

SAMIZDAT MAGAZINES OF THE SOVIET DISSIDENT WOMEN'S GROUPS, 1979-1982:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

By
Alexandra Talaver

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Department of Gender Studies

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Éva Fodor

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Abstract

The current research aims to re-write, or at least reconsider, the history of feminism in the USSR during the late Brezhnev years. My starting point is the group which is often called ‘the first Soviet feminists,’ or considered to be the first reincarnation of feminist ideas in the Soviet Union since 1920s, namely, the dissident women’s group, which appeared in 1979 with samizdat publication of the almanac *Woman and Russia* and existed till 1982.

My research question is: Was the *Woman and Russia* group the only feminists in the SU in 1970s, and what are implications of that label in light of the Cold War competition?

The dissident women's group started its activity at the time of intense international debates on women’s rights after the International Women’s Year of the United Nations (1975) and during the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). Thus, it was a time when women's rights became an important battlefield of the Cold War confrontation. Therefore, regarding the group I will not only reconstruct the history of this group, and do a content analysis of their almanacs, but also situate their activity within the broader political context.

My key argument is that the exclusive attachment of the label 'feminist' to the dissident women's group both in media and scholarship is determined by the Cold War paradigm and serves to erase the history of activism of communist women or those who acted within the state system.

The key assumption of the research is that women in state women’s organizations had certain agency and opportunities to promote a feminist agenda, therefore they should not be ignored. This paradigm was developed by such scholars as Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, Raluca Maria Popa, Kristen Ghodsee, Zheng Wang. Therefore, I analyze the activity of the state-owned magazine *Rabotnitsa* as well, from the perspective of its institutional ability to act as an agent, affecting state gender politics. I also compare issues raised by dissident women with ones discussed in the official media and show their similarity.

My sources are printed copies of the samizdat dissident almanacs *Woman and Russia* (№1, 1979) and *Maria* (№1-3, 1980-1982); issues of *Rabotnitsa* (monthly, 1975-1980); the electronic archive of the *USSR News Brief*, the human rights bulletin, which existed from 1978 till 1991; the testimonies of the members of the dissident groups (both published and unpublished); and materials from the personal archive of Tat’yana Mamonova, founder of *Woman and Russia*.

Declaration of Original Research and the Word Count

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 20 772 words

Entire manuscript: 27 589 words

Signed _____ (*Alexandra Talaver*)

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I can not believe this is happening, but my thesis is written and the best academic year of my life is close to its end. I am very thankful to everyone, who was with me and around during this challenging time.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to contribute to a re-thinking history of feminism under state socialism, in particular, in the USSR during the late Brezhnev years. Therefore, my starting point is the group, which is considered in historiography to be ‘the first soviet feminists’ since 1920s, namely, the editorial board of the dissident *samizdat* almanac¹ *Zhenschina i Rossiya* (Woman and Russia, further—*W&R*). The group appeared in September 1979 in Leningrad, and it is also called *Leningradsky feminism* in Russian historiography.

The problem I want to address in my research is the isolated image of the group in historiography, i.e. without consideration of the international context and domestic gender politics in the USSR. I find the question essential for two reasons. Firstly, the group appeared during the intense international debates on women’s rights within Cold War competition.² Secondly, the exclusive label ‘first feminists’ overshadows the activity of women and groups who worked on the woman question³ within the state system. Therefore, I believe, the broader perspective on the group will also provide ground for a re-writing of the history of feminism in the USSR. I claim that the dominant representation of the group was created by the Western media during the Cold War, and the narrative about it implies an orientalizing of the official women’s organisations in the SU.⁴

As I hope, my main contribution of the thesis will be to overcome Cold War mentalities in the historiography of feminism in Russia, and the ‘othering’ of the official women’s organisations existed in the SU, based on the common assumption that they were only puppets

¹ i.e. oppositional to the state uncensored self-published magazine.

² Svetlana Sergeevna Zakharova, *Gendering Soviet Dissent : How and Why the Woman Question Was Excluded from the Agenda of Soviet Dissidents (1964 - 1982)*, CEU Gender Studies Department Master Theses: 2013/37 (Budapest : Central European University, 2013), 32.

³ The term became widespread during the debates on women’s roles in society in 19th century, later it was actively in the USSR as a signifier for women’s problems and gender inequality in the Soviet society.

⁴ Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations: The Case of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF),” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 4 (September 2010): 547–73, doi:10.1080/09612025.2010.502399.

of the Communist Party. I hope to create more complex picture of the gender politics during the late Brezhnev years by consideration of domestic and international politics, at the crossroads of which the dissident group's history is located. However, it is important to emphasize the limitations of my research: I will consider only one state-owned Soviet magazine — *Rabotnitsa* (en. Working woman). Moreover, I was not able to interview the editorial board of the magazine, or work with its archives. This research is only one of the first steps toward a more detailed portrait of 'state feminists' in the USSR during Brezhnev years.

Finally, as a part of the Russian feminist community, I have personal interest in reclaiming the term 'feminism' and broadening its meaning with the consideration of different communist state-supported organisations in the USSR, as well as this dissident group. I want to use the term 'feminist' to emphasize that the woman question was not merely complement of the Party line on the pages of *Rabotnitsa*, in my case, but was a core interest of the magazine, as well as an essential part of the broader socialist project. I believe that it will help to overcome the approach toward feminism in the post-Soviet space as something alien and exported from the West after the dissolution of the SU. In this argument, I am also joining professor of University of East London Alliane Cerwonka's claim that East/West borders were porous even during the Cold War, and the transition of feminist ideas went both directions.⁵

My main research question is: Was *Zhenschina i Rossiya* (W&R) the only feminist group in the SU in 1970s, and what are the implications of the label 'feminists', in the context of Cold War competition?

In order to answer this my thesis will be structured as followed. In the first chapter I will analyze gender politics promoted by state-owned magazine *Rabotnitsa* from 1975 until 1980, and their own activities regarding the woman question. In my analysis I will try to suggest a new perspective on the magazine, which is usually regarded in scholarship as an engineer of

⁵ Allaine Cerwonka, "Traveling Feminist Thought: Difference and Transculturation in Central and Eastern European Feminism," *Signs* 33, no. 4 (2008): 809–32, doi:10.1086/528852.

the Soviet woman. In my research I will address dimensions usually ignored by scholars: readers' letters and editorial interventions into politics for the resolution of women's problems. Therefore, I will try to consider the possibility that women had their own agency within the state system. In my attempt to do so, I inspired by Zheng Wang 's statement, that gender and feminist scholars, being ignorant toward activities of women and women's organisations within the state apparatus, act not better than patriarchal system they aim to fight against,⁶ and Krassimira Daskalova's claim that we should acknowledge "pro-women and friendly to women" politics in the state socialism, despite the fact that the full equality was not achieved and erasure of all the forms patriarchal relationships did not happen under state socialism.⁷

In the second chapter I will re-consider the history of the *W&R* group with particular attention to the international context. Also, I will compare their agenda with the one promoted by *Rabotnitsa*. Deriving from the poststructuralist idea of the dependency of the oppositional discourse from its counterpart,⁸ I explore the role of the language of the Soviet official media and Western feminism in the formation of the group's discourse. I will also elaborate on the implications of attaching the label 'feminist' to the group, with regards to the political context of the Cold War.

In the third chapter I will provide a chronicle and analysis of the larger part of the group, whose agenda is often ignored by scholars due to its religious and conservative aspirations, i.e. 'Maria' club. It was formed in 1980, less than half a year after the presentation of the *W&R*, and Maria' club united a majority of the participants of the first almanac. In particular, I will focus on what their emancipatory project was in opposition to the Soviet one.

⁶ Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State - A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (University of California Press, 2016), 2.

⁷ Krassimira Daskalova, "How Should We Name the 'Women-Friendly' Actions of State Socialism?," *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 214–19, doi:10.3167/asp.2007.010113.

⁸ Jacob Torfing, "Power and Discourse: Towards an Anti-Foundationalist Concept of Power," in *The SAGE Handbook of Power* (SAGE, 2009), 112.

I will argue that *W&R* was created with a conscious orientation to Western feminist discourse; therefore, they were recognized by Western society as feminists, in contrast to the state-supported women's organisations in the SU, in particular, *Rabotnitsa* magazine. However, *W&R* and *Rabotnitsa* raised similar issues, though they promoted different ways to solve problems, which could be categorized within recognition-redistribution dilemma.⁹ A great part of the dissident activists which formed 'Maria' club had a religious and conservative agenda, claiming that women in the USSR were deprived from their essential femininity and they needed emancipation from the Soviet hermaphroditism by embracing traditional gender roles—this part of the group was almost ignored within the myth about the first Soviet feminists. The fact that the editorial board was expelled from the country in 1980 because of their dissident activities reinforced the idea that feminism (understood as fight for improvement of women's rights) was absent and even forbidden in the USSR. I want to emphasize that the narrative about the 'feminist exile' from the USSR served for broader political competition between the SU and US in the international domain of women's rights and in future overshadowed the history of the women's struggle.

My sources are printed copies of the samizdat dissident almanacs *W&R* (№1, 1979) and *Maria* (№1-3, 1980-1982); issues of *Rabotnitsa* (monthly, 1975-1980); electronic archive of the *USSR News Brief*, the human rights bulletin, which existed from 1978 till 1991; the testimonies of the members of the dissident groups (both published and unpublished); and materials from the personal archive of Tat'yana Mamonova, founder of *Woman and Russia*.

⁹ Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age.," *New Left Review* 1/212, (August 1995), 70.

Chapter 1. Debates on feminism in the USSR: literature review and theoretical framework

As far as my goal is to re-consider the history of feminism in the USSR during the late Brezhnev years, I situate my research project at the crossroads of two research subfields: the historiography of the Soviet gender politics and the historiography of the almanacs *Zhenschina i Rossiya* (Woman and Russia, further—*W&R*) and *Maria*. I will dedicate to the observation of these two fields the first and the last parts of the Literature review. As for theoretical framework I will stick to the idea that the Cold War paradigm, which represents the SU and Eastern Europe as the ‘Other’ of the West, is still influential in the Soviet history and should be challenged. I hope to contribute to the debates about the possibility of women’s agency within the state structure in the SU — these debates I will overview in the second part. In this chapter I will provide the short explanation of the key terms I am using in my research: Cold War paradigm in historiography, agency, movement, feminism, state feminist (they will be underlined).

1.1. Historiography of the Soviet gender politics: a problem of *not knowing*

The first years after the October revolution in 1917 brought a dramatic change into women’s lives in the former Russian Empire, future Soviet Union. Women received political and economical rights equal to men, and everyday life was transformed with the new projects of communal life and abolition of the traditional marriage.¹⁰ Since the first years, as Mary Buckley states, “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.”¹¹ Despite the great improvements of the first years and further inconsistent changes in the field of women's wellbeing, women in the SU did not reach full equality regarding representation in politics, level of salaries and career opportunities, domestic duties — but this had not happened anywhere else in the world at that time either.

¹⁰ Natalia Novikova, “Communism as a Vision and Practice,” *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2007), 204-205.

¹¹ Mary (Mary E. A.) Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : Iniversity of Michigan Press, 1989), 227.

In 1919 Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, two prominent socialist activists and revolutionaries, founded *Zhenotdel* (Women's Bureau),¹² which aimed to increase political engagement of women, reduce illiteracy and deal with many other gendered issues (such as childcare and improving of everyday services). Its activities Wendy Z. Goldman, Paul Mellon Distinguished Professor of History in the History Department of Carnegie Mellon University, characterizes as the struggle over 'working class feminism'.¹³ Such a complimentary approach toward the state women's organisation in the historiography is an exceptional case. The *Zhenotdel* was abolished in 1930. All the future state women's institutions in the Soviet Union are represented within the frame of the *Party-tool narrative*,¹⁴ i.e. women's organisations are treated as merely instruments of the Party's politics without any agency or interest in helping women. However, since 1941 the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee (the Soviet Women's Committee since 1956)¹⁵ existed, and in 1958 *zhensovety* (women's councils) were introduced,¹⁶ as well as different women's organisations in the Soviet republics. The activity of these organisations in the interest of the Soviet women has deserved attention from scholars only recently, yet, in numerous publications they are regarded as purely formal. For example, the Soviet Women's Committee played an important role in the promotion of women's rights in the international domain.¹⁷ Following the argument of Francisca de Haan, Professor in Department of Gender Studies in the Central European University, I state that it is happening due to the influence of the Cold War paradigm in the historiography. As she suggests, this paradigm assumes that the official women's organisations from the eastern part of the 'Iron

¹² The women's department (zhenskii otdel) of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

¹³ Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates : Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33-70.

¹⁴ See more: Yana Knopova, *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)*, CEU Gender Studies Department Master Theses: 2011/21 (Budapest : Central European University, 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ See more: Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR : Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups* (Sussex : Wheatsheaf Books ; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1987).

¹⁷ Knopova, *The Soviet Union and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles*, 127-136.

Curtain' "were deeply politicized, i.e. 'Communist', but not 'feminist'" and lead to *not knowing* about them.¹⁸ Their bias with the Party and the state served as an excuse for the ignorance in scholarship, which results in an ignorance of their achievements and activities. This hierarchy was built upon the existing discourse about the West and the East, the Occident and the Orient,¹⁹ where the latter was represented as backward and lacking different signs of 'civilizational progress'. In the Cold War narrative this division was prescribed by the metaphor of the Iron Curtain, "which in the western hegemonic view separated 'the free West' from its dark, homogenised Other, 'the Soviet bloc', or an oppressed 'Eastern Europe'".²⁰

I hope to contribute to overcoming this *not knowing* about struggle of communist and party-affiliated women in the SU by analysis of the magazine *Rabotnitsa*, the oldest communist women's magazine in the country, which was established in 1913. As its editor, Zoya Timofyevna, in early 1980s, stated the magazine served "as a forum where problems can be aired"²¹ and sometimes even solved with the help of journalists. In contrast to the dominating approach toward the magazine as an engineer of the new Soviet women in the historiography,²² I will try to understand what kind of engagement it suggested to women, what problems it raised and whether it was capable of at least partially resolving these problems.

1.2. Debates on agency: communism and feminism

Since the 2000s a number of studies appeared, in which the authors (Francisca de Haan, Raluca Popa, Krassimira Daskalova, Alexandra Ghit, Kristen Ghodsee, Magdalena Grabowska, Jasmina Lukic, etc.) have suggested a more detailed portrait of women's organisations in the

¹⁸ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations," 551.

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, c1979), 2.

²⁰ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations," 556.

²¹ Cited in Maggie McAndrew, "Soviet Women's Magazines," in *Soviet Sisterhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 98.

²² See Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, c1999., 1999); Maria Davidenko, "Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s-1990s," *Journal of Gender Studies* 0, no. 0 (September 26, 2016): 1-19, doi:10.1080/09589236.2016.1233864.

former state socialist countries and leftist international women's organisations, active during the 20th century. The unifying assumption behind their approach, is that women were not only instruments of the communist parties, but that the women's organisations had certain agency in shaping politics, and in some cases could be even referred to as 'feminist'.

Their studies aim to question hegemonic assumptions about the history of feminism as something happening in the Western democracies only, and emphasize the fact that the term 'feminism' has its own historicity and its meaning depends on historical context, especially in the history of the 20th century, when women's rights became an important battlefield of the Cold War.²³ In my thesis I will analyze the meaning of the label 'feminist' attached to the dissident women's group in the USSR, and by comparison of the *W&R* with the official magazine *Rabotnitsa*, I will argue that it should be re-considered. Official women's organizations under state socialism did not refer to themselves as feminist due to the division between liberal and communist emancipatory politics at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁴ I believe that historians might use term 'feminism' analytically to include women's struggles all over the world and de-centre the West as the main location of women's struggle for their rights and women's agency. Because such Western-centred assumption leads to the colonizing approach toward women in non-Western countries and the construction of them as passive objects of patriarchal oppression.²⁵ Therefore, in my research I will start with a definition of feminism, suggested by Kumari Jayawardena, Sri Lanka's feminist scholar, on the base of her research of women's struggles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Egypt, Iran, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, as "movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change

²³ See great example of how meaning of the term 'women's movement' is incorporated into realities of the Cold war: Knopova, *The Soviet Union and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles*, 39–42.

²⁴ Marilyn J. Boxer, "Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept 'Bourgeois Feminism,'" *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007), 133.

²⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review*, 1988.

the system.”²⁶

Another important term for my research — 'state socialist feminist', was introduced by Zheng Wang, Professor of Women's Studies and History and Research Scientist of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, in her research on the women's activism within the state structure in the People's Republic of China (1949-1964). Wang regards it as a means for “scholarly examinations of the institutionalization of feminism in state agencies in a variety of political and economical systems.”²⁷ Initially, she borrows the term 'state feminist' from studies on Scandinavia, therefore by this gesture Wang reclaims the division between Western democracies, where feminism is possible, and illiberal communist regimes. By adding 'socialist' to the definition, she underscores the fact that these women believed that emancipation is possible only through abolishment of private property and all social and economical hierarchies.²⁸

Obviously, this challenge of the common assumptions in history of feminism and reclaiming of the term could not have passed unnoticed. In 2014, on the pages of the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, the debates over women's agency in state socialism in Eastern Europe took place. Nannette Funk, American feminist philosopher, started it with the article “A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organisations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism”.²⁹ Funk argues with the position of the above-named scholars and claims that no women's agency was possible in the socialist countries. In order to prove that, she suggests distinguishing conceptually four types of agency: reactive and proactive, active and passive— and only proactive active agency among these, in her opinion,

²⁶ Kumari Jayawardena and Rafia Zakaria, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Reprint edition (London ; New York: Verso, 2016), 43-44.

²⁷ Zheng Wang, *Finding Women in the State : A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Oakland, Calif. : University of California Press, [2017], 2017), 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁹ Nannette Funk, “A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism,” *European Journal of Womens Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 2014): 344–60, doi:10.1177/1350506814539929.

deserves acknowledgement and corresponds with feminist ideas. The critique of her superior positionality and production of hierarchies is not the point of my brief observation, though she received one from Kristen Ghodsee, an American ethnographer and a Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Bowdoin College,³⁰ and later on the pages of *Aspasia*.³¹ However, I think that the analytical distinctions suggested by Funk might be useful for clarifying my own categories of analysis. So, Funk defines proactive agency as “acting because of one’s own will, policies, commitments or initiatives”,³² or in other words acts as subject of emancipation, and opposes it to reactive agency, which means “acting because of the will of another, including authorities’ directives”,³³ or in other words objects of emancipation. I want to emphasize, following Ghodsee, that everyone in her or his actions is limited by certain institutional rules and existing hierarchies.³⁴ I argue that the fact that limitations for individual actions under state socialism were different and at some aspects more severe (for example, freedom of expression or discussion of sexuality) than in Western democracies should not lead to the denial of possibility of women to act out of their own initiatives and commitments. Moreover, Marilyn J. Boxer, Professor of History Emeretia of San Francisco State University, argues that an emphasis on autonomy in defining women's agency, which could be regarded as 'feminist' leads to the denial of any socialist feminist project as such, as far as it always implies fight against individualism and atomization.³⁵ I believe that we should make the limitations visible, but not overshadow the opportunity for people to act. As Krassimira Daskalova, a professor of modern European cultural history at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, suggests, “the agency these women exercised needs to be carefully contextualized, taking seriously the ways in which their

³⁰ Kristen Ghodsee, “Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk,” *European Journal of Womens Studies* 22, no. 2 (May 2015): 248–52, doi:10.1177/1350506815571264.

³¹ Francisca de Haan et al., “Ten Years After: Communism and Feminism Revisited,” *Aspasia* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 102–68, doi:10.3167/asp.2016.100107.

³² Funk, “A Very Tangled Knot,” 349.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ghodsee, “Untangling the Knot,” 249.

³⁵ Marilyn J. Boxer, “‘Communist Feminism’ as Oxymoron? Reflections of a ‘Second-Wave’ Feminist Historian of European Socialism and Feminism,” *Aspasia* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 242, doi:10.3167/asp.2007.010117.

actions were both supported and opposed”.³⁶ I also want to bring here the research by Kirill Rogov, Russian political scientist, about diaries and memoirs about everyday life in the SU during Brezhnev years, which showed that people in their diaries were much less unsatisfied with the existing situation, whereas negative evaluation was reinforced by the latter discourses of *Perestroika*, when the idea of strong distinction between state and independent languages was constructed.³⁷

In my research I will assume, that even if women acted or made speeches in tune with the Party line they might do it due to their own beliefs and interconnection of personal commitments and official discourse. In my analysis I focus on opportunities of Soviet women to express and solve their own concerns through the *Rabotnitsa*, and the way the editorial board communicated to the Soviet authorities. Could this be characterized as a purely top-down relationship, or can we see a certain independence of the magazine's agenda, shaped by its readers' letters and by the agency of the editorial board?

1.3. Historiography of the *W&R* and *Maria*: a problem of exceptionalism

Some parts of the first issue of the almanac *W&R* were published in Paris less than a half a year after the release, and the editorial board of *W&R* was expelled from the Soviet Union less than a year after the first publication, in summer 1980. Both of these events got enormous media coverage. The articles about the ‘movement’ and interviews with the activists appeared in numerous newspapers, including the *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Washington Post* and many others. In November, 1980 the editors of the *W&R*, Yulia Voznesenskaya, Natalya Malakhovskaya, Tat’yana Goricheva and Tat’yana Mamonova appeared on the cover of the American feminist magazine *Ms*. As Alix Holt, the member of The Women in Eastern Europe Group, in the article about *W&R* wrote: “The feminists received more notice from the Western

³⁶ Krassimira Daskalova, “Audiatur et Altera Pars: In Response to Nanette Funk,” *Aspasia* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 122.

³⁷ Rogov, K. Iu. 1998. ‘O proekte “Rossiia/Russia”—1970-e gody.’ [About the project “Rossiia/Russia”—the 1970s]. *Rossiia/Russia* 1 (9): 7–11.

media than any other dissident groups. They are the first to speak out on the subordination of women in Soviet society and thus they have novelty value.”³⁸

These numerous publications created certain myths about the ‘movement’ and gender politics in the USSR, which were lately transferred into scholarship about the dissident group. In part, this is because the testimonies from the activists have remained one of the main sources, and in many cases, the activists themselves wrote the history of the group: Yulia Voznesenskaya, Natalya Malakhovskaya and Tat’yana Mamonova — all of them retrospectively wrote the histories of the group. Mamonova’s article, for example, is included into anthology *Sisterhood is global* about women’s movements all over the world, edited by Robin Morgan.³⁹

The first assumption, which shapes the history of the group, is the idea that *W&R* was the first feminist and women’s movement in the USSR since the 1920s. We can meet such an approach in numerous comprehensive books about women’s movements in the USSR and gender history, where the group will appear as the first feminist movement since *Zhenotdel* dissolution in 1930.⁴⁰ As Nadina Milewska-Pindor, PhD student of the University of Łódź, resumes the beginning of her article about the group: “the events related in this work [her article — A.T.] confirm the opinion of those researchers who consider that the publication of the Almanac [*W&R* — A.T.] marked the beginning of the resurrection of the feminist movement in Russia”.⁴¹ To uncover the assumption hidden behind such a chronology, I want to bring up the quote from the *Introduction* from the Women and Eastern Europe Group, which prefaced the publication of the almanac in English in 1980. The authors of the *Introduction* stated: “In

³⁸ Alix Holt, “The First Soviet Feminists,” in *Soviet Sisterhood* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1985), 255.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See, for example, Rosalind J. Marsh, *Women in Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1996), 286. Irina Yukina, *Russkyi Feminism Kak Vyzov Povsednevnosti [Russian Feminism as a Challenge of Modernity]* (St. Petersburg: Aletya, 2007), 459. Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia : From Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2012), 277.

⁴¹ Nadina Milewska-Pindor, “The Almanac ‘Woman and Russia’ and the Soviet Feminist Movement at the End of the 1970s,” *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political & Cultural Journal* 15, no. 1 (December 2013): 5.

the Soviet Union all political and social organisations have to be initiated and directed by the party of the state. Women's magazines are published, but there is no women's movement."⁴²

The appearance of the feminist group *W&R* reinforced this idea by their representation in contrast to the official organisations and media, which appeared in their discourse each time.

As a result of such an exceptional position of the group as the first feminist group since 1920s, the almanac is regarded often as the only platform for women to express their concerns in the SU during the late Brezhnev years. As Tat'yana Mamonova, editor of the *W&R*, told in their famous interview for *Ms.* with Robin Morgan, the American feminist and journalist: "I think feminism may start with intellectuals but then it turns to women of all classes. That's why I wanted *samizdat* to be a forum for all kinds of thought, even a Party woman may have positive statements on feminism."⁴³ Mamonova claimed that it was in fact the only opportunity for women to discuss their problems, and we can see how this idea determines scholarship. For example, in the *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements* (ed. Norma C. Noonan, Carol Nechemias) one can read: "Foremost among these [reasons to act together, despite the differences — A.T.] was their frustration with the unwillingness of both the dominant, official culture and the dissident, or nonconformist, groups to address women's issues seriously. The lack of forums for the discussion of social concerns such as motherhood, divorce, child care, and alcoholism and its role in the disintegration of the family affected Soviet women more directly than men because of women's responsibilities."⁴⁴ As it is evident from the above quotes, the official women's magazines were regarded only as mediators of the Party's interest.

In an opposition to them, the *W&R* is represented as a free and independent, an opportunity for women speak for themselves. I want to question such a dichotomy between

⁴² *Woman and Russia: First Feminist Samizdat*, Almanach for Women about Women: No. 1 (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1980), 1.

⁴³ Robin Morgan, "The First Feminist Exiles from the USSR," *Ms.*, November 1980, 107.

⁴⁴ Norma C. Noonan and Carol Nechemias, *Encyclopedia of Russian Women's Movements* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 182.

official/unofficial discourses in the SU by bringing an approach toward dissident culture, suggested by Alexei Yurchak, Associate Professor of the Department of Anthropology at Berkeley, who problematizes such a strict dichotomy on the material of the pre-Perestroika informal culture. He argues that foundational idea of the dissident and oppositional writing and activity about the purity of their language is a construct, produced by these groups themselves.⁴⁵ From a Foucauldian perspective, Yurchak suggests, the ‘pure language’ simply can not exist, as far, oppositional discourse in the SU could not have existed without its constitutive Other — the official discourse, and at the same time language of unofficial culture borrowed elements of the official one. As for the groups’ history, such a perspective was not brought yet. However, Tat’yana Mamonova, the founder of *W&R*, acknowledged both Kollontai’s influence on her⁴⁶ and censored literature⁴⁷ on the crisis of gender roles in the late Soviet Union (such soviet sociologists as Bal’shay, Golod, Kharchev).⁴⁸ Moreover, the results of the Soviet emancipatory project and gender politics played an important role as a ground *W&R*, and in the future ‘Maria’ group, which built their own emancipatory project. Therefore, I argue, it is essential to reconsider the group’s history in its relation to the broader discourses on gender equality in the USSR — a context which itself is extremely lacking in all the narratives about the ‘movement’.

However, even without consideration of the official Soviet discourse, *W&R* independence and autonomy is a very problematic assumption, due to their deep connections with two discourses, neither of which could be regarded as politically neutral — Soviet dissident and the

⁴⁵ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, In-Formation Series (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2006.), 6.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Tucker, “Feminism in the U.S.S.R.,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1984, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1984/08/29/feminism-in-the-ussr/bb884fe2-0ca0-420f-a253-f753697b4673/?utm_term=.a234dead584b.

⁴⁷ In my research I will use terms ‘censored’ and ‘uncensored’ for the materials which were officially published and were not accordingly. However, following Yurchak, I want to emphasize that “the fact that many of the common cultural phenomena in socialism that were allowed, tolerated, or even promoted within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party.” Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*. p.6

⁴⁸ Tatyana Mamonova and Margaret Maxwell, *Russian Women’s Studies: Essays on Sexism in Soviet Culture*, The Athene Series (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1989), 135.

Western, so-called, second wave feminism. *W&R* was regarded in the context of the dissident movement of the USSR. Elena Vassilieva, CEU alumni, in her MA thesis, analyzed the group in the context of the Soviet dissident thought, and argued that the division within the group could be explained by the inner conflict of the dissident circle between ‘liberals’ and ‘traditionalists’, i.e. Sakharov’s (liberal, western-orientated) camp and Solzhenitsyn’s (orthodox, traditional Russian values) position.⁴⁹ Alla Mitrofanova, a Russian feminist and philosopher, in her article on the group, regards it as a part of the literary dissident and, in particular, rebellion against its high aesthetical requirements and inner censorship.⁵⁰ However, the way the dissident feminists were treated by the state is regarded by the scholars as extremely harsh, despite the fact of deep involvement of the activists into the dissident movement. I do not argue that repressions against the group were not serious, but insist on the necessity of a detailed reconstruction of processes over the activists and an investigation into their connections with other dissident groups as well.

Another important context of *W&R* is the Western, so-called, second wave feminism. For example, Svetlana Zakharova, CEU Alumni, in her master thesis shows that the Western feminist project was essential for the *W&R*’s agenda, though Zakharova dedicates to the group only few pages and limits her analysis to the fact that the *W&R*’s claims in favour for Western feminism coupled with an ignorance toward Soviet women’s organisations and efforts to improve women’s position.⁵¹ Rochelle Ruthchild, research associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, in her article about the group emphasizes the importance of the Soviet dissident feminists for the transnational history of the so-called

⁴⁹ Elena Vassilieva, *First Feminist Groups in Leningrad(1979-1982) : Samizdat Journals Zhenshchina I Rossiya and Maria*, CEU History Department Master Theses: 1998/42 (Budapest : Central European University, 1998), 67.

⁵⁰ Alla Mitrofanova, “Leningradsky Feminism 70h: Uslovia I Prichiny Voznyknovenia Feminisma v SSSR v Dissidentskom Dvizhenii [Leningrad Feminism of 70s: The Reasons and Preconditions for the Emergence of Feminism in the USSR among Dissidents],” [Http://Ravnopravka.ru/2013/05/Leningrad_feminism/](http://Ravnopravka.ru/2013/05/Leningrad_feminism/), May 2013.

⁵¹ Zakharova, *Gendering Soviet Dissent*, 76.

second wave feminism. Nevertheless, Ruthchild does not focus on the international dimension of the group's activity, or on the function of the vocabulary of the Western feminism in their discourse. Therefore, I want to underscore in my reconstruction of the groups' history this transnational dimension of their activity, as well as the groups' meaning for the international political context. It would be wrong to assume that the introduction of the agenda of Western feminism by the activists was somehow natural or politically neutral — naturalisation of certain discourses is always a sign of established hegemony, as Yana Knopova, CEU alumni, showed it in the example of the definition of the term 'women's movement'.⁵²

I find this transnational context especially important as it raises questions about the struggle over the definition of 'feminism' and leadership in women's rights domain between the US and the SU at the time of the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). As the authors of the first English translation of the almanac *W&R* stated: "We wondered anxiously whether we would feel at home with their feminism".⁵³ The authors also honestly expressed their misunderstanding of the part of the group and draw the line that will be crucial in future historiography: "Some of the contents we found difficult to appreciate; we felt distant from the religious ideas expressed by one or two of the women and we shuddered at the conservative ideas in Tat'yana Goricheva's article".⁵⁴ As in this Introduction, the religious part of the 'movement' ('Maria' group) would be eclipsed in majority of the scholarship by "a language we could understand".⁵⁵ As Elena Vassilieva argues, "the analysis of the Western reactions to the emergence of the feminist agenda allowed to conclude that the coverage of the women's activities in the USSR by the Western media abounded in the elements of projection of the Western expectations onto the Soviet

⁵² Knopova, *The Soviet Union and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles*, 39–42.

⁵³ *Woman and Russia*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

conditions.”⁵⁶ Therefore, I find it essential for the writing of ‘movement’s’ history to problematize both the label ‘feminist’ attached to all the activists, despite the differences between the groups, as well assess critically the fact of their appeal toward the language of the Western feminism, which was not common for their Soviet audience.

Finally, I want to clarify the term “movement”, attached to the group formed around the *W&R* in scholarship. I want to emphasize that the only activity of the ‘movement’ was publication of the almanac, and its editorial board consisted of three or four women (depending on the testimony). Soon after the publication they had a conflict, after which ‘Maria’ group was formed out of the *W&R* editorial board. ‘Maria’ group existed until 1982, however, it was not numerous. I will try to avoid the term ‘movement’, however, bearing in mind the problematic of the group as a social movement. Instead, I will pay special attention to the way they were organized and they tried to mobilize more people.

⁵⁶ Vassilieva, *First Feminist Groups in Leningrad(1979-1982)*, 67.

Chapter 2. Gender Politics in the USSR during the late Brezhnev Years (1975-1980): a content analysis of the *Rabotnitsa* magazine

2.1. Introduction

During the early Brezhnev years, the woman question was officially discussed as ‘unsolved’, it was the first time gender inequality issues were articulated in the SU since the 1930s.⁵⁷ Plenty of sociological research projects were launched to study the ways women organized their lives, what concerns they had about their jobs, political participation and housework. The expert community was given the task to find out what problems there were and to define the new stage of women’s emancipation in the era of “developed socialism”.⁵⁸ Ordinary women were supposed to be able to express their concerns openly and to participate in the solution of the woman question as well.⁵⁹

In this chapter, I want to explore what happened to the woman question in the SU ten years after its re-opening, with a special focus on two important international events: the International Women’s Year (1975) and the International Year of the Child (1979).⁶⁰ There are two reasons behind my decision to narrow the chronological framework of my research in such a manner. First, my chapter will help me to provide the historical context for the dissident women’s group in the SU which appeared in 1979. Second, such focus on the international events will help me to find out how gender politics in the SU were influenced by the international political context and what role gender politics played in international relations of the late 1970s. In my research I derive from the assumption that the role of the socialist bloc,

⁵⁷ Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 165

⁵⁹ Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003), 243.

⁶⁰ I should mention here, that the initial plan for the research was to regard also influence of the Olympics, but as the analysis showed, that, firstly, in 1980 the IYC still was a very important theme on the pages of *Rabotnitsa*, secondly, 1980 brought changes in the international political context with the intensification of the war conflict in Afghanistan, which was reflected in the new rubric “The expert in International relations answers” of *Rabotnitsa*. Also, as Buckley mentions the early 1980s brought broader changes in Soviet gender politics, therefore, I decided to narrow my research to the IYC.

and the SU in particular, in promotion of women's rights on the international arena was meaningful,⁶¹ therefore, I aim to see how it was reflected in domestic politics.

The main source for my research will be the Soviet women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (Working woman). By the studied period, it was the women's periodical in the SU with the largest print-run (more than 13 000 000 copies). *Rabotnitsa* grew out of women's page, which was mainly devoted to working- -class women's letters in *Pravda* (Truth), the main newspaper of the Bolshevik party. A separate editorial board for the new women's magazine was formed in 1913, they started preparing the first publication, but the day before its supposed release on March 8, 1914, the editors were arrested. Yet the first issue was published thanks to Anna Elizarova, a Russian revolutionary, the older sister of Vladimir Lenin. From the very beginning, the magazine aimed to spread awareness about working class women's problems and to organize their activity. *Rabotnitsa* was shut down during the First World War, and in 1923, it was re-established as a monthly magazine that combined political information with stories, poems, other fiction, and useful advice on healthcare. So, it is important to emphasize that *Rabotnitsa* was part of Pravda Publishing House, the oldest party publishing house in the USSR, and was accountable directly to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.⁶²

My choice of the source is determined by the fact that it functioned as a mediator between the state and ordinary women. On the one hand, the party was able to communicate its decisions to a wider audience through the magazine. *Rabotnitsa* also conjured the ideal type of the Soviet woman, as far as the magazine was closely connected with the party since its very foundation and was responsible for spreading all the current political information among women. As *Spravochnik Zhurnalista (Journalist Handbook)*, published in 1971, proclaims: "The aim of the

⁶¹ See Raluca Maria Popa, "Translating Equality between Women and Men across Cold War Divides: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year," in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist East and Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 59–74.; Knopova, *The Soviet Union and the International Domain of Women's Rights and Struggles*.

⁶² McAndrew, "Soviet Women's Magazines," 88–91.

journal is cultural and political education of working women and housewives, mobilizing them to fulfil tasks established by the CPSU.”⁶³ Therefore, in the scholarship it is often regarded as the ‘engineer of the New Soviet woman’.⁶⁴ However, I will emphasize that this aspect is only one dimension of the magazine’s functioning and not even the most important one, as I hope to show by my research. Moreover, such a focus on the magazine’s ‘engineering’ politics reinforces the totalitarian paradigm, regarding the Soviet project and Soviet gender politics as top-bottom implementation of a certain ideology on people, who had no agency in shaping or producing it. I would prefer to approach the *Rabotnitsa* magazine from the perspective, suggested by the contributors of *Aspasia* Forum “Ten Years After: Communism and Feminism Revisited”,⁶⁵ as a platform of a mass women’s organizing, which took part in the complex process of shaping Soviet gender politics bottom-up. I am also inspired by the findings of Krassimira Daskalova and Zheng Wang about the women’s magazines in socialist Bulgaria and People’s Republic of China accordingly, which show that the editorial boards of the magazines struggled for promotion of feminist initiatives.⁶⁶ However, my focus would be on visible results of the invisible efforts of *Rabotnitsa*’s editorial board, because I did not work in archives or their interviews.

I want to emphasize that there was a space in *Rabotnitsa* for concerns, letters and voices of ordinary women. As Maggie McAndrew who studied journalism in the Soviet Union during the early 1980s, argues, readers’ letters were extremely important in the Soviet press. As one of the examples she mentions that in the editorial team of *Rabotnitsa* 15 out of 35 people were working with letters they got from readers, approximately 500-700 letters per day. In addition, the editorial board not only published letters or sent journalists to locations, but also sent queries

⁶³ Nikolay Bogdanov, *Spravochnik Zhurnalista [Journalist’s Handbook]* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1971), 590.

⁶⁴ See Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*; Davidenko, “Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women’s Magazines, 1970s–1990s.”

⁶⁵ Haan et al., “Ten Years After.”

⁶⁶ Daskalova, “Audiatur et Altera Pars: In Response to Nanette Funk,” 124; Wang Zheng, “Creating a Socialist Feminist Cultural Front: Women of China (1949-1966) [Article],” *China Quarterly*, no. 204 (2010): 827.

regarding the content of letters to the relevant authorities.⁶⁷ McAndrew reflects as follows on the position of Zoya Timofeeva, the vice chief editor of *Rabotnitsa* in late 1970s-early 1980s: “The magazine sees itself acting almost as a pressure group to care for the interests of its women readers, both at the level of intervention at individual enterprises and at the policy-making level. The editor felt that *Rabotnitsa* had played a significant role in the recent introduction of part-time work for women with small children, by passing to the decision-makers the needs expressed by women in their communications with the magazine, and, by printing articles on the subject, creating a favorable climate of opinion.”⁶⁸

The question of how the issues which could be raised in the pages of the magazine were selected needs further research. However, in the chapter I will treat *Rabotnitsa* not only as a part of the State politics, but mostly as an instance of women’s agency that contributed to the constitution of women as an interest group and as a platform for their participation in gender politics.

My research question is: What kind of gender politics was promoted by the Soviet women’s magazine *Rabotnitsa* from 1975 till 1980?

My chapter will consist of three parts. In the first part I will give a brief overview of gender politics during Brezhnev years. In the second part I will conduct content-analysis of the magazines. In the Conclusion I will try to place my findings within the discussions about gender politics in the Soviet historiography. My sources are scholarly publications and issues of *Rabotnitsa* from 1975 till 1980.

⁶⁷ McAndrew, “Soviet Women’s Magazines,” 97.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

Interestingly, that despite the acknowledgment of such a role of *Rabotnitsa* and accurate reflection on issues, raised on the pages of the magazine, McAndrew remains within the Cold War paradigm. She argues that “there is little suggestion of official interest in effecting any major transformation in the pattern of women’s lives, or of men’s”, as if the only real concern of feminism should be the radical change of sex roles, but the opportunities for women to be economically independent, to get any education and profession, access to free healthcare and childrearing have not affected ‘pattern of women’s lives’ dramatically.

⁶⁸

2.2. Gender politics during the Brezhnev years

The woman question was discussed during Brezhnev years⁶⁹ within the framework of ‘non-antagonistic contradictions’ in the situation of ‘developed socialism’, meaning those problems that could be solved without radical transformation of society and at the same were considered to be essential parts of further improvement of the socialist project.⁷⁰ At the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1971 the party leaders articulated its position clearly: “The goal of party policy is for Soviet woman to have new opportunities regarding childrearing, participation in society, recreation and study.”⁷¹ On the next Congress they would announce that “the party considers it its duty continually to protect women, to improve their position as workers, mothers, childrearingers and housewives.”⁷²

Special attention toward women was provoked by domestic economical and demographical problems (decline of productivity, labor shortages and a decreasing birth rate), as well as ideological reasons: women's emancipation was an essential part of the Soviet project.⁷³ Moreover, as Svetlana Zakharova, CEU alumni, argues, the re-opening of the woman question during this period was triggered by the situation in the international arena and the Cold War, when gender politics was a very important sphere of competition. The development of women’s movement in Western countries and claims that women in the SU were not liberated yet “made the Soviet authorities to intensify their efforts in this area.”⁷⁴ But in developing new gender politics the Soviet state followed the line of the Marxist feminist tradition, regarding Western 'bourgeois' feminism incomplete without consideration of the economical (class)

⁶⁹ The Early 1980s saw one more shift in gender politics toward a natalist policy and the sharing of domestic roles between spouses. See Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, 179–85.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–63.

⁷¹ *Materyaly XXIV s'ezda KPSS*, 1972, c.75 cite

⁷² *Materyaly XXV s'ezda KPSS*, 1976, c. 85 cited by Buckley, Mary. *Women And Ideology...*: 165

⁷³ Buckley, Mary. *Women And Ideology...*: 166

⁷⁴ Zakharova, Svetlana Sergeevna. *Gendering Soviet dissent : how and why the woman question was excluded from the agenda of Soviet dissidents (1964 - 1982)*. MA thesis. Budapest: Central European University, 2013: 32

dimension of women's oppression.⁷⁵ In my analysis I will explore how the SU regarded its place in the development international women's movements.

Based on sociological research about how women organized their lives, what were their occupations and obstacles on their further improvement of efficiency of their work, a new gender politics was worked out. Social scientists considered as key directions for the improvement of women's position in the labor market the mechanization of labor, provision of more training for women, redistribution of domestic duties (however, with more emphasis on state role, than on men), protecting health of working women and providing part-time job offers.⁷⁶ More contradictions appeared in the improvement of the demographical situation, as far as the majority of scholars expressed belief in very specific women's psychology, based on women's 'natural' roles as mothers, therefore, politics should be directed to strengthening the nuclear family.⁷⁷ As Mary Buckley points out, political involvement of women was not questioned, and sexist atmosphere of Soviet high rank politics was almost totally ignored.⁷⁸ It is interesting, that the question of domestic roles was also repeatedly silenced in professional debates,⁷⁹ despite the fact that "50 percent of women who declared themselves unhappily married were dissatisfied with the division of labor in their household",⁸⁰ according to a survey held in Moscow in 1965. In my analysis of *Rabotnitsa* I will trace how all these professional debates were reflected on the magazine's pages during the studied period and what was done for the improvement of the situation.

Speaking about gender politics we should consider the broader economical situation, and in particular the development of consumer goods. It is essential to mention that during Brezhnev years, at the end on the 1960s the family standard of living in the SU increased, and economical

⁷⁵ Buckley, Mary. *Women And Ideology...*: 176

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-71

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 175

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 178

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 169

⁸⁰ Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*, 227.

stagnation started only in the late 1970s.⁸¹ As Natalya Chernyshova shows in her book about the consumption in the USSR, improvement of quality of consumer goods and their availability was important concern of Brezhnev government, which conducted surveys about consumer demands and tried to respond to them. She argues that consumer practices changed in comparison with Khrushchev years. Analyzing public discourse and economic data, she shows that during Brezhnev years fashion trends started playing important role in consumer choice of clothes, certain attention appeared to brands of home technology and, in general, flats, which became more and more available, were regarded as space for expression of one's taste through unique and beautiful furniture.⁸² All this three market segments: clothes, furniture and home appliances — are gendered, and as I will show, occupied an important place on the pages of *Rabotnitsa* magazine, therefore, might be considered as a part of gender politics.

2.3. Gender politics in *Rabotnitsa* magazine

During the period under consideration, two International Years proclaimed by the UN that directly affected women were held: International Women's Year (IWY, 1975) and International Year of the Child (IYC, 1979). The chronicles of the events held within both occupied an important place in the pages of *Rabotnitsa*, but also triggered an intensification of Soviet domestic politics. In this subchapter, I will discuss the way these international events were represented and framed, how they affected Soviet gender politics, and in the end I will briefly overview gender agenda of *Rabotnitsa*, in the context of the international events. I will introduce the events, as they were presented on the pages of the magazines, all the additional information I will provide in footnotes.

International events

Valentina Nikolaeva-Tereshkova, the first female cosmonaut, head of the Soviet Women Committee (SWC), explained the introduction of IWY is by in her speech on the Plenum of the

⁸¹ Zakharova, *Gendering Soviet Dissent*, 41–44.

⁸² Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies: 90 (New York : Routledge, c2013, 2013).

SWC in 1975 as a result of the pressure from Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in the United Nations (UN).⁸³ She emphasized that the SWC was eager to participate in all the international events held by the UN and mentioned events that would be organized or facilitated by the SWC: a seminar for Asian and African women in Alexandria, a seminar for Asian women in Alma-Ata about women's role in the development of their countries and upbringing of future generations, an anti-war and anti-fascist women's meeting in Minsk, a conference for peace, social progress and equality for young women in Moscow, and, finally, the World Congress in Berlin. She claimed that in the SU there was great enthusiasm about the IWY, as she explained, because of the opportunity to spread Lenin's ideas about social and spiritual empowerment of women and strengthening solidarity between women in different countries.⁸⁴ Therefore, the ideological meaning of the IWY is not hidden in her speech and the link between gender agenda and international politics of the SU is explicit. This connection was used as a legitimate reason for exclusion of pro-Soviet and explicitly Marxist International women's organisations from the history of the feminism of 20th century, because of their partisanship, whereas in the Western discourse proper feminist women's organisations were presented as politically neutral, even despite the fact that they were in many cases also involved in this ideological Cold War competition.⁸⁵

As far as women's emancipation, Nikolaeva-Tereshkova argued, could not be achieved without class struggle, her description of the situation worldwide was characterized by strong privileging of the situation in the socialist countries in comparison with others. She said that "the holding of the International Women's Year is of great importance for the struggle of women

⁸⁴ As far as in further research I will refer to different issues of *Rabotnitsa* from different years as a whole body of texts, promoting certain agenda and in majority of cases particular name of the article and the author are not my object of analysis, I will make references in brackets in text, mentioning year, issue and the page of the quote or the idea. In this case it is: 1975, #4: 3.

⁸⁵ Kristen Ghodsee, "Revisiting the United Nations Decade for Women: Brief Reflections on Feminism, Capitalism and Cold War Politics in the Early Years of the International Women's Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum* 33 (January 1, 2010): 3–12, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2009.11.008.

in the non-socialist zone for their rights. They are inspired by the world-historical achievements of the socialist countries in the solution of the woman question”. (1975, #04: 2) This distinction between the socialist bloc and the Western capitalistic countries is an important leitmotif in all *Rabotnitsa* reports about both years. For example, the report about The International Children’s Festival that took place in Artek in 1977, as a preparation for the IYC, ends with the speech of the representative of West Germany, Christi Luccard: “Achievements in the field of children’s rights worldwide would not be possible if it were not for the October Revolution and the foundation of the first socialist state in the world” (1977, #10: 11). The socialist countries in all *Rabotnitsa* reports about the international meetings are represented as an inspirational example for the whole world. For example, when Nikolaeva-Tereshkova explained the meaning of IWY, she provided some statistics about gender inequality worldwide, mainly in Europe and the US. But she did not mention any problems that existed in the Soviet Union and were addressed in *Rabotnitsa*.

Such a one-sided representation might be interpreted not only in light of the SU’s international political goals, but also against the the fact that situating the Soviet gender regime within a broader context was useful as a means of distancing Soviet women from their everyday life and reminding them about the achievements they attained in comparison with women all over the world. For example, in several articles the authors used the discursive figure of an imaginary dialogue between the delegates from different countries and Soviet women, like in the following example: “Is education in the SU free? Obviously, it is! Does anyone can get any professional training? Sure, everyone! How much does surgery cost? Nothing! <...> Women have equal wages to men? I can’t believe it! A million rubles for improvement of working conditions? Million? Only for the last five years? One has an opportunity to study in the evening time? Anyone? One has a paid leave for exams?” (1975, #11: 21-22) In another case the author explicitly said that “everything that is so common to us: equal rights for education, equal

chances to get any profession, equal labor rights and equal wages — is still merely a dream for millions of your coevals in the capitalist world” (1975, #9: 17).

Therefore, the very complimentary representation of the Soviet gender regime might be seen as a trope for defamiliarization of the position of women in the SU, especially considering the fact how much critique of living conditions we can find in other articles of the magazine.

Domestic politics

One of the main lines of gender politics discussed in *Rabotnitsa* during the studied period is the improvement of women’s working and living conditions and childrearing. For this purpose, several specialized institutions were established, for example, Commission for consumer goods, affiliated with the Higher Soviet, and Laboratory of women’s hygiene in the Research Institute of Labor Hygiene and Occupational Diseases. In both cases the importance of specific women’s experience is emphasized. As Zarya Alexandrovna Volkova, head of the Laboratory wrote, there was skepticism in the Institute about creating a separate body for special research on women’s health, but they were able to advocate the necessity of special approach toward women due to their function as mothers (1977, #2: 16-17). But those are only two of the many institutions that were actively involved in the process, on a par with local party committees, Zhensovet (women’s councils), healthcare departments at factories and other organisations. Such a huge attention toward women’s life was, as I pointed out above, provoked by certain economical and demographical demands, but also intensified by the international context. Therefore, during the IWY and IYC the all-Soviet-Union review (smotr) of women’s working, living conditions and leisure facilities and all-Soviet-Union review of preschool institutions for improvement of healthcare and decreasing of sickness rate were held as the main inner campaign in the two respective years, besides various cultural events and celebrations.

On the pages of *Rabotnitsa* the results of all those activities were presented, as for example, the introduction of compulsory hand spa procedures for women who encounter with chemicals during their work, at the ZIL factory (1978, #01: 16-17), the introduction of special

shopping facilities during the work day on Friday in the Novosibirsk aviation factory (1975,#04: 25), or the introduction of compulsory 10 minutes breaks each 50 minutes in shop floor with monotonous working process at Factories of Sverdlovsk (1975, #11: 16) — those are just few example of the policies that directly affected women’s health besides the mechanization of labor that eased physical labor, and the building of new facilities for childrearing. The results of the IYC are also quite impressive: 2,000 new preschool facilities were built for more than for half million children during 1979, and overall 123,000 nurseries and kindergartens were operating that served 14 million children, as the main editor of *Rabotnitsa* Vavilova reports (1980, #2: 8). Important to mention here is that these improvements of working conditions partially advocated for by reiterating women’s roles as mothers had some negative consequences as well, i.e. the prohibition of certain jobs for women due to their potential harm for women’s reproductive system which was represented as care about ‘future mothers’ and described in one line with other changes, regarding the workload of pregnant woman (1975, #11: 16).

However, it would be wrong to think that representation of the domestic situation is one-dimensional and purely optimistic. Even in the report about the results of the IYC, on the one hand Vavilova states: “Our system of protection of motherhood and childhood is a great example of humanity and social justice for the whole world.” (1980, #2: 8) But on the other, at the end of the article she mentions that not all the Soviet Republics were able to fulfill the plan of construction of child facilities, that the quality of goods is not high enough, that the healthcare for children needs further improvement and that the laws about protection of women’s labor are not always observed. (1980, #2: 9) Also, as in interview with Chayanov, a member of the Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers for science and technology, the correspondent of the magazine does not hesitate to ask to comment on the fact that: “As far as mechanization comes to this or that part of the factory, men are the ones who become operators,

whereas women are transferred to those departments where manual labor persists” (1976, #1: 9)

It’s no surprise that *Rabotnitsa*’s editorial board and correspondents of the magazine keep their critical perspective, because, as I wrote above, collecting letters from readers all over the country was an important part of their activity, and the publication of those letters takes at least 2-3 pages of each issue. What were those letters about? There are two main themes. First one is about working conditions: violations of the labor code, bad working conditions, lack of healthcare and childrearing facilities, bad projects of mechanization, reluctance of the factory management to respond and respect certain initiatives etc. The other — about bad quality of consumer goods and domestic (bytovye) services — there is a special rubric for such letters “Persol”, where the problems are presented in an ironic way. However, this irony does not mean that *Rabotnitsa* does not see its mission as solving the articulated problems, as I will show later. Beside those two major topics, a great variety of issues are discussed on the pages of the magazine: unequal distribution of domestic duties, problems of single mothers, conflicts between different generations, domestic violence etc. Very often, following the publication of a personal story in the letter, in next issues the letters from readers in response to the story are published, usually with a commentary from the editors, who try to show a wide spectrum of reactions and discuss them, shaping the readers’ position on the issue. Other important part is psychological counseling (rubrics “Family pages” and “Girlfriend”) and legal consultations about social payments, labor rights etc.

However, despite this great variety of problems raised in the pages of the magazine the dominant intonation of *Rabotnitsa* is enthusiastic due to the biographies of different working women, sometimes exceptional (shock workers, veterans of the SWW, public servants, respected by the community, women with successful careers, etc.), sometimes those who seemed to be ordinary working women, but their life is represented as important for the

collective and the country in any case.⁸⁶ Thus, a strong discursive bond between women's work and the country's development is created — the articles about working women are accompanied with taglines like “Your biography — the biography of the country” or “I am part of this great power”. Though women's representation is not a topic of the chapter, it has to be mentioned that women on the pages of *Rabotnitsa*, with the exception of the fashion rubric, are always depicted in their working environments; quite often they do not even pose for the camera, but are involved into the working process. Moreover, portraits of women are very different in terms of age, nationality and appearance⁸⁷ — having a certain appearance is obviously not the main dimension of women's life, according to *Rabotnitsa*. However, they acknowledge women's desire to follow fashion and look beautiful, even advocate it in front of different authorities, as I will show below.

Interestingly, problems of women's representation are even discussed in the magazine a few times. For example, Freda Brown, the president of the preparatory committee for the World Congress in Berlin and the president of the WIDF, says that during the Congress a special Commission dealing with women's representations and their effects on women's place in society is planned, as far as, she argues, in capitalist countries women are represented as ‘objects for sex’⁸⁸ (predmet sexa) (1975, #9: 8). The other example is a reader's letter, in which he criticizes the unequal distribution of domestic duties and claims that gendering of domestic

⁸⁶ Interestingly, this strategy was used also in the solution of certain problems for the mobilization women involved in certain spheres. A good example is an article about the low quality of domestic services and the rudeness of those involved in non-material production. In the article about the issue the author tries to emphasize the role of non-material production (service economy) for the whole production process, addressing women who are accused of being rude and unprofessional. Therefore, their rudeness becomes a question of socialist state building. (1977, #03:19)

⁸⁷ For more on women's representation, see Davidenko, “Multiple Femininities in Two Russian Women's Magazines, 1970s–1990s.”

⁸⁸ That is an interesting example of adoption of the Western second-wave feminist discourse, which illustrates a certain permeability of the Soviet discourse of gender politics. That is not the only example: in the article about women in the US the author explains what ‘sexism’ is — “that is how they call discrimination against women in the US” (75-9-18). As Clements shows, Western feminist writing were available in closed stacks in few libraries (Clements, *A History of Women in Russia*, 277.), but those examples open the floor for further research: to what extend those discourses were reflected in the public discourse.

work happens during socialization, but also because of certain representations such as that one can see in *Handbooks for housewives* or in the advertisements, packages and instructions of house supplies that, as rule, depict women (1976, #1: 26).

The politics of Rabotnitsa

I argue that *Rabotnitsa* was not only a venue for information or a passive recipient of the party's directives, but quite an active agent in the field of promoting women's rights at the institutional level.

The first type of their activities were inspections of the places they got complaints about. They sent correspondents in response to letters and complaints, and the goal was not necessarily a big one: it could be working conditions at a certain factory as well as the struggle of a single mother to preserve her place in the dorm. Usually such a spot check brought about a practical solution to the situation, but also, by reporting the issues, it helped promote certain values and generalize one particular case into a structural issue. The conclusion of an article about a single mother who struggled for a place in the dorm is indicative: "The question of what could a woman who decided to give birth to a child without a husband, can rely on, has only one answer. She relies on the morality and humanism of the society she lives in. On us, those who surround her" (1979, #11: 22).

The second type of their activity is direct dialogue with the authorities, high-rank officials, decision-makers: in the form of an interview when the journalist, among other questions, articulates complaints from the readers' letters (the special rubric "Interview with *Rabotnitsa*"), in the form of official appeals to the relevant institutions (special rubrics "The letter was not published, but... The Guilty are punished/ The Ministry replied/etc", "In the footsteps of our speeches", "We get answers..." — in which results of their publications or appeals are presented). An interesting case is the problem with baby food which was essential, as far as one fifth of Soviet women did not have their own breast milk, according to the author, and even more kids need additional nutrition besides their mothers' milk. So, the author

interviews representatives of different Ministries and shows that they are not aware of the situation, focusing on their own narrow zone of responsibility. The article ends with an appeal to the Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Meat and Dairy Industry and Ministry of Food Industry to come together and find a solution (1976, #04: 27).

Actually, organizing round table of representatives of various authorities is one more strategy of *Rabotnitsa*. For example, they organized a round table on big size clothes, people, who are involved into their production and distribution were invited to discuss what should be done in order to improve its quality and availability. Interestingly, the problem with the big size clothing was not only its deficit but also its aesthetics, as a letter in the opening of the article mentioned: “Big size itself is not a decoration for a woman. But the clothes produced by the industry are simply impossible to wear. If a woman is old and fat, it does not mean that anything goes! On the contrary, she should be able to wear beautiful clothes.” (1975, #9: 28) It is important to emphasize here, that although the majority of problems *Rabotnitsa* tried to solve were connected with women’s working or living conditions, they also from time to time addressed such issues as aesthetics and fashion, as the correspondent told the official from the Commission of consumer goods: “Our editorial office gets a lot of letters about the quality of goods. Quality is not enough, people want to have also beautiful, fashionable things” (1975, #4: 22).

Obviously, *Rabotnitsa*’s opportunities for influence and repertoire of their activities were limited, yet, I would argue that in many cases they acted out of interest of their readers, not male-dominated party-establishment, and they were able to shape or influence the politics of the different authorities. Moreover, as far as the editorial board of the magazine provided a lot of space for readers’ letters, which they treated seriously, I might suggest, that they also facilitated ordinary women’s participation in gender politics of the state.

2.4. Conclusion

As my research has shown, the IWY and IYC were very important for the Soviet gender politics. On the one hand, they were used as a source for promotion of Soviet achievements in the field of women's equality in the international arena, as well as inside the country by numerous publications about the comparison between Soviet women and their coevals in different non-socialist countries. As a way to celebrate the IWY and IYC two important All-union reviews were launched, as well as special institutions for improvement of working, living and childrearing conditions.

My analysis has also shown, that there a distinctive difference between the way the SU is represented in articles about the international events (as a dreamland of gender equality) and the way *Rabotnitsa* discussed inner problems of gender politics in the SU (in much more critical manner). The criticism of *Rabotnitsa* editorial board, as I showed, was also put into action, therefore the magazine could be seen as an active agent in shaping Soviet gender politics.

Obviously, further research is needed with consideration of *Rabotnitsa*'s archive of letters and inner documents, maybe interviews with former editors, as well as broader context of gender politics during Brezhnev time, which is not studied enough. But even my short observation is enough to change perspective on *Rabotnitsa* as 'engineer' of the Soviet woman toward its role as a 'socialist state feminist'⁸⁹ platform. To name them feminist does not mean to deny limits of their agency, I will address to *Rabotnitsa*'s limitation in the next chapter and in the conclusion.

⁸⁹ Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State - A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964*. University of California Press, 2016: 7-8

Chapter 3. Samizdat Almanac *Zhenschina i Rossia* (*Woman and Russia*) (1979): The First Soviet Feminists?

3.1. Introduction

The dissident women's group in the USSR emerged in 1979 with the publication of the almanac *Zhenschina i Rossia* (*Woman and Russia*, hereinafter — *W&R*). Its founders were expelled from the country less than a year after the publication of their first magazine. In the West they were praised as the first Soviet feminists.⁹⁰ This interpretation still determines scholarship about the group and defines it as 'movement', as I have shown in the literature review. However, as I have shown in Chapter 1, they were definitely not the only feminist agent in the Soviet Union, and even hardly could be called the only feminist publication in the USSR. Even a brief analysis of *Rabotnitsa* magazine's activities allow us to regard *Rabotnitsa* as a socialist state feminist platform, which worked in the interest of the Soviet women.

In this chapter, I want to assess critically the construction of the narrative about the *W&R* as the first Soviet feminists. There are very few articles dedicated to the group itself, though it is difficult to find even a single book describing the late Soviet gender order where they are not mentioned as a proof of failures in the Soviet gender project. Therefore, I argue that the label 'feminist' in scholarship has its own broader political implications and reinforces the Cold War anti-communist ideology in the contemporary field of the Soviet historiography, as well as ignorance toward the activities of communist/party-affiliated women in the Soviet Union.

My starting point is the reaction to the first issue of *W&R* from a reader from Leningrad that was published in a later edition of the almanac. The letter starts with an acknowledgment of the fact that the almanac was not the only venue for discussions about women's problems: "It would be wrong to say that the official press has passed over women's problems in silence. Problems of one sort or another relating to women are constantly being discussed: for example, combining women's roles at home and at work; problems of marriage; difficulties with family

⁹⁰ Holt, "The First Soviet Feminists."

and raising children.”⁹¹ But as the author writes further, the novelty of the almanac was in its intonation, in its uncensored freedom of expression. Therefore, I want to compare the agenda and language of *W&R* with *Rabotnitsa* magazine and find out what exactly the novelty of the group consists in.

My research question is: What was the agenda of *W&R* and what does the label ‘feminist’ imply beside their ideas?

In this chapter, I want to find out why the group was considered to be dangerous in the USSR, what implications the dominant interpretive framework as ‘the first Soviet feminist’ presupposes and what was their agenda. My chapter will consist of two parts. In the first part, I will provide an overview of the history of the group with particular emphasis on the international context. In the second part, I will provide a content-analysis of the first almanac and compare the findings with *Rabotnitsa*’s agenda, described in the previous chapter. In the conclusion I will summarize my findings. My sources are scholarly publications, the first issue of the almanac *W&R*, the *USSR News Brief*, the human rights bulletin by Kronid Lyubarsky in Munich from 1978 till 1991, and testimonies of the participants (both published memoirs and unpublished interviews).

3.2. A Chronicle of the *W&R*

The ‘movement’ began with the publication of the samizdat almanac (uncensored self-published magazine) *W&R* in autumn 1979. It was initiated by Tat’yana Mamonova and supported by three other women who became its editors: Tat’yana Goricheva, Yulia Voznesenskaya⁹² and Natalia Malakhovskaya — all of them participated in the dissident movement before the publication of their own almanac, which will be crucial for the repression of the group. Taty’ana Mamonova is an artist and poet, her idea to launch a feminist magazine

⁹¹ Tatyana Mamonova et al., *Women and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union* (Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell, 1984), 223.

⁹² According to another version, Voznesenskaya did not participate in the publication of the first almanac. See Хроника from the email correspondence.

was the result of the “blatant sexist tendencies” among men in unofficial art circles that she was facing.⁹³ Tat’yana Goricheva was a dissident religious philosopher and was one of the editors of the influential dissident religious almanac *37*.⁹⁴ Yulia Voznesenskaya was an orthodox poet; a few months before the publication of the almanac, in June 1979, she was released from a Siberian labour camp where she had been sent on a charge of ‘anti-Soviet propaganda’. Her experience of imprisonment shaped her views on the gender issue in the USSR. Natalia Malakhovskaya was an uncensored writer and she participated in the production of the almanac *37*.⁹⁵

They secretly printed ten copies of the almanac *W&R*, and spread them in September 25, 1979 among the dissident circles and abroad, during an attempt to send it to Switzerland with one American tourist, the almanac was found by KGB.⁹⁶ In December, 1979, according to the *USSR News Brief*, KGB threatened Mamonova, Voznesenskaya and Sofia Sokolova, one of the authors of the *W&R*, demanding to stop publishing the almanac.⁹⁷ In December, 1979 Mamonova wrote a letter to the main prosecutor of Leningrad with a request to stop the harassment from KGB and claim that she was going to continue her feminist activity because she considered it to be a progressive movement and an essential part of the worldwide democratic movement, the letter was published in the Russian-language émigré newspaper *Russkaya Mysl’* (Russian thought) based in Paris in January 10, 1979.⁹⁸

At the end of December, 1979 the copy of the almanac *W&R* reached Paris, it was translated into French and published in the magazine *Des femmes en mouvements* (Women in

⁹³ Mamonova et al., *Women and Russia*, 272.

⁹⁴ Yulia Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia],” *Posev*, no. 4 (1981), <http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/voznescenskaya/1145211846.html>.

⁹⁵ Rochelle Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory,” in *Women’s Activism and “Second Wave” Feminism: Transnational Histories*. (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 105–6.

⁹⁶ According to document “Chronicle of 1980”, created by Mamonova’s husband after the exile, from Tat’yana Mamonova’s personal archive, which she sent me by email.

⁹⁷ *USSR News Brief. Archive*. Accessed May 16, 2017 <https://kronid.wordpress.com/2014/06/22/1982-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4/>

⁹⁸ *Znehschina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]* (Éditions des femmes), 139–41.

movements, FM) of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (Women's Liberation Movement, MLF).⁹⁹ The MLF also send copies of the almanac *W&R* to various publishing houses in Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, etc. in order to spread the information about “existence of the women’s movement in the USSR”.¹⁰⁰ After the publication of the French translation of the almanac, in 1980 two editors of the *FM* visited Leningrad and met with the editors of the *W&R*, and suggested that they sign a contract for re-printing the original Russian version of the almanac *W&R* by "Éditions des femmes" (Women's Editions),¹⁰¹ publishing house of the MLF, which was accepted with a huge enthusiasm.¹⁰² Also Mamonova and her husband, according to their testimonies, sent almanacs to Austria, the UK and the US. I want to emphasize this international dimension of the group's activity and the fact that Mamonova initially planned to publish almanac abroad with the support of European and American feminists, because in the USSR "the approach toward feminism is very ignorant [nevezhestvennyi]”,¹⁰³ but Gorycheva convinced her to start with the USSR. Mamonova was inspired by the contemporary American authors, such as Robin Morgan, Susan Brownmiller and Kate Millett, whom she was able to reach due to her connections in dissident and diplomatic communities.¹⁰⁴ And, in general, we can see that the group’s ideology was derived from the notion that there was one version of feminism — and it is present only in the Western countries. These ideas can be found in their interviews, for example, in their famous interview with Robin Morgan, Mamonova told: “I

⁹⁹ The French feminist movement, which grew out of the student movement of the 1960s. They adopted a leftist political agenda, but broadened it by including gender oppression. The magazine *Des femmes en mouvements* was initiated by the group «Psychoanalysis and Politics» of the MLF, founded by Antoinette Fouque, a psychoanalyst, who is considered to be an essentialist feminist. The French feminist movement, which grew out of student movement of the 1960s. They occupied leftist political agenda, but broaden it, including gender oppression. Details about MLF in Domonique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, “Feminism in the 1970s,” in *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 662–65.

¹⁰⁰ Afterword of the editors of the French publication of the almanac. *Znehschina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 143.

¹⁰¹ This is the copy I work with in Russian. But I will quote mostly (unless linguistic comments are needed) from the first publication of the Almanac in English: *Woman and Russia*.

¹⁰² Chronicle from email correspondence., 12-14

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory,” 104.

think feminism may start with intellectuals but then it turns to women of all classes. That's why I wanted *samizdat* to be a forum for all kinds of thought, even a Party woman may have positive statements on feminism."¹⁰⁵ The almanac was presented as the only platform of expression of women's concerns and discussions, however such a representation is highly problematic as far as in the previous chapter I have shown that work with readers' letters was one of the main tasks of *Rabotnitsa* magazine. Such agenda of the *W&R* editors was very welcomed in the West as far as it reinforced the existing myth that there were no women's groups in the USSR, who had any agency, and women's organisation were simply the Party's puppets due to their Marxist rhetoric and focus on class issues as alongside with those of gender.

The *W&R*'s idea about absence of feminism in the SU was not just a product of Western propaganda, but could be regarded as a consequence of the fact that since the beginning of the 20th century liberal feminism and Marxist feminism were divided upon the class struggle question, and in the public discourse in the USSR 'feminism' meant a bourgeois women's movement for their rights, but, I believe, it should not prevent us from the retrospective usage of the term 'feminism' toward women's groups in the SU. Moreover, as I will show in the Conclusion analytical distinction between politics of redistribution and recognition might be very useful for clarifying the distinctions between analysed feminist groups.

Meanwhile, despite the international attention, the secret police continued harassing the activists. The so-called 'anti-mother's terror' started, *Voznesenskaya*'s son was expelled from college due to KGB's order and was notified about about the draft which supposedly would have led him to the war in Afghanistan, therefore in February, 1980, *Voznesenskaya* submitted documents for emigration. *Tat'yana Mamonova* and her husband, *Gennady Shikaryov*, were under threat of criminal proceedings for not having an official job, according to the decree issued by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR on May 4, 1961 entitled "On Strengthening the

¹⁰⁵ Morgan, "The First Feminist Exiles from the USSR," 107.

Struggle with Persons Avoiding Socially Useful Work and Leading an Anti-Social, Parasitic Way of Life”, which was often used for repressions against dissidents. They also applied for emigration in February, 1980.¹⁰⁶

However, according to the *USSR News Brief*, the searches sometimes were also connected with other dissidents. For example, on February 29, 1980 police searched Voznesenskaya’s apartment, because of her connection with dissident Vladimir Poresh, during the search Tat’yana Goricheva came to Voznesenskaya, the police checked Goricheva’s bag and found a French copy of *W&R*, whereas in Voznesenskaya’s apartment the police also found camera-ready copy of the almanac *Maria*.¹⁰⁷ The same day Sokolova’s flat was searched,¹⁰⁸ according to testimonies of Mamonova’s husband, Sokolova was accidentally considered to be the editor-in-chief of *W&R* abroad and presented herself in such a manner in the dissident circles. Soon after that, Sokolova left the group because she “too often ‘lost information’ (even at KGB)”.¹⁰⁹

After the publication of the first almanac, the initial team of editors split into two groups because of their deep disagreements about the strategy of women’s emancipation. The first one, which consisted of Tat’yana Mamonova, supported by her husband and Natalya Maltseva, tried to develop a Western-type feminism, and so they launched a new samizdat magazine *Rossianka* that should have been published abroad.¹¹⁰ The second group was formed around the independent women’s religious club ‘Maria’, initiated by Yulia Voznesenskaya and supported by Tat’yana Goricheva, Natalya Malakhovskaya and many others. I will overview the agenda and activities of ‘Maria’ group in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁶ *USSR News Brief. Archive*. Accessed May 16, 2017 <https://kronid.wordpress.com/2014/06/22/1982-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4/>

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ “Chronicle-1980”

¹¹⁰ It is difficult today to find the publication. But, according to Mamonova, the materials were published in first issue of ‘Maria’ almanac (“Chronicle of 1980”), though neither Mamonova’s, nor Malysheva’s traces are not there. According to other information, the collected materials were published by Mamonova abroad in the book *Women and Russia. Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union* (1984).

On July, 20, 1980 Mamonova and her husband left the USSR. The almanac *W&R* was translated into more than ten languages, Tat'yana Mamonova toured all over the world, she also published several more versions of the almanac *W&R* abroad and launched a new almanac — *Woman and Earth*. And if during the first years all the women got enormous media coverage and invitations to different events, later Mamonova faced a lack of support from the community abroad, which she expected to be more interested in helping Soviet women after all the attention they got. As she writes in her memoirs about her attempts to launch a feminist publishing house for Soviet women: “I have received the non-profit status for such a press from the Women’s Center in Cambridge, Massachussets, but despite the enthusiasm displayed by some American feminists I have failed to receive enough support for such a press to be realized. My requests for aid from many foundations were never answered. It was conveyed to me via a third party that the foundations only help Americans. Russian feminists, of course, are not Americans! As for me — in Austria they tell me I’m not Austrian, in France not French, and in America not American.”¹¹¹ Interestingly, in her memoirs Mamonova reveals the discourse of internationalism, so common in the USSR, and so unpopular in the Western democratic nation-states. Further she develops her concerns about that national dimension of feminism in the West: “Many American newspapers have published interviews with me, and although they know my name very well, they for some reason always run headlines that say:” *Émigré Talks About Feminism in the Soviet Union*”. I have never felt like, or considered myself, an *émigré*. I see myself as *a citizen of the world*, but this concept does not penetrate the heads of journalists.”¹¹² Her last note shows a painful effect of the media’s interest in her mainly as a source of critique of the Soviet Union during the Cold War confrontation. Gradually, the group and its activists became forgotten in the US, as well as in Europe. As Rochelle Ruthchild, the research associate in Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University,

¹¹¹ Mamonova and Maxwell, *Russian Women’s Studies*, 166.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 166-7

wrote in her recent article: «On the cover of *Ms. Magazine* in 1980 and touring the country with Ms. Founder and editor Robin Morgan, they [dissident feminists— A.T.] dropped from the spotlight several years later. The thirtieth anniversary of the feminists’ exile was not considered worth noting in the pages of *Ms.*”¹¹³

3.3. The *W&R* as the only feminist platform: comparison with the *Rabotnitsa* magazine

The Almanac included an introduction, 6 articles and 5 fiction stories. The authors raised problems such as the poor quality of healthcare (*Human birth* by R. Batalova) and social services (“*Golden Childhood*” by V. Pazukhin) in the SU, symbolic oppression of women (*Rejoice, redemption from the tears of Eve* by T. Goricheva), the double burden (*The matriarchal family* by N. Malakhovskaya) and single motherhood (*The other side of the medal* by V. Golubeva), women’s life in prisons (*Letter from Novosibirsk* by J. Voznesenskaya). The very last page of the almanac contains the *Appeal to sisters*, in which the editors were calling upon women all over the country to send them articles and fiction. It is important to emphasize, as it is obvious from the *W&R*’s history and the *Introduction*, where the authors praised both Lenin and Jesus, the almanac united women from different worldviews and because of numerous contradictions their agenda eventually reduced to those related to ‘essential’ women’s roles as mothers and wives. Neither issues of sexuality, nor rape, not even domestic violence were discussed on the pages of the almanac. In this regard the content of the almanac was pretty similar to the problems we can see on the pages of *Rabotnitsa*, as well as the call to women to send letters to the editorial board was the common practice of *Rabotnitsa*. But the difference hides in details.

¹¹³ Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory,” 115.

Firstly, as the reader indicated — the intonation and language make a huge difference. In general *W&R*'s tone is rather pessimistic and sometimes even hopeless, like at the end of the *Introduction*: “The conservatism of this mass of alcoholics, degenerated to the utmost, the unheeding malevolence towards women of this stunted one-celled organism, this gigantic, spineless amoeba — that is the cruel brake to social progress!”¹¹⁴ The language of the almanac, rich in emotional epithets and metaphors, very personal, provokes readers' response and represents a striking contrast with the official language. The examples from articles about single mothers from *W&R* and *Rabotnitsa* are telling. If *Rabotnitsa*'s author described the situation of a single mother who tried to get a place in a dorm from the position of an outsider and concluded with the relative enthusiasm: “The question of what could a woman who decided to give birth to a child without a husband, can rely on, has only one answer. She relies on the morality and humanism of the society she lives in. On us, those who surround her.”¹¹⁵ The author of *W&R* dipped the reader into the ocean of single mother's despair in her struggle to survive during the first years with very low state support: “It's only by making superhuman efforts that they can keep themselves and their children, the future members of our society, alive — a society which doesn't bother to consider the real meaning and consequences of its rhetorical slogans about ‘women's emancipation’.”¹¹⁶ Or, another example, the problems with the childrearing infrastructure were represented in *Rabotnitsa* mostly in a report-style. Vavilova, the main editor of the magazine, concluded about the results of IYC: “There is a rule in our collective — to sum up achievements, but not forget about failures. <...>Not all republics fulfilled the task of building pre-school institutions. The letters of workers received by the commission contained proposals for improving health care in kindergartens and schools. Fair claims were made about the quality of goods for children.”¹¹⁷ In *W&R*, the problems of the childrearing infrastructure

¹¹⁴ *Zneshchina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Rabotnitsa* 1979,#11: 22

¹¹⁶ *Zneshchina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 53.

¹¹⁷ *Rabotnitsa*, 1980#2: 9

looked totally different: "...she naturally relies on the state, on nurseries. But this poses a new problem: how to get a place. To get a child into a nursery the child has to be on the waiting-list before it's even born. There's only one other solution, and that's to give up your job and go to work at a nursery yourself, for that way they'll take the child too."¹¹⁸

This linguistic difference was determined by the position of the author: usually an outside observer in *Rabotnitsa*, writing in a dry, sometimes bureaucratic manner, and a participant, sharing her personal experience and emotions in *W&R*. The *W&R* in this regard definitely corresponded much more with the idea of feminist writing than *Rabotnitsa*'s report-style. However, I want to underline that the both publications raised similar issues.

The second important distinction produced by the two different languages was the discursive construction of women's subjectivity. In *Rabotnitsa*, women's subjectivity is represented, as a rule, through career, whereas their inner world and psychology were barely presented on the pages devoted to psychological counselling and sometimes in an anecdotic way as a part of stories about women's everyday lives. For example, the story about Nina Vasilievna, the leading technologist of the largest building combine in Volgograd, which describes one of her ordinary working day full of different tasks and duties with a slight taste of overworking, ends with a dialogue between the reporter and Nina:

- How would you describe your occupation as a leading technologist?
- Hell.
- Don't you want to go to haven?
- No, I like my hell. A Lot.¹¹⁹

At the beginning of the article the reader is introduced to the fact that Nina is a mother and before she has been convinced to accept this job offer she dreamed about less intense and responsible work to be able to be a good mother. The reader could only guess what an inner

¹¹⁸ *Znehschina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 54.

¹¹⁹ *Rabotnitsa*, 1975, #4: 9-10

conflict is left behind this inspirational report. Whereas on the pages of *W&R*, the reader will find outspoken representations of women's inner world, which make the image of women's subjectivity much more complex. I will provide the similar dilemma of the working mother from *W&R*: "When she has a baby, a woman has to quit her self care as a bad job. <...>And bit by bit, the life of the woman is exchanged for the life of the child. The family is built on the bones of women, on their blood and tears."¹²⁰ Bodily metaphors are very common in *W&R*, they turned psychological experiences into visible facts, thus, constructing a deeper and more problematic subjectivity than it was possible in the censored Soviet press.¹²¹ Moreover, these metaphors are based on bodily parts, and in the almanac women are represented as part-objects, relics of the normal subject. For example, in the introduction *Those good old patriarchal principles*, the editors argue that in the SU women were the most vulnerable group, in particular because of the ruining of the very core of women's subjectivity: "The cruel pressure on women of this phallogocentric 'culture' crushes any sort of the female core in women, pushing them to hate other women."¹²² Not accidentally, religious spiritual searches in Gorycheva's interpretation found their place on the pages of the almanac. They could be regarded as one of the most accessible way of coping with the existing inner problems.

The third distinctive feature of the *W&R* language is obvious in the quote from the Introduction above — they used the vocabulary of Western feminism: patriarchy, phallogocentrism, phallogocracy, multi-vaginal tyranny, etc. Important to notice that the editors did not explain any of those terms, therefore, they quite straightforwardly marked their audience as a Western one or Western-orientated. Being aware of the contemporary Western feminist theory

¹²⁰ *Znehschina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 40.

¹²¹ As Russian philologist, Ilya Kukulin, argues one of the key distinctions between censored and uncensored literature laid in the concept of subject, because tradition of socialist realism writing did not leave a space for complicated subjectivity, formed within modernist literature canon. See Ilya Kukulin, "K Voprosy Ob Exponirovanii Nashego Famil'nogo Serebra [To the Question of Exhibiting Our Family Silver]," *New Literature Review* 122, no. 4 (2013), <http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/3799>.

¹²² *Znehschina I Rossia [Woman and Russia]*, 22.

they build a connection to it with the vocabulary which did not circulate in the Soviet official discourse. In *Rabotnitsa* I have found only few examples of such an interest. For instance, in the article about women in the US the author explains what ‘sexism’ is — “that is how they call discrimination against women in the US.”¹²³

Despite the very different language of the *W&R* it would be wrong to suggest that it was totally independent from the official one, as well as the group itself was not possible without the opposition to the USSR, and, as I have shown above, was not interesting when the heat of conflict decreased. Following the argument of Alexei Yurchak’s, Associate Professor of the Department of Anthropology at Berkeley, that the purity of dissidents’ language is no more than a political construct,¹²⁴ I want to underline that the *W&R*’s discourse was informed by the official one. For example, in the Introduction they referred to Lenin’s speeches, in which he never left out the woman question, to the Soviet Minister of Culture Furtseva and the first female cosmonaut Tereshkova. As Mamonova recalls, she was called komsomolka (member of The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League), which had obvious negative connotations in the dissident circles, for her explicit sympathy toward the socialist emancipatory project.

Finally, representation of the Western countries made a huge difference. In *Rabotnitsa* the USSR on the international arena was represented as a pioneer, even in comparison with developed Western countries. *W&R* advocated a very different position from the very first lines of the *Introduction*: “The position of women in society is, currently, a key issue. If in Europe this question is close to being resolved — particularly in France, where four women are in the cabinet and at present a good many women have entered the European parliament — nevertheless, for us this question remains extremely vital.”¹²⁵ Although *W&R* occupied an extreme position — that the situation in the West is almost solved — yet, they pointed out

¹²³ *Rabotnitsa*, 1975, #9, p. 18

¹²⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More*, 6.

¹²⁵ *Woman and Russia*, 21.

important problem of women's political underrepresentation, which was unfortunately almost totally ignored by *Rabotnitsa*, as well as the Party. However, the comparison with the West is very problematic, as Donna Harsh, professor of History at Carnegie Mellon University, states in her chapter on women in different communist regimes for the Oxford Handbook: "Neither individual women nor women as a group attained direct political power in any communist state. Initially, the number of women elected to national legislatures looked impressive, at least relative to women's low representation in the West."¹²⁶

3.4. Conclusion

As I have shown in the overview of the *W&R*'s history, the group was intentionally addressed in its activity regarding Western countries and women's organisations. In their opinion, the only and proper version of feminism existed there and the Soviet people did not know about it. Such an approach constructed the myth about the first and the only Soviet feminist publication, if we add 'Western' to that definition it might be almost true. Although their writings were welcomed in the US and Europe, but soon after the confrontation between the two super-powers became less intense the interest from the Western media greatly decreased — this fact makes me question what the reason for such a huge attention to the group was: their ideas or their critique of the SU.

In my analysis of the content of the almanac, I have shown that due to the appeal to personal experience, dealing with purely women's issues, a certain vocabulary they adopted and the complementary approach toward the West in comparison with the SU that they practiced, *W&R* almost perfectly matched the framework of Western second-wave feminism. However, their topics corresponded with the ones raised on the pages of *Rabotnitsa*.

¹²⁶ Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 491.

Chapter 4. Soviet Dissident Women's Group 'Maria' (1980-1982): Re-writing the History of the Feminism in the late USSR

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I want to reinterpret the existing narrative in scholarship, which I observed in my literature review, about the dissident women's 'movement' as the 'first Soviet feminists' by bringing into the spotlight the history and ideas of the important part of a 'movement' — the 'Maria' group.

The 'Maria' group was formed after the split of the initial editorial board in 1979, soon after the publication of the almanac *Zhenschina i Rossiya* (Woman and Russia, further—*W&R*), because of crucial disagreement about the emancipatory project needed for the Soviet women. The 'Maria' group grew out of the religious part of the dissident circles and consistently advocated importance of the Russian Orthodox Church for women's empowerment in the SU.¹²⁷ It was active from official foundation in 1980 till 1982, despite the repressions and exiles of its members.

The importance of the special attention toward the group is determined by two reasons: academic and political; however, these are interconnected. Firstly, the historiography of the Soviet dissident women's 'movement' of 1979-1982, as I showed in the literature review, is quite poor and mainly focused on the first stage of its development, the publication of the first almanac *W&R*.¹²⁸ The scholars usually do not pay much attention to ideas expressed in the almanac *Maria* (and the philosophical club of the same name) which was established after the split of the initial editorial board in 1980. And if they do, they usually reduce their analysis to the fact that 'Maria' group advocated essentialist ideas about femininity grounded in the

¹²⁷ Vassilieva, *First Feminist Groups in Leningrad(1979-1982)*, 55.

¹²⁸ However, example of more attentive approach toward the 'movement' in the recent publication by Rochelle Ruthchild shows how consideration of 'Maria' group activity produces an important change in the narrative about the group, in particular. It shows that their activity played a decisive role in the process of exile. See Ruthchild, "Feminist Dissidents in the 'Motherland of Women's Liberation': Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory," 101–2.

Russian religious philosophy of the pre-revolutionary era, i.e. prevailing of emotional rather than intellectual strength in women and their possibilities of self-sacrifice in the name of other.

The authors of the *Introduction* to one of the first publications of *W&R* in English honestly express their disagreement with the authors from the future 'Maria' group: "Some of the contents we found difficult to appreciate; we felt distant from the religious ideas expressed by one or two of the women and we shuddered at the conservative ideas in Tat'yana Goricheva's article."¹²⁹ Interestingly, even this acknowledgment does not lead to a questioning of the label 'feminist' attached to the movement, neither in the media, nor in scholarship, which I aim to critically assess. I would argue that the importance of the category 'feminist' was determined by the approach, developed during the Cold War, which considers that the true women's agency could only be expressed in autonomous organisations not affiliated with any parties, usually meaning Communist ones.

However, I would argue that this bound between autonomy of the movement and 'feminist' label, when the second one might be regarded as almost a synonym of the first one, is very problematic in case of the 'Maria' group. Especially considering the fact that the majority of women in 'Maria' group found "feminism" frivolous and irrelevant for solving Soviet women's problems.¹³⁰ I would suggest that their approach was partially affected by the division between the communist emancipatory project and the bourgeois feminist ideas back then in the beginning of 20th century, which determined the hegemonic meaning of the word 'feminism' in the Soviet Union as a frivolous political program of middle-class women for votes.¹³¹ Considering that they did not identify themselves as 'feminists' and advocated relatively conservative views on women's roles, I think it is very important to rethink the

¹²⁹ *Woman and Russia*, 2.

¹³⁰ Ruthchild, "Feminist Dissidents in the 'Motherland of Women's Liberation': Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory," 106–7.

¹³¹ However, being in the West they quite often addressed to international feminist community. However, in the exile they also learnt that many of the feminists are leaning toward leftist political agenda, which the 'Maria' club did not accept at all, because they equated it to the Soviet project. See more: *Maria* #1, pp. 22- 23.

meaning of ‘feminist’ label attached to them and their role in history of women’s movements in the USSR.

Secondly, political reasons. As Francesca Scrinzi¹³² shows, contemporary scholarship on rightist movements is characterized by a lack of research on women’s involvement, and I believe that in the case of the *Maria* almanac, we have a great opportunity to get insights into how the conservative gender agenda was formed within (and as a reaction to) the Soviet gender order. Important to mention here is that last book of Tat’yana Gorycheva, religious philosopher and one of the founder of the club, was published in 2016 with an introduction by Alexander Dugin, a prominent Russian conservative philosopher who is considered to be the key ideologist of the contemporary Russian government.¹³³

However, for me as a person coming from the context and involved in the contemporary feminist movement in Russia, it is important not only to understand and critically assess their agenda, but also to avoid being dismissive of their ability to maintain their activity despite repressions from the State, and, maybe even find some directions for building a continuity between different stages of oppositional women’s activity. Therefore, I want to embrace the method of reparative critical reading suggested by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick in her essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”.¹³⁴ The author challenges the dominant way of theorizing in queer and critical theory, based on the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Ricoeur). The main representatives of that type of theorizing are Marx, Nietzsche, Freud. Their goal is to unmask the truth, which is hidden under the surface of society or personality, because of the shared assumption that the exposure of the truth is performative itself and will entail

¹³² Francesca Scrinzi, “A Relational Approach to the Study of Gender in Radical Right Populism,” in *Generee Partecipazione Politica (Gender and Political Participation)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), 82–94.

¹³³ “Russian Anti-Liberals Love Donald Trump but It May Not Be Entirely Mutual,” *The Economist*, accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2016/11/america-russia-and-new-right>.

¹³⁴ Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–53.

consequences. She calls such a position ‘paranoid’. Despite the fact that Sedgwick does not reject it, she argues that it is not the only way to produce valuable knowledge about the world. Thus, she suggests a strategy of ‘reparative reading’ as an alternative approach to the objects of research. She embraces Klein’s psychoanalytic concepts ‘schizoid/paranoid’ and ‘depressive positions’ of infants to explain the difference in subject-object relationship in those two approaches. The first one, paranoid, is built upon the total alertness about the threat that is everywhere in the situation when both the self and the other are represented as ‘part-objects’ and the boundaries between the recipient and the surrounding world are blurred. The second one, depressive (or reparative in Sedgwick’s terms), is defined by gathering “the murderous part-objects into something like a whole”, which becomes a bit more comprehensible and not necessarily threatening to the subject. I want to go beyond the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ as far as in this case it would presuppose unmasking the conservative faces of those called the ‘first Soviet feminists’, however, a critical discourse analysis will constitute an important part of my work. I aim to find something beyond their ‘essentialist’ ideas through a close reading of the almanacs and tracing their activity.

Another important methodological direction for me is ‘researching around’, suggested by Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry.¹³⁵ Because there are no documents available about the case of the ‘Maria’ group in the State archive, I will look for information in other sources (interviews, almanacs) and consider broader discourses in which the ideas of the group were formed.

My research question regarding ‘Maria’ group is: What were the key ideas of the ‘Maria’ club and how can we assess their emancipatory project?

The chapter will consist of three parts. In the first part I will provide an overview of the history of the ‘Maria’ club. In the second part I will analyze their key ideas as expressed in

¹³⁵ Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, “Introduction,” in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2010), i–xiii.

three almanacs (typed in Leningrad in 1980-1981, republished in Frankfurt am Main in 1981-1982). Considering the fact that gender equality was one of the important battlefields during the ‘Cold War’, and the ‘Maria’ club started its activity at the time of the intense international debates on women’s rights, i.e. after the International Women’s Year of the United Nations (1975) and during the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), I would argue that concept “woman” was highly invested category at the moment of the foundation of the club. Therefore, I want to focus on the meaning of the concept, its semantics and pragmatic. In the conclusion I will summarize my findings. My sources are scholarly publications, three issues of *Maria*¹³⁶ (1981-1982) and testimonies of the participants (both published and unpublished interviews).

4.2. A Chronicle of the ‘Maria’ club

The independent Russian religious women’s club ‘Maria’ emerged as a result of an ideological split within the editorial board of the first dissident women’s almanac *W&R*. The ‘Maria’ club was initiated by Yulia Voznesenskaya, a former author of *W&R* and a dissident poet who was released from a labor camp in June 1979 where she had been sent in 1977 on a charge of ‘anti-Soviet propaganda’. The idea was supported by other women from dissident circles: as Voznesenskaya recalls, before launching the club they conducted a poll among women in the dissident circle on the format: “We made questionnaires for women, copied and spread them, the questions were like: "How would you like to see an independent women's club? What forms of work can you offer?" Yulia Voznesenskaya conducted the main work on the preparation of the club together with Tat’yana Goricheva and Sofia Sokolova. After a month of preparation, the club announced itself formed on March 1, 1980 in Leningrad.¹³⁷ The group named itself after Virgin Mary — Maria.

¹³⁶ Published in Frankfurt am Main, which include both parts of the almanacs ‘Maria’, originally published in Leningrad, and some additional articles, written in the emigration.

¹³⁷ Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia].”

Their first public activity was the publication of a letter against the war in Afghanistan,¹³⁸ “Appeal to Mothers”, and a discussion on Marxism. A camera-ready copy of the first almanac was expected to be published. But on March 1, 1980, the day of official opening of the club, the secret police searched the activists’ flats and the only copy of the almanac was seized; the content of it was recollected and the first almanac was published in May 1980,¹³⁹ meanwhile the activists also published letters against the war¹⁴⁰ and were involved in other dissident activities. In May, Yulia Voznesenskaya was expelled from the country; in July 1980, the secret police suggested to Natalia Malakhovskaya (dissident poet and editor of *W&R*, a participant of ‘Maria’ club) to choose between imprisonment and exile, Malakhovskaya choose the second option, but said that she would not leave the country without Tat’yana Goricheva, — that is how Goricheva and Malakhovskaya left the USSR,¹⁴¹ Tat’yana Mamonova¹⁴² (the editor of *W&R*) was expelled as well in July 1980.¹⁴³

However, the exile of the club founders did not lead to the collapse of the club, other women from dissident circles Tat’yana Belyaeva, Xenia Rotmanova, Elena Shanygina, Irina Zhosan, Alla Saroban, Luidmila Dmitrieva, Anna Malonga and Galina Grigorieva continued its activities.¹⁴⁴ In *Maria #3* we can find a letter from Tat’yana Belyaeva about their first meeting after the exile of the former team: “Of course, your departure has put us in a difficult situation. What are we going to do next? Many of us were neither at any gathering, nor at any meeting of the club, and therefore any continuity within us — well, it was not possible. And when we met for the first time, it turned out that we were concerned with what was probably worrying you, when you met for the first time: what is happening in our society, what is a

¹³⁸ The Soviet troops were sent to Afghanistan on December 24, 1979.

¹³⁹ Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia].”

¹⁴⁰ Holt, “The First Soviet Feminists,” 251.

¹⁴¹ Natalia Malakhovskaya, “Kak Nachinalos’ Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Konce 70h [How the Women’s Movement Started in Late 70s],” *FemInf*, no. 1–2 (1993 1992), <http://www.owl.ru/win/books/feminf/index.htm>.

¹⁴² Unfortunately, no documents related to the case of ‘Maria’ almanac are available now. It is a direction for further research on the theme.

¹⁴³ Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia].”

¹⁴⁴ Belyaeva, Tat’yana in *Maria #3* (1982), p. 37

woman? More than 10 women attended our first meeting: they were musicians, artists, sociologists, philosophers and stage directors.”¹⁴⁵ One could draw two contradictory conclusions from that testimony: on the one hand, that the group was quite small, on the other, the fact that the club was supported mainly by those who had never attended the previous meetings clearly shows that the circulation of the almanac was relatively broad and its ideas were appealing to women in dissident circles. It is also important to underscore the professional identity of the participants, as I will show later it played a crucial role in their conceptualization of ‘woman’. Also, important to mention here that many of participants of the ‘Maria’ group were married and had children, and as all Soviet citizens, they had to work, so many of issues they raised about the double burden, healthcare and childrearing system grew out of their personal experience.¹⁴⁶

Maria’s second editorial team mostly left the USSR at the end of 1981, after the publication of four issues of the almanac. Leading the activities of the club passed on to Galina Grigorieva and Natalia Lazareva. They published the last, sixth¹⁴⁷ issue of the almanac, after which on March 13, 1982 Lazareva was imprisoned for ‘anti-soviet propaganda’ and illegal transition of materials abroad for four years.¹⁴⁸ The activity of the club in Leningrad stopped. As *USSR News Brief* reported on July 17, 1982 Lazareva publicly acknowledged her guilt and

¹⁴⁵ Belyaeva, Tat'yana in *Maria* #3 (1982), p. 34

¹⁴⁶ See more: Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory.”

¹⁴⁷ However, in accordance to other source the third one was published in Moscow. See: Malakhovskaya, Natalia in *Maria* #3 (1982), p. 3

Also short mentioning of Moscow branch (calling for attention to searches in flats of the activists) could be found in the club’s statement against the imprisonment of Natalia Lazareva in *Maria* #3 (1982) p. 97.

¹⁴⁸ It was already her second sentence. Her first criminal case happened as a result of searches in her flat, which was caused by her connection with another dissident, Valery Kalyagin. The secret police found her draft of the letter against the war in Afghanistan and accused her of ‘anti-soviet propaganda’. As she recalls it: “In December, when the troops entered Afghanistan, I wrote an appeal to the women of the world, that this is disgrace, etc. When I read it, I realized that I wrote it very badly. I crumpled the paper and put it, for some reason, into a folder. Then I threw this folder under the bed (I’m not a very careful person) and forgot about it. The irony of fate is that during the search it was found. This was my first term. For this piece of paper, which no one except me had read. And the girls [‘Maria’ group] wrote their appeal, it had nothing to do with my paper. They recorded it on a tape recorder. They sent it to Paris, and there it all resonated”. From Natalia Lazareva, “Po Etomu Delu Sela Ya Odna [Only I Was Imprisoned],” *Pchela*, no. 12 (1998), http://www.pchela.ru/podshiv/12/punished_alone.htm.

testified against other members of the ‘Maria’ group and dissidents. On September 30, 1982 *USSR News Brief* reported that the state film studio in Leningrad shot a documentary about the group, in which Galina Grigorieva publicly condemn her previous activity in the group.¹⁴⁹

However, from the time of the emigration of the first editors, the activity of the club dispersed between three more locations: Paris, where Goricheva settled, Frankfurt am Main, where Voznesenskaya immigrated to,¹⁵⁰ and Austria, where Malakhovskaya went.¹⁵¹ They maintained correspondence, and the publication of the almanac was also facilitated by their communication: the almanacs were typed in Leningrad, then sent to Frankfurt where they were printed, and then sent back, even after the group in Leningrad ceased its documented activity.¹⁵² Also the club was active in developing international connections: with Polish feminists,¹⁵³ with Mouvement de libération des femmes (Women's Liberation Movement, MLF)¹⁵⁴ and many others NGOs.¹⁵⁵

4.3. Key Ideas of the Group

The researchers have characterized the ‘Maria’ group’s agenda as an ‘essentialist feminism’ and usually see it as grounded in Russian religious philosophy and the orthodox Church both of which occupied a strong anti-Marxist position. As Ruthchild puts it: “Their concern was neither equality nor, in their view, making women more like men, but the discovery of the feminine, or more precisely, the Russian feminine essence. That essence, they argued, was the soul of Russia, and in the godless Soviet state it had found refuge in the

¹⁴⁹ *USSR News Brief. Archive*. Accessed May 16, 2017 <https://kronid.wordpress.com/2014/06/22/1982-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4/>

¹⁵⁰ As Voznesenskaya wrote, they established branches of the club in Frankfurt am Main and were preparing to set the one in Paris. See Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia].”

¹⁵¹ Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory.”, 108

¹⁵² Malakhovskaya, Natalia in *Maria* #3 (1982). p. 3

¹⁵³ It was a group of young women, who started their gatherings in October 1980, in student club Sygma in Warsaw. Their main concerns were quality of medical care, contraception, conditions of pregnant students and young mothers and hidden gender discrimination. Letter from Sabina Gweiman, member of the group, to ‘Maria’ club is published in *Maria* #3 (1982) pp. 92-94. See short summary of their program in Svetlana Aivazova, “Liberty and Equality for Women in the Socialist Countries of Eastern Europe, 1960-1980,” in *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 645-6.

¹⁵⁴ See report about ‘Maria’ club participation in March 8 celebration in Paris in *Maria* #3 (1982) pp. 101-108

¹⁵⁵ See the brief observation of their activities abroad *Maria* #3 (1982) p. 102

Church.”¹⁵⁶ In my analysis I want to focus on how ‘Maria’ club imagined ‘women’s essence’ and how their ideas were informed by the Soviet context. In other words, I aim to uncover what kind of femininity the ‘Maria’ group constituted by their discourse.

Their almanacs, each around 100 pages, present a documentation of the discussions held by the activists, essays on the problems that women in the SU faced, letters to each other and also some letters to the international community about political processes in the SU, some novels and poems. Important here is to mention that their texts on women’s issues have a dialogical structure: the authors refer to each other, agree or disagree. Therefore, I find it possible to regard the whole body of the texts as a homogeneous discourse, despite being written by different authors. I also want to clarify that I will not include women’s problems in the SU as described in the almanacs, as far as the raised issues were alike to ones, discussed on pages of *W&R*: healthcare, domestic violence, double burden etc.

I will start with the materials of ‘Maria’ club first conference “Our view, ideas, position”, held in 1980 in Leningrad. The papers of three main speakers: Tat’yana Goricheva, Yulia Voznesenkaya and Natalia Malakhovskaya were published in the first issue of the almanac ‘Maria’. One of the main lines of their agenda is the so-called crisis of gender relations, i.e. femininity and masculinity in the Soviet society. Goricheva claims that women have lost their essential feminine qualities: love, self-sacrifice and creativity — instead, they have developed the qualities that are important for survival under the patriarchal system (indifference to suffering, acceptance of hierarchies and desire to dominate) — and that this type of personality is dominant in the Soviet society, which she characterizes as hermaphrodite.¹⁵⁷ I want to emphasize the fact that ‘Maria’ group’s ideas of femininity, in particular as expressed by Taty’ana Goricheva, who might be considered their main ideologist, were informed not only

¹⁵⁶ Ruthchild, “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory,” 107.

¹⁵⁷ Goricheva, Tat’yana in *Maria* #1 (1981), pp. 10-11

by Russian orthodox philosophy, but also by existentialism: Goricheva was corresponding with Martin Heidegger, German philosopher, who influenced a lot on the development of existentialism and phenomenology, and Goricheva also often cited Simone de Beauvoir, French existentialist philosopher, feminist, in her articles. She combined these ideas with Russian religious philosophy. She interestingly turns upside down de Beauvoir's thesis "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", arguing that one could become a conscious adult person only by embracing one's historicity (age) and one's nature (sex)¹⁵⁸. Therefore, what de Beauvoir suggested as an argument for a constructivist approach to gender, Goricheva interprets in a totally opposite way, as a discovery of women's inherent femininity.¹⁵⁹ Her essentialist ideas were nurtured by creationist religious ideas, and in her argumentation she quite often refers to the Bible, therefore, the discovery of sex means the discovery of God's intention, and has almost nothing to do with the real human body and desires. However, this God's intention in their view of women has certain class characteristics, as I will show below.

Developing Goricheva's thought about femininity, Natalia Malakhovskaya adds that women and creativity are inseparable and that the deprivation of creative self-expression in work place means deprivation of femininity: "Depriving us of the possibility of creativity, they kill us as women."¹⁶⁰ In particular, she is dissatisfied with the Soviet policy on 'parasitism'¹⁶¹ and the fact that everyone is pushed to have a job, which often interferes with their artistic ambitions: "However, work for us is not a means of self-incarnation, but a curse."¹⁶² As I mentioned above, the majority of club participants were professionals in the creative sphere, therefore, the state monopoly on the culture sphere was crucial for their career opportunities.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ She also insists on the importance to open to the Other, i.e. God, whereas de Beauvoir argues that women are men's Other.

¹⁶⁰ Malakhovskaya, Natalia in *Maria* #2 (1982), p. 16

¹⁶¹ She means here decree issued by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR on May 4, 1961 entitled "On Strengthening the Struggle with Persons Avoiding Socially Useful Work and Leading an Anti-Social, Parasitic Way of Life", which enabled to exile those able-bodied citizens who refused to work. The decree was often used for repressions against dissidents.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 15

However, there are some other obstacles to the development of women's feminine essence, in Malakhovskaya's view it is *byt* (everyday life). Discussions on *byt* take an important place in the almanacs, but in the majority of cases the authors do not regard everyday problems (*bytovye problemy*) in a purely economic and materialistic dimension, but as a part of the existential crisis of the Soviet society. Malakhovskaya refers to Gorycheva's interpretation of De Beauvoir's notion about women's enslavement by nature (water, fire, air), Malakhovskaya adds that the woman in the SU is additionally oppressed by some more power of the same importance: queues, anger of the strangers in the streets and transport crushes and communal kitchens — thus, the discomfort of Soviet life is articulated in one row with the natural disasters and given an ontological status. All those circumstances, as she writes, kill femininity in women¹⁶³. Here the opposition between the Soviet Union and Western countries (as member of 'Maria' group imagined them) becomes especially important, as far as she connects discovering of femininity with certain level of life. The problems of domestic violence and single mothers, they believe, are also less acute in the more developed Western countries, if they exist there at all.¹⁶⁴ As Aja Lauva, member of the club from Latvia, writes in her article about domestic violence: "Woman [in the SU], "free" from her free time, exhausted by lines in shops after her working day, bad quality service of daily needs [*slyzhba byta*], gets old very fast, feels that she is losing her femininity and attractiveness, <...> let to treat herself worse than one treats slaves and concubines."¹⁶⁵ At the end of the article, Lauva comes to conclusion that the domestic violence is widespread in the SU, because of shaming women for being single, she compares it with the Western countries, as she knows them from literature, and states: "...the problem of marriage and keeping husbands does not grow to such an awful scale, does not have such ugly manifestations."¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, in their writings they homogenized the

¹⁶³ Malakhovskaya, Natalia in *Maria* #1 (1981), p. 13

¹⁶⁴ See Lauva, Aja in *Maria* #1 (1981), Khamova, Galina in *Maria* #3 (1982).

¹⁶⁵ Lauva in *Maria* #1 (1981), p. 39

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.40

Western countries and narrowed women's image to the happy middle-class white heterosexual housewife in a way the Western media will homogenize feminism in the SU, narrowing it mainly to the *W&R*'s agenda.

So, women's true femininity, according to 'Maria' group, could be discovered through creativity, freedom of self-expression (not necessarily in a workplace) and a comfortable life. Who is that woman? As Galina Khamova, member of 'Maria' club, puts it: "We do not want to be functionaries, cogs, robots, slaves. WE WANT TO BE MOTHERS, WIVES, HOUSEWIVES — WOMEN, FINALLY!"¹⁶⁷ Therefore, I want to argue that they strategically use the concept 'essential femininity' as an umbrella term for all their desires, and in their case it has strong connotations of a middle-class white housewife in the developed capitalist society — Betty Friedan's¹⁶⁸ nightmare was 'Maria' group's dream. Considering this, it is even more interesting that they were praised as feminists by the Western media, especially in the US, mostly due to the fact that they represented as counter-discourse toward the SU.¹⁶⁹

But the 'true femininity' in their discourse has also very particular function — it serves as a trope for critiquing the Soviet regime. This is true as far as 'women's emancipation' was embodied into the Soviet state building. For example, Goricheva used Lenin's famous quotation "Every cook (female) can govern" — and revised it, claiming that Soviet society was ruled by the primitive rules of a rural kitchen, that servants became masters and that the bad side of women's character, which was developed in the circumstances of subordination, eventually triumphed.¹⁷⁰ As Voznesenskaya puts it: "Against the slavery of the Bolshevik hermaphroditism we put forward the development of a woman in fullness and the beauty of her

¹⁶⁷ Khamova, Galina in *Maria* #3 (1982), p. 54

¹⁶⁸ The prominent American feminist author, who critically described life of suburban housewife in the US in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

¹⁶⁹ For more details about the media coverage and reactions to the group see: Holt, Alix *The First Soviet Feminists...*, pp. 251-255

¹⁷⁰ Goricheva, Tat'yana in *Maria* #1 (1981), p.10

sex: a woman-personality, a woman-mother, a free woman.”¹⁷¹ They build a strong dichotomy on the base of occupation between 'real women' and 'femina sovetica'. Goricheva diagnoses the development of a new kind of woman — femina sovetica: “women-judges, women-administrators, women-overseers, cruel and fanatic, who are fulfilling other’s will blindly and trampling the weaker impudently.”¹⁷² Malakhovskaya joins her and brings examples of cruelty of Soviet women who work as secretaries, saleswoman, barmaids, heads of schools — little masters, as she calls them.¹⁷³ Interestingly, these ideas are totally inconsistent with their own characterization of women in the SU as «slaves of slaves». As expressed by Goricheva in her report on the first conference of ‘Maria’ club. Too focused on spiritual revival, they failed to recognize the obvious fact that the cruel ‘femina sovetica’ occupies relatively low-paid and unprestigious jobs — and that if the Soviet bureaucratic system had a woman’s face, that might be because of the glass ceiling and sexism.

It is important that their ideas about crisis of traditional gender roles corresponded with the ones were circulating even in the official state media. Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, professors of Department of Political Science and Sociology of European University at St. Petersburg, show that during the Brezhnev years so-called ‘liberal critical discourse’ was articulated in numerous sociological and demographic publications, and in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Literary newspaper) and “thick” literary journals. The key topic in those publications was crisis of masculinity by which the authors expressed their dissatisfaction with the Soviet socio-anthropological type.¹⁷⁴ There is no doubts, that members of the ‘Maria’ group, being part of intelligentsia, were readers of both *Literary newspaper* and “thick” literary journals. Moreover, Anatolii Kharchev, one of the founders of Soviet sociology, was one of the important authors,

¹⁷¹ Voznesenskaya, Yulia in *Maria* #1 (1981), p.18

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 11

¹⁷³ Malakhovskaya, Natalia in *Maria* #1, p.16

¹⁷⁴ Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse,” *Russian Studies in History* 51, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 13–34, doi:10.2753/RSH1061-1983510201.

who formed this discourse, in accordance to Zdravomyslova and Temkina, he published the book *Brak i sem'ia v SSSR* (Marriage and Family in the USSR) in 1979, in which he discussed feminization and infantilism of young men in the USSR — in a very similar manner the 'Maria' group describe the crisis of gender relations. I can suggest that members 'Maria' group were aware of his ideas, because Tat'yana Mamonova, editor of *W&R*, in her memoirs refers to him as a source of her 'neo-feminist' ideas.¹⁷⁵

But if their 'feminist' ideas, which usually constitute the main part of the narrative about the movement, turned out to consist in the advocacy of women's right to be housewives, exhausted by the double burden and the poor economic conditions of their country, I also want to take into account other parts of their agenda that seem to be much more productive in the history of women's movement in the late-Soviet and post-Soviet years: namely the 'Maria' club's anti-war politics and community building.

As I wrote above, 'Maria' club's first activity in 1980 was the publication of a letter against the war in Afghanistan, which is barely mentioned in narratives about the 'movement'. However, in their 'Appeal to Mothers' they found the strategy that later would be developed by the Soldiers' Mothers Committee, an important anti-war women's organisation during the late-Soviet time and the 1990s in Russia.¹⁷⁶ In their letter, they appealed to the essential feeling of motherhood, trying to convince mothers not to send their children to the army,¹⁷⁷ and choose 'honorable imprisonment' instead.¹⁷⁸ They also tried to establish contacts with women in Afghanistan and in emigration they worked with political refugees from Afghanistan. On the

¹⁷⁵ Mamonova and Maxwell, *Russian Women's Studies*, 135.

¹⁷⁶ The Soldiers' Mothers movement started in 1988-89 in the Soviet Union as a reaction to the violation of the soldiers' rights during draft (officers' cruelty against recruits, coercion participated in Afghanistan war etc.). It was registered as an NGO "Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia" (CSMR) in 1991, and has branches in many regions across the country. For details see Amy B. Caiazza, *Mothers and Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷⁷ Yulia Voznesenskaya herself embraced this strategy and was hiding her son from draft till the emigration.

¹⁷⁸ *Maria* #2 (1982), p. 11

pages of the almanac ‘Maria’ group provided a space for refugees’ publications about the situation in Afghanistan.

The second aspect of ‘Maria’ club agenda I want to pay attention to is the idea of specific kinship and forms of solidarity and support they developed within the club. Voznesenskaya also insists that they have no leaders, which is why the group is so sustainable. Interestingly, she is very cautious in claiming this, but she does acknowledge that absence of men in their circle might be a factor in the formation of such a democratic and reciprocal organisation, and member of ‘Maria’ club called each other ‘sisters’.¹⁷⁹ One example: as Voznesenskaya wrote, they created the “Union of mothers” with a kindergarten and a financial fund for supporting those of them, who was in a difficult situation.¹⁸⁰ Another example of their commitment to each other is the support of their imprisoned ‘sisters’ and raising money for families of imprisoned dissidents: they launched a huge campaign in support of Natalia Lazareva and collected money for the family of the imprisoned chief editor of the magazine *Obschina* (Community) — these are only two examples among those one can find on the pages of the almanacs. They were also collecting a herstory of GULAG and dissident activity, a genre alternative to the biographies of women in *Rabotnica* magazine, for example, biographies of Tat’yana Schipkova, Natalia Lazareva and Tat’yana Veliknova. They also wrote and kept biographies of each other to ensure they would have biographical information to spread if one of them were imprisoned. Galina Grigorieva writes: “The idea of writing one's own biographies for the case of arrest, so that the remaining free friends could vouch for the arrested, appeared, of course, not accidentally. We tried at least to protect ourselves...”¹⁸¹

4.4. Conclusion

The ‘Maria’ group participants’ fortune was not exceptional among Soviet dissidents: exiles and repressions were part of the community’s difficult life, but there was indeed

¹⁷⁹ Voznesenskaya, Yulia in *Maria* #1 (1981), p. 18

¹⁸⁰ Voznesenskaya, “Zhenskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii [Women’s Movement in Russia].”

¹⁸¹ Grigorieva, Galina in *Maria* #2, p. 69

something exceptional — the attention their exile received. However, as I hope to have shown through my analysis the term ‘women’ linked with the discovery of the ‘true femininity’ in their agenda was in fact used for critiquing the Soviet system itself and referred to the ideal type of a Western housewife. Moreover, the participants themselves did not identify themselves as feminists, or at least not in a way ‘feminism’ was understood in the Western countries. They were consistent advocates of opening women’s femininity through religious practices and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Therefore, their “feminist agenda” might be the most controversial part of the group’s history. Surprising is the fact that in 2017 they could still be referred to as ‘feminists’ in Rochelle Ruthchild’s article named “Feminist Dissidents in the ‘Motherland of Women’s Liberation’: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory”. The title of the article speaks for itself — their feminist label is essentially important for questioning the Soviet state gender politics and reinforcing Western hegemony regarding the questions of feminist movements and history, even though the author’s intention is the opposite.

Regarding problem of the label ‘feminist’ I want to emphasize that the category ‘woman’ was for them a way to critique the Soviet project as such. ‘Maria’ club called the women, occupied low paid job in daily needs services and state institutions ‘femina sovetica’. Maria’ group’s emancipatory project aimed to be opposite to those women, they advocated women’s freedom, which could be characterized as freedom from the image of the Soviet women. However, in their case women yet should do many things, i.e. open their essence in accordance to God’s intention. On the pages of the *Maria* almanac the authors created certain dichotomy: hermaphroditic tired and angry ‘femina sovetica’ vs. careless housewife who can freely express her creativity through artistic work or domestic duties and thus find her way to true femininity (God’s intention). Such dichotomy is a very useful tool for conservative forces for shifting attention from the structural economical problems and gender inequality to women’s essential

position as wives and mothers, coming back to which women can get rid off all the problems they had, trying to combine job and family, or have a career. Moreover, this ideas of ‘correcting’ unnatural Soviet gender project formed a ground for re-domestication of women after the dissolution of the USSR in many countries.¹⁸²

As the chapter shows, if we try to escape the trap of the myth about the ‘first Soviet feminists’, other valuable aspects of their activity could be illuminated, such as their anti-war activity and commitment to their community, which might be of high importance for writing women’s movements history in the region.

¹⁸² Jill Owezarzak, “Introduction: Postcolonial Studies and Postsocialism in Eastern Europe,” *Focaal* 2009, no. 53 (March 1, 2009): 3–19, doi:10.3167/fcl.2009.530101.

Conclusion

The current research suggests a new perspective on the history of feminism in the Soviet Union during the late Brezhnev years. This period was chosen due to consensus in existing historiography about the ‘first Soviet feminism’ since 1920s, which appeared in 1979 with samizdat almanac *Zhenschina i Rossiya* (Woman and Russia —further *W&R*). Situating their project within a broader Soviet and international context, I attempt to overcome the exceptional position of the samizdat group and ‘othering’ of the official Soviet women’s organisations, i.e. *Rabotnitsa* magazine, which has happened because of the Cold War paradigm in historiography.

I started with a partial reconstruction of the background of the *W&R* publication by analysis of *Rabotnitsa* magazine, which is only one among many official Soviet women’s organisations. I showed that *Rabotnitsa* provided a space for Soviet women to articulate their concerns by reserving a considerable amount of space for readers’ letters. The Soviet gender politics received lots of critique on the pages of magazine; in particular the authors of *Rabotnitsa* addressed to bad working conditions, lack of childrearing infrastructure, bad quality of consumer goods and everyday services which resulted in a double burden for women. Also one can find articles and letters about unequal distribution of domestic duties, problems of single mothers, domestic violence etc. Moreover, the magazine itself actively participated in the resolution of women’s problems by inspections of the places they got complaints about, by direct dialogue with the authorities, high-rank officials, decision-makers, and by redirecting readers’ letter to the relevant instances. Admittedly, this does not mean to deny the limitations of *Rabotnitsa*’s activities such as, for example, language restrictions prescribed by official discourse, and the taboo of certain topics in censored literature. But I argue in my research that we should acknowledge the agency of *Rabotnitsa*’s editorial board in influencing gender politics in the USSR, even we might regard the magazine as the state socialist feminist platform.

However, further research on *Rabotnitsa*'s politics is needed; interviews with the editorial board and their archive will clarify both limitations and achievements of the magazine's activities.

Also, my analysis of *Rabotnitsa* has shown that the international events of International Women's Year (1975) and the International Year of the Child (1979) received a lot of attention on the pages of *Rabotnitsa* with the fair emphasis on the role of the Soviet Women's Committee and Women's International Democratic Federation in their organization. Interestingly, the Soviet gender politics in the materials about the international context is represented in a much more positive way in comparison with other articles about the situation in the USSR. Therefore, I would suggest that the dissident almanac *W&R*, aimed to critique the Soviet gender politics, did not accidentally appear during this period, but was informed by the wider debates on women's roles and rights both within the USSR and in the international arena, especially bearing in mind the fact that initially Tat'yana Mamonova, the editor of the almanac, suggested to launch feminist almanac in 1975, in International Women's Year.

I argue that *W&R* project from its very beginning had an orientation toward the Western feminist community, which is obvious from the vocabulary they used (words like 'patriarchy', 'phallocentrism', 'phallocracy', 'multi-vaginal tyranny' without explanation) as well as from their intentional efforts to send the almanac (and even print it at the beginning) to Europe. Therefore, in the West, the almanac was recognized as feminist, as the authors of the first English translation stated: we found "a language we could understand".¹⁸³ The authors of the almanac also embraced a strategy of personal testimonies, which corresponded with the ideas of feminist writings and consciousness raising practices. I emphasized in my research that Tat'yana Mamonova, due to her connections with diplomats, was able to reach Western feminist authors, including Robin Morgan, Susan Brownmiller and Kate Millett, and another editor of the almanac, Tat'yana Goricheva, based her ideas on Simone de Beauvoir's

¹⁸³ *Woman and Russia*. p.2.

philosophy. However, in comparison with *Rabotnitsa*, I showed that both the censored women's magazine and uncensored dissident almanac raised similar issues, yet the first is never mentioned in the history of feminism in the USSR.

The very fast exile of the editorial board of *W&R* from the USSR made them available for the Western media, which gave to the group more attention than to any other dissident group. Numerous interviews created the myth about the 'first Soviet feminists', where the term 'feminist' referred to the women's movement as it was present in the West and was strategically used to underline failures of the Soviet gender politics, which were essential for the period when women's rights was one of the important battlefields of the Cold War. Until the present, this narrative defines the historiography of feminism in the Soviet Union, as I have shown in the Literature review, reinforcing the hegemony of the Western-centric perspective on women's struggles and the idea that Soviet women's organisations were merely the Party's puppets.

Suggested by this research's critical approach toward the label of 'feminist' attached to the group, revealed the fact that majority of so-called 'first Soviet feminists', namely members of later-formed 'Maria' group, did not consider themselves feminists, but used the term strategically for gaining international support. 'Maria' group's agenda was based on the idea that the new anthropological type 'femina sovetica' appeared as a result of the Soviet gender politics. They negatively characterized it as hermaphroditic, and believed that it should be fixed by embracing traditional gender roles. Their ideas on women's liberation were in tune with the ones, which formed a ground for the re-domestication of women after the dissolution of the USSR as a part of 'normalization' of the life in the region in accordance to the Western standards.¹⁸⁴

Finally, I argue that removing focus from their feminist agenda is also essential for writing a history of women's movement in the region, because it opens up a perspective on

¹⁸⁴ Owczarzak, "Introduction," 8–9.

their other activities. For instance, the anti-war politics of ‘Maria’ group, were built upon the essentialist idea of motherhood. The same strategy led to the further development of the Soldiers’ Mothers Committee, one of the more powerful women’s organisations in the late-Soviet and post-Soviet years in Russia.

Showing these three different women’s groups in late Brezhnev years, I regard them as intermediated counter-discourses to each other as well to the Western feminist discourse and argue that the history of ‘feminism’ in late-Brezhnev years should be extended by inclusion *Rabotnitsa* magazine. So, I will compare them along the lines of the most crucial dimensions for definition of feminism, as I observed it in my Literature review, namely, agency and struggle for gender equality.

As my research showed, the agenda of *Rabotnitsa* was shaped by different circumstances: the Party, the international events and by its editorial board with readers themselves. Also, I should emphasize the restrictions of language, which was ultimately limited by official Soviet rhetoric and a Marxist framework. Though following Jill Massino, a gender historian, I might suggest that the latter with its implied critique of patriarchy might have been strategically used to challenge gender inequality.¹⁸⁵ However, it would not be fair to claim that *W&R* represents an example of pure and entirely independent agenda. As the analysis showed, firstly, the group was greatly influenced by the Western feminist writings, though they did not rework terms and concepts on the base of the Soviet reality, but simply implement them without even definitions, which implied certain hierarchy between West and East. Another important source of their agenda, to which Tat’yana Mamonova explicitly refers, was the censored sociological and psychological literature on crisis of masculinity and changing gender roles in the USSR. The third one is the Soviet gender politics — on critique of which the almanac *W&R* was mainly built. Finally, ‘Maria’ group’s agenda was deeply grounded in religious dissident philosophy.

¹⁸⁵ Penn, Shana, and Jill Massino. «Introduction». *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, c2009, p.5

Therefore, none of the three groups might be considered as entirely autonomous in setting their agenda. And if *Rabotnitsa* existed within the official discourse, for the dissident almanacs the existing official discourse served as constitutive counterpart, which is especially evident in the articles of *Maria* almanacs. However, by highlighting the conditionality of the dissident groups, I also want to emphasize that they had certain opportunities to choose among frameworks, whereas *Rabotnitsa* as a state-supported magazine had no other option.

The second aspect of my comparison is the struggle for gender equality. My analysis showed that both *Rabotnitsa* and *W&R* dealt with the similar issues; moreover, they also suggested the same way of women's mobilization — by inviting readers to send letters to the editorial board. However, due to its affiliation with the Party, *Rabotnitsa*'s editorial board had more institutional opportunities to influence politics and the decision-making process, as well as reaching wider audience (*Rabotnitsa*'s print run was more than more than 13 000 000 copies versus 10 first copies of *W&R*). I want to include the analytical categories of 'redistribution' and 'recognition', developed by Nancy Fraser,¹⁸⁶ an American critical theorist, in order to complicate the comparison. I argue that *Rabotnitsa* and *W&R* had different goals: the first fought for redistribution and the second — for recognition. This distinction followed from the broader agenda of the groups and determined the position of the authors and the representation of female subjectivity. As I have shown, the authors of *Rabotnitsa* are in a majority of cases outsiders, and women's inner worlds were hidden from readers. The focus of their activity was on demands for redistribution of sources regarding women's interests (childrearing infrastructure, quality of everyday services and consumer goods, redistribution of domestic duties between spouses, improvement of women's working conditions and mechanization of female-dominated spheres). Such claims could be regarded as challenges of prevailing socioeconomic injustice, i.e., using Fraser's terms, against "deprivation (being denied an

¹⁸⁶ Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age.," 70

adequate material standard of living)”,¹⁸⁷ which were in tune with the Marxist approach toward gender inequality as rooted in political-economic structure. In contrast, on the pages of *W&R*, women’s subjectivity and experience as different from men’s took the first place, as far as the existing gender inequality, in accordance to them, was grounded in symbolic oppression of femininity as ‘other’ in the Soviet society. As they state in the Introduction: “Long ago the patriarchy degenerated into a phallocracy.<...>Female protest against the arbitrary rule of men finds expression not only in a rejection of motherhood, but more often, in a paradoxical rejection of self.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, we could regard their agenda as a struggle for recognition of a ‘woman’ as identity equal to ‘man’, in other words, fight against androcentrism¹⁸⁹ of the Soviet culture. This tendency is developed even further in *Maria* almanacs, the authors of which demanded, in particular, acknowledgment of a specific feminine essence, the ideal representation of which is a caring housewife and mother, which was not possible in the USSR because of state’s fight against ‘parasitism’, meaning criminal pursuit of un-employed people.

However, both of these claims were intertwined, as Fraser states, “[R] redistributive remedies generally presuppose an underlying conception of recognition. <...> Conversely, recognition remedies sometimes presuppose an underlying conception of redistribution.”¹⁹⁰ But distinction between the goal and remedies is important here, as far as it entails politics and the focus of the struggle. I would suggest, that this different claims of the groups were partially determined by the broader context of each groups’ activities: official Marxist framework for *Rabotnitsa*, and liberal dissident discourse for *W&R* and *Maria*. However, it also corresponds to the main audience and readers'-authors' social position. If for *Rabotntitsa* it was the working

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ *Woman and Russia*, 22.

¹⁸⁹ As Nancy Fraser defines it: “an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as ‘feminine’”. Nancy Fraser, “Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice,” *Studies in Social Justice* 1, no. 1 (March 5, 2007): 28.

¹⁹⁰ Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age.,” 72

woman from non-capital cities and different republics, for *W&R* and *Maria* it was the woman from Moscow or Leningrad, as I have shown, from intelligentsia, meaning a status group which was constituted through certain cultural consumption due to the lack of other means of building distinctions in the Soviet society.¹⁹¹

Therefore, I suggest that the official and dissident women's groups both had limited agency in setting their agenda and both struggled for gender equality, but were very different in their strategies and claims (redistribution and recognition), which, as Nancy Fraser argues, is essential to combine in contemporary feminist politics.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Alexander Kustarev, *Nervnye ludi [Nervous people]* (KMK, 2006).

¹⁹² Fraser, "Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition."

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