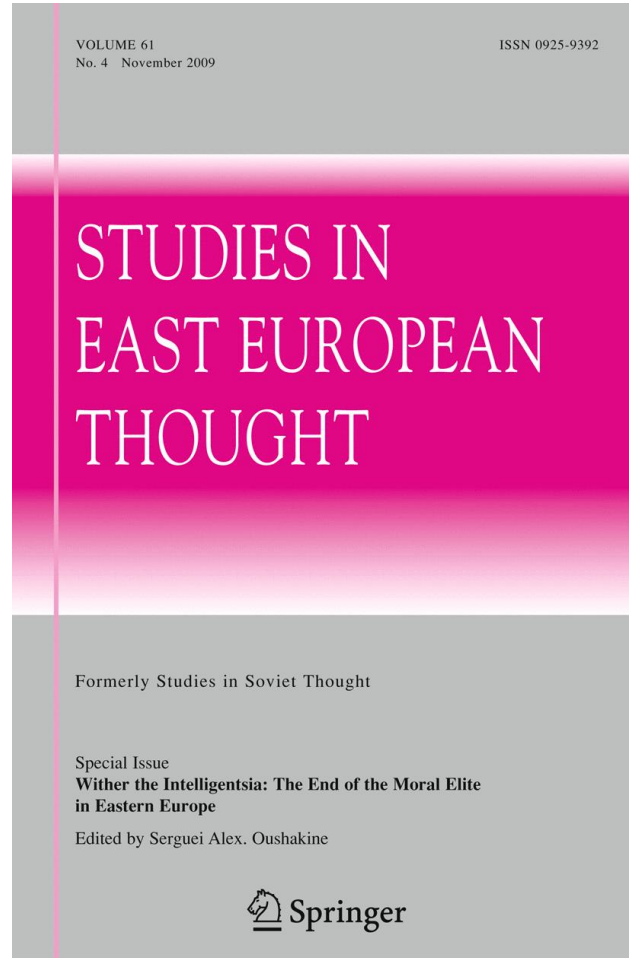


ISSN 0925-9392, Volume 61, Number 4



**This article was published in the above mentioned Springer issue.
The material, including all portions thereof, is protected by copyright;
all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science + Business Media.
The material is for personal use only;
commercial use is not permitted.
Unauthorized reproduction, transfer and/or use
may be a violation of criminal as well as civil law.**

Feminism, intellectuals and the formation of micro-publics in postcommunist Ukraine

Alexandra Hrycak · Maria G. Rewakowicz

Published online: 8 December 2009
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

Abstract This article broadens understanding of the role that East European intellectuals have played in building foundations for democratic institutions and practices over the past two decades. Drawing on Habermas' writings on the public sphere, we use interviews conducted with founders of women's and gender studies centers, professional women's NGOs and Internet forums to examine the establishment of new micro-contexts for civic engagement and critical debate in Ukraine. Three main types of indigenous feminist micro-public are identified: academic, professional and virtual. Through an analysis of these micro-publics as well as the works of writer Oksana Zabuzhko, we explore the articulation and legitimation of a "national feminist" standpoint that draws upon feminism to criticize populist understandings of national history and civic belonging. We contribute to studies of democratization and transition by suggesting how small groups of critical intellectuals (locally called "tusovky") acted as microfoundations of civil society. By supporting local engagement with Western critical theory, these small groups helped to create a new infrastructure for engaging intellectuals in the pluralization and diversification of public life.

Keywords Public sphere · Civil society · NGOs · Gender studies · Women's activism

A. Hrycak (✉)

Department of Sociology, Reed College, 3203 SE Woodstock Blvd, Portland, OR 97202-8199, USA
e-mail: hrycaka@reed.edu

M. G. Rewakowicz

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Washington, Box 353580, Seattle, WA 98195, USA
e-mail: mrewakow@uw.edu

Introduction

Twenty years ago, protest exploded across the communist bloc, leading to the later dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of Ukraine, Belarus, and other Soviet republics. In this essay we wish to reconsider the role that intellectuals played in these events and more broadly, in shaping the subsequent trajectories of public life in these new countries. Our aim is to interrogate how intellectuals have contributed to the development of the communicative infrastructures, discourses, networks, and associations that are considered by social theorists and political philosophers to constitute the necessary foundations for democratic institutions. In particular, we analyze the relationships intellectuals have developed to the state and to broader publics.

We position our analysis against the assumptions of the dualistic model of civil society and public life that is commonly used to explain protests and democratization in Eastern Europe. When transitions from communism first began, intellectuals were widely considered to be responsible for integrating a citizenry that was atomized by state socialist rule into a coherent public with a shared collective identity. Typically, it was assumed that intellectuals were crucial because they had established a public sphere where debate can be conducted about matters of concern, something that Jürgen Habermas in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, considers to be the foundation of a liberal, democratic political order (Habermas 1991).

As we will show below, in the case of Ukraine, we do indeed see intellectuals as playing a vital role in creating new forums for engaging citizens in public debates. Within these forums, intellectuals have created conditions for producing and legitimizing new oppositional discourses. We consider these oppositional discourses to be indispensable for creating new foundations for critical social theory and democratic practice.

But the public sphere that has come into existence in Ukraine over the past two decades bears little resemblance to the public sphere we find in Western theories of civil society. As Nancy Fraser and others have noted, Habermas assumes the existence of a “single, comprehensive, overarching public” (Fraser 1992) that is differentiated from the private sphere in a simple, clear manner (Calhoun 1992). By contrast, Ukraine’s public sphere is diverse and fragmented into numerous spheres of publicity within which boundaries between public and private remain blurred. Following Ukrainian theorist Oksana Zabuzhko, we call these basic units “micro-publics” (Zabuzhko 2002).

Zabuzhko and others have pointed out that contemporary micro-public spheres originate in the “clandestine and semi-clandestine” personal networks (or “tusovky”) that formed during the Soviet era on the margins of universities, research institutes, writers’ union, and other “official” state institutions that controlled the production of knowledge in the Soviet Union (Zabuzhko 2002). These institutions are no longer as tightly controlled by the state as they were in the past. Consequently, intellectuals can engage more publicly in debating and challenging academic canons. However, the same administrators and decision-makers who previously controlled Soviet knowledge production retain control over much of post-Soviet academia and hence, continue to play a role in defining hegemonic ideology. Moreover, this administrative stratum

often continues to embrace the same populist discourses as it did in the past, and favors scholars and scholarship that adopt them as well. Thus, new forums for critical debate take the form of what Nancy Fraser calls “weak” publics, whose deliberative practices consist exclusively of forming opinions on the edges of institutions that are themselves embedded within “strong” publics, whose discourses both shape opinions and result in decisions that have binding authority over other intellectuals and the institutions within which they are employed. Furthermore, as we show below, micro-publics found in Ukraine remain small and fragile—surprisingly so, given that they have received nearly two decades of grants and other forms of support from Western benefactors interested in strengthening post-Soviet civil societies.

We explore these themes through an examination of the spaces and discourses that intellectuals have created in response to their engagement with feminism. The rise of new forms of women’s activism in the countries of Eastern Europe has attracted much interest among scholars of civil society and considerable support from donors involved in shaping postcommunist transitions and strengthening local civil societies. Indeed, gender studies is arguably the only field within post-Soviet academia that has arisen *de novo* since the collapse, almost completely in response to Western support. One might expect, presumably, that feminist spaces would most closely conform to Western models of the public sphere as a large, open domain that fosters society-wide, rational debates and encourages liberal critique.

And yet, scholars have failed to acknowledge (or grapple with) the critical discourses that new feminist publics have produced in post-Soviet countries. Scholarship examining postcommunist women’s activism has tended to focus mainly on non-feminist groups, in particular non-governmental organizations that provide social services to women who are experiencing violence, unemployment, poverty or some other crisis. With notable exceptions such as the Moscow Gender Studies Center, far less attention has been paid by scholars to other sites within which indigenous feminist discourse is being developed.

We fill this gap below by offering detailed examinations of the reception of feminist thought within several new feminist micro-publics: women’s and gender studies centers, professional women’s NGOs and new Internet forums. We use these sites to explore the articulation within new public arenas of what Ukrainian feminist scholar Tatiana Zhurzhenko calls a “national feminist” standpoint that brings together feminist critique around national concerns regarding how to transform Ukraine from a colony into a democratic nation-state (Zhurzhenko 2008). According to Zhurzhenko, there has been a tendency in critical discussions of postcommunist feminism to assume that the “national” can be easily equated with “nationalism.” As a consequence, analysts concerned with understanding postcommunist feminism in contexts such as Ukraine too quickly assumed that the only natural question to ask is how nationalism manipulates women’s interests and distorts domestic understandings of women’s empowerment. No space has been carved out for understanding the standpoint of “national feminists” who use feminist discourses to “participate in the process of inventing a Ukrainian nation and negotiating its borders, in constructing collective memory and a national identity” (Zhurzhenko 2008, pp. 38–39). Consequently, Zhurzhenko argues, a number of important questions about postcommunist feminists remain unaddressed, such as “how do they define their position in the current situation

of unfinished nation building and blurred identity? What role do they seek in the process of a national revival?"

To respond to these questions and to develop an agenda for future assessments of postcommunist feminist publics, we will explore the standpoint of national feminists as it has taken shape within several contexts. After we examine how independence and recent democratization have created new opportunities in Ukraine for civic organizations that challenge the state, we survey the rise of feminist micro-publics. Then we go on to analyze in greater depth the popularization of national feminism through the works of Oksana Zabuzhko. We use her works to examine the broader national feminist historical narrative she has articulated that links the concerns of several of Ukraine's primary micro-publics together around a project to define a liberal alternative to the populist national historical discourses widely prevalent in the Soviet as well as post-Soviet eras. We believe that Zabuzhko's efforts to use national feminism as an instrument for forging a broader intellectual public (above the level of distinct micro-publics) are useful for understanding the type of institution-building that feminist intellectuals have considered necessary for strengthening the context for oppositional feminist intellectual discourse in Ukraine. Her work demonstrates that the oppositional discourses articulated within new, weak micro-publics of the late Soviet era are beginning to influence the development of a nascent civil society that is relatively diverse ideologically and unites intellectuals together in a common project to create pluralistic, critical foundations for political and academic discourse in Ukraine.

The rise of postcommunist counter-publics

Over the course of the past two decades since the disintegration of the Soviet Union began, political liberalization has allowed a multitude of new civic groups to form at various levels of society in Ukraine.¹ Just as in most other post-Soviet countries, participation in civic activities in Ukraine—ranging from small-scale groups to large-scale protests—was very low in the decade after the Soviet Union's collapse, relative to countries with more developed democratic institutions (Kuts 2001; Kuts and Palyvoda 2006). State elites attempted to control civil society by creating "GONGOS" (government-organized non-governmental organizations) and coopting civic groups. However, a broad range of new civic organizations remained outside the control of the state. Starting in the late 1990s, these civic groups became the power base for a coalition with politicians and political parties that had split off from the ruling elite. This opposition movement was subjected to increasing repression by the state. Powerholders' efforts to retain control of the government led to the falsification of the outcome of presidential elections of 2004 in which the opposition's leader, Viktor Yushchenko, ran against Viktor Yanukovych, a candidate backed by the power elite. In response to efforts to declare Yanukovych

¹ The number of civic groups exploded in the late 1990s in Ukraine and has continued to grow since then. In 2005, there were 28,000 such groups registered with the state. Four years later, there are more than 63,000 nonprofit civic groups that are registered with the state (State statistics committee of Ukraine 2009). One should note that many groups also operate informally, without registering.

the winner, an estimated one-fifth of the population participated in mass protests that came to be called the Orange Revolution (Stepanenko 2005). Since this impressive demonstration of nonviolent civil disobedience and “people power,” state elites have been compelled to relinquish control over the mass media and other public spaces. Civic groups now operate without interference.

There are many civic groups in Ukraine that consider themselves to be women’s organizations (in Ukrainian, *Zhinochi orhanizatsii*). These groups have struggled to find the resources to sustain themselves, but have enjoyed increasing political influence since the Orange Revolution. Some women’s organizations formed nearly 20 years ago with assistance from the independence movement, Rukh. But most were established in the mid to late 1990s, a time when more than a thousand women’s groups registered with the state. These include a proliferation of foundations, charities, and self-help groups as well as a diverse array of other organizations that formed at the local level. Several women’s parties and a multitude of groups that affiliate with political parties or politicians have forged nationwide federations.

Women’s groups have created new channels that encourage women to become active in public life, thereby contributing significantly to broader efforts to strengthen patterns of civic engagement that arise outside the reach of the state. But while these groups empower women as citizens, most have remained wary of associations with feminism (Kis’ 2003; Pavlychko 1992). Indeed, many argue that “women’s emancipation” is not needed, either because the Soviet state already “emancipated women” or because Ukrainian national traditions are based upon principles of partnership and respect for women as mothers (Zhurzhenko 2001). Participants in most new women’s organizations—and many women in the broader public—interpret their needs, interests and identities as civic actors primarily through a discourse of motherhood that focuses upon the welfare of children and the family. They often articulate their civic mission through references to the *Berehynia*, a mythic pagan goddess that is said to have guarded the hearth in Ukrainian peasant homes. However, a small but growing community of feminist commentators and feminist groups challenges the terms of such public discourses and is reinterpreting them through feminist theoretical frameworks (Pavlychko 1992).

The rise of feminism and gender studies

Scholars in Ukraine first became interested in drawing upon women’s studies and feminism in the early 1990s. Typically, they worked informally, in small groups that developed in relative isolation from one another, within small spaces carved out at the margins of major universities or academic institutes. In the second half of the 1990s, support from Western governments, private foundations (e.g., the Soros Foundation), and the United Nations Development Program stimulated the establishment of gender studies centers (Shymchyshyn 2005). Local feminist groups received grants for translating Western works (e.g., Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*), publishing monographs and textbooks, developing new curricula, as well as coordinating seminars, conferences and summer schools. They also began to apply

feminist theory to domestic concerns and raised such issues as domestic violence and workplace discrimination (problems that had been taboo in the Soviet era).

Feminist scholars have encountered various kinds of resistance to their efforts to establish spaces for challenging established views on women's issues. They have been accused of mainly serving the interests and needs of Western projects in postcommunist countries (Zherebkina 2003). Indeed, in the late 1990s, scholars who worked on gender issues often encountered accusations that they were "grant chasers" or "grant-eaters" [*hrantoiidy*, in Ukrainian], as presumably, they undertook such work mainly in exchange for money from Western foundations and Western aid initiatives, rather than out of genuine interest (Zabuzhko 2001). And they have often faced opposition from their colleagues, in particular, the old guard academics who continue to occupy decision-making positions in post-Soviet Ukrainian academia (Zherebkina 2003).

Nevertheless, local efforts to develop indigenous feminism and institutionalize gender studies in academia have gained acceptance and are growing in popularity among graduate students, as illustrated by statistics on candidate's and doctoral dissertations that draw upon gender theories and methods (see Table 1). Young scholars in Ukraine have been developing their interest in feminism and gender issues mainly in the disciplines of philology, history, psychology, law, and philosophy. Gender studies have remained relatively underdeveloped within the social sciences. Several dissertations have been written in politics and economics, but only a few in sociology.

Gender studies appear to be becoming institutionalized in geographic clusters. Dissertations on gender themes are concentrated in Kyiv and Kharkiv, the country's two largest cities, where gender studies projects have received the most support (see Table 2). Nearly half of all dissertations have been written at institutions located in Kyiv. Around one out of five dissertations in gender studies is written at a Kharkiv

Table 1 Dissertations in gender studies in Ukraine, by field

Field	Candidate's	Doctoral	Total
Philosophy	18	6	24
Philology	34	2	36
History	28	2	30
Psychology	38	2	40
Sociology	14	0	14
Politics	3	0	3
Economics	1	0	1
Geography	1	0	1
Law	27	5	32
Public administration	1	6	7
Education	8	0	8
Total	173	23	196

Source: Kharkov Center for Gender Studies, <http://www.gender.univer.kharkov.ua/diss/>

Table 2 Dissertations in gender studies in Ukraine, by city

City	Total
Kyiv	91
Kharkiv	47
Lviv	11
Odesa	11
Luhansk	7
Donetsk	6
Ivano-Frankivsk	5
Dnipropetrovsk	4
Kirovohrad	3
Zaporizhzhia	3
Simferopil	2
Ternopil	2
Chernivtsi	1
Kherson	1
Lutsk	1
Khmelnyskyi	1
Total	196

Source: Kharkov Center for Gender Studies, <http://www.gender.univer.kharkov.ua/diss/>

institution of higher education. And around ten percent of dissertations were defended in Odessa and Lviv, which were early leaders in the field of women's history.

The field of gender studies has even managed to gain sufficient legitimacy to be deemed worthy of support among state officials, who have agreed to make gender courses mandatory in higher education in the future (Zherebkina 2003). More broadly, state support for efforts to mandate the integration of gender studies into the curriculum of universities as well as schools has increased since the Orange Revolution, when Western-oriented state officials gained leverage and increased their presence among decision-makers.

Academic feminists and gender studies

It is mainly through the work of small circles of feminist intellectuals in the 1990s that academic work on feminism has established a foothold in Ukraine and is giving rise to a new generation of Ukrainian scholars interested in gender studies. At the core of these micro-publics are academic feminists. Most academic feminists are employed full time at a university or an academic research institute in a large city. Many are also affiliated closely with a center for women's and gender studies, or have participated in seminars devoted to advancing work in this new field.

The first gender studies centers were founded in the mid-1990s in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odessa and Lviv (locations where, in recent years, nearly all dissertations in gender

studies have been written). In response to their activities, gender centers have also been established in six other cities (Vinnytsia, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, Simferopol, Sumy, and Ternopil). The number of such organizations has grown to nearly a dozen in Kyiv. It is estimated that there are nearly two dozen gender studies centers (United Nations Development Program 2003).

Much like other new academic and literary micro-publics, academic feminism originated in small informal groups of oppositional intellectuals, colloquially called *tusovky* (Zabuzhko 2002). *Tusovky* formed on the margins of major universities, academic institutes and professional associations in most major cities in the final decades of Soviet rule.² They attracted underground artists, poets, and intellectuals who were alienated from Soviet society and the official Soviet academic and cultural establishment. In the Soviet era, members of *tusovky* expressed their disaffection mainly through spontaneous gatherings, discussions and poetry readings that operated predominantly in private residences. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought about new opportunities for these intellectuals to engage more openly in activities that challenged the conceptual foundations of academic disciplines and intellectual discourse. They began to hold public seminars, summer schools and other new forums to engage other scholars in discussion and debate of literature that was excluded from the official Soviet canon, including feminism as well as critical theory, postmodernism, cultural studies and other schools of thought that had been prohibited in the Soviet era (Shymchyshyn 2005). Through such informal activities, spaces for engagement with feminist thought were also created on the margins of academic institutions in major Ukrainian cities.

Competing feminist discourses

While a diversity of feminist micro-publics has been established in various sites in Ukraine, in the 1990s, two broad overarching ideological camps developed. The chief divide, it is widely acknowledged, came into existence between the feminist perspectives developed within two competing academic centers of gender studies, one in Kharkiv, founded in 1994 and affiliated with Kharkiv University, and the other one located in Kyiv and originating in a seminar held over the course of the 1990s at the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Zhurzhenko 2001).

The Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies foregrounds the philosophical aspects of feminism. It has primarily focused on introducing the Russian-speaking intellectual public to French deconstructionist thought (Zhurzhenko 2001). Its founder and director, Irina Zherebkina, self-identifies as a “Russian” and positions herself mainly as an interlocutor between feminists in Russia and the West (Zherebkina 2003). Her center initially engaged in considerable local outreach and acted as an

² “Tusovky” are not unique to academic feminist activities or to academia in Ukraine. As Zabuzhko herself points out, they constitute the basis for intellectual micro-publics not only in Ukraine but other postcommunist countries (Zabuzhko 2002). The *tusovka* also has long been a central organizing principle among Russian urban teens, although it has undergone significant changes in the post-Soviet era (Pilkington 1996).

incubator for local women's activism. But more recently, post-Soviet academics outside Ukraine appear to be its chief audience. Zhrebkina's works have examined the historic experiences of colonization that have left Ukrainian women "unconscious" of their real political interests and "fearing feminism" (Zhrebkina 1999a, b, 2002). Consequently, Zhrebkina argues, women are "collective" in their mentality, and hence Western feminist theory needs to be adapted to suit their needs. But she appears ambivalent regarding the validity of efforts to develop national feminism. In the late 1990s, she praised the efforts of historians and literary critics in Ukraine who adopted feminist approaches (Zhrebkina 1999a, p. 61). But in her later work, she makes assertions that suggest that she does not consider them to be contributing to gender studies as a field (Zhrebkina 2003). Indeed, some scholars find her later works' concern for debunking nationalist myths to be nostalgic for the Soviet era, when the entire region was defined as a Russian language space (Chernetsky 2007).

The Kyiv school of feminism, by contrast, initiated the development of what Zhurzhenko calls national feminism (Zhurzhenko 2008). The school concerned itself predominantly with applying literary criticism and developing new feminist methodologies for reinterpreting Ukrainian literary classics and national identity. Solomea Pavlychko, a literary scholar who was the founder of the Kyiv school, first began to call for scholars to apply feminism to Ukrainian literature in the early 1990s. In "Do Ukrainian Literary Studies Need a Feminist School?," a 1991 article published in one of Ukraine's "official" literary journals, Pavlychko argued that incorporating feminist theory was a precondition to raising Ukrainian literary studies to European standards (Pavlychko 2002).³ She continued throughout the 1990s to build broader acceptance of feminist methods within Ukrainian academia through her publications and public appearances, her activities as a publisher and member of the board of the Renaissance Foundation (the Ukrainian chapter of the Soros Foundation), as well as through her ongoing seminars and a summer school on feminism.⁴

These two schools of feminist thought serve to demonstrate that feminist discourses were divided over what benefit feminism could bring to Ukrainians as citizens and to Ukraine as a country. For one side, feminism was a discourse useful for questioning the legitimacy of efforts to make Ukraine independent from Russia, which some scholars in Ukraine viewed as the location of their principle audiences and their historic community. For the other, feminism was useful for challenging the ethnocentric, populist ways in which some intellectuals (particularly, those of the older generation) were envisioning Ukrainian history, culture and national identity.

The fact that debates on indigenous feminist discourses were conducted in the 1990s mainly by two specific figures also demonstrates the small scale of the debates that later gave rise to the field of gender studies, which now includes dozens of scholars and activists. After Ukraine's independence, it was at the micro-level

³ This essay was originally published as "Chy potribna ukrains'komu literaturoznavstvu feministychna shkola?" See Pavlychko (1991).

⁴ Pavlychko's contribution in this regard has never been questioned, and since her untimely death in 1999 she has become an object of intense veneration among her feminist colleagues. For example, Oksana Zabuzhko's most recent non-fiction book *Notre Dame d'Ukraine: Ukrainka v konflikti mifolohii* (2007), discussed further below, is dedicated to Pavlychko's memory.

that individual founding figures undertook steps to start the development of feminist debates, establishing the small intellectual space that served as the foundation for gender studies as an academic field. Indeed, while networks of scholars have continued to grow, gender centers have remained small, fragile and highly dependent on their founders. For instance, in the years following Pavlychko's untimely death in 1999 in a household accident, the Kyiv Center as an organization has largely dissolved: it no longer sponsors conferences and several of its founders have drifted away from gender studies (most visibly, Nila Zborovs'ka, who has publicly renounced feminism and repudiated her earlier work). Nonetheless, the Kyiv Center's intellectual contributions have entered into the new canon of post-Soviet Ukrainian literary criticism and gender studies as a field. Similarly, the deaths of several other leading academic feminists (Natalia Chukhym in Kyiv and Liudmyla Smoliar in Odessa, both of whom died of breast cancer) have led work within their gender centers to cease or slow down significantly, even though their monographs and primers are now required readings in courses offered in their fields.⁵ Nonetheless, despite the fragmented and fragile character of these feminist micro-publics, and despite the weakness of gender centers as organizations, they helped feminist discourses establish new spaces within academia.

Studies of literature

The attractiveness of feminist theory and gender studies for women literary scholars in Ukraine stemmed from a profound need to find new ways of interpreting literature after many years of stagnation and ideological constraints under the Soviet regime. The transition from highly proscribed readings and outdated methodologies has been rather slow and uneven. A small circle of women literary critics associated with the Kyiv school of feminist thought is widely acknowledged for challenging the status quo in Ukrainian literary studies by introducing feminist theory and psychoanalysis as viable interpretative alternatives to canonical readings that were rooted in Soviet paradigms (Shymchyshyn 2005). In the 1990s, Solomea Pavlychko, Vira Aheieva, Nila Zborovs'ka and Tamara Hundorova, all working at the Institute of Literature at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv, not only offered fresh readings of Ukrainian classics but also turned their attention to new literature that scholars of a more conservative proclivity shunned.

The most pronounced achievement of feminist literary scholars in Ukraine lies in their calling into question the established canon, not simply because it was ideologically biased (promoting communist propaganda) but also because it clearly reflected a patriarchal, populist mode of thinking. Their interpretative return to classic male authors such as Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) and Ivan Franko (1856–1916) was prompted by the desire to remove the clichés attached to founding figures and to read their oeuvre through the prism of feminism, psychoanalysis, pure aestheticism, and/or philosophy (Hundorova 1996; Zabuzhko 1993, 1997). Women

⁵ Furthermore, the absence of the latter two figures has left a leadership void that has prevented an association of gender studies from forming in Ukraine (Chukhym and Smoliar were both involved in this latter project).

writers already recognized as firmly belonging to the canon were also given a new look. Marko Vovchok (1833–1907), Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863–1942), and Lesia Ukraïнка (1871–1913), praised in the Soviet era mainly for their political views on social justice, were reexamined in order to bring to light their feminist agenda and standpoint as new women in Ukrainian letters.

In addition to classic authors, feminist critics turned their attention to recovering figures that the Soviet academic canon marginalized or excluded, in particular, Ukrainian modernists. Here, Pavlychko's (2000) study on Ahatanhel Kryms'kyi (1871–1942) especially deserves to be mentioned. She presents Kryms'kyi not only as a poet and writer but also discusses his contribution as a scholar of Middle East languages and political thinker, including his views on nationalism and issues of identity. Kryms'kyi's major prose work *Andrii Lahovs'kyi* foregrounds the issue of homosexuality and this aspect is especially analyzed by Pavlychko.⁶ While Pavlychko turned to a male author whose position in the canon was considered secondary, Aheieva rehabilitated women's writing by focusing on a number of lesser-known female writers, mainly from the second half of the nineteenth century, who nonetheless played an important role in the development of modernist premises of Ukrainian literature (Aheieva 2003). Aheieva widened the focus of feminist analyses of modernism beyond the standard icons of Kobylians'ka and Ukraïнка, thereby reinforcing the argument that Ukrainian modernism has roots in an indigenous feminist discourse.

The critical texts put forth by the literary scholars of the Kyiv Center are striking for their breadth of feminist approaches, from feminist critique to psychoanalytical studies of female subjectivity, at the heart of which lies a desire to shake up the conservatism of the academy by introducing controversial topics and novel methodologies. Pavlychko's re-conceptualization of Ukrainian modernism in terms of a gender conflict that was intertwined with a debate over Ukraine's geopolitical orientation was perhaps the most novel and sweeping. Her *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukraïnskii literaturi* [Discourse of Modernism in Ukrainian Literature] frames the fin-de-siècle discourse in Ukrainian letters as a struggle between populism (which she saw as representing traditional and patriarchal values) and modernism (which she saw as drawing upon the progressive ideas of European elites) (Pavlychko 1999). She argues that, in Ukraine, modernism was articulated more successfully by female rather than male writers, thus raising a theme that other national feminist scholars in Ukraine have analyzed: the notion that women as intellectuals have played a crucial role as Westernizers, bearers of progressive ideals that are necessary for Ukrainian culture to develop and outgrow colonial shackles.

As the above examples of feminist criticism assert, the Kyiv Center had been preoccupied first and foremost with reinterpreting the history of Ukrainian literature by offering new reading strategies of which feminist theory was considered the most productive. However, to Kyiv feminists, fighting colonial complexes in post-Soviet Ukraine was as important as studying the theoretical premises of feminism; indeed,

⁶ Pavlychko's penchant for queer aspects in Ukrainian literature is well documented. Earlier, in her monograph on Ukrainian modernism, she placed the quasi-lesbian correspondence between Kobylians'ka and Ukraïнка at the center of Ukrainian modernist discourse. See, for example, Pavlychko (1999, pp. 83–88).

they argued that feminism was essential to decolonizing Ukrainian intellectual thought.

Professional feminists and state policy formation

A second and related group of national feminists has also become influential in Ukraine: feminists who raise issues of gender discrimination and gender equity within policy circles. Domestically, members of these groups are sometimes called “professional feminists.” Professional feminists work as intermediaries between the Ukrainian state, on the one hand, and international organizations and Western initiatives that are dedicated to women’s issues, on the other. Since the Orange Revolution, state officials have demonstrated increased support for gender equity initiatives and have established new access points for women’s groups to influence policy and its implementation. In response to increasing state responsiveness to the demands of women’s advocates, a growing network of gender resource centers, crisis centers, shelters and other women’s rights organizations has been established.

Professional feminist networks can be traced back to the activities of the Kyiv and Kharkiv circles of academic feminists in the early 1990s. At this time, Pavlychko and Zherebkina each established civic organizations and coordinated seminars and other events that expanded the reach of feminism beyond the confines of academia.⁷

Participation in the public discussions of women’s interests that early academic feminists coordinated in the 1990s attracted the interest of a small but growing number of academics and activists who began to call for the state to develop policies and laws to strengthen women’s rights. While their agenda was formed through early discussions and conferences organized by women’s groups established after independence, it was later reshaped by exposure to international women’s rights activism during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women that took place in and around Beijing in September 1995 (Zhurzhenko 2004).⁸

⁷ Pavlychko helped to establish one of the first independent women’s organizations (*Zhinocha Hromada*), which grew out of the independence movement Rukh and saw Ukraine’s independence as the first step toward establishing state institutions that would strengthen support for women’s rights. She was, nevertheless, very critical of the traditionalist stance that *Zhinocha Hromada* and other new women’s organizations adopted after independence. Writing in the late 1990s, Pavlychko lamented that “contemporary Ukraine shows two tendencies: first, the strengthening of discrimination against women in all spheres of social life and the workplace; and, second, the unwillingness or inability of society in general, and women’s organizations in particular, to understand this phenomenon and to challenge it” (Pavlychko 1997, p. 232). She explained the rampant sexism and negative attitudes toward feminism in Ukrainian society as a direct consequence of insufficiently developed democratic traditions and the failure of Ukraine as a country to make a transition to democracy and the market. Building a new nation and a civil society depended upon the genuine emancipation of women, according to Pavlychko. For her, the two processes of democratization and women’s empowerment cannot be separated. Both depended, she believed, on strengthening the authority of the Ukrainian women who “speak with an independent voice” and “sound dissonant chords” (Pavlychko 1997).

⁸ The experience of “Beijing” marked a crucial turning point for the standpoint professional feminists developed. It not only introduced them to such new issues as violence against women but also led them to realize that Ukraine was obligated to address these and other violations of women’s rights by the

Crucial support to advance the agendas of policy feminists came from the Ukrainian staff of the United Nations Development Program. At the time of Ukraine's independence, the program hired Larysa Kobelyanska, a lecturer in philosophy at Kyiv University, to head its Equal Opportunities Program. Kobelyanska first became active in the early 1990s in *Zhinocha Hromada*, the women's organization that Solomea Pavlychko helped to establish within Rukh. After participating in the NGO Forum at the Fourth World Conference on Women as a representative of *Zhinocha Hromada*, and organizing several conferences on women's issues, Kobelyanska and several of her close collaborators from this organization grew dissatisfied with the traditionalism they found among many women activists and established "League of Women Voters 50/50" to advocate for gender equality and women's rights. As we have already indicated, most feminists in Ukraine work in academic institutes within small, informal micro-publics. Kobelyanska is one of the relatively few self-described feminists engaged in bridging between these feminist micro-publics and state officials involved in developing policy to strengthen women's rights. Her program has led to many notable achievements and has gained considerable support from policy makers since the Orange Revolution (as mentioned above). Nonetheless, Kobelyanska does not believe that the foundations exist yet in Ukraine for feminist activists to work on a macro scale, mobilizing the broader public. She explained, "In our society, it is very hard for feminism to find a place, to legitimize itself" (Author's Interview with Larysa Kobelyanska, May 9, 2001). In order to build support for gender equality, she believes that lobbying by small, professional feminist groups working directly with individual state officials and leaders of political parties at present remains more effective than mobilization at the macro level: "I am convinced that the professional activity of some small number of women can exert greater influence on the consciousness of society and on legislators than the spontaneous contentious activity of even the greatest movement."

Consequently, rather than working to engage women in the public at large in a mass women's movement, Kobelyanska engages feminist groups and gender studies experts who adopt a professional style of activism and work at the elite level to develop support for women's rights within the polity. She believes that in a post-Soviet society such as Ukraine, where civic engagement remains weak and there is still little popular demand for women's empowerment, efforts to undertake mobilization at the macro level are bound to be ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive to feminism. Most other feminists in Ukraine that belong to her generation share this position. To begin to create legal support for women's rights, they argue, it is first necessary to persuade others in positions of power that gender inequality exists in Ukraine. Most state officials (in particular, those who are women) still do not believe that gender inequality is a significant problem. Both the broader public and state officials and legislators view "feminists" as irrational, emotional individuals who mistakenly blame men for their lack of personal

Footnote 8 continued

Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international treaties to which it was a party.

fulfillment. To counter this “angry man-hater” stereotype, Kobelyanska and her allies feel that it is first necessary to legitimate their cause using evidence, data, and reasoned argument. And they are also committed to further work on refining state programs and laws in order to improve the legal institutional foundation for women’s rights.

Virtual feminist activism

New communication media and discussion forums based in the Internet in particular are an integral part of activism involving young people in Ukraine. The importance of Internet sites to organizing political communities first became clear during the Orange Revolution, when various websites became central sources of information on breaking news locally as well as abroad (in particular, Brama, Maidan, Ukrayinska Pravda, Pora, Razom, all of which included links to further websites) (Filippova 2007; Kyj 2006). In recent years, local Internet sites and chat rooms have grown in importance among young people as sites for mobilizing protest and seeking support for new causes. New communications media arguably surpass traditional media in their importance for the “Orange generation,” the students who participated in the Orange Revolution. Young activists have established new spaces for sustaining their political activism through the Internet as well as through mobilization initiated through the web.

Blogging and Internet publishing have also become a central force in producing “virtual community” among young feminists who belong to the Orange generation and are seeking to use newfound freedoms to expand women’s rights.⁹ The most popular site for conducting debates among young people in Ukraine is LiveJournal.¹⁰ LiveJournal first became popular in English-speaking countries.¹¹ In recent years, it has also become increasingly popular in Ukraine. From August 2008 until March 2009, the number of users of LiveJournal in Ukraine increased 50%. They now number close to one hundred thirty thousand. Sites based in LiveJournal have surpassed other forms of communication among young civic activists in Ukraine, particularly those who were in their teens and twenties during the Orange Revolution.

At the core of virtual feminist networks are dozens of “friends” who are linked to each other through several communities concerned with feminism in Ukraine. Most are based on the margins of academic institutions.¹² Among the most active of these

⁹ The first feminist virtual network based on the Internet was created in the 1990s through a list serve: the Kharkiv Gender studies list. This list continues to be the main method of communication for spreading announcements regarding gender studies as an academic discipline. Recently, several new sites have emerged on LiveJournal that constitute new locations for political discussions on the topic of feminism and that also seek to engage youth in feminist acts of resistance.

¹⁰ Tamara Zlobina, writing in v. 16 of the Kharkiv Gender Studies Journal, <http://www.gender.univer.kharkov.ua/gurnal/16/04.pdf> [accessed July 18, 2008].

¹¹ The United States has by far the most LiveJournal users among users who choose to list a location.

¹² The oldest feminist forum on LiveJournal is the Kyiv Gender Linguistics Forum (see http://community.livejournal.com/feminism_ua/profile). It was established by a sociolinguistics seminar

feminist forums is *Feminisms is*, a site maintained by a graduate of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Tamara Zlobina. Of the communities linked around Ukrainian feminism, this blog is one that is attracting the most public attention among young virtual activists. Over the course of the first year since its creation in 2008, it grew to 98 users who list *Feminism is* as their “friend” and over two hundred that the site has linked to as “friends.” Zlobina, who seeks specifically to develop “Ukrainian feminism” that will empower the “New Ukrainian Woman,” has used the site to organize several related events that publicize a new liberal feminist agenda that she is seeking to advance among members of her generation. One of the focuses of this campaign has been promoting a feminist book Zlobina wrote for members of her generation, titled *Feminism is...* A description of this project, which seeks to persuade women that feminism is about freedom of choice and personal liberty, first appeared on LiveJournal, where the creators of this feminist project had posted a page titled in Ukrainian, “All that you wanted to know about feminism, but were afraid to ask.”¹³

Even more publicity has been gained by the FEMEN women’s movement.¹⁴ FEMEN, a group of Kyiv university students who are feminists, uses LiveJournal to organize dramatic theatrical protests in downtown Kyiv. The main issues they raise are sex tourism and sex trafficking. But they have also been involved in other dramatic acts of protest against misogyny and government malfeasance. FEMEN’s protests have received considerable attention not only from the mass media in Ukraine, but also, increasingly, from the state officials who are the targets of their protest. Both these campaigns suggest that participation in the Orange Revolution (where women’s voices were not heard) has stimulated a new wave of feminist activism.

Oksana Zabuzhko: a case study

Intellectuals have over the past decades created a number of small niches for critical feminist debate, mainly at the margins of educational institutions. Within these spaces, Ukrainian feminists engage mainly in discursive activities through which they formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. But their debates are concerned more with differentiating among types of women, rather than with unifying citizens as a group. In the postcommunist public sphere, most intellectuals do not act as architects of a broader macro-public (they associate this understanding with the role intellectuals were expected to play in the Soviet era). Rather, they see their primary role as contributing to the establishment of a multitude of micro-publics. Some of their networks orient toward decision-makers and seek to shape state policies (e.g., professional feminists), but most feminist

Footnote 12 continued

associated with the Academy of Sciences. The other communities linked around this interest include the Kyiv Mohyla Academy Sociology Department blog, a lesbian information blog, a punk forum, Ukrainian Indymedia, and the fans of Nila Zborovs’ka (the former feminist who was once the director of the Kyiv Gender Studies Center).

¹³ See <http://feminism-is.livejournal.com>.

¹⁴ See <http://femen.livejournal.com/profile>.

micro-publics are fragmented and isolated from each other as well as from the wider institutions of officialdom.

Most feminists work within academic specialties and write for an audience that is relatively small.¹⁵ Here we explore the works of Oksana Zabuzhko, the one feminist who has not only achieved prominence outside her field but has become one of the few intellectuals in Ukraine who regularly appears in the mass media. Zabuzhko is a philosopher by training. After graduating with a degree in philosophy from the National University of Kyiv in 1982, she continued her studies and in 1987 defended a dissertation in aesthetics. She later worked as a research associate at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences in Ukraine. But in addition, Zabuzhko is one of a relatively small number of writers and critics that has established new meso- and macro-publics by bringing together people who are concerned with discussing the shortcomings of the Ukrainian state and developing alternative visions of Ukraine. She regularly writes for a broader popular audience, maintains a blog (on the oppositional internet publication *Ukrayinska Pravda*) that is well-regarded, and participates in talk shows and other television programs concerned with current affairs.

Zabuzhko's influence as a feminist stemmed initially not so much from her work as a scholar but as a writer of fiction. Her novel, *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* (which we examine in depth below) made her a celebrity of sorts almost overnight (Zabuzhko 2002). She began to appear on television. Her opinions on various issues were sought after by the media.¹⁶ Her prominence allowed her to break free of the forms of self-censorship that academic institutions continued to impose upon most Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1990s. Her voice has often been heard criticizing the Ukrainian state (both during the time of increasing repression and media censorship before the Orange Revolution, as well as since then, when members of the Orange Revolution coalition have appeared incapable of acting on their pledges of bringing about a genuine democratic transformation in Ukraine).

She reveals her self-understanding of the role she plays as a public intellectual and spokesperson, as a "a national awakener" following in the footsteps of Shevchenko, Franko and other Ukrainian writers, in her book that examines the period before and after the Orange Revolution, titled (in English) *Let My People Go* (Zabuzhko 2005). The book opens with a brief introduction written a year after the events of the Orange Revolution, but then proceeds with Zabuzhko's letters, interviews and public speeches given in the mid-2000s. These include a letter that she sent on the eve of presidential 2004 elections in which she warns that the Ukrainian regime will resort to violence, fraud, and irregularities in order to keep power at all cost. *Let My People Go* also includes a 2005 speech presented at the Fulbright Foundation in Kyiv shortly after the Orange Revolution, titled "A Public Intellectual in Ukraine," in which she reveals her understanding of the critical role intellectuals as an independent social stratum should play in furthering the development of a public sphere in Ukraine. In this speech she bemoans the state of

¹⁵ This is the case even for Solomea Pavlychko, who most gender studies scholars acknowledge to be the most influential figure in this field. Nevertheless, she wrote mainly for a literary audience.

¹⁶ For example, in the second half of the 1990s she began to write columns for a number of Kyiv newspapers, and even the government was interested in soliciting her advice.

the Ukrainian print media and decries the cultural apathy that is apparent within the broader population. She underscores the importance of Internet sites for reviving public life in Ukraine and suggests that the future belongs to them. She also suggests that she sees interpreting Ukraine for Western audiences as one of her principal roles. Indeed, in her interview with us she states:

Ukraine is a country which doesn't yet know how to 'speak for herself,' neither is there much of a visible 'European presence' in the national media. We don't possess a sufficient network of foreign correspondents, nor even a sufficient number of qualified journalists to monitor the foreign press (not even where Ukrainian issues are in question!). This explains lots of false stereotypes on Ukraine circulating in the West, most of them borrowed ready-made from the Russian media, which have been in a state of 'cold war' with Ukraine since the Orange Revolution. And those Ukrainian intellectuals who make public appearances in the West, be they writers, musicians or sportsmen, have no other option than to perform as spokespersons for their country, more than once against their will (Authors' Interview with Oksana Zabuzhko, June 26, 2008).

Zabuzhko's belles-lettres

Academic feminists in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries have reexamined classic questions raised by Western postcolonial feminist writings, for instance, by debunking nationalist myths (Irina Zhrebkina), examining homosexuality (Solo-mea Pavlychko), and problematizing male passivity (Nila Zborovs'ka). But while feminists writing for a pan-Russian audience typically express concern primarily for using postcolonial theory to address the blindness to gender inequality that results from the Soviet gender regime (Temkina and Zdravomyslova 2003), feminists writing for a Ukrainian audience have sought to adapt feminism to analyze a second set of hierarchies that have remained unrecognized sources of oppression: ethnolinguistic inequalities that result from the impact upon colonial selves of Russian imperial narratives. It is as a writer of feminist fiction who addresses the intersection of gender and ethnolinguistic hierarchies in Ukraine that Zabuzhko has reached a far wider audience than other contemporary feminists in Ukraine and has spurred broader acceptance of an indigenous feminism that intertwines the dual projects of national and sexual/gender liberation.

Zabuzhko's (1996) novel *Pol'ovi doslidzhennia z ukrains'koho seksu* [Field Work in Ukrainian Sex] has been recognized as one of the most influential books to be published in Ukraine since independence.¹⁷ It made Zabuzhko one of the best-known writers in post-independence Ukraine. Observers also argue that it represented an important advance in the articulation of an indigenous feminism in

¹⁷ For instance, *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* was named "the #1 Ukrainian literary hit since 1991", according to a poll conducted by the Elit-profi agency and the newspaper "Halyski Kontrakty" in January 2004. Two years later, Elit-profi declared it to be the top choice in its poll, "The Most Influential Book For the 15 Years Of Ukraine's Independence".

Ukraine (Zhurzhenko 2001). In *Field Work* Zabuzhko draws parallels between the conditions for achieving personal and national self-fulfillment, explaining pathologies in intimate relationship between two protagonists through a postcolonial feminist lens. The result is a feminism that “is attempting simultaneously to overturn a gender hierarchy in which women are subordinate to men and a literary one in which the Ukrainian language has been subordinated to Russian” (Wachtel 2006). The novel describes the stormy relationship between the writer-protagonist O. and her lover M., a Ukrainian artist. Their courtship illustrates the plight of the male and female intellectual in Ukraine. Due to their nation’s state of prolonged colonial dependency, he appears passive, weak and unable to stand up for himself in adverse situations. On the other hand, her heroine exudes the power, confidence and determination more commonly associated with men than women. As a consequence of this asymmetry, it is impossible for them to achieve either sexual or self-fulfillment. The initial physical attraction between them is very strong, in large part because he is the first romantic partner she has encountered who is a “real Ukrainian man” who shares her commitment to the Ukrainian culture and language (Zhurzhenko 2001). However, despite this common bond, the relationship quickly disintegrates once he joins her abroad in America, where she is teaching at a university as a Fulbright scholar. Although M. is nationally conscious, he nonetheless suffers from inferiority complexes that leave him unable to satisfy her. Indeed, he is sexually abusive. The novel implies that his inability to fulfill her and his abusive behavior stem from the fact that a colonial subject is not a free subject. M. has interiorized imperial abuse and in turn becomes an abuser himself. Despite this personal tragedy, the heroine’s voice exudes power and determination to transform her painful experience into something creatively meaningful. Through all-out self-exposure, she writes her body and authorial self out in a way that becomes a cathartic and self-therapeutic experience.

The significance of *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* also stems from the fact that, for the first time in Ukrainian fiction, the perspective of a woman intellectual is heard not only on romance or sex, but on the patriarchal marginalization of women and the colonial handicaps of men, that is, on complexes that distort the behavior of both genders alike. In the Soviet era, according to Zabuzhko, women as writers in Ukraine were largely confined to what she calls a “women’s ghetto.” They were expected to use a “woman’s voice” only to talk about love in a manner that was highly sanitized and romanticized. Women’s poetry appeared in mainstream publications only on March 8, International Women’s Day, an official Soviet holiday when saccharine “love poetry by women” was featured in “the pages of the press and various official publications” and obligatory “pictures of the women authors” were used to create an illusion that the Party listened to women’s voices and cared about what they had to say (Authors’ Interview with Oksana Zabuzhko, June 26, 2008).

In the period of *glasnost* there was considerable freedom of artistic expression. Women who were outside the literary mainstream and belonged to artistic micro-publics were not expected to conform to any stereotypes. But this was a time mainly for discussions of broader national issues rather than gender concerns. Women’s writing continued to be marginalized. Writers expressed concern for understanding issues of:

national, not gender, identity. “*Perestrojka*”, with its quickly vanishing political censorship, enabled discussing the painful issues of national discrimination, and writers took full advantage of the newly-opened opportunities - this was probably the first time in the Soviet history that they went out of their “velvet prison,” straight into the “velvet revolution” - to [meet] crowds of people at free readings and public manifestations [demonstrations], and ... found themselves in the highest social demand (which, due to the lack of experience, they were then honestly mistaking for a literary success). It was then that I first learned to perform as a public figure ... but in literary terms it was the period of a deep inner dissatisfaction, of a desperate search for my own voice: I already knew I didn’t want “to write as I was supposed to,” in compliance with the ruling cultural standards. ... However, the complete “liberation” and the break with the whole set of Soviet and colonial cultural stereotypes didn’t come until the mid-1990s, with the “Field Work in Ukrainian Sex,” my as yet best-known book, in which I’ve “translated” the issues of national and cultural identity and traumas into the language of a woman’s body.

It was only after independence that opportunities were created for a diversity of new literary voices to be heard by the broader public discussing gender issues. Zabuzhko’s novel set a new precedent for frank, critical discussions of the neotraditional conceptions of Ukrainian women (who, in public discourse, were frequently associated with the “Berehynia” (Guardian of the Hearth), the mythic goddess whose chief mission was purportedly maintaining traditions within the peasant family). Zabuzhko put it rather bluntly in her interview with us: “with this novel Ukrainian women’s literature had, for the first time, broken the walls of the ghetto and made it right into the mainstream, transforming the formerly existing literary canon” (Authors’ Interview with Oksana Zabuzhko, June 26, 2008).

The novel also adds a further dimension to feminist analysis of the gendering of public and private spheres (Gal and Kligman 2000; Rosaldo et al. 1974). In postcommunist discourse, women are often excluded from public life and expected to achieve fulfillment through motherhood and nurturing their family. The protagonist of Zabuzhko’s novel fails to conform to this logic of separate spheres. She is strong and smart, equally at ease in both the domestic and public spheres. Furthermore, Zabuzhko’s narratives blur the hierarchy implied to exist between private and public spaces, by elevating the private to the level of the public in a way that critics and readers find new and unexpected. In one of her interviews, Zabuzhko expressed surprise to receive so many responses from a wide spectrum of women identifying with the protagonist’s story:

My greatest, I would say, “cultural shock” came from my hundreds of female readers, ranging in age from early twenties to early sixties, who responded with the same exclamations – in letters, at meetings – “This is my story!”, “It reads as though you were sitting in my kitchen, and I was pouring my heart out to you!”, “I feel as though I wrote it!” etc. I didn’t expect that, honestly. It stunned me. Never before did I realize to what extent half of the nation had been deprived of a direct voice of their own when it came to the most intimate,

everyday life experiences. Somehow the most “personal” turned out to be the most universal, immediately recognizable by so many women with biographies completely different from my heroine’s: women having no dissident background, never teaching (nor even being!) in America, even belonging to different generations... (Hryn 2001)

A similar dynamic between the public and the private is also present in Zabuzhko’s short story “I, Milena” (Zabuzhko 1998). The main character, Milena, is a TV talk show figure who maintains two different personae, one for domestic use (her relationship with her husband) and another for the public use (her aggressive and at times manipulative work relations in the media, yet yielding to male power). In the end we see the heroine completely disoriented and unable to distinguish between the two spheres of daily existence as she realizes that her husband prefers to make love to the television version of her. Similarly, her boss at work is attracted only to her TV persona and simply does not recognize her “physical self” without makeup, that is, without the mask. The dissolution of the female identity in this story goes hand in hand with a blurring of the private and public spheres. One wonders if the heroine’s seeming identity crisis stems from her inability to recognize her value beyond being a mere sex object, or from her failure to adapt to the hierarchy of interests represented by the television network’s male executives. Zabuzhko raises the issue of woman’s identity and questions the utility of traditionally assigned gender roles. This again only reinforces her pioneering efforts to present a gendered voice in Ukrainian literature. Returning to her interview with us, Zabuzhko put it this way: “women’s identity wasn’t then a subject in the Ukrainian literary mainstream: to be let [in]to the mainstream, you were supposed first to “castrate (sic!) yourself,” to perform “genderly neutral” in your choice of subjects, as well as in your language (anything “genderly pronounced” went marginalized, pushed out into the “women’s ghetto,” ...).” Having no female role models in her formative years, Zabuzhko herself has mentored a number of younger women writers: “The young generation of Ukrainian women writers has already been dubbed by critics “Zabuzhko’s daughters,” and I’m really proud to be recognized as a “mother figure” for such talents as Oksana Lutsyshyna, Svitlana Pyrkalo, Marianna Kiianovs’ka, Mar’iana Savka – to mention just a few” (Authors’ Interview with Oksana Zabuzhko, June 26, 2008).

Zabuzhko’s turn toward the past: reinterpreting national history

Zabuzhko not only sees her mission as helping to free women writers from the “ghetto” of women’s writing by creating new spaces for women’s voices in mainstream Ukrainian literature. Through her work as a public intellectual, she has also sought to incorporate the perspectives of national feminists and national feminism into broader public understandings of national history and identity (thereby preventing feminism and gender studies from being viewed as disciplines segregated from the academic mainstream). Here it is instructive to note that in general theoretical literature on the development of nations and national consciousness, there is widespread agreement that nations, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s widely employed

phrase, are “imagined communities” and that, consequently, national identity is developed or constructed by intellectuals who help create the vehicles and machinery for inculcating national attachments (Anderson 1983). The writing (and rewriting) of national histories has been viewed as a precondition for developing the common myths and historical memories upon which all nations rely (Smith 1987, 1991), but is particularly central for “nationalizing” nations that are “post-colonial” (Bhabha 1990), or where a colonial power’s language and culture have displaced the national language and culture, particularly among the local elite (Hroch 1985).

Zabuzhko’s main works as a public intellectual are somewhat untypical of patriotic history in Ukraine, which adopts a populist, patriarchal standpoint and is built upon “impersonal, romantic female figures” that possess no individuality (Pavlychko 2002). Her reinterpretation of Shevchenko, Franko and Ukraïнка, the three undisputed giants of Ukrainian literature, challenge the official populist readings of Ukrainian classics, building alternative models of examining the national past. Arguably, the most important underlying aspect of these three authors is the desire to advance the project of personal and collective decolonization.¹⁸ By challenging the entrenched official readings of the venerated “trinity” of Ukrainian letters, Zabuzhko attempts to awaken a new sense of national identity among intellectuals of her generation. These works nonetheless do achieve the basic tasks that Anderson, Smith, and other theorists of nationalism see as crucial to “nationalisms of the intelligentsia” that arise in colonial settings, where identities and allegiances are blurred. That is, they use the past to locate “heroes” or exemplary historical figures to whom present-day readers can turn for moral guidance, in the process differentiating a new “us” while also creating a new basis for legal rights and sovereignty.

Zabuzhko returns to feminism and uses it to engage in an analysis of postcolonialism in her third monograph in this trilogy, an examination of Lesia Ukraïнка, *Notre Dame d’Ukraine* (Zabuzhko 2007). The work takes its point of departure from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which she uses to discuss the importance of the voices of dissident intellectuals like Ukraïнка who engage in a battle against both native as well as imperial forces of oppression (Zabuzhko 2007). Zabuzhko refers to a large number of classic Western intellectuals who indict various forms of oppression and call for individual liberties (ranging from Hannah Arendt to Jacques Derrida). However, rather than engaging in an academic analysis, it is clear from the style of the work that the author aims at producing a narrative that the broader public at large will find readable, a retelling of the biography of Ukraïнка that restores to her a principal place in Ukrainian letters as a Westernizer and *fin-de-siècle* woman, a story that only a national feminist could possibly tell.

In this work, Zabuzhko deconstructs populist, patriarchal readings of Ukraïнка, which tend to desexualize or ignore her clearly gendered literary voice. She then reconstructs her as the primary Ukrainian national literary hero through whose ideals Zabuzhko can indict Ukrainian state leaders for the sham democracy (*khamokratii*) they have created, while also reexamining in sharper detail the

¹⁸ See her *Filosofia ukrains’koi’ ideï ta i evropeï’s’kyi kontekst: Frankivs’kyi period* [The Philosophy of the Ukrainian Idea and the European Context: The Franko Period, 1992], *Shevchenkiv mif Ukraïny: Sproba filosof’s’koho analizu* [Shevchenko’s Myth of Ukraine: An Attempt at a Philosophical Analysis, 1997], and *Notre Dame d’Ukraine* (2007).

pathological gender dynamics that have resulted from Ukraine's colonial experience (thus returning to the subject at the heart of *Field Work*). Zabuzhko, once again, restores the body of the woman (her first chapter bears the subtitle "The Cultural Presentation of the Heroine: Body as Text"), which was described by male critics as weak, sickly, asexual, incapable of carnal pleasures, to its full-fledged physical vibrancy despite her chronic illness, at the same time, it seems, implies that the similar reevaluation is due for the national body, so to speak. Ukraïinka brilliantly appropriated and internalized European literary themes in her oeuvre, thus expanding her community's horizon of expectations. Zabuzhko suggests through her reinterpretation of Ukraïinka's texts and her role as a woman, a national feminist reassessment of Ukraine's current situation, as well as alternative understanding of the moral lessons that can be drawn from forgotten episodes in the national past.

Zabuzhko, responding to present-day anxieties regarding Ukraine's identity (these are some of the questions she poses on the book jacket: "Who are we—Ukraine or Little Russia? Europe or Russia? Is Ukrainian religion the same as Byzantine Orthodoxy?") looks to Ukraïinka and her works as bearers of the lost Ukrainian aristocratic tradition that survived only within the milieu into which this writer was born. Through this writer and her works, Zabuzhko defines a new origins-narrative about the Ukrainian intelligentsia (that was written out of official Soviet history, which tended to conceive of Ukrainians as a "peasant nation" that lacked a native aristocracy and thus, needed to be liberated by the Russian "progressive" intelligentsia). By focusing on this woman author, she recovers an alternative tradition of liberal critique, transforming the book into an indictment against the corrupt political and cultural elites of present-day Ukraine, and a call for Ukrainians to transform themselves into genuine citizens capable of self-determination. *Notre Dame d'Ukraine* also illustrates Zabuzhko's standpoint as a feminist and intellectual who believes that national liberation will occur only through the political involvement of the country's women intellectuals, who she believes embody its "feminine, Europeanizing impulse" or essence. Here, of course, she arrives at a feminist retelling and inversion of the populist gender myths of the Berehynia as a symbol of Ukraine's matriarchal gender order. While populist intellectuals idealize peasant women who they see as the bearers of authentic Ukrainian traditions, here Zabuzhko offers women intellectuals like herself and Ukraïinka who are bearers of a European, aristocratic culture and who, she argues, will lead their country (and its men) "out of captivity" and back to Europe.

Conclusion

Intellectuals in Eastern Europe are assumed to play an important role in creating foundations for democratic practice by developing discourses, networks, and associations that engage citizens in public life. As we have shown in the case of Ukraine, however, even though the country is today considered by watchdogs such as Freedom House to be among the only post-Soviet states that is not a consolidated authoritarian state, Ukraine's intellectuals in the post-independence period have not created a public sphere that is homogeneous and unites the whole country around a

common identity.¹⁹ Instead, the spaces they have carved for themselves are diverse, fragmented, and fragile. This also applies to the work of intellectuals involved in advancing feminist thought both in their own work and in society at large.

Indigenous feminism has begun to take shape within academic settings. Its proponents have established several centers for Women's and Gender Studies. Most are affiliated with major universities. Whether these centers will continue to thrive in coming years depends upon the commitments of those who belong to new feminist micro-publics. It seems that thus far, individual founders of gender studies centers have acted as the principal catalysts for this new field. The academic old guard and the broader population continue to ridicule feminism. Feminist scholars have struggled to secure necessary funds and other forms of support for the existence of their programs. Challenging prevailing stereotypes about women as well as fighting for feminist voices to be heard and legitimated has been a major task for proponents of feminism. The fact that there is no single voice speaking on behalf of all women in Ukraine complicates efforts to unite feminists, but, on the other hand, the ongoing existence of diverse feminisms points to an incipient pluralism and diversity that was absent in the Soviet period and is essential to creating foundations for a democratic systems. And in this respect, for all involved, having to learn to deal with a number of micro-publics rather than with one public sphere is certainly a positive sign for intellectuals who are seeking to find their place in a post-authoritarian, postcolonial setting.

More generally, a broad variety of voices representing the needs and interests of women who are differently situated may even hinder politicians' efforts to polarize the country along ethnolinguistic lines. Initially, the field of feminist studies in postcommunist Ukraine became differentiated in the 1990s into Russian and Ukrainian speaking feminisms. However, cutting across the linguistic divide among the younger generation, are a number of new feminisms, including punk feminism, eco-feminism, and 'lipstick' feminisms, that so far appear to be taking shape in bilingual Internet sites where ethnolinguistic polarization is not apparent. Interestingly, though not surprisingly, these young feminisms seem to have a wider reach than academic and even professional feminists have. On the other hand, the latter can also claim accomplishments. Academic feminists have established a new field of gender studies and produced a considerable number of dissertations, while professional feminists have scored some legislative victories that have even more widespread implications for women (and men) in general.

These small niches of feminism not only play a role in offering "safe spaces" from which women as scholars and activists have developed new critiques of various forms of oppression. They also contribute to strengthening the overall democratic fabric of the society by offering a new generation of writers and readers potentially powerful tools that they have used to, in Oksana Zabuzhko's words, "break out of the ghetto," that is, develop a public voice as members of a broader community of citizens. Micro-publics thus can become foundations for building a

¹⁹ See Vladimir Shkolnikov, *Nations in Transit 2009: Democracy's Dark Year* (Freedom House, 2009), http://www.freedomhouse.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=242:nations-in-transit-2009&catid=30&Itemid=92.

wider public and developing broader critical discourses. Oksana Zabuzhko has managed to demonstrate that this is possible—in large part, by challenging assumptions about the role that women and men should play as intellectuals and as citizens in Ukraine.

References

- Aheieva, V. (2003). *Zhinochyi prostir: Feministychnyi dyskurs ukrains'koho modernizmu*. Kyiv: Fakt.
- Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Author's Interview with Larysa Kobelyanska, May 9. (2001).
- Authors' Interview with Oksana Zabuzhko, June 26. (2008).
- Bhabha, H. K. (Ed.). (1990). *Nation and narration*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Calhoun, C. J. (1992). Introduction: Habermas and the public sphere. In C. J. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 1–48). Cambridge, Mass: MIT.
- Chernetsky, V. (2007). *Mapping postcommunist cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the context of globalization*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Filippova, O. (2007). Anti-orange discourses in Ukraine's internet: Before the orange split. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 23(1), 138–151.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In C. J. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109–142). Cambridge, Mass: MIT.
- Gal, S., & Kligman, G. (2000). *The politics of gender after socialism: A comparative-historical essay*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT.
- Hroch, M. (1985). *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe: A comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hryn, H. (2001). *A conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://www.bu.edu/agni/interviews/print/2001/zabuzhko-hryn.html>.
- Hundorova, T. (1996). *Franko—ne Kameniar*. Melbourne, Australia: Monash University.
- Kis', O. (2003). Modeli konstruiuvannia gendernoi identychnosti v suchasni Ukraini. *Yi*, 27, 37–58.
- Kuts, S. (2001). *Deepening the roots of civil society in Ukraine*. Kyiv: Civicus.
- Kuts, S., & Palyvoda, L. (2006). *Civil society in Ukraine: "Driving engine or spare wheel for change?"* Kiev: Center for Philanthropy, Counterpart Creative Center and the CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.
- Kyj, M. J. (2006). Internet use in Ukraine's Orange Revolution. *Business Horizons*, 49, 71–80.
- Pavlychko, S. (1991). Chy potrebna ukrains'komu literaturoznavstvu feministychna shkola? *Slovo i chas*, 6, 10–15.
- Pavlychko, S. (1992). Between feminism and nationalism: New women's groups in the Ukraine. In M. Buckley (Ed.), *Perestroika and Soviet women* (pp. 82–96). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlychko, S. (1997). Progress on hold: The conservative faces of women in Ukraine. In M. Buckley (Ed.), *Post-Soviet women: From the Baltic to Central Asia* (pp. 219–234). Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlychko, S. (1999). *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrains'kii literaturi*. Kyiv: Lybid'.
- Pavlychko, S. (2000). *Natsionalizm, seksual'nist', orientalizm: Skladnyi svit Ahatanhela Kryms'koho*. Kyiv: Vyd-vo Solomii Pavlychko "Osnovy".
- Pavlychko, S. (2002). *Feminizm*. Kyiv: Vyd-vo Solomii Pavlychko "Osnovy".
- Pilkington, H. (1996). Farewell to the Tusovka: Masculinities and femininities on the Moscow youth scene. In H. Pilkington (Ed.), *Gender, generation and identity in contemporary Russia* (pp. 237–262). London, New York: Routledge.

- Rosaldo, M. Z., Lamphere, L., & Bamberger, J. (Eds.). (1974). *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Shymchyshyn, M. (2005). Ideology and women's studies programs in Ukraine. *NWSA Journal*, 17(3), 173–185.
- Smith, A. D. (1987). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Oxford, UK and New York, NY, USA: Blackwell.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- State statistics committee of Ukraine. (2009). Retrieved June 7, 2009, from <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua>.
- Stepanenko, V. (2005). How Ukrainians view their Orange Revolution: Public opinion and the national peculiarities of citizenry political activities. *Demokratizatsiya*, 13(4), 595–616.
- Temkina, A., & Zdravomyslova, E. (2003). Gender studies in post-soviet society: Western frames and cultural differences. *Studies in East European Thought*, 55(1), 51–61.
- United Nations Development Program. (2003). *Gender issues in Ukraine: Challenges and opportunities*. Kyiv: UNDP.
- Wachtel, A. (2006). *Remaining relevant after communism: The role of the writer in eastern Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zabuzhko, O. (1993). *Filosofia ukraïns'koi' ideï ta ievropeï's'kyi kontekst: Frankivs'kyi period*. Kyiv: Vyd-vo "Osnovy".
- Zabuzhko, O. (1996). *Pol'ovi doslidzhennia z ukraïns'koho seksu: Roman*. Kyiv: "Zhoda".
- Zabuzhko, O. (1997). *Shevchenkiv mif Ukraïny: Sproba filosofov'koho analizu*. Kyiv: Abrys.
- Zabuzhko, O. (1998). I, Milena. In J. K. Keefer & S. Pavlychko (Eds.), *Two lands, new visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine* (pp. 125–161). Regina, SK: Coteau Books.
- Zabuzhko, O. (2001). *Reportazh iz 2000-oho roku*. Kyiv: Vyd-vo Fakt.
- Zabuzhko, O. (2002). Publicity and media under communism and after: The destruction of privacy. *Social Research*, 69(1), 35–47.
- Zabuzhko, O. (2005). *Let my people go: 15 tekstiv pro ukraïns'ku revoliutsiiu*. Kyiv: Vyd-vo "Fakt".
- Zabuzhko, O. (2007). *Notre Dame d'Ukraine: Ukraïnka v konflikti mifolohii*. Kyiv: Fakt.
- Zherebkina, I. (1999a). "Kto boitsia feminizma" v byvshe SSSR? In I. Zherebkina (Ed.), *Femina Postsovietica: Ukraïnskaïa zhenshchina v perekhodnyi period: Ot sotsial'nykh dvizhenii k politike* (pp. 11–82). Kharkiv: Kharkiv Gender Studies Center.
- Zherebkina, I. (Ed.). (1999b). *Femina Postsovietica. Ukraïnskaïa zhenshchina v perekhodnyi period: Ot sotsial'nykh dvizhenii k politike*. Kharkov: Kharkovskii tsentr gendernykh issledovanii.
- Zherebkina, I. (2002). *Zhenskoe politicheskoe bessoznatel'noe* (2 ed.). Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteia.
- Zherebkina, I. (2003). On the performativity of gender: Gender studies in post-Soviet higher education. *Studies in East European Thought*, 55(1), 63–79.
- Zhurzhenko, T. (2001). *Ukrainian feminism(s): Between nationalist myth and anti-nationalist critique*. International World Bank working paper, Vienna.
- Zhurzhenko, T. (2004). Strong woman, weak state: Family politics and nationbuilding in post-Soviet Ukraine. In K. R. Kuehnast & C. Nechemias (Eds.), *Post-Soviet women encountering transition: Nation building, economic survival, and civic activism* (pp. 23–43). Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zhurzhenko, T. (2008). *Gendernye rynki Ukraïny: Politicheskaiia ekonomiiia natsional'nogo stroitel'stva*. Vilnius: European Humanities University.