

UKRAINIAN FEMINISM(S):
BETWEEN NATIONALIST MYTH
AND ANTI-NATIONALIST CRITIQUE

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IWM Working Paper No. 4/2001
Vienna 2001

IWM Publications



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Preferred Citation: Zhurzhenko, Tatiana: *Ukrainian Feminism(s): Between Nationalist Myth and Anti-Nationalist Critique*. IWM Working Paper No. 2/2001: Vienna.

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Ukrainian Feminism(s): Between Nationalist Myth and Anti-Nationalist Critique

This paper considers the intense debates about the role of women in nation-building and state-building processes in contemporary Ukraine, the uneasy relationship between feminism and nationalism in these debates, and growing contradictions inside Ukrainian feminism itself – between “nationalist” and “cosmopolitan” approaches. It focuses on the ambivalence of the recent shift from imported, western-centered feminism to the “original” Ukrainian feminist project as a process of invention of a new feminist myth – the myth of the “strong” Ukrainian woman and of the “matriarchal” roots of Ukrainian culture.

State building, nationalism and women: the case of Ukraine

As feminist literature recognizes, nationalist ideology is not gender neutral and nation-building affects women and men differently. In the framework of the national project, women have usually been treated as biological reproducers of the nation and have become passive objects in a demographic discourse, which serves to conceal the nationalist political goal of population growth. At the same time, men are considered as active (spiritual) creators and defenders of the nation (and families).¹

The process of nation-building is pursued by drawing the cultural heritage and traditions into the ideological struggle and creating historiographic myths concerning the origins, na-

tional character and destiny of the newly emerging nation. In the process of this “invention of tradition”, women have usually been utilized as symbols of national identity and have been required to carry the “burden of representation”. At the same time national-democratic movements, by reconstructing the public sphere and by involving women in politics, create the very conditions under which feminist demands are possible. Therefore women’s movements can be interrelated in different ways with nationalist struggles, and women can be passive symbols (and even victims) as well as active participants of this historical struggle. In the case of the Ukraine this interrelation has specific features.

One should start with the lack of an established tradition of Ukrainian statehood and with the continuing importance of past historical differences between the regions of the Ukraine. In western Ukraine “the relatively short period of Soviet rule was unable to eradicate the strong Ukrainian traditions, which were developed under the Habsburgs and in interwar Poland”.² A strong national emancipation movement made this region the keeper of “true” Ukrainian national identity and the basis of the post-Soviet national-democratic movement. Eastern and Southern Ukraine which historically was a part of the Russian empire and shared a common Soviet experience with Russia, does not fit well into the newly constructed Ukrainian national identity.

This historical division was also crucial for the development of the Ukrainian women’s movement. In Western Ukraine women’s groups started to emerge in the 1890’s as an integral part of the national emancipation movement against the Austrian authorities. Although the activity of these groups was focused on educational and charity work among women on the local level, their leaders were inspired by the goals of preserving the Ukrainian language and traditions, and developing the national culture. The strategy of “enlightenment” of the wide masses of people (or women) was common for cultural nationalism and for the women’s groups of this period. In Eastern and Southern Ukraine the women’s movement, which emerged at approximately the same time, was not generally nationalist-oriented, though in some cases it supported the idea of Ukrainian cultural autonomy. Women’s groups in these regions were more likely to form part of the Russian women’s movement with its different traditions and history. They were, for example, more active on the political level and had connections with social-democratic politics and socialist ideology.

These historical differences became even stronger in the interwar period. In Soviet Ukraine, feminism was eliminated as a “bourgeois” movement, and women’s organizations became one of the bodies of the Communist party apparatus. They shared the official communist ideology with its commitment to “worker’s internationalism” and suspicion of nationalistically colored dissident ideas as “anti-Soviet”. At the same time the nationalist movement in Polish occupied Western Ukraine was built up ideologically and organizationally and became more radical and militarized. During this period the leaders of the women’s movement in Western Ukraine treated feminism as a “conscious participation of women in the creation of national culture and the national state”. They tried to modernize the traditional image of Ukrainian woman as a passive and suffering object of oppression, to encourage them to be

heroic fighters for the Ukrainian nation. Many prominent women intellectuals shared the tragic fate of this generation of nationalists, persecuted by the Nazis as well as by Soviet authorities. After the Second World War, with the new highly politicized wave of Ukrainian emigration to the West, powerful women's groups were created in the Diaspora. Their aim was the preservation of Ukrainian culture and national identity and the very idea of Ukrainian statehood for future generations. No wonder then that when an independent Ukrainian state emerged in 1991, the Ukrainian Diaspora became one of the main ideological resources for national building and women were called upon to subordinate their particular "narrow" interests to the universal "interests of the nation".

Because of the general weakness of Ukrainian national identity and of the nationalist movement, the emergence of independent Ukrainian state became possible as a result of the collapse of central power in the former USSR. Apart from western Ukraine, the idea of state independence has been supported by the population, mainly as an anti-communist, but not as a nationalist idea. But actually it was the former communist elite of Soviet Ukraine – party and state nomenklatura - who initiated and supported political separation from Russia and who gained the main benefits from this separation. Under these circumstances this former communist elite became extremely interested in the "invention of the Ukrainian nation" and therefore in an alliance with nationalist intellectuals. In this sense, Ukrainian nationalism as a state ideology was mainly imposed "from above" and turned out to be unattractive for people as an official doctrine. The people's disappointment is connected now not only with political crisis and economic hardship but also with the failure of state nationalism and state-led construction of national identity. For Eastern Ukrainians it appears too ethnically-determined and exclusive; for Western Ukrainians, not consistent and compromising the very idea of nationhood.

But the fact is that during these years of independence this kind of "state nationalism" and "new" independent women's NGO's suited each other quite well. Borrowed from Diaspora women's organizations, the idea of the primacy of Ukrainian statehood became the ideological basis for the emerging Ukrainian women's movement. The necessity for the unity of the women's movement and for the subjection of specific women's issues to the universal goals of the state-building process have been especially stressed in the documents of women's conferences. 'The normal position of women is possible only in a normal, stable state. All our strengths should first of all be aimed at the strengthening of Ukrainian statehood. Political non-uniformity and the stratification of Ukrainian society do not facilitate the state building process. Even in this hall everyone sings his/her own song, though it is time to sound concerted in chorus'³ - stressed one of the participants of All-Ukrainian Women's Congress in 1998.

This paradigm for the women's movement has been accepted even more willingly because it has corresponded to the former official communist ideology (the primacy of collective goals over personal interests and self-sacrificing for the sake of the future). As the Croatian feminist Djurdja Knezevic stressed, "the idea of the national state as the supreme value seems to work

surprisingly well for the legitimation of an almost unchanged power structure”⁴ and one should add – fits surprisingly well to an almost unchanged political consciousness.

But one idea elaborated by the Ukrainian women’s movement should probably be recognized as an innovation. This is the image of a strong and empowered woman as a supporter of the state-building process. It is accompanied by the image of “weak nationalism” in the Ukraine, which needs women’s support. Unlike in the states of former Yugoslavia where nationalisms had strong connotations of the strengthening of a traditional patriarchal order and with returning women to the private sphere of the family, in the Ukraine this militant patriarchal nationalism plays only a marginal role. It is not surprising that the ideology of the contemporary Ukrainian women’s movement is mainly based on the historical myth of “Ukrainian matriarchal culture” rather than on western feminist ideas of women’s emancipation from patriarchal power.⁵ The essence of this myth is that, in the past Ukrainian women lived in a society in which the sexes had complementary roles of roughly equal value, that they enjoyed ‘equality in difference’ and ...their natural female roles were highly regarded”.⁶ Of course, in the framework of the nationalist interpretation, this unique and promising peculiarity of Ukrainian life was lost due to the external (Russian) cultural influence and political oppression. In this type of discourse the new Ukrainian women’s identity is constructed around the ancient image of the Berehinia (pagan goddess-protectress of the home hearth), which is widely used today as a female symbol of the Ukrainian nation. It also justifies the perpetuation of traditional women’s roles of mother, career and housekeeper as “natural” and “vitally important” for society. But this myth of “Ukrainian matriarchal culture” is obviously ambivalent because it refers to the pre-Christian images (and some remains of the pre-Christian traditions in Ukrainian culture). This pre-Christian system of values (according to contemporary interpretations) was not structured along the dichotomy of male/female as spiritual/material and powerful/powerless. Therefore the “strong mother” image can be interpreted in a feminist/nationalist way and women can be represented not only as biological but also as spiritual reproducers of nation. In this interpretation independent Ukrainian statehood can be seen as a “new born child” who needs women’s care.

Post-soviet neo-familianism: a brief comparison between Russia and Ukraine

The first changes in the dominant ideology regarding the family and the social role of women actually occurred in the middle of the 1980’s. With the collapse of communism these processes were radicalized because of the delegitimization of Soviet policy for women’s emancipation as a part of the communist project. Post-soviet neo-traditionalism as a new mainstream ideology appeals to such principles as the moral superiority of the traditional family and family values, the moral and economic autonomy of the family, especially its independence from the state, a focus on reproduction and on the strengthening of parents’ responsibility and, of course, returning to the “natural” gender roles. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences in the types of neo-traditionalist discourse which dominate, for example, in Russia and

in Ukraine. A brief comparison will be helpful for articulating the specificity of Ukrainian situation.

Very roughly, one could say that Russian neo-traditionalism is more determined by rationalism and statism (identification with state interests), and Ukrainian neo-traditionalism more by nationalism and cultural mythology. In Russian media and academic discourse the “family crisis” is very often described as a crisis of reproduction activity and is thereby connected to depopulation (a decline in population numbers). This decline in turn is seen as leading to the weakening of the Russian state and as endangering its geopolitical interests. These interests of state are revealed in such statements as “the necessity for every person and family to realize the significance of demographic processes”.⁷ Due to the fact that “Russia’s main strategic goal, which come from its geopolitical position, is supporting and strengthening its status as a great power, inherited from the USSR”⁸, its demographic policy should fit into this strategy. Geopolitical priorities such as Russia's relationship with the West, its positions in the Slavic world and in the NIS, depend very much on this factor. Population growth especially fits into state interests because of the low density of population in border areas, which often leads to territorial claims from the neighboring countries (Far East, Kaliningrad region). Another argument for population growth comes from the decrease in the number of men of draft age in the new geopolitical situation as NATO approaches Russian borders. Taking into account the deep crisis of socialist ideas and the relative weakness of Russian nationalism, statism today becomes the dominating ideology, which is likely to influence family and gender politics if necessary paying lip service to liberal democratic values. In the framework of a statist discourse of “family crisis”, the decline in population and the weakening of Russia’s geopolitical status can be seen as links in the same chain.

Unlike in Russia, in Ukraine neo-traditionalism turns out to be connected to a greater extent with cultural and historical myths and with their reconstruction during the nation-building process. “Family” is a very important element of the Ukrainian national myth, and the symbolic link of Family-Nation is more obvious in this case than that of Family-State. Depopulation and demographic crisis are discussed in the media and academic writing, but usually not in terms of “family crisis”. On the contrary, the very common statement is that Ukrainians have special family traditions, a special family mentality and that high marriage and birth rates are fundamental peculiarities of Ukrainian ethnos. The loss of these traditions can be seen as a result of anti-Ukrainian Soviet politics (a radical nationalist interpretation) or of economic hardship in the transition period (a moderate one), but in any case this is viewed as a temporary situation. Ukrainian sociologists stress not the “family crisis” but quite the opposite, the commitment of the Ukrainian population to the family lifestyle and family values. As it was stressed in the official Annual Report “On the Position of Families in Ukraine”:

“Under conditions of radical changes in the social and cultural environment, competition on labor markets and in the professional sphere the person’s need rises for the family, where one could get emotional support and recognition and find the way out of economic problems by joint efforts.”⁹

One cannot speak about a “family crisis”, because Family is the very basis for Nation. Not by accident, in the framework of Ukrainian neo-traditionalism the solution of family problems is being linked to the revival of the Ukrainian nation, and vice versa – the revival of the Nation starts within the family. It is the family where national identity is being formed, and where love of the native language and culture emerges. The leading role in the family as a spiritual community belongs to the mother: it is she who educates children and transmits national traditions, culture and language to them. The construction of sacred images of motherhood is a characteristic of modern Ukrainian neo-traditionalism and even the women’s movement formulates the interests of women primarily as the interests of the mother. One of the delegates to the women’s congress in 1998 underlined in her presentation that:

“Throughout history in the Ukraine it was considered the greatest of sins to kill a child in one’s womb, the harshest of God’s penalties – to not have one’s own children, the unforgivable judgment of the people – to abandon one’s child, to forget elderly parents and to disrespect the father of one’s children.”¹⁰

In the neo-traditionalist discourse the mother’s role in the family is sometimes regarded as a basis for a global “mother’s responsibility” – the care for the whole nation. Examples of this kind of rhetoric can also be found in the materials of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Women: “Nature itself placed upon women responsibility for the future of humanity. Childbearing and the raising of children are the highest goal and ideal in a woman’s life. Possibly because of this women for a long time were unconcerned with politics, instead being concerned with the comfort and harmony of the family. However, when these values are endangered she should become an active participant in political life since responsibility for children is responsibility for the contemporary and future society.”¹¹ In accordance with this pro-family logic, professional activity such as participation in politics and business is quite possible for women, however making sense of them only for the “good” of their children and families, or in the wider meaning – for the good of future generations. These social roles seem derivative of the main and primordial roles – motherhood, and altruism (in contrast to male egoism) is seen as the main incentive for social and political activity.

In general, the creation of sacred images of family and motherhood as reflecting the very the “essence” of Ukrainian nation can be considered one of the main features of neo-traditionalist discourse in Ukraine which distinguishes it from the more rationalist Russian one. It emphasizes not only women’s role as the biological reproducer of the nation, but also her role in socialization, national identity formation – and in this sense – active role in the symbolic reproduction of the nation. But this feature can be seen also as an inferiority of Ukrainian “weak” nationalism, based on a matriarchal myth. This contradiction in contemporary national mythology opens it to various feminist interpretations.

Feminism in the Ukraine or Ukrainian feminism?

The first serious attempt to introduce feminist ideas into contemporary Ukrainian society and particularly into academia was the foundation of the Center for Gender Studies in Kharkiv. The founder and director of this Center, Irina Zherebkina, a philosopher with a special interest in post-modernism, came from Moscow, where she had worked in the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Science. The Center as an independent women's research organization was founded in 1994 and later associated with Kharkiv State University. At the beginning it had close contacts with the Moscow Center for Gender Studies and other centers in Russia, but later some Ukrainian contacts were also developed. After several years of development Kharkiv Center has claimed to develop a post-modernist approach, literary criticism and contemporary feminist theories.

It is exactly from this position of postmodern feminist critique that Irina Zherebkina wrote her book "Women's political unconsciousness"¹², published in Kharkiv in 1996 in Russian. Using ideas from Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, as well as contemporary Western feminists, she made the first serious attempt at a feminist critique of Ukrainian nationalism and, more widely, of mainstream post-Soviet political discourse. By analyzing different kinds of historical and cultural material (such as Ukrainian classical poetry and prose, the history of women's movement at the beginning of 20 century and documents of contemporary women's conferences) Zherebkina demonstrated historical continuity in the ideology of the Ukrainian women's movement, determined by nationalism and nation-building. According to her main idea, an obsession with nationalist ideology prevented Ukrainian women's leaders from posing problems in feminist terms, from articulating special women's interests and defending women's rights. The priority of women's issues was sacrificed for the sake of the nation. Referring to the images of women in Taras Shevchenko poetry, she especially stressed the importance of the image of "the raped mother" - the Ukrainian woman, raped by Moskali (Russian soldiers). Poetry by Taras Shevchenko, one of the founders of Ukrainian literature reflects the strengthening of imperial pressure of Russian power in middle of 19th century and the awaking Ukrainian national conscious. According to Zherebkina, Shevchenko's images of victimized women became crucial in the processes of national identity formation, in so far as colonial Ukraine was symbolized by "the raped mother" image. National identity was formed in opposition to the hated "Other", the Enemy, which was, of course, imperial Russia. This kind of post-colonial hatred of the dominant "Other" (and "victimized women" images as passive symbols) can be considered as a main resource for national identity politics in present-day Ukraine.

Zherebkina's contribution to Ukrainian feminism was a profound critique of "state nationalist" discourse and a clear identification of feminism in Ukraine with radical opposition to the dominant ideology and politics. This political position immediately gave the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies marginal status in the Ukrainian women's movement as well as in academic life. But on the other hand the strategy of distancing from contemporary women's movement was of course quite conscious. Zherebkina seeks to speak the same language as

contemporary western feminists, and although she sometimes criticizes Western-centered approaches from the position of an East-European woman, her theoretical position is no doubt defined by applying deconstruction and other powerful instruments of western philosophical discourse to the “raw material” of indigenous Ukrainian culture.

No wonder that nationalism became the watershed in the development of feminism in Ukraine. Another feminist group, which is interesting from this point of view, emerged at approximately the same time in Kiev, and was formed around the Institute of Literary Studies (Solomeia Pavlychko, Nina Zborovska, and others). Although they were much more recognized in Ukrainian cultural life than the marginal Zherebkina, for a long time they did not have very well-elaborated theoretical and ideological positions, and did not stress their feminist identification. In an article written by Solomeia Pavlychko in 1991 and entitled “Do Ukrainian Literary Studies need a Feminist School?” the necessity of having “normal” and full-fledged modern European culture was presented as a main reason for developing a feminist approach. From the very beginning perspectives of feminism appeared to be subordinated to the much wider and universal goal of overcoming the “cultural backwardness” and “cultural dependence” of post-Soviet Ukraine.

Feminist discussions in contemporary Ukraine and the first attempts to articulate an “original Ukrainian feminism” were speeded up by the publication in 1997 of a scandalous book, “Field studies in Ukrainian sex”, written by Kiev female writer Oksana Zabuzhko.¹³ This love story told by a female heroine is not actually about love or sex, but first of all about the impossibility of women’s and national self-fulfillment in Ukraine’s post-colonial cultural situation. A strong modern woman and Ukrainian intellectual, the heroine strives for real love and meets eventually the “first real Ukrainian man”, an artist with a clear commitment to Ukrainian culture and language, a “man-winner” who seems to avoid the political repressions of the Soviet regime. But her hopes for women’s happiness and love fail, because this “new Ukrainian man” demonstrates in their relations the same inferiority complex as the other post-Soviet men. As critics put it, the woman in Zabuzhko’s story turns out to be marginalized twice, her sufferings as a women are reinforced by the stigma of being born Ukrainian, belonging to a nation which again and again fails to realize itself.¹⁴ The existential burden of “Ukrainianness” is especially bitter for a woman, and sometimes the heroine’s feelings are the clear case of Freudian “penis envy”. Although this book can hardly be called feminist, it initiated a lot of discussion, where the central points of Ukrainian feminism were articulated: national feelings, internal commitment to Ukrainian language and culture as central for a feminist identity; the topic of “strong woman” and “weak man”, women’s choice of spiritual life and creative activity as a space of freedom, in contrast to men’s world of politics, by definition doomed to totalitarianism.

These topics were further elaborated in a recent book by Nila Zborovska, “Feminist thoughts at the carnival of dead kisses”, which is a collection of her essays. Zborovska makes an attempt to re-formulate the relationship between nationalism and feminism in a Ukrainian context. Challenging male “neo-nationalist” discourse, which is of course rather hostile to

feminism, she paradoxically argues that “feminism is the best nationalism”. She refers to the ideas of the inter-war Ukrainian feminist Milena Rudnitska, who stressed the priority of national consolidation and freely chosen women’s responsibility for the nation’s destiny, the so called potential for “spiritual motherhood”, women’s ability to overcome men’s party disagreements for the sake of the future of the nation. According to Zborovska, Ukrainian feminism had been originally based on the idea of national *Sobornost* (integral spiritual unity of the nation). In this sense nationalism is not an alienated ideology, it comes from the natural and very personal feelings of women as citizens.

Here the main idea of “women’s nationalism” in the Ukraine is revealed, as represented by Zborovska. This nationalism, in her writings, has nothing in common with the official state nationalist ideology – superficial, archaic, and not attractive. She speaks about “poetic” nationalism as a “private, deeply intimate feeling, an affective discourse of a concrete person”, which cannot be utilized by the authorities. This kind of nationalism – as a romantic, individual, poetic thinking – was quite typical for Ukraine's historical situation, where national men’s solidarity had no chance to be realized in politics and economics. Therefore marginality is the main feature, which can be seen as common for both Ukrainian feminism and nationalism. “Nationalism as a destruction of cosmopolitan (imperialist) thinking, as a returning to another, marginal national existence and feminism as a destruction of the patriarchal discourse of power and turning to the women’s marginal life is first of all myth-creating (myth-poetic) process with the aim of spiritual self-realization”.¹⁵ Zborovska confirms her approach by re-interpretation of Shevchenko’s poetry in a female way (this work was actually started by Zabužhko in her book “Shevchenko’s myth of Ukraine”). According to this interpretation the real nationalism (patriotism) was represented by Shevchenko as an irrational feeling, spontaneous experience, passion, which is very similar to women’s blind love. This irrational love for “enslaved brothers” (enslaved in a spiritual way) which does not expect a response, is reminiscent of women’s altruism and capacity for self-sacrifice. Other Ukrainian classical writers can be also interpreted in such a way: it is the “women’s world” which is the best part of Ukrainehood, and male aggressiveness and the predatory militarist traditions of Ukrainian Cossacks are fraught with future fratricide.

These peculiarities make the newly constructed Ukrainian feminism rather different from Western feminist theories in some important points. Building her concept around the opposition of Western civilization – Ukrainian culture, Zborovska speaks about a “totalitarian threat” which comes from this civilization to the underdeveloped Ukrainian culture. According to her, the idea of gender equality belongs to this “order of civilization”, but real women’s superiority can be fulfilled only in the area of culture, of spiritual creativity. Western feminist egoism with its commitment to women’s rights and interests is not suitable for the Ukrainian situation, not only due to national-building priorities, but also due to the historical “humiliation and elimination of Ukrainian manhood”. Ukrainian feminism is non-aggressive and “friendly” to men and moreover, here also emerges another romantic idea of *pobratimstvo*

(refers to the Slav custom of establishing special brotherly relations) between a strong woman and a man as a (spiritual) “brother”.

It should be added that this “Ukrainian feminism”, which claims to be authentic and original, of course, identifies itself as an ideological opposition to the Kharkiv school of feminism. The latter is defined as the Enemy – “imperialist chauvinist cosmopolitan feminism”, as “Russian feminism in Ukraine”. Indeed, a feminism which puts itself outside the national project can be regarded as a more serious enemy, than male patriarchal neo-nationalism. It is rather difficult to compare both approaches, because Zborobska sees the development of Ukrainian feminism as a conscious myth-creation, as an invention of a new feminist/nationalist myth, contrary to Zhrebkina, whose main strategy is the deconstruction of nationalist mythology. Paradoxically they need each other and they should have to invent each other (and to some extent exactly this has happened).

Uncompleted national project and the historical role of feminism in the Ukraine

This indicative opposition inside feminism in Ukraine can be seen in a wider context as a sign of the general incompleteness and transitivity of present day nation and state building. In some sense the opposition of Kiev and Kharkiv feminism reflects the political opposition of the Ukrainian and Russian-speaking community in the Ukraine. The role of Russian-speakers can be seen by some as a main problem for the nation-building process. From the point of view of Ukrainian nationalists the Russian speakers should admit their new status as a national minority and abandon their post-imperial ambitions of having equal status with Ukrainian language. From the point of view of Russian-speakers, such narrow cultural and linguistic politics is irrational, narrow-minded and does not correspond to the interests of the majority of the population. The question is even deeper: should Russian-speakers adapt to this imposed cultural/linguistic/political identity, or should the very identity of Ukrainianness be redefined to include the historical experience, cultural and linguistic identity of Russian-speakers as an original part of Ukrainian nation? The question is still open, and it could be seen not only as a sign of the incompleteness of the Ukrainian national project but also as a hope for a more inclusive and tolerant citizenship, and a more universal (not only ethnically or linguistically based) national identity. The “Russian-speaking feminism” of the Kharkiv center (Russian is the exclusive language of its publications) usually seen as an “anti-Ukrainian position” can be interpreted as a conscious attempt to make marginal cultural experience visible, as resistance to a Ukrainian women’s identity, which is imposed from above and too narrow.

Unfortunately these perspectives for inclusive identity seem very problematic just because Russia remains an important factor of Ukrainian identity formation. (Imagined) Russia as an imperial power, which threatens the very existence of the Ukrainian nation, language and culture, is constructed as the “Other” in opposition to which “true Ukrainian identity” is being formed. Therefore from the nationalist point of view Russian-speaking feminism is inevitably considered as an agent of “Russian cultural imperialism”.

The ambivalent position of the Ukraine between Russia and the West, and current attempts to reconstruct the image of the Ukraine (in opposition to Russia) as an “original European nation” can also be regarded as an important geopolitical context for Ukrainian feminism. It identifies itself with some kind of “postcolonial feminism”, but the target of the “postcolonial” critique is not so clear. It is not a “Western-centered discourse” as is usual in postcolonial studies, but first of all, Russian (Soviet) cultural influence and dominance – past and present. The opposition between “Ukrainian feminism” and “Russian-speaking feminism in Ukraine” can be also considered in terms of political battle for access to the new Western (feminist) language, for the right to be treated as “oppressed” and “marginalized” and to treat others as dominant and “oppressive”.

Contemporary feminist debate in Ukraine is an important part of the process of nation-building and national identity formation. Taking into account its incompleteness and openness, both approaches will contribute into it. And it is exactly because state nationalism turned out to be artificial and not modern, that women’s “romantic nationalism” could appear. And because this state nationalism turned out to be too narrow ethnically and linguistically based, “Russian feminism in the Ukraine” also emerged. One can already admit, that opposition of both feminisms in Ukraine determined the two main poles in the current discussions on the national project, the very political amplitude of incompatible positions.

Nation building presumes the reinterpretation of cultural heritage and myth creating: it is through these processes that the national culture and the national idea are being modernized. Women’s voices in these processes of reinterpretation of tradition, searching for special women’s ways of “inventing the nation” can be very important for defining women’s role in the society and for the national project as a whole. But still, the women’s opposition to the dominant state and nationalist ideology, feminist struggle for the right for deconstruction of national myths are even more important, and this new established “tradition of anti-nationalism” could help to modernize the Ukrainian national idea even more effectively. That is why I do not believe there is only one “right” feminism and only one way for it to deal with nationalism.

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