underestimated: a systematic account has not yet been accomplished. This paper is a step toward such an account, addressing the question 'What role was played by the Soviet Union within the international domain of women's rights and struggles, and how can it be conceptualized?'. The subsequent research question is 'What were the specific ways and mechanisms of the SU's direct engagement as this was carried out by the Soviet Women's Committee (1941-1992)?'.

¹ I borrow the formulation from the Haan (2010b), who notes that she was inspired by Florence Dole's book project, 'Not Knowing: forms of privacy in the postwar southern novel'; and Melvyn P. Leffler (1999) 'The Cold War: what do 'we now know'', *American Historical Review*, 104(2), pp. 501-524.

I argue that there is a need to move the focus of research in the field to actual impact of this involvement. In the regard I suggest a concept of *engagement*. Engagement comes to encompass the idea that regardless of the exact motivations of the socialist super power, its actions had the potential of real although not necessary positive impact within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles. I demonstrate that actions of the socialist super power and the SWC had potential for multiple effects not exclusively or inherently in compliance with original motivations or the direct interests of the actors. Furthermore, I argue that the mere fact that some of the impact were in compliance with the interests of the Soviet state, shall not and do not imply automatically that its impact were historically insignificant for women's history in the twentieth century. On the contrary, for instance since the Marxist-Leninist platform on the woman question, was in compliance with many of women's and feminist demands, the impact of SU's involvement was of high practical significance for the history of the domain.

Systematizing extant research and adding my own, I suggest that the role of the SU and the SWC in the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles can be conceptualized as consisting of motivational and active dimensions, while the active dimension can be divided to direct and indirect engagement. I define the motivational dimension as the impact which the Soviet Union's internal policy concerning woman question had internationally. Under the definition of the active dimension of the SU's role I include the impact of the SU's active international engagement. Within the active dimension I differentiate between active indirect engagement, which was not directed solely or primarily to influence women or women's movements but nevertheless had impact upon them, and active direct engagement, the activities of the Soviet Union which were specifically targeting to influence women and women's movements.

My research relies on analysis of archival documents from the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), fond *P7928 Komitet Sovetskikh Zhenshin* [Soviet Women's Committee].

I also analyze printed materials issued by the SWC and materials issued by other Soviet sources about the SWC's work, including various brochures and books as well as the journal *Sovetskaja Zhenshina* [Soviet Woman], which the SWC issued between 1945 and 1991. I also use archival materials from an electronic archive uploaded by Vladimir Bukovsky and documents from the (electronic) archive of Alexander Yakovlev.²

In addition, I derive evidence and ideas from interviews, most significantly the one I held in October 2010 with Samira Khoury, a leader of Harakat al-Nissa' al-Dimokratiyat Fi Isra'il – The Democratic Women's Movement in Israel (T'andi). Born in 1920, Khoury is one of the most persistent activists for women rights in the region, whose “love of the Palestinian motherland and commitment to a class struggle” brought her to a life long struggle for emancipation of women.³

In the first chapter I locate the argument of the thesis within the field of gender and women's history as well as in relation to the latest developments in the field. I begin the second chapter of the thesis by debating the meanings and the outcomes of the historical evidence presented, for instance, by sociologist Maxine Molyneux (2001), that during the twentieth century the Bolshevik platform on ‘the woman question’ had traveled world-wide, becoming an integral part of Communist parties' agendas and Marxist revolutionary movements as well as a significant part of the policies of socialist and communist states. In light of my main hypothesis, I suggest that the effects of the Bolshevik platform are examples of the impact which SU's internal policies had worldwide. Since the Marxist Leninist movement's parties and states were motivated by the Soviet Union's example, regardless of whether the socialist super power had actively engaged in its promotion, I suggest the transmission of ideas represents a motivational dimension of the historical role of the socialist super power. Yet another component of the

² Since Bukovsky was a Soviet dissident, his archive is hardly a neutral collection of documents. However, it is among rare collections available from the archives of Central Committee of the Communist Party and used by respected colleges. Alexander Yakovlev (1923-2005) was a high profile Soviet official. Among other posts in his career he was a member of politburo and of the secretary of the CCCP his personal archive is uploaded online by the foundation called by his name.

³ Samira Khoury, Interview, 8/10/10, Nazareth, Israel.

motivational role is the inspirational impact which the internal policies, achievements and setbacks of the Soviet Union had for women and women movements worldwide.

However, the motivational dimension alone is hardly enough to sustain my hypothesis that the Soviet Union played a persistent and significant role within the domain. It is necessary to inquire whether the Soviet Union actively engaged in influencing the history of the domain, and if so, in what ways. Since any active engagement within the domain would have been an integral element of the broader foreign policy and diplomacy of the Soviet State, I begin this part with presenting the major discussions about the general lines along which the SU's foreign policy and diplomacy were developing.

I argue that the Soviet Union played a role within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles by the mere support of the Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements in the Third World.⁴ I base this argument on ideas of Mohanty (1991, 2003) who sees Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements as an important location for the development of women's movements and cardinal changes within the standards of women's rights and liberties in the Third World. I suggest that this presence of the Soviet Union in the history of the domain represents yet another dimension of the state's engagement. I argue that this engagement can be referred to as active and indirect, since the activity of the socialist super power was not exclusively and directly targeting women or women's movements: The impact was a side effect of broad-spectrum involvement.

Finally, I discuss examples of Soviet engagement in drafting international treaties which were influential in the establishment of contemporary international women's rights standards. I suggest that this activity is an example of yet another dimension of the role played by the SU's active engagement. I propose to refer to this type of activities as direct active engagement since they targeted the international arena with the specific goal of influencing the domain.

Was the activity of the Soviet Union within the UN the only component of direct active

⁴ I am aware that the term Third World is highly contested and rightly criticized I share post colonial critic of the word (Mohanty(1986), Said (2005)) and use it here for the sole reason of limited space.

engagement of the state within the international domain of women's rights and struggles? The answer is negative. In fact the major actor which was responsible for active engagement on behalf of the SU was the Soviet Women's Committee, the international involvement of which was by and large *not known* in contemporary history of the women and women's movements. In the third chapter I discuss the reasons behind this absence in the light of Francisca de Haan's (2009, 2010b), Wang Zheng's (2005, 2011) and Raluca Popa's (2009) theoretical insights.

I begin by identifying and confronting the hegemonic assumptions which underlie a narrow perception of historical presence and role of SWC in contemporary historical research, and propose a theoretical framework for future research. I argue that the facts that the SWC did not promote social change within the SU and was committed to the interests of Communist Party and the socialist super power in its international work shall be integrated in future research as a starting point. The fourth chapter lays the base for such research. I discuss the context of SWC's establishment, its structure, and some crucial points in its history as well as the main characteristics of its international work. Finally, I am suggesting that further research will be able to establish that the international experience and principles of SWC's work, stood at the base of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries – which was among the biggest and the most important organizational structures within the people's diplomacy of the socialist super power.

In the fifth chapter I discuss the ways and mechanisms through which SWC played direct active role within the international domain of women's rights and struggles on behalf of the Soviet state. I present general lines of this role as well as the scope of material resources at its disposal, including financial, human and state resources. I also discuss the lines of SWC's political authority for Marxist Leninists and socialists worldwide, as well as the authority which it enjoyed as representatives of a Cold War's super power. Finally, I suggest a few insights to a research discuss of the role which the SWC played in Women's International Democratic Federation.

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE

INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES, AND OF THE COLD WAR COMPETITION

1.1. The Twentieth Century and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles

Important changes for the international domain of women's rights and struggles happened within the newly established international arenas, first of all in the framework of League of Nations (1920-1945) and then in the United Nations (since 1945). According to Francisca de Haan's *A Brief Survey of Women's Rights* written for UN Chronicle in 2010, two international women's organizations, the International Council of Women (ICW), established in 1888, and the International Alliance of Women (IAW), established in 1904,⁵ were most significant in their activity, which lead to "the recognition that women's status was an issue that belonged on the international level" within the League of Nations (de Haan 2010a). Among their other achievements, de Haan emphasizes that the ICW and IAW had stood behind "the establishment in 1937 of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, which laid the foundations for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)" (de Haan *ibid*).

Later in the twentieth century, a series of international documents on women's rights, which were based on the principles proclaimed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* was followed by *The Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 7th of November 1967. The Declaration preceded the legally binding *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and ratified in

⁵ According to de Haan, the IAW was established as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, then renamed as the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in 1926, and finally as International Alliance of Women in 1946.

1981⁶. CEDAW is the single most important treaty exclusively devoted to gender in the international human rights arena and is described as “an international bill of rights for women”.⁷

Within the liberal feminist framework, CEDAW and other legally binding documents might be perceived as evidence that the twentieth century was a period of advancement in the position of women on an international scale. However, although nearly all of the member-states of the UN (except seven, the United States among them) have ratified the CEDAW, the contemporary realities of women’s lives remain far from its principles of liberty and equality. Today, women still do sixty six percent of the world’s labor, earn ten percent of the global income and own one percent of the world’s property.⁸ In addition to this, another twenty two million women will join the ranks of unemployment due to the recent global economic crisis.⁹ Domestic violence against women remains high and “is still a major cause of death and disability among women aged 15 to 44 years”.¹⁰ Moreover, “the victims in today’s armed conflicts are far more likely to be civilians than soldiers”¹¹ – while majority of the civilians killed in the wars are women and children. Additionally, wars and environmental changes continue to create millions of refugees, around eighty percent of whom are women and children.¹² As de Haan summarizes - “whatever may have been achieved is a work in progress at best. For most women, their human rights still exist only on paper.” (de Haan 2010a).

Indeed, the twentieth century did not bring stable advancement in women’s situation, position or emancipation. However, the significance of CEDAW and other internationally ratified treaties such as for *Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security]*¹³

⁶ Short history of CEDAW Convention, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm>.

⁷ Overview of the CEDAW <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

⁸ Augusto Lopez-Claros, Saadia Zahidi 2005

⁹ International Labor Organization, ‘Global Employment Trends for Women’, 2009.

¹⁰ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2002, Recommendation 1582 (2002) on Domestic Violence against Women.

¹¹ Quoted from: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php?page=7, Referred to by General Assembly, In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General, 2006. A/61/122/Add.1. 6 July 2006, p. 45.

¹² *ibid*

¹³ UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security]*, 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000), available online: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00f4672e.html> [accessed 3 May 2011]

should not be disregarded.¹⁴ First, CEDAW and the sequence of international legally binding documents are evidence that the century was marked by a rapid improvement in *awareness* of the issues of gender based discrimination, when the domain of women's rights and struggles came to be in focus of international political considerations. Indeed the century was a truly revolutionary epoch with regards to the *visibility* of women and gender and the scope and significance of women's and gender struggles. Second, the internationally acknowledged standards of women's rights as represented by CEDAW and other international legally binding documents serve as inspiration for women's struggles internationally. Women worldwide collaborate for the enforcement of CEDAW and other legally binding international treaties on women's rights under the umbrellas of UN conferences of women, Commission for the Implementation of CEDAW, and the like. This collective action by itself is a domain of empowerment for women and women's movements.

1.2 Lost behind the Iron Curtain of our minds: Toward a theoretical framework for the role of the Soviet Union in the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles

Then the president of the US, George Bush gets a call from NASA: "Mr. President! The Russians have landed on the Moon!" The next day NASA calls again: "Sir! The Russians are starting to paint the Moon red!" Bush treats the issue with little interest, NASA, the US Air Force, the Navy, the Army, the Marines are all alarmed and push Bush to do something about it. The third day, they assault him: "Mr. President, we have to do something, they already painted half of the Moon red!" Bush doesn't give much attention to all the noise and fuss around him... The fourth day, the US Congress starts a meeting on the subject, accusing Bush of ignorance: "They have painted the Moon

¹⁴ For the full list refer to the website of The Advocates of Human Rights http://stopvaw.org/Thematic_Human_Rights_Documents.html?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={12402DD4-CCD9-4AF1-92E4-F7AA90A4DC90}

*red! It's as red as the communist flag, red red red!" Bush: "O.K. guys, let's write Coca-Cola on it now!"*¹⁵

1.2.1 The Short twentieth century, the Cold War and the Iron Curtain

Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991 by Eric Hobsbawm (1994) is a captivating account of a period ranging from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The author refers to the period as the *Short Twentieth century*.

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Through his account of the century's history, Hobsbawm places a special emphasis on the Cold War, which he considers among the most important dimensions of the period. Historically, the term Cold War became widely used after the publication of Walter Lippmann's book titled *The Cold War*. Lippmann's book came out in 1947, at the very beginning of the East/West standoff, a period that can be characterized as the brewing time of ideological arguments and terms to be later put to use for legitimizing the grand diplomatic and armed conflicts of the second half of the century. The Cold War came to denote "the all-encompassing struggle for global power and influence between United States, the Soviet Union and their respective allies" (McMahon 2003, p. 106).¹⁷

The Iron Curtain was among the most defining symbolic features on which the rivalry dynamics of the Cold War relied and according to de Haan (2010b) it was perhaps the most successful metaphor through the 20th Century. Larry Wolff (1994) defines the Iron Curtain trope and its discursive effects: "Throughout the Cold War, the Iron Curtain would be envisioned as a

¹⁵ <http://www.coldwarjokes.com/soviet-us-competition.htm>, accessed on 25/08/10.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm himself notes in the opening of his book that he owes the concept to Ivan Berend, formerly president of the Hungarian academy of sciences.

¹⁷ Its important to emphasize that the term Cold War is contested and have inbuilt problematic since the Cold was a very actual war in the Third world, more on the subject see for instance Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

barrier of quarantine, separating the light of Christian civilization from whatever lurked in the shadows, and such a conception was all the more justification for not looking too closely at the lands behind” (Wolff 1994; quoted in: de Haan 2010b, p. 2).

British cultural and social historian Patrick Wright refers to an article by British writer Violet Paget (1856-1935), who used and popularized the metaphor under the pseudonym of Vernon Lee during the First World War as one of the earliest mentions of the Iron Curtain that he could find (Wright 2007, p. 17). The metaphor traveled then to Nazi Germany where it was used by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels in 1945 (Isaacs et al (eds) 2001, p.312). However, Iron Curtain became a central and well known feature of the Cold War discourse and imaginary only after Winston Churchill the British Prime Minister used it in a speech he gave on March 1946 in Fulton, Missouri:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow.¹⁸

According to Wright (2007) and de Haan (2010b), the metaphoric meanings of the Iron Curtain did not vanish entirely from our minds after the fall of the metaphor’s physical representation, the Berlin wall, in 1990. Wright argues that “the widespread belief that the Iron Curtain vanished with the Berlin Wall may itself be mixed with illusion” (Wright 2007, p. 384), and puts forth the idea of a *long Cold War*, arguing that judging by the life span of the Iron Curtain’s metaphor; the Cold War was in fact much more persistent than its officially proclaimed

¹⁸ Winston Churchill, The Sinews of Peace. Quoted in: Kishlansky, Mark (ed) (2005), p. 300.

life span, and started earlier and lasted longer than its officially-stated limits of 1945-1990.¹⁹

1.2.2 The relevance of the Cold War competition and the Soviet Union's role within it to the history of international domain of women's rights and struggles

Eric Hobsbawm (1994) relates to the Short Twentieth Century mainly as a battle field the main characteristic of which was a Cold War competition, the dynamic between the so-called East and West camps. A significant amount of research on Cold War competition tends to emphasize its destructive effects. Carol Anderson (2003), for instance, argues that it had devastating effects on the Black civil rights struggle in the USA. Others put especial emphasis on the arms race and its short-term and long-term devastative effects (see, for example, Bacon Edwin, Sandle Mark (eds) (2003). Hobsbawm, however, points out that the Cold War arms race also had profoundly positive outcomes and impact, since it stimulated both systems to elaborate evolution in diverse areas. Moreover, according to Hobsbawm, a leftist harshly critical of the SU, the mere existence of the socialist super power along with its allies as an alternative to Western capitalism had significant restrictive effects on the potentially devastating aspects of capitalism.

Hobsbawm goes as far to argue that “[I]t is one of the ironies of the strange century that the most lasting results of October revolution was to save its antagonist, both in war and peace – that is to say, by providing it with the intensive fear, to reform itself after the Second World War, and, by establishing a popularity of economic planning, furnishing it with some of the procedures for its reform” (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 18). It was only the alliance of the Bolshevik state with western liberal capitalism against the growth of fascism in Europe, which eventually assured that the Western world became “a set of variations on liberal parliamentary” democracy rather than “a set of variations on authoritarian and fascist themes” (ibid, p7). Thus, according to Hobsbawm, the withering away of the Soviet state has had “enormous and still not fully calculable, but mainly negative, consequences” (ibid, p.9). This pessimistic account is joined by

¹⁹ Patrick Wright describes the process of writing his book in Open Democracy website: http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/iron_curtain_a_century_restaged accessed on 22/11/10

the feminist critic Cynthia Cockburn (2007) in *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis*, in which she mourns that after the fall of the SU “the socialist rug has been pulled from under (their feet) our feet, by the neo-liberal turn and by the discrediting of any alternative to the capitalist system” (Cockburn 2007, p. 230).

The Great October Revolution, October 7, 1917, had inspired and initiated the establishment, empowerment and growth of governments, parties and social movements on a worldwide scale. The dimension of inspiration is indeed a crucial one, especially since “within thirty years after the October Revolution, a third of the human race have found itself living under communist regimes” (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 73). It is even more significant if we take into account that the Soviet Union and the CPSU had motivational as well as inspirational effects upon those social change movements which rose in opposition to the old-SU related left, as for instance the New Left social movements in Europe and the USA (Isserman 1987).

As much as the Cold War was a war on international influences, it was also a war of ideas which evolved around its main tool– propaganda: The “deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett, Jowett and O'Donnell 2006, p.7). Indeed, the war for the minds of people has touched practically every dimension of social matters and its subject was no less than *way of life* itself. Helen Laville (2002) argues that the struggle over the right way of life was to a large extent build on the revelry upon a “right” image of a woman and family life when for the most of the period the United States promoted an image of a happy (white and middle class) housewife, while the Soviet Union from its side featured an image of a self-realized mother-worker. Commission on the Status of Women became an “important battleground” of this rivalry argued Laville (Laville, 2002, p113).²⁰

²⁰ In addition, Laville reveals that when confronted in their international activities between the national Cold War interest of the US and promotion of women's rights and issues US women's organizations had frequently sided with the interest of the Capitalist super-power on account of a progress in women's rights.

Indeed, as historian Odd Arne Westad (2010) notes, “Gender relations were closer to the core of the conflict both in terms of representation and in language than we have previously thought”²¹. Soviet propaganda touting achievements in emancipation of women definitely played a central role in the war on minds. Since Soviet leaders believed that the level of emancipation of women was symbolic of the level of progress for society, (Brodsky Farnsworth 1976, p. 1) a belief which is shared by many, the Soviet propaganda upon its own successes and achievements in the domain of emancipation of women was a way to demonstrate the advantages of the Communist system.²²

Within the Soviet framework the propaganda effort had profound positive connotations and was perceived by the Party as one of the main tools in promotion of progress.²³ Indeed the Soviet propaganda of its achievements in emancipation of women had profound positive effects. According to British historian Melanie Ilic, who has written a brief survey of the international connections of the Soviet Women’s Committee in Khrushchev’s era -“many of the ‘progressive’ women involved in the emerging second wave feminist movement in the West and around the world looked to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War as a model for the advancement of women’s rights as workers and as mothers, in politics and in culture” (Ilic 2011, p 162). Thus, the Cold War competition as well as the role of the Soviet Union in it in particular, had vital motivational inspirational, restrictive, and other significant impact for the domain.

²¹ Odd Arne Westad (Ed.) *Reviewing the Cold War: approaches, interpretations, theory*, London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 10–11. cited in de Haan (2010b, p 551)

²² See, for example, chapter 5 and the debate on significance of letters exchange between Soviet and foreign women.

²³ Rossiya i zapad, formirovanie vneshnepoliticheskikh stereotipov v soznanii rossiyskogo obshchestva pervoy poloviny XX veka [Russia and the West, the formation of foreign political stereotypes in the conciseness of the Russian society in the first half of the XX century], Ed A. V. Golubev, 1998, accessed on 3/04/2011 on the website of the Institute of Russian history of the Russian Academy of Sciences: <http://iriran.ru/?q=node/303>.

CHAPTER 2 RETELLING THE STORY WHICH WAS TOLD –

CONCEPTUALIZING THE ROLE OF THE SOVIET UNION WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES

In the previous chapter I have situated my hypothesis – namely that the Soviet Union played a persistent role within the international domain of women’s rights and struggles as reflected in the research of the history of the domain, and the significance of the Cold War for this history. In this chapter I debate the existent materials in regard to the presence of the Soviet Union within the domain. Consequently to the debate I am suggesting a conceptual framework for a role of the Soviet Union within the history of the domain.

2.1 The international impact of the SU’s internal policies upon the woman question

2.1.1 The Bolshevik platform and the internal policies of the Soviet Union on the woman question

The Bolshevik Party (from Russian *bol’shinstvo* – majority), was established as an independent entity in 1903 after its break from Russian Social Democratic Party. As a consequence of the October revolution, the Bolshevik or the Communist Party and its Central Committee (CC) became the governor de facto of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.²⁴ The ideology of the Bolshevik Party, Marxism-Leninism-(Stalinism) was the only doctrine promoted within the borders of the state.

The Bolshevik, later Soviet doctrine regarding women should not be perceived as essentially monolithic. Friedrich Engels, August Bebel (1840 - 1913) Vladimir Lenin, Alexandra Kollontai (1872 - 1952), Inessa Armand (1874 - 1920), and Clara Zetkin (1857 - 1933) and many more contributed to the development of what had become a rather flexible platform. The common ground of the platform was an identification of economic organization of human society as the foundation on which the subjugation and the oppression of women evolved and

²⁴ Although it was officially proclaimed as such only in the third Soviet constitution published in 1977.

has been sustained. In regards to possible resolutions of the woman question, they identified an equal economic organization of society as essential for liberation of women and believed that “a prerequisite of female emancipation is economic independence” (Buckley 1981, p. 79). Clara Zetkin cited Lenin in this regards: “real freedom for women is possible only through communism. The inseparable connection between the social and human position of the woman, and private property in the means of production, must be strongly brought out.”²⁵

Both Vladimir Lenin and Clara Zetkin had identify between the struggle of women and the struggle of proletariat against bourgeoisie, and argued that women had no other special struggle other than that of the proletariat. However, the views of Inessa Armand, a French communist who devoted her life to the Bolshevik revolution, and Alexandra Kollontai, a prominent communist born to affluent family as Alexandra Michailovna Domontovich, had evolved through the decades of their political engagement and by and large they argued that emancipation of women is an additional task of crucial importance for the Party and the revolution which required special attention and recourses. Their views however remained marginalized. According to gender historian Mary Buckley, who explored the origins of the gaps between Bolshevik doctrinal aspirations in regards to women’s question and realities of the Soviet women’s lives, “Armand’s argument that the success of socialism depends upon women’s liberation and upon changes in the home has never really been accepted by the CPSU” (Buckley 1981, p. 228). Notwithstanding the disagreements, at the heart all of Marxist doctrinal readings of oppression of women before the October revolution stood an argument that the female workers had a lower degree of common social, political and economic interests with women from upper strata of society than with their male worker-comrades.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was a period of expansion of women’s movements in Russia. The Bolshevik referred to movements which were led by women from the upper classes as feminist, although not all of them identified as

²⁵ Clara Zetkin made an interview with Lenin regarding the woman question in 1920 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1925/lenin/zetkin2.htm> accessed on 18/3/10.

such. Lenin argued for a need to “draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our [Bolshevik, Y.K.] policy and feminism”.²⁶ This perception was largely shared by women and men in the Party. According to gender historian Linda Edmondson (1984), during the All-Russia Congress of Women (1908) Alexandra Kollontai raised harsh criticism towards the leaders and the organizers of the Congress proclaiming that the *feminist demands* were of bourgeois character. Kollontai argued that the masses of working women are in need for a platform focusing on labor rights and that a radical change of the political system rather than suffrage, to which she and her Bolshevik comrades referred as *bourgeoisie reformism*, is needed in Russia. The Bolshevik delegation walked out of the Congress in protest against the dispute which revolved around the question of suffrage and included a dispute whether the suffrage shall be universal or restricted by property ownership (Edmondson 1984, pp. 83-106).

Following the revolution, Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand and other women leaders of the Bolshevik Party organized the First National Congress of Women Workers and Peasants which was held in Petrograd in November, 1918. Despite serious disagreements among the Bolshevik's cadres, women and men, on whether there was a need for a separate women's entity within the Party, the Congress had ratified a resolution calling for organization of a “special commission for propaganda and agitation among women”.²⁷ In 1919, the Commissions were upgraded into a Department (Otdel) for the Work among Women within the Secretariat of the Central Committee -Zhenotdel. Local women's departments were subject to local Party cells and the superior Women's Department. During the eleven years of their existence the women's departments were led by Inessa Armand (1919-1920), Alexandra Kollontai (1920-1922), Sophia Smidovich (1922-1924), Claudia Nikolaeva (1924-1925) and Alexandra Artyukhina (1925-January, 1930) (Buckley, 1989).

According to Mary Buckley (1989) and Elizabeth A. Wood (1997) the goals and objectives of women's departments were constantly discussed and contested within the Party as a whole and

²⁶ Zetkin, Ibid

²⁷ Resolution of the First national Congress cited in: Wood Elizabeth (1997).

the internal forums of the organization and included enhancement of the influence of the Communist Party among women workers and peasants as well as various forms of political and educational work and integration of women to the Party apparatus, the trade unions and other governmental and Party organs. A large part of the organization's activity was in cooperation with other structures within the evolving Soviet system. For instance, the women's departments closely cooperated with the trade unions in order to encourage the establishment of kindergartens and public canteens at work places (Buckley 1981, 1989; Wood 1997; Stites 1991).

Researchers generally agree that the leaders and majority of the cadres of women's departments were genuinely passionate about revolutionary politics and women's emancipation. The activists led a wide variety of large scale campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy among women, and educated women about new possibilities which rose due to the October revolution. Furthermore, women's departments were a ground for heated and rather radical debates. For instance, during the 1920s, there was a massive debate on freedom of love and withering away of family, which was largely fueled by references to the fundamental *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (1884)* by Engels. (Warshofsky Lapidus 1978, p. 78-81; Buckley 1981, p. 89-103).

Stalin dissolved the women's departments in the end of 1929, and the goal of full resolution of the woman question in the socialist super power was proclaimed achieved.²⁸ The abolition of women's departments symbolized an end era in the history of women's organizing in the Soviet Union (Buckley 1989). Women's departments are symbolic of the first period in Soviet policies within the theoretical framework suggested by Russian historian Olga Khasbulatova. The author suggests that the Soviet policies can be divided to three main periods: 1917-1930, 1930-1960 and 1960-1990. (Khasbulatova 2001, pp. 397-407). She describes the first stage, 1917 – 1930, as the period in which the achievement of full equality of the sexes was among the highest priorities of official policy of the Soviet state. Khasbulatova tells that the

²⁸ See Buckley (1989) for a deep debate on how Stalin understood a resolution of woman question.

Soviet legislation which was drafted during this period proclaimed full equality between men and women and included decrees legalizing civil marriage, equating women in the matters of divorce and legalized abortions. The second part of the Bolshevik program during the period was to ensure the exercise of equal political rights. Above all, from the very beginning of the Soviet state in consistency with the Marxist doctrine, the Bolshevik Party aspired to increase participation of women in the labor force.

Significant changes within the Soviet internal policies regarding woman question happened, according to Khasbulatova, between 1930 and 1960, a period during which the state needed to mobilize women into both rapid industrialization and wartime labor. Laws issued in 1936 significantly infringed women's liberties, establishing gender separated school education, complicating process of divorce and abolishing civil marriages. Additional laws aspired to protect 'women and motherhood' by welfare measures and prohibited abortions, these due to the heavy demographic concerns of the Soviet state.

Khasbulatova shows that by the early 1960's, it was widely realized that many of the goals and standards which the Soviet state set as part of an emancipation scheme of women were not fully implemented. According to Buckley even more concerns rose later when "under the leadership of Brezhnev the women's question was freshly declared 'unsolved' and inequality of sexes officially recognized. Attaining equality of sexes was now viewed as a complex and protracted process. It was argued that legal or formal equality has been won but factual equality or equality in life had yet to be attained" (Buckley 1987, p. 223).

Indeed, according to Khasbulatova, Buckley and Warshofsky Lapidus, Soviet women remained through the period at the secondary positions in the field of production. The Soviet state failed to ensure socialization of the household and motherhood, and no significant changes happened in traditional division of family roles – women remained under the double burden of laboring as both a worker and domestic wife-mother.

The harsh realities of ordinary Soviet women's lives are addressed by Natalia Baranskaya

(1968) in *A week like any other*, which was leaked to the West right after its publication by *samizdat*²⁹ and became one of the most important texts of gender criticism of the Soviet's foreign propaganda. Baranskaya describes one full week in life of protagonist, Olga Nikolayevna, scientific laboratory worker, detailing greatly on her maneuvers among work and the family obligations, while experiencing all of the hardships of an ordinary Soviet woman in 1968. Baranskaya demonstrates how the shortcomings of the central planning, the economic organization of the SU in which all of the economic activity was planned from above, were solved by women who stand in the long lines and had 'run' among different shops in order to provide for the family dinners. She also demonstrates how the shortcomings of primary education and health system were solved through women's maneuvering between work and family obligations in order to be able to provide care for children.

Despite the criticism raised by Khrushchev and later Brezhnev, these details of the daily hardness of women's lives were not only not utilized in foreign propaganda, but up to the late 1980, constituted a well kept secret within the Soviet Union itself. One of the first Soviet feminists, dissident, Tatyana Mamontova related to this secret in her landmark article *Its time we begin with ourselves* (1984). In a graphic manner Mamonova had unfolded an insider's view of the harsh reality of Soviet women's lives, the collapse of the health and educational systems, the persistence of state and popular chauvinism, the silencing of violence against women and the secrecy which surrounded these questions in the public discourse.

In general lines, according to Mary Buckley (1981, p. 227), "women's economic and political roles have been persistent themes in the history of the USSR, although they have been treated in different ways at different times." The arguments made by Engels, Lenin, Kollontai and Armand about the need to end domestic drudgery, to mobilize women into labor force, to encourage political participation and to introduce legal equality and social services remain[ed. Y.K.] at the core of Soviet ideology" (Buckley 1987, p. 224). However, as Buckley emphasized,

²⁹ Underground grassroots network active in the SU, in which censored and forbidden publications were reproduced.

“some arguments incorporated into Marxist writings about female roles have been much less durable. For example, Kollontai insisted in the 1920s that the meaning of revolution for changing relations between the sexes should be an important subject for reflection under socialism. Political and cultural pressures have always restricted debate about this wide-ranging topic” (Buckley 1981, p. 227).

2.1.2 The international impact of the internal policy of the Soviet Union-general lines

It can be seen that the internal Soviet Union’s policies in regard to the domain of women’s rights were not steadily evolving towards less patriarchal approaches, but varied in accordance with the national interest of the Soviet Union as those were perceived by the Party leadership. However, in regard to the doctrine itself, Bolshevik’s Party platform “combined general support for the principle of women's emancipation with a range of policies that reflected many of the demands feminists had been calling for” (Molyneux 2001, p.106).

Putting aside the fundamental differences within the Party platform and actual policies of the SU in regard to woman question as those partially discussed above, a question must be asked whether the platform as summarized by Molyneux had an actual impact on other places and movements around the world. In other words, did the internal policies of the SU have any international impact?

Molyneux provides a general answer when she examines a discussion on the history of women’s movements in Latin America. The author emphasizes that the Bolshevik Party platform on women’s emancipation “remained the basis for subsequent Communist Party policy across the world” and determined to a large extent the policies in regard to women’s question in a long list of newborn socialist and communist states (Molyneux 2001, p.105). In addition, the Bolshevik platform had an impact in those places in which Communist parties were not in power to fully implement it statewide. For instance, when representatives of Communist parties were elected to

parliaments they had a possibility to promote the policies as part of their legislative work.³⁰

It is almost unnecessary to say that the influence of the CPSU's Party platform on the domain of women's rights worldwide shall not be regarded only as strictly positive phenomena. For instance, as Molyneux rightly remarks and was partially discussed above on the example of the SU itself, in socialist states – “the inequalities persisted and were sustained by policies, not only in domestic sphere but also in the main areas of public life” (ibid, p. 6).

I would like to suggest that the export of the Bolshevik platform on women's question is one example of the role played by the Soviet state within the international domain of women's rights and struggles. Rather than an outcome of active involvement this role was along the lines suggested by Hobsbawm, an impact of the mere existence of the Soviet state. I propose to refer to this impact of the SU as motivational, meaning that the historical role was not an outcome of the activities of the state, but an inspirational impact of its internal policies.

³⁰ See examples later the survey of the work of Tamar Guzhansky, the member of Israeli parliament on behalf of the Communist Party

2.2 Active role of the Soviet Union within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles

I have argued that Soviet Union played motivational role within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles. However, we shall proceed to asking also whether the state played an active role within the domain in addition to the impact that it had by the mere fact of its own policies and existence. Since the active role of the SU in the domain if such existed was a part of international engagement of the state, in order to answer this question we shall first inquire into the principles of foreign policy and international involvement of the socialist super power.

Despite the wide-ranging call for world wide unity amongst the struggling workers and oppressed which was expressed already in Communist manifesto (1848)³¹, and reinforced in the constitutions of the Soviet Union, the extent to which the newly born state should play an active role in international and foreign affairs was a contested issue among its early leadership. The main opponents on the matter were Leib (Leon) Trotsky (1879-1940) and Iosif Stalin (1878-1953). In the years after the Civil war and following the assassination attempt on Lenin in 1922, the two men were leading the race for the Party leadership (Lane 1985, pp. 64-65).

In his *State and Politics in the USSR*, David Lane provides a summary of the debate and its outcomes. Trotsky, according to Lane's summary, "emphasized the international character of socialism and the international role the USSR should play in supporting workers revolutions abroad. [...] Capitalism was seen as international in character and could only be destroyed by an

³¹ "In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements, they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

Finally, they labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Proletarians of all countries, unite!"

Communist manifesto, 1948, the full version is available online:

<http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html#c1r3> [accessed on 10/22/10].

international revolution [...thus according to Trotsky] a socialist social system can not be completed by a proletarian in one country along” (ibid, pp. 65-66). Stalin, Lane continues, although he seconded Trotsky's opinion in his “Foundation of Leninism” (1924), had presented a different position in *Problems of Leninism* (1926) calling his own previous analyses regarding the matter “inadequate and inaccurate”. Eventually, Stalin’s doctrine *Socialism in one country*, which consisted of industrialization, collectivization and centralized political control within the USSR, had become the paradigm which determined the development of the Soviet Union. In the following decades, the foreign and the internal policies of Soviet Union represented a near-complete abandonment of Trotsky’s ideal that the state should be a direct and primary organizer and engine of international communist revolution and according to British academic Neil MacFarlane „the Soviets tended to focus on consolidation and maintenance of power internally and the security of state externally” (MacFarlane 1991, p.9). After the failure of the Left Opposition within the CPSU, of which the debate was a central part, Leon Trotsky was expelled from the Party and went into exile in Mexico, where he continued to oppose Stalinist policies up till 1940, when he was assassinated by a Soviet agent (Volkogonov 1996).

In spite of the abandonment of the idea of leading a world wide communist revolution the Soviet Union was engaged in a wide range of international affairs. This involvement included for instance active military support to Marxist revolutionaries and national liberation movements around the world as well as promotion of declarations on a variety of matters in the Council of United Nations and other international arenas. The Korean War, the Vietnamese war, the Cuban revolution and the idea of veto rights within the Security Council of the UN, are only few of the well known examples of the USSR's active involvement internationally.

The major discussion regarding the principles of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union evolved among Western Sovietologists around the question whether and to what extent the international involvement was guided by Marxist-Leninist doctrine and to what extent it was guided by the national interests of the Soviet Union as those were perceived by the contemporary

leadership of the state. Upon consideration of existent scholarship, Donald D. Barry and Carol Barner-Barry (1978, p. 281) conclude that “In spite of the presence of doctrinal ornamentation in Soviet foreign policy pronouncements, the policies themselves are largely determined by national interest as perceived by the contemporary Soviet leadership”. However they also note that it is possible that the doctrinal considerations might have had a bigger weight earlier at the Soviet history.

Impact of the Cold War, among them the role of the Soviet Union within the international domain of women right and struggles, cannot be understood if one disregards the role the socialist super power played in the history of struggles in the Third World, which became an arena for much of the rivalry between the East and West. According to Neil MacFarlane, “starting with the October 1917 revolution the Soviet regime had steadily advocated national liberation and social revolution throughout the Third World. In this sense, its support [to the liberation and revolutionary movements in the Third World – Y.K.] has been universal and permanent” (MacFarlane 1991, p.9). However, as Barry and Barner-Barry argued, in order to get active support from the Soviet State even the struggles which were in essential compliance with the Marxist Leninist doctrine had also to correspond to the national interest of the USSR³² (Barry, Barner-Barry 1978).

Thus, rather than being occupied deeply in the entire scope of socialist/Marxist and anti-colonial/national liberation struggles in the Third World, the Soviet Union was actively involved only in part of them, this to varying and frequently criticized by the movements as insufficient, extent (Katz 1990, pp. 2-3).

Again, the magnitude of the ideological, doctrinal dimension of the active SU engagement in the Third World varied over time. It is worthwhile to quote Professor Jerry F. Hough of Duke University, who in 1985 argued that ‘the ideology [in SU, Y.K] has become a medium of debate, with a room for many competing perceptions’ (Hough 1985, p. 12). Barry and Barner-Barry

³² Or an activity which matched national interests of the SU had to be starched in order to appear as complieng with the doctrine.

support this view and further argued that Marxist-Leninist doctrine was a flexible ideological body, which during the years of USSR's existence allowed for instance the Soviet support of a wide range of national liberation movements, even though some of those might not have been in strict compliance with Marxist-Leninist doctrine (Barry, Barner-Barry 1978, p. 281).

Mark N. Katz, in his introduction to *USSR and Marxist revolutionaries in the Third World* (1990) argued that during the early attempts of intervention into foreign affairs and the support of Marxist revolutions abroad, for instance during the support that the SU provided to the Chinese communists in the 1920s, crucial lessons were learned by the Soviet State. The Soviets, he argues, learned that the interference from outside can not succeed if the Marxist group in question is too small or when it is fighting against another popular supported group or popular supported government. Thus to the lessons during 1950s and 1960s the Soviet Union leadership preferred to withhold military support until the particular revolutionary movement was reasonably strong. (Katz, 1990 p 3-4) In fact, according to Katz, the Soviet Union became more actively engaged in the Third World again only in 1970s, when numerous promising opportunities for liberation and revolutionary movements occurred at ones (ibid, pp. 3-4). However, Katz notes that as much as it can be argued that the USSR did a little for military support of Marxist revolutionaries on their way to power, they did a great deal to keep them in power (ibid, pp. 4-5).

However, military support which, according to Neil MacFarlane and Mark Katz, was not at all a frequent phenomenon, was only one dimension of the active involvement of USSR in the Third World Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements. The section devoted to the Soviet Union on the website of *The Anti Apartheid Movement Archives* describes one characteristic scope of Soviet engagement:

The Soviet Union gave enormous support to the liberation struggle in South Africa, starting in the late 1950s/early 1960s with the boycott of South African products. Contact between the USSR and the South African Communist Party(then CPSA) and the ANC started during World War II.

Over the years, close ties grew between the USSR and the ANC/SACP/SACTU. Support ranged from financial and humanitarian aid to military aid. Many students from the liberation movements received their university education in the SU and cadres from MK and trade unionists were trained as well. The country gave important political and diplomatic support in the international arena. Several NGOs were involved in the anti-apartheid activities, among them the **Soviet Women's Committee** [the emphasis is mine Y.K], the USSR Students' Council, the All-Union Council of Trade Unions and the Committee of the USSR Youth Organizations.

Indeed, as it can be seen from the text, whether or not the Soviet Union had provided the particular national liberation or Marxist revolutionary movement with military support, its engagement could have also include financial and humanitarian aid, provision of educational opportunities for professionals, trade unionists and other political cadres, as well as political and diplomatic support in the international arena.

Now let us combine the active engagement of the SU within the Third World's struggles with the significance of those for the history of the domain of women's rights and struggles on international scale. First, Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements were important domains for women's empowerment and development of women leadership and movements. (Mohanty 1991). Second, the outcomes of the successes or failures of Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements had profound, though not exclusively positive impact for women's rights and their position.³³ Since the SU persistently played an active role within the struggles, and those were significant for women and women's movements, it can be reasoned that the socialist super power had played a role within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles through this involvement. However this role which SU

³³ For a comprehensive debate on revolutions as locations of change for women and women's movements refer for instance to: Tétreault Mary Ann *Women and revolution in Africa, Asia, and the New World*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1994.

had played within the history of the domain was not specifically targeting women or women's movements but was a part of state's active engagement within the Third World struggles.

Thus, through its engagement with national liberation and Marxist revolutionary movements worldwide, Soviet Union played a role within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles. On the one hand, this engagement was active-the SU actively and deliberately engaged with the field; on the other hand, this particular engagement was not an outcome of work specifically targeting women or women's movements. Thus, this part of the role which the Soviet Union played within the domain was active but indirect. However, this impact shall not be perceived as a matter of a mere coincidence. Marxism-Leninism had proclaimed liberation of women as one of its priorities. The mere idea of emancipation of women was an inbuilt characteristic of the *way of life* which the SU promoted. Thus, regardless the justified criticism about the practical implementation of the platform within the SU and abroad, the mere principle of emancipation of women was an integral part of the platform and consequently of the foreign engagement of the socialist super power.

2.3 The direct engagement of the Soviet Union within the international domain of women's rights and struggles in the council of United Nations

As it was discussed in the first chapter, the Council of United Nations was an arena of the utmost significance for the historical developments within international domain of women's rights and struggles during the century. Since the victory over the Nazi Germany the Soviet Union became a widely acknowledged super power and held a momentous weight within the UN. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was a member of the vital Security Council as well as a member of virtually every committee within the UN. Moreover its actual involvement and influence ranged further than its own engagement, given the power and authority that the Soviet Union had among the Socialist states in the UN.

Political philosopher and historian Johannes Morsink, whose work in large part focuses on

a rigorous research of the history of the drafting of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) presents in *Women's Rights in the Universal Declaration* (1991) a remarkable historical record of the role which the SU played within the debates upon gender dimensions of the Declaration. Morsink's research of the original protocols of the meetings of drafting committees he demonstrates that "every time that "everyone" and "no one" are used within the declaration they definitely [meant to] represent an idea of equality among sexes" (Morsink 1991, p. 256). Remarkably for our case Morsink argues that the credit for such a profound for 1948 inclusion goes "to the effective women's lobby, made up of the representatives of the Commission on the status of women, mainly its chair- Bodil Begtrup and the delegates from the communist states" [the emphasis is mine Y.K] (ibid, p. 256). He especially emphasizes „the steady pressure of the Soviet delegation".(Morsink 1991, p231) Later in the article the author even goes farther when stressing that it was the "steady pressure from Soviet delegation [which stood at the base of] the absence of sexism in the Universal Declaration' of Human Rights (ibid, p. 231).

Indeed, the deliberation about Declaration's sex neutrality was an important arena for the Soviet Union. Morsink cites the memoirs of Mr.Humphrey, the first director of the UN Secretariat's Division of Human Rights in which she says that "the Soviet Union was proud of its record in the matter of the equality of men and women and often attacked the Western countries for their 'backwardness.' (Morsink 1991, p 232)

Morsink discusses a number of examples from the protocols. Among the most revealing: When the opening article of the declaration was discussed, a suggestion was made to base it on the phrase "All Men are Created Equal" – similar to the first article of the US Declaration of Independence (1776). However, many delegations and mainly the communist ones were more than uneasy with the suggestion and raised objections to it. Koretsky, the Soviet Union's delegate, argued that the phrase does not include *all* and that "this implied an historical reflection on the mastery of men over women" and expressed a wish that the statement could "be modified

in some way to make it clear that all human beings were included”³⁴. And indeed, when the final declaration was drafted the gender neutral *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...* was chosen as the opening statement.

One additional arena of intense deliberations according to Morsink was upon the article on Family and Marriage. In the discussion, it was the Soviet representative Bogomolov who lead the way for a neutral and secularized definition of family as it is expressed in the final version of the Declaration. Another Soviet representative Pavlov addressed an article which dealt with legal equality before the law and repeatedly raised the issue of discrimination against women. For instance, during the second meeting of the drafting committee Pavlov wanted to know what “equality before law” actually meant while “in the State of Georgia of the United States, a married woman had no legal existence apart from her husband's”³⁵. It is important to note that this account by Morsink which singles out the SU as an exceptionally important force in regard to promotion of women rights in international arena is rare and the narrative needs further development and evidence.³⁶

Clearly the debates were an arena in which the Soviet Union established itself as a progressive power. Whether women rights were in fact a primary concern of the Soviet representatives or those were the geo-political interests of the Soviet state can not be determined now with certainty. It is definite, however, that the involvement of the SU resulted in actual and historically significant impact within the history of international domain of women’s rights and struggles by establishing gender neutrality of the Declaration and putting a light on gender discrimination which existed in the US in those days. Those are examples on how gender was used by the Soviet Union as powerful ammunition in the Cold War. Those are also examples of how the Soviet Union had a real and significant impact within the history of the domain. Those

³⁴ U.N.Doc. E/ch.4/ac.1.sr.13 AT 6. Quoted in: Morsink (1991), p. 233.

³⁵ U.N. Doc.E/CH.4/AC1/SR.37 at 7.8 Quoted in: Morsink (1991), p.243.

³⁶ For examples of mainstream western centered outlook refer for instance to Winslow, Anne Ed. (1995) *Women, politics, and the United Nation*, Conn: Greenwood Press and Pietil, Hilkka (2007), *The Unfinished Story of Women and the United Nations* (New York, UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service) accessed at <http://www.iiav.nl/epublications/2007/unfinishedstory.pdf>

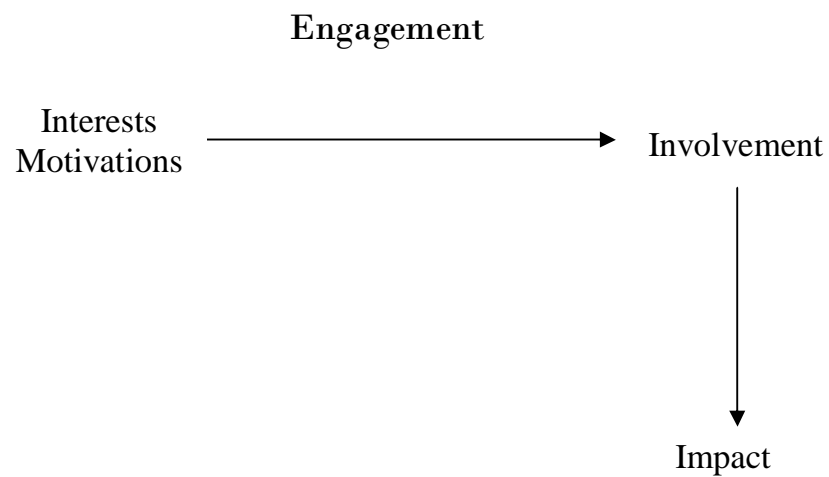
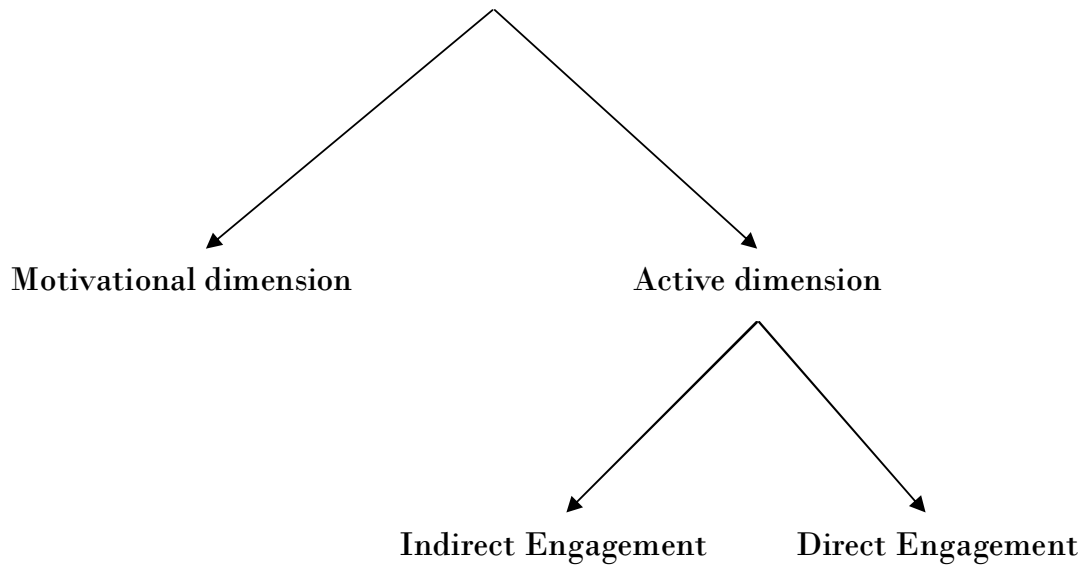
examples illustrate that regardless the actual motivations which might have been complicated, the SU had actual impact within the history of the domain. Later I refer to the complex dynamic as *engagement*.

One more negative impact of the SU within the domain was described by political scientist Margaret E. Galey in 1984. Galey argued that the Soviet Union was continually blocking the possibility of individual complaints to the UN – the mechanism which was supposed to ensure the implementation of the CEDAW and enhance its effectiveness. According to Galey, the Soviet Union opposed to the mechanism arguing that complaints of individuals shall be discussed, investigated and punished within the respective states, and by their own criminal systems. Galey argues that the SU acted as such in order to prevent its own citizens from a possibility to complain to international bodies on individual base. Whether this was the only motivation behind the actions of the SU or not, the impact was dismal in the implementation of CEDAW.

The above examples represent part of the direct engagement of the SU within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles. I suggest referring to this type of engagement as direct since it was directly targeting the domain as a specified and proclaimed objective of the activity. However, the engagement of the SU in the international arena of UN was only one dimension of this engagement, as I mentioned above and I am developing below, a major part of it was carried out internationally by the Soviet Women Committee-the Soviet representative in the domain.

In this chapter, I suggested that the role which was played by the SU within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles can be conceptualized as consisting of motivational and active dimensions, while I suggested that the active dimension can be conceptually divided to indirect and direct engagements. Finally, I suggest engagement as a concept encompassing the idea that regardless the particular motivations of the Soviet Union in its involvement within the domain, the state's actions had an actual impact on its history.

The role of the SU in the history of
international domain of women's rights and



CHAPTER 3 THE STORY WHICH WAS NOT TOLD – THE SOVIET WOMEN’S COMMITTEE IN THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES

In the previous chapter I delineated a conceptual framework for the role which was played by the SU within the international domain of women’s rights and struggles. I argued that the Soviet Union had played motivational as well as indirect and direct active roles. Within the definition of the motivational role I proposed to include the impact of the Soviet State’ internal policies on the international arena, as was the case for example in the *export* of the Bolshevik platform, and the effect it had on the woman question worldwide. As for the SU’s active role, I suggested to differentiate between an active indirect engagement on the one hand, and active direct engagement on the other. I argued that the SU’s indirect engagement was an inbuilt effect of its general foreign policies – for instance, while providing general support to Marxist and national liberation struggles in the Third World. The SU’s direct active engagement includes for example, the SU’s active involvement within the history of the domain in the arena of the council of the United Nations.

However the SU’s engagement in the UN was only one part of its direct active role within the history of the international domain of women’s rights and struggles. In fact, according to Soviet sources, the major part of the state’ direct active engagement was in jurisdiction of the Soviet Women’s Committee, whose activities are heavily under researched in women’s and gender historiography. In February 2009, Natalya Pushkareva, an acclaimed historian of Soviet and Russian women’s and gender history, responded to the question of whether there is any study currently under way on the issue of the history of the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC) by saying: “NO ONE is interested in our Committee now.”³⁷ An explanation for the absence of contemporary critical research about the SWC in the former USSR area was subsequently

³⁷ E-mail exchange between Francisca de Haan and Natalia Pushkareva (Feb 20, 2009), on file with author, emphasis in original.

proposed in an e-mail exchange with Russian gender sociologist Anna Temkina. Temkina estimated that the reasons that no comprehensive research of SWC local or international work was done in Russia is because “the ‘good feminists’ are not very interested in the history of the Soviet “officious” [integral parts of official Soviet apparatus, Y.K.], whereas the ‘good historians’ are not very interested in women”.³⁸

Temkina’s first explanation applies to scholars in Russia, but cannot explain the absence of comprehensive research on the SWC or at least parts of its activity by historians of the Soviet Union or gender historians working in Slavic and Soviet studies working in the West. Research in the West, both sociologic and historical, did deal in depth with gender and women's history within the Soviet Union -dozens of books and hundreds of articles were published about the position of women in Soviet society and the changes which occurred before and after the Great October Revolution. In similar way the second reason suggested by Temkina as an explanation for the lack of research in the academy of the former Soviet Union cannot explain the very minimalist accounts of SWC’s history in the West. Western feminist and gender research is full of historical accounts of women-based establishments which might without doubt be considered not “feminist enough” in one of the dominant contemporary senses of the term; this reality by itself did not lead to them being forgotten from the history of the domain.

Thus, although the lack of research about SWC within the former Soviet Union is quite understandable in the light of the above explanations given by Temkina, the limited scope of it in the West is highly remarkable if one would only consider the potential for research on the base of already well-known and widely accepted details about the SWC’s work as was briefly presented in the introduction. This chapter discusses the reasons for the lack of research on the SWC and its history in the West. I intend to situate my arguments within the latest debates in women’s historiography, to reveal and address the assumptions which underlie the lack of studies on the SWC and its historical role and to propose a framework for future research.

³⁸ E-mail exchange between Yana Knopova and Anna Temkina (Nov 20, 2009), on file with author.

3.1 Women – Party tools narrative and its roots

3.1.1 The women – Party tools narrative

Notwithstanding the immense potential for research, the typical account of this topic that is found in American and Western European research amounts to a few lines on a few pages and summarizes the SWC and its historical role as “designed to serve Party goals,” (Sperling, Marx Ferree, Risman 2001, p. 1161), and as having “functioned as a mouth piece for Soviet propaganda” (Nechemias 1998, p. 10). Mary Buckley summarizes the approach when saying that SWC was “generally viewed as an apologist for the regime, toeing Party lines rather than challenging them” (Buckley 1997, p. 159). These narratives present the women who worked and acted within the SWC as mere tools of an almighty and monolithic *Party-patriarch* to use a phrase coined by Chinese scholar Wang Zheng. Indeed, as De Haan argued, the women of Communist and allegedly communist movements are “constructed [in this discourse] as women without individual agency who were just following the Party orders” (de Haan 2010b, p. 564).

Following de Haan and Wang Zheng, I will further refer to this group of accounts as *women-Party tools* narratives. Notwithstanding the fact that no comprehensive in-depth research on the SWC’s actual work, structure and local and international activities is available, statements such as these, initially made by respected researchers in the fields of Soviet and gender history, are by now reproduced by young historians and frequently treated not only as self evident but as comprehensively describing the work and historical role of SWC.

One can argue that the *women-Party tools* narratives function to a high extent as a self reproducing loop. In this loop, the lack of knowledge about SWC’s actual work and historical significance produces lack of interest in the further research, which in turn reproduces and sustains the lack of knowledge, ensuring that no complex account will be pursued. However, if a mere lack of knowledge were the sole explanation for the continuation of the *women-Party tools* narratives, we might expect that more in-depth historical inquiries would necessarily suggest a

more complex narrative.

That does not however appear to be so in actual research. The most detailed description of SWC's work and history in English is a captivating account by U.S. academics Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan-See. Their book, *Women's Activism in Contemporary Russia* (1997) focuses on women's movements in Russia in the post-Soviet period. As part of their chapter on the work of the Union of Women of Russia, the official successor of the SWC, they include an inquiry into the history of the organization's work as well as a long interview with the last president of the SWC Alevtina Fedulova.

The scope of information about the SWC in *Women's Activism in Contemporary Russia* is noteworthy. The authors discuss some details in the organization's history, relate them to its structure and ideology, and give significant space to Alevtina Fedulova's own analyses and words. However, as opposed to what might have been expected from a more developed account, the framework within which the work of the SWC is approached with more of the same narrowed approach. When characterizing a major period of the SWC's work from its establishment until the late 1980s, Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See state that the SWC was the "state's chief propagandist on women's issues [which] after having successfully helped mobilize women on behalf of the war effort at home was used [by the Soviet Government/Party] to make contacts with women internationally" (Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See 1997, p. 74).

Evidentially, a relatively more developed account of the SWC's history did not lead to developing a significantly more complex understanding of its role and history. Let us now consider the possibility that the grounds for the *women-Party tools* narratives are deeper and more complex than mere lack of information.

3.1.2 The roots of women-Party tools narrative-between “the lingering Iron curtain in our minds” and “the continuing Cold War paradigms” within the historiography of local and international women movements

Wang Zheng discusses the roots of what I refer to as *women-Party-tools* narratives in regard to Communist women organizations within western research³⁹ in her article *State Feminism? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China* (2005). Wang Zheng’s research reveals and analyzes the complex dynamics of negotiations and power relations between the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF), the Chinese analog of the SWC, and the male-dominated Communist Party in China. Her research argues that the agency of women activists of ACWF was previously overlooked in western scholarship because “a methodological difference exists between studies on women and socialist states and studies on feminism in capitalist democratic states” due to “the lack of desire or imagination to excavate women's role in policymaking processes in socialist state” (Ibid, p. 520). “The socialist state,” Wang Zheng continues, “is generally perceived as too centralized and monolithic to have any space for women's intervention” (Ibid, p. 520). Moreover, argues Wang Zheng, even as Communist women and those affiliated with them are assumed to be lacking any agency by the self-evident default of being under the “total dominance of the socialist patriarchal state” (Ibid, p 520), Western women are by default perceived in the western historical research as active agents (Ibid, 520).

The phenomenon of downgrading and silencing of the role which Communist and alleged by the mainstream of western research as Communist women’s organization played within the history of women and women’s movements is discussed by Francisca de Haan in her recent work “*Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational, Women’s Organizations: The*

³⁹ I use *western research* here along the lines suggested by Mohanty: “Clearly, western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests or analyses. However it is possible to trace a coherence of *effects* resulting from implicit assumption of the West (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis. [...]remarkably similar effects of various analytic categories and even strategies which codify their relationship to Other in implicitly hierarchical terms” (Mohanty 1988, pp. 61-62).

Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)" (de Haan, 2010b). In this fundamental work, De Haan discusses the silence around the historical role of Women's International Democratic Federation.

De Haan argues that "Western historiography of inter/transnational women's movements is characterized, or at the very least influenced by [...] a continuing Cold War paradigm in women's history"(de Haan 2010b, p 564). She explains the concept through an inquiry into the roots of the research silence around WIDF, and emphasizes that it derives from two intervening assumptions in the western historiography of international women's movements. One is a consensus that the WIDF was no more than a puppet in the hands of the Soviet Union and even the "communist international"⁴⁰. The second assumption, which derives in part from the one mentioned above, is "that women in the WIDF and its affiliated branches were either not 'feminists' or 'not really' interested in "dealing with women's problems [...] but were primarily interested in advancing the Communist cause" (de Haan 2010b, p 556). Notably, De Haan traces these unexamined assumptions underlying the absence of research on WIDF to the original text of House Un-American Activities Committees 1949/1950 Report on the Congress of American Women, an organization which was the affiliated with WIDF and worked in the US, which states:

The purpose of these organizations [WIDF and its branches] is not to deal primarily with women's problems, as such, but rather to serve as a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current "peace" campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States and democratic nations generally, in order to render them helpless in the face of the Communist drive for world conquest.⁴¹

Connecting the discussed insights of de Haan and Wang Zheng, we can see that the mainstream approaches of western historiography to the history of Communist (or alleged as communist in WIDF's case) women's organizations perpetuate the fundamental suppositions of American Cold War policy and ideology. The supposition can be summarized as a default

⁴⁰ K. Offen, p. 389. Quoted in: de Haan 2010b.

⁴¹ HUAC, *Report on the CAW*, 1. Quoted in: in de Haan 2010b.

perception that Communist and the alleged Communist women's organizations, as well as women who took an active part within their work, were merely tools of an almost metaphoric almighty *Party –Patriarch*, as Wang Zheng refers to it, inherently serving goals that are perceived as contrary to those of women and women movements.

3.2 Moving beyond hegemonic perspectives: towards a modification of the theoretical approach for the research of the role played by the Soviet Women's Committee within the international domain of women's rights and struggles

3.2.1 “Neutrality” of hegemony

In the previous section, I argued that the Soviet Women's Committee is unknown, or unseen, by western historians, for the reasons proposed by de Haan and Wang Zheng. Namely, that the histories and activities of the communist or allegedly communist women's movements are disregarded, viewed as the empty maneuvers of women whose engagement with women's struggles was mere cloaking for their role as *tools of the Party*. Indeed, the main argument against recognizing those movements, or even studying of their history, is their alleged or actual lack of neutrality – their full commitment, or in case of WIDE, alleged full commitment, to the principles and the interests of Communist movements.

Furthermore, as Wang Zheng and de Haan argue, within the mainstream historiography of the domain of women's rights and struggles, communist and alleged communist movements are constructed as *the other*, agents of ulterior agenda, not *real* women's movements. In order to understand the bias beneath this argument, a question must first be posed: Which movements are considered in this discourse to be 'neutral' or 'authentic' and on what grounds? What type of change is considered 'real' social change, by whom, and who does this change serve?

Before attempting to answer these questions let us only consider in this regard a colorful illustration of the general lines of such bias. A search of the term *Feminist movement* in the Free

Online Encyclopedia (FOE) will lead to a page with two articles named *Women's movement*- one article is from the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (GRE) and the other one is borrowed from Encyclopedia Britannica (EB)⁴². The article from GRE portrays 'the' women's movement as global, while emphasizing the class divisions within it and prioritizing the significance of the proletarian and communist parts of the women's movements in the development of the global women's movements. The article by GRE is accompanied by the following statement: "*Warning! The following article is from The Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1979). It might be outdated **or ideologically biased***". [The emphasis is mine, Y.K]. Notably enough, no such warning is placed near by the entry which is borrowed from the Encyclopedia Britannica which states no less than:

Women's movement – diverse social movement, largely based in the U.S., seeking equal rights and opportunities for women in their economic activities, personal lives and politics. It is recognized as the “second wave” of the larger feminist movement. While first-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused on women's legal rights, such as the right to vote, the second-wave feminism of the “women's movement” peaked in the 1960s and 70s and touched on every area of women's experience – including family, sexuality, and work⁴³.

We can effortlessly observe that both accounts are biased, each originating in its own ideological and geographical context, yet the Free Encyclopedia Online only finds it necessary to warn the readers about the biases of the GRE. It can be argued, and might very well be true, that a warning about the bias of the GRE is automatically defined in the system of the website and was not specifically placed within the subject of *Women's movement*. Still, the certainty remains that FEO, which originated in and is based in the West, fails to identify or even consider that a western-centric account of any subject can also very well be biased.

This is a captivating example of how the self-proclaimed neutrality of the western historical account is accepted here, and in many other instances, as suggested in the *Prison*

⁴² <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/feminist+movement>

⁴³ Ibid.

Notebooks (1929-1935) of Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci. In his monumental work, Gramsci suggested an application of the concept of political hegemony to the analyses of dynamics among social classes in society, and argued that in any given society there exists a ruling (bourgeoisie) class which dominates over the other classes. The ideals and desires of this class gradually come to be seen as the *norm*. Its values are gradually perceived as universal and its interests are perceived as the interests of society as a whole. The hegemony of the ruling class rests upon *cultural norms*, meaning practices, institutions and beliefs that become considered neutral and “normal.” Following Gramsci, the mere idea of neutrality of western women’s movements as opposed to the communist or alleged communist women’s movements is a sign of the hegemony of the western-centered approaches within the field of historiography of the international domain of women’s rights and struggles.

The western and capitalist hegemony within the field of women's and feminist movements in practice and in theory is exposed, and its mechanisms revealed, within theoretical discussions on the ongoing basis. For instance, American feminist historian Kristen Ghodsee (2003) holds a critical discussion revealing and addressing capitalist hegemony within the contemporary deeply *NGO-ised* women movement in her *And if the shoe doesn't fit?(wear it anyway): economic transformations and western paradigms of women in development programs in post communist Central and eastern Europe* where she argues that the support provided by western women’s movements and organizations to the women's movement in the former USSR actually acts on behalf of neo-liberal powers and serves to promote capitalist values and agendas. In the same regard, Francisca de Haan (2010b) uncovers deception within the self-proclaimed and widely accepted neutrality of the International Council of Women (ICW) and the International Alliance of Women (IAW) and argues that the two were in fact taking a very active role in the Cold War and saw themselves as integral agents of the Cold War’s West.

The suggestion that communist and alleged communist states that supported women’s movements and organizations are not significant for history of the domain is an outcome of this

hegemony. According to this hegemonic perception, the communists and alleged communists are *not neutral* but *political*; as such they are irrelevant to a global history of women and women's movements, representing political interests rather than women's interests, which are politically 'neutral' in concert with hegemony itself. However, as argued by the large cohort of researchers I've mentioned, all women's movements are political, in the sense that they promote their own agendas. Some of them, however, outwardly proclaim that the woman question/issue/position cannot be framed as disconnected from a political agenda; others argue that their agendas are neutral. The following text by Lidia Petrova, a Soviet author and lifelong friend of Nina Popova (1908-1995) (the second president of the SWC) explains the differences between WIDF and other international women's movements in the Soviet view:

The main goal of a great number of feminist organizations, which formed at the end of the last century, was to strive for equality of women. However, their demands expressed the interests of women from the bourgeois class and were limited to the right to vote and right to education. Pacifist women's organizations, principally rejecting war, also spoke out against the oppressed nations' fight for freedom and independence. Bourgeois organizations which dealt with the issue of childhood hoped to improve the situation of children primarily by means of charity work.

In opposition to all these organizations, the Women's International Democratic Federation takes upon itself not only one, but all the issues which concern women worldwide. It does not approach these issues from a feminist, pacifist or charity-oriented positions, but aims to address them in their fullness, conceiving their resolution as connected to the conduct of wide democratic transformations and realization of peace-loving foreign policy (Petrova, 1956, p. 4).

3.2.2 Identifying hegemonic assumptions and moving beyond them– toward a new theoretical approach for the research of the work of SWC

Romanian gender historian Raluca Popa asks, in her *Translating Equality Between Women and Men Across Cold War Divides: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year* how the “international activism of the communist women organizations” should be read (Popa 2009, p. 73). Popa inquires into the history of National Council of Hungarian Women and the National Council of Women in Romania, and argues that the two organizations played central roles in the establishment of the International Women's Year (IWY) by the UN in 1975. The year constituted the beginning of International Women's Decade, which sociologist Nitza Berkovich argued to be “the most significant event in global organizing on women's issues”⁴⁴. Popa addresses the fact that the role which the state feminists of the so-called *second world* played in the adoption of IWY went unnoticed for a long time. Her findings challenge the assumption that women's international activism was Western-driven. In addition, argues Popa, “women's organizations in socialist countries had their own institutional agency. [...] Furthermore, even if these organizations were unable to change national policies [...] individual women within them may have found other ways of exercising agency on particular issues” (ibid p. 74).

In the next chapters, I would like to support Popa's argument and further reinforce it by exploring the ways and mechanisms through which the SWC engaged in the international domain of women's rights and struggles. To do so, I will first examine and expose hegemonic cultural norms and beliefs which underlie the *women-Party-tools* narratives of SWC's story.

The first assumption underlying the narratives is a belief that SWC was *either* working for women's rights *or* serving Party goals. This dichotomy alone represents an over-simplification. Not only did the CPSU proclaim the liberation and emancipation of women locally and internationally as one of its highest priorities, it also influenced gender aspects of major treaties

⁴⁴ Berkovich 1999, p. 120, cited in Popa 2009

in the UN, was among world pioneers in the promotion of formal equality for women, and led one of the few states which had already formally guaranteed women equal rights in education and labor in the early years of the century. Therefore, in the context of Soviet doctrine as well as its internal and foreign policies, the concepts of working for promotion of women's rights and of serving the goals of the Party should not be considered mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the two aims could potentially be interrelated, even interdependent, and the relationships between them should be carefully examined for complexities that are missing in the dichotomist view that supports *women-Party tools* narratives.

The first assumption is closely tied to another: The perception of the CPSU as an all-male establishment, and the women of SWC as working almost outside of the Party-Patriarch as mere servants of its patriarchal goals and orders. While we touched on the complexity of the goals of the Party in the above section, it is worth elaborating on the perception of SWC's women as outsiders working in the service of the Party. This notion is yet another obfuscating oversimplification. The life of Nina Popova, the president of the SWC in the years 1945-1967, serves as an illustration of this. Among her other positions, Popova was a longtime member of the Supreme Soviet and of the Central Committee of CPSU; the head of the Krasnopresnensky district in Moscow in WWII – and responsible for its defense; vice president of WIDF; and head of the board of The Union of Friendship Societies for Cultural Relations with the Foreign States – the biggest base of SU's citizen diplomacy.



Nina Popova at the XX Party Congress

Popova's active and varied participation in many levels of leadership was not exceptional: The leadership of SWC was top cadres of the state; professors, heads of municipalities, stakhanovites⁴⁵, members of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union and the Central Committee of the Party, or occupied other positions of influence in the community and the state. Certainly, the SU's elite women, some of whom were active in the SWC, had a less powerful collective voice than did the male elites. However, among the women who led and represented the SWC were some of the most powerful high-ranking officials in the Soviet state.

It could be argued that, notwithstanding the high ranking women leading SWC and the position of the members of organizations in the Soviet hierarchy, the system as a whole was in fact led by men, as can be seen in the demography of the Central Committee of the Party and the Politburo, which were de facto the highest governmental authorities of the Soviet Union. While this is true, the same criticism can be leveled against almost every democracy in the west during most of the 20th century, and that fact does not automatically lead to a narrowed perception of women working in state-supported establishments in these democracies as solely mere tools of the ruling male hegemonies not worthy of historical record.

Another dead end in the research of the SWC is the 'revelation' that it was not a public organization in the western sense of the word. And indeed, as sociologist Alfred B. Evans notes, most scholars agree that civil society, at least as it is usually defined by western theoretical approaches, "did not exist in the Soviet Union, because no sphere of formal organization was sufficiently independent of control by the Party-State regime to be considered fundamentally self-governing" (Evans, Henry, McIntosh 2005, p. 28). Historically, Evans asserts, the Soviet authorities responded to the flourishing of independent voluntary civil society in the 1920s by moving towards "direct administrative interference in the process of creating of social

⁴⁵ Competitive labor movement which emerged during second five-year plan in 1935, and was named after Aleksey Stakhanov, who had mined 102 tons of coal within less than 6 hours (14 daily norms). More on the movement see, for example: Siegelbaum, Sokolov (2004).

organizations”⁴⁶. When a new law regulating non-profit organizations and groups was issued, it led to a rapid decrease in the number and membership of public organizations⁴⁷. The process of consolidation of control continued throughout the 1930s, eventually resulting in the near-complete subjugation of all public activism to the Party.⁴⁸ However, it needs to be noted that according to Evans it also shall not be assumed that public organizations of the Soviet Union (and the SWC among them – Y. K.), were in fact totally subjugated to some near-mythic totalitarian state. As Evans argues even the very robust efforts of the state, when such existed, could not result in the actual control of every organization’s every move. Such total control would be nearly impossible.

In light of these facts, the term *obshchestvennaya organizatsia*, or ‘public organization,’ as used by the SWC, must be evaluated in the sense familiar to contemporaries in that time and context. The SWC was not a public organization seeking to promote radical social change in the Soviet Union. Although the public hardly set the goals or priorities for the organization’s work, there was active public participation in the SWC on a voluntary ‘*dobrovol’niy*’ basis, or what was cynically referred to by ordinary citizens as ‘compulsory-voluntary’ (*dobrovol’no-prinuditel’nyi*) (Orlova 2007). More importantly, the organization still had the potential to make a social impact locally, and even had the potential to engage in social change internationally.

Furthermore, the idea that the possibility of international social change impact of SWC should be dismissed as a subject of academic interest simply on the grounds that the organization did not promote radical social change inside the Soviet Union embodies another double standard in regard to women’s activism in the Cold War’s East and West. It is generally accepted that women’s organizations which originated within the mainstream of the West might have had significant social change impact for local women’s movements elsewhere as well as for

⁴⁶ Il’ina (2000), p. 110. referenced in Evans, Henry, McIntosh , 2005, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Il’ina (2000), pp. 56, 83, 90. referenced in: Evans, Henry, McIntosh , 2005.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

international women's movement.⁴⁹ In contrast, when it comes to the state supported communist women's organizations of the Cold War's East, the alleged impact which its work might have had internationally is by default assumed as equated with its ability or will to promote social change within their societies. . However, as argued above by Popa this automatic dismissing is essentially wrong and the Cold War's East organizations had a potential and played a significant international role at least in the arena of the UN.

In this regard, the three decade-long relationship between SWC and Tandi should be considered. Closely related to the Communist Party of Israel, Tandi directly collaborated with SWC up until the fall of the Soviet Union. Thus the interview with Khoury sheds light on the very ways and mechanisms of SWC's international work and the impact of this engagement.

My interviewee, Samira Khoury was born to a Palestinian Nazareth's family of ten girls and two boys. It was within the family and from her communist uncle, she says, that she "learned that women are equally capable and deserve equal rights". Khoury's early youth coincided with Thawrat Falasteen Al-Kubra (The Grand Palestinian Revolution), 1936-1939, an Arab revolt against the British mandate and the mass Jewish settlement in Palestine. Khoury began participating in demonstrations when she was only in elementary school. She continued to be socially and politically active during her higher studies in a British-run women's college in Jerusalem. It was there that she decided to support the National Liberation League (an Arab-Jewish political movement which later became the Communist Party of Israel) and their political platform which included the support of the division of Palestine into two states – Jewish and Palestinian. When the British mandate ended in 1947, the teachers fled the college, but not before ensuring the students, Khoury among them, were hurriedly graduated with teaching diplomas. Eighteen-year-old Khoury went to work in a school in Acre, a town which was relatively close to her home in Nazareth. However, after the eruption of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War on the 14th of May, the school was immediately transformed into a shelter for Palestinian refugees. Khoury

⁴⁹ See, for example: Lavelle (2002), Ghodsee (2003).

stayed in Acre and helped with the absorption of refugees. Only when Acre surrendered to the newly established Israeli army did she return to Nazareth in order to support the refugees which were arriving to the Arab city from the surrounding areas.

Khoury recounts that in Nazareth she and seven of her friends decided to organize in order to support the refugees. She tells that at the first meeting of the group the women agreed that the new framework will generally support the platform of the Communist Party and attributes this decision mainly to the fact that all women in the group had immediate relatives who were members of the Party.

According to Khoury, at the second meeting twenty seven women were present and the detailed platform of the organization was discussed. Women agreed that the organization would work for “refugee rights of Palestinians who were internally displaced, against violence and in support of the rights of women, including marital liberties, labor rights and elective rights”(Khoury 2010) The third meeting took place in October 1948, when according to Khoury as many as eighty three women participated and a board was elected. The women decided to name the organization –al-Nahda al-Nisaii – Women’s Uprising. During the first years of the organization’s existence the activists were “mainly occupied with the support of refugees and the empowerment of women” (Khoury 2010). The latter included presenting lectures and workshops which focused on promoting literacy and the education of women on political and social issues. According to Khoury the activists aspired to do no less than “prevent a second Nakba” (Khoury 2010) or expulsion of Palestinian people from their land.

In late 1948 a Communist friend told the members of the Women’s Uprising about the work of *Hanashim Hamitkadmot*, The Progressive Women, a Communist Jewish women’s organization. The two organizations met in 1949 and cooperation between them slowly developed during the year. In the same year Ruth Lubich (1906-2010), who was among the most influential activists in The Progressive Women, attended the International Congress of Women of Asia, which was organized under an umbrella of Women’s International Democratic

Federation in China. (Lubich 1985) The WIDF, which was established in Paris in 1945 and remains active today, was the largest international women's organization of the post-1945 era, uniting one hundred and eighty different organizations claiming to represent eighty million women from around the five continents from the moment of its establishment. To mention only a few highlights from extensive research in progress conducted by Francisca de Haan, the WIDF had initiated the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and was among the driving forces of the UN International Women's Year (1975), subsequent Decade for Women (1976-1985), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Samira Khoury recalls that at the International Congress of Women of Asia, Lubich took it upon herself to represent both Women's Uprising and The Progressive Women. When she returned, the two had decided to merge and called for the first congress of an Organization of Democratic Women in 1951 (Lubich 1985). Khoury tells that it was renamed in 1954, when part of women activists of Zionist socialist MAPAM asked to join The Organization of Democratic Women following the divide in the Party. According to Khoury, from 1954 to 1973 they worked under the name Union of Democratic Women in 65 villages, towns and cities. In 1973, five thousand women joined the organization as a result of a national membership recruitment campaign. Since the association had grown significantly they decided to change the name to Democratic Women's Movement in Israel (Tandi).

On the structural level, Tandi has an elected national board as well as a general assembly meeting once a year; in addition to that, every region has its own local management board which organizes its work. Today the organization focuses on political, social and educational activities and its work includes the empowerment of women, activism against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and encouraging the civil engagement of women and girls.

In our meeting Samira Khoury presented evidence and argued that SWC supported the work of Tandi, especially its international outreach and development of its activist body. She developed on the ways through which SWC provided Tandi with resources that were necessary

for its work including financial support for its international activity, scholarships for studies for its members, consultancy services and more and was crucial in enhancing the impact and significance of the communist women's organization.

Given the relations between the two organizations the impact which SWC had for the feminist field in Israel can be understood more fully if we examine the significance of Tandi itself for the feminist and political field in Israel. Tandi is not only among the oldest women's movements in Israel-Palestine, with thousands of members and a history of over five decades of women's empowerment, it also advocates and promotes fundamental social change in Israel. Consider, for instance the work of one of the leaders of Tandi, Tamar Guzansky (born 1940) who was a member of the Israeli parliament, ha-Knesset representing Israeli Democratic Front between 1990 and 2003. Guzansky is considered among the most important social law makers in Israeli history. In her parliamentary work, Guzansky focused on the protection of women and childhood, welfare, and a wide range of other social issues. The movement is not strictly self-defined as feminist; however, its work is by and large focused on rights and empowerment of women, especially the most marginalized among them. Most importantly, Tandi is cherished and acknowledged in the history of the feminist movements in Israel as the site in which many of the contemporary leaders of the Palestinian Arab feminist movement in Israel had begun their feminist engagement and work⁵⁰.

Since the work of Tandi does most definitely answer the usual criteria for social change and since the SWC had supported Tandi through decades of its work, it can be established that, in parallel to many foundations and organizations in the Cold War's west, SWC's international engagement encompassed a potential of cardinal social change.

The last misconception to consider when looking for the roots of *women-Party tools* narratives for SWC's work is a possible misreading of contemporary political jargon. Many Communist women have described their engagement as service to the Party. However, *service of*

⁵⁰ Interview with Abeer Kobti, Palestinian feminist and a member of the city council of Nazareth 10/12/10.

the Party was a general concept used to describe the political participation in the CPSU, rooted in the Leninist perspective of the Party as the leading and professional vanguard of the Revolution⁵¹. In this Leninist jargon, the female Party members were serving the Party much as men were. Conceptually, it implied serving as *Soldiers of the Revolution* rather than *servants of the leaders*. One can rightly argue that in fact along the history of the Soviet state the ordinary citizens had only very limited influence on the actual governance of the state and were servants to interests of the Soviet elites. However yet again the criticism can be easily applied to the grounding myth of government by people (or their representatives) on which western liberal democracies rely, while for the most of the twentieth century the real power as many argue has shifted from national states and their institutions to powerful international corporations.⁵²

In order to suggest a more complex narrative of the work and historical role of SWC, these assumptions should be addressed and a different theoretical approach should be mapped. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988, 2003) and Edward Said (1994) suggested that alternative narratives should not be built as reversals of the northern/western/orientalist perspectives, as a simple reversal will be a continuation of hegemonic rule. Therefore, I would like to propose that not to contradict the fact that SWC was a communist organization closely intertwined with the state. On the contrary, future investigations should implicate the organization and its complicity as the very base of research. The SWC was an integral part of the Soviet state and its foreign diplomacy apparatus. It was deeply connected with the CPSU and was promoting Party and state interests within the international domain of women's rights and struggles. In addition, it did not promote any cardinal change within the borders of the Soviet Union. However, as I have illustrated above, these facts by themselves do not imply that the work it did both domestically and internationally was insignificant, or lacked the potential to promote social change.

⁵¹ See, example, Hobsbawm (1994), p. 76.

⁵² See, for example, Klein Naomi *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York Metropolitan Books, 2008

CHAPTER 4: THE SOVIET WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, ITS HISTORY AND STRUCTURE AND MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS DIRECT PRO-ACTIVE ROLE WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES ON BEHALF OF THE SOVIET STATE

We derive our organizational ideas from our ideological conceptions. We want no separate organization of communist women. She who is a Communist belongs as a member to the Party, just as he who is a Communist.

- Vladimir Lenin ⁵³

Surely, right now, we look at the activities of any women's organization and judge from the viewpoint of what this organization does for women. But we can't separate the realities of time and the activities of any organization.

Alevtina Fedulova, the last president of SWC. ⁵⁴

In the last chapter I explored the reasons behind the narrowed *women-Party tools* narratives of the SWC and the general silence around its role in the history of international and local women's movements. Based on the example of the relationship between Tandi and the SWC, I argued that even though within the Soviet Union SWC was not an organization for social change, its international activities had potential to support and promote such change in other locations. I proposed that future research should consider the facts of the organization's affiliation to the CPSU and the Soviet state as the base from which the research inquiry should begin. This chapter provides the basis for future research inquiries using my suggested approach. Here, I will present the general outline of a history of the SWAFC-SWC's establishment; its organizational structure; and the main characteristics of its international work and its impact locally. Finally, I will present a hypothesis about its broader historical influence on the foreign diplomacy of the Soviet Union.

⁵³ Lenin 1977, p. 110, Quoted in: Buckley (1981), p. 100.

⁵⁴ Quoted in: Racioppi, O'Sullivan See (1997), p. 85.

4.1 Born within the national interest

4.1.1 The Second World War and the establishment of the Soviet Bureau of Information (SIB)

The Second World War, among the most significant periods in the history of the twentieth century, saw a shifting of Soviet alliances. The Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the treaty of non-aggression with Germany, in 1939. The SU did not join the Allies until June 22, 1941, when it was invaded by German forces during Operation Barbarossa. Because the Soviet state was defined by its ideology, and because Nazi Germany had a particular hatred towards communism, the Soviet Union was a state struggling for its mere existence. For almost four years, the USSR was in a condition of *total war* in which all of the resources of the state – financial, human or infrastructural, civil or military – were subjugated to the war effort (Murmantseva 1974). The propaganda effort took on a special significance. The Soviet Informational Bureau (SIB) was established on June 24, 1941, within the National Committee for Foreign Affairs. The SIB, according to Russian historians Natalija Nikulina and Zoia Soroka (1999), was under the direct authority of the Central Committee of the CPSU and was led by the influential and respected Alexander Sherbakov (1901-1945), who served as the secretary of the Moscow Party compartment as well. The SIB was formed with the goal of propagating the policies and positions of the Soviet Union⁵⁵.

The propaganda effort was especially significant since the deep general suspicion towards the Soviet Union in the West had been further reinforced by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which was perceived and portrayed by the Western Allies as an act of treason to the war effort. The propaganda campaign was not by any means an easy one. According to Nikulina and Soroka, enormous resources were mobilized for the SIB and the propaganda effort in general. Thus, the authors continue, during the years of the war, the Bureau became a vast structure

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Resolution of the Organization Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) "On the improvement of Soviet propaganda abroad"* (issued on September 29, 1949). Document from Alexander Yakovlev personal archive Online. Retrieved on March 3, 2011 from: <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/69228>.

which incorporated eleven departments, including a military department, a counter-propaganda department, and a department of international affairs. The departments, however, were only one part of SIB's broader structure. The anti-fascist committees, including Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee⁵⁶, Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Youth, All-Slavs Anti-Fascist Committee, Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Scientists and Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Women, were established during the first year of the war, and worked under SIB's authority as well (Nikulina and Soroka 1999).

According to Russian historians D. Nadgarov and Z. Belousova, (2005) being subject to the authority of the SIB meant that the anti-fascist committees were literally unable to send articles, letters and telegrams abroad prior to inspection and permission. It also meant that all meetings with foreigners, visits to embassies, banquets and receptions, as well as all speeches and presentations in meetings and plenary sessions had to be approved by the SIB. This meant that the events and materials were pre-examined by SIB, and also had to be approved by the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the CPSU⁵⁷.

4.1.2 Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee-the beginning

Thus, the establishment of Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee only a few months into the war has to be examined as part of the war effort, within the framework of the evolving needs of Soviet propaganda and under the urgent pressures of mobilization for the state of *total war*. It is in this framework that Soviet women, as collectively and also as a *brand* (a term I will substantiate below) had to be mobilized for the national effort. Alevtina Fedulova, the last president of the SWC says in the interview with Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See that SWAFC had an important role in the mobilization of Soviet Women as well as women around the world for the

⁵⁶ In brackets it's worth to mention the tragic fate of the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee: the Committee which played a significant role in the Soviet Victory came to represent a threat in the eyes of Stalin's circles and in 1948, after the Soviet policies in the Middle East proved fail its members were accused of anti-Soviet activities. The organization was disbanded in the end of 1948 and its leadership was executed.

⁵⁷ D.G. Nadgarov, Z.S.Belousova, Stalin and Cosmopolitanism, 1945-1953. International foundation Democracy, 2005. Retrieved on March 3 2011 from: <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/69228>.

struggle against fascism during the WWII (Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See 1997, pp. 84-85). It is beyond the scope of this research to establish how significant in fact was the SWAFC's role in the mobilization of Soviet women for the struggle against the Nazi invasion.⁵⁸ However, it is definite that the Soviet women did participate in the war effort on an enormous scale. Women fought on the forefront of the military defense and took part in underground partisan rebellions, and they were mobilized both compulsorily and voluntarily to the wartime industry. The Soviet women contributed the largest part of the financial resources which were needed for the military effort. They cared for children, including those who were orphaned by the war, as well as tending to the injured. They were also the major blood donors – over ninety percent of blood donations came from women (Murmantseva 1974). SWC's brochure, 1981, quotes Leonid Brezhnev, who was general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in the years 1964-1982:

If we could find such weight-scales, so that to put on one scale the military deeds of our soldiers, and on the other – the labor deeds of the Soviet women, then the scales would be probably equal reflecting the strength of the Soviet women that were fighting alongside their husbands and sons during the war⁵⁹.

In its official history, the SWC refers to the assembly which was held on September 7, 1941 in Moscow's Palace of Nations, as the moment of its establishment (SWC 1975, 1981, 1987). The assembly was attended by hundreds of Soviet women and hosted female representatives from abroad. During the assembly, the Soviet women's delegation addressed the women of the world and called upon them to join the struggle against fascism:

We address all women the world over, regardless of political convictions, religious beliefs or social status. We call on you on behalf of all Soviet women. Our victory and the fate of our children, our brothers and our husbands depend on us. In the face of the danger threatening all of us and the whole of civilized humanity, we

⁵⁸ In brackets it shall be noted that whether the ACSW had played any actual role within the mobilization of women or not, the mere participation of women in the war remained one of the main themes of SU foreign propaganda efforts, for examples refer to Sz, 1945, 1; 1962, 3.

⁵⁹ Leonid Brezhnev (1970) *Leninskim Kursom*. Vol. I. Moscow: Politizdat. p. 136.cited in: SWC, 1981, p. 19.

call upon your emotions and your intellect. Our unity is our strength and the guarantee of the victory⁶⁰.

The proclaimed goals of the SWAFC at the point of its founding included developing relations with women's organizations abroad, uniting women worldwide in the fight against fascism and for peace and women's rights, advancement of children, and engagement of Soviet women in socio-economic matters of the state⁶¹.

The first head of the SWAFC was Valentina Stepanovna Grizodubova (1909-1993), who became famous in 1938, when she set an international record for women pilots in long-range flights. Born to a pioneering aircraft designer, Stepan Vasil'yevich Grizodubov, over the years of her life Valentina Stepanovna was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union (1939) and Hero of Socialist Labor (1986), as well as numerous other awards and titles (Geroi, 1987). Grizodubova was the only woman in the important Extraordinary State Commission for the Establishment and Investigation of the Crimes of the Fascist German Invaders and Their Accomplices, and of the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises, and Institutions of the USSR, which was appointed by the Party in 1942 (Sorokina 2005).

During World War II, Grizodubova was the commander of a long-range aviation regiment, and was awarded the rank of colonel in 1943. However, it seems that her public obligations interfered with her command position: According to Alexander Golovanov (1904-1975), the Commander of the Air Forces of the Red Army in those years, she repeatedly left her post during the military operations, and her regiment had low discipline and a large number of non-combat flight accidents (Golovanov 2004).

It is reasonable to suggest, although further verification is needed, that Grizodubova's

⁶⁰ Soviet Women's Committee 1987, p. 5-6 cited from:

K zhenshchinam vsego mira! Vystupleniia na zhenskom antifashitskom mitinge, sostoyavshiemsya v Moskve v kolonnom zale doma soyuzov 7 sentyabrya 1941 g. [To the women of the intire world, speeches from the women's assembly...] Moscow: OGIZ, 1941. See also Women's Anglo-Soviet Committee, Soviet Women Call to You, London: H. Clarke and Co., n.d. [1942].)

⁶¹ Ibid.

complaint against Golovanov, was the reason behind the removal of Grizodubova from the post of the president of the SWAFC. Golovanov reports that in 1944, Grizodubova, well connected among the highest ranks of state leadership, filed a complaint against him, in what he describes as an attempt to obtain the rank of General. According to Golovanov, after an investigation and consideration by the Politburo – the highest organ of the Central Committee of the Party, the complaint was declared as deliberately false, and the decision was made to transfer the case to a military tribunal. Golovanov argues that at the end the case did not go to the tribunal because of his request, but Valentina Grizodubova was removed from all her military positions (Golovanov 2004).

Nina Popova, who came from the close circle of Sherbakov, also a the head of the SIB , served as the president of the SWC up to 1968, was one of the most influential Soviet women figures of her time. Her life is the focus of a book written in 2005 by the Russian scholar Natalia Borisova. *Nina Popova – Life-time of Creation* is based on materials from Popova's personal archive, materials from GARF, and interviews with Popova's colleagues and her daughter, film director Renita Andreyevna Grigoryeva.



Nina Popova and her daughter Renita. Date and place unknown. Private collection of Renita Grigoryeva.

Borisova (2005) writes that Nina Vasilyevna was born on 22 of January, 1908 in Yeletsk, Russia, to a family of a working class constructor. Orphaned at the age of twelve she became a student in the first generation of Soviet orphanages in post-revolutionary Russia. Popova was energetic and quickly became socially engaged. She joined the Pioneers, a 'communist students' movement, and later Komsomol (Ibid, p.22-23). Idealistic and committed, Popova rapidly progressed within the new system. She became a member of the Party in 1932 and obtained a degree in education from Moscow University in 1934 (Ibid, p. 5-54). Aside from her presidency of the SWC in 1945-1968, during her long and impressive career Popova had served as Secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions 1945-1957 and the Chairwoman of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (1958-1975). She was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party between 1961 and 1976. In addition, Popova was a member of the presidium of the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace (Soviet Peace Committee) from 1955, served as a member of the World Peace Council from 1958, the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with Asian and African states and the Soviet Committee for European Security and Cooperation.

Popova was awarded the International Stalin Peace Prize for Strengthening of Peace among the Nations (1953) – the Soviet equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize. Along with Nikita Khrushchev, Popova was among the few SU citizens who were honored with this high award which was renamed Lenin's Peace Prize in 1956. The long and impressive list of the laureates of the prize includes the president of WIDF Eugenie Cotton (1950), the leader of WIDF and of Swedish women's movement, doctor Andrea Andreen (1953), the Latin America revolutionary Fidel Castro (1961), long standing president of India Indira Gandhi (1983–84), the Columbian revolutionary writer Jorge Zalamea (1967), Palestinian politician and poet Mahmoud Darwish (1980–82) and the leader of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa Nelson Mandela

(1990). In addition to the honorary award Popova had two Orders of Lenin and Order of the October Revolution (Ibid, p. 204).



Indira Ghandi and Nina Popova, according to Borisova the two women were close friends. Date unknown. Private collection of Renita Grigoryeva.

Popova was a woman of exceptional political talent. The mere fact that she continued to progress within the Soviet state under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev is itself evidence of her political flexibility and ability to maneuver in hard and changing conditions. Khoury says “Popova knew how to promote issues and push. She was very personal with people and intimate.[...] Popova was an activist.”

According to Borisova, Popova left Yeletsk in 1925 and arrived in Moscow to continue her Party work there. Borisova draws a portrait of Popova as a person of great political talent and exceptional courage. One story Borisova recounts is especially remarkable. According to Borisova, Andrey Shamshin, Nina’s first husband, was arrested during Stalin’s purges, Popova decided to fight the system. She later described that at the time she “fought, internally decided to fight. Unfortunately not many people then made any attempts to fight” (Borisova 2005, p. 38). Popova waged a fearless campaign for her husband’s release, following which Andrey Shamshin

was indeed set free, along with his five colleagues. This was a unique accomplishment in those oppressive days (Borisova, *ibid*). Popova and Shamshin divorced before the eruption of the war.

Borisova writes that in the beginning of 1941, Popova was offered by Alexander Sherbakov to become head of the Krasnopresneskiy district in Moscow. Notwithstanding the common belief that the war would not cross the borders of the SU, preparations for such a possibility were at the center of Popova's early work. Popova took the new assignment most seriously and began with preparations of defense and mobilization of all available material and human resources (*Ibid* p. 53-54). Borisova observes that among the many dimensions of mobilization for the war effort, Popova especially encouraged and cherished women's mobilization, which in her eyes was a central part of the district's defense program. Popova praised women's power, their skills and devotion (Borisova 2005, p52). She not only encouraged and mobilized others, but was herself planning and preparing to go underground in 1942, in case Moscow fell to Nazi occupation⁶².

During the war, Popova fell in love and married a war hero, Colonel Vladimir Orlov. The passionate relationship and brief marriage ended tragically on the 18th of March, 1945, when Orlov was killed on the way to Berlin, less than two months before the end of the war⁶³.

The third head of the SWC was Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova, world's first female cosmonaut. Tereshkova was born on March 6, 1937, in a village Bolshoye Maslenikovo in the Yaroslavl region in the Russian federative republic. Both her parents worked in a land cooperative, and her father was a war hero who died in combat when Valentina was only three years old. When Sergey Korolyev, the leading figure of the Soviet Space program, proposed sending a woman to space and the country wide selection process began, Tereshkova's class background played a central role in her selection. Tereshkova was sent to space in June 16, 1963 and had spent almost three full days in earth's orbit. While in space, she collected data about the

⁶² Archival spravka [Archival note]18/07/65, partarhiv of the Institute of Party history.[part-archive of Party history] Cited in Borisova (2005).

⁶³ Letters of Orlov to Nina Popova and Renita, 1942-1945 (referred to in: Borisova (2005), pp. 206-208.

reactions of the female body to space, and also made photographs of the Earth's horizon which led to the discovery of aerosol holes in earth's atmosphere (Lothian 1993).

Tereshkova served as a member of the World Peace Council from 1966. She was elected a member of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in 1966–1974 as well as in 1970–1974, served at the presidium of the Supreme Soviet in 1974–1989 and was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1969–1991. In her role as the president of the SWC (1968–1987) led the Soviet delegation to the IWY UN Conference in Mexico in 1975 as well as to the World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, 1980.

Tereshkova was awarded a long list of honorary prizes and medals including the Order of October revolution and the highest honor, the Order of Lenin, the medal of Hero of the Soviet Union, United Nations' Gold Medal of Peace and the Simba International Women's Movement Award. A crater on the moon was named after her.

In the capacity of Soviet Women's Committee, Tereshkova was also Vice President of the Woman's International Democratic Federation. It is unclear how influential she was within the WIDF or within the SU apparatus. Mamonova (1984) calls her a "token" and Khoury says "she [Tereshkova] was like a Goddess. Who can reach as far as she had? When she came back from space and went on stage [at the 1963's World Congress of Women in Moscow] people saw a goddess in her. She was very humble and shy. She was very pretty and loved by all women of the Federation. She was more representational than activist[...] Popova was not replaced. I don't remember but perhaps it did happen and perhaps because Tereshkova was a symbol, she was a returning astronaut... Popova continued to do the work she had done always but allowed Tereshkova, as a symbol, to be in the foreground. It was for purposes of visibility but I think Popova continued her work for much longer".



Cuban leader Fidel Castro and cosmonaut, Hero of the Soviet Union and head of the Committee of Soviet Women Valentina Tereshkova at the twenty seventh congress of the CPSU. 26.11.1986 Moscow, Ria-novosti

Tereshkova was replaced in 1987 by a former Stakhanovite weaver, Hero of Socialist Labor Zoia Pukhova (born on September 24, 1936). Pukhova served as the president of the SWC up to 1989. Racioppi and O'Sullivan described the processes under her leadership as the beginning of *reorientation* of the organization. They argue that during the period the SWC became much more engaged with the situation of women within the Soviet Union. The accounts of a total reorientation seem to be an exaggeration. As I will show, the SWC in its own records reports that the organization had an impact within SU' through the entire period of its existence, for instance in the processes of law-making. However, rather innovatively from those times Pukhova addressed questions of the representation of women in the leadership of the state and the poor

availability of professional training for women in major Party and state forums (Racioppi, O'Sullivan-See, pp. 58-59). In addition under her leadership, the SWC established a range of projects which targeted women's professional and personal development (ibid, p. 77). In the 1989 elections, seventy five of SWC's members were selected due to the quota system in the newly established by Mikhail Gorbachev Congress of People Deputies.

The last head of the SWC was Alevtina Fedulova (born on April 14, 1940). In her interview with Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See, she talks about her remarkable path from her childhood as a daughter to illiterate single mother in the industrial city Elektrastalia, to becoming among the most influential Soviet woman of the 1980s. Fedulova, who worked as a teacher in her earlier career was gradually promoted within the Party which she joined in 1963, at the age of twenty three. In 1971 Alevtina was appointed head of the Pioneers Youth Movement and in 1984 she was elected as an executive secretary of the Soviet Peace Committee (SPC). This is how Fedulova tells of the period of work at SPC:

I am grateful for this opportunity in my life. Because in those times, the Soviet Peace Committee united very many interesting, I would say outstanding, people who realized what was happening in the world, who realized the danger of war. They taught me how to look for common things, how to work in informal ways, and how to develop direct contacts. (ibid, p 84)

In parallel, in 1987, Fedulova was elected as vice president of SWC: "I think this was a logical step in my life and it was really very harmonious with my inner state of mind: women, children and peace. I would say that all my life I was working in a very noble sphere: women, children and peace" (ibid, p 84).

According to Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See, Fedulova, together with other women at the SWC, completed the process in which the focus of the organization became the conditions of women's lives within the Soviet Union (while retaining its international contacts). Finally, Fedulova was the one who led the establishment of the Union of Russian Women on the base of

SWC's infrastructure and in 1993 was elected to lead the election block *Women of Russia*.

The above biographies testify that, aside from Grizodubova who rose from a middle class background, the SWC's presidents were women who rose from a working class background up to the highest positions of power within the Soviet apparatus. Still, one of the main arguments which opponents of SWC raised was that the SWC was in fact an organization of women elite, well connected, and well positioned women, and their ability to represent Soviet women was widely perceived by the contemporaries as limited. Fedulova addresses this question in the interview to Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See:

In those times, the committee did a lot in uniting women of the world against fascism, in uniting Soviet women; but surely the task was not to unite all the women, it was necessary to put together and involve prominent women whose names and whose authority could somehow influence legislation. Well today, sometimes people think and say that the Soviet's women committee united only elite women and was set up only for contacts with foreign countries. And I would call this a positive act. Because every country tries to show the world the best that it has. And the fact that we sent abroad the best women scientists, writers, artists how can they blame the committee for this? (ibid, p. 86)

This representation by Fedulova is lacking in complexity, and the argument that the women did not represent ordinary Soviet women had a basis in fact. For instance, it should be noted that an absolute majority of SWC's leadership including those who initially rose from different backgrounds but were to various extents estranged in their daily experience from the lives of ordinary Soviet women. The mere fact of their high positions or family relations, they were situated in the higher ranks of an elite social strata of the state. The nomenclature system in the Soviet Union consisted of a list of authoritative positions and a list of potential candidates for these positions⁶⁴. The rise of Soviet nomenclatura as a separated class was discussed by

⁶⁴ See Voslensky Michail (1984). *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class* (1st edition). Russian original was

Michail Voslensky (1984) in his *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class*. His book which was first published by the *samizdat* in 1970 was inspired by the ideas of the Yugoslavian revolutionary and later dissident Milovan Đilas (1911-1995) who in his *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (1957), suggested that in the socialist societies in Eastern Europe the elites of Party bureaucracy became a new ruling class. Voslensky who applied Đilas ideas to the SU, argued that the gap between the lives of nomenclatura and the ordinary Soviet people was so significant that the average *nomenklaturshik* (a person from nomenclatura ranks) could live her/his entire life within what he satirically called *nomenklaturia* – a land of special and elite housing, education, recreation and health services. Thus, since the absolute majority of the women who represented SWC in its international work belonged to the ranks of nomenclatura they most probably were in fact representatives of a different, better country, the Soviet Union as they experienced it.

4.2 Organizational Structure and Financing

As I have argued, the SWAFC was established in order to enhance the propaganda efforts of the Soviet Informational Bureau. According to the description of the SWC's archive in GARF, "in November 1945 by a decree of the Central Committee of the AUCP ⁶⁵ the Committee was made an independent organization".⁶⁶ It was renamed Soviet Women's Committee, officially, by a decision from its Plenum on 15 of May, 1956 (SWC, 1981). Thus, the organization was renamed following the death of Stalin and the profound changes within internal and foreign policies of the SU which followed, most significantly the secret speech *On the Personality Cult and its Consequences*, which was given by Nikita Khrushchev to the XX Party Congress on February 25, 1956. The secret speech, which denounced the crimes of Stalin's era and the personality cult during his rule, opened a new, more liberal era in the history of the Soviet Union, also referred to

written in 1970, distributed by samizdat, and eventually printed as Voslenskiy M.S. (1991) *Nomenklatura. The Ruling class of the Soviet Union*. M., 1991.

⁶⁵ The Bolshevik party was renamed Russian Communist Party in 1918, in 1925 it was renamed again to All-Union Communist Party (AUCP) and finally renamed 1952 to Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

⁶⁶ Kometet sovetskikh zhenshin,; Annotatsiya [Soviet Women Committee, Description]. <http://statearchive.ru/383> accessed on 2/05/2011.

as *ottepel*, a 'thaw' – an era of profound change in internal and foreign policies, including the reform of public organizations in the Soviet state (Dawisha 1975).

Every five years a general assembly met to approve the future plans and to elect the members of the Plenum of the SWC. The Plenum met once a year and elected the Presidium, which led and supervised SWC's work between the Plenums. The SWC was "comprised of representatives of all Unions and autonomous Republics, *krais*, many *oblasti* and cities. Among the members of the Committee are the representatives of trade unions, youth organizations, artistic and professional unions. Among its members are also the chief editors of the 21 women's magazines published by the committee" (SWC, 1981, pp 11-12).

Over the years of its existence, the SWC's structure included a general department, a department for relations with the WIDF and other international women's organizations, departments for relations with national women's organizations worldwide and a department for information management. In addition, the organization had a managerial department, a department for translations and an accounting department. Khoury noted during the interview that SWC's international work was structured along the same lines as WIDF's, meaning that each region (the number of regions and their precise division probably evolved over time) had a responsible person who provided guidance to the organizations and who led correspondence and collaboration with them (Khoury 2010; SWC, 1981, 1987; GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760).



Chairwoman of the Presidium of the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC), Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, left, making a speech at the SWC plenary meeting. 02.07.1968 Moscow, Ria-novosti

One important part of its structure, according to the SWC, were public commissions working nearby and within the organization:

“Hundreds of activists and volunteering specialists were active within approximately 20 commissions including sociologists, jurists, economists, psychologists, doctors, and representatives of labor unions. They contributed significantly to the conduct of various symposia and meetings, making reports as experts and consultants, as well as prepare materials for publications”(Soviet Women's Committee 1981, p. 14)

Starting in December 1945, the SWC published the journal *Sovetskaya Zhenshhina* - Soviet Woman, which was issued in fifteen language editions by the fall of the SU. According to the 1961's budget, *Soviet Woman* was an integral part of the SWC on a structural level⁶⁷.

According to SWC (1981, 1987) along with other SU public organizations, SWC was taking

⁶⁷ See: GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760. The list of staff and budget for administrative expenses of the Committee for the year 1961, p. 3-4.

a part in legislation and initiatives (SWC, 1981, pp. 12-13). In this capacity the SWC was active in the Supreme Soviet's commission on Women's Working and Leaving Conditions and on Mother and Child Care, it also took an active part in preparing "the basic directions of economic and social development of the USSR for 1981-1985 and until 1990" (Soviet Women's Committee 1981, p. 13), "contributed to the drafting of the fundamentals of USSR legislation and the union republics on marriage and the family, national labor legislation, national legislation in housing and public education, and the USSR constitution adapted during perestroika (Soviet Women's Committee 1987, pp.11-12).

This is how the SWC described the mechanisms of its legislative work:

Annually, the Committee receives tens of thousands of letters from women in which they raise their points of criticisms concerning everyday life. This helps the Committee to stay aware of the issues that matter for Soviet women. Summarizing these issues, SWC introduces its suggestions to the legislative bodies (SWC 1981, p. 13.)

The SWC had a growing number of employees that had reached hundred thirteen as early as 1961.⁶⁸ In addition, SWC employed freelancers, including experts, writers and photographers, along with additional temporary employees for big projects, for instance, international congresses held in the Soviet Union.

In the 1980s, the SWC became more practically active on issues internal to the state, especially since they were revived by a decision of the XXVII Party congress *zhensovetov* women's councils and were subjugated to its authority in 1987 (Pukhova 1987). Women's councils were established in 1958 as part of Nikita Khrushchev's efforts to mobilize the Soviet citizens for more active participation in public life (Browning 1987, pp. 52-53) and his "differentiated approach" which literally meant greater openness towards organized interest groups within the Soviet Society (Buckley 1989, pp. 144-147). According to Mary Buckley, women's councils were

⁶⁸ See: GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760.

formed in large part by the work enterprises and offices, as well as on different regional levels (Browning 1987, Buckley 1989) and were subject to “official Party priorities for work among women” (Buckley 1989, p. 150). The councils were composed of groups of women activists, some with only a few members and some with dozens. They were active to a degree that differed among the councils as well as during the different periods of Soviet rule. For example, the period of Brezhnev’s rule, generally referred to as *zastoj* – the stagnation – was the lowest point of the councils’ activities. The women’s councils participated in areas such as working conditions, culture, health, agitation, child care, and more. It should be noted that both Buckley and Browning argued that the councils genuinely strived, within the limits of their authority, to improve women's working and living conditions, and were able to do so locally to a certain extent on an individual or group level. Indeed, in concert with the depiction I have provided of the nature of SWC’s work, in spite of the fact that women’s councils were not women's organizations for social change, they were in fact organization-cells *of women for women*, which provided women with a certain extent of support to ease the double burden of a Soviet worker-mother model. Moreover, based on the findings of Buckley and Browning, it can be argued that if the councils are examined relative to their western counterparts, and for the same practical purposes, women’s councils had a relatively wide scope of occupation and a reasonably or even notably significant impact.⁶⁹

The question of finances available for SWC’s work is among the most important dimensions that can enable us to establish the significance of the direct active role which the SWC played within the international domain of women’s rights and struggles on behalf of the Soviet State. Indeed, in order to argue that the Soviet Union was a persistent actor within the

⁶⁹ -Grandma, did you know about the Soviet Women’s Committee?

-Ah, of course, they were doing international work; with women around the world, they were traveling abroad and also hosting women from abroad, we would never dare to meddle into this business...

-And what they did locally?

-Some women who had problems went to them, like for instance single mothers. They could arrange a flat sometime or a kinder garden, and also if there was violence at a family women went to them sometimes for help. We didn’t need this, but some women did.

-Were there many of them (*zhensoveti*)?

- They were everywhere, in each work place, in the city Party enagement, everywhere.

December, 2009, Kiryat Haim, Israel.

domain, one should be able to demonstrate that the socialist super power was “ready to put money on it.” In fact, the answer to the question of funds is very complicated, mainly due to the fact that the major part of the archives of the Central Committee of the Party, which was responsible for many backstage budget related decisions, was opened to the public for only a few months in 1992, and has been closed ever since.

According to the brochure which was issued by SWC in 1987, part of the funds for international activity of the SWC came from the payments for its journals, distributed locally and abroad, and another part came from the Soviet Peace Fund (SPF) after its establishment in 1961. The SWC was among the founders of the SPF, along with the Soviet Peace Committee, the Committee of Youth Organizations of the USSR, and the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and numerous other smaller public organizations. Notably, Nina Popova was deeply involved with three of the four largest founding organizations.

Soviet Peace Fund was a closed, opaque organization, which did not publish any financial statements. The exact amounts of its revenues and expenditures remain unknown but were undoubtedly immense. The Peace Fund collected funds from church revenues; withdrawals from the summer labor practicum for schoolchildren; sport prizes won by Soviet Sports men and women during international competitions; and withdrawals from fees paid for the concerts of popular musicians, bands and singers. Money was also collected during the so-called “Peace Watches” – a labor day in which workers of Soviet enterprises were obliged to transfer their salary towards the funds of the SPF. A final source of funding came from the individual contributions of ordinary citizens.

On several occasions the SWC pronounced that the majority of those who contributed to the SWF were women, and adds citations from the letters of women to the Fund: “Let my little contribution, along with the contributions of other people; help prevent the war so that our children and grandchildren could leave in peace, so that there would be a peaceful sky all over the

planet” (hospital medical assistant Natalia Puzireva).⁷⁰

The brochure of SWC makes the contribution seem a completely voluntary action: “The Peace Fund is supported by many activists from culture and art. Artists organize concerts and plays, and money from these events is donated to the Peace Fund. Painters organize photo exhibitions for the same purpose. Writers transfer their honoraria as well” (Soviet Women’s Committee 1981, p 31). However, as Galina Orlova (2007) describes in her fascinating inquiry into the ways by which former Soviet citizens construct the memories of their participation in the SU’s *peace movement*, the ordinary people frequently perceived the contributions to the Peace Fund as one more tax they were obliged to pay.

Examples for the projects which are widely known to have been supported by the fund are: The Soviet Peace Committee and The World Peace Council; Coverage of tuition fees and scholarships for students from Asian and African countries in the Soviet Union; assistance to national liberation and Marxist revolutionaries in the regions of the Soviet Union’s engagement (including Angola, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia); support of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; funding the construction of monuments to Soviet soldiers who died in Europe; support of the victims of the earthquake in Armenia in 1989; and support of the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1980.⁷¹

However it needs to be noted that a major part of the SPF’s spending decisions were made by the Central Committee (CC) of the Party.⁷² In addition, according to a document in the

⁷⁰ Quoted in: Soviet Women’s Committee 1981, p. 31 .

⁷¹ <http://www.peacefond.ru/en/> accessed on 3/03/11

⁷² See for instance Bukovsky, Section 8 (Peace), Document № CT219/59: CT: Financial assistance to women from Asia and Africa in participation in the International Women congress [07/11/1980]:

Decree of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party Regarding the financial aid to the International Women’s Democratic Federation to provide for the participation of representatives of women’s organizations from the countries of Asia and Africa in the Forum of Nongovernmental organizations in Copenhagen (14-24th of July of this year).

To agree with the proposal about provision of financial aid in the amount of 20 thousand *convertible roubles* to the International Women’s Democratic Federation in connection with the participation of the Federation’s delegations in the Forum of Nongovernmental organizations (Copenhagen, 14-24 July of this year) at the expense of the *Soviet Peace Fund*. (*if this is a quote, put it in quotation marks.*)

Bukovsky archive,⁷³ the SWC also had the ability to ask CC for additional foreign currency funds.

4.3 The Principles of the International Work of SWC

Despite the fact that SWC had already begun making international contacts under Grizodubova, the principles of SWC's vast international work and networking were established during the period of Nina Popova's leadership. In June, 1945, Popova led a delegation of the Soviet Women to the First National Congress of the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) – Union of French Women. Borisova argues that Popova was already the president of the SWC at the time of the conference (Borisova 2001, p.103). However, the fact that Popova lists Zinaida Gagarina as the secretary of the SWAFC in the report of the Congress while she herself is listed as Secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions might be a sign that Popova was not yet the president of the SWC at that time. In fact, given that Popova was in mourning over the death of her husband, which had occurred just a few months before the Congress convened, it is possible that she was sent to lead the delegation in order to examine whether she would wish to become the president of the SWAFC during this hard period in her personal life.

Ten women had participated in the Soviet delegation to the UFF congress, among them were artists, scientists and workers. According to Borisova, Popova's friend Lidia Petrova said that the delegation flew to Paris through Berlin, where the delegates were shown the bombed city, and Popova was taken to the forest where Orlov had been killed.

The delegation arrived to Paris on June 15, 1945, and was met by Eugenie Cotton (1881-1967). Cotton, a physicist, was a student of Marry Curie and an anti-fascist leader. She was elected as the first president of the Women's International Democratic Federation when it was established later that year. A warm and genuine friendship flourished between Cotton and Popova, and lasted for over two decades (De Haan, 2010c). The photos of the two leaders, the

⁷³ Bukovsky Archive, Section 8 (KPSS i bor'ba za mir [CPSU and struggle for peace]), Document № CT219/59": CT: Financial assistance to women from Asia and Africa in participation in the International Women congress (07/11/1980).

filmed documentary materials, and the letters as well as the articles, in which Popova described Cotton, are full of love and admiration. Borisova includes in her book a photo of Cotton's letter from an exchange between the two (ibid, pp. 248, 249). In the letter, Cotton writes to Popova in the manner of an old and committed friend, almost without any formalities attached. She opens the letter with the salutation, "My Gentle, Dear Friend!" and closes, upon thanking Renita, Popova's daughter, for a „sweet" letter she had sent, by saying „we are looking forward for her [Renita's, Y.K] visit in the spring". In the Soviet documentary film (1975) *Eugenie Cotton*, the two appear to be intimate and close friends – holding hands, supporting and loving each other. The documentary material shows Popova looking warmly into Cotton's eyes and helping her put the order of honor on Eugenie's chest when the anti fascist leader is awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in 1951. Here is another scene, the two women are leading a women's march in Moscow – their arms intertwined and their bodies intimately close. Their genuine love and friendship are apparent in many additional photos and documentary materials.



Nina Popova, Chairman of the Soviet Women's Committee and Laureate of the International Lenin Peace Prize with Eugenie Cotton, President of the Women's International Democratic Federation (from left to right). Ria –novosti 03.06.1954

Cotton was far from being Popova's only personal friend within the WIDF. Nina Vasilyevna also had a close relationship with Dolores Ibarruri (1895–1989) who was a “special guest” in the family (ibid, p. 113-114). *La Pasionaria*, was known worldwide as a Republican leader of the Spanish civil war. Her cry *No pasaran!* (They will not pass!) before the battle upon Madrid in 1936 became a symbol of determination in the struggle against fascism. Ibarruri was in political exile in USSR from 1939 to 1977. Following the death of the fascist dictator Franco in 1975, she returned to Spain. Ibarruri lost her son, Ruben Ruiz Ibarruri, in the battle of Stalingrad in 1942 and was awarded an Order of Lenin and several other medals by the Soviet state (Sorel 1989).



Nina Popova, chair of the Presidium of the Soviet Women's Committee (on the right), congratulating Dolores Ibarruri, former Secretary General of the Communist Party of Spain (in 1944-1960), on the award of the International Lenin Prize for Strengthening Peace among Nations. 26.05.1964, Moscow , Ria-Novosti

Among her warmest friendships was Popova's relationship with Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier (1912-1996). During the WWII Vaillant-Couturier was engaged in the La Resistance Francaise – a movement which fought against the Vichy regime and the Nazi occupation of France, and had gone through the Nazi concentration and death camps Romainville, Auschwitz-Birkenau and finally Ravensbruck. Vaillant-Couturier was a witness in the Nuremberg trials, and a member of the central committee of the French Communist Party from 1947. She was the general secretary of WIDF in 1945-1955, vice president of WIDF from 1954 and vice-president of the Union des Femmes Francaises (today *Femmes Solidaires*) from 1979. Vaillant-Couturier served as a vice-president of the French National Assembly in 1956-1958 and 1967-1968 (Cazenave 2004). According to Borisova, Vaillant-Couturier was a frequent guest in Popova's house and had especially warm relations with Popova's daughter. In a letter dated December, 23, 1972, Marie-Claude writes a quick note thanking Popova for the warm greeting she had sent to Vaillant-Couturier on her birthday. In the letter, Marie-Claude apologizes that she had not written before and says that she couldn't find Nina at the Congress they both attended a few days earlier,

and tells her that she wanted to find Popova in order to show her a photo of Vaillant-Couturier's grandson –who is “the cutest thing.” Marie-Claude is leaving Popova a present –pate for Nina's New Year's table-“Do no forget to put it in the fridge!”-she finishes the note.⁷⁴

Indeed, as de Haan (2010c) argued in her conference paper *Politics and Friendship in the Early Decades of the WIDF – An Exploration Based on Letters and other Personal Documents*, warm personal relations were at the very foundation of the work of the entire WIDF. According to de Haan, “a number of women within the WIDF formed deep and long-lasting friendships, which seem to have made an important contribution to the functioning of the WIDF and to some of its members' long-term dedication to the organization” (Ibid). Furthermore, according to de Haan, “...personal relations and chemistry contributed significantly to the success of the organization.” “Body language IS meaningful,” says de Haan, and calls our attention to the joy that the women leaders of WIDF share in the famous picture which appeared in the report of House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) under a headline “Ringleaders of the Women's International Democratic Federation”⁷⁵.

De Haan also uses the examples of the warm personal relations to call an attention to another dimension of WIDF – its anti-colonial and anti-racist position. In this regard, de Haan notes that, for instance “Nigerian leader Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978) (WIDF Vice-president from 1953)...positively contrasted her treatment within the WIDF with that in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which she disliked.” De Haan believes that “the WIDF's policies of support for anti-colonialism also included the level of personal engagement and interactions with women from Asia and Africa which was in line with and supported those politics, and about which we know through various personal documents” (De Haan 2010c).

According to Borisova's research and my interview with Khoury, Nina Popova had an

⁷⁴ A letter from Vaillant-Couturier; cited in: Borisova, 2005, p. 250.

⁷⁵ See: Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives (1950, original release date - October 23, 1949). Report on the Congress of American Women. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office), p. 10.

exceptional talent for interpersonal relations. It seems that it was this talent that sustained the warm friendships which stood at the base of a formation of especially warm organizational culture, and which, according to Khoury, remained characteristic of the SWC's international work. In Khoury's opinion, "all of the Committee's activists were quite genuinely warmly enthusiastic about the relations with foreigners and exceptionally friendly."

Popova writes in her report that before and during the congress of UFF, the delegation met a number of representatives from the French women's movement and gathered information about their work. Collecting information about the lives and activities of women remained an important dimension in SWC's work. In fact, the archive of the SWC in GARF, is almost an irresistible temptation for reading, while it is without a doubt one of the biggest collections of its kind in the world. It includes reports about women from Mozambique, Libya, Peru, the United States, Nigeria, and Spain, to name only a few. It seems that the SWC with the help of WIDF, its national organizations, local communist parties around the world and the SU's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was rapidly and continuously collecting detailed information about the situation of women, their struggles and activism in virtually every place around the world⁷⁶.

Judging by the organization of files in the archives and the individual documents, the collection of the information was done for several functional reasons. Among them was the development of international contacts, and selecting ideologically appropriate partners worldwide. In some of the countries' files, for instance Great Britain and United States, the archives contain files which on several organizations active in the region, with notes about their comparative ideological suitability and activist potential.⁷⁷ There is also a collection of data assembled for its own publications, including *Soviet Woman* and brochures published by SWC on

⁷⁶ See for an example document: GARF, Fond 7928 (SWC), op. 2, d. 71: "Women in Columbia have no rights therefore there are no women organizations here and no women press" (seems that the committee continued to try after finally finding women's organization –alliance of Columbia women and establishing connection with them).

⁷⁷ See, for example: GARF, Fond 7928 (SWC), op. 2, d. 149 (Report on the visit of Soviet women to France, June 15 – July 5) and GARF, Fond 7928 (SWC), op. 2, d. 19 (E-mail correspondence with National Council of women of Great Britain on information exchange).

the international women's movement and the WIDE.⁷⁸

In the public report on the Congress, Popova praises UFF women's courage, their contribution to the Resistance, and their work against the poverty, starvation and the black market in a post-war France. The way Popova portrays women's struggle against the black market and the space it gets within her story raises an important point which has to be mentioned in connection with the materials published by the SWC about international affairs, whether single printed reports or articles in *Soviet Woman*. Gudova (2008) argues in her conference paper on *Soviet Woman* and another popular Soviet women journal *Krestyanka* [Peasant woman that the materials printed in the journals were meant to educate the Soviet women about appropriate behavior and values. In the case of materials dealing with foreign affairs, an author didn't even need to spell out that the same issues existed in the Soviet Union, and that the French women were positive models for the Soviet context. In the example of the UFF struggle against black marketeering, Popova condemns the black market and praises those who fight against it. In this way, Popova promoted the Party line against the black market of the post war years, without needing to mention that such a problem existed in the Soviet Union at all⁷⁹. The message about values could be delivered without reference to any deficiencies in the Soviet system.

The Initiative Committee for the preparation of an international congress of women was established during the UFF congress, and included four representatives of the USSR: Nina Popova, along with Vasilyeva (a professor of the Second Moscow Medicine Institute, representing the Russian federation), Aleksandrovskaya (People's Artist of the SU, who represented Belarus) and Pidtychenko (a professor of Kiev University who represented Ukraine) (Popova, 1946, p 20). Note that the separate representation for Ukraine and Belarus reflects the

⁷⁸ See for example *Soviet Woman* 1960, 12, Nina Popova „For a world without weapons and wars, slavery and oppression”.

⁷⁹ The published, modified accounts require critical reading, but shall not at any rate be disregarded as non useful in general. In the joint work with de Haan, we drew comparisons between several accounts within the brochures issued by the SWC and articles within the *Soviet Woman* and data from other archival sources. We concluded that SWC's texts are by and large useful in indicating significant events. Moreover, we found that the account which is provided under the quite easily to identify Party line, is frequently remarkably accurate on a factual level and can be trusted to serve as a base for an establishment of a more comprehensible account of historical events.

way in which the SU was represented at the UN. The Initiative Committee called for a gathering of an international women's congress.

Delegations and representatives of forty-one states arrived in Paris for the International Women's Congress, which was organized in just a few short months to begin on the 26th of November, 1945, in Paris. According to Borisova, this tight schedule was met with surprise and disbelief in Moscow. However, it seems that Borisova's account is mistaken and it was most probably the Soviet side that pushed for a congress in "the year in which war ended," in Popova's words (Borisova 2005, p. 115-116). This is judging from Popova's own public report in which she notes that the British delegation lead by Miss Ellen, was "managing an intensive struggle against establishment of our women's democratic federation". The *sabotage* as Popova referred to it, included objections to the time line and suggestions to postpone the gathering (Popova 1946, p. 34). De Haan summarizes this early rivalry in the WIDF's history which seems to undermine "any notion that the Soviet Union or its representatives simply decided what the WIDF would look like or how it would function" (de Haan, 2010b, p 561):

The British members of the International Initiative Committee, supported by Australian women who had no formal role on that Committee, argued for postponing the congress for a year in order to give women in their countries time to organise and establish a common viewpoint about the nature and aims of the Federation. In regard to the wording of the Statutes, they argued for replacing the word 'anti-fascist' with 'democratic' in relation to member organisations (and indeed a more open formulation was added) and also proposed changing the 'ordering style' for the member organisations which, according to Elisabeth Allen, sounded 'Communist'. More than this, Elisabeth Allen also argued against the Federation

having direct control of member organisations and opposed the proposed system of voting.⁸⁰

At the time the president of SWAFC, Popova was once again the head of the delegation. This is how Evdokiia Belolipetskaia, a woman of a village background who worked with Popova in those days described the trip to Borisova:

And so Nina Vasiliyevna tells me: “We will go to the Paris Congress, as members of the delegation. There will be about 30 of us – actresses, scientists, engineers, women soldiers from all the republics.” We were then driven to Nikolskaya to receive the outfits. Everyone was dressed in brown coats, very very stylish ones, brown hats, and was given terrycloth robes. From the central airport we flew on a “Douglas.” Many flew abroad for the first time. As I recall, it was freezing cold on the plane. We were running around the plane, warming ourselves up like the Fritz⁸¹ in winter. I took the bathrobe out of the suitcase and put it on under the coat; I tied my shawl over my hat. We landed in France. We were met by the French women, Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier among them. We settled in the trade mission, four to five people per room. We would eat at the canteen. The translators were the White immigrants. One translator invited us to his house, and there is the czar's family portrait on the wall. One of ours went to visit the emigree who was the czar's relative, and someone filed a complaint. We were all gathered at the embassy and told: “Not a step anywhere on your own!” One of us ratted on Maretskaya “She is going out to meet people in a cabaret!” I remember Maretskaya saying “I am an actress. I should see that.” Maretskaya was returned.

Before the Congress, Ambassador Bogomolov's wife came to visit us. She brought us some scarves, shawls, fur, some jewelry. We dressed up and no longer

⁸⁰ De Haan (2010b, pp 560-561) based on Nina Popova (1946) *Mezhdunarodnoe Edinenie Zhenshchin – Viliikaya Sila* (International Unity of Women: the great power) (Moscow: VTsSPS Profisdat). pp. 85–91; Jessie Street's memoirs; see her *Jessie Street*, p. 195.

⁸¹ Fritz – derogatory, a German person.

resembled orphanage children. In Moscow they gave me a box of groceries to take with me. When I opened it, it turned out to be empty. Some confusion happened, perhaps... Everyone was laughing at me after that - look what happened once she was allowed to leave home and into Europe...

The French treated us exceptionally well. I remember, at night we wore crepe de Chine night gowns, embroidered in satin stitch, beautiful like evening dresses. Before going to bed we flaunted in front of each other. I remember it as if it happened just now - it's time to fly home, but the weather is frightful. Douglas cannot manage to take off. Everyone has wrapped themselves up, frozen... Then we are told - airports are not taking us in. And all of a sudden Minsk allows landing, with bonfires. Minsk let us in” (Borisova 2005, p 116)

The Soviet delegation was among the biggest. The list of Soviet participants provides an interesting account of considerations involved in composition of the delegation.⁸² The largest group of Soviet women delegates came from academic backgrounds. Aside from Popova's fascination with knowledge and higher education and her deep respect towards it, as described by Borisova, the idea beyond the participation of such a number of professors must have been to

⁸² The delegation included Gagarina – the editor of the newly established „The Soviet woman”, Sabillo, a jurist; Petrova, a head of History Department; Gurina – an engineer in heavy industry; Belyayeva, the head of the Central Committee of workers within printing industry. Kirsayeva – member of the of the SWAFC, Kovrigina – Kotor – deputy of the Minister of health of SU, Zuyeva – head of the committee on the issues of cultural education under the Soviets of people's commissar of USSR, professor of economics and a member of the Moscow council; Parfenova – head of the board of schools in the ministry of education, Bahtigul – minister of light industry of Turkmenia, a member of the Supreme Soviet, Vainberg – minister of Jurisdiction of Latvia, Vasilyeva – professor, Gorinevskaya – colonel, professor of military medicine. Dzhavahashvili – PHD in medicine, Tbilisi, Lebedeva – a head of institute of Tuberkulez studies near by the academy of science and a member of the scientific advisement board of the ministry of health, Pidchenko – professor of Kiev University, Sharigina – PHD in chemistry, professor in the Mendeleyev Institute; Aleksandrovskaya – national artist of USSR, Zelrkalova – artist; Kononenko – a writer; Fedorova – metropoliten engineer, member of the Supreme Soviet, Troitskaya – colonel, Moscow metropoliten; Ivaneyeva – a worker-stahanovez; Garmash – head of a tractor brigade; Berhsanskaya – colonel of aviation, a hero of the Soviet Union; Ivatsek, a manager of sanatorium of the Trade Unions, mother of a hero of the Soviet Union; Sveshnikova – a librarian in Lenin's library, Belkina – journalist, Kapustina – architect; Furzeva – chemistry engineer; Fomicheva – colonel, Hero of the Soviet Union, Kosheleva – head of the cultural department of the union of state organizations; Shangina – engineer; Tyuleneva – member of the advising board to the ministry of trade of USSR; Maretskaya – artist; Arefyeva – director of kindergarten of Krasnoprecnenskij district; Ermolyeva – professor, head of the institute of biological prevention of infections, member of the Academy of Science; Blolipezkaya – asistent of the Secretary of the Trade Unions(Popova); Mechenko – professor of Moscow University of Foreign Languages, Boychenko – director of a school of Kirov district in Moscow; Nikitina – Assistant professor in Academy of Science and finally Bugayeva – a journalist (Popova 1946, pp. 93-94).

argue that the advancement of women in the academy is a regular and standard characteristic of the Soviet state. The progress of women was in the Soviet academy especially meaningful in establishing the superiority of the Communist rule, given the status of women in higher education in the West in those years⁸³. As a side note, it is also important to mention that in order to become a professor one had to be a member of the Party and that Popova didn't only need to compose a politically impressive delegation, but also the most reliable one.

Another significant group within the delegation was women who hold very high posts in the government, including Ministers of the Republics, members of Advisory Committees by the ministries of SU, members of the Central Committee of the Party and the like. Indeed women in state leadership positions represented one more impressive formal achievement of the Soviet Union.

The next significant group within the delegation was the military personnel. This group was supposed to not only position the Soviet women within a framework of military glory and to emphasize their role as *defenders of the world* against fascism, but also to yet again emphasize the idea that Soviet women served at the highest ranks of the military apparatus, a fact literally unthinkable among the armies of Western Allies. According to Popova, the Soviet heroines of war were met by the women at the Congress with special enthusiasm.

The artists who were chosen for the delegation were internationally known from their participation in films about heroism of Soviet women during the war. In this regard Popova even tells us of an anecdote when the film actress Maretskaya was accepted by women at the Congress, as if she was an actual war heroin, due to the role she played in one of the wartime movies which were known abroad. (Popova 1946)

One more dimension which should be emphasized in regard to the composition of the delegation is the ethnic representation. While an absolute majority of the delegation was of Russian origin, Popova assigned special significance and attention to representative of the East

⁸³ Although the reality of women's status within the academic community in USSR was far from this celebrative representation, yet it was far more advanced than the reality in the West.

of the Soviet Union. The way in which Popova tells about the Eastern representative and the way that she was accepted by other delegations at the Congress is a remarkable mix of colonial tropes with nothing less than full admiration of her achievements:

Our Bahtygul Altibayeva, the daughter of Turkmen [...] was born in exactly the same conditions in which children of exploited and heart Islamic public of Morocco and Algeria are born nowadays. [...] But ...our Bahtygul was educated and raised by the Soviet rule [...] as every child of her nation Bahtygul had received not only the right but an opportunity to study. It occurred that she was a gifted child. [...] And young Bahtygul, by working and studying, rose higher and higher. To Paris she arrived as a big public figure, a member of the Supreme Soviet of USSR and minister of the government of Turkmen (Popova 1946, pp. 65-66).

Bahtygul, according to Popova, immediately drew attention because of her eastern looks- “A woman born in Asia, in peasant’s family to Muslim parents, a daughter of a nation which not long ago was under colonial rule and suddenly – a member of Supreme Soviet, a minister, a member of a republic’s government!” (Popova 1946, p. 66).

In summary - the delegation of the SWAFC to the WIDF’s founding congress was representative of the official narrative of full emancipation of women by the Soviet state.



The Soviet delegation at the WIDF's founding congress, Paris, France, November 1945

According to Popova's account, the broad and illustrative representation within the delegation brought the desired results; women from all around the world were fascinated with the Soviet delegation. This is also supported by an account from the Congress in *Christian Science Monitor* which reports that “the largest and certainly the most representative delegation was that of Soviet Russia. Numbering forty two, it included a woman general, a famous surgeon, wearing the uniform of lieutenant colonel, a captain who carried out night bomber flight, a Russian Film Star, architects, women industrial workers, writers and mothers of large families” (Lavelle 2002, p. 112). Thus, through the mere composition of the delegation, the SWAFC succeeded not only in portraying the idea that were women fully emancipated by the Soviet state, but also in claiming for itself a unique status among the delegations at the Congress. By its mere composition, the delegation proclaimed that the Soviet Union had progressed beyond the ‘woman question.’ Borisova tells us that when Popova walked to the stage to deliver her speech, the entire room was standing. She received this reaction, according to Borisova, because “a woman was walking who represented the people who won over fascism, in a grandiose battle never seen before in history”

(Borisova 2001, p. 118). In the next decades, the SWC's was working to preserve this unique status of Soviet Union's representation in WIDE, by similar means.

The Women's International Democratic Federation was established on November 29, and on Saturday, 1 December 1945, the week ended with a mass rally in the Velodrome d'Hiver in Paris (De Haan, 2009, 2010). Two hundred thirty three women present had an elective voice, another hundred and seven an advisory voice and yet another four hundred forty women present were from local French organizations. The official languages of the congress were English, Chinese, French, Spanish and Russian. The agenda of the congress included four main themes: women in the struggle against fascism; economic, legal and social status of women and the measures which need to take place in order to improve them; childhood and education; and finally, the participation of women in the establishment of democracy and strengthening of peace. The four themes became the focus of the WIDE's future work as well (Popova 1946, de Haan 2009, 2010).

Popova's account (1946) of the congress reflects an atmosphere of deep solidarity, and the feeling of arriving at a decisive moment in world history. Her narrative joined an ideological framework and analyses with stories and accounts of women's struggles and survival, their strength and often beauty. Her narrative is a powerful account of her genuine respect and affection for women and is demonstrative of her political talent as well. The account reveals Popova as a well-educated politician and diplomat, who easily maneuvered the wide variety of women's narratives present at the congress. These include the personal domain and local political accounts, as well as broad political analysis structured according to the line of the Party, all this within the framework of the Soviet Foreign Policy. For example, propagating the Soviet presence and occupation in the Eastern Europe by citing a long list of examples on how protection of motherhood improved in the countries in which "people democracy had gained the power" (Popova 1946, pp. 48-49).

The structure of the presentation which the Soviet delegation gave on stage was

representative of the narrative in which the SWAFC and later SWC used in their work for decades later. The main focus of the presentation was on exceptional heroism of Soviet women during the WWII. The narrative was meant to demonstrate that this heroism was an integral outcome of the “history of the development of the Soviet state,” (Popova 1946, p. 24). The “exceptional and mass heroism of the Soviet women during the War” was, according to the narrative which Popova presented in the public report, due to the fact that the Soviet women “knew very well what she is fighting for,” (Popova 1946, p. 25). The presentation lauded the resolution of the “woman question” as one in a long list of factual and imaginary Soviet achievements, which were a common theme of the Committee's propaganda internationally and locally up until the 1980s (Popova 1946, pp 25-28).

4.4 Prospects for the research on the role of the SWP within the development of the foreign policies and diplomacy of SU

Thus, the history, structure and characteristics of the work of SWC which were discussed in depth above demonstrate that the work of the Soviet Women's Committee had promoted the Soviet Union's national interests by the means of:

- Networking with women, women's rights activists and movements as part of the Soviet People's diplomacy, using citizen diplomacy, a channel which was highly important at the earlier stages of the USSR's existence and remained significant until its fall.

- Empowerment of women, women's rights activists and women's rights movements as part of the Soviet's Union engagement in the national liberation struggles and Marxist revolutions in the Third World.

- Appeals for solidarity of women and women's rights activists and movements in the West and internationally, and/or appeals for support International women's movements, as well as women's movements and activists in the West whose goals complied with the national interest and the foreign policies of the USSR.

However, it seems that the role of the SWC within the history of people's diplomacy of the USSR can not be summarized by this account only. In the following section I will strive to demonstrate that although a much deeper inquiry is needed, there are grounds to believe that the model of the work of the SWC formed the basis for the establishment of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign States (the Union). This is only a very brief inquiry into the facts which lead me to suggest this hypothesis. Again, a much deeper inquiry is needed in order to substantiate the argument, the full scope of which can not be included in this thesis research. I have chosen to include this rudimentary evidence in hope to encourage further research of this subject.

The rise of Nikita Khrushchev brought profound changes within the Soviet foreign diplomacy. These changes were not so much in the content of foreign policy, but in how diplomacy was performed (Dawisha 1975). One of the major changes in this regard was the ban on the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) – the governmental structure which was responsible for “informal” contacts with foreign states up until 1956. The Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was established in place of the VOKS. Nina Popova was assigned to head the board of this newly established structure, which later became one of the more important and influential pillars of Soviet people's diplomacy.

Natalia Borisova argues that Popova was assigned to the post because of the international experience she had from her work in the SWAFC and WIDF. I would like to expend this argument and briefly show that there is a possibility that the Union was actually built based on the experience gathered within the framework of international networking among women and WIDF; that there is a possibility that it was not only Popova's experience which was wanted, but the entire organizational culture and the model for international cooperation of SWC.

Let us turn to a document by Radio Free Europe – a popular western propagandist radio

station that played a significant role during the Cold War.⁸⁴ This is how Radio Free Europe describes the reasons behind the ban of VOKS:

VOKS [...] had the disadvantage of being an organization that was commonly recognized and tacitly admitted to be controlled by the official State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, under the chairmanship of G.A. Zhukov; at the same time it dealt only with unofficial and unrepresentative organizations such as the Communist-dominated friendship societies in the West.⁸⁵

However, Radio Free Europe further argues that the new Union is merely VOKS under another name. Their main argument that supported this analysis is that the Union will not be a *real public organization* but “a supposedly independent organization, which enables them (the Soviet authorities) to argue that the friendship societies are unofficial and must therefore be left free to deal with similar unofficial bodies abroad”⁸⁶.

I disagree with the general nature of Radio Free Europe's argument. Indeed, as elaborated above, a public organization in USSR was certainly not an independent entity striving for a social change. However, even from the reading of Radio Free Europe's own report, it is clear that the ban of VOKS and the establishment of the Union did represent profound changes both in the organizational culture and in the ways of foreign propaganda and the Soviet State's diplomacy. Radio Free Europe itself hints at the quality of the changes with citation from an interview with Popova, in which she compares the new organizations and VOKS:

Madame Popova admitted that some of VOKS' past activities have embarrassed the Soviet Government and prejudiced its relations with other countries

⁸⁴ „New Organization to Control "Friendship"” April 25, 1958. OSI Archive: HU OSA 300-8-3, 55-3-16.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

when she said that its “forms and methods” are “outmoded”.⁸⁷

Indeed, as Radio Free Europe itself describes, VOKS worked through governmental authorities or communist parties, while the Union, similarly to SWAFC, aspired to establish relations with a broad range of political and social actors around the world, grounded in a vision of cultural and personal contacts rather than up-front propaganda. According to Radio Free Europe:

Madame Popova's opening address suggested that the new organization is intended to be the new spearhead of the Soviet "peace and friendship" propaganda on the model of the Moscow Youth Festival. Its goals according to Popova were to acquaint the Soviet people with the life, work, custom, economy, culture, history and languages of foreign countries and to diffuse abroad all kinds of information on the life of the Soviet people, the development of their economy, culture and science and the peace loving foreign policy of the Soviet state.⁸⁸

Thus, according to the citations brought by radio Europe, it can be suggested that the new Union was to work on the principles on which the SWC was working under Popova's leadership: warm interpersonal relations and cultural exchanges.

The hypothesis which I suggest here, namely that that further research will be able to establish that the legacy of the SWC was in fact much more far reaching than its actual work and included the exporting of its principles to the biggest structure of people's diplomacy – the Union of Friendship Societies with Foreign Countries, requires without a doubt an extensive archival research, however the outcomes of such an inquiry for the history of people diplomacy of the Soviet Union can be profound.

In this chapter I've discussed the establishment of the SWC and the principles of its international work. I also discussed a possibility that these principles stood at the base of the establishment and work of Union of Friendship Societies with Foreign Countries

⁸⁷ Ibid.
⁸⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5 THE MECHANISMS OF THE DIRECT ACTIVE ROLE PLAYED BY SWC ON BEHALF OF THE SOVIET UNION WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND STRUGGLES

One of the major directions of the work of the Soviet Women's Committee is the development of cooperation with other women's organizations in the world in name of peace, friendship and mutual understanding between the peoples.

(Soviet Women's Committee, 1981, p. 2)

In the previous chapter I have presented a general outline of SWC's history and structure, and identified the main characteristics of its work during the organization's founding period. This chapter summarizes the ways and mechanisms of the engagement of the SWC on behalf of the SU within the international domain of women's rights and struggles in regard to two main target audiences – women's masses and women leadership, and in regard to both local and international arenas. A comprehensive argument on the historical significance of this role is beyond the scope of the thesis, however where applicable and where the evidence allows, I will suggest general lines for this future inquiry.

5.1 Introduction

I begin by emphasizing once again that the direct active engagement of the SU within the international domain of women's rights and struggles was part of a general framework of Soviet foreign policy and diplomacy. Thus, there was a special emphasis on rights of women-workers and their social welfare, in combination and integration with anti-fascist, anti-capitalist and anti imperialist struggles.

The work of SWC can be better understood through its outreach efforts to two main target audiences - the broad public of women around the world- *women masses*⁸⁹, and women-

⁸⁹ The term *women masses* in Soviet jargon was used not only to in order to emphasize that the target audience-comrades was vast but to emphasize the antagonism which existed according to the Marxist Leninist doctrine,

activists and leaders⁹⁰. The SWC reached out to women's activists and leadership located in Cold War's East and West. This included connecting with women leaders of local and international women's movements, as well as with women leaders and activists within national liberation and Marxist revolutionary struggles⁹¹. Given that the struggle for liberation and emancipation of women was conceptualized as an integral part of a struggle for peace, national liberation and for social, racial and economic equality, the women leading these struggles and movements constituted a valuable target audience and a pool of possible partnerships for the SWC. It is important to note in this regard that within the domain of outreach and collaboration with women leaders, the SWC not only did outreach to and cooperated with existing leadership and activists, but was also deeply engaged in the development of future leadership through empowering women, especially in the Third World.

The single most significant engagement of the SWC and definitely the most central within its work were its role and participation in Women's International Democratic Federation. Until recently, the consensus in the women and gender history scholarship of the transnational women's movements was that SWC was a tool of the Soviet Union that had absolute control over WIDF. Francisca de Haan objected to this false consensus, arguing convincingly that the WIDF was the location of a significant, powerful and dynamic meeting among women from different political and ideological backgrounds and different "sides" of the Iron curtain (de Haan 2009, 2010). Thus, argued de Haan, WIDF's history can not be degraded to presentation of this international structure as a mere submissive tool of the SWC and the Soviet Union. However, the SWC was not merely one more organization among equals. Certainly, to paraphrase George Orwell, all organizations within WIDF were equal, but some organizations were more equal than others: The SWC definitely played a central and influential role within the WIDF.

between interests of ordinary women in the west and east, and interests of the ruling capitalist governments in the West.

⁹⁰ The usage of the term „outreach” is not taken for granted: I will argue later why this in my opinion is the most appropriate term in regard to the work of the committee.

⁹¹ The committee also had connection with women leaders from capitalist world but this can not be perceived as outreach or cooperation and won't be elaborated upon here.

Before approaching the actual mechanisms of SWC's activity internationally, it is important to broaden our understanding of the complexities of the position of SWC within the Soviet state. Dr. Wang Zheng (2005, 2010) shows in her research of All-China Women Democratic Federation that the organization, which was in a very similar structural position within the Chinese People Democratic Republic, did in practice have its own *voice* and even a slightly different set of priorities than the broader CP of China. Although I am not relying on such a broad base of evidence as my respectable colleague who had interviewed leading women of the ACWDF, I would like to suggest as well that a more complicated approach might be applicable to SWC's relations with the Central Committee of the CPSU.

First, let us get back to David Lane's (1985) analysis of the Soviet state's character of governance. Lane argues that an understanding of the Soviet state as a totalitarian regime of a few, who obtained and sustained total control over all of its structures and subjects, is an unrealistic supposition, at least as far as the period after Stalin's death is concerned. The governance of the Soviet Union according to Lane can be better understood as a meeting among interest groups within the particular ideological domain. If we think of the Soviet state as a meeting point of actors with interests, the SWC might have had a degree of autonomy that is if it was a separate agent within system acting on its own interests.

The first dimension which must be considered in this regard is whether its members, paid staff and activists', had any personal interests in SWC's work. They did. In the words of Racioppi and O'Sullivan-See, "the SWC was particularly attractive to professional women, because it provided opportunities to make international contacts, to learn from foreign experiences and viewpoints and sometimes even to travel abroad" (ibid p.76). The SWC provided its elite members, staff and activists with privileges that were rare and valuable within the Soviet Union and included opportunities for career advancement and *svyazi* [connections] with other women belonging to the nomenclature elite of the Soviet state. The connections which women of the SWC had from the work within and with the SWC were a capital by itself, given that a system of

informal and personal networking – *blat* – stood at the base of the strategies of Soviet people, including the elites, to cope with the failures of the central planning (Ledeneva 1998).

The second dimension which must be taken into account in this regard is that the SWC also had to answer to outside pressures and to advocate for the interests of other actors with which it collaborated inside the Soviet state. This is clearly the case, given that the SWC networked with more than three hundred local women organizations in hundred thirty seven countries (Pukhova 1989b, p. 7) and built relationships with transnational women organizations, most importantly WIDF, and forged relations with individual women leaders worldwide. In addition, it continually received divergent and even conflicting requests, and was under pressure from different quarters, as I will show. The SWC received requests for stipends from women students, for invitations and visits and delegations to the Soviet Union, for vacations within the Soviet Union for women leaders and their children, for humanitarian aid for areas of crisis and the like. The SWC could fund the requests from its own budget or from the budget of the Soviet Peace Fund. Some of the requests also demanded collaboration with other Party and state structures. The pressures to respond to the requests were both on a personal level, due to above mentioned warm personal relations with foreign women, as well as on a political level. It is reasonable that the (in)ability of the SWC to respond to some of the requests could have influenced its position within the international domain of women's rights and struggles. Simply put: In order to stay relevant and influential, the SWC had to *be* relevant and influential, and as much as being part of the powerful Soviet state was an important symbolic and practical advantage in this regard, the SWC had also to provide actual and relevant support to its partners worldwide. In order to be able to respond to the requests, the SWC strived to enlarge its own budget, and requested from CC an additional budget on a project *by project* basis.⁹² The above demonstrates the organization had some autonomy and self-interest in the context.

These two dimensions – personal interests of the activists and the staff of the SWC and

⁹² Section 8 (Peace), Document № CT219/59: CT: Financial assistance to women from Asia and Africa in participation in the International Women congress [07/11/1980].

the pressures it experienced from outside – are examples of sites in which potential for conflicts of interest existed between the SWC and the Central Committee. In addition, while the governing authority of the Soviet state had limited recourses it could allocate to foreign diplomacy, efforts needed to be divided among many clients – national liberation and Marxist revolutionary movements, communist parties in the West, socialist governments in Eastern Europe, the various public organizations within the State and more. Under these conditions, the SWC had an interest in the enlargement both of the privileges that the women of the organization, and also to enlarge the resources which it could allocate to women and women's organizations worldwide, helping it stay relevant in the domain.

5.2 The ways and the mechanisms of engagement of the SWC within the international domain of women's rights and struggles

5.2.1 Distribution of printed materials

According to Karen Dawisha (1975) who focuses on the Soviet Union's people's diplomacy in the Middle East, the leadership of the SU believed in the efficacy of cultural propaganda and people diplomacy not only in promoting its international standing and interests, but also in encouraging other people's struggles and progress. An important part of the active propaganda within the international domain of women's rights and struggles was the distribution of printed materials that illustrated the achievements of the Soviet Union in the emancipation of women. As I have mentioned briefly above, the main printed material which the SWC distributed was the journal *Soviet Woman*.



*The "Soviet Woman" magazine published in 14 languages. Moscow. 1983.
01.07.1983*

According to the budget and work plan for 1961, approximately seventy five percent of materials in the foreign language editions were translated from Russian, but the French edition encompassed fifty percent of original material.⁹³ The original materials addressed the specific interests of the target audiences and also responded to cultural differences. For instance, pattern samples for women's dresses which were included in the Russian edition were replaced in Indian edition by sample patterns for child dresses.⁹⁴

The journal was developing over the years and included articles and a considerable number of drawings and, later, photographs. It featured articles about the position and welfare of women within the Soviet state, as well as their rights as workers and mothers. It also featured sections on fashion, cooking, culture and child upbringing. *Soviet Woman* was heavily occupied

⁹³ GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760. The list of staff and budget for administrative expenses of the Committee for the year 1961.

⁹⁴ In 1961 the Journal was issued in ten languages-Russian, English, German, Spanish, Hungarian, Chinese's, Japanese, Hindi and also in French under a title "A Woman today". The journal was issued monthly. According to the budget for 1962, the editions are divided to „groups”: the first group includes English, German, Hungarian and Spanish. The issuing of this group requires partial replacement of written and illustrating material, including replacement of headlines for every edition and style editing and additional control editing for every issue. *A Woman Today* in French cost half of the amount of the entire first group, probably due to the higher percentage of original material. The last group of issues includes Chinese Korean, Japanese and Hindi. It is notable that while the partial replacement of material is as expensive within the first group, it requires two control editing's which together with the literally editing and "writing of graphical headlines" amount to three times more expensive affair than the first group. In Hindi and French, the covers of the Journal were also replaced.

with representing women's role within the Soviet state as a central one which is in line with propagandist efforts outside and inside the state. To this end, the Soviet Woman featured articles about women occupying the highest posts within the state, as members of Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, professors, health professionals, stakhanovite and alike.

From its very first edition, a considerable part of the journal's space was dedicated to the international domain. The journal included articles debating the situation of women around the world, articles about struggles of women for their political and economic rights, and articles on the role women took in national liberation and Marxist movements worldwide. It also included articles dedicated to the work of WIDF and other international and transnational women's organizations. The articles dedicated to WIDF included reports from the congresses and the initiative committee meetings, and the Soviet interpretations of the WIDF's work and obstacles to it and its successes. This part of the journal also served to report about the international work of SWC and included reports from delegations sent to foreign countries, letters of acknowledgment from women who visited SU, letters received for celebrating memorable dates, for instance, for the day of the Great Victory, and more.

It should be noted that the pieces regarding international affairs used almost solely the term *democratic* in regard to WIDF and its branches and organizations. It seems that the authors and the editors were careful to decrease usage of the word *communist* in regard to WIDF itself, its organizations and branches, and even with few exceptions in regard to the SWC and its own work. This was probably a part of the broader consistent effort of the SWC and the WIDF to combat the accusations of WIDF as being under the complete control of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party.

The narrative which describes the SWC role and position within WIDF, and the general position of Soviet women within the international community of women is an *Older sister* narrative. According to the narrative, the Soviet Women are sisters within the community of women worldwide, however, since they now occupy unique and high places, being, as they are,

completely liberated and emancipated, they are not just any sister, but an older sister, wise and supportive of other sisters within the family of humankind⁹⁵.

However, Soviet Woman was not the only printed material that the SWC was sending abroad. For instance, in the budget of 1961, the year of SWC's twentieth anniversary, also included plans to send to a hundred organizations worldwide "libraries of 5-6 brochures and books about the lives of Soviet women"⁹⁶. Photography was a very important dimension of the printed propaganda for foreign women. In 1961, SWC planned to send to seventy different states a photographic exhibition called "International relations of Soviet women," with each exhibition set to include fifty pictures illustrating the topic. On the same subject, SWC also planned to issue the next year twenty albums containing hundreds of photos in each. In the same year extra collections were prepared featuring different topics: family, Soviet children, vacation, and the informal education of children. The same year the SWC also planned to send abroad eight thousands greeting cards for the New Year and six thousand for the International Women's Day.

One more dimension of printed showcase propaganda was a wide scheme for letter exchanges among Soviet and foreign women. The letters written by the Soviet women were sent to the SWC, where they were edited by a member of the SWC's staff (meaning, most probably, screened by the KGB), translated, typed and sent abroad. The letters arriving from abroad received the same treatment. For 1961, the SWC planned to issue an answer to sixty five incoming letters a month, which had amounted to quite an expensive affair because of the translation and typing fees. The eventual cost was almost twice as much as what the SWC spent yearly on payments to the authors of the articles in for its printed materials (excluding honorarium for the articles within the *Soviet Woman*). So expensive it was indeed that the SWC had to justify the spending in the budget proposal:

⁹⁵ See, for example: Nina Popova (1947) Sovetskaya zhenshhina v bor'be za delo mira I sotrudnicstva mezhdu narodami [Soviet woman in a struggle for peace and friendship among people]. Soviet Woman. No 6, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁶ GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760. The list of staff and budget for administrative expenses of the Committee for the year 1961.

The Committee is receiving many letters from foreign organizations and public figures and journalists, which are addressed individually to Soviet women. Given that the letter exchange is a means of propaganda of the advantages of the Soviet socialist system and a way to establishing contacts with different groups within foreign countries, the Committee is using the exchanges, and incorporating not only women from Moscow, but also from other cities and also other regions to participate⁹⁷.

5.2.2 Financial support to women, women's movements and women activists in the Third World, colonial and dependent states

Samira Khoury argues that Tandi itself didn't receive any direct financial support for its activities. However, Khoury notes that to her best knowledge the SWC did provide direct support to the women's organization in the Third World, dependant, colonial and post-colonial states.⁹⁸ Indeed one of the files within the archive include a "letter exchange with The League of Syrian women, USSR embassy in Syria, about preparation of the congress of peaceful forces, exchange of delegations and **provision of financial (*materialnoy*) aid** [the emphasis is mine, Y.K.]"⁹⁹. In its own brochure the SWC argues:

It has become a good tradition to support in various ways the women's organizations of young independent states in Africa and Asia, which are yet to overcome the difficult burden of colonialism: illiteracy, hunger, poverty and disease. In these countries, with the help of the Committee, the campaigns are conducted to eradicate illiteracy among women; and public centers are established to aid women and children. Upon the invitation of these countries, the Committee sends lecturers

⁹⁷ GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760. The list of staff and budget for administrative expenses of the Committee for the year 1961, and annexes.

⁹⁸ See, for instance: GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 3329. Mail correspondence with the League of Syrian women on preparations for the World Congress of Peace corps, exchange of delegations, and provision of material aid, January-October, 1973.

⁹⁹

to these states in order to give talks and provide trainings on the upbringing of children and sanitary education; meetings and workshops are organized to share the experiences in addressing women's problems in the USSR. For instance, the Committee actively participated in preparing and conducting regional workshop in Delhi in January 1978 addressing the contemporary plight of children in Asia. (Soviet Women's Committee 1981, p. 28-29)

Khoury says also that the SWC sponsored mass campaigns against illiteracy in the Third World. This is reasonable, in light of the Soviet state's high interest in this domain and its broad experience in this issue. These campaigns were also mentioned within the work of WIDF, and a possibility that part of WIDF's campaigns was in fact financed by the SWC exists.

Khoury also mentions that, according to the stories of the women she met in WIDF's congresses, the SWC sponsored the establishment of schools for children in Africa. The scale of the campaigns against illiteracy, support of women's centers and schools is unclear and further research is required. However, some range can be imagined from the following data on the SWC support to Vietnam:

At this moment, women of our country are providing assistance to the people of Vietnam in the reconstruction of their domestic economy, in the development of healthcare and culture. Through the Soviet Peace Fund, they were able to inject over 2 million roubles for the establishment of the international centre for the protection of motherhood and childhood in Hanoi (Women... 1977, p.236).

Khoury emphasizes the importance of humanitarian support which SWC provided to women and women's movements in cases of natural disasters: "They would offer support through local women's organizations. They would coordinate the sending of aids from women organizations around the world to crisis struck areas. When there was a volcanic eruption in China or somewhere in that area or many times in Vietnam we would send aid even from here in Palestine. The Soviet women would coordinate these aids." This, according to Khoury, was done

both in the framework of SWC's engagement within WIDF and its global campaigns and in response to particular requests for help, which arrived directly to the SWC. And indeed, among the archival documents, I have encountered a file called "A letter of association USSR-Madagascar about the natural disaster in Madagascar and humanitarian aid"¹⁰⁰.

It is hard to track the exact scope of the humanitarian aid, and the research effort required to do so is beyond the extent of the thesis. However, it seems that humanitarian aid was a significant contribution from the SWC in the international arena. It is notable that according to the notes from the annual assembly of the SWC's plenum the practice of provision of humanitarian aid continued even during 1989, when the Soviet Union's own economy was in a state of collapse.¹⁰¹

5.2.3 Scholarships

According to the analytical section of *Russian education for foreign students*, the practice of inviting foreign students to study in the newly established Soviet state had begun already in the 1920s when students from Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and Mongolia arrived to the Russian Soviet Federation Socialist Republic. The Communist University of Workers of the East (CUWE) was established in 1921. By the end of 1921, CUWE had trained foreign students from 44-nations.

However, due to the suspicion and fear of foreigners which characterized the period of Stalin's rule, the number foreign students in the USSR declined sharply. However according to Russian scholar Valdimir Petrick, their numbers began to increase again after the World War II, when representatives from Eastern European and Asian states, and later African and Latin American states began to arrive to the Soviet state, and, as Petrick notes, "the Soviet Union has provided a significant support to many countries in the world in preparation of national cadres"

¹⁰⁰ GARF, fond 7928, op. 3, d. 304. The letter from Madagascar-USSR association on natural disaster in Madagascar and humanitarian aid, 1959.

¹⁰¹ *Export of higher education services in Russian educational system*. Online. Retrieved on March 20, 2011 from: <http://www.russia.edu.ru/information/analit/1300/>

(Petrick 2007, p. 132). The Soviet Union, in Petrick's opinion, was highly instrumental in the professional development of cadres of post colonial states. Petrick remarks that, since the colonial powers did not prioritize higher education within the colonies, the newly established states experienced severe shortages in specialists, and the fact that the Soviet Union had provided students from these countries with an opportunity for studies on a massive scale was of utmost significance (ibid, p. 134-135).

Moscow People's Friendship University was established in 1960 and named after Patrice Lumumba, the first elected Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo after its liberation from Belgium colonialism who was assassinated shortly after the establishment of the republic. Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University was among the world's largest educational institutions for training of foreign specialists and is considered the third best university in Russia today. The university has had excellent academic personnel and quite a developed infrastructure, by the standards of the Soviet Union. Aside from the foreign students, the university also accepted a low percentage of Soviet students after a rigorous competition, as well as evaluating students' *svyazi* – connections. According to the *Foreign Studies in Russia*, in 1988, forty-six percent of foreign students came from Asia, twenty-four percent from Africa, seventeen percent from Europe, ten percent from South America and ten percent from North America. The People's Friendship University was the place in which the percentage of foreign students was the highest. However, the foreign students studied all over the Soviet Union. From 1950 to 1990 the number of foreign students in the Soviet Union increased more than 20 times, reaching 126,500 people on the eve of the collapse of the USSR. These students accounted for 10.8% of the worldwide number of students studying abroad and were the third largest group of foreign students after USA and France.

However, according to one graduate of SWC's scholarship, Salwa Najjab, the plain comparison among the different numbers of students in the foreign studies programs of superpowers like the USA, France and Soviet Union, is not the best way to reach an

understanding of the significance of the socialist super power's engagement worldwide. Unlike the USA and France, all of the foreign students studying in the Soviet Union (and much of the eastern block), not only studied for free (which was also true in France), but also received living stipends. Najjab testifies that the foreign students who studied in the Soviet Union had a stipend amounting up to three times more than the stipends of their local counterparts. In addition, the travel from and to one's country of origin was usually reimbursed. Dormitories accommodating foreigners were usually of higher standards than the regular facilities, housing one to three students per room. In PFU, the foreigners lived together with the Soviet students; this was so the latter group would help them with the language and adaptation process.¹⁰²

The foreign students were chosen by Communist and Socialist parties in their regions of origin and also by other organizations friendly to the Soviet Union or intended to become such structures and states. Titos Christofides, who today is the Under Secretary to the President in Cyprus, states in his interview to the *News of Cyprus*¹⁰³ that one of the criteria for the selection of prospective students was the level of excellence in studies. Titos also says that some students "headed to USSR independently".

According to the SWC's archival annotation it "started to provide special affirmative action scholarships beginning in 1964."¹⁰⁴ Khoury says that they began with this practice in response to requests from women's organizations and women activists abroad. For instance, in regard to Israel, Khoury writes that Tandi turned to SWC and requested whether there was a possibility to secure special scholarships for women students, when it became apparent that the Communist Party of Israel had selected many more men than women to be sent to the studies in USSR. Khoury suggests that other women's organizations also appealed to the SWC and that was how

¹⁰² Interview with Salwa Najjab, 10/03/2010

¹⁰³ Text of the interview is available online.

Retrieved on February 15, 2011 from: <http://www.vestnikkipra.com/?mod=news&id=223>

¹⁰⁴ See for example GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 3471 (Mail correspondence with the Secretariat of African Party of the independence of Guinea... on providing stipends for studying in USSR, December 1973 – October 1974); GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 3631 (mail correspondence with the Union of Central African women on providing stipends for studying in USSR, December 1973); GARF fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 2601 (letters to girls from Rwanda about providing stipends for studying in USSR), etc.

the practice of women fellowships began. The SWC argued that it provided the stipends “according to the recommendation of the local women’s organizations (Soviet Women’s Committee 1981, p. 29).

In 1981 SWC writes:

Today, there are about 800 girls from 59 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America studying in the vocational or higher education institutions in the Soviet Union. Upon graduation, they receive the degrees of doctors, pedagogues, engineers, jurists, economists, philosophers, historians, etc. More than 200 girls have already completed their studies and now successfully work in their homeland, actively participating in the women’s movement. (Soviet Women’s Committee 1981, p. 30)

The number of women who came to study on the special scholarships provided through the channel of SWC amounted to 2,000 students across the Soviet Union in the year 1987. The archive includes exchanges with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Yemen, Jordan, Congo, Tanzania, Senegal, Namibia, Ruanda, Peru, Iran, Costa–Rica and many more, including organizations non-affiliated with specific states, such as the Union of Central-African women. Moreover, one file indicates that there were also private persons who turned to the SWC for stipends.¹⁰⁵ This number of course does not represent the total of foreign women who studied in the Soviet Union in these years, which was much higher. However, according to the SWC all of the women students including those who were not studying on the women scholarship received care and attention from local women’s councils or directly from the SWC. This would have included, for instance, invitations to celebrations, assurance of appropriate medical care, visits during the illness, and the like. (Plenum notes, 1987)

The significance of the Soviet stipends, which guaranteed that a considerable number of women from Communist parties abroad; Communist, colonial and dependant states; Marxist

¹⁰⁵ See: GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 4312 (Mail correspondence with private individuals about conducting seminar “Woman and socialism” in Moscow, and on accepting female scholarship students for studying in USSR, May–August 1977).

revolutionary and national liberation movements could obtain a higher education, can hardly be overestimated. To name only a few notables from the Middle East, note my interviewee Salwa Najjab, who was studied medicine in the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University and was the Advisor for the Women Affairs in the Health Ministry of the Palestinian authority in the years 2007-8, and Tamar Guzhansky, a Knesset member in the years 1990-2003, who obtained her degree in economics from the University of Leningrad. In a moved voice Khoury summarizes the significance of the engagement – “when I travel around the country, I see *OUR* students [those who were recommended by Tandi for SWC scholarships] everywhere, in each city, in each village”(Khoury, 2010).



A female student from Guinea-Bissau, holder of the Committee of the Soviet Women scholarship, Marceline dos Santos in a quick sports exercise with her pupils. 01.10.1987 Moscow region, Ria-novosti

5.2.4 Travel expenses for the major International congresses on women's rights

„They also aided delegations to reach Russia they helped us reach the Soviet Union and then they bought the tickets to the Federation. They helped all those who could not afford the trip to the Federation. Not only us but also from Latin America and from poor Arab countries.”¹⁰⁶

The practice of paying for the 'Third World delegations' travel fees to international forums and congresses was widespread within the Soviet foreign diplomacy structure¹⁰⁷. The evidence for the frequency of the practice can be found in the request which was sent by the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with States of Africa and Asia to the Central Committee in 1981(SCSSAA) .¹⁰⁸ In the document, the SCSSAA asks Central Committee's for approval to fly 600 foreign delegates both to the Soviet Union and to the international forums of the Organization of Solidarity with Peoples of Asia and Africa. SCSSAA argues in the request that coverage of the flights fees constitutes the main part of the Soviet Union's financial participation within the forums and is also a sufficient way to ensure pro-Soviet political representation within the forum. The requests were not automatically approved. In this particular case, the foreign department of the Central Committee answered to the SCSPAA that they would be allowed to fly five hundred people instead of six hundred, while expressing the hope that the rest will be covered by national organizations participating in the forum. CC orders that this affair is to be fully covered by the Soviet Peace Fund.

Khoury singles out the travel sponsorship which the SWC provided to international women activists as one of the most important dimensions of its contribution to the international domain of women's right and struggles. The organization had sponsored the international travel of a few hundred women every year. This included sponsorship of travel of women activists' to

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Samira Khoury. 8/10/10, Nazareth, Israel.

¹⁰⁷ See: Bukovsky archive, Section 8 (Peace), Document № CT250/69: CT: Use of "Airoflot" for transportation of foreign representatives (per request of the Soviet Women's Committee) [02/17/1981].

¹⁰⁸ See: Bukovsky archive, Section 8 (Peace), Document № CT246/22 Soviet Committee of Solidarity with Asia and Africa: transportation for 500 foreign delegates [01/15/1980].

the women's congresses world wide, both of WIDF and other organizations, as well as to United Nation's conferences. The SWC proactively invited leading activists to international women's forums; among the famous Third World women who were host in Europe by the SWC was for instance was South-African Lillian Ngoyi (1911-1980), "the mother of the black resistance" who was invited to participate in WIDF's congress in Prague 1955 (de Haan, 2010b). At the time of the congress, Lillian Ngoyi was the vice president of Federation of South African Women. The Federation which was established in 1954 became closely affiliated with WIDF. Lillian Ngoyi travel to the congress was integrated with a tour of socialist countries of the Eastern Block, including the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, sponsorship of flights was a common way of international cooperation and contributing to the international domain of women's rights and struggles, and should be also understood in the prism of severe shortages of foreign currency in the Soviet state. As I have shown above, in order to obtain foreign currency the SWC had to submit special requests and justify these requests in a way reminiscent of contemporary fundraising. This was probably the practical reason behind the fact that the majority of foreign delegates whose travel was funded by SWC usually passed through the Soviet Union and Socialists states in Europe on their way to WIDF's and other international congresses¹¹⁰. This way the transportation could be carried out by Aeroflot, the national Soviet flight company, with tickets paid for by rubles, within the state. Thus, allocating the Soviet support to this budget line was a way to reduce national spending in foreign currency.

It needs to be noted that the practice of the delegations paying for each other's travel to congresses and meetings was widespread in the work of WIDF. For instance, for WIDF's council meeting in Helsinki in 1957, the Federation of Swiss Women for Peace and Progress covered the travel of South African delegates, while the Netherlands Women's Movement

¹⁰⁹ According to de Haan, Lillian Ngoyi's experiences were discussed by Barbara Caine during a recent talk in Amsterdam where several of the Potsdam participants were present.

¹¹⁰ See: Bukovsky archive, Section 8 (Peace), Document № CT219/50: CT: A request from the leadership of the People's Party of Iran. Special training for people [08/11/1980].

assisted Indonesian delegates.¹¹¹ The practice of sponsorship promoted the connections among specific delegations and guaranteed participation of women from marginalized communities in international arena.

5.2.5 Invitation of women's delegations and individual visits of women -leaders to the Soviet Union

Roz Mari from Gvadelupa writes for *Soviet Woman* in 1960: "Dear friends, after I have seen the life of your people it made me think more deeply about the fight of our nation and our women for independence" (Soviet Woman, 1960, No 10).□ Indeed, it seems that participation in delegations of women leaders from all around the world was not only very important for SU propaganda efforts, but also had a profound effect on the women who visited the socialist super power. The scope of these visits is not clear, but according to Khoury, it appears that something like a few hundred women arrived every year as part of dozens of delegations, as well as in individual visits. This included those who were staying in the SU on their way to international meetings and congresses. The delegations were rigorously prepared. In the budget for 1961, there is a funding request for the inspection of sites which would be visited by delegations in the upcoming year. Twenty-five delegations were expected to arrive that year from different states; each was supposed to visit a few additional cities apart from Moscow. The SWC budgeted a number of five-day-long work inspections in order to visit these sites and "to examine the objects" of the intended program¹¹².

A typical delegation consisted of anywhere from a few to a few dozen foreign women, who were accompanied by a representative of the SWC. The programs varied, and Khoury describes them as combining the interests of the delegation and the SWC. According to Khoury and the reports in *Soviet Woman* and brochures of SWC, the typical duration of a visit ranged

¹¹¹ WIDF IV Congress, Vienna, 1-5 June 1958, *Documents*. Quoted In Ilic 2010

¹¹² GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3, d. 760. The list of staff and budget for administrative expenses of the Committee for the year 1961, and annexes.

from two weeks to a month, thus, it was possible for visitors to travel to different cities, meet with workers, and visit universities and health facilities¹¹³.

The sites which were shown (off) were not ordinary, but carefully chosen and exemplary of Soviet successes, as I elaborated earlier. Two factors should be considered in this regard. According to my interview with Khoury, the visitors were well aware that they were shown exemplary locations, which means that they at least tried to make appropriate adjustments when drawing conclusions about the lives of ordinary SU citizens. However, this does not mean that the visits had no potential to inspire and impress the participants. In Khoury's opinion, the visits in fact had a profound effect: "The women were highly inspired by the things they saw and the stories they heard, they got many ideas and learned a lot," (Khoury, 2010). Indeed, since the delegations were shown the highest achievements in labor, rest, education and health in the Soviet Union, which were certainly impressive, the visits surely had an educational and inspirational value. In addition to the visits, the SWC also held lectures about position and welfare of women in the SU.

Another factor to mention in this regard is the empowerment effect that organizing such delegation could have had on those who were responsible for the invitations on the local level. Khoury speaks proudly of one incident when Tandi received an invitation to organize a delegation of twenty women from Israel. Tandi was able to invite women from other women's organizations in Israel, for instance from the mainstream organizations Vitzo and Naamat, the two closely related to the ruling Party of Israel at that time -Mapai. According to Khoury, after they came back from the visit, the women had not only been inspired and learned a great deal, but they were also grateful to Tandi for this experience. Thus, the SWC partner organizations could assign places for their own members, increasing their commitment and strengthening relations and status among other organizations.

¹¹³ Khoury, 2010, SWC 1981, 1987, Soviet Woman, 1960, no 10, p 12.

5.2.6 Well-being of women

One of the most special dimensions of the engagement of the SWC was described when Khoury spoke about a month long trip she took to the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the trip, which was supposed to be a vacation for activists, Khoury underwent a full medical check at a Soviet hospital. The medical exam showed she needed an operation. The surgery was performed, and she was sent to a medical recovery vacation afterwards. All of her medical and recovery expenses were fully covered by the Soviet Union. This particular story alone may be enough to induce nostalgia for the resources mobilized for women's support, even if that support was only available for the women within a particular ideological wing of the women's movements. This historical anecdote calls to mind the words of King Solomon:

*What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.*

The promotion of the well-being of activists and human rights defenders, has recently come to the forefront of the global civil society, has only recently spread from women's and feminist movements to other areas of social activism. The practice of self- and community care is considered pioneering, and professionals and activists gather together with grant makers and organizations in order to discuss the ways to address the concern.¹¹⁴ Contemporary issues include, for instance, how to responsibly fund movements, and vacation-trainings for activists during which they can take time to reflect on their own well-being and security. These contemporary innovations were clearly prefigured by the programs offered in the Soviet Union for activist women.

Although the Soviet Union and the SWC did not offer empowerment trainings, they did provide activists and even their children with vacations up to a month long in Soviet sanatoriums for rest and health, as well as providing vouchers which allowed their children to attend youth

¹¹⁴ See for example Barry Jane, Djordjevic Jelena (2008).

camps. „We would organize a drawing competition for children. We would have a board that chose the nicer ones and send them to the Soviet Union they would pick the best drawings and send back a reward. The children were invited to summer camps in the Soviet Union. They would conduct these summer camps in Yalta or in Sochi. Each year about 50 children went to these summer camps.”(Khoury, 2010) Khoury speaks with great nostalgia about her visit to the famous Artek, an international Soviet child and youth camp, to which many activists’ children traveled, and the warm and moving reception they received from the young people there.

Indeed, according to Khoury, these vacations, and even the extra medical care she herself received, were routinely provided for activists. Those who came for long visits were offered full medical check-ups upon arrival to the country, and if any health issues were identified, they were offered treatment immediately. The visitors, according to Khoury „also received per diem while we were there. Everyone received a month's salary from the Party. This is how the Soviet Union helped poor people that could not afford a vacation”.

One document on GARF is a letter sent on April 5, 1965, to the Secretary of the SWC , at the time a Ms. Fedorova, by a representative of the organization at WIDF’s headquarters in Berlin WIDF, Proskurnikova. Proskurnikova sent a request from Annie Khubie, an employee of the secretariat of the WIDF, in which she requested a voucher to Artek for her son. Proskurnikova accompanied Annie’s letter with a note that the positive answer will be desired and adds her recommendation on her side: ”Annie Khubi has worked in the secretariat of WIDF for 14 years, and right now is an assistant to the general secretary of WIDF. She is doing important work and has proved herself as dynamic, active and reliable (ispolnitelnyj) employee”.

A hand-written note at the bottom of the page also states: “About the voucher: speak with Yatunina Ljudmila Vasiljevna”¹¹⁵.

It seems that providing opportunities to rest and attend to one’s personal well-being was an important way in which the Soviet Union engaged on the international scene, and not

¹¹⁵ GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op. 3 d. 1398. Mail correspondence with the Soviet representative of WIDF about its activities.

just with activist women. Several documents in Bukovsky's archive deal with organizing vacations for foreigners. For example, Document 71-2 of the electronic archive states: "On the invitation of foreign Party officials to the USSR in 1971: organization of their reception and service, and related expenditures" may shed light on the procedure of what seems to have been a large-scale activity. The document discussed plans to invite leading cadres from other countries' communist, labor and national democratic parties for a "rest and health vacation for the year 1971". The document details that, at the first stage, letters to the parties would be prepared and approved. In the second stage, the budget would be developed and detailed, with limits of 3,200,000 rubles for hosting 2,900 foreign visitors. An additional 650,000 rubles were to be granted by the Ministry of Finances in foreign currency, for services to the first secretaries of the parties (the document especially emphasized Italian and French communist parties' secretaries) and states that the KGB would be responsible for the visitors with help of other authorities. Then the document lists the administrative authorities which would be responsible for obtaining vouchers to sanatoriums and other vacation places. The next section speaks of organizing medical services, ordering to "oblige the Fourth Main Department"¹¹⁶ under the Ministry of Protection of Health to accept up to 100 foreign guests," while the departments of CC CPSU are singled out as responsible for the inspection of specific requests from the foreign Parties. The final order is "to ministries, authorities and public organizations to provide, according to requests from the Central Committee, specialists with knowledge of the foreign languages for the service of the foreign guests"¹¹⁷.

Yet another document in Bukovsky archive, entitled "Invitation for leaders of ex-patriot organizations for vacation and medical treatment" shows what the procedure when the invitation

¹¹⁶ The *Fourth Department* was a department of nomenclature and foreigners which had in its use best health facilities and infrastructure available which at no way were representative of the standards which the general public of the Soviet States was used to.

¹¹⁷ See: Bukovsky Archive, section „Peace”, Document № CT123/30: "On the invitation of foreign Party officials to the USSR in 1971: organization of their reception and service, and related expenditures" [07/28/1971].

came, at least nominally, from a public organization rather than from the CC itself.¹¹⁸ The document begins with a decision to “accept the offer of the presidium of the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Country Men Abroad” for a duration up to 30 days. This should be in accordance with the attached list of people while “some minor changes to the lists can be done by *Rodina* (Motherland) themselves.”¹¹⁹ The public organization itself would be responsible for the reception of their visitors, as well as for obtaining the vouchers for sanatoriums and other vocational facilities. The Fourth Department within the Ministry of Protection of Health was assigned responsibility for health services. The expenditures were intended to be covered from the Motherland’s own budget. The evidence demonstrates the complicated and well designed process through which organization of delegations went.

5.3 Engagement in WIDF

“Samira, was the Federation communist during the years of existence of the Soviet Union?”

“Oh no, no! Those were women of all backgrounds, from all over the world, women of the entire world!”

Interview with the author, Nazareth, October 8, 2010

The work and the significance of the SWC within the international domain of women’s rights and struggles cannot be understood without taking into account their deep engagement within and with the Women International Democratic Federation. Before I begin analyzing archival materials and the interview to uncover the role and the influence of the Soviet Union and SWC within the WIDF, it should be clarified that the question of their involvement can and should be asked from at least two different positions. One position is rooted in support of, or in opposition to, the mainstream western narrative of WIDF’s history. This narrative claims that WIDF was fully controlled by the Soviet Union, and that SWC was a tool of this control. In this case the precise question would be whether the Soviet Union (and SWC) had control within the

¹¹⁸ See: Bukovsky Archive, section „Peace”, Document № CT206/32: “ Invitation for leaders of ex-patriot organizations for vacation and medical treatment ” [04/10/1980].

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p 1

WIDF, and to what extent. De Haan addresses this important question in her developing research.

Another position from which we can approach this question is based on de Haan's own argument that WIDF had grand historical significance for women and women's movements on a global scale. If we accept that WIDF was an important entity for women and women's movements worldwide, then our inquiry acquires additional and very different meanings and implications for the historiography of women's movements worldwide. More precisely, the question becomes *how the Soviet state and the SWC supported and enhanced the work of WIDF, and whether or not, and to which extent, that support was necessary for the organization's success.*

The two possibilities can be encompassed by the theoretical concept of engagement, which I have suggested in previous chapters. Let us examine this concept in light of the above discussed SWC's sponsorship of international travel of women activists and leaders. As I have shown, the motivations of the SWC in sponsoring travel were complex, and included responding to requests from WIDF and local foreign organizations, promotion of Soviet foreign interests, and creating propaganda to counter the capitalist vision, as well as fulfilling "the obligations which Soviet women have for empowerment of women worldwide" in SWC's own words (Soviet Women's Committee 1981, p 1). Notwithstanding the exact motivations, sponsorship by the SWC ensured the presence of hundreds of women leaders and activists from globally marginalized movements and people in international arenas, which is incredibly significant. On the other hand, at least in the eyes of Central Committee of the Communist Party, this sponsorship was probably motivated mainly by the Soviet Union's national interests, including its aspiration to influence the international arena through the domain of women's rights and struggles by issuing these invitations. However, regardless of the multiple and sometimes conflicting aims, these efforts constituted a very real contribution to the empowerment and visibility of women's voices from the Third World, colonial and dependant states.

The significance of the Eastern block and the Soviet Union for WIDF's work, its scope

and scale, can be understood by the profound impact that the fall of the communist rule in Eastern and Central Europe had on WIDF. According to Khoury, in an argument supported by de Haan, after the fall of the Soviet Union was an enormous blow to WIDF affecting both, its ideology and its infrastructure. It was only able to reestablish itself in 1994, when its headquarters moved to Brazil (de Haan, 2010b, p550).

Most certainly, the Soviet Women's Committee was not another organization among equals within the WIDF, but rather, it occupied a very unique and powerful position (De Haan 2010b, Ilic 2011) and was "regarded as the 'advance guard'" (Ilic 2011, p 164). According to Khoury: "They were simply an influential organization in the Federation – politically, the last word belonged to them. I presume it was because the Soviet Union also had global political influence."

However, the SWC was not so powerful as to hold absolute and default control, as has been suggested by some respected academics. In fact, as in the example of the disagreements between Soviet and British delegations, the international arena of WIDF was the location of persistent rivalries. According to Ilic, "WIDF was subject to internal debates about its purpose, ambitions and even its own name," (Ilic 2011, p. 163). It served as "a site in which the cultural gaps that existed between women from different nations could be identified and discussed," (Ilic 2011, *ibid*).¹²⁰ Obviously, these rivalries would hardly have been fought with such vigor if their outcomes were fully predetermined by the Soviet Union.

Ilic brings a long list of examples. She recounts that in "late 1940s and early 1950s, there was some discussion over whether the term 'imperialism' was appropriate for use at WIDF meetings and in its publications because this was potentially alienating to some delegates to its congresses, particularly those from colonial countries still living under imperial rule," (Ilic 2011, p. 163). Another discussion centered on the question of "whether it was right for WIDF to be calling for 'equal pay' when women in some countries had not yet even secured the right to work

¹²⁰ I disagree with Ilic about the use of *cultural* here; in my opinion political would have been more appropriated term to describe the many disagreements within WIDF, due to the type of motivations, themes and impact of the revelries.

or to be paid for the work they already undertook,” (Ilic 2011, p. 165). In addition, while the right for work was proclaimed among the one of WIDF’s priorities “women from the strongly Roman Catholic countries of Latin America, for example, questioned whether it was right for mothers to go out for work at all if this meant that their children would be left in nurseries,” (Ilic 2011, p. 165). One more important example of a long standing rivalry within the WIDF was the confrontation between the SWC and the Chinese federation, which unsurprisingly evolved along the lines of the crisis that developed after Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ between the Soviet Union and Chinese People Democratic Republic and culminated in Sino-Soviet split in 1961. A confrontation led by Chinese delegates and supported by Albanian, had erupted in 1963 WIDF’s congress in Moscow (Ilic 2011, p. 170). The confrontation between the two socialist giants evolved following the Khrushchev’s secret speech and around the new “Peaceful Coexistence” paradigm in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union

Indeed, the idea that the SWC had by default complete control over the WIDF as represented by the opponents of the WIDF is a pure Cold War assumption, one that follows the *Cold War chimera* metaphor which de Haan (2010b) discusses in regards to the perception of WIDF in the mainstream of western historiography of women’s movements. In fact, the women organizations which encompassed the WIDF were different from one other on multiple levels: Experience; ideology; number of members; financial and infrastructural resources, and so on. The brochure written by the Union of Russian women for the 60th anniversary of the WIDF further notes that “difficulties had frequently arisen around (dis)agreements on political and activist platforms of work, for instance around the phrasing of WIDF’s documents to international forums,” (The Union., p. 70).

Setting aside the Cold War paradigms, such a *Chimera* (to put it in de Haan’s words) in a sense of wished-for but mythical illusion of full control could not possibly exist. The Soviet Union had no mystical powers. The earthly powers of the state included its resources human and material – as well as its significance as a superpower within the international arena, specifically

along the lines of the Cold War competition as discussed by Eric Hobsbawm (1994). Moreover, as was already mentioned above, while the SWC was a part of the Soviet foreign policy and diplomacy structure, it was also a separate organizational unit with its own interests, and its own will to survive and grow, to keep and extend the privileges of its members. It also had to respond to pressures from abroad in order to keep its relevance within the international arena of women's rights and struggles. As such, the SWC was not a mere tool of the Soviet state's will to control of the WIDF, even if its existence was defined by the SU in these terms, but rather a mediator between the will of the Party, the organization's own interests and needs, and the will and interests of the broader WIDF and its organizations.

What can be definitely said on the basis of the materials discussed above and the interview with Khoury is that SWC had made enormous efforts in order to obtain and keep a central role within WIDF. In fact, for an entity which supposedly was in complete control by some almost mythical default, it expended far too much effort keeping its position. The extent of the political maneuvering required for maintaining the SWC's eminent position is evident in a secret SWAFC report from the first congress of UFF. The author of the report is unidentified; however judging from the personal writing style it is likely to have been written by Nina Popova. In the report, the author analyzes the work of the UFF and its significance in France and praises UFF's mass organization skills:

Union of French Women (UFF) may form a base for the International Women's Union concerning its battle for "extermination" of the remnants of fascism, and a battle for peace. However, Initiative Committee, which was created during the Congress will require greater attention from the Soviet delegation since we have already faced issues which sparked serious debates (about the principles and timing of making a call for the first (zasedaniya) of the Initiative Committee at the International Congress)¹²¹.

¹²¹ See: GARF, fond 7928 (SWC), op.2, d.149 Report about the visit of Soviet women to France, conclusion.

On the other hand, according to the document, UFF did not have enough “organizational experience and political adulthood”. Therefore, “great attention and support are required.” The author complains of the lack of information about the Soviet Union, available in France, which is even more problematic given the steady flow of British propaganda to the state. The planned international women’s congress had the potential, according to the author, to “become a platform for the organizing of an international union of women for struggle against the remains of fascism and for peace.” The author finishes by saying that the initiative committee which was established for the preparation of the Congress will “require great attention from the side of the Soviet delegation.” She suggests:

In one month, a trip to France by one of the members of the Soviet delegation which is part of the Initiative Committee ought to be considered reasonable and it is also imperative to satisfy the request of the French and English women about granting permission to their delegations to come to the Soviet Union.

It must be considered expedient to give permission to the Antifascist Women’s Committee to make a call for a meeting to which the French and English women would be invited, in the month of August in Moscow until the beginning of the work of the Initiative Committee.

One more very important dimension to take into account when considering meaning of the role that the Soviet Union and the SWC played for and within the WIDF was of course the influence that the Soviet Union had within the Eastern bloc: “The former communist states of eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia and Albania, as well as the countries of the Warsaw Pact,” (Hirsch, Kett and Trefil 2002, p. 316). The complexity of these relations cannot be neatly summarized here. Every Eastern bloc state had different relations with the Soviet Union, the nature of which changed over time; thus hardly any generalizations can be made in this regard. However, almost all of the State entities in the Eastern bloc, except Yugoslavia and Albania during certain periods, had some level of coordination with the Soviet Union. Along the same

lines, the officially supported women's organizations of the Eastern bloc had some level of cooperation with the SWC, including the work within WIDF. This is how SWC presents these relationships:

Bilateral ties of the SWC with similar committees of the socialist countries are focused on the exchange of experience with the aim of further bettering of the situation of women and children. The commonalities in social-economic formation determined common major direction in finding solutions to the women's problems in the socialist societies. However, each country has its own specifics of development and its own experience in solving women's problems (Soviet Women's Committee 1981, p. 15).

What was the exact level and character of the relations and how it actually worked among the women's organizations of the Eastern bloc is unclear at this point. The scholarship of the dynamics within the bloc does not provide a base for thinking that these were stable relations of "orders given orders taken" type. In fact, one document suggests that the SWC used the stage of WIDF in order to promote the interests of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia: This internal SWC document includes suggestions for the upcoming meeting of WIDF, the SWC proposes that:

...during the presentation which will be held by the National Front of Czechoslovak Women, Soviet representative-members of Ispolkom of the Federation, shall draw attention to the Ispolkom because of the necessity to clarify the structure and coordination of work among National Front of Czechoslovak Women and the Council of Czechoslovak Women¹²².

One more example of the Soviet influence was their accusation of Yugoslav Women's Front of being 'false anti-fascists', and the expulsion of the organization (but not all Yugoslav women) from WIDF which happened following the expulsion of Yugoslavia from Cominform in

¹²² See: GARF fond 7928 SWC, op. 2 d. 256 (Reference materials about Women's movement in Czechoslovakia), p. 5.

1948. This, however, did not mean that all Yugoslav women were excluded from the organization (Ilic 2011)¹²³. Yet another painful point in WIDF's history which shall be mentioned in this regard was the execution of Czechoslovak Milada Horakova (1901-1950). Horakova was a public figure active in anti-fascism struggle in Czechoslovakia during the war and was among the leaders of the WIDF at the time of its founding. In 1946 she joined the provisional national assembly of Czechoslovakia. She resigned in 1948 after the communist take-over. Horakova was arrested in 1949, sentenced to death and executed by hanging in 1950 (De Haan, Daskalova and Loutfi (eds) (2006) Pp. 178-180). The death of the Czech feminist was according to de Haan, "probably one of the most painful chapters in the history of the organization." De Haan sees in „the WIDF's reaction (or lack of it) to this traumatic event" some „evidence that even though [in de Haan's opinion] the WIDF has been much more of a progressive force in the history of women's organizing and political activism worldwide than we have known, that doesn't mean that it has not also been implicated in some of the black pages in the history of state socialism"(de Haan 2010c, p. 5). Khoury's opinion about the assumption that the SWC had complete control over WIDF was of the most important topics in our interview. Khoury had stressed again and again that this assumption is essentially wrong. "The SWC was very powerful indeed," she says. However, she locates the power in the resources that the organization had at its disposal. Khoury emphasizes that both material and human resources were significant in amounting to SWC's authority within WIDF.

Khoury's argument was supported by a story she told, which I find even more significant due to the fact that the role of SWC within the WIDF is not directly addressed here but comes up as a side story. Up to the 1980s there were tense relations between Tandi, as a mixed Arab-Jewish organization from Israel, and the women's organization of the Palestinian Diaspora-Palestinian Women Movement (PWM). Indeed, up to the late 1980s Palestinian citizens of Israel

¹²³ Zinaida Gurina, *Courage in the fight for Peace*, WIDF Information Bulletin, no 41, November – December, 1949, p 1; Dolores Ibarruri, *The Struggle Against the War-makers is the Sacred duty of All Women*, WIDF Information Bulletin, no 41, November –December, 1949, p 4 cited in Ilic (2011).

(the Zionist entity) were frequently considered by the Palestinian Diaspora as traitors of the Palestinian cause. This was evident especially in the approach of PWM in regard to Tandi, in which the Palestinian women who were citizens of Israel cooperated with Jewish citizens of Israel. Khoury tells about an occasion during which at the beginning of 1980s she gave a speech in WIDF's meeting in Tashkent. When she had arrived to a part in her speech that began with "I want to send the delegates regards from Palestinian women from the Occupied Territories..." she wasn't allowed to continue towards the second part of the sentence which was "with whom we work together against the occupation". The women of PWM and their comrades in WIDF, which included representatives of Arab countries and some states in the Third World were so outraged by what they saw as a "collaborator with Zionists sending greetings from the Palestinian women from the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories," (Khoury, 2010) that they stopped her speech with an emotional outburst:

Y: So what did you do then?

S: I went to (talk to) the Soviet Women's Committee.

Y: Why? Because they were the hosts?

S: No, because they were *my* comrades in the WIDF, they were communist as I was, many others, majority of the organizations were *nationalist*, and they (SWC) were communist so they were from my side.

Y: And what did the Soviet women do in this regard?

S: They advised me to skip the part where I sent the greetings and also went and talk to the PWM, and I was allowed to continue.

Y: And why did PWM women listen to them?

S: Because they were the hosts and also because they were very nice women, they *knew how to talk*...

This story is a fascinating and rare account. Khoury is suggesting that at least in the view of its communist participants the WIDF was perceived as a field of rivalry among ideological

camps, a field in which the “communist” camp was opposing the “nationalist” one. The SWC, according to this narrative was a leader of the Communist camp, and also was a capable and a significant mediator with the “nationalist” camp, due to the exceptional resources it had at its disposal. Yet again, Khoury’s account in this regard is quite valuable, since it was not given as an answer to a direct question about dynamics and the power relations within the WIDF, but came up as background to another story (in fact a very painful one for the interviewee) – the story of the complicated relations among Palestinian citizen of Israel and the Palestinian Diaspora.

Thus, I would like to propose evaluating the SWC’s engagement in WIDF along the lines of two main dimensions: political and material. According to Khoury, the political value of the organization included the authority of SWC as a representative of the Soviet Union. This is not only because the Soviet Union’s official policies in regard to women’s rights and welfare constituted formal achievements and were exemplary and progressive, but also because its policies were quite similar to the goals of WIDF, and the goals of its organizations and branches in the international arena of the UN. “If I need to identify what was the most important power which influenced WIDF and which WIDF wanted to influence, it was the UN.” says Khoury in this regard. According to her, “since the Soviet Union had policies similar to the UN or more progressive than the UN, and since it was also promoting WIDF’s ideas and proposals within the UN, it was especially important for the federation’s work”. Thus, “The authority that the SWC had within WIDF was, among other factors, due to the ability of the Soviet Union to represent and promote the interests of the WIDF to the UN”(Khoury, 2010). The material side of SWC’s engagement included all of the above-mentioned mechanisms of engagement within the women movements and women’s rights domain. This of course included sponsoring the travel expenses of women activists and leaders from around the world to the international congresses of WIDF, sponsoring the travel expenses of WIDF representatives and its member organizations and branches to other international congresses, as well as sponsoring WIDF’s campaigns. Lastly, it should be mentioned that SWC’s own vast infrastructure of international work also allowed it to

organize, sponsor and host dozens of large congresses and conferences.¹²⁴

The exact scope of SWC's financial contribution to the work of WIDF is unclear. Melanie Ilic (2011) notes in this regard, that according to its own records, the Federation took steps towards ensuring its own independent financial security. WIDF raised fees from its affiliated national organizations and engaged in sales of its magazines. It also organized its own widespread fundraising campaigns, whereby women from wealthier nations and from the industrialized countries of Europe and the United States would directly sponsor women from the developing world in attending congresses and council meetings¹²⁵. Grand bazaars were held at the World Congresses, where handcrafts and folk art items were sent from women's organizations from many different countries and were put on sale. The 1963 World Congress was partly sponsored by the mass purchase of pearls by 100,000 Finnish women to be given as souvenir necklaces to the delegates.¹²⁶ International solidarity funds were set up to receive donations to sponsor the congresses in Moscow and Helsinki, with instructions to send payments to bank accounts in London, Berlin and Prague as well as Moscow itself (Ilic, 2011). Consider Orlova's quote a cynical remark made by a Soviet citizen in regard to how the peace campaigns were actually financed: "the people gave a ruble, the Party threw in a million and this covered it all (Orlova 2007). Indeed, the above was most certainly rather romantic and misleading presentation and it is most probable that the funds from Finnish women, if such existed at all, were "supplemented" by the Soviet state.

The framework of the Soviet Union's financial engagement was surely much more complex than payment of membership fees. Moreover, according to the budget of the SWC for 1961, the membership fees contributed by the Soviet Union's representative constituted only 2.41 percent of WIDF's budget and amounted to 11,920 dollars within WIDF's 493,677 dollar budget. The

¹²⁴ For the full list refer for instance to *60 years to WIDF*, The Union of Russian Women, 2005

¹²⁵ For example, the Federation of Swiss Women for Peace and Progress paid for South African delegates and the Netherlands Women's Movement assisted Indonesian delegates in their attendance at the 1957 WIDF council meeting in Helsinki. See WIDF IV Congress, Vienna, 1-5 June 1958, Documents, p. 29. Cited in Ilic (2011)

¹²⁶ WIDF Information Bulletin... (1963), p. 3. Cited in: Ilic (2011).

biggest part of the membership fees, amounting to 452,380 dollars was contributed by German Democratic Republic (GDR). This distribution of membership fees should be considered within the context of the Soviet presence in GDR as well as in the context of the unique place that the GDR women organizations held within the WIDF.

In any case, the fact that the majority of funds for WIDF'S work came from the GDR was probably an outcome of the Soviet presence in the GDR, and the general Soviet idea that the GDR should "pay" for Nazi crimes.¹²⁷ It is only reasonable that the official record of membership fees was a way to downplay the significance of the Soviet Union and SWC within the WIDF. In this regard, one important question which should be raised in future research is how the situation with distribution of membership fees for WIDF worked before the GDR organization were accepted to WIDF.

Indeed it seems that the major part of material engagement of the SWC within the WIDF was in terms of sponsorship by project. Let us consider in depth the material meanings of one category of SWC was sponsorship – the organization of international congresses. A WIDF congress in Moscow (June 24-29, 1963) was an especially significant event for the SWC and the preparations for it were not only intense but done on grand scale. A document summarizing the events planned by the SWC for the international congress sheds light on the scale of their efforts, which included the mobilization of a broad cross-section of Soviet women, activists, paid staff, translators, other public organizations, ministers, societies, research institutions, publishing houses and the like. The SWC also planned to "support "the WIDF with preparations – this was through a persistent contact with Lebedeva, the Soviet representative in WIDF, as well as by sending delegations abroad "in order to explain the goals of the upcoming congress"□¹²⁸ at international events. For example, the committee sent such a delegation to the Congress of

¹²⁷ Since WIDF's headquarters were located in Berlin beginning 1951, this due to Cotton's condemnation of French invasion to Vietnam,(de Haan, 2009) it is possible that the German contribution listed, was in fact *in kind* (for instance headquarters rent) translated to money terms.

¹²⁸ GARF fond 7928 (SWC) op. 3 d. 1008 (List of activities for preparing and conducting the International Congress of Women), pp.1-4.

Women of Latin America in Cuba, January 1963. In addition, the SWC had planned to “use the delegation exchange among the Soviet and foreign women in order to propagate the congress.”¹²⁹

According to the document, the Congress was an important platform for the propaganda of the Soviet Union’s “achievements” locally and internationally. The SWC planned to ensure the publication of interviews of famous foreign and Soviet women in the Soviet Union’s media. Foreign delegations to the congress were supposed to receive a long list of propaganda materials issued by different bodies and also including a film and a song. Tours were organized around the state, in which the delegates were to meet Soviet women, and visit different regions; this part was of course carefully prepared. The SWC planned “to support WIDF in the assurance of the wide representation of the women from all over the world.” To do this, it intended to find out about plans for delegation exchanges in other Eastern bloc socialist states, and also use the delegation exchanges which were planned with the Soviet Union in order to bring delegates to the congress. In sum, the scope of logistical details in the document is impressive in its scale and thinking, and even includes details about the organization of presents from Soviet women to the foreign delegates¹³⁰.

Beginning on June 24, 1963, the Moscow Congress was indeed an impressive event. Representatives of 113 countries and 180 organizations and movements, 1,552 delegates, and 384 observers were present in the room. One of the most moving moments was when Valentina Tereshkova, the world’s first woman cosmonaut, entered the auditorium. Popova invited Tereshkova to come up to the stage together with the members of the Plenum and all of the delegates stood up and applauded what was perceived as the Soviet woman’s heroic deed and an enormous step in emancipation of women worldwide.¹³¹

Notably enough Tereshkova’s historical journey to space happened only ten days before the

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Novosti Dnya, Khronika nashikh dney [News of the day, chronicles of our days], directed by Katanyan V. Russian Central Studio of Documentary Films. 1963. No 26.

Congress, and she was invited to the congress by a special letter from Cotton herself¹³². Even though we do not have enough evidence to establish that this ‘coincidence’ was planned, it is probable.



The honorary stage at the WIDF Moscow Congress, 1963 From left: Dolores Ibarruri, pilot cosmonaut Valery Bykovsky, Eugenie Cotton, Nina Popova, Valentina Tereshkova, Kapila Khandwala. Moscow, 1963, 25.06.1963 (Note the Indian representative educator Kapila Khandwala on the stage near by Teeshkova. The political meaning of her honorary presence on the stage shall be understood in light of the heated confrontation which evolved at the Congress, mainly between Chinese and Soviet delegations and the degrading relations between China and India at the time).

In this chapter I have addressed the mechanisms by which the SWC played an active and direct role within the international domain of women’s rights and struggles on behalf of the Soviet state. I have analyzed the organization’s various ways of engagement within the domain, including funding of travel fees for women to international congresses, delegations to the SU, humanitarian aid, and scholarships for women from Third World, colonial and dependent states and more. In regard to WIDF, I argued that the SWC was not in a position of full control over

¹³² Cotton writes:

The WIDF Bureau is announcing with great happiness its admiration for the extraordinary and outstanding deed of yours. From the bottom of our hearts, we congratulate you and ask you to honor us with your presence at the World Congress of Women. Presence of the first woman cosmonaut will grant the Congress particular weight. We would be remarkably happy to welcome you as an honorary delegate of the World Congress. From the name of the women of all continents, we are awaiting the meeting with you at our Congress with great enthusiasm and hope. Eugenie Cotton, President of the WIDF. Cited in: Borisova 2005, p 140.

the WIDF but was of utmost significance due to its material and political value. The material value, I argue, included financial, human and organizational resources, while the political value included its role as the representative of the Soviet state which included the possibility of promoting WIDF's agenda within the UN, and its weight as the biggest communist organization in the Federation.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The current research aims to contribute to the dispute about which political circumstances and women's movements had a significant impact for an history of women and women's movements during the twentieth century. Influenced by Francisca de Haan, I aspired to contribute to an argument about the significance of the Cold War and Cold War competition, and focused on the role of the Soviet Union and its impact within the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles.

My research is situated in the argument that the twentieth century was not a location of stable development within the international domain of women's rights and struggles. It is also informed by the belief that the UN treaties on women's rights, although they have failed to guarantee a stable improvement in women's lives worldwide, achieved very real and durable progress in the twentieth century, such as the rise of the gender perspective and its increased visibility, as well as its influence alongside women's movements in the international arena of the UN and beyond. Finally, it is located in the assumption that changes, developments and setbacks within the international domain of women's rights happened due to a combination of political circumstances that radically shifted during the century and the work of local and inter/transnational women's movements.

Although examples of the presence of the Soviet Union within the history of the domain are documented and discussed, there is no systematic approach to this role. The overall historical impact of the socialist super power remains, by and large, absent from women's and gender history. This thesis addresses this lack of a systematic approach. I suggest a conceptual framework in order to promote higher visibility of the presence of the Soviet Union within the historiography of the international domain of women's rights and struggles.

My research question was twofold: 'What was the role of the Soviet Union within the international domain of women's rights and how can it be conceptualized?' with the subsequent

question, ‘What were the specific ways and mechanisms of its direct engagement within the domain as carried out by the Soviet Women’s Committee (1941-1991)?’

In addressing these questions I suggest that the role of the SU in the history of the international domain of women’s rights and struggles can be conceptualized as consisting of motivational and active dimensions. I argued that the international dissemination of the Bolshevik platform regarding the woman question represents the *international impact of the internal policies of the SU* and I refer to this impact as “motivational.” I suggested the term motivational to argue that the very presence of the Soviet Union in the international arena had an inspiring effect, since its internal policies were an example for other states, and represented desirable standards for women leaders and women’s struggles worldwide. As for the active dimension of the role the SU played within the history of the domain, I have situated my research in the consensus within the SU’s political historiography that the SU’s foreign policy and diplomacy was a junction of quite flexible Marxist-Leninist doctrine and changing national interests as those were perceived by the contemporary Soviet leadership at the time. I also situated my research among those who argued that although the SU did not in fact lead a worldwide revolution, it was still deeply engaged internationally. I especially emphasized the fact that the Soviet state was particularly involved in support of the Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries and national liberation movements. The SU’s involvement frequently focused on the preparing of revolutionary, professional and military cadres, and on making a contribution in the international diplomatic scene, and so forth, rather than on military intervention. I argued that since Third World Marxist revolutionary and national liberation movements were an important location for both development and setbacks for women’s movements and women rights throughout the twentieth century, it is only reasonable that the mere fact of Soviet engagement in the struggles had indirectly impacted local women and women’s movements elsewhere, as well as their international visibility and presence. I suggested that this is an example of active, though indirect, SU engagement in the field. By suggesting that this type of impact be referred to as ‘indirect,; I mean

to emphasize that this and similar impacts were not the outcome of a purposeful outreach to women or women's movements, but an inbuilt effect of the Soviet state's general involvement in the international arena.

Finally, I have provided examples from the research that describe the essential role that the SU played in drafting and promoting international treaties that were influential for the establishment of contemporary international women's rights standards. I have suggested that this involvement is an example of one more way in which the SU was significantly present in the field. I propose to refer to this involvement as direct and *active* since the actions specifically targeted and impacted the domain.

I suggest the theoretical notion of *engagement* as a concept that allows us to view Soviet influence regardless of its exact motivations. According to Soviet sources the main agent which was actively engaged in the international domain of women's rights and struggles on behalf of the Soviet Union was the Soviet Women's Committee, an organization whose history has only been the subject of very limited research in either the former Soviet Union or the West. I suggest some reasons for this lack of research, and for the narrow *women-Party tools* approach to SWC's history, including the Western hegemony in the historiography of women's movements, as well as the persistence of misleading assumptions about state-supported Communist women's organization in general, and the Soviet organization in particular, thereby contributing to the insights of de Francisca Haan, Reluca Maria Popa and Wang Zheng.

The first assumption I addressed is that the SWC could only have been working for women and women's rights *or* serving the goals of the Party. I cited in this regard Mary Buckley's comprehensive study, where she establishes that the relation between the field of women's rights and the goals of the Party were complex, and definitely not mutually exclusive, but interrelated. Thus, I argue that an *either-or* approach leads to truncated perceptions of SWC's record. I also argue that the *women-Party tools* narration of the SWC's history along either-or lines is an extreme over-simplification, because the official Marxist-Leninist doctrine implicitly endorsed aspirations

for gender equality, and its agenda was not far from the agenda of inter/transnational feminist movements as well as many local movements, as Molyneux argued.

The second assumption I have uncovered is the perception of CPSU and the Soviet state apparatus as a male-only establishment in which women were mere “servants.” In this regard, I have argued that since the SWC was an organization of political and professional women elite, the women were an integral part of the ruling apparatus rather than mere servants of it. I have also noted that one can argue that, notwithstanding women’s involvement, the system was led by men. This general observation, however, was true not only in the Soviet Union but in most parts of the world, both west and east, for the most of the twentieth century.

One more dimension which I discuss is the double standard applied the research on the women’s organization in the Cold War’s West and East. An argument raised by de Haan, Popa and Wang Zheng states that in the historiography of women’s movements, western organizations are by and large perceived as active and independent agents with potential for international influence, while at the same time, the actors affiliated with or originated in the Cold War’s east are perceived as essentially local and insignificant in respect to developments in the international arena.

I join Popa in arguing that contrary to this perception, in both the East and the West of the Cold War, any actor had potential for international influence. I discuss the example of the SWC’s relationship with Tandi, which spanned more than three decades. Since Tandi not only promoted social change in Israel, but also raised an entire generation of leaders in the Palestinian feminist movements in Israel, SWC’s contributions to that organization’s growth made an active and direct impact on the feminist field in the state. Thus, despite the fact that SWC was not an organization for social change within the SU, it had the capacity to promote and support social change within other states.

Finally, following Edward Said and Chandra Mohanty, I suggest that the fact that the SWC did not promote social change within the Soviet Union and was committed to the interests of the

Party should be acknowledged in further research into the organization and the role it played in the history of women and women's movements during the twentieth century.

I locate the establishment of the SWC in the state of *total war* which mobilized the Soviet Union during World War II, and the measures which were taken under the auspices of the Soviet Informational Bureau (SIB) to produce propaganda for extra-territorial consumption. I discuss the SWC's subjugation to the SIB, and the fact that all of its activities up to 1945 had to be reviewed and approved by the Bureau. I suggest that the first head of the SWAFC, Valentina Grizodubova, was removed from her post as president of the SWAFC because of a conflict she had with General Alexander Golovanov. I also suggest that Nina Popova was appointed as the second head of the organization due to her earlier work with Alexander Sherbakov, who also served as the head of SIB in 1941-1945. Finally, I have provided short biographies of Nina Popova and the last three heads of the SWC – Valentina Tereshkova, Zoya Pukhova and Alevtina Fedulova – and emphasized that, other than Grizodubova, the SWC leaders were of working-class origin. Nevertheless, it is evident that the majority of women involved in the SWC were part of the Soviet elite, accordingly, I argue that their daily experience as part of nomenclature elite of the SU, must have been very different from the daily lives of ordinary Soviet Women.

I argue that the principles of SWC's international work were established during the first year of Popova's leadership. These principles included a strong emphasis on representing the Soviet Union's achievements through the structure of delegations, a commitment to rigorous information-gathering, and the establishment of exceptionally warm and friendly personal relations with women within the international arena. In addition, I suggest that further research will be needed to establish that these and other principles of the work and organization of SWC stood at the base of the Union of Friendship Societies for Cultural Relations with the Foreign States – the most important structure within the people diplomacy of the socialist super power.

Finally, I discuss the ways in which the SWC played a direct and active role within the international domain of women's rights and struggles on behalf of the Soviet state. On the

theoretical level, I argue that the SWC's authority and influence were based on its material and political value. The material resources included financial, human and organizational resources. The political resources included its genuine significance for the Marxist- Leninist parties and movements, its authority and power as a representative of a state which had achieved significant accomplishments in the emancipation of women and promotion of women's rights treaties within the UN, through the activity of the Soviet representatives including the representatives of the Republics of Ukraine and Belarus (in this regard I also mentioned briefly the significance of the Soviet influence upon the Eastern bloc).

This direct engagement of SWC included sending of experts on the education of women and children to Third World; the provision of humanitarian aid in case of wars and natural disasters; the organizational support, sponsorship of travel costs for women leaders and activists to international congresses and seminars; the organization of international congresses; the organization and sponsorship of a variety of seminars; and the provision of stipends for women students, the well-being of women leaders, financial support of organizations of women in the Third World, and more.

In regard to the SWC's engagement in WIDF, I join de Haan's argument that the organization was influential in the Federation but did not have all-encompassing control over it. First, I drew attention to the fact that the exact same question "What was the role and the influence of the Soviet Union and SWC within the WIDF?" can and should be asked from at least two different positions. One is *whether the Soviet Union (and SWC) had control/ had no control/ had a certain extent of control within the WIDF* and another one is *how the Soviet state and the SWC supported the work of WIDF, enhanced it and whether and to which extent it was necessary for its success*. I further suggest that the concept of engagement addresses this ambiguity when building a framework for the two answers. I also argue that, although the SWC was part of the Soviet foreign policy and diplomacy structure, it was also a separate organizational unit with its own interests and played a role of a mediator between the will of the Party, its own interests and needs as those were

perceived by the leadership of the SWC, and the will and interests of WIDF⁷ and its organizations. I showed that the SWC made enormous efforts in order to obtain and keep a central role within the WIDF and analyzed a document in which the very beginning of these efforts is addressed [specific].

I have presented Khoury's argument that the WIDF was the site of rivalry between ideological camps, a field in which the "communist" camp opposed the "nationalist" one. The SWC, according to her narrative, was a leader of the Communist camp, and also was a capable and a significant mediator with the "nationalist" camp, this due to the exceptional resources discussed earlier.

Finally, I point out that Tereshkova's historical journey to space happened only ten days before the 1963 Congress in Moscow and argued that although we do not have enough evidence to establish that this 'coincidence' was planned, it is highly likely.

This research has proposed a theoretical framework for the Soviet Union's role within the international domain of women's rights, which can serve as the basis for further research in the field. In a single thesis, there cannot be a comprehensive account of the scope and significance of this role. It is my hope that my research has indicated the vast potential for further inquiries into the direct role which that the SU played within the international domain of women's rights and struggles.

Although I have intended to suggest a conceptual framework more than a judgment, this thesis is heavily focused on what can be called the "positive" impact of the SU upon the domain. However, the negative consequences of the role played by the Soviet Union should be explored more, including, for instance, the international impact of Soviet reluctance to address the issue of violence against women, which was "was ignored and denied by the [Soviet] authorities" (Misner-Pollard 2009, p. 153); the impact of Russian chauvinism on the SWC's work, as well as imperialist aspects of the SU's policies. Another dimension which I could not fully address is the changing aspects of the Cold War over time. Indeed, as the scope, themes, and locations of Cold War

competition changed, we may assume that the focus, range and significance of the role played by the SU within the history of international domain of women rights and struggles changed as well. What those changes were and how significant they were, would bear a significant investigation and could help to create a more detailed historical account of the Soviet engagement.

Regarding the imperialist aspects of the role played by the Soviet state within the domain of women's rights and struggles in the Third World, future research should ask how and whether the Soviet intervention within the domain produced colonial subjects defined by a Soviet gaze. Future research should also address how and whether the Soviet intervention oppressed local women's struggles, prioritizing specific types of activities, as well as how racism played out in the milieu and how it corresponded with the internal imperialism of the Soviet state, its racism and Russian chauvinism.¹³³

But the most fascinating topic to explore further and I can only hope that the respected reader finds it by now as interesting as I do, is the scope and the significance of the active role played by the Soviet Union within the international domain of women's rights and struggles. This is a vast project, and much more should be done in order to understand how this intervention actually worked on the administrative, human and material levels. What was the exact role of the SWC's specialists in drafting the major women's rights treaties of the century? What resources were actually invested by the SU in women's struggles and the promotion of women's rights? Was this figure high in relation to other issues in which the Soviet state was involved within the international arena? What was the exact role and significance of the Soviet Women's Committee within the WIDE? How did it change through the years of SWC's existence? How did the SWC influence the history of particular women's movements in the Third World and the West? The

¹³³ For more on the racism of the SU, refer for instance to Kate A. Baldwin. *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922-1963*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002; for a deep inquiry into Russian chauvinism in the Soviet state, refer for instance to Hagendoorn, L., Linssen, H., Tumanov, S. Ed. *Intergroup Relations in States of the Former Soviet Union. The Perception of Russians*. East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2001

answers to these and many more questions could shed a fascinating light on the exact ways in which the history of the international domain of women's rights and struggles evolved through the century. This inquiry, I believe, is valuable beyond a strictly historical interest. The ways in which the existence of a socialist super power influenced the history of the domain can illuminate ways in which women's and feminist struggles have changed since that superpower itself has withered away.

Wang Zheng (2009) recalls the words of Arif Dirlik (2005) in order to summarize the agenda of her research: "[The] contemporary hegemony of global capitalism over the present and future may have left the past as the sole source of critical perspectives."¹³⁴ And: "[A] past forgotten is a past erased as a possible space from which to view the present critically."¹³⁵ I share this agenda and hope that my research will be able to contribute to the critical analyses of the meanings and consequences of the contemporary hegemony of global capitalism for women and women's movements, their work and struggles.

* * *

Y: Samira, how would it be if there wasn't the Soviet Union and the Soviet Women organization?

*S: **Like now.** What with the Soviet Union gone the third world countries are in very bad shape. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer even in Russia.*

Y: What would be different in terms of women rights?

S: The situation would be as it was before the Soviet Union. I think the Soviet Union taught the world about women rights. Countries in the world were constantly afraid of laborers and women uprising as it would spell in their eyes a communist revolution. So for fear of that they gave rights to women and laborers to pacify them, and the crowds also learned how to claim their rights. The western countries like France the US and England were all afraid of laborers uprising and that is why they gave social rights. Now that the Soviet Union no longer exists there is a regression in these issues. Now people are starting to ask where the Marxism is.

¹³⁴ Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 279. Quoted in Wang Zheng, "Revealing Erasures: Visual Representation of *Women of China*: 1949-2009," unpublished paper, 2009, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Arif Dirlik, "Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies: Notes on the Contemporary Historiography of Modern China," *Modern China*, Vol. 22, Issue 3, Jul., 1996, p. 248. Quoted in Wang Zheng, "Revealing Erasures: Visual Representation of *Women of China*: 1949-2009," unpublished paper, 2009, p. 1.

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For full information about the archive please refer to: <http://www.statearchive.ru/383>

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